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New Testament conversions

# NEW TESTAMENT CONVERSIONS

THEIR MANIFOLDNESS

BY

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## PREFACE.

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THE history of this volume of sermons is soon told. During his pastorates, East and West, the writer was frequently consulted by members of his congregation regarding the validity of their conversion. After witnessing a revival of religion or listening to the experience of those converted at such a season, they often entertained doubts as to the genuineness of their own conversion. They had accepted the general impression that the means which arrest the sinner's attention, the path through which he is led to the Cross, and the feelings experienced on accepting the Saviour, are exactly the same in all cases. The writer has spent many an hour in prayer and in efforts to convince such that men are not all converted in the same way, made to pass through the same struggles, or to experience the same joys. This has seemed to many like a new revelation. It has brought them from painful bondage to the liberty of the children of God.

This pastoral experience suggested the propriety of preparing a series of discourses on

the different phases of conversion. To remove every doubt as to the correctness of the truths presented, conversions recorded in the New Testament alone were selected as the themes. From the attendance at church and the interest manifested by the secular press, it became evident that the subject was one of more than ordinary interest. The discourses were reported almost verbatim and published in one of the leading journals of the city. Since then they have been rewritten from the stenographic reports and, the author hopes, materially improved. Repeated requests have been received that they should be put into a permanent form for the benefit of the many who feel troubled about the genuineness of their conversion. Compliance with this request has led me to throw this new volume upon the public.

The conversions considered in this volume are arranged in four classes, according to peculiarities common to the members of each. The first class comprises men who had been religiously reared, but differently situated in after life. The first sermon is on the conversion of the disciples who were not only religiously reared, but who also enjoyed the pungent preaching of John the Baptist. The second is on the conversion of a son of Abraham who had gone far astray from the faith of his fathers; and the third is on the conversion of an Israelite religiously reared, but who, through

bodily infirmities, had been deprived of many of the privileges which others enjoyed. The second class comprises three women, one of whom was an afflicted member of the Jewish Church, another belonged to a heretical sect, and the third was a heathen, conscious of not being one of the chosen people. The third class comprises two men, one wrecked in body and in mind by his dissipated life, and the other a malefactor drawing his last breath on the cross. The fourth class comprises three who occupied a very different position from all the others, both in society and in the world. One was the prime minister of a great monarch; the second was a member of the most illustrious family of Rome; and the third was the greatest genius of his age.

As these discourses have been largely prepared for the press from stenographic reports, it has been impossible to give credit by name to all those from whose writings extracts have been taken. It is not claimed that even quotation marks have been always put when the expressions of others have been incorporated. The aim of the author has not been to be original and novel, but useful to every one who asks, "Am I his or am I not?"



## CHAPTER I.

---

### THE CONVERSION OF THE RELIGIOUSLY- REARED ANDREW AND JOHN.

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John i. 37-50: "And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus."

**T**HE only entrance into the kingdom of heaven is through regeneration. The announcement of this fact perplexes and even discourages many sincere seekers after it. It causes them to ask such questions as, "Is every renewed person required to know the time, the place and the order of his spiritual birth?" "Must he be able to tell the arresting means, the convicting truth and the hour of deliverance?"

These questions arise from the mistaken idea that all men are converted in the same manner, pass through the same struggles and experience the same joys. Those who have fallen into this mistake conclude that, if they have not taken the same steps and felt the same agony of soul as those whom they have heard

tell their experience, they have not been born again. They often become troubled in mind if they do not pronounce themselves self-deceived. Thus multitudes of God's children deny themselves for years the comforts of religion and deprive the Church of years of valuable service.

A careful examination of the conversions described in the New Testament will show that they differed from each other both in the means employed and in the feelings experienced. The conversion of the disciples who had been John's followers presents nothing startling in the means employed, the mental process through which they passed, or in their outward conduct. This is not strange when it is remembered that they had been reared religiously, made to obey the commandments, trained to live moral lives, led to pass through the baptism of repentance and taught to look for the coming of the Messiah. The conversion of Zaccheus, on the other hand, was very different. He had disregarded the demands of the law and abandoned the religious practices of the true Israel; he had become thoroughly identified with the world and lived like the heathen around him. He was suddenly arrested in a life of extortion, and brought to confess his sins and to begin to live a better life. The conversion of the thief on the cross was different from both. He had lived the desperate life of a thief or a

murderer. Spiritual things had found no place in his life or thoughts. The words of Christ on the cross, like the strains of celestial music, were probably the first means that softened his heart. The hand nailed to the cursed tree snatched him as a brand from the burning. His exclamation, "Lord, remember me," shows that he found the Saviour at the last moment. His conviction, conversion and sanctification were almost synchronous. The conversion of Cornelius, whilst it was not accompanied by any special outward demonstration, was a great surprise. The power that could bring a proud Roman to the feet of the humble Nazarene must have been above anything earthly. The bringing of a member of the haughty Cornelian family to mingle with Jewish peasants and Galilean fishermen marked a change of views and feelings which none but God could effect. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus was in most of its features miraculous—the very kind of conversion looked for, unfortunately, by the majority of unregenerate men. He was arrested in his wild career of persecution and smitten to the ground by light from heaven; he was struck with blindness and made to hear the voice of Jesus saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" He listened to the heavenly voice which changed the whole current of his life. After experiencing such a conversion he found no difficulty in remembering the day,

the means, or the circumstances connected with it.

Similar varieties of conversion are witnessed in our own day. The carefully instructed and religiously reared are often brought to Christ like the disciples, without anything to mark the time or the means. President Edwards states that he could not remember when he was brought to Christ. Thousands like him have no more knowledge of the day of their spiritual than they have of the day of their natural birth. There are many, on the other hand, who can tell, in the words of another, the exact time of it, "Giving the day and the date, the hour, the providence, the place, the text, the preacher, and all the circumstances connected with it. They can show the arrow which, shot from some bow drawn at a venture, pierced the joints of their armor and quivered in their heart. They can show the pebble from the brook that, slung it may be by a youthful hand, but directed by God, was buried in the forehead of their giant sin. They can show the word that prostrated their soul and—some truth of Scripture—the salve that healed the sore, the balm that stanchèd the blood, and the bandage that Christ's own hands wrapped on the bleeding wounds. Able to trace the steps of the whole process of their conversion, its most minute details, they can say with David: 'Come and hear, all ye that fear the Lord, and I

will declare what he hath done for my soul.'”

Inability to recall the moment when our hearts were changed, or to tell the circumstances which led to it, or to describe the joy which followed, is no cause of discouragement. None of us can tell when or where the first faint steel-gray gleam of morn appears, though we turn our faces to the East and our backs to the setting sun; we know it only after the day has appeared. In like manner thousands of Christians can only say with the man in the gospel, “Whereas I was blind, now I see.” They are conscious of the presence of a life that they did not once possess throbbing within them in feelings and acts of godliness. Consciousness of their spiritual existence is all the proof men need of their birth into Christ’s kingdom.

In this series of discourses it will be shown that every conversion is a new conversion; that is to say, it is different in some of its aspects from every one that has gone before or that will follow. The structure of men’s minds is different, the individual bias is different, the training is different, the surrounding circumstances are different, and the effects of the change are different, though conversion itself is in every case genuine. No one, therefore, should feel discouraged when he fails to find much in common between his own

experience and that of his pious neighbors. In our treatment of New Testament conversions we shall endeavor to correct the error that the circumstances, the means used and the outward effects of conversion are in all cases the same.

The subject of this discourse is "The Conversion of the Religiously-Reared Andrew and John."

These disciples had followed the Baptist into the wilderness, where they heard words which proved like a hammer, breaking in pieces their flinty hearts and piercing like a flame of fire their hidden thoughts. Though they had been brought up religiously, yet not until John came did they learn the awful character of the law of Sinai or see its full purity or grandeur. Under the Baptist's preaching they realized their guilt and felt their need of the Lamb of God now pointed out to them.

Notice, first, what men of this character are required to do in order to enter the kingdom of God. Three things are here mentioned, namely, coming to Christ, trusting his saving power, and following him through evil and good report. Recognizing the valuable preparation which they had received under the preaching of his forerunner, the Saviour invited Andrew and John to visit his abode. Mark the breadth and beauty of this invitation, "Come and see"; not to one brief interview, not to a desultory conversation, not to

one passing hour of fellowship in which they might listen to his words, but to see, to know, and to live with him. The same invitation is still sent to all who have not found him.

What encouragement and promise are contained in the word "see." It implies that the deepest longing of the human heart is to see Jesus. The Greeks who had heard of him cried, "We would see Jesus." To see him is to have one's inquiring soul satisfied. There are, however, degrees of seeing him. Great was the glory of Him which was seen by Moses on the Mount, but greater was that beheld by Andrew and John as they accompanied him to the place of his abode. The entire Christian life may be included in the act of seeing Jesus—seeing him under his own guidance; seeing his glory day by day; seeing his divine kindness in providing for their wants and in watching over their steps; seeing the blessings of the covenant sealed by his blood; seeing here the privileges of his spiritual kingdom, and seeing in the dim distance some of the glory still to be revealed.

Those who are religiously reared are not only to come to where Jesus dwells, but to trust him for their salvation. Finding Simon, Andrew's brother, the two disciples announced to him the wonderful discovery they had made: "We have found the Messiah," and have committed to him our keeping. This simple dec-

laration must have brought to the mind of Simon multitudes of facts and incidents already familiar to him. It may have suggested to him the first promise; the majesty of that wonderful night when Jehovah appeared unto Abraham on the open plains and showed him the sky with its myriad stars, and gave him the promise of one who should redeem Israel; of the glorious manifestation of God's interest in his people in bringing them out of their Egyptian bondage by the hand of Moses, and of the bright star which cast its sweet light on the plains of Moab. Can it be that the glorious One whose advent is repeatedly foretold has at last come to earth? Has my own brother seen him and committed to him his keeping?

The revelation of Christ to those who have been religiously reared in our day brings to mind many passages of Scripture with a significance and vividness they never had before. In this new light they connect Jesus with the salvation of their own souls and cast on him their all for time and eternity. It is only when they find themselves safe in the arms of Jesus that their hearts are melted, and the snows of the long winter of their unbelief are dissolved into sweet waters, which now, freed from their icy chains, flow with music in their ripples and fruitfulness in their path through their lately bare and barren lives. They now



see that there is no spiritual life without vital connection with the Son of God.

The disciples not only went to see Jesus and intrusted to him their all, but they left the world to follow him. "Straightway they forsook their nets and followed him." No mention is here made of a remonstrance or hesitation. Not one of them asked if he might once more cast his nets into the sea, or have a day to mend them, or a few hours to dry those which had just been pulled out of the deep. They heard the call and instantly obeyed it. The voice of Jesus is the same to every one of us, and our reply should be identical with that of Andrew and John. We must not ask his permission to weave any more righteousness of our own, or to patch our character that it may present a better appearance to the world, or to go any longer through the dull round of religious ceremonies which we may have mistaken for walking with God. We must straightway follow him.

Secondly, men are not all brought to do this in the same manner. In the text is set forth the way in which those who have been religiously reared are brought to Christ. Andrew and John had from childhood correct theoretical knowledge of God's demands; they had lived, to all human appearance, religious lives, and had been roused by the preaching of John to look beyond the shadow to the substance,

beyond the form to the reality, beyond the abstract doctrine to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. All enjoyed those privileges and heard the voice of Jesus inviting them. All still, no matter how great their privileges or correct their lives, how deep their conviction of sin or vivid their sense of guilt, must hear the voice of Jesus and obey. None will take a single step towards Christ until they hear his voice. The faintest longing after him, the first tear of penitence that trickles down the cheek, the first cry of the soul for rest and the first motion towards Christ result from hearing his voice. Have you, dear reader, experienced tender feelings towards him; felt the tear of penitence moistening the eye, or a secret prompting of the soul to follow him? That is the echo of his voice speaking in the depth of your heart. It is an emotion born of God. It is the first breath from the four winds passing over the valley of dry bones in your soul. It may be the first pulsation of the new life within. It may be feeble; it may be only a whisper darting through the soul like a flash of lightning, a faint longing after God—it is nevertheless born from above. Stop not there, but ask the Saviour to quicken this spark into a flame. Seek the godly sorrow which worketh repentance not to be repented of. Let nothing make you linger; cast aside every hindrance and

break through all the barriers in your way to Jesus' arms. The heavenly messenger who is now calling may never issue another invitation.

Simon was brought to Christ by his own brother, Andrew. This presents to us a very suggestive thought. Instead of going first to tell the story of his discovery to the multitudes without, who are perishing for the lack of knowledge, he went first to his own household. In this he followed the order of nature as well as of grace. The conversion of the man who overlooks the perishing among his own relatives and friends, and goes immediately after the distant ones, is not Scriptural in his conduct. It is not natural to feel anxious for the souls of those whom we have never seen and be indifferent towards those among whom we live. If you, reader, have found Jesus, go at once to those who are near and dear to you and tell them that you have found the Messiah. Bid them "Come and see." Then go after the outside world with the same zeal.

"The day following, Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me." There is apparent imperiousness in this command, but no apology is offered. Jesus does not give Philip time to deliberate or hours for decision. He listens to no plea for delay nor entertains an excuse. The command is, "Follow me." It is thus that Christ speaks to every one. He may find us,

as he found Philip, busily engaged in worldly pursuits and fully occupied with family affairs or household duties, and says, "Follow me." He tells us that his claim is paramount to that of all others, admitting of no delay. "Follow me" is heard above the voice of pleasure and the clatter of worldly cares. When the request, "Let me first bury my father," is made, Christ's reply is, "Let the dead bury the dead." "Follow thou me."

The feeling which prompted Andrew to go after Simon now prompted Philip to go after Nathanael. But he found his mind full of questionings and misgivings. He did not, however, stop to reason with him regarding the causes of his perplexities. He entered into no controversy about the probability or the improbability of any good coming out of Nazareth. He met his doubts and fears with the kindly invitation, "Come and see." Nathanael followed Jesus and, in following him, his doubts disappeared, his difficulties passed away, and the light of assurance concerning the identity of the Messiah dawned upon his soul.

Are you, dear reader, troubled with doubts and fears? Has the poisonous arrow of unbelief penetrated your soul? Has the cloud of disappointment eclipsed your faith or intervened between you and the light of your Father's countenance? Waste no time in surveying the intricate fields of apologetics. Do not weary

your soul with efforts to solve the dark problems of providence. Follow Jesus and all will be well. Are you, like Martha, troubled about many things? Do crosses multiply? Has God's providence hedged your way so that you know not how to proceed? Follow Jesus, and the path of duty will be made plain, rays of heavenly love will dart through the clouds which now obstruct your vision.

The call of Jesus to Andrew and John, Simon, Philip and Nathanael was to them the dawn of a new and better day. It broke upon their view whilst the rest of the world was as yet sleeping the sleep of death. But by degrees the true Israel, who had heard the voice of the harbinger and had long waited for the promised redemption, saw the rising of the Sun of Righteousness and rejoiced. At last the bridegroom for whom they had been looking came. He met and recognized the bride. The bride finally met and recognized the bridegroom. She listened to his voice and obeyed his call. He appeared to them meek and lowly. His royalty was as yet concealed. The glory which he had had with the Father was veiled in human flesh; nevertheless, he attracted to himself all whom the Father had given him. All who had been prepared by God through the prophecies, the types and the shadows; by the preaching of the law and the baptism of John, followed him. They found in him the fulfill-

ment of the prophecies, the substance of the shadows, and the realization of the hopes and longings of God's people in all ages.

Are you, impenitent reader, satisfied with your bare morality and the performance of a meaningless round of religious duties? Are you still unable to see the need of anything more than an upright conduct? Has not God spoken to you through his providence, his Word and Spirit? Has he not awakened doubts in regard to the safety of your present attitude of mind and heart? Has he not, through the preaching of the word, the faith of a friend, a wife or a mother, shown you that something more is needed? Has he not stirred up some longings after like faith and communion with God with that of loved ones gone to glory? Hear, this moment, the voice of the Baptist, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." That Lamb is the Christ. It is the long-looked-for Messiah. It is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending. He says to you, "Follow me," "Come and see." Remain no longer under the teachings of the law or in the school of morality. Having worshiped long enough in the outer court, accept at once the invitation to "Come and see." Believe Christ's word, seek his fellowship, and see that your name is enrolled among his followers.

As soon as Andrew comprehended the full

meaning of the invitation, "Come and see," he uttered the jubilant cry, "We have found the Christ." This stirred the heart of Philip to re-echo the same. Nathanael took up the strain which was passing from lip to lip, and added, "We have found him of whom Moses and the prophets did write." This set the hearts of all who believed on fire and filled their lips with praise. So let it be with you, dear reader. Let your cry be, "Jesus, Jesus only;" Jesus in my heart as the hope of glory; Jesus in my affections as the one altogether lovely; Jesus on my tongue as the only subject of praise; Jesus in my life as my present and eternal righteousness; Jesus in my death as the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother, and Jesus in my heavenly joys as my all and in all.

## CHAPTER II.

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### THE CONVERSION OF A RICH TAX GATHERER--ZACCHEUS.

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Luke xix. 5, 6: "Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully."

THE disciples whose conversion was considered in our last, lived in the quiet hamlets that dotted the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Their calling was that of fishermen, which was held in high repute among the Jews. They had not been contaminated by the dissipation of society or by the corruption of wealth in large and royal cities like Jericho. Zaccheus, on the other hand, was born and reared amid the pomp and splendor, the vice and temptations of the Herodian capital which was called "the city of fragrance," because the whole plain was covered with aromatic shrubs; "the city of roses," because the valley of the Jordan looked in the spring like a sea whipped into foam, and "the city of palm trees," because



the whole region abounded in richer vegetation than that found in any other part of Palestine. At this time, Jericho was able to boast of the royal palace of Herod Antipas and of the gorgeous abodes of his courtiers. It formed the golden key which unlocked Palestine and the Mediterranean to the nations of the East. Its population was about one hundred thousand souls, exclusive of the pilgrims who stopped there for a season on their way home from observing the Jewish passover.

Zaccheus not only lived in a place full of temptations, but he occupied a *position* peculiarly trying to his religious principles, so far as he had any. He was the chief of the publicans—an office of considerable importance under the Roman government. A publican was the collector of the imperial taxes. The methods used by the Romans of collecting them, in a city like Jericho, was to *farm* them out; that is, to bind the officer to pay a certain sum to the government, with the understanding that he was entitled to all he could exact from the people. Under such circumstances a most favorable opportunity was afforded him for extortion, fraud and violence. The strongest temptation was thus laid in the publican's way to become rich by what the sacred penman calls "false accusation."

Zaccheus was not only a *native* of Jericho, and the *chief* of the tax gatherers, but he was *rich*. It is not stated whether his wealth was

accumulated by his own efforts or fell to him by inheritance. The inference from the record is that he made most of it himself, and a large portion perhaps by extortion.

The subject to which your attention is invited is "The Conversion of a Rich Tax Gatherer—Zaccheus."

Notice first, the obstacles in the way of his conversion. These were mainly three; viz., local, circumstantial and associational; in other words, they sprang from the three sources referred to in the text, namely, the place where he lived, the office which he held, and the social position he occupied in the community.

The place in which he lived exposed him to three temptations. First, to a low estimate of the religion of his fathers. Jericho was a city of priests, who were at this time exceedingly corrupt. Consequently, the publicans concluded that a religion which had such men to minister at her altars was not of much value, if it was from God. On the same principle the people of Rome judge in our day of the Christian religion from the priests whose lives are known to all who observe them.

Zaccheus was exposed also to the paralysis arising from breathing the foulest atmosphere of home and foreign corruption. Jericho was not only a city of priests, but of all sorts of people, many of whom were among the most degraded of the nations. On account of its loca-

tion, wealth and royal splendor, Jericho became the home of the Roman tax gatherers and extortioners generally. Through their wealth and numbers they commanded a larger amount of respect than they were really entitled to. For their low morality did not appear in as glaring a light there as it would have done in Jerusalem or Capernaum.

Zaccheus was further exposed to the temptations of gayety and licentiousness. In Jericho, Herod the Great lived and displayed his wealth and extravagance. The conduct of the king and his courtiers was naturally imitated by all who could afford it, and even by many, as in our own day, who could *not* afford it. This led the ambitious and unscrupulous to all kinds of expedients to amass riches in order to make a display.

Not only the place in which Zaccheus lived, but also the office he held, exposed him to temptations. First, to *extortion*—a practice which degraded him even in his own eyes. He knew that the only redress open to an overtaxed people was an appeal to law, in which their chance of redress was slender before a tribunal of which the judge was a heathen and the gatherer an unscrupulous official of the Roman government. This comparative freedom from detection was a temptation to indulge in dishonesty and fraud.

It exposed him also to hardness of heart

and harshness of manner, destructive of kindly feelings. He came in contact with human nature in the line of the most *degraded* business. He had to contend with men's ignorance, stupidity, and plans to deceive; consequently, if he was ever tender hearted, he would become, in time, impatient, if not feelingless.

Zaccheus's office exposed him, once more, to indifference to moral and religious restraints. He was despised and looked upon by the people as one totally devoid of character. They regarded the publicans as excluded from the religious life and communion of the true Israel, as devoid of conscience and without the fear of God before their eyes. Zaccheus accepted as true this sentiment regarding the class to which he belonged, and followed his calling without expectation of anything better. The same thing is largely true of certain classes of men in our own day. They conclude that it is useless to try to do anything toward becoming religious, because they cannot rise in the estimation of their fellow-men or convince even their friends that they are sincere.

Zaccheus's wealth, as well as his office and dwelling place, exposed him to temptation. It cannot be denied that riches everywhere tend to drive men from God and to plunge them into the corruption and fashions of the world. With what emphasis does the Saviour say, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into

the kingdom of God!" The publican was rich. As a consequence he was thrown into the company of those who could not abide the self-denial of religion, loved all sorts of indulgences, and were heathen in their principles and conduct.

Zaccheus's case seemed at this time hopeless. The obstacles in the way of his conversion were most formidable. All connected with his home, calling and condition looked like insurmountable barriers to the entrance of saving truth into his heart. But God's grace triumphed over them all. Grace never shines in all its loveliness until it comes in contact with great obstacles. Then only does it shine in its full glory. It is in pardoning a dying thief, in welcoming a forlorn prodigal, in acquitting a noted adulteress, or in seeking and saving a public extortioner, that its truest and brightest colors are reflected. These are some of its richest trophies. They are the gems which sparkle in the crown of infinite love. They are the jewels which are destined to shine forever in the diadem of the King of kings.

Notice, next, the successive steps that led to his conversion. And, first, those taken by the publican himself. They are striking, and fitted to reflect credit on his manliness and courage. The first is to *resolve* to see Jesus. This was the grandest resolution of his life, though it did not perhaps seem so to him at the time.

We read that "he sought to see Jesus who he was." He had heard of him, and the tidings may have revived in his soul the early truths he had learned at his mother's knee in regard to the promised Messiah. He had long heard of him. He had been for years dissatisfied with his own life. In his sober moments he had looked for some means that would bring him to believe the religion of his fathers. At last he came to the conclusion that Jesus might do this. But he could not see him, and felt that the fault was not his but God's. He was small of stature.

Besides, Christ was surrounded by a multitude who rendered it difficult, if not impossible, for him to see him. Nevertheless, Zaccheus furnishes us with a striking illustration of the proverb, "Where there is a will there is a way." He had resolved to see the distinguished stranger as he was passing by. For that purpose "he ran before" the multitude. He not only desired to see him, but he put forth every effort in order to do it. He ran—not a dignified attitude by any means for the chief of the publicans—but he was in earnest, he was bent on accomplishing his object, and hence he laid aside minor considerations. He resolved to overcome, if possible, all the obstacles lying in his path. In his desire to see, and efforts to meet Jesus, we find an illustration of what men can do in our day to find the Saviour.

Zaccheus not only *desired* to see Jesus, and ran before the multitude for that purpose, but he put himself in a *position* in which he would be able to catch a view of his face and form if he could not hear his voice. "He climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him." This tree has large, long limbs running out almost at right angles with the trunk, and, in many cases, near the ground. Hence it was well adapted to the purpose for which Zaccheus selected it. He had, however, but little hope that the Saviour would notice him. He hid himself among the branches. Nevertheless, every step he took, however trivial and accidental it may have seemed at the time, brought him nearer and nearer to seeing the Saviour face to face.

Not a few of us can look back and see how strangely we were led to Christ's feet. Providence often hedged up the particular path we had selected, and opened another we never thought of; it thwarted some favorite plan we had formed, and presented another which a combination of events led us to adopt. How often has some apparently accidental step, or a trifling incident, led to a train of associations and occurrences which changed the whole course of our lives. A moment too late for the train; the falling of a shower driving us to seek shelter in the house of a neighbor; a hint let fall in general conversation, or the climbing to some high place to gratify curiosity—on these

and circumstances more trifling still hang often the most momentous issues of our life. How blessed to think that in this tangled web of circumstances, in the labyrinth which momentarily entwines itself round our feet, we are not left to walk alone! How blessed the thought that a wise, loving and an unseen hand is directing our steps!

In connection with this course of the publican, let us trace that of the Saviour. First, he went in the direction in which he was expected to go. He knew that Zaccheus had climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him. He was more anxious to see the publican than the publican was to see him. The seeker was sought and found. Blessed fact! If we put ourselves like Zaccheus in Christ's way, we are sure to be found of him. For no cares or business will draw him aside. He always goes in the direction of the waiting sinner. He marks every beat of his heart, traces his steps to the place in which he expects to see him, and finds him even when he has fled into the most secret concealment.

Christ not only went in the way leading to the sycamore tree, but he looked up. Who can describe or even imagine the way Zaccheus must have felt when he saw the multitude, headed by the Master, moving toward him? Vaguely and perhaps confusedly his past life, with its sins and sorrows, misgivings and doubts,



passed before his eye; longing and hope, fear and trembling expectation filled his soul. Yet he would see Jesus, for he was to pass that way, and then all would be over, and he would go home perhaps to quiet conscience and hope for something better. But would seeing Jesus meet his expectation? Would that end his captivity? Would it solve the problem of his life? Would it remove the manacles from his hands and feet? Would it take away the burden he had borne for years? At this juncture the Saviour made his appearance. He halted, looked up, and the people paused and held their breath!

Christ not only moved in the right direction, but he looked up, not simply at the tree, not with an indifferent glance, nor merely to see what kind of man the hiding publican was, but he cast on his hard face a loving, melting look! There went out in that glance the declarations, "Thou art the man! I am in search of thee! Thou art an heir of glory!" For a moment the publican was embarrassed, perplexed, and no doubt troubled. But,

"A second look he gave, which said,  
I freely all forgive;  
My blood is for thy ransom paid;  
I die that thou mayst live."

The third step was to call Zaccheus by name. He singled him out from among the rest. He let him know that his name and character were

perfectly familiar to him. He convinced him that, though a publican, lost in his own estimation, he was of some importance in the sight of the world's Saviour. Though shunned by his countrymen, he thought of him! This is in keeping with the rule Christ uniformly observes in dealing with sinners. We read of a thief saved, of a lost sheep sought and found, of a leper returning to give thanks to God, of a prodigal welcomed by his father, of an extortioner sought and brought within the Saviour's fold.

How tellingly does all this teach our individual importance in the sight of God, however worthless we may be in the estimation of our fellowmen! How often is it said, "I am of no importance in the world. Can God care for such a poor, frail, insignificant creature as I? Can he think of one so guilty as I, one whom the world despises, one forgotten by friends and left alone?" Such examples as I have given should rebuke our unbelieving thoughts.

The other step in the conversion of Zaccheus was the command to obedience—"Make haste, and come down." The publican might have said, "The multitude will laugh at my coming down from this tree; those who believe that I have defrauded them will sneer at the thought of my becoming Christ's follower; my old friends and companions will ridicule such a step when they hear of it;" or he might have exclaimed,

“ I have been a great sinner and am not worthy to have the Son of God come under my roof. I will mend my ways, in the hope of being worthy to have him come into my house the next time he passes by. Ere long I will abandon my office and arrange to become one of his disciples.” Christ made no reply to all this, neither rebuked him for his sins or for following a wicked calling. He met him as he was and said to him, without conditions or prerequisites, “ To-day I must abide in thy house.” He met him in tones of welcome which melted his hard heart. His love penetrated its depth and constrained obedience. His assurance brought him from the tree and quickened his footsteps. He in return welcomed the Saviour. Here is a beautiful illustration of the way men are still made to come down from their lofty heights of pride and self-righteousness to meet and entertain the lowly Saviour.

The last point to which your attention is invited is the outward proof of Zaccheus's conversion. What was there in his subsequent life to show that he was made a child of God during this meeting with Jesus? What was there in his own personal experience to convince himself of it? It is not told us what happened during the Saviour's stay at his house. We do not know what was said to him. Nothing is mentioned in regard to his confession, the outpouring of his heart, or his ex-

pressions of gratitude and love. No record has been left of the word of counsel, instruction, guidance and consolation which Jesus may have given him. All these were private. But we are told that he experienced—

First, *feelings of joy*. “He made haste, and came down, and received him *joyfully*.” A new feeling welled up within his soul. He had often felt something like real joy in the midst of his worldly companions, and in the contemplation of the accumulation of his riches. But, to all that, there was a serious drawback. It was not unmixed with sorrow. But who can describe his joy now? Who can fathom its depths, measure its heights or tell its breadth? Its source was heaven and its flow promised to be perennial.

The converted man in the present day knows something of the same experience. His heart is filled with joy which the world cannot give and which it cannot take away. It is unalloyed.

The second effect of the publican's conversion was to lead him to make an open acknowledgment of his sin. “If I have taken anything by false accusation.” His past life comes up at length in its true light. Sin appears exceeding sinful. Instead of realizing his guilt before he came to the Saviour, he felt it in its crushing weight only after he came. Not until he heard the melody of heaven in

the voice which cried, "Zaccheus, come down," did he realize fully the jarring of sin. Not until the sunshine of love filled his soul did he see the threatening clouds of a life of extortion; not until the Son of God entered his dwelling did he become fully conscious of the evils he had committed as a minion of the Roman government.

Something of the same nature must be experienced by every one who comes to Christ. When the light of the divine Spirit shines upon the soul, it is sure to produce a deep sense of sin against God and man. Thus it has been in every age; when that light fell upon Job he exclaimed, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself." When it fell upon Isaiah, he cried, "Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips." When it fell upon Paul, he exclaimed, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" When it fell upon the poor publican, he cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

Still another effect of Christ's entrance into Zaccheus's house was a sense of justice toward men. This manifested itself in willingness to restore what he had taken by fraud. "I restore him fourfold." He does not offer simply the value of what he had taken, with the addition of one-fifth, which was the utmost the law imposed if the property was voluntarily restored; nor the double, the penalty attached to stolen

goods. But, acting under the law of Calvary and not under that of Sinai—the law of love and not that of justice—he offered to restore it on a munificent scale. This is the true prompting of a new heart. And something analogous to it must be seen in the life of every converted man. He must desire to repair the wrongdoings of his life as far as practicable. He must restore the reputation he may have ruined by his slander, he must counteract the baleful influence of his bad example, and make up for the extortion which he perpetrated through cupidity.

The last effect of Zaccheus's conversion was the exercise of genuine Christian liberality. He did not stop with the feeling of joy which he experienced, nor with the acknowledgment of his sin, nor even with the restitution he made, but he passed on without delay to the largest alms-giving. Half his fortune went in one donation to the poor: "that fortune," as another has said, "which he had amassed by measures so unscrupulous; that fortune on which he had set his heart; that fortune for which he had sacrificed his good name, his happiness and his immortal soul." But the entrance of Christ into his heart produced therein a radical change. He became at once a new man. What things formerly were gain he now counted but loss. He was more eager in his new life to restore than he was in his old to appropriate; more ready to give than he was to get.

One of the marvels connected with this conversion is that, in spite of its suddenness, it was most complete. The morning saw Zaccheus a man whose name his countrymen could not pronounce without contempt, and whose own conscience reëchoed their accusation, as his confession testifies. In the morning Christ had pronounced him a lost man. The evening of the *same* day beheld him rescued from perdition, transformed by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, made just, truthful and charitable. The palace which resounded in the morning with the mirth of the extortioner, rang at night with the sweet words of the penitent—

“Amazing grace! how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.”

## CHAPTER III.

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### THE CONVERSION OF AN AFFLICTED BEGGAR—BARTIMEUS.

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Mark x. 46-52: "And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimeus, the son of Timeus, sat by the highway side begging," etc.

**I**N looking at the two men brought to Christ in the neighborhood of Jericho, we discover resemblances and differences in the mode and circumstances of their conversion. Both belonged to the chosen people. Both were recognized by their neighbors as the sons of Abraham according to the flesh. Consequently, we are safe in saying that both were more or less familiar with the law and the prophets, the Jewish ritual and the promises concerning the coming of Christ.

Both men were well known in Jericho, but for different reasons. The publican, by his office, social position and wealth; and the blind man by his father, Timeus, who was a person of note for reasons not furnished in the record.



The fact that the evangelist states that Bartimeus was the son of Timeus shows that he was a man of some distinction among his fellow-citizens.

The two had acquired more or less knowledge of Jesus, either from the preaching of John, or from friends and neighbors who had seen and heard him. Both believed him to be more than an ordinary man—perhaps a performer of miracles or a prophet, if not the promised Messiah. What they had heard of him produced a strong desire to see him. From infancy the publican had looked on the beauties of Jericho and the faces of its citizens; but Bartimeus had seen neither. Here is presented a sad contrast. “I can fancy few sadder sights,” says Dr. Guthrie, “than a family, parents and children, all blind—a home where the flowers have no beauty, where the night has no stars, where the morning has no blushing dawn, and where the azure sky has no blessed sun; a home where the members have never looked on each other’s faces, but where the blind father sits by a dull fire with a blind boy upon his knees, and the sightless mother nurses at her breast a sightless babe that never gladdened her with his happy smile.” The chasm between Zaccheus and Bartimeus in this respect was as wide as that between the east and the west.

The subject to which your attention is in-

vited is "The Conversion of an Afflicted Beggar—Bartimeus."

Notice, first, the view which he had been holding of his own condition. He thought for years that it was utterly hopeless. He may have accepted the allegation that Jesus, who was about to pass by, had power to heal diseases. He might have accepted this as a general truth and soliloquized, "Yes, he may have healed many kinds of diseases, he may have cured serious ailments, he may have even opened the eyes of the blind, but I do not believe that he has ever opened the eyes of one stone-blind, blind for fifty years." He concluded, therefore, that his case was peculiar, difficult to reach, hopeless.

He may, on the other hand, have implicitly believed all that had been told him of Jesus. He may have come to the conclusion that he *could* heal him, if he would; that he could remove the scales from eyes as blind as his, if he was only willing to do it. But he was sure that he would never come to Jericho. It was a den of thieves—a corrupt, God-forsaken city. Why should he come there? He would be despised of the priests and rejected of the publicans. That must have been known to him since he was a prophet and possibly the Messiah. He was honored at Nazareth; he was followed by a multitude of admiring people along the shores of Galilee; he was sure to be

received with royal honor at Jerusalem. "He will not come to Jericho, and I, a poor, afflicted beggar, cannot leave home nor cross the country in order to meet him. My doom is sealed!

"Jericho is a populous, Godless city, and Christ is gracious and full of compassion. For these reasons he may come to Herod's city. But, if he does, he will take the royal road and not this obscure path beside which I sit. He may open the eyes of those fortunate enough to come in his way or who may have friends to bring them to his presence. Alas! I do not belong to that class. Consequently I must keep my old seat by the roadside and be contented to let him go, without his blessing, even if he pass this way. There is no *hope* for *me!*

"Should he come to Jericho and pass my way, he will not notice *me*. He is a King, not accustomed to speak to beggars! He is high and lifted up, hence he is above looking on a blind man by the wayside. He is surrounded by such a multitude as will render it impossible for him to hear my cry. It is vain, therefore, to hope for anything better than I now enjoy. Blindness and beggary will continue to be my unwelcome companions to the end of life!" Some such thoughts as these probably passed through the mind of Bartimeus after he heard of Jesus.

We often hear something like this from the

lips of those who are spiritually blind. They unduly emphasize their unworthiness and lost condition. They sometimes aver that the class to which they belong is so uninviting that the Son of God will not visit them. Should he have pity on any, it will be on those who are in a favorable position, or possession of friends who have influence with him. He *will* not, he *cannot* condescend to look on any one so lowly and so far gone as they are! What a strange view to take of the Friend of sinners! What ignorance of the character of his love! What an erroneous conception of his infinite compassion! The ground of his love does not lie in us, nor in anything about us. He himself is the cause and reason, the motive and end of his love for our race. If we fail to grasp this thought we have not learned the half of the fulness of Christ's love. His is a love which has no motive but itself; a love which is eternal, having existed in the divine heart before there were creatures toward whom it could flow; a love that is its own guarantee, its own cause, safe and unshaken, with all the firmness of his unchangeable nature, unaffected by our transgressions, deeper than our ill deserts, more ancient than the hills, partaking of the essence of the coequal and coeternal Son of God.

It is as true of the Son as of the Father that *he is love*; hence, before any considera-

tion of what we need—deeper and more blessed than all thoughts of compassion which spring from the feeling of human distress and the sight of human misery—lies this thought of an affection which does not require the presence of sorrow to evoke it, which does not wait for the touch of men's fingers to flow out, but which is in its very nature *everlasting*, in its very nature *infinite*, in its very nature a stream which pours out the flood of its measureless fulness upon the heads of the poorest as well as of the richest of our fallen race. This is wondrous love!

Under a painful consciousness of his inability to comprehend the length and breadth of Christ's compassion, or to do anything toward receiving his sight, Bartimeus lifted the loud cry, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." The selfish disciples checked him, chided him, and even tried to stop him. But he cried the more; for it was his first, perhaps his only chance. He must remain blind till the day of his death if he cannot now catch the ear and arrest the progress of the great Physician as he is passing by. The obstructions in his way only made him to cry the more a great deal, "Son of David, have mercy on me."

Notice, secondly, the means Bartimeus took to find relief.

He looked for it in the right place. He did not, like the woman in the gospel, spend his

all on physicians who failed to afford any relief. He went not after quacks or magicians to open his eyes. He did not make his appeal to the disciples to intercede for him. He did all he could to catch the ear of the Great Physician. Quitting man, he turned to God. Abandoning human expedients, he resorted to divine grace. Relinquishing all hopes of finding relief in earthly means, he turned his darkened eyeballs toward Jesus of Nazareth, who was passing by.

He looked for relief at the right time. Happy man, who hit on the nick of time! It ought not to be said, perhaps, that any time could be a wrong time, but Jesus had not been that way before and he was not likely to pass again that way. This perhaps was not known to the blind beggar, but it was enough for him to know that he might not come again that way, and that even if he should he himself might not be there to meet him or to receive his blessing. He was, therefore, determined to make the best of his present opportunity.

He looked for relief in the right manner. He plead no Scripture promises, for he knew of none that met his case. He sought nothing to commend him to Christ, for there was nothing within his reach that could do so. He came in *faith*, believing in Christ's power to do what he asked. He came with *prayer* upon his lips. He did not offer a long, or a carefully worded one. It was a simple cry of distress:

“Son of David, have mercy on me.” Though brief, it was direct, intelligent, importunate; it recognized in the Son of David divinity as well as humanity, consequently, the possession of power to heal him. It was uttered in faith: “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”

The greatest hindrance to the salvation of this man came from Christ's own disciples. They did all they could to stop his cry, not because they were indifferent to his condition, but because they were unwilling to lose aught of the time or the words of Jesus, or because they doubted his sincerity in crying for aid. No matter which of these reasons influenced their conduct, it was unworthy of men who were themselves saved by grace. If they were indifferent to the sad condition of a blind beggar sitting by the wayside, it showed a state of heart unworthy the disciples of the compassionate Saviour. If they were so anxious to hear all that fell from his lips that they could not afford to let him speak words of healing to a blind beggar, they went beyond what was becoming in Christ's followers. If they doubted the sincerity of the man in crying after the wonder-worker, they were uncharitable.

Here we discover the great difference between the thought concerning sinful creatures which is natural to a holy being and that concerning them which is natural to a half-hearted, self-righteous man. The one is repulsion, certainly

indifference; the other is pity. Jesus knew what the blind beggar was, and consequently he halted on the road and commanded him to be brought to him. What did his knowledge of him lead to? To reject him? To chide him? To hurl at him his withering rebukes? No! It made him more gentle and tender; it added new brightness to his face and softness to the tones of his voice as he said to him, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? Thy sins are truly great, but my love is greater. Thine ill deserts are as the great sea, but my love is as the everlasting mountains, whose roots go down far beneath its deepest places."

What lessons of encouragement are here taught the spiritually blind? They, like Bartimeus, must look for relief in the right place. They should resort to no earthly expedients to remove their blindness; they should believe in no quack or magician to render them aid; for all these are but deceivers. They should not content themselves with consulting parents, teachers or even tender-hearted pastors, but should go directly to the Great Physician. They should forthwith utter the cry, "Lord, save, I perish."

They must seek him also at the right time. "Now is the accepted time," and not when the Saviour comes again, next month or next year. They must let the uncertainty as to whether he will come again or not lead them to cry the



more, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us; have mercy on us to-day, now, this moment!"

They must furthermore seek him in the right manner. They must exercise faith in his power and say to him: "If thou wilt thou canst make us clean." They must not depend on anything of their own, but cry to him for help, cry quickly, cry intelligently, cry importunately.

If the disciples' hearts should be cold, we are assured that Jesus's is tender. If professed Christians should be selfish, we are told that Jesus is self-denying. If men should be suspicious of our motives, we learn that the Searcher of hearts knows them and will freely forgive. His infinite loving-kindness does not turn away from us because we are sinners, but remains hovering about us, with wooing invitations and gentle drawings, in order to bring us to repentance and open a fountain of genuine affection in our dry and dusty hearts.

"Sin," says some one, "is but a cloud, behind which the everlasting sun lies in all its power and warmth, unaffected by the cloud; and the light of his love will yet pierce through with its merciful shafts, bringing healing in their beams and dispersing all the pitchy darkness of man's transgressions. And as the mists gather themselves up and roll away, dissipated by the heat of the sun in the upper sky, and reveal the fair earth below, so the love of Christ shines in, melting the mists

and dissipating the fog, thinning it off in its thickest places, and at last piercing its way right through it down to the heart of the man who has been lying beneath the oppression of this thick darkness, and who thought that the fog was the sky and that there was no sun above."

Notice, thirdly, the response Bartimeus received from the passer-by. It is impossible to see this in all its grandeur without calling to mind who Christ was, whither he was going, and what was awaiting him at Jerusalem. He was the son of David, the promised Messiah, the Eternal Son of God who had created all things by the word of his power; he was at this moment displaying in his life and actions the attributes of divinity, and attending to the affairs of ten thousand worlds. He was on his way to Calvary, where he was soon to be offered up like his illustrious type on Moriah; he was to drink of the cup of divine wrath, struggle with the powers of darkness, suffer the hidings of the Father's face, and die upon the cross amid the insults of an infuriated mob.

Under such circumstances what could arrest his attention? What impede his progress? What could call his mind away from these great events? Would the destiny of one person be sufficiently important to gain a thought of his at such a moment? Would

angels or cherubim be allowed to intrude at this time? Could there be a voice in heaven or on earth able to catch his ear at such a juncture? Was there a being in the universe bold enough to approach him under the shadow of his approaching sufferings? Yes, one, and perhaps only one. Hark! "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Who is that man? An afflicted mortal. A blind beggar, obtruding his petty sorrows on the heart that is gathering to itself the woes of a world. What rashness! In this light we should be indulgent toward the disciples' conduct. Will the voice of such an one be heeded? Will the war-chariot rushing into battle turn aside for a worm? Will the swell of the sea, breaking on the shore, be checked by a straying bird? Shall not heaven and earth join the multitude in bidding Bartimeus hold his peace? If they do they will betray a mistaken view of the heart of Jesus. If they decide that by so doing they are honoring him who came to seek and to save the lost, they will be put to shame by his gracious act. He turned at the beggar's cry and looked with compassion on his blind eyes. He "stood still" and cast upon Bartimeus a look of infinite benignity.

"Oh, when," asks some one, "did Christ ever refuse to stay at the call of a distressed sinner? Nay, if he stayed at the gates of Jericho, when *can* he refuse? Is he not the

same, yesterday, to-day, and forever? Has the love which death and the grave could not quench perished in his exaltation? Did he not bring it with him from the throne? And is it not an everlasting love? Oh, needy sinners, he cannot refuse your cry. 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me' finds its way through adoring ranks of saints and urges and constrains his blessed heart. He cannot resist it."

Christ not only listened to the cry of the blind beggar, but he called for him. The three evangelists differ in their statement of this act. Some claim that they find here a jarring note, but to our ear there is nothing but the harmony of heaven. Listen! Matthew says, "he called;" Mark, "he commanded him to be called;" and Luke, "he commanded him to be brought unto him." These are but progressive steps from blindness to sight, from death to life. Bartimeus was *savingly* called by Christ; he was *instrumentally* called by men; and he was *efficiently* called by the helping hand which guided him to the presence of Jesus. This is indeed effectual calling. God calls you, dear reader, to eternal life. His servants are commissioned to call you; they come now with their loving invitation. Will you heed them? All the aid you need in order to come is accessible, freely offered you. Hands are ready to guide, tongues are willing to instruct, and means are within reach to strengthen you.

Having come to the Saviour in obedience to his call, Bartimeus was asked, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" What is your request? Christ well knew what he wished, but he let him tell his own story. He said, "Lord, that I might receive my sight." "And immediately he received his sight." Upon asking, the blessing was bestowed. The blind man immediately saw. A new universe now burst upon his sight. All about, around and within him seemed new. The great sun, the full moon, and the million stars, with all the beauty of air, cloud, trees, flowers and hills came to the blind man as he opened his eyes. But the *first* object that struck his illumined eyeballs was the Opener. Though brightly shone the sun and fair seemed the Jordan valley, though gorgeous appeared the foliage of the sycamore and the acacia, all new and wondrous sights to him, yet they were not the first objects that he saw. The renewed faculty of vision was first exercised on him by whom the sight had been bestowed, and upon him all the wealth within its power was cheerfully lavished.

Who can depict the glowing views which break upon the vision of the newly-converted soul? A new heaven and a new earth; new objects to live for, new beauties in life; new fountains of delight, and new sources of consolation. Songs in the night and stars of

promise; the light of morning with its fragrant breath and the singing of birds; health for the sick, restoration to the banished, pardon to the doomed and life to the dying; love, joy, peace, hope, crowns, waving palms and blessed visions of eternal glory come now to sight.

Notice, lastly, two of the results of Christ's gracious act in opening the blind man's eyes. He *followed Jesus in the way*. He did not say, "Having received my sight, I shall henceforth be able to take care of myself" His gratitude was too great for that. The sunflower could more readily hide its face and turn aside from the light of day than the eyes of poor Bartimeus could allow Jesus to go out of his sight. Those newly opened eyes looked after him whithersoever he went. They followed his steps and waited for further manifestations of his glory. Bartimeus carried out the command, "If any man love me, let him follow me." Christ's sheep hear his voice and follow him. It is hardly credible that he has very many sheep who refuse long to do his bidding. The Psalmist does not speak for himself alone, but for all true believers, when he says, "My soul followeth hard after thee." It was the salvation of Caleb and Joshua in the day of wrath, and it is recorded as their glory that they followed the Lord fully. It is the only path of safety, and the only one which stops not short of the heavenly Canaan. Following Jesus is the

antidote of all error, all doubt and all despondency; it insures soundness in doctrine, growth in grace, and comforting, perpetual and life-giving illumination of soul.

Bartimeus not only *followed Jesus* but in addition to it, he "*glorified God.*" The piety of the early Church was of the frank, outspoken kind. None were ashamed of their King. None shrank from being regarded as his subjects. What bursts of joy were heard from their lips, what loud thanksgivings, like the swell of the sea, were those which found utterance in the well-known words, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!" Let all who trust that they are God's children follow this example of the Psalmist.

## CHAPTER IV.

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### THE CONVERSION OF A TIMID AND LONELY INVALID—THE WOMAN WITH THE ISSUE OF BLOOD.

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Mark v. 25-34: "And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years," etc.

**L**IGHT is a great revealer. It discloses to the eye that which, without it, would remain concealed. It brings out the good and the bad, the comely and the repulsive. It renders visible the tints of the cloud and the blue of the sea, the curve of the brook and the contour of the mountain.

Light not only reveals what without it would remain unseen, but it brings out of their hiding places objects not known to exist. It extracts odor from the rose and fragrance from the violet; it draws poison out of a harmless weed, and lifts the noisome pestilence from the fetid pool; it calls the bird out of its nest and the wild beast from its lair.

The same thing is witnessed also in the spiritual world. Christ himself is its light. His



coming was marked by the appearance of virtue and vice never before known; of beauties and deformities the outlines of which were seen by no man's eyes until then. Every circuit made by the Sun of Righteousness disclosed the healing virtue of his beams, the genial nature of his presence, and the sweet beauty of his light. It moreover disclosed the deformity of sinful life, the foul diseases to which our fallen nature is heir, the hidden iniquity which sleeps in the human breast, and the poisonous miasma that rises from concealed sinks of corruption.

As in the days of his flesh, Christ still draws out the unknown and neglected sons and daughters of sorrow in order to receive his blessings. Seated in glory, he is the great High Priest who can be *touched* with the feelings of our infirmities! The Bible tells us that he looks down upon us with more than the compassion which he manifested when living upon earth. "His garment," says some one, "wide spread and dropping low, is near our hand, and he feels a sinner's and a sufferer's touch upon his throne, with circle on circle of glory gathering round him, and saints and angels thronging in. He came down that, in his nearness to our misery, we might learn to know his heart, and he rose that we might be assured of his power to help and to heal."

The subject here suggested is the *Conversion*

*of a Timid and Lonely Invalid—the Woman with the Issue of Blood.*

Notice, first, her condition before she touched the hem of Christ's garment. She is represented as a person whose life had a dark background of loneliness, ignorance and disease, that set forth Christ's compassion in bold relief. It is probable that she was unknown to the people among whom she lived, unknown to the multitude who followed the Saviour, and unknown to him, except as she was one of the sheep whom his Father had given him to reclaim. She may have shrunk from society on account of her disease, or may have been rendered unable by her malady to take an active part in society, or may have evaded her neighbors in consequence of her condition. Whatever may have been the cause of her loneliness, the fact remained. When she came out of her obscure abode and mingled with the crowd who followed the Saviour on his way to heal the daughter of Jairus, she keenly realized her condition. No one hailed her by name. No one recognized her by a nod. No one encouraged her by a kind word. Even the Saviour did not accost her. No one seemed to understand her eagerness, know her heart's longing, or appreciate her motive in pushing through the multitude. She had been lonely in her own home, and she is now lonely in a crowd.

She was not only *lonely*, but *ignorant*. From not knowing the Scriptures and the power of God, we may reasonably conclude that she was ignorant even of common things concerning the Christ. Be that as it may, she entertained some dim and confused views of his power to heal. She thought of him, possibly, as a worker of miracles, who, like the magicians of the day, cured by material means. She knew nothing of his divine will, of his infinite knowledge, or of his pitying love. She felt that, if she could but touch the hem of his garment, the repository, as she thought, of his healing virtue, she would be made whole. And she sought to obtain this without his knowledge or agency. What ignorance of the Saviour's character and of his way of working! What misconception of the relation existing between his person and his healing blessings! What low, superstitious views of the salvation of the soul!

She was, moreover, the victim of an incurable disease. We read that she was suffering from the issue of blood. Like the leprosy, this disease afforded those afflicted with it no hope of securing a cure by human expedients. And yet, that indisposition to give up and accept of her lot, led her to try all the physicians she heard of in the expectation that some of them might succeed in removing it. For twelve long years she hoped against hope, suffered from the treat-

ments to which she was subjected, and spent all she had in seeking what she might have known to be impossible.

This is not all! She was ceremonially unclean, and consequently debarred the privilege of going to the only place where she could reasonably expect comfort. She was not allowed to enter the courts of God's house. Her heart was not permitted to swell with joy in connection with the Jewish feasts. She was obliged to feel that she had no part or lot in the inheritance of Jacob. How trying to a true daughter of Abraham! Doubly trying it must have been to one who had all her days attached even superstitious importance to the outward rites and ceremonies of the temple.

Long before she met the Saviour she had sunk into a state of helplessness and despair. How could it have been otherwise? She was lonely and without a relative to care for her! She was ignorant, and often haunted by superstitious notions! She had become convinced that her disease was incurable and had no means of support during the remaining days of her life. Who would not feel despondent under such an accumulation of evils?

Is not this a picture of thousands of men and women in our own day? Many feel that no one cares for their souls. Not a friend has taken them by the hand or said to them, "Be of good cheer." They go to God's house

and come from it without recognition. Even the minister fails often to reach their case from the pulpit, or to aid them by a call at their homes. In many cases, they are ignorant of spiritual truth and the way of salvation. They have never understood thoroughly the way of life. They have turned to the world for the cure of their spiritual malady, and received no response. They ought to have known that it furnishes no remedy for the diseases of the soul. It has no balm for a wounded heart. It is a broken cistern which for a thirsty one holds no water. It promises, but it never performs. It bruises, but it never heals. Sinners have no share in the blessings promised to God's people. They are strangers to the joy of salvation. They are without hope and without God in the world. No light of truth shines within their souls, telling of sin put away and of peace proclaimed through Christ's blood. There is no salvation lighting up the heart with love, quickening it with devotion, and making God's service a delight. All is darkness and uncertainty, fear and dread, bondage and restraint, dreariness and death. The memorial over the skeleton remains of a bishop, scratched by his own hand in one of the dungeons of Rome, is the only true superscription to put over the brightest and best the world can hold out to them: "No rest here but in Christ."

Notice, secondly, what prompted this woman to turn to Christ? There are many things connected with her life not revealed to us. We are not told how she learned that Jesus was to come her way; how she found that there was virtue in the hem of his garment; how she became convinced that he could do more for her than all her physicians. There is a thick veil thrown over the whole of this. We cannot affirm that any friend of Jesus had told her, because her conduct was not that of a person well informed regarding his character. Besides, repeated disappointments, like those she had so often experienced, would have cast strong doubts on a mere report. An agent had been at work in her heart, of which she was probably unconscious, and of whose work she was not able to offer any explanation. The Spirit of God had been preparing the vessel for the virtue that was to be poured into it.

Here is disclosed a phase of conversion worthy of our careful notice, viz., the preparatory work of the Spirit, before the sinner is conscious of it, producing contrition, the lifting of the eye, the falling of the penitential tear, involving perhaps years of providential dealings by which the soul emerges at length from darkness to light. Who can trace it? Where is its record? There is a veil thrown over it. The soul's conversion is like the volcanic eruption which, though unseen by mortal eye, has been little by little gath-

ering its elements for one grand explosion, until it makes itself heard and felt. What is called a sudden conversion is frequently sudden only in the sense that the coming out is sudden. The work had been secretly going on within for years under the eye and agency of the Spirit.

Not only the Spirit had been working quietly within, but the Saviour himself, like a great magnet, had come near enough to draw the soul to his feet. "Faith," says some one, "goes straight to Christ like a driven arrow, with grounds for going that it cannot tell to others, or tell even to itself. There is an intuition which has reason in its heart, and which will be able one day to bring them out full and clear—a groping half-blind which will yet find enlightened eyes—a sense of misery, of sin, urged to him by a divine necessity. 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'"

There is nothing here out of analogy with what is perfectly familiar to us in the natural world. Who can tell why the needle points to the pole? Why the buds feel their way to the warm breath of spring? Why the flowers turn to the sunlight? The only answer which can be given is that they are made for it. Souls, in like manner, are made for Christ. He created them, loved them, died for them, and, when he comes near, they feel his drawing power and cannot keep away from him or live without him.

The reason of this is not hard to find. It is Christ's whisper in the heart, "My sheep hear my voice." The cure began with this woman before she had touched the hem of his garment. Christ's arm guided her to himself. His strength sustained her in her weakness. His lips whispered, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Some day, we shall find that Christ was with us in all our good purposes, in all our choosing and chosen hours; Christ was with us but we knew it not. Nevertheless our heart burned within us while he talked with us by the way. This gives the assurance of final success to those who long for the healing of the soul, for where that soul feels its need of Christ, it is Christ who is there, leading it to himself."

A striking illustration of this is afforded in the case of a deaf boy who was brought to Christ during a season of religious interest. He could not hear any thing said by the preacher. He could not enter into the spirit of the prayers. He could not throw his soul into the sweet incense of praise, and yet he was most attentive on the service; he was interested in the work going on, he was at times moved to tears, and was finally converted. With others, he applied for a place in the church, and was accepted by the session. Strange to say, his experience was identical with that of his friends



who could both see and hear! Like them, he was taught of God. Heavenly melody got somehow into his deaf ears, and heaven's glory shone upon his blind eyes. The Spirit worked faith within him, which drew his whole being to the feet of Jesus who was passing by.

Notice, thirdly, how she presented herself to the Saviour. In general terms, it may be said that she presented herself just as she was. She was alone, and consequently had not the prayers of relatives to depend upon, nor the intercession of neighbors to look to, nor the instructions of a teacher to follow. She had spent her all on physicians, and therefore she could bring no gift to the altar. She had shed no tears of repentance, consequently she could not point to them as her precious jewels. She had not kept the whole law of God, and hence she could not present any righteousness as a plea. She offered no prayer for mercy, and therefore could not lean on it. What, then, did she do? She drew near enough to touch the hem of Christ's garment. There is something striking in this. She longed for a sense of nearness to Christ. Her heart pressed close to the Healer as a sick child to its mother's breast. This was done in obedience to an instinct of her soul which the Saviour himself had sanctioned.

She not only drew *nigh* him, but *touched* the hem of his garment. She did it with fear and trembling. She durst not appeal to his

heart, for she was ignorant of its feelings toward her; she shrank from meeting his eye, because she knew not but it was full of terror. She resolved to let him pass by, and then quietly put forth her trembling hand to touch the hem of his garment. At that moment cross currents of emotion agitated her soul. She had doubts, yet she believed that Christ could do her good; she was afraid lest she might be rebuked and driven back, yet she became bold enough by her very despair to try the experiment; she was too diffident to cast herself on his pity, yet she had too much faith not to try his healing virtue. In this conflict of hope and despair, she stretched forth her hand and touched the hem of his garment.

There is here not only an *approach* and a *touch*, but a true *exercise* of faith. She would not have come near the Saviour, if she had not had some confidence in him; she would not have touched the hem of his garment, if she had not believed that there was in it some healing virtue, but oh, how *weak*, how *selfish*, how *groveling* was her faith! It was but a mustard seed. It had in it scarcely any knowledge of Christ's true character. She looked upon him, perhaps, more as a magician than as the Redeemer of the world. Yet, she knew enough to approach him.

Her faith was as *selfish* as it was *weak*. She sought health; but did not care for the Healer.

She wanted his blessing, but did not feel disposed to honor him as the giver. She would probably have been contented to have had nothing to do with him, if she could only steal some healing virtue. She felt but a little gratitude toward him who, she hoped, was unconscious of the good she had derived from her touch.

Her faith was *groveling* as well as *weak* and *selfish*. It was scarce more than the faith of a patient in a skillful physician, the faith of a client in an advocate, the faith of a beggar in a kind friend, yet it was accepted of God as sufficient to save.

The path to Christ is here beautifully set forth. Men must come to him like the poor woman in the text. It is so plain that even a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein. Trust in the prayers and intercessions of friends must be relinquished; reliance upon interviews with pastors or parents, leaning on our own understanding, looking to human expedients, trust in penances, prayers, rounds of religious duties, tears and church ordinances, confidence in our own efforts, charitable deeds or kind dispositions—all these must be relinquished. Trust in Christ himself is the only way. None will ever obtain Christ's blessing without it. When the landscape is cloudy, when the sky is overcast, when the stream is dry, when the pitcher is broken at the cistern,

and every bud, blossom, flower and leaf is seared and frost-bitten, then the sinner must follow Christ and strive to touch the hem of his garment.

All must come nigh to him, *touch* the hem of his garment, and exercise faith in his saving power. None are required to have the faith of Abraham, the ardor of Peter, or the love of John. A conviction that this is needed is one of the causes of men's hesitation in coming to Christ. They feel that without this their faith is not genuine, or complete, and hence conclude that it will not save them. Even the best of Christians are often tried in this way. Their ideal perfection is a faith that shall always be unbroken and undarkened by the slightest shadow of doubt. But the reality of experience does not tally with this.

"May there not be," says some one, "an inner heart and centre of true trust, with a nebulous environment of doubt, through which the nucleus shall gradually send its attractive and consolidating power, and turn it too into firm substance? May there not be a germ, infinitesimal, yet with a real life throbbing in its microscopic minuteness and destined to be a great tree with all the fowls of the air lodging in its branches? May there not be hid in a heart a principle of action which is obviously marked out for supremacy, though it has not yet risen to sovereign power and manifestation

in either the inward or outward being? Where do we learn that faith must be complete in order to be genuine? It may begin with desiring the blessing rather than the Christ. It must end with desiring *him* more than all besides, and with utterly losing self in his infinite love. Its starting point *may* well be, 'Save, Lord, or I perish.' Its goal *must* be, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'"

There is no faith so feeble to which Christ fails to respond. The most ignorant, self-regarding, timid trust may unite the soul to the world's Redeemer. To desire under these circumstances is to have, and whosoever will may take of the water of life freely. If you but cry to him, though he may have passed by, he will halt. If you come trusting yet doubting, he will forgive the doubt, and confirm the trust. If you come to him knowing nothing more than that you are full of sin, which none can forgive save Christ, he will meet you. If you put out a trembling hand to touch the hem of his garment, if you sincerely believe that he has healing balm, it will be according to your faith.

Notice, lastly, the way this woman was brought to a full knowledge of Christ. From diffidence, enfeebled health, or shame on account of her malady, she expected to steal away from him unnoticed, as she hoped she had come to him. But she was forced to face the thronging multitude, and to tell her sad story. This gave

her courage. In a moment she leaped from timidity to boldness; stretched out her hand a tremulous invalid ready to hide in any corner in order to escape notice, but in a moment after she knelt at Jesus' feet and confessed him before the world as her personal Redeemer.

*You* who are really saved are trying perhaps to keep your salvation a secret. Against all the instincts of your new nature you wish to shut up the fire which is burning in your spirit, to seal your lips in silence, and to trust your love to concealment. Let the question put to the woman in the text arrest your attention. Come back, why are you turning away? Christ has done his part, why will you not do yours? You owe your soul to him; why do you not say so? You have not been ashamed to accept his blessing; why should you be ashamed to own it? It is a dishonorable thing to steal it. It is not worthy of your manhood to accept a benefit and refuse to give credit for it to the benefactor.

The confession of Christ not only imparted boldness but peace also to the timid convert. She came trembling at his word, for though cured, her mind was not yet at rest; because, though she had exercised faith, she had not as yet openly called upon his name. Faith secured the cure, profession of faith was to bring the rest. She knew that it was not right to carry off the blessing in a furtive manner. She was

not satisfied with herself, her soul was not at rest, her conscience made her tremble at the Saviour's voice. But when she acknowledged the mercy by open praise, he said unto her, "Daughter, be of good comfort, go in peace."

He had withheld the expected peace to this moment because until now she had not done his will; he had withheld it until now, because she had not exercised a full faith in his word. In the act of professing Christ, however, her faith was strengthened. It forthwith rose to a higher point than it had ever reached before and henceforth trusted Christ not only as the Healer of her body, but also as the Saviour of her soul.

## CHAPTER V.

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### THE CONVERSION OF A DISREPUTABLE VILLAGER—THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

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John iv. 13-15: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

IN this chapter is found a fine photograph setting forth with astonishing accuracy every particular of the scene at Sychar. In style and finish, if not in minuteness of detail, it stands almost alone. "It is not," says one commentator, "a monument composed of an aggregate of stones, but, like the patriarch's pillar at Bethel, a glorious monolith—its hieroglyphics the riches of redeeming love and mercy." It is a master exhibition of Christ's condescension and readiness to forgive.

The subject suggested by it is the *Conversion of a Disreputable Villager—the Woman of Samaria*.



Notice, first, the place of her abode. This is called Shechem, Sychar, or in modern times, Nablous. It was not an inviting place. Though associated in early times with the pitching of Abraham's tent; with the purchase of a burying place by Jacob; with the reading of the curses and the blessings by the Levites, and with the resting place of Joseph's bones, yet it had by this time acquired an unenviable reputation. It was one of the cities which belonged to Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. Its name had been changed to Sychar, meaning drunken or foolish, on account of the wickedness of its citizens. Jesus afterwards forbade his disciples to go to any of the cities of the Samaritans. Nevertheless, he went there now himself; thus rising above dispensational barriers and overstepping the limitations of his mission, in order to take pity on one of that lost race.

From among the vicious of this place the Saviour had resolved to gather some trophies of redeeming grace. He concluded that he must show even there the omnipotence of that love which was to change the lion into a lamb, the outcast into a child, and the alien into an heir. He must plant some trees of righteousness at the foot of the Mount of Curses, and preserve a remnant of the God-forsaken Samaritans. Jacob's well must send forth richer blessings than the water it furnished the Shechemites.

Notice, secondly, Christ's meeting a disreputable woman of the place. These two persons form almost the sole actors in this memorable scene. They were as different from each other as light and darkness, and yet fellowship sprang up between them. They were as far from each other morally and spiritually as the poles of the earth, and yet they were brought together by a mysterious spiritual power. They were members of two antagonistic nations, and yet their national prejudices now melted like snowflakes in the midday sun. They were devotees of rival religions, and yet the worst rivalry yielded at this time to peace and concord.

The more conspicuous of the two of course is the weary stranger, who sat on Jacob's well. Here you catch a full view of the Saviour's humanity. You can see the dust of the road clinging to his sandals, and the large beads of sweat standing on his brow. You can read weariness in his limbs and heaviness in his eyes. You can feel that that hungry and thirsty one, who flings himself on the grass or sits on the masonry beside the well, is bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh.

There is a world of comfort in all this. Christ could have called the ravens to bring him food, and the clouds to distil of their contents to quench his thirst. He might have turned the stones of the valley into bread, and opened fountains of water on the rocky sides

of Ebal and Gerizim; he might have summoned angels to minister to his wants, but he preferred asking a poor woman of Sychar to do it. He was willing to put himself under obligation to one who was despised by his people on account of her birth, life and religion. Here is true humanity. Kindness and heartfelt sympathy lay beneath that heaving heart; tenderness and love were shrouded in the soul of that weary man; grace and mercy were blended most beautifully in that face wrinkled with care.

Our Saviour to-day wears in glory the same human form. He is changed as to his outward appearance, but not as to his heart's inner workings. The weary pilgrim who cast himself on the well at Sychar is enthroned amid his redeemed ones in heaven. The divine Shepherd who is to-day leading his flocks to living fountains is, in the sympathies of his glorified manhood, the same Saviour who sat on Jacob's well. When the cries of the tried and tempted of earth reach his ears, they receive the loving response of a human heart.

There is not only humanity, but humility displayed in this incident. Though a man, weary with travel, yet he might have shared the feeling of his race in despising a Samaritan. He might have given her a shekel of silver for the cup of water, and thereby put her under obligation to him, but instead of that, he asked of her a favor, showing thereby that he did not despise

her on account of her poverty, religious connections, or manner of life. There is no surer way of putting ourselves on equality with our fellow-men than by asking of them a favor. If we would touch the heart of the humble and cast down, if we would win the confidence and sympathies of the lowly, we must condescend to ask of them a service. Our gifts to them lead them to feel the distance existing between us, but their gifts to us cause them to feel that they stand on the common level of humanity with us.

There is not only humanity and humility but charity here displayed. It astonished the dissipated Samaritan. "How is it that thou, being a Jew" (his dress, tongue and appearance betraying him); "askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?" The Jews and the Samaritans had been for ages bitter enemies. It, therefore, surprised this woman to find a Jew able to rise above the prejudices of his race. It touched her heart, and gave her a better view of life. It disposed her to hearken favorably to what the stranger had to say.

During this interview, Christ rose from being a son of Abraham to being the Son of the Highest. In the offer made he showed himself greater than the patriarchs. "Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well?" He not only offered her living water, but rehearsed the sad story of her life. On hearing

this, she pronounced him a prophet. She felt that he could enter into the concealed depths of the heart, and reveal its hidden iniquity. She was conscious of being in the presence of an extraordinary person. At this juncture, he says, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." These simple words are full of divinity! They carry us up to heaven! What effect they must have produced as they fell fresh from the lips of Jesus on the ears of the poor villager! They turned her reproving questions into an humble prayer: "Give me this water." They changed to her mind the weary stranger from a prejudiced Jew to an object of religious worship.

The other person in this picture is a disreputable villager. "There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water." She is one of the daughters of Sychar, living at this very time in adultery, and knowing to some extent its sinfulness. On being accused of it, her conduct showed that she was ill at ease. She showed that she had been sinning against the dictates of her own conscience.

She was ignorant as well as dissolute. Religious things had not occupied much of her attention. "The living water," "the well of living water," "the water springing up into everlasting life," were expressions far beyond

her comprehension. To her they were like the words of an unknown tongue. She could think of no water higher, or more precious, than the contents of Jacob's well. There was over her mind and heart a veil of ignorance that caused her to misinterpret all that the Saviour had said to her. She stood in his presence a living embodiment of Paul's words: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God."

She was not only dissolute and ignorant, but immersed in the cares of this life. She hardly knew what it was to look heavenward. The earthly water-pot and the well of Sychar; the duties of her household and the physical wants of her family so filled her mind that she had neither room nor opportunity for anything else. The present so absorbed her thoughts as to exclude altogether the future.

Notice, thirdly, the interview which took place between these dissimilar persons. It would be natural to expect from Christ some words of reproof, heavy accusations or solemn threats. We might infer that his words under such circumstances would be deep as the thunder and scathing as the lightning, but lo! they fell as the rain and distilled as the dew. He did not denounce her adultery, though of course he disapproved of it; he did not find fault with her ignorance, though he deplored its existence; he said nothing concerning worldliness, though he regretted it, but simply asked her for some

water to drink. Here we find sovereign grace in all its glory. He first spoke to the sinner, and not the sinner to him. He was at Sychar the tender shepherd, who went after, until he found, the lost sheep, before the lost sheep struggled to get back to the fold or to seize the shepherd. He begged, besought her, as though he were the gainer.

Christ not only spoke to her first, but he did it unexpectedly. The woman had no expectation of meeting the world's Saviour at Jacob's well. She as usual went after water without looking for aught beyond. She did not know that her name was written in the Lamb's book of life, and that therefore it was needful for the Messiah to go through Samaria. Even after seeing his face she did not suppose that he would speak to her. And, after his speaking, she did not suspect that he would make her at once an heir of eternal life.

This is a specimen of what occurs all around us. The Saviour comes unexpectedly to this and that one. The still, small voice reaches the heart in the most unaccountable way. There goes a sick soldier to a stranger's door to obtain permission to sleep on his veranda. He is offered a bed in the house, but he declines it on account of his condition. He asks leave to lie anywhere under the shelter of the dwelling and it was granted. A little girl comes out to see him and feels a deep sympathy for his condition.

She offers him her kind ministry, but he is in no need of it. Foiled in this, the little angel prays for him before she goes to bed, and the soldier hears the words: "Blessed Jesus, shelter the poor soldier on our porch; may he love thee, and be cleansed in thy blood." These words sank into his heart and awoke new reflections. They broke his slumbers and disturbed his rest, but they led him to look for a nobler rest. Little did he think, when he obtained permission to lie over night on the piazza, that Jesus would speak to him through the window from the mouth of a babe.

Christ not only spoke first, and unexpectedly, but convincingly. He clearly showed his divine skill and tenderness. He dealt with Nicodemus—a man carefully reared and versed in all of life's proprieties—gently and delicately. He dealt kindly with the woman of Samaria, but with her dissolute life, ignorance, and blunted feelings he knew that there were no scruples to consult. She needed the piercing blast of the north wind, bringing with it sharp convictions of sin, and hence he resorted to that kind of means. He hurled the barbed arrows of truth through the thick folds of guilt and pollution covering her heart, and turned the full blaze of the eternal throne upon her darkened understanding, until she lay bleeding at his feet. "Go, call thy husband." Here was a sharp thrust at her conscience. "I have no husband." "True," re-



sponded the Searcher of hearts, "thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband." This went deep, and called up memories of past iniquities. It opened that desolate soul to her own severe inspection. It gave her a clear view of the world of sin wrapped up within. It brought her to a full consciousness of what she was in God's sight. It proved to her the harbinger of the Sun of Righteousness which dispersed the clouds that had thus far obstructed her vision, and enabled her to rejoice in the truth she had as yet but dimly seen.

Christ spoke to her savingly. This was his aim in the whole interview. It would be interesting to trace the successive steps leading to this culmination. They resemble those which she took from her bleak home to Jacob's well. Each brought her nearer and nearer, until she finally reached the water. Every word and question of the Saviour led to the living water. Jesus answered and said unto her: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Under this simple figure was disclosed to her the great plan of salvation which instantly rose before her in its source, progress and results.

Its source is more than hinted at. It is not

good works, it is not perfect obedience. It does not spring out of the earth; it flows not from the rock, it distils not from the clouds. It is the gift of God: "The water that *I* shall give." It comes from the Saviour's heart. It flows down from the eternal hills.

Salvation is not only of God, but in the sinner's heart. It is not an outward robe which the storms of winter may tear away, nor a detached object which human means may remove; but a spiritual life—a hidden life. "The water that I shall give him shall be *in* him." It is "Christ in the soul the hope of glory." The spring whence the river flows is below ground. The stream is visible, rising and flowing, winding and reflecting the sun's rays, but no eye can detect the source. The Christian is unseen. His life is hid with Christ in God.

This salvation which is of God and in the heart is largely independent of outward influences. It is wholly so in its perpetuity. No external agent can destroy it. But its outward manifestation and fullness may be somewhat dependent on worldly influences. But even these cannot be wholly destroyed. Summer's drought cannot dry them and winter's frost cannot bind them. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water." There is joy often within when the outgoings are dark and threatening. The spiritual stream frequently flows freshest when that of earth is dried up.

This salvation is beyond all price. It is more precious than gold—even the gold of Ophir. “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.” What a contrast between this and all other means used to slake the soul’s thirst! The inscription written by our Lord on the well of Sychar may be written on all the wells of this world. “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again.” Let a man drink ever so deeply of the sparkling brooks of worldly pleasure, and he will thirst again. Let him quaff to his heart’s content of the turbulent waters of self-indulgence and he will thirst again. Let him sip ever so freely of the stream of power, and he will thirst again. Let him catch the golden tides of wealth and he will thirst again. But the water that Christ shall give him “shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

Alas, that so many in Christian lands should eagerly pant after the painted glories of this unsatisfying world! Alas, that so many should drink of these earthly streams, when the living water is so full, so fresh, so free! For what, within a few brief years, will it all come to? A death-bed without hope, an eternity unprovided for, a corpse, a shroud, a grave! All that the world can give, apart from Christ, cannot satisfy the soul.

Notice, lastly, some of the results of Christ’s interview with the woman of Samaria. It con-

vinced her of the worthlessness of her own faith. This was for her a sober matter. It is a solemn thing for a soul to be stripped at once of its shelter, its carefully constructed defenses, and its strong tower! It is pitiable to see one who has been at ease exposed suddenly to the stormy blast and made to shiver in the wintry cold. The woman of Samaria was, in her way, religious. She was able to point to the mountain side on which her forefathers had worshiped for centuries. She knew considerable about the Messiah, and looked, in her way, for his coming. To some extent she was acquainted with his character. She had some knowledge of God and of the principles of morality. She had been an observer of the rites and ceremonies of the Samaritan religion. She thought that she had enough to shelter her in the day of storm and judgment. But, lo! all these were swept away by a single sentence of the great Prophet: "Ye worship ye know not what." What you inhabitants of Sychar take to be religion is no religion at all. The props on which you now lean will presently let you fall. The refuge into which you have fled is a refuge of lies. There is no genuine worship as long as the soul remains unrenewed by grace, and as long as the love of Christ is not shed abroad in the heart.

She was not only convinced of the worthlessness of her religious duties, but taught the true way to worship God: "They that worship him

must worship him in spirit and in truth." No elaborate ritual is demanded. No sacred place is needed to make it effectual. No carefully arranged words are called for. Two things only enter into it, viz., a spiritual and holy God revealed as a loving Father, and an humble, trusting soul looking up to him with reverence and faith.

The last result of the interview at Jacob's well was to turn a wicked woman into a noble missionary who should carry glad tidings to her fellow-citizens. The woman left her water-pot and went her way into the city and said to the men, "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" In her abounding joy she forgot her errand at the well. She ran back to the city without her pitcher, to tell her relatives and friends of the living water. She left Sychar a wretched sinner, and returned a rejoicing saint. In a moment a fountain was opened in her stony heart, that was not only to bubble up, but to flow over. Not only her own powers were refreshed, but the waste places around her home. Her soul was not hereafter to be a stagnant pool, but a sparkling spring discharging everywhere its living water to cause the God-forsaken town and the blighted valley to blossom as the rose.

The grace which was so full and free at Jacob's well is still full and free. The Spirit and the Bride still say, Come. The water of life is still freely given.

## CHAPTER VI.

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### THE CONVERSION OF ONE OUTSIDE THE CHOSEN PEOPLE—THE SYRO- PHOENICIAN WOMAN.

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Matt. xv. 28: "O, woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

THIS is one of the most touching incidents in the life of our Lord. He was once prompted to overstep the boundary of his own country, not to teach nor to heal, but to seek a little rest in a quiet region overlooking the old cities of Phœnicia. We read that "he rose and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon." This is a tract of country lying between the Tyrian Ladder, or the ridge of rocks north of the bay of Acre, and the foot of Lebanon. The precise spot to which he resorted was the ancient town of Sarepta, on the shores of the Mediterranean. Here he hoped to escape notice, and spend a short time unrecognized by its inhabitants. But he failed in this. Just as soon could the sun find a place in the heaven

where he might pause and rest, as Christ could find a hiding place in any land. Whither could the Friend of sinners go without being followed by the poor and needy claiming his friendship and waiting for his blessings? Whither could the great Physician go without encountering sufferers ready to appeal to his loving and compassionate heart? His fame had been noised abroad, and his works of mercy had become known to all the people of these regions.

“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!” Her *nationality* is here given for an important purpose. She was not one of the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but a descendant of those corrupt tribes whom the chosen people were to exterminate. She was a child of that doomed race in whose room the descendants of Abraham had been planted. She was a woman of Phœnicia not only in its Canaanitish but Syrian sense—that Syria which had not only so often, in its limited acceptation, been the foe of Israel, and consequently bears in Isaiah’s prophecies the burden of Damascus, but which three hundred years before Christ’s advent had merged in itself as one empire, the old glories of Assyria—the Assyria of Shalmaneser, Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar—and which thus involved in its associations and connections the whole body of the *Eastern* enemies

of the Jewish people. She is further called "a Greek," and very properly, for all this region was subdued by Alexander the Great, and continued until after her day to be regarded as a Greek colony. She had doubtless fallen into the degeneracy and idolatry of her fellow-citizens. Hence, by birth, by pedigree and by religion, this woman was a Canaanitish Gentile.

She had somehow heard of Christ's grace and power, and was determined to try both. "Humble, penitent and believing," says Archer Butler, "she came from the long slavery of her idols. She spoke for one whom she had left at home, and spoke as only a mother could. Her words were few—she strove not to be heard for her much speaking, but quantity was compensated by intensity of feeling and truth of conviction. Tears and cries, not words and periods, were intended for him who hears not with human ears; who regards not the tongue, but listens to the beating of the heart! Her words were few, but what a body of theology they contain! She cried unto him, saying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David!' 'Mercy,' for every thought and purpose of thy heart is compassion; 'mercy,' for art thou not the long-expected Messiah, at once the Lord of all and the Son of David, true God and true Israelite?"

Most unexpected barriers here rise mountain high. She has found the right person, "Son



of David." She addresses him by that name, but he retires mysteriously behind those lofty Jewish barriers which conceal him from the view of a *poor Canaanite*. He appears as a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promise made unto the fathers. Not one jot or tittle of those promises could ever fail in the hands of such a faithful and august minister; and therefore, unless the Syro-Phœnician could view him in a higher character than as a minister of the circumcision, he must maintain strict silence. "He answered her not a word." What a damper to her warm heart! What a blight of her fond hopes! She had poured out words of the tenderest pathos on the ears supposed to be always open to the cry of distress; she had pleaded with all the earnestness of a mother with one who had been called the Friend of sinners; and she had cast her tearful eyes on his benevolent face in hope of a gracious response, but he had no answer for a Canaanite. He must stand for the truth of God and confirm the promise made unto the fathers. With these promises she had nothing to do. He could not help a Gentile at the expense of the seed of Abraham.

An ordinary seeker might give up his effort before this *first* barrier. But not this Canaanitish woman. Her faith was not to be foiled. She became somehow convinced that there was a rich blessing in the heart of Jesus for her,

and she was bound to have it. She had set out to touch his loving, tender heart, and she would not be put off. The dispensational barriers might be lofty, but that made no difference to her. They might be immovable, but it was all the same to her. She knew nothing about his covenant regulations with his own people. She was not supposed to know. All she thought of was his blessed character and tender heart. She had heard that he was mighty to save, and hence felt that, though he might not be able to *remove* the barriers, he could rise *above* them. Just here the light of hope began to break upon her soul—though the glories of the Son of David could only shine within the boundaries of Jewry, the glories of the Son of God could shed their bright beams over all the earth. The Plenipotentiary of heaven could perhaps, if he would, transcend his commission. He cannot be bound by laws, when he himself is the Law-giver.

The simple fact that he had all power in heaven and on earth was not wholly satisfactory, however, because the same power that had made Carmel to blossom had left Sinai a desert. He had said, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." At this very point, seemingly the darkest and the most discouraging in her search after Christ's mercy, her faith takes a bold and lofty flight. "She

springs," says the writer already quoted, "from Christ's supreme control and infinite power to the benevolent equity of Providence. She rises above the clouds of divine power which seem to us, who can only see from below, *dark, disturbed, stormy*, into the holy serenity beyond them. She sees the calm Sovereign of the universe partial, yet impartial too, preferring some, yet forgetting none. She knows that his care is over all his works, and, deepest wonder of her heaven-sent enlightenment! she can see that he loves her, and yet accords his unquestionable right to love, if he please, others more; allows she can ask but little, yet believingly dares to pronounce that little *certain!* She will permit no mystery of dispensation to contradict the truth of the divine character. 'Truth, Lord,' is her retort, for the calmness of her settled convictions left her power to point her reply: 'Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.' Everything is here. All Christianity is concentrated in one happy sentence. She believes in her own lowliness; she believes in God's absolute supremacy; she believes in the secret propriety of the apparent inequalities of his providence; she believes that those inequalities can never affect the true universality of his love."

What a lesson is here taught those who stumble at God's plans and purposes! It is frequently said that if men are *elected* to be saved,

they *will be* saved, do what they will. This is their sheet anchor, their stronghold. There is in this an appearance of respect for the divine power. They see no use in attempting anything themselves; for if they are not of the elect, it all will be in vain. The conduct of the poor idolater in the text is a standing rebuke to this class. She knew that she was not one of God's chosen people, and understood the necessary limitations of Christ's mission, but she did not on that account give up her search. She persevered until she secured the blessing. She was determined to reach the Saviour's heart if she had to pass through iron gates, or rocky barriers, and she succeeded.

Some are making barriers of their own, and putting impediments in the way to heaven. They are assured of the infinite love of God, they have heard Christ's gracious invitations, they are entitled to all the promises of Scripture—for they are to *every* one that *heareth*. To *all* that are weary and heavy laden—to *whosoever* will. Let all take these promises to the throne, and tell the Promiser that they understand them to include *them*, and he will not cast them away. It is an encouraging fact that the same Bible which teaches God's sovereignty, teaches also man's free agency. The same Bible which says, "Whom God foreknew, them he also predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son," also says, "Whosoever will, let him take

of the water of life freely." Prying into the profound mysteries of God may do as much injury as gazing upon the sun did the mole, whose organs of vision could not bear the splendor of the orb of day. Let us not perplex ourselves then, with those things which are too deep for us to fathom, but let us bless God that, according to the Scriptures, "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," even the chief.

The second barrier which rose between the Canaanitish mother and the Saviour's blessing, was his apparent indifference to her prayer. It was discouraging enough to feel that she was, by reason of her birth and religion, outside the covenant blessings of the chosen people. But to be treated with absolute *indifference* by the Saviour of the world was all but overwhelming. He might have uttered a word of pity! He might have expressed some tender regret at her hopeless condition! But he uttered not a word! In no other case is found similar coldness on the part of the tender Saviour; nor are we informed of the cause of it.

The disciples noticed it with amazement. Their Master never acted so before—he had never treated another as he had this poor Canaanite. Their hearts were greatly moved. They asked him to grant her request and let her go. It was a rare thing in the life of Christ to

seem less tender toward the afflicted than his disciples, and to need to be importuned by them to a deed of charity. "But all is rare here," as one commentator remarks; "rare his silence, rare their entreaty, and rare too the next step, or stage, of the incident."

Two reasons for this strange conduct of Christ suggest themselves. First, he may have desired to test the feelings of his disciples, who, in the narrow spirit of Judaic exclusiveness, might have been unprepared to see him grant his blessings, not only to a Gentile, but to a Canaanite, a descendant of a condemned race. It was true that he had healed the servant of the Centurion, but he was probably a Roman, certainly a benefactor to the Jews, if not a proselyte of the gate. But it is more likely in the second place that, knowing what would follow, he may have desired to test yet further the woman's faith, both that he might crown it with a more glorious reward, and that she might learn something profounder respecting him than the mere Jewish title which she may have accidentally heard.

At this juncture she came "and worshiped him, saying, Lord, help me." Her faith once more proved equal to the test. It enabled her to put herself in the divine presence as one simply needing *help*, and no one can ever do this in vain! Oh! the depth, the power, and the fullness of her short prayer, "Lord, help

me!" It consists of only three words—three *short* ones. They form a chain with three links—golden links. The "Lord" is put at one end and "me" on the other, and "help" is placed as a blessed link between! Nothing can be simpler. The moment faith forms this kind of chain all is fixed. The little word "*help*" contains everything that the soul can need here or hereafter.

Many feel discouraged yet at Christ's silence to their importunate prayers. They have been praying for themselves, and for their friends, but he has not given the slightest response. On this account they are perplexed, perhaps cast down. "Forty years," said one, "have I been pleading before the throne, and no answer has yet come. I am ready to give up," and she gave up; then the reply came. Under the conviction of sin men sometimes pray, and ask for an interest in the prayers of God's people, while they persistently refuse to believe in Christ. What is it they pray for? What is it they really want? What is it they would have God do for them? The gushing fountain is open and accessible at their feet! What are they doing? Drinking? No, but praying God to quench their thirst! They turn to the passing traveler and ask him to pray that God may take away this feverishness in their soul. What saith the Spirit? "Come and take of the water of life." You may

have read that story of a ship's crew dying of thirst on the coast of South America. When a vessel came in sight, they hailed her and asked for water to quench their thirst. "We are dying," they cried, "for the want of water." "Why," replied the sailors of the hailed ship, "you are in the mouth of the Amazon, you are in fresh water; why do you not cast your buckets and help yourselves?" I say to you, who may have prayed long and earnestly for the waters of life, that they are all around you; draw from the wells of salvation; drink and live.

The third barrier which stood in the way of this poor woman was her personal unworthiness. She felt that she belonged to a cast-off race. She acknowledged that she was a Gentile. She had not concealed from Christ her past idolatry. Nevertheless she was not prepared for the last and most trying repulse. It was bad enough to be told that she lay without the limits of Christ's commission; it was discouraging to have her warm entreaties cooled by a painful silence, but worse than all was the designation given her by the Saviour, namely, a *dog*. "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." Here, you say, her faith must fail her. But wait! Will it grow strong enough for this emergency? Will it bear the heat of this scorching crucible? The Saviour knows with whom he is dealing. He is



leading this Gentile mother to a point from which she can get a view of him which will satisfy every longing of her soul.

How completely is this at last effected! She accepts the distinction made by Christ between the children and the dogs. She readily admits that in the same household there are the children of the family; there are also the dogs, and that it is right they should be fed at different times and on different viands. In the great human household differences of a like kind exist; there are the favored sons of Abraham; and there are the outcast children of Ham and Japheth. "She neither disputes the fact," says Dr. Hanna, "nor quarrels with those arrangements of Providence under which a different treatment had been given to them; she takes the lowly place that Christ has given her among the outcast tribes—among the dogs! But have not the dogs and the children all one master? Do they not dwell under one roof? May not even the dogs expect some little kindness at their master's hands? The finest and the choicest of the food should be given to the children, but are there no fragments for the dogs? 'Truth, Lord,' she cries, venturing in the boldness of her *ardent* faith to take up the image that Christ had suggested, and to construct out of it an argument, as it were, against himself: 'Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.'

“‘Truth, Lord, but thou art the Master; and there dwells in thee such a kind and loving heart, that I will not believe—no, not though thine own words and deeds should seem to declare it—that the meanest creature in thy household will be overlooked or left unprovided for. Truth, Lord, I am not a child, and I ask not, expect not a child’s favor at thy hands. I am but a dog before thee, and it is no part of the children’s food—it is but a crumb from thy richly furnished table that I crave; and what but such among all the rich and varied blessings that thou hast come to lavish upon thine own—what but such would be the saving mercy upon the like of me, and healing my poor afflicted child?’ She triumphs and more than triumphs. Not one moment longer does her Lord prolong the agony of her suspense. ‘O, woman,’ he exclaims, ‘great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.’”

Many in our day say that they are too great sinners to be pardoned. I fear that these do not feel the full meaning of their allegation. They may be conscious of heavy guilt, but they are not conscious of guilt so crushing as that. One of this class told her pastor, who knew the weakness of human nature, that she was too great a sinner to be pardoned; that she had done despite to the Spirit of grace, and defied for many years Christ’s authority. The keen eyes of that master in Israel

saw below all that show of humility a large amount of self-righteousness, and joined with her in her depreciation of self. When she was done, he proceeded to say that she was a far greater sinner than she had acknowledged—far greater than she had any conception of. At this point the spirit of rebellion arose. She broke out into a torrent of invectives on professed Christians, and alleged that she was much better than many of them. Her concealed pride and self-righteousness came at last to the surface. She went home displeased with her pastor, declaring that she could no longer attend his ministry since he had such a low opinion of her character. But his searching words had made their impression. "Yes, you are a greater sinner than you have any conception of," rang in her ears, until she was brought to the condition of the poor woman in the text. She became willing at last to accept even the crumbs from the Master's table. When she reached that point, the blessing came. Her sins were forgiven. The Lord said unto her, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." After this she visited her pastor with a light heart and a beaming face, in order to tell him that her sins had been forgiven, but not until she had cried :

"Other refuge have I none ;  
Hangs my helpless soul on thee ;  
Leave, ah ! leave me not alone,  
Still support and comfort me."

If you, dear reader, have imagined that you are too great a sinner to be pardoned, give it up at once and remember that Christ's blood cleanseth from all sin. Throw your dying soul into his loving arms. Cast your all upon him for time and eternity. Approach him at once with the sweet words :

“Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind ;  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind :  
Yea, all I need, in thee to find,  
O Lamb of God, I come !

“Just as I am ! thou wilt receive,  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve ;  
Because thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come !”

“Truth, Lord : yet :” is the sum and substance of faith. If we have learned to connect these words, we have learned to believe. “Truth, Lord :” sin has abounded unto death ; *yet* “hath thy grace much more abounded unto life.” “Truth, Lord :” cursed is every one that abideth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them ; *yet*, “He, who knew no sin was made sin for us ; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” “Truth, Lord” is a true view of self ; “yet” is a profound knowledge of Christ. The two, in their proper relation, constitute a saved person—a child of God.

## CHAPTER VII.

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### THE CONVERSION OF A BROKEN-DOWN MERCHANT—THE DEMONIAC OF GADARA.

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Mark v. 19, 20: "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee," etc.

AS we have seen, the publican and the way-side beggar both went after Jesus. They had heard of his intention to pass by them, and made every effort to meet him. The former ran before the multitude and climbed into a sycamore tree, and the latter cried, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me."

In the case of the Gadarene this order was reversed. Though he had heard of the coming of the Great Physician to Capernaum, he did not cross the lake in order to consult him, nor did he wait on his own shore for his arrival. There is nothing in his history from which we may gather that he ever expected to see him. He had doubtless heard of his miracles, but had expressed no desire to meet him.

Here is a case in which the Great Shepherd

went, of his own accord, after his lost sheep. He commanded his disciples to secure a boat to convey him to the other side of the sea. They were probably ignorant of his object in crossing, but it was enough for them to know that he wanted to visit the opposite bank. There is in this a lesson of great practical importance. The Saviour could have walked around the sea to the country of the Gadarenes, but he preferred allowing his disciples to take him thither. This suggests that means are to be used in order to bring Christ into touch with perishing souls.

Christ not only went after the lost sheep, but he went after it at no little sacrifice. He had just been addressing the multitude until his physical strength was nearly exhausted. As soon as the boat left the shore, therefore, he lay his head on the hard cushion of the steersman and fell into a deep sleep. But he was suddenly roused by his frightened companions. One of the fierce storms which are common to Palestine unexpectedly swept down the slope of Gennesaret. With scarce a moment's warning the air was turned into a whirlwind, and the sea into a foam. Danger became imminent, but so great was the Saviour's fatigue that he calmly slept until the cry came, "Lord! Master! Save, we perish!" Without confusion of thought or quivering of nerve, he first stilled the tempest in the souls of his disciples, and then commanded

the winds and the waves to subside. But soon after this had passed away the boat reached the bleak country of the Gadarenes.

The subject of the text is the *Conversion of a Broken-down Merchant—the Demoniac of Gadara*.

Notice, first, his physical and mental condition when Christ found him. It is said that he was possessed of the devil. He is called in Scripture a Demoniac. For our present purpose it is of no importance what theory we adopt regarding the nature of the demons that tormented his mind or body. The inspired writers do not explain it, and commentators have not been able to set the question at rest. Some hold that the demons in the Saviour's day were not evil spirits, but malignant diseases. Whichever it was, the results of their possession of the man in the text were distressing in the extreme.

The first result was the marring of his personal appearance. It is safe to infer that the Demoniac was in his younger days a man of some comeliness of person. But when he met the Saviour on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, he hardly looked like a man. His face was burned by exposure to the sun, his frame emaciated by hunger, and his limbs were bleeding from self-inflicted torture. His eyes were fierce and fiery from inward pain, and his whole bearing was that of a savage beast that was a

terror to the neighborhood. His food consisted of what he found in the woods, among the rocks and along the east coast of the sea.

The demons not only marred his personal appearance, but separated him from his home and friends. He was probably a native, and once a respectable merchant of the city of Gadara. But, under demoniacal influence, he had lost his love for family and kindred, and they, in turn, had become alienated from him. From the loss of affection, if not from shame, he left his home and city for the highlands of Gennesaret, where he discovered spacious excavations used as haunts of robbers, places of refuge, and tombs for the dead. By this time, his mind was so far unbalanced that, instead of living with his relatives and following his original calling, he dwelt among the tombs, where his thoughts were filled with ghostly images of the departed.

The devil not only marred his personal appearance and drove him from his home, but plunged him also into the deepest degradation and misery. The tendency of sin was then, as it is now, to degradation, if not to downright bestiality. The devil creates in man's soul an affinity for the low and the unclean. By it the Gadarene demoniac had been reduced to the level of the swine. Like the prodigal he found himself sharing the lot of the unclean beasts.

The devil, moreover, produced a species of



mental derangement. This is the best way to account for the conduct of the Gadarene in making his home not *among*, but *in* the tombs. There he was a voluntary outcast from society without desire to hold communication with his family. He cared not for their welfare. But, during his lucid moments when he realized what he once was, and what he still might be, he carried on a frantic war with himself by lacerating his body with sharp flints gathered on the slopes of Galilee. When he relapsed from these lucid spells he was more furious than before. Then, in self-protection, he forced his neighbors to bind him with fetters and chains. But so great was his physical strength under those demoniacal possessions that he broke the chains and cut the fetters in sunder.

It may be asked, if there is anything analogous to this in our own day and country? No doubt there were peculiar elements in the case of the Demoniac which put his case beyond the limits of ordinary experience. He must have been at times overpowered by some agent stronger than himself. Meanwhile, it must be true that he yielded to it of his own accord. We are not ready to affirm that the Demoniac was insane any more than the drunkard, the libertine, the gambler or the defaulter of our own day. All of them, however, are to be regarded as being possessed of the devil in some sense. Is it not true that there are

raving maniacs of this sort in every community in our land? Are not all those such who succumb to the tempting power of the intoxicating cup? Some of them, alas! have taken every step the Gadarene Demoniac took. Their visage has become marred by years of indulgence. Their home has lost its attractions, and their dearest relatives, their fascination. Their business and place of abode have been exchanged for the country or some out of the way, godless village. There, unchecked by the presence of wife, children or friends, they are sinking to the low level of the beast. The recollection of home and their once happy life, mingled with the compunctions of a guilty conscience, lacerate the soul more severely than the flints of the desert cut the flesh of the Demoniac of Gadara.

Are not our large cities the homes of multitudes of libertines who have exchanged the sweet company of mothers and sisters for that of strangers whose steps lead to death? Do not their disfigured faces and unsteady bearing betray the presence of the demon lust? Have not multitudes left homes of happiness and comfort for mining camps, or God-forsaken towns on the frontier? Not a few have passed from one downward step to another, until they have nearly reached the low level of the brute.

Is not the course also of the gambler and the defaulter similar to that of the Demoniac?

How many of them in a few years, have sadly changed in their personal appearance? How many have become indifferent to home and relatives and sought a place of abode in a far country, among a people for whom they once had no affinity?

Notice, secondly, the impotency of human means to bring such persons to their right mind. It can hardly be doubted that the wife and children of the Demoniac did all in their power to correct his habits, hide his faults and bring him to repentance. No one can describe the pain they experienced; the struggles through which they passed, and the tears they shed over his bad conduct long before they let it be known to his neighbors. It is safe to say that not until all home expedients had failed was he allowed to break through the restraints of love and affection. Even when that was done friends and neighbors were not wanting to offer their kindly services, but they were of no avail. It is emphatically said that they "could not bind him, no, not with chains." They tried fetters, they tried manacles, and they tried confinement. But he broke the fetters, removed the manacles, and escaped from his confinement. They could do nothing with him. All the expedients devised failed.

Human means are no more effective in our own day in bringing about a thorough reformation in the case of demoniacs. Many are the

chains and fetters, the tears and expostulations of wives and children. Friends and relatives weep over, preach to, exact promises from, watch night and day, follow and guard the drunkard. Parents, children and friends expostulate with and try to persuade the gambler. The law of the land, public sentiment, and the punishments of Almighty God are pointed out to the libertine. Much is thus done to keep vice and crime from encroaching on the liberty and enjoyment of others; much to keep both within respectable bounds. Nevertheless, they fail to change the Demoniac; they succeed at times in checking the demon, but they do not cast him out. They may protect society, but they do not save the soul!

Notice, thirdly, the reception accorded to the Saviour by many who stand most in need of his blessings. The Demoniac begged of him to let him alone. "He cried with a loud voice, saying, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God?" The Gadarene, observe, identifies himself with the demon within and bids the Saviour let him alone—"go away and disturb me not." He is contented to live in the tombs, to clank his chains, cut his flesh, and howl like a madman. There can be no sadder description than this of the sinner! Yet it is true, down to the minutest details. The drunkard cries to Christ to let him alone; not to torment him, not to take away his intoxicating

cup! The gambler cries to him to go away, to let him alone, and not to torment him. The libertine bids him keep away, and prays him not to trouble him. The covetous man cries, "Torment me not! Let me cling to my gold and die by its side." The proud, the vain, the ambitious and the self-indulgent cry, "Torment us not by coming to us with self-denial, with religious life or with a cross." This is the welcome often received by him who left heaven to convey men thither; who took upon him the form of a servant in order to suffer for them; who crossed the tempestuous sea of life to reach them; who agonized and died in order to save them. Alas! multitudes speak of Christ as though he came to torment their souls. Nevertheless, he continues to seek and to save even the least likely to come.

Notice, lastly, a few of the results of Christ's meeting the Demoniac. He was restored to his right mind. He was not what we understand by a downright maniac, but a man who was broken down in health or morally wrecked. The Bible often speaks of the sinner who rebels against God and destroys his own happiness as being beside himself. The prodigal is said to have been brought to himself, implying that he had been previously mad. What can be greater madness than to defy the God in whose hands our breath is? than to carry weapons of rebellion against him who controls the winds

and the waves? than to refuse the offers of reconciliation when we know that persistence in rebellion will prove our ruin? The converted man is restored to his right mind.

The Demoniac was brought not only to his right mind, but to his right place also, namely, the feet of Jesus. What a contrast between what this man was a few days before, and what he is now. Yesterday he dwelt in the tombs—to-day he sits at the feet of him who is the Resurrection and the Life. Yesterday he carried upon his body the scent of corruption—to-day he carries the atmosphere of heaven. Yesterday he lay in the midst of the chilly damp of the caves—to-day he basks in the full sunshine of the Sun of Righteousness. Yesterday he sat under the shadow of the burnt mountains of Gadara—to-day he sits under the shadow of the great Rock. Yesterday he amused himself with the phosphorescence of the grave—to-day he revels in the light of life!

The attitude of all true converts is that of sitting at the feet of Jesus. They take a low place. Humility is their constant garment. It shows their spiritual greatness. Much knowledge makes one humble. The shallow man is the conceited one. There is no room for self at Jesus' feet. No place is found there for pride. None sit at his feet but the empty, the poor in spirit, the one who smites upon his breast and cries, "God be merciful unto me, a sinner."

Sitting at his feet is a mark of discipleship also. The Demoniac, therefore, was not only in his right mind and in the right place, but in the right company, namely, that of Christ's disciples. He mingled with those who were in the school of Christ. It is there that the Spirit teaches his lessons, and those who do not sit there are not taught of him. But he who sits there gets nearest to the throne of God. No soul will find itself at the foot of the throne in heaven which is not found at the feet of Jesus on earth.

The Demoniac was further brought to the right frame of mind. It is said of him, as was said of Paul, "Behold, he prayeth." Prayer is the Christian's vital breath. The Demoniac breathed out his desire in the ears of Christ, but, strange to say, he received no reply. The prayer which he offered was the only one perhaps which Jesus did not answer in the way it was intended. The demons prayed that they might be permitted to enter the swine, and it was granted; the Gadarenes prayed that Jesus might depart from their coast, and it was granted. But when this restored child asked to be allowed to follow the Saviour his prayer was not heard. The wayside beggar was allowed to go with the multitude who were praising God, but the Demoniac was refused the same privilege. Why is this? The object for which he prayed must have been right and proper. The spirit in

which he prayed must have been humble and all that could be asked. Why, then, was he not heard? His motives may not have been in all respects right. They may have contained a selfish desire to be happy in Christ's presence, and to bask the rest of his days in his love, to see his face and enjoy his fellowship, rather than to be useful in his service. Or, his prayer may have been offered from a trembling fear of his old enemies. He may have felt that if he remained in those parts the old passions and habits would come back and again overcome him, forgetting that he who expelled them was able also to keep them out. The Lord himself, though absent from him in the flesh, had promised to watch over him in all his ways.

Or, perhaps, his prayer may have been offered from a desire to abandon the place in which he had lived a raving demoniac. Shame may have led him to wish to get away from the presence of those whom he had injured, and who had seen his wretched condition under demoniacal possession.

Admitting that the object, spirit and motives of his prayer were all right, the Saviour may have seen that it would be better for him and the neighborhood to answer it in a different way from what he intended. Of all men, he seemed to be the one to go back to his country and companions to tell the story of Jesus' love. All the disciples combined could not produce the



effect upon the minds of the Gadarenes which his presence could. "He had friends," says another, "who once felt tenderly toward him, but whom he had long estranged by his ungodly ways. He may have had a father and a mother who had spent many a sleepless night thinking of their poor prodigal, especially when the storm was loud and he was alone with the demons among the tombs. He may have had a wife, who thought, with burning tears, of her husband, who once, and perhaps still, was the idol of her heart. He may have had children to whom their father had been a terror and a mystery as they gathered around their mother's knee like scared birds when they heard his voice and his steps coming near the door. To be the acquaintance, the parents, the wife, or the children of a demon-possessed man—how dreadful was the thought! He has dragged them all with him into the abyss and tormented them through his sin. In vain have they tried to bind him with chains. Many a painful struggle to do so has that house witnessed. Upon its walls the chains are perhaps still hanging with the thought of their being used again, and with better hopes of success. Now, however, since the man has met Jesus, these chains are no longer required. The friend, son, brother, husband, father returns; his face calm as an inland sea, and shining as if he were fresh from the brow of Tabor. His mother can see in his eyes those of her child

again, yet more innocent and beautiful; the wife can discern the old, familiar look of earthly love transfigured with heavenly grace; the children can climb his knees and kiss his face still marked by the scars of the old battles among the tombs, yet full of love that casteth out fear, and whose every look and word is to their young hearts refreshing as the dews of Hermon."

It was Christ's will that this restored Demoniac should be a beacon light to all the people of that coast. This newly enkindled light on the banks of the dangerous sea was not to be kept safe and warm, or hid under a bushel, but exposed to sight that it might safely guide those driven before the storms. How fearful is the denunciation of Christ against a beacon which sends forth no light: "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" What image could be more terrible than this! Here is a Christian, set forth as an eclipsed luminary! A star in the night, or a sun at noon-day, giving no light!

At the command of Christ the Demoniac went to his own house. Picture if you can that return—that approach to his own household—that crossing of the threshold—that welcome of the loved ones—those bounding feet—those clasping arms—those sobbing utterances of overwhelming rapture, too deep for words! "There he is once more with the living, in his own house with the ministries of gentle hands, the brightness of

loving eyes, the music of sweet voices—all the peace, the triumph, the rapture of holy and exultant life, within him and round him!”

Follow him one step further to the streets of Decapolis, and see him among the friends and companions of his years of revelry and sin. See how his eyes flash, how his heart bounds! See how, in simple yet earnest eloquence, he tells them of that blessed Redeemer who met him in his wanderings, and who graciously saved him from sin and hell! His very presence, in his right mind, was a sermon more eloquent than any which Paul or Apollos could preach.

## CHAPTER VIII.

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### THE CONVERSION OF A MAN AT THE LAST HOUR—THE MALEFACTOR ON THE CROSS.

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Luke xxiii. 42, 43 : " Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," etc.

THESE are the last words of a dying thief. He had reached the eleventh hour both in time and condition. In the jaws of death he cast his eye on Christ and addressed him as Lord. Life was rapidly ebbing, and for him the world was fast passing away. He knew that there was a world beyond, but he had no ground for hoping that it would be well with him there. He had only a few more hours to live, and the question stared him in the face how he was to make the necessary preparation for the future in the midst of pain, jeers and blasphemy.

He was not only on the verge of eternity, but was a malefactor—a thief or a robber, probably both. He was conscious of being justly con-

demned, and legally nailed to the tree of shame. In addressing Christ, he thus summed up the sad result of his life and that of one of his fellow-sufferers: "We receive the due reward of our deeds." The end of our efforts, the results of our life, the prize of our conflicts, and the reward of our struggles, is this righteous condemnation! What could be more sad! Nevertheless a ray of hope, a flash of light from above appears even here. It discloses the outward expression of the noblest faith, a faith which sprang up where there was no soil; which put forth leaves without sunshine; which bore precious fruit in the absence of the usual succession of seed-time and harvest.

The subject to which your attention is invited is *The Conversion of a Man at the Last Hour—the Malefactor on the Cross.*

Notice, first, some of the steps leading to it. We discover in his words that he had now a full realization of his guilt. It is a fearful experience for one to become suddenly conscious of his lost condition; but to become conscious of it when it seems to be too late to have it remedied is overwhelmingly so! The dying thief makes no attempt to conceal, to justify, or even to palliate his crime. He acknowledges it frankly and fully: "We indeed justly." He thus takes the entire blame to himself, and seeks the clemency of the merciful King hanging by his side.

A realization of his lost condition at such an

hour and under such circumstances must have produced fear and trembling. Never before had he seen himself in such a light. He had not previously felt that he stood before any court higher than the Roman tribunal. If he had ever thought of the eternal throne, it was soon forgotten, banished or buried from sight. But now it cannot be set aside or even disregarded. He asks his fellow-sufferer: "Dost thou not fear God?" It is every one's duty to do so. What a change to go from a state of irreverence to God's presence—from habitual forgetfulness of divine justice to a recognition of its claims.

Here are not only a conviction of sin and fear of retribution, but a new view of the Person hanging by his side. Human sympathy could afford him no help—for divine justice was now frowning upon him. By his side hangs one who seemed to be covered with obloquy and loaded with shame, but who, in spite of all accusations and appearances, was not only innocent of crime, but omnipotent. "Lord, remember me." New light instantly dawned upon the malefactor's mind—the events of the past few days passed in rapid succession before his dazed vision. He had possibly heard the testimony of Pilate, who declared that he had found no fault in Christ, and that of the great company of people and of women who bewailed and lamented him; he had heard many speak of Christ's innocence and of the work of love and kindness he had performed among them

for three years and a half. He had no doubt seen his face, and discovered on it the outward glow of a pure and calm conscience; he had seen him fearless, composed, yet meek and gentle; he had heard his words to the daughters of Jerusalem, so solemn and yet so tender, so majestic and yet so divine: "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." He had perhaps heard his prayer, revealing a love and holiness, more than human: "Father, forgive them!" This caused the conviction to flash across his mind that Christ was the only-begotten of the Father—the Lord of Glory.

The thief recognized in Christ not only divinity, but also kingly power: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." He looked upon him as the Sovereign of that kingdom which was looked to and longed for by all the chosen people. What he saw in him to produce this conviction it is impossible to tell. Christ had no robes to set forth his kingly power save the crimson stream that flowed from his hands and feet; he had no crown save that of thorns to set forth any dominion he might have possessed; he had no throne save the trans-fixed beams of the cross; he had no courtiers but the disciples who at this trying hour stood afar off. Yet, the dying thief discovered that he was a king!

Whatever may have been the process through which his mind passed, he came to the conclusion

that the taunted sufferer hanging by his side was the long-expected Messiah, the hope of Israel, and the refuge of the guilty, and made his appeal to him, desperate as his condition was. Condemned of men, condemned by his own conscience and condemned of God, he felt that probably the pangs he was now enduring were only the foretaste of the deeper and darker ones still awaiting him beyond death. But, by his side, if anywhere in the universe, was one who was able to rescue him from his impending doom, and with that conviction he turns to the bleeding Saviour, and urges his plea: "Lord, remember me." There is no hesitation, no circumlocution, no peradventure in his speech or demeanor. He sees his guilt; he feels his danger; he is sure that he discovers in Jesus evidence of power to help him, and he at once earnestly urges his suit: "Lord, remember me!" No conditions are here laid down, no terms are offered; he centres his hopes in the mere mercy of him whom he names Lord and King. All he asks is remembrance, notice, pity, just what the Lord might, of his own goodness, be disposed to grant him. This is unquestionably a saving faith. When alarmed under the conviction of sin, a man attempts much, does much, and promises more, in the hope of obtaining God's favor. But when he is thoroughly humbled; when he is truly penitent, he begins to apprehend the real character, the all-sufficiency, and the matchless grace



of Christ, as the Saviour of perishing souls; he then abandons self-reliance, he struggles under conviction; he offers no terms, he simply and cordially submits to the good pleasure, the unrestricted will of God in Christ, and the feelings of his heart are expressed in the words, "Lord, remember me!"

He commits his cause into his hands for time and for eternity. To be remembered by this High Priest who is about to enter the holy of holies, is all his desire and hope. He was in some way raised of God high above all his contemporaries, so that the saying became true, the last was first. He had not only knowledge and faith, but clear knowledge and a gigantic faith. He understood, better perhaps than the apostles, the nature of the two kingdoms of Christ—the relation between his cross and his crown, his suffering and his glory. His confidence, even in his humiliation and shame, was stronger than their faith or their adoring trust. He was more loyal and faithful than even the chosen ambassadors and pillars of the church, for he confessed his heavenly Master before his revilers, testified of his righteousness in the ear of those who condemned him, and shared his reproach. Thus on the cross of loneliest agony and bitterest suffering, when this poor earth offered no consolation, no sympathy, no cordial to the Son of Man, this dying thief afforded all three; he was indeed a lily among thorns; whose beauty and fragrance afforded

Jesus the last joy he experienced before his death.

Notice, secondly, the difficulties with which the dying thief had to contend in securing his salvation. The first, in all probability, was the suggestion of Satan that he was too great a sinner to be saved. The difference between a man who is a great sinner and a self-righteous one is very great. Satan seeks to destroy their souls in a variety of ways. Coming to one he whispers in his ears, "You are not so lost as to need salvation." He comes to another and says, "You are too bad to think of ever getting it." The centurion is an example of the former, and the thief on the cross, of the latter. If any one under the blinding power of the deceiver has gone so far astray as to think that he does not need salvation through the atoning death of Christ—if he considers himself safe, because he has never done anything particularly wrong—does not wish any one ill, does his duty as a father, husband, friend, attends to some of the outward duties of religion—supposing that all this is true, to what does it amount? It does not go beyond the religion of Cornelius, for an angel sent from heaven came to tell him that his prayers and alms had come up as a memorial before God. But, did his prayers and alms save him? No, they only proved that he was seriously seeking salvation. And, again, if any one should say, "I am too bad, too wretched, too guilty to be saved, I am beyond

the reach of mercy," let such an one consider the case of the dying thief. The man in the text was doubtless tempted of the devil in this direction. What! a thief and a robber asking mercy with his dying breath! Is it not an insult to God? In spite of all this the poor man looked to God and was saved.

The second difficulty with which the thief had to contend was the outward appearance and surroundings of the Saviour. He saw in him no outward signs of power or of royalty. He was not present when courtiers applauded him; he was not an eyewitness of the Galilean prophet's triumph when the risen Lazarus stood before him; when those who had long been lame, halt, crippled, paralytic or lunatic were gratefully proclaiming the power that had healed them; he was not one of the thousands who were miraculously fed by his hand and who hailed him as the prophet long foretold, the Son of David, Israel's promised Messiah, Israel's King. No, no, all those recognitions were probably unknown to him. The dying thief spoke to Jesus—the despised, calumniated, condemned Jesus—when hanging on the cross; when surrounded by a jecring crowd, mocked by the rude soldiery and taunted by even the priests and scribes of his own people.

The third difficulty was the desperate circumstances in which he found himself—hanging upon the cross. It was not easy, hardly possible, for him to speak so that the Saviour could hear him,

and hardly possible for him to hear the reply of the Saviour. It was with difficulty he could control his mind and tongue under the excruciating pains of the crucifixion. It was hard to think under such circumstances, and yet he succeeded in doing it to the saving of his soul. Unmoved by example, unawed by power and unaffected by ridicule, contempt or mockery, this boldest of believers judged for himself, and obeyed the impulses of his own conscience, and, while all the world rejected the Christ, while his very disciples were hiding in cowardly desertion, this poor suffering criminal, this despised outlaw, this guilty but now penitent thief, dared, alone and in defiance of Jews and Romans, of tortures and scoffers, to single out the very person on whom all others thus heaped contumely and insult, as the One whom his heart and his voice, solitary though it was, should hail in open acknowledgment, as the great Prophet, the promised Messiah, the Lord of the future, the one only hope of his guilty, perishing soul: "Lord, remember me."

Notice, lastly, the triumphs of the dying thief, and, first, his triumph over his old habits, passions and desires. Only a few days before this he was an abandoned profligate, a daring ruffian, trampling under foot the laws of God and man in order to gratify his passions and satisfy his lust. But now he is completely changed. His lust is eradicated, his fierce passions are subdued and

even his love of life is lost under the influence of higher, nobler and holier motives. He seeks the life of his soul, regardless of the infamy that covered him, or the pain that was racking every fibre of his frame, and of the contempt and mockery which were heaped upon both, and without spending a thought on the pangs of death which he felt must soon be upon him, he looked beyond death and the grave and laid his last wish, his final petition, before him in whom his faith then clearly beheld the Lord of glory.

He also triumphed over time. To God time is nothing. His Spirit can create in a moment what, in others, is effected only by degrees. None can reach a higher point than this sinner did who was suddenly converted. To fear God, to acknowledge our sins, to submit to the justice of our condemnation, to turn to Christ, to call him Lord, to surrender ourselves entirely to him, to cry for his mercy and mediation, to believe, to love, to hope, to confess and suffer Christ's reproach—these are the fruits of the Spirit against which there is no law. Although no time was given the thief to bring forth fruit on earth to verify his profession of a godly life and to prove the genuineness of his conversion by a holy walk, yet he performed one of the greatest works which any saved sinner ever did. He bore witness to the truth—he bore it under trying circumstances and before a gain-saying world. True, his feet and his hands were nailed to the cross, and were

therefore powerless, but his eye, his heart and his tongue were free. His eye was free to gaze upon the Son of God; his heart was free to believe in his blessed person, and his tongue was free to confess his name when all other tongues were silent. Had he come down from the cross and lived to the age of Methuselah, he could have done nothing more glorious, nothing more pleasing to God than that which he did during the few brief moments of his Christian life—a life begun, continued and ended on the cross, so far as this world was concerned, but to be resumed in that other world in which death cannot enter.

The marvel of this conversion is that though sudden it was complete. It cleared away many stages at once. The dying thief did not linger in gradual repentance, in dawning faith, in prelude prayers or in desires and efforts, before clear and indisputable fruit appeared; but summer and harvest, aye, and a rich harvest, trod upon the heels of spring.

Some regard conversion as a mere process of training and education and not as a new birth. Such ask if it is possible to prepare a person for heaven in so short a time? The answer is, Yes. Suppose one was rejoicing in the birth of a child to bear his name and to inherit his property, and some one should say, "Wait a little; the child is only just born, it is not yet trained and instructed; do not yet regard it as your son." Would he not say, "Away with such reason-

ing. That child, to be sure, is young—only a few hours old, but it is as much my son as if it had been born twenty-one years before." And so when a sinner believes in Christ, he is a child of God, and God provides for him an inheritance; and if death should in youth carry him hence, he takes him at once to paradise.

The thief on the cross triumphed not only over his habits, passions, desires, and *time*, but also over *death*. "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Here is implied a blessed companionship with the eternal King. What could be more glorious? The dying thief, like ourselves, was ignorant of the locality of paradise. He did not know where it was, what is the condition of its inhabitants, or what are their pursuits and pleasures. But he is told in the text that he is to be *with Jesus*. He would be willing to remain ignorant of the locality if he could only be *with Jesus*. It is a glorious fact that when saints die they at once enter into the presence of the great King. He said, "Where I am, there shall also my servant be."

"The promise to be with Jesus comprehends," says some one, "all that we can desire. It includes perfect pardon; for would Jesus welcome to his presence in glory any whose dress was soiled with sin? It includes perfect sanctification; for would Jesus invite to his immediate presence any who would be reluctant to obey any command he might issue?"

There is not only companionship with Christ promised the dying thief, but companionship with him in paradise: "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Without dwelling on the connection which the word paradise is supposed to have with heathen nations or with the primitive paradise, the first abode of men embraced the following elements, viz., a state of purity or of innocence; a place of beauty, abundance and delight; a condition of peaceful and full satisfaction; nearness to God as a loving Father, and an implied pledge of immortality. The Saviour told the thief that there was in reserve for him a better world to which he would conduct him after death; for wherever he himself would be, there should his believing people be also.

There was not only companionship with Christ in paradise promised him, but companionship at once. "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." How close to each other, according to this, are pardon and paradise, the cross and the crown, the battle and the prize, the wilderness and Canaan, the darkest midnight and the morning dawn, Calvary and Zion above!

What a striking contrast is that which we are here permitted to behold—the conscious blessedness rushing close upon the heels of the momentary darkness of death! At one moment there hangs the thief writhing in mortal agony; the wild shouts of the fierce mob at his feet and all the familiar sights of earth growing dim to his



failing vision. The soldier's spear is thrust, the legs are broken, and, in an instant, there hangs a relaxed corpse; and the spirit is—where? Ah, how far away; released from all its sins and its mortal agony, struggling up, at once, into such strange divine enlargement—a new star swimming into the firmament of heaven, a new face before the throne of God, another sinner redeemed from earth! Thus from the greatest depth of sin, the Lord Jesus often gathers his brightest jewels. Paul was a persecutor, Zaccheus a publican, the man of Gadara a demoniac and the woman of Samaria an adulteress; and yet the grace of God went plunging through the depths of their sin and ignorance until it found them and brought them up to the light of life. There is no depth the bottom of which grace cannot touch. “All over the Dead Sea of sin covering the nations at the present time, God's diving-bells,” says some one, “are busy; all through the mountains of death, God's miners are blasting.” Where sin aboundeth, grace shall much more abound.

Though we are permitted to rejoice in the boundless nature of God's love, though we are told that whilst there is life there is hope, yet there is no safety in putting off our conversion a single day. It is said of the man swept down the Niagara River, that before his little skiff tilts over into the whirling rapids, he may, by one bound, reach the shore and be *saved*. This, how-

ever, is a fearful risk to run. For a moment's miscalculation and skiff and voyager alike are buried in the seething trough below, and they come up torn to pieces far down on the turbulent foam. "One," as an old divine has said, "was saved at the last moment upon the cross, that *none* might despair; and *only* one that none might *presume*." "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation."

## CHAPTER IX.

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### THE CONVERSION OF A PRIME MINISTER— THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH.

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Acts viii. 26-39: "And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip saying, Arise, and go toward the south," etc.

THE remaining persons, whose conversions are to be considered in this volume, differ in important particulars from those whose conversions have already been under consideration. Their surroundings in youth, their early instruction, and their social positions were unlike those of Zaccheus, the blind beggar, or the Demoniac of Gadara. It is not necessary to add that there was but little resemblance between their conversion and that of the women whose lives we have endeavored to depict.

The majority of the persons whose conversion has already been considered were humble, uneducated, and of but little influence in the community. The seeming exception was Zaccheus, but that was only a little more than a

seeming exception. For he was probably a man of humble origin and of limited early advantages, but had acquired some influence through his wealth. His calling kept him from places of importance in the government, as well as from high social positions in the community. Consequently the conversions which have been considered were largely those of the poor.

The conversions which are to occupy our attention to the end of this course are those of men of the highest character socially, politically and intellectually. The Eunuch in the text was an Ethiopian nobleman of high rank and influence. Cornelius was a member of one of the most distinguished families of Rome, and Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee of the rarest intellectual powers.

Attention has been called to a number of the difficulties which had to be overcome by the poor in their efforts to find the Saviour. At times they seemed almost insurmountable. In the remaining discourses your attention will be called to the difficulties to be overcome by the rich. In these days of mission churches and zeal for the poor, there is some danger of overlooking the rich, and of neglecting their spiritual needs. The destitution of the poor is brought before us in a thousand forms, but that of the rich is seldom dwelt upon. Even those who regularly attend the house of God, are not often appealed to in the same burning terms as the poor. Their difficulties are overlooked and sometimes set aside

unappreciated. In the second half of the last century, Mr. Courtonne, a celebrated pastor of Amsterdam, visited the Hague and the court of the Prince of Orange. He was surrounded by the officers of the Stadtholder who pressed him to preach for them on the Sabbath. He refused, saying that the Prince and his nobility would be offended at his plain, uncompromising way of presenting the truth. They promised that the household of the Prince would be at church, and that no one would be offended at what he might present. Upon this assurance, he consented to preach. When the Sabbath came, the church was crowded with the nobility and members of Parliament. The preacher took for his text the words at the head of this chapter. The theme was the conversion of the Ethiopian statesman, and the divisions of the discourse were the following: namely, first, "A courtier who read the Scriptures, which is surprising; second, a courtier who acknowledged his ignorance, which is more surprising; third, a courtier who asked his inferior to instruct him, which should cause the redoubling of our surprise; and lastly, a courtier who was converted, which caps the climax of wonders." The state of things in our own day is not quite so bad, perhaps, and yet it is still true that not many mighty are called.

A few of the difficulties in the way of the Eunuch's conversion are given by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. He was an Ethiopian

nobleman of high rank—perhaps of the highest—for none but such were generally appointed chamberlains of monarchs, or lords of the treasury. It is not possible to tell with certainty what was this man's nationality. The champions of the colored race persistently hold that he was a full-blooded negro. They claim that they have traced his pedigree from some of the old Ethiopian families which had carried the marks of that race from time immemorial. We are not prepared to deny positively that the Lord Chamberlain of Queen Candace was a colored man. For we know that not a few of the highest officers of Mexico and Brazil to-day belong to that race.

It must be confessed, however, that there are important circumstances connected with the incident before us, which suggest that the Eunuch was a Jew and not a negro. It is affirmed by a trustworthy historian that a large number of Jews had settled at an early day in and around the capital of Queen Candace. It is further stated that the prime minister in the text went up to Jerusalem to attend the yearly feasts of the Jews. Hence, we may reasonably infer that he was a Jew, born perhaps in Ethiopia. However this may be, the first barrier to his conversion remains the same, viz., a strong religious prejudice. If he was an Ethiopian he would have adhered to the gods of his fathers and despised the worship of the God of Israel. If, on the other hand, he was a Jew, he would have

shown the hatred of that race toward the despised Galilean.

The second difficulty was his position in the government. He held the most important office under the sovereign. He was the Lord Chamberlain, or, as we would call him, the Secretary of the Treasury. And, as the sovereign was a woman, it is quite likely that he was virtually the ruler. He exercised great power over a nation both large and influential. He might have excused himself on this account for not attending to his soul's interest. Or, he might have looked down upon religion, regarding it only as an object fitted to cheer the poor and occupy the minds of women and children. Many in his position have resorted to such subterfuges. The temptations of the rich and influential are often stronger than most men who are not similarly situated suppose.

Then, his association was such as to drive away all thoughts of religion. He had to live night and day in the midst of gaiety and fashion. As the highest officer of the realm, it devolved upon him to entertain distinguished foreign guests, and treat with courtesy and kindness the home princes; to respect national prejudices and protect, if not worship, the gods of the land. He was expected to be all things to all men. Such duties are not adapted to lead men to think of their soul's salvation. The exercise of power does not usually foster humility.

✓ Though this man was in possession of almost  
limitless power and fame, yet he was not happy. Though he had abundance of wealth so that he could say with the man in the gospel: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry," yet he was not above and beyond anxiety. In some way, not revealed to us, he had discovered that he was a sinner, but he had not found how he could obtain pardon. His conscience had told him of guilt, but no one had pointed out to him the world's Redeemer. He left Jerusalem under a load of grief, deeply sighing: "O wretched man that I am." He was spoken of perhaps as one of the successful ones of the earth and, on that account, was supposed to be always happy. But the Spirit of God had begun his work of reproving him of sin and of righteousness and of judgment, and consequently all his riches and honors failed to satisfy his longings. His soul thirsted for God, for the living God. He drank of the world's pleasures, but he discovered that whoso drinketh of that water thirsteth again. His soul sought goodly pearls; but the pearls of the world, valuable and bright as they had formerly seemed to him were now of no value in his eyes. He was made to desire the good part that should not be taken from him.

Should it be asked what were the means used to bring the Ethiopian to this state of mind, the only answer that can be given is that we are not



told. We know that God has many ways and messengers for this purpose. He may have used, in the Eunuch's case, disappointments in the things which he longed and labored for. His worldly ambition may have been gratified, and his brightest hopes realized. All that his imagination had pictured as a desirable good may have been gained. But he did not find any of them satisfying to the soul. He may have frequently soliloquized, "This will make me happy, fill my soul with perennial sunshine, give me peace and tranquillity! But, alas! it leaves me as empty as I was before." Or, perhaps, some great affliction, bitter grief, or sore disappointment—the treachery of a friend, or the ingratitude of a dependent—may have led him to reflect. Or, some captive may have told him of a rest which he might find for his soul in the land of Israel.

The second step taken to satisfy the longings of his soul was to go up to Jerusalem. Having heard that there was a place in which God revealed himself to his people, he could not rest till he had visited it. This occurred the very year in which Christ was crucified. He had possibly heard of him from priests and rulers. He may have been a visitor in the Sanhedrin when Christ's character and deeds were discussed. He may have witnessed the trial before Pilate, mingled with the multitude that followed Jesus along the Via Dolorosa to the summit of Calvary and seen him hanging upon the cross. He may have heard

of his miracles and been present at the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost. He may have tried *everything* and gone *everywhere* for rest, but failed to find it. The priests may have exhorted him to be thankful for his blessings and to abandon his melancholy forebodings. They may have called his attention to his prosperity; to the gifts and graces he possessed; to the spheres of usefulness he had filled; and to the honors which had been heaped upon him. All this only made him cry: "Conscience! religion!" They may have replied: "Are you not conscientiously religious? Who can charge you with injustice or unkindness?" He continued, "Death! the future!" They may have asked: "Can you not accept the teaching of the law and the prophets regarding them?" He heard nothing from these ministers of religion but commendations of his merits, flattery and fulsome eulogies. But they failed to satisfy him. They proved sheer mockeries. In despair he cried, "I must have truth, not opinions; sunlight, not the fitful phosphorescence of the imagination; solid instruction, not foolish flattery; a living one, even a Father who can forgive, love and guide, not cold abstraction which, after all, refers me to myself as my helper and saviour." He did not find in the Jewish religion what he came for and diligently sought!

Notice, next, the means which brought this anxious statesman to Christ and salvation. He was returning to Ethiopia with his wounds un-

healed, though probed to the bottom; with his fears unallayed, though painfully quickened; with his anxiety unremoved, though greatly deepened. Look at him! Within were found uncertainty, terror, anguish; at the same time, humility, longing for God, and prayerfulness. In his hands was the word of God, opened at the fifty-third chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. He was searching in it after the water of life as eagerly as he would have searched near a group of palm trees after a cooling spring. An instinct, stimulated by what he had seen and heard at Jerusalem, told him that somewhere near this spot the water of life would be found. He was reading the words: "He bore our sins." What? my sins? "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter." Here he paused! He could not go further. Great tears gathered in the dark eye of the distinguished courtier and dropped on the pages of the book in his hands. "Led as a lamb to the slaughter!" This recalled to him the Man of Sorrows whom he saw nailed to the cross. He dwelt alternately on the verse just read and the strange scenes he had lately witnessed. His heart was throbbing and his eyes swimming with tears. Of whom then speaketh the prophet? Of himself, or of some other man? Does not the word point directly to the *other man* who had just died on the accursed tree? Those looks and tones were more like heaven than earth. "When he was reviled he reviled not again." When the

dying thief at his side exclaimed: "Lord, remember me," he answered, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." That other man! "Of whom speaketh the prophet thus?"

So animated grew the reader, and so loud became the tones of his voice, that Philip, who was near, heard the interrogatories. He was anxious to help him, but was deterred by his official dignity. At that moment "the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot." Mark the coincidence! The Spirit, who had led the mind of the Eunuch to the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, brought from Samaria an inspired expounder of the mysterious passage! Upon this simple act depended untold interests! "God's ways are in the sea, and his paths in the great waters." "If his purposes in creation," says Dr. Arnot, "require the meeting of two circling worlds at some period in the evolution of time, he will so arrange that the two shall approach and touch each other at the very point of space and time which he has designed." The same might and wisdom have been at work to arrange a meeting wherever and whenever one earthen vessel charged bears Christ, and another earthen vessel empty receives Christ at a brother's hand. The Spirit not only brought the two men together, but he enabled the evangelist to speak a word in season, and gave the Eunuch a hearing ear and an understanding heart. Here we behold the humility, meekness and docile spirit

of the great man: "How can I understand unless some one guide me?" How ignorant often are even the most cultivated men, of the things pertaining to the salvation of their souls!

Finding the distinguished statesman ready to listen to his exposition, Philip preached unto him the gospel. The sermon is not given. The most meagre outline only is preserved. "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture." It was the same Scripture as that which the Eunuch was reading, namely, the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. A more remarkable passage of Scripture cannot be found. The evangelist could not preach anything from it save Christ and him crucified. He held up to the unknown traveler the one whom he saw on the cross as the Saviour of the world. The doctrine of the cross was pressed upon his attention and conscience with simple but telling power. It was not only Jesus, but Jesus as the Saviour of the high and the low alike. It was Jesus *then* and *there*.

Notice, lastly, the effect of the preaching, upon the mind, heart and life of the Ethiopian statesman. It was threefold, viz.: To believe in Christ, to confess him before the world, and to go his way rejoicing. As he listened to the telling truths contained in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, a new light and a new hope sprang up in his heart. He became convinced that the Messiah was the person whom he saw

hanging on the tree. He accepted the declaration that he was the Christ. He cast himself as a helpless sinner on his mercy. He embraced the Son of God in all his fulness as the Lord's anointed. He made a complete surrender of himself to him and declared that all he was and all he had were Christ's!

He not only believed in Christ, but he yielded to the promptings of the Spirit in the heart. He did not wait until Philip urged upon him the necessity of being baptized: "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? I wish to be a thorough convert. I am saved by grace and am glad to have the opportunity to show my appreciation of the blessing." His baptism was, therefore, a manifestation of his faith and a proof of his obedience and submission to the will of God. He was not ashamed to own, by this simple, visible act, his allegiance to the crucified Nazarene, and his belief in his divinity.

Having committed his all to Christ and been baptized in his name, "He went on his way rejoicing." This did not diminish the leagues of desert to be traversed before he would reach his home; it did not temper for him the rays of the tropical sun falling upon his head; it did not excuse him from further duty; but it did cast a new light on the desert he was crossing; it did assure him that the sun would not smite him by day; and it did furnish him with new motives for the performance of future duties.

If the religion of Christ were calculated to make any one sad and morose, it would have so made the great courtier of Queen Candace. He knew that it required him to give up many of his indulgences, much of his gaiety and perhaps the entire mode of his life. But, instead of making him sad, it caused him to rejoice. This is in harmony with the character of our religion. It should always be judged by what it brings and by what it takes away. It brings to us a sense of acceptance with God, and consequent rest of the soul; it brings to us a life which is both bright and joyful. It takes away from us the fear of death, the strifes within us, the fierce conflict which rages between our conscience and our inclinations, between our will and our passions, which tears the heart asunder and makes sorrow and tumult wherever it comes. It takes away the sense of sin. It gives us, instead of the torpid or the stinging conscience—a conscience calm and free from accusations, with the sting extracted. The gospel works joy, because the soul is at rest in God; joy because every function of our spiritual nature finds in it its object. It is both deep and abiding.

All this was experienced by the Ethiopian, for he went on his way rejoicing. He expected that afflictions, trials and temptations still awaited him in the idolatrous capital of Queen Candace, and in her God-estranged court, but he knew, on the other hand, that Christ had died for him,

that faith was the victory which overcometh the world, that God was a sun and a shield, and that he would give grace and glory.

What hinders you, dear reader, to become a follower of Christ? There can be nothing on his part! For he has come to seek and to save that which was lost. He calls you; his offers of pardon and peace are full and free, kind and urgent, tender and loving; his work is finished and his redemption is complete. What doth hinder you? Is it your sin? Christ died for the ungodly; he calls sinners to repentance. Is it your past ingratitude and open rejection of his mercy? Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Is it your want of repentance? Christ is exalted a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance and remission of sins. What doth hinder you then?

“Let not conscience make you linger,  
Nor of fitness fondly dream;  
All the fitness he requireth  
Is to feel your need of him.”



## CHAPTER X.

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### THE CONVERSION OF A MAN OF THE HIGHEST SOCIAL STANDING— CORNELIUS.

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Acts x. 1-48: "There was a certain man in Cæsarea, called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band," etc.

**I**N view of the brevity of Scripture on the subject, it is surprising to find a whole chapter devoted to the conversion of one man. The steps taken are given with a minuteness of detail that seems almost unaccountable. Is this due to the fact that the person converted was an officer of note under the Roman government? Has it been done in order to magnify the power of the Christian religion to reach the heart of the mighty as well as of the weak? That cannot be. For it is explicitly said in the same chapter that God is no respecter of persons. He does not fall into the weakness common among men of making a display of the conversion of any one because he exerts a mighty influence in the world.

There is probably close connection between the Saviour's great command, "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," and the conversion of the centurion. Christ had come not only to be the glory of his people Israel, but to be also a light to lighten the Gentiles. He came, it is true, to hold the sceptre in Judah, but it is equally true that to him must also the gathering of the nations be. The Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs and of the same body by the gospel. The conversion of Cornelius, therefore, marks the beginning of this promise. The way the door was opened for their entrance, or the steps were taken toward demolishing the middle wall of partition between them are carefully given. Cornelius formed the joint where the Gentile branch was grafted into the true vine.

This Roman soldier has often been compared to the father of the faithful. It is held that what Abraham was to the Jews, Cornelius was to the Gentiles. He was the first Gentile publicly admitted by the apostle into the Christian Church. With him began a new era in the kingdom of God on earth, and from him may be dated "the times of the Gentiles." Cornelius was not merely the representative and the earnest of a great multitude which no man can number, who, besides God's ancient people, are to be gathered out of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues, but his conversion and the outpouring of the Spirit upon him and all who, with him,

heard the word preached by Peter, were the events which formed a turning-point in the views and efforts of the apostles. It was the dawn of a day of light and joy for the Gentile world. As God chose, called and separated Abraham to be the father of the Hebrews according to the flesh, so was Cornelius chosen to be the beginning of the Gentile Church, and hence, probably, the space devoted and the importance attached to the conversion of this distinguished Gentile.

The person thus chosen to be the first fruits of the Gentiles was one of the most attractive and lovely in the world's history. In his noble character he blended those elements which everywhere command respect and love. He was not only a captain of the Italian band, which implies that he was a Roman, but he had inherited the frank, open and manly traits of that nation. Whilst he could not cringe and fawn to the highest of the high, he could not, on the other hand, be discourteous to the lowest of the low.

He was not only a Roman, but probably a member of the patrician branch of the Cornelian family, the most distinguished in the empire. By virtue of his social standing, he mingled in the best society in Rome, enjoyed the highest culture of his times, and the greatest political advantages of the age. He was sent with a portion of a Roman legion as the body guard of the governor of Syria, who had his home in the old city of Cæsarea.

Whilst stationed there he became convinced that the gods of the nations were dumb idols which could impart neither light nor peace to the soul; consequently he turned to the God of the Jews and adopted his worship. He studied the Scriptures, witnessed the devotions of the people of Palestine and admired their conduct. Though his knowledge of these things was defective, his privileges meagre, and his opportunities limited, yet he made the best use of what he possessed.

Through long residence in Cæsarea and by mingling extensively with the Jews, he became "a *devout* man, one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always." There is, probably, no church in our day which would not be willing to receive into her communion a man of his social and official standing, his devotional spirit and benevolent disposition. Two views have been entertained regarding the spiritual condition of Cornelius—one makes him a proselyte of the Jewish Church, and a truly pious man; the other makes him like the young man in the gospel, almost a Christian. It is alleged, in favor of the former, that "fearing God" is a term often applied to proselytes of the gates; that Cornelius offered up his prayers at the usual hours among the Jews; that he had read the Old Testament; that he had paid the tithes required by the Jewish law, and that he had conferred upon the Jews

many valuable gifts. In support of the second view, it is said that "fearing God" is a term frequently applied in Scripture to persons studious of piety and filled with reverence; that Peter calls him a person of another race, with whom it was not lawful for a Jew to associate, while there was nothing in the law to prohibit associating with proselytes; that the news of his conversion and the opposition made to Peter on account of it shows he could not be a proselyte, and that he is expressly classed among the Gentiles by the apostle James. For these reasons it is difficult to conclude that Cornelius was a Jewish proselyte.

On the theory that he was a Gentile, he appears to have received much light and knowledge from the Jews. He was convinced that theirs was the true God; hence he worshiped him essentially after the manner of the Jews, and showed by his alms and charitable deeds his obligation to him as the bestower of every good and every perfect gift. With all this, he lacked one thing. To fear and reverence God, to try to obey his commandments, to be kind and helpful to our fellow-men, to meditate on divine truth and to lift up our hearts to heaven in prayer, are goodly pearls, but they do not constitute the pearl of great price, whose possession is satisfying to the soul. All these make a sweet and beautiful character, but not necessarily the character of a true Christian. Seeking God is not the Saviour; the Saviour is no act of ours, no frame of mind, no virtuous exertion; he

is a living person, who gives himself, that the soul may find spiritual rest. Cornelius had many good traits, but he lacked the one thing needful. A man may speak with the tongues of men and of angels; have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; bestow all his goods to feed the poor, and give his body to be burned, and yet, for the lack of one thing, be as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal—of no value in the sight of God. We should pray to be delivered from the shallow advice, that a man should be satisfied with praying and doing his best! As if prayers were not means to an end, as if the one who really prays does not look for the answer, clearly and unmistakably God's answer, to whom he has cried. The man who is satisfied with praying and giving, has never prayed aright, and has never given from true love to God.

From all this we learn that irreproachable morality and religious rounds of duty cannot save the soul. The question, what would have become of Cornelius if he had died before the apostle's visit to him, is an idle one. God takes care of all such contingencies; but it must be admitted that the inference is not a groundless one when we remember Cornelius' own account of the angel's bidding. "Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee." It may be essential to some of you, whose characters, as far as they are outwardly seen, secure for you no

small degree of affectionate interest and esteem—characters honorable, moral, amiable, reverential—I say it may be essential that you too should meditate on the words, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God,” not far from it, yet not in it. One thing your religion lacks, and may not that thing be a simple, believing faith in Christ as your Saviour? Ponder, I pray you, the Evangelist’s testimony, so like that of the Baptist: “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” Beware of a religion in which Christ does not occupy his proper place, as the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the all and in all!

Notice, secondly, some of the hindrances in the way of Cornelius’s acceptance of the one thing needful. The first one in his way to become a Christian was doubtless his pride of blood. Could a member of the Cornelian band ever become identified with Jews? Could a proud aristocratic officer of the Roman army worship with the most despised of the subdued provinces of Rome? Could he bear the taunts of his rivals and even those of his own family, and run the risk of being dismissed from the Roman service? His proud, unyielding spirit rebelled against all this. How much less could he become the follower of a despised Galilean whom his government had recently put to death in the Jewish capital!

There was in Cornelius’s way not only pride of

blood, but perplexity as to Christ's character. All the religion possessed by him he had received from the Jews and the Jewish Scriptures; and now, those very Jews, with their ecclesiastical authorities at their head, had put Christ to death as an impostor, and laid Christianity under interdict and anathema. Cornelius had heard of Christ, his wonderful life and his tragic death. He was at a loss to know what to believe in regard to him, and what dependence to place in his claims to be the Messiah.

His profession also proved a hindrance to his becoming a follower of Christ. There was an impression in those days that a soldier could not be a Christian. His duties were thought to conflict with the principles inculcated by Christ and his apostles. This impression has existed to a greater or less extent ever since. One illustration will suffice. During some of the unhappy troubles in Ireland, an officer in the army of Lord Cornwallis was observed to be daily absent for a time from his quarters and the company of his comrades. This led to the suspicion that he was holding intercourse with the rebels, and to his trial by a court-martial, which resulted in finding him guilty of treason and in condemning him to be shot. On hearing this, the Marquis resolved to read the minutes of the trial, and, finding in them a number of unsatisfactory and unaccountable things, he sent for the tried and condemned man, to learn his explanation. Upon being inter-



rogated, he solemnly disavowed every treasonable practice or intention, declared his sincere attachment to his sovereign, and his readiness to live or die in his service; he affirmed that the cause of his frequent absences was his withdrawal to a place of retirement for the purpose of private prayer, for which his lordship knew he had no opportunity among his profane fellow-officers. He averred that he had made this defense on his trial, but that the judges declared piety among military officers an impossibility. In order to satisfy himself in regard to the truth of his defense, the Marquis observed that, if so, he must have acquired considerable aptness in this exercise. The convicted man replied that in that direction he had nothing to boast of. The Marquis then insisted on his kneeling down and praying aloud before him; which he did, and poured forth his soul before God, with such copiousness, fluency and ardor, that the Marquis took him by the hand, and said he was satisfied that no man could pray in that manner who did not live in the habit of intercourse with God. He not only revoked the sentence, but received him into his special favor, placing him on his staff and in the line of promotion. Thus, the centurion, in spite of the difficulties arising from blood, mental perplexities and profession, was led to the feet of Jesus.

In some of its aspects, his conversion was almost miraculous. First, he received a commu-

nication through the instrumentality of angels. Perhaps it required a divine interposition to prepare the Gentile world for the reception of the saving truths of the gospel. At any rate, Cornelius was visited by an angel. "He saw in a vision clearly, about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God." He approached him in *human* form: "A *man* stood before me in bright clothing." From this we see that celestial intelligences appeared in New Testament times. Painters and poets give us angels with wings, but in none of the records of the visits of angels to our world do we find them thus endowed. The appearance of this celestial messenger struck fear into the heart of Cornelius: "He was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord?" It is probable that the best way into the heart of a brave soldier is through his fear.

The angel brought words of encouragement to the trembling sinner. He said unto him, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God." His good character, his devout spirit and his supplications were recognized in heaven. He had acted according to the light he had enjoyed, and consequently God was ready to give him more. Every breath of sincere prayer and every generous act of the soul went up as sweet incense from the altar of the heart. I incline to the belief, or perhaps the conjecture, of Mede, that very possibly Cornelius had been laying his perplexities before the Lord in prayer,

and asking divine guidance as to what he should believe and do, concerning Jesus of Nazareth.

The angel gave direction to "send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." Why not tell it thyself, thou blessed messenger of Jehovah? Thou knowest, as well as Peter, what the centurion is required to do! The gospel is to be preached by men, not by angels. God in his love and compassion has ordained that men saved from sin, death and hell, and animated by the constraining love of Christ, should be his ambassadors, and declare with all authority and certainty, and yet with tender sympathy and pity, the salvation which is in Christ. The messenger of peace on this occasion was Simon Peter. At this Cornelius may have been surprised. The teacher was not a Pharisee nor a scribe, not one of the priests nor of the Levites—but one Simon whose surname is Peter. He was to send, not to Jerusalem, not to the temple, not to the synagogue, not to Gamaliel, nor to one of his disciples—but to Joppa, a small town on the seacoast, and to a lodger at the house of Simon the tanner. What marvelous circumstantiality! What poet would have dared to put these minute local directions into the mouth of an angel? And why not? Because poets, as one has well said, "do not dare to be as poetical as God's ways and God's truths are in reality. For it is the highest poetry, and, blessed be God,

the truest fact, that God knows and sees and remembers all; that the house where Mary dwells and Martha and Lazarus—the homes of all his people, however poor and obscure they may be, are well known to him.”

Men still receive visions and dream dreams which arrest them in the way of sin. You may have read the account of the conversion of Colonel Gardner. He was one of the boldest sinners of his day. Whilst spending an evening of folly with some of his gay companions, he accidentally discovered a tract which his pious mother had put in his portmanteau, called “Christian Soldier, or Heaven Taken by Storm.” Before retiring that night he read the tract, hoping to extract some amusement from it. But, before he laid it aside, he fell asleep, or rather into a reverie, and saw a vision like that of Cornelius, not of angels, but of Christ himself hanging in midair on the cross, looking directly at him, and saying with his last breath: “O! sinner, did I suffer thus for thee, and are these the returns?” This led him to study the Scriptures and consult those who could direct him in the way of life. He was not saved by the vision, but the vision led him to the truth which made him free.

Notice, next, the preaching of Peter to the centurion and his family: “Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he

that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." Three important truths are taught us in this address: First, the universality of the plan of salvation. It is not confined to any special people or particular family, or to a given condition or calling. It is for all. God is no respecter of persons. No matter whether one is rich or poor, high or low, learned or unlearned, he is invited to secure the salvation of his soul. The merits of the atonement are sufficient for all; the force of moral motive is adapted to all, and the agency of the Spirit is available to all.

The second truth is that the only character acceptable to God is that which worketh righteousness. It is that which leads to a right conduct in relation to man, God, and the universe. Man is not accepted because of his Judaism or Gentilism, not because of his birth, his country or his particular form of worship, but because of his moral rectitude.

Here is further taught us the *mediatorship* of Christ: "Preaching peace by Jesus Christ." What the apostle says of Christ's mission is in substance the same as that which he proclaims in his discourse on the day of Pentecost. He shows that his mission was divine in its origin, redemptive in its purpose and universal in its application.

The third fact taught us in the conversion of Cornelius is the *effusion* of the *Holy Ghost*.

This was just as necessary to the conversion of the Gentiles as to that of the Jews. The divine Spirit, in its regenerating and redemptive influences, must ever follow the blood. The gospel is the channel through which this holy influence flows into the soul. The gospel is the chariot on which the divine Conqueror marches forth to subdue his enemies and to take possession of the land promised him of the Father. The Spirit, in connection with the word preached by Peter, effected the conversion of Cornelius.

Thus by varied means God opened the heart of the Gentile soldier, and the great folding-doors of the Church which form an entrance into the outside world. There is significance in the absence here of pomp and striking circumstances. It shows that in the higher and richer dispensation of the gospel, the revelations of the Holy Ghost are given with less of outward display, but with more of inward power; that his influence, in proportion as it is spiritual, resembles the dew and seldom exceeds the measure of the small rain on the mown grass. The Lord is less in the hurricane, the earthquake and the flame than in the still small voice. As in the material world the mightiest agencies are the least seen and heard, so in the kingdom of Christ. He writes his laws in our hearts with a silent pen, whose inscription is never effaced. His government is a government of persuasive love, but love is neither loud nor demonstrative.

The outward manifestations of Cornelius's conversion are very much the same as those witnessed since his day. Though a member of the proud and aristocratic Cornelian family, though a Roman by birth and education, and though a military officer of high rank under the governor of Syria, he did not shrink from the publicity connected with acknowledging the lowly Jesus as his Lord and Master. He and all his house were baptized. Thus, he not only declared to Jews and Gentiles his covenant relations with the world's Redeemer, but brought his loved ones also into the same blessed relations. Encouraging thought! Grace not only flows down like water, so that from the head of the house it reaches the youngest, "but it also, by a cognate law," says Dr. Arnot, "rises up like vapor, so that it may find its way from a godly child to a worldly father. Parents should bring their house to the Church and bring the Church to their house."

Cornelius not only showed his willingness to become an open follower of Christ by being baptized, but he showed also his readiness to be thoroughly identified with his humble followers. He urged Peter to stay at his house that he might learn of him his duty and talk with him over the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom! He desired Christian fellowship and the prayers of a good man. Happy house! Above it heaven was open, from it prayers ascended, and into it angels came from heaven.

We learn once more from this incident that the river of life does not branch out into divers streams. It is the same to Jews and Gentiles. "There is not a broad sweep of water," says some one, "for the rich, the intellectual and the cultivated, and a little scanty rill where the poor now and then come and get healed by the side of its precarious wave. There is no costly sanatorium beneath whose shade patrician leprosy may get by itself to be fashionably sprinkled. Naaman, with all his retinue watching, must come and dip and plunge like common men in the Jordan. The haughty son of the Cornelian family must be saved like the blind beggar at the gates of Jericho."



## CHAPTER XI.

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### THE CONVERSION OF A GREAT GENIUS— SAUL OF TARSUS.

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Acts ix. 1-9: "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter," etc.

**E**XCEPT Christ's advent and the descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, there is no event in the world's history of greater importance to the race, or of richer blessings to the Church, than the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. It was the starting point of many of the mightiest forces which have been used of Providence to mould the Church and the world. Whether we consider the heart, the head, or the outward conduct of this Cilician Jew, we are compelled to regard him as one of the most remarkable men of the ages.

The rare qualities of Saul's heart are often overshadowed by his peerless intellect. Amongst the former may be mentioned his deep humility and unaffected devotion to God's cause. He was unyielding when he believed that truth and principle were involved; he was gentle and

tender, whenever he had to deal with believers who were weak in the faith; he was self-denying and patient when he was persecuted for Christ's sake; he was affectionate as a mother, toward his son Timothy; his heart was ready to be sacrificed for Israel, his kinsmen according to the flesh, and his sympathies were world-wide in their scope.

None but those who have carefully studied his epistles can form an adequate conception of his intellectual powers. Luther discovered in his writings a treasure which filled his soul with peace and joy. On their radiant pages, earnest, struggling souls still find such accurate descriptions of their inmost feelings and thoughts, such lucid solutions of their difficulties, such clear demonstrations of saving truths as are found nowhere else in ancient or modern epistolary writings. His counsels of wisdom, gentleness, self-denial, meekness and patience direct to-day our households, govern our churches, and guide our missionary enterprises. Even his enemies confess that his epistles are both weighty and profound.

Paul's life and labors will not be fully known until their rich fruits are gathered at the last day. In general terms it may be said, that mainly through him the Gentiles heard the gospel and the Church of Christ was founded among them, that idolatry vanished and the pure light of revealed truth shone upon the dark and benighted nations of the earth. In Ephesus, in Corinth, in Athens, in Philippi, in Thessalonica

and in Galatia, as well as along the coast of the Mediterranean, from Jerusalem to Rome—*everywhere* may be found imperishable monuments to his untiring zeal and apostleship.

The elements entering into the structure of this unique character are rare and numerous. Even the setting must be carefully considered before we can discover its full splendor. The *time* of his birth was marked by the greatest events of secular history. It was during the reign of Augustus, which was the most illustrious in Roman history. When Saul began to inhale the pure air of the Taurus mountains and to lave in the crystal waters of the Cydnus, there was a noted youth rambling over the hills of Hebron, preparing himself by meditation and prayer to become the voice of one crying in the wilderness; and another more distinguished still, seen playing around Nazareth and the slopes of Tabor. And on the banks of Gennesaret could be found also three or four ruddy fishermen mending their nets, who were destined of Providence to become the inspired apostles of the coming dispensation. Neither the parents, nor the youths themselves, with one exception, knew aught of the sublime relations which they were to hold to each other in coming years :

“God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform ;  
He plants his footsteps on the sea,  
He rides upon the storm.”

Notice, first, some of the important agents in the formation of Saul's character. The first was the example and training of his parents. They were both Jews, as he has repeatedly informed us. He alleges that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, or a Jew from both parents. Though residents, and perhaps natives of Tarsus, yet his father and mother were bigoted members of the Jewish Church. They belonged to the sect called the Pharisees. And from the words, "he served God from his *forefathers*," we infer that his ancestors for generations had been strict Pharisees, serving the God of Israel in the synagogue at the Gentile city of Tarsus.

It is a remarkable fact that no mention is made by Paul of his mother. Most of the distinguished men of earth have owed a large debt of gratitude to their mothers, and they have usually taken pleasure in acknowledging it. Are we to conclude that Paul is an exception to this rule? It is difficult to do so. Some commentators have explained the omission by saying that the mother had probably died before the son was old enough to remember her. If that had been the case it would have been doubtless mentioned somewhere in his epistles. But a better explanation is, that his mother, though a true woman, was the most bigoted of the Pharisees, that she had trained her son to hate all other sects, and to be unswerving in his adherence to the interests of her own religion, and when he was converted

on the way to Damascus, and made one of the followers of Jesus, she blotted his name out of the family record and banished him as far as possible from her memory. This conduct is not without a parallel. Many a Jewish mother since then has done likewise. May we not conclude, therefore, that Paul, as a dutiful son, has intentionally thrown the cloak, not merely of charity but of silence also, over that devoted but bigoted parent. "Who can tell," says Dr. McDuff, "but ere he became Paul, the Aged, he was allowed to sit by the dying pillow of that mother and point her sinking soul to the same Jesus who met him on his way to Damascus!"

By such parents Saul was doubtless taught to believe in the Jewish Scriptures, to be a stern advocate of the law's authority, and to be the supporter of a regularly constituted government; to oppose every outbreak of irregularities and passion; to live a strictly moral life, to be unyielding in his opinions regarding his religion and to use all means in his power to propagate its truths; to be intolerant of the opinions of others, even to persecution, in order to carry out the principles of his sect. Such was clearly the early training of Saul of Tarsus.

In addition to this, he enjoyed all the advantages of the Jewish school in his native city. It is not likely that he was ever sent to the University of Tarsus, because there his mind would be in danger of being contaminated by heathen and

corrupt teachings. The Jews who lived among the Gentiles, and who suffered many things on account of their nationality, became intensely Jewish in their views and feelings. The home training and the teaching of their schools tended to produce this result. When Saul was old enough to be in danger of having his views liberalized and his morals corrupted by contact with Greeks and Syrians, he was sent to Jerusalem, where he would enjoy the instruction of the greatest rabbi of the nation.

There the teaching was of the same general character as that which he had enjoyed at home and in the school at Tarsus. Though Gamaliel was a man of candor and coolness of judgment, as is clear from his advice to the Sanhedrin, yet he was a Jew to the very core. He was a teacher of the law. He would sacrifice everything to maintain authority in the Church and in the State. We can readily trace his influence on the whole of Saul's public life—alike as a Jewish persecutor and a defender of the faith which he at first labored to destroy. We can see how he would be likely to sympathize with persecutors; how confidence could be reposed in him in that regard; how he would abstain from acts of open violence and lawlessness, and yet how, under the sanction of law, he might become—as he did—one of the most violent enemies of the Christian Church.

We have now before us the young Cilician Jew

as the open enemy of Christianity. He hated it with perfect hatred. We read that he persecuted its adherents unto death, binding and delivering into prison both men and women. The martyrdom of Stephen had intensified his hatred. "Like the taste of blood to a wild beast," says one commentator, "it heightened his ferocity and quickened his powers to make havoc of the Church. The very breath of his soul was malignity toward the disciples of the new religion. It was like the heat of a furnace threatening to scorch and burn everything on which it fell. His whole nature and education gave momentum to his work of destruction." His was a mighty intellect, and we know that intellect rules to a great extent the feelings of love and hatred. In men of weak minds the emotions are usually feeble as compared with those of men endowed with strong powers of mind. As Saul was great in intellect his hatred of the Church was intense. It was literally fanned into a flame. He was also a man of tremendous impulses. He was not one of the cold, phlegmatic and unimpassioned ones, the fires of whose natures are too weak to flame. He was the very opposite. Feeling in him was a sea of fire, and its great tides throbbed through every artery in his body. He did nothing without feeling. Feeling gave force to every purpose, a flash to every look, emphasis to every word, and a resoluteness to every act. The love of such a nature was worth much—worth every-

thing; the hatred of the same was such as might well make men tremble.

He was, moreover, a man of great conscientiousness. Wherever conscience gives her sanction to men's feelings their strength reaches its highest point. Whatever feeling, thought or effort conscience sanctions, it intensifies. Saul's conscience not only sanctioned, but *enforced* his enmity toward Christ. He considered that he "was doing God service," and regarded it as a sacred obligation to blot, if he could, the name of Jesus from the earth!

The enmity of Saul did not live merely in feeling, however strong, nor did it expend itself in anathemas, however terrible. It took a practical shape of the most determined sort. It is said that he made havoc of the Church, that he shut in prison many saints, and that he did all he could to make them blaspheme the name of Jesus. It is stated further that he invaded the sanctuaries of domestic life—entering into every house—and ruthlessly tearing away those whom he committed to prison.

Before he went after the poor fugitives who had sought an asylum in Damascus, he showed the effect of the legal training he had enjoyed in Tarsus and Jerusalem. He secured from the high priest letters legalizing his efforts in the interest, as he regarded it, of the religion of his fathers. And, as soon as he had received them, he started to wreak his vengeance on young



and old, male and female. Without delay he went with men of like views and purposes to Damascus in order to persecute all who believed in the Christian religion.

Without attempting to describe the journey, or to set forth the probable thoughts which passed through his mind, as he caught the first glimpse of Damascus, resting like an island of paradise, in the green enclosure of its beautiful gardens, we shall simply undertake to portray his *conversion*. It was one of the miraculous sort which unregenerate men generally look for. As he came in sight of the walls of that ancient city, suddenly, at *midday*, there appeared a light in the firmament, a dazzling brightness, above that of the sun. It was not a flash of lightning, but a continued glare composed of rays that darted from the body of the Sun of Righteousness, who condescended to appear personally to the heartless persecutor of the Church, when in sight of his victims, sure of speedy victory, and almost ready to send up his shouts of triumph. At this, he and his companions in travel, fell to the earth, dazzled and confounded. He lay speechless, wondering what all this could mean. When he dared to lift his eyes toward the light, lo! there shone the emblem of God's presence—the Shekinah which had dwelt in the tabernacle and the temple. But it was no mere light—no mere vision which was before him. There was also an august Person. It was Jesus of Nazareth, whom

he was persecuting. We are not left in doubt in regard to this, because he tells us more than once that he had seen the Lord. Jesus addressed him in the Hebrew tongue, in that same tongue in which he had conversed with his twelve disciples. He named him twice: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is not my poor, innocent people that you are cruel to, but to me. I and they are one. What you do to them I feel as if you were doing it to me; in injuring them you are injuring *me*." What an encouraging thought! What a disclosure of the tender heart of Jesus! Even Stephen's dying love is not to be compared with this. "Why persecutest thou *me*?" If the smitten one had dared to excuse himself, it would doubtless be somewhat after this fashion: "I took no part in the scenes of the garden or in the transactions of Calvary! I was not one of those who apprehended thee with swords and staves! I gave thee no traitor's kiss. I wove for thee no crown of twisted thorns. I plunged no spear into thy side. My tongue was not employed in mocking thee whilst hanging on the cursed tree." If the Saviour had replied it would have been perhaps in some such words as these: "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me!" Then would come the question from the confused lips of the vanquished foe, "Who art thou, Lord?" And the answer would follow from the glorified One: "I am Jesus of Nazareth,

whom thou persecutest! I am the Lord of glory! It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

What could the helpless persecutor now expect? Convinced of his guilt, what could he look for but sudden destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power? But God's thoughts are not as our thoughts. He had designs of mercy toward him and had provided a work and a reward for him far beyond his expectation. The power of the Spirit was exerted in connection with the heavenly vision to change his heart. It is not probable that Saul's companions, though greatly affrighted like himself, were converted. God has often spoken to men in thunders and lightnings and earthquakes, by voices from heaven and visions from the dead, without changing their hearts. Nothing but grace can do that. The heart of Saul was subdued and changed, for he, trembling and astonished, exclaimed, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

Notice, secondly, some of the effects of this revelation upon the mind of Saul. They were twofold. First, it brought him into conscious contact with Christ. "Who art thou, Lord?" As yet he knew not who it was that had appeared and spoken to him. The word "Lord" may mean nothing more in this connection than "Sir." As yet he was in the dark as to the one who was dealing with him. He knew not who came in the

splendor, or who spoke in the electric flash. His ignorance, however, was quickly removed. He heard a voice saying, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." This answer filled the soul of the persecutor with the thought that he was in immediate contact with Jesus of Nazareth. He saw him first with the eyes of his mind and never forgot the sight. He took delight in referring to this again and again in after-life.

He was not only brought into contact with the person of Christ, but into a complete submission to his *will*. He said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" His own will was at last overcome. The will of the Sanhedrin was no longer of importance to him, the will of Christ was all. The revolution was thorough and the submission complete. From this time forth the glory of Christ filled his vision, the name of Christ charmed his ears, the interests of Christ's kingdom called into exercise all the powers of his soul and body. From the day of his conversion he lived and labored, suffered and died for his Saviour. By him he tested the value of all things, and all that failed to bear that test was by him rejected. Whatever task he undertook, whatever plan he laid out, whatever plea he urged, whatever end he set before his eyes, but one question was asked regarding it, namely, "How will it stand in relation to Christ?"

What a change! How thorough, how wonderful, how soon effected! What a world was that

which burst on Saul's vision when his eyes were shut to the beauties of the plains of the Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus! How everything he had valued paled before that! What nonentities seemed all the world's power and greatness, its grandeur and magnificence! How the unseen and eternal unveiled to his soul the fictitious value set on all things seen and temporal! How clearly he discovered, to his great dismay, that he had been walking in a vain show!

This is Saul's second birth, and yet it is infinitely more exalted than that on the banks of the Cydnus—more exalted because in the former he was born but to die, whereas in the latter he was born a son of the Highest, to live forever. Better! because the march of the feet which climbed the slopes of the Taurus, was along a rough path between the cradle and the coffin; whereas the way of grace, with its toils and trials, shipwrecks and forty stripes save one, its bitter persecutions and long imprisonments, was from regeneration onward and upward to a crown of glory in heaven. Happy for you, dear reader, if you are heaven-born and heaven-bound! It may be that like Paul's, a stormy life is before you; but let storms rage and tempests roar—however rude the gale or high the billows—a heaven-born passenger in a heaven-bound bark, you cannot fail to enter the haven of eternal rest.

Notice, lastly, some of the immediate results of Saul's conversion. The first mentioned is that

he *prayed*. There is deep significance in this declaration. He was a Pharisee, given to long prayers on the corners of the streets. These were regarded by him after his conversion as of no account. He drew his first spiritual breath amid the aromatic shrubs in the plains of Damascus.

“Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath,  
The Christian’s native air.”

The second result was willingness to mingle with the persecuted people he had so heartily despised. He went to the house of an humble deacon, or even a private member of the church, to receive instruction as to his future course in the world. What! the proud disciple of Gamaliel sitting at the feet of Ananias! The most brilliant member of the Jewish Sanhedrin taking counsel of an humble man whom that august body had condemned! The terror of the followers of Christ is now moving like a lamb among those who trembled at the sound of his name! What wonder of divine grace! To see the pride of birth, loftiness of intellect, brilliancy of genius and unimpeachable morality laid at the foot of the cross of a despised Galilean, and to witness the Jewish rabbis, the senators of the nation and the learned of the land set aside for the fellowship of fishermen, humble peasants and ignorant craftsmen is no ordinary sight. This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes!

The third result is the giving up of the brightest worldly prospects for a promised inheritance beyond the grave. "Saul of Tarsus," says some one, "gave up hopes and prospects as brilliant as any ever cherished by an aspiring youth; he subjected himself to the bitter hatred and scorn of his kindred; he embraced a religion at the time the most unpopular of all on earth; he exposed himself to every form of persecution; he became poor, an outcast and a wanderer; he set before him one great object of life, if by any means he might save some; he feared no danger, was appalled by no obstacle, asked no reward, was checked by no opposition; he avowed his principles everywhere—seeking to assert and defend them in places of intelligence, influence and power—where men were best qualified to judge of truth, and where a sensitive and noble-minded man would feel it most keenly, if his sentiments were held in contempt, when confronted with philosophy at Athens, and when arraigned for his life before Nero; never wavering, never shrinking, never breathing out one sigh of regret, never concealing his new views; exulting, triumphing, rejoicing to the end of life that he had counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ."

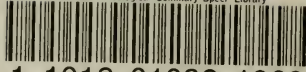
What a change! None of the fanciful transformations of Ovid could rival the matchless work wrought by Christ upon this sinner's heart. Oh, what a difference between Saul of Tarsus breath-

ing out threatenings, and Paul the apostle saying, "I am now ready to be offered"! Between "the dead in trespasses and sins," and the quickened by divine grace! "If God should speak to Niagara and bid its floods, in their tremendous leap, stand still," says Mr. Spurgeon, "that were a trifling demonstration of power compared with the stay of the soul bent on slaughter at the gates of Damascus! If he should suddenly speak to the broad Atlantic, and bid it be wrapped in flames, we should not then see such a manifestation of his greatness as when he converted that sea of fire in the heart of Saul into a fountain of love and kindness!"





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