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# STUDIES

IN

# MARK'S GOSPEL.

BY

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## P R E F A C E .

THESE Studies had their place in the regular utterances of pulpit duty from Sabbath to Sabbath. They follow the gospel history and doctrine in orderly progress through the narrative of the evangelist Mark, taking up consecutive passages with the harmony of the others.

In character they are meant to be plain expository sermons, with illustrations and enforcements joined easily together. It is in this one particular that my hopes of their usefulness are centred.

Two dear friends have aided me in the drudgery of mechanical preparation. I hope the little volume will serve to us all as a memorial of the summer their help has enlivened.

CHARLES SEYMOUR ROBINSON.

NEW YORK, 57 East Fifty-fourth Street,  
September 15, 1888.

# STUDIES IN MARK'S GOSPEL.

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## I.

### BEGINNINGS OF THE GOSPEL.

"THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD."—*Mark 1:1.*

IT has been remarked that, over and above all the others, Mark is the evangelist of rapidity in action. He gives us fewer of the great incidents in our Lord's career which we meet elsewhere; but he furnishes more of the minor and picturesque particulars of such as he does introduce. Two expressions there are which he uses again and again until they may be recognized as signs of his style.

One of these is the word "immediately," sometimes in our version rendered "straightway," and sometimes "forthwith." This appears in Mark's short sixteen chapters over forty times; about as many times as it can be found in all the rest of the New Testament.

How swiftly this evangelist advances may be seen in the opening of his story. In the first twenty verses we have the account of Malachi's prediction of the Messiah's advent and Isaiah's



prophecy of his forerunner John the Baptist's preaching, Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, and his forty days' temptation in the wilderness by the devil. Before we are really aware of it, the persons of the grand drama of the gospel narrative are sweeping along before us: John is making the nation shake under his denunciations; Immanuel and Satan are in the thick of the conflict which is to end only at the final judgment. We grow breathless with the haste of the history.

The other characteristic form of expression in Mark's gospel is offered us in the text. The first sentence in this book is the title to the whole of it: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." This evangelist uses the word "began" over and over again, a score of times at least, where no one else would think of employing it. When Jesus was gathering multitudes at the seaside, Mark says "he began to teach." When he had permitted the devils to enter the herd of swine, Mark says the terrified inhabitants "began to pray him to depart." When the leper was healed he "began to publish" the miracle. Our Lord "began to send out" the disciples. When Jesus was before the council the servants "began to" mock him; when he came forth on the way to the cross the soldiers "began to" spit upon him. Thus the tale is just full of beginnings from the first sentence to the close.

Let us fasten our attention for a little while upon the earliest and chief of all these beginnings, "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the

Son of God." It does not seem right to pass over this expression lightly, as if all that Mark meant by it was to get a start somehow in his composition. The gospel has had at least three beginnings, and we feel that the evangelist must have designed to make some sort of reference to them all when he chose such a title.

I. It began first in the purpose of the Almighty Father. There was certainly a plan of redemption before any man was redeemed. The Omniscient One foresaw what he was going to do. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." There was an "eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

There is need that we go further back than simple prophecy in the Old Testament. Observe here how pertinently Mark quotes two of the seers who foretold these grand events: "As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee; the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

We cannot help believing that this evangelist knew in the outset what wonderful matters he had to record. For here, all driven up compactly together, is found the finest group of "first things" in the New Testament: the first sermon on repentance, the first baptism of a convert, the first sensible manifestation of the Holy Ghost, the first voice from heaven in recognition of Jesus' office and glory, the first fight with Beelzebub, and the first victory over temptation. This did not happen so;

it must have been ordered so. This would be taught from the prophets.

Still there is need of our going back beyond the prophets. The Jewish rabbis have fabled that when Eve left Paradise she concealed just one flower upon her person, the sign of a promise of divine grace in the pardon of the human race. But this was not the earliest beginning of the gospel.

We read in the opening verses of the last chapter in the Bible this: "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Most interpreters agree that this "water of life" signifies the gospel of Jesus, the Son of God. The most suggestive matter of notice in the description is what is here said concerning the origin of the stream. Our springs are in God. This river may be traced all along, among the fruitful trees and the singing angels upon its margin; and in the end it will be found to issue from beneath "the throne of God and the Lamb."

We are reminded at once of that passage in Ezekiel's prophecy, which every expositor pronounces at once the most brilliant and perhaps the most obscure in the Bible. This verse in the book of Revelation explains it; and we learn that when the angel conducted Ezekiel to the top of the mountain, it was that he might see far away in his

beautiful visions the glory of the latter day. It was a familiar figure the prophet employed. A fountain opened in Israel for the cleansing away of sin is what he saw. "Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward; for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar. Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and behold, there ran out waters on the right side."

Here, then, we begin: the gospel has its origin in the very palace of God; the river starts from under the altar of sacrifice, where atonement is made. Next, the rapid growth of the gospel is figured in the rising of the stream: "And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; and the waters were to the ankles. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins. Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over."

Thus the gospel river rolls along, growing voluminous and irresistible as the ages succeed each

other. And all its aims are beneficial; it flows to beautify, to refresh, never to destroy: "And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen this? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river. Now, when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other. Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. And it shall come to pass that everything that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and everything shall live whither the river cometh. And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine."

II. The gospel had a second beginning in the advent of our Saviour Jesus Christ. This was to the first beginning as the flower is to the seed. We see how this evangelist Mark teaches such a truth by his account of the obedience Jesus rendered, and the testimony John gave to him as the Lamb of God, taking away the sins of the world.

All of the modern commentators call attention

to the fact that Mark gives us glimpses of our Lord's person more often than any one of the other writers. He describes Jesus' looks and gestures. He repeats the vernacular words he used in those moments of supreme emotion when he fell back upon his mother tongue. It is Mark who quotes the *Talitha-cumi* in the miracle, the *Corban* in the discourse, the *Ephphatha* in the sigh to heaven, and the *Eloi, Eloi* on the cross. Thus he makes us see the Master as he moves around in his labors and is worried with his cares. So as the original purpose was lodged in the bosom of the Father for one beginning, here in the actual embodiment of the gospel in Jesus' life is another.

It is very striking, and often pathetic, to notice how the views of the common people seize upon and really enjoy the forms of speech in which this personal Saviour of ours preached the gospel. The English critic, Ruskin, tells us in the "Modern Painters" that once, when he was coming down from the rocks in the neighborhood of Montreux in Switzerland, both weary and thirsty, he found at the turn of the path a spring, conducted as usual by the herdsmen into a hollowed pine-trunk. He stooped to it, and drank deeply; and then as he raised his head, drawing in his breath heavily with a sigh of full satisfaction, some one behind him, unseen hitherto, spoke in the words of the beautiful French version of John's gospel, "*Celui qui boira de cette eau-ci, aura encore soif.*" — "Whosoever drinketh of this water, shall thirst again." He says that at first he did not comprehend the mean-

ing of the singular sentence; he looked up, and saw the friendly countenance of a plain, frank mountaineer, who without the least embarrassment went on with the verse, "*Mais celui qui boira de l'eau que je lui donnerai, n'aura jamais soif*"—"But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst."

Oh, how little we think concerning the wonderful privileges we enjoy in this age of ours, and in this land of light! Christ has come! The gospel has had its fresh beginning in him. Those must have been sad days when God's plan for human redemption was known only through signs and symbols. It seems affecting to an imaginative and generous mind to think even of those unreckoned ages of primeval history, before the discovery of such a vision of landscape beauty as the Yosemite Valley, for example, or the Falls of Niagara. We fancy the sweet sunshine for years falling over Cathedral Mountain, the majestic music of the solemn cataract echoing through the forests before the ship of Columbus set sail; and we feel that the generations of men lost much who never set eyes upon such beauty, who never heard such voices of God in the waters. Those old years seem melancholy under the waste of earth's best beauty.

III. In the third place, the gospel had a beginning in the work of the Holy Ghost upon the hearts of men. Even Mark shows this clearly in the story he gives of the descent of the dove upon the head of Christ as he comes up from the Jordan, and by the use of the energetic word "drive" when de-

scribing the urgency with which our pattern Lord was constrained to endure the temptation. The good news of perfected salvation began to be told in the moment when Satan received his defeat. It was the Spirit of God which here brought on the conflict, and crowned the victor with success.

Now it is at this special point in all the sacred story that the admonition reaches us. The question above all others for us to ask and to answer is, How does the work of the Holy Ghost effect "the beginning the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," in the soul of an unregenerate man?

The reply to it is not difficult. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit: and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all."

Sometimes by a strange disturbance, he sovereignly works uneasiness and discontent in the conscience. The sinner does not know, perhaps, the cause of his restlessness, but he becomes sure that his peace is not made, and that it ought to be made with an offended God. We ought to recognize the working of our Helper, and be grateful that he stirs us up into dissatisfaction with our present self. It is a fact that religious convictions, which lead to penitence and set us to ask for pardon, are among the best gifts of heaven. There is wisdom in the words, and force in the figure, of devout Gurnall: "It is a greater mercy," says he, "to give the first grace of conversion than to crown that with glory. It is more condescension in a prince to marry a poor damsel, than having married her to clothe her



like a princess. He was free to do the first, or not; but his relation to her afterward pleads strongly for the other."

Sometimes, also, the Holy Spirit begins the gospel work in the heart by the quiet and persistent communication of truth. By the slower processes of a patient education a child is led on up into the knowledge of God. Then the Spirit of God moves that awakened life on to a farther step, and unites it almost without its own startled consciousness savingly to Jesus Christ as the Redeemer. And all the new heart can say is, "One thing I know; whereas I once was blind, now I see." From this beginning the advance is sure to every believing soul. For we are "confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work" in us "will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Sometimes this same divine Agent of regeneration employs for our awakening the dispensations of providence, prosperous or adverse. Some extraordinary benediction of love and peace comes to us in the midst of our toiling and our hurry. Or a sharp bereavement makes a careless man thoughtful; the sudden defection of a friend breaks the power of the world over him. Then at last even the old miser in "Pilgrim's Progress" must look up from his muck-rake, and now at once he catches a glimpse of the crown in the air. Thus the gospel begins: now if the work be followed, the soul has its fair chance to be saved.

Thus I reach the conclusion to which we have all along been working our way. In the copy-

books of the Latin schools we were long ago taught to write the motto, "*Quodcunque agis, respice finem;*" whatever you do, respect the end.

"Beginnings are alike—'t is ends that differ;  
One drop falls, lasts, and dries up—but a drop;  
Another begins a river."

Cherish your religious convictions. Let them bear you steadily forward in the service of God's truth. Keep committing yourself more and more. It will matter very little to you, a hundred years hence, what your earthly lot has been. "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ."

For remember: when once this "gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," has had its true beginning in any genuine experience, and has been sustained and nurtured in an energetic life, no violence can avail to take away its priceless privilege, no humiliation of outward degradation can make it ashamed. Christian manhood begins as knighthood does, with a sovereign's sword-stroke while the subject is on his knees. After that, the soul is noble, and remains out of reach of hatred.

"Jerome Savonarola, I separate thee from the church militant and the church triumphant," said the papal legate to the Italian reformer, while he stood upon the scaffold awaiting martyrdom. Solemn and slow came the answer, "From the church militant you may divide me; but from the church triumphant.—no! that is above your power!"

## II.

## THE FORERUNNER OF JESUS.

“BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE THY FACE, WHICH SHALL PREPARE THY WAY BEFORE THEE.”—*Mark 1:2.*

WHEN John the Baptist came upon the stage of human life as an acknowledged forerunner of the Jewish Messiah, his career began to challenge the usual estimate and criticism of those who hurried down to the Jordan to hear him preach. People formed very characteristic, but very widely differing opinions of him. On one occasion an opportunity occurred for a declaration to be made by no less a person than our Lord Jesus Christ.

He commented for a little upon the mistakes of some who asserted they had been disappointed in this strange creature's looks, his speech, and general presentation of himself. At the same moment, he pressed them with the folly of the preconceived notions they had of him.

“And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger

before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.”

I. It will be well for us, in the outset of our study, to inquire concerning the exact significance of the figure here employed.

1. “A reed shaken by the wind” can easily be seen anywhere in Palestine without the trouble of going out into the wilderness. What are called *reeds* are not the same in species as the plants in our southern country that we call *canes*; and yet they resemble them somewhat. The reeds in the Jordan valley are woody and arundinaceous shrubs, growing generally a little higher than a man’s head. There are two kinds of these among the common thickets; from one of them the better reed-pens are usually made for the native scribes, though pens fashioned from the other can be found. It would not be accurate to say reeds grow wherever water is found; they the rather seem to establish themselves in permanent patches, commonly in moist places, however, where they are able to endure the chances of a dry winter with safety.

2. The ordinary interpretation of this expression, “a reed shaken with the wind,” has been this: “Did you suppose that John was a mere courtier, one of the weaklings of this trimming world? Did you expect to find him in sumptuous attire, his soft robes floating in the cool breezes by the stream? Were you thinking of a forerunner of the Messiah who would come into this age of ours tremulously seeking popular approval with delicate words, turning and twisting his doctrines so as to secure favor

from all parties, now one thing, now another, bending and bowing and quivering like a mere rush when the wind blows it? You would better have gone into kings' houses for facile favorites than have led your steps down here in search of a preacher."

That exposition is excellent; and there is no reason why it should not be considered satisfactory.

3. But lately, a new suggestion has been made by one who was born in Palestine, and who has been thoroughly educated in the Greek language. He calls attention to the fact that shepherd-boys often shelter themselves among the tall grass during the tedious hours of the middle of the day, when the sunshine is hottest upon man and beast, and while away the time with playing upon a rude flute or whistle which they themselves fashion out of the reeds that shade them. Hence, one frequently stumbles upon such a musician anywhere by the Jordan all along its course. It is but a poor little apology for a tune that he will play; for the tone of the instrument is feeble and effeminate. It might well become the symbol of a gentle sweetness of entertainment, altogether without either vigor or force.

Now, if we should accept this as the meaning of our Lord's allusion, the paraphrase would probably read thus: "Did you, looking for a forerunner of the Messiah, come down here beside the river to hear a small shepherd-boy playing upon a flute, a mere reed blown with one's breath?" Such a suggestion is at least worth looking up for the commentaries; it may be the true one.

II. But however we interpret the figure, let us now, in the second place, consider the picture of the man who was thrown into such an amazing contrast by it.

1. Naturally, this stern preacher, just coming forth from the wilderness solitudes and stirring the whole nation at once, must have been an individual of almost phenomenal endowments. Every age has what may be called its men of mark. Society is always trying to create such; and if they will only be peaceable on vexed questions of casuistry, and perhaps be immoral or of easy virtue themselves, the world at large will generally greet them with welcome. The race makes a peculiarly sharp demand upon every reformer within its reach. Thrusting him up to the extreme limit of his ability, it holds him accountable for furnishing all he can accomplish. Off upon a watched hill-top he must remain, until the actual amount of his working-power is known and put on record. Then he is suffered to come down quietly to the level of other men, and is ever afterward registered for precisely what he is worth. That is to say, the question now shifts, and becomes one of availability. How can he be most used?

2. Spiritually, therefore, this forerunner of Jesus Christ was necessarily, and from the beginning, a failure. He would not be used at all. The priests tried him; and he called them vipers, and told them he wondered how such hypocrites could escape the damnation of hell. Herod tried him; and had eventually to cut off his head. John had immense

power, but he was impracticable. There was something very remarkable in his personal career. A lonely hermit, fed on locusts and wild honey, girded with a leathern skirt about his loins, he came in out of mystery and silence, and began preaching about labor and wages, about honesty and purity, about military service and usurious rates of interest. He seemed to know everything that was going on. And he struck right and left wherever his eyes saw wrong, no matter who committed it. A stroke of deeper irony could hardly be imagined than the comparison of this man with a reed shaken, or a flute blown with the wind.

3. But rhetorically, John the Baptist was a prodigious success. From every city and every hamlet flocked the convicted multitudes to be baptized in the Jordan for the remission of confessed sin. Of course, his reputation was towering, his influence was paramount, his fame was peerless. The disciples of Christ, as a body, felt all this. They bowed to the popular estimate, even after they had known Jesus in person. Our Lord did not seek to change their views, but he rather admitted the correctness of them. He uttered, in his own right, terms of eminent praise concerning his cousin's gifts. Absolutely first he put him in the foremost rank of men—the greatest man ever born of woman.

III. But now what did John really do to merit all this? That leads us forward a step. Let us inquire, next, concerning his mission.

1. John was the forerunner of Jesus: what he did was to prepare the way for Jesus. The Old

Testament prophecies are full of this. The close of the book of Malachi predicted this man's advent and told what was to be his office. In oriental countries it was the custom, whenever the king was going to make a progress through a certain province or district of his realm, that a herald should precede him along the route making announcement of his purpose, caring for the roads, and seeing that the people should be ready to receive their sovereign fitly. John was to go forward to preach the law before Jesus was to come to preach the gospel. Men would never want a Saviour till they felt the peril of sin.

2. Thus we see instantly that the secret of John's power did not lie in his gifts alone. Plutarch, when giving account of the great commander Phocion, says that his speeches are to be estimated like coins—not for their size, but for their value. Demosthenes, afraid of his utterances, sharp and condensed, used to exclaim, when he rose to take part in the debate: "Here comes the ender of my harangues!" And Phocion himself once told Leosthenes that his orations resembled cypress-trees—they were large and lofty, but they bore no fruit. No; not even John the Baptist could have drawn Jerusalem and Judæa down to the Jordan merely by eloquence.

3. The power of this man lay in the message he bore. He said to those supercilious Pharisees: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He introduced his hearers abruptly into the presence of the King of kings, without a veil before his



great white throne. "Herod feared John, and did many things," says pious old Gurnall; "but if he had feared God, he would have done everything." Surely it was not for want of plain dealing with him from this intrepid teacher. He told the whole Jewish world of the judgment close at hand, the wrath of God, the unquenchable fire. "Oh, I love those who thunder out the Word!" exclaimed George Whitefield; "the Christian world is in a deep sleep: nothing but a loud voice can wake souls out of it." So that Judæan world was asleep when John came forth from his silence of years, and the "voice of one crying in the wilderness" was what stirred the whole people into penitence and prayer for pardon.

4. And then, to crown all, after John, Jesus came in person. John kept telling his anxious hearers about the One whose shoe's latchet he was unworthy to unloose. And his entire message culminated suddenly one day when Immanuel was seen walking along by the riverside. Then he cried out: "Behold! the Lamb of God!" In the paintings of the masters, the world over, this is John's best moment. The emblems are chosen to show the significance of the attitude. There is added the lamb, and with it a scrolled flag the staff of which looks like a rude cross; and on this is written the final proclamation of his ministry as the forerunner of Christ: "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

5. Herein is the type of all Christian life and duty. John must come earliest, then Jesus. A

broken law must be heeded. Some practical disposal must be made of human guilt before any soul can come forth into the peace of the gospel. "First pure, then peaceable:" that is the order. Then all experience fashions itself easily to the rule of happy and holy living. The lamb and the flag are the two emblems which each knight-templar kept for his own, when the spirit of chivalry in the middle ages rose to its highest. He said that one must be gentle as the lamb; but that there had also been given him a banner to be displayed, because of the truth, before the infidel; and thus the flag would always have to be cherished as the sign of courage for a grieved, militant church; innocence itself must at times become martial, yet even military zeal must be innocent; the Lamb of God is the Lion of Judah.

IV. Finally, we are taught our lesson as to the great common need of this forerunner of the Christ. He had his limits like the rest of us. Jesus said that, great as John was, even the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater.

I. The fact is, John the Baptist was only a sinner, needing like all the rest to repent, believe, and be saved. For he belonged to the fallen race of humankind. Not even the austerities of his fasting and raiment could redeem his soul. He who is condemned to die, and who is liable to be summoned to execution at any moment, may be considered as dead to all intents and purposes now. "Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." That is what the apostle means when he

declares that all men are "dead in trespasses and sins." John, the Nazarite preacher, must enter the kingdom of heaven by Jesus Christ, who is the door, just as anybody else by faith in the atonement.

2. And this is our conclusion now. This is precisely where our present study brings its lesson to bear upon our consciences and hearts. Better is it to have the calm repose of a renewed and rational mind sitting at the feet of Jesus, than to do the daring and brilliant exploits of a madman. Better that the world shall never hear of us as famous in history, if eternity may welcome us as saved and safe at the right hand of God. Better any way, better every way, to be alive than dead. Better to be the least one of those believing and penitent ones, surely and securely redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, than to be the greatest of those whose fame will vanish into nothing. "For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee." "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he."

## III.

## A DAY'S WORK IN CAPERNAUM.

"AND HE HEALED MANY THAT WERE SICK OF DIVERS DISEASES, AND CAST OUT MANY DEVILS; AND SUFFERED NOT THE DEVILS TO SPEAK, BECAUSE THEY KNEW HIM."—*Mark* 1:34.

THE text forms the culmination and the close of a most remarkable passage, in which is described, with that fullness of detail for which the evangelist Mark is so distinguished, just one day's work of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was a Sabbath-day; and from morning to even when "the sun did set," he was preaching and working miracles for his occupation.

The preaching was such that the people were "astonished," and the miracles were such that they were "amazed." We cannot fail to see that these two, the wonders and the doctrine, go together in producing the impression by which his "fame" was spread abroad through all the region of Galilee. He taught "as one that had authority, and not as the scribes," because with "authority" he commanded the unclean spirits also. The vast powers of his evangelical commission from heaven covered the signs and the sermons, and made them help each other.

It seems worth our while, now once for all in this course of study, that an hour should be spent in the patient and exclusive examination of the

miracles which our Saviour wrought in attestation of his teaching.

I. There were some few outward circumstances in which they differed from all others.

1. For one thing, you cannot fail, in reading the gospel history, to have been struck with the almost *endless variety* of these miracles of Jesus. He hardly moved, without some splendid sign falling by the way to show he had passed.

Everything yielded to his power. Sickness and disease of every kind were rebuked. The powers of nature were checked, and urged forward, at his will. The sea was calmed; the loaves were multiplied; biers on the way to the grave were stopped till their lifeless burdens were quickened; sepulchres opened that the dead might come forth; fishes were made to disclose coin to pay tribute-money, or enter a net in myriad shoals out in deep water, and late after noon; billows of the sea were forced to harden into solidity under human feet; streams from a fountain were made to flash into wine. Thus everything, through a sphere of existence wide as the world, was fain to forget its nature, and remember only its Master in him.

2. Then again, we have all observed that our Lord's miracles *were wrought in his own name*. Jesus always revered the Father; he sighed and looked up to heaven. But he told his disciples plainly, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

Hence his language is peculiar. "Thou deaf and dumb spirit, I charge thee come out of him."

So to Jairus' daughter: "Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise."

Compare in this particular Simon Peter with his divine Master. When that disciple would heal a man of the palsy, he must say, "Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole!" All that the combined faith of Peter and John both could do with a lame man at the Beautiful Gate was to take him by the hand, and utter over him the invocation, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" But our Lord, to a poor cripple who for thirty-eight years had not stood on his feet, had only to say, "Rise up and walk," and immediately he was made whole.

In like manner, contrast the forms of working miracles recorded for us in the Old Testament. Moses must needs pray for his leprous sister Miriam: "Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee!" And this was the man whose rod divided the Red Sea! But Jesus lifted no prayer for external reinforcement even when he healed ten lepers at a time. There was a resident power in our Lord which sufficed for all the wonders he wrought. When the disciples failed in casting out the difficult devil from the demoniac boy, he calmly said, "Bring him unto me!" Even his bitterest opposers recognized this superiority; for they exclaimed, "When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?"

3. Once more; we all have noticed that the miracles of our Lord were *much more extensive* than

any other person ever wrought. They were more in number, and they excelled in majesty.

It is perhaps a solecism to say that one miracle is greater than another. But then we speak accurately enough when we declare that, in every instance in which Jesus and the other miracle-workers who went before him or came after him in the Scripture record happen to meet on the same plane, Christ's miracles always in some particulars transcend theirs. Elijah raised a child to life; but we see him stretching himself upon it three times and praying mightily, with every appearance of intense effort to secure the divine intervention. Contrast this with the serene majesty with which Jesus stood at the door of a sepulchre in Bethany, and said, "Lazarus, come forth," to one who had lain four days in corruption. Elisha made his twenty loaves feed a hundred men; Jesus made his five loaves and two fishes satisfy five thousand men, besides the women and the children who came with them.

Then, too, there was the use of a sensuous sign, or a conspicuous instrument, in most instances; this always betokened the employment of some other person's power. Jesus used not even the artifice of displaying a divine rod. Elisha could turn bitter waters into sweet with a cruse of salt at Jericho: Jesus turned water into wine with only a word. "The conscious water saw its God, and blushed." Elijah divided the waves with his mantle, and Moses the billows with his staff; but Jesus in silence smoothed the waters under Peter's footsteps, and hushed them with a word of command, when they

were rushing in the madness of a storm. Here as ever our Lord stood peerless and alone. There are always added in the history just circumstances enough to show a difference and a superiority on his part.

4. Again: we have found in our studies, as the chief of all the peculiarities of contrast, that the miracles of Jesus were *in every instance beneficent*. Nowhere in the Sacred Records do we discover that he wrought even so much as one as a destructive judgment of wrath.

If anybody suggests that the withering of the fig tree must be made an exception, we have only to remember that the tree was never smitten for its own sake at all, but to teach a gracious lesson. Inanimate and painless, it was merely constituted an instrument of admonition. Our Lord destroyed fishes to feed the multitudes on the shore of Genesaret; but the miracle lay in the feeding, not in the destroying. His wonders never brought curses, but blessings. He lamed no one, but made the lame man leap as a hart. He rendered no man speechless; he caused the tongue of the dumb to sing. He struck no one blind; he only opened eyes, and then forgave sins.

That this peculiarity attracted notice very early and was considered of vast importance, is evident from an old legend told of Constantine the Great. It appears that at first his mother, Helena, was seriously offended because her imperial son was converted to Christianity. He replied by inviting her to become a Christian too. And he proposed a test



by which her pagan religion could be compared with Christ's. Two of the chief Greek philosophers, Zeno and Cato, were selected to be judges. Helena had one chosen magician, so runs the ancient story; his name was Zambri. He said, "I know the name of the Omnipotent. Let them bring me the fiercest wild bull that can be found. When I have uttered that name in his ear he will fall dead. The experiment was tried; the bull was brought, the word was spoken, the animal fell as if struck by a stone. But Sylvester, who now stood forth upon Constantine's side, exclaimed, "The name he has pronounced cannot be that of God, but of Satan, for Christ does not smite the living dead, but restores the dead to life." Then he made the demand that Zambri should raise up the dead creature and set him on his feet again. So the emperor commanded; but this the man could not do. Then Sylvester made the sign of the cross; the bull rose up alive; and not only that, it was ever afterwards tame and gentle, and was led away in peace.

It is not necessary to indorse or contradict the legend; the teaching is clear. Christ came to exhibit grace and love, and all the narrative of his life shows he was in earnest. He did not destroy Jerusalem that killed the prophets; he sat up over against the city and wept at the ruin he foresaw was coming.

Now, for example, contrast this with the mission of Moses. Sternly and relentlessly it was the Lawgiver's office to bring on those awful curses which filled Pharaoh with suffering. One after

another they fell, growing in their violence, till all Egypt wailed over the firstborn lying dead in the households. So Elisha could turn on the mocking children of Bethel, who said, "Go up, thou bald head," and give them for prey to the wild beasts of the field. And so Elijah, haggard and worn, could lift his hand to heaven for fire to come and sweep away division after division of Ahab's soldiery with its hail of flame. These men were not personally harsh, vindictive, or severe. It was the spirit of that dispensation which compelled them to revere the very letter of the law. Jesus came to establish a dispensation of love. So when he had a chance he explained to his disciples the difference: "And so it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go up to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before his face; and they went and entered into a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village."

In these respects, then, the miracles of our Lord transcended all the others recorded in the Bible: they were more numerous and varied, they were independently announced and wrought, they were

more extensive and splendid, and they were always beneficial rather than destructive. Thus our divine Redeemer stood unequalled and unparalleled. If Moses' wonders rose above the plane of common life loftily, as rugged and yet as grand as Mount Ararat, Jesus' wonders surely rose above them as the early rainbow rose above even Ararat's summit, loftier and yet more lovely, reaching more widely and yet more graciously, and bearing even in their wonderful mystery of display the token of a better covenant—a purpose of good which should stand unchallenged while the world endures, and be completely fulfilled when it vanishes.

II. Thus now we reach, in the second place, the consideration of what this purpose is. What was the use of the miracles of Christ?

I. Let us admit in the outset, in order to guard against misconception, that the one grand service of all miracles was meant to be performed in those which Jesus wrought: they were *evidential proofs of the gospel*.

God was making a fresh revelation of his will from heaven to men. The "Law," with Moses as its representative, had been issued; the "Prophets," with Elijah as one of their chiefs, had been given to the world; now the "Gospel" was to be announced and confirmed "with signs following." That those who were with our Lord Jesus Christ while he was doing his matchless day's work in Capernaum on this occasion perfectly understood the relation of his wonders to his word, is plain from the excited exclamation they made. This the

New Version records with more accuracy of translation than the Common Version: "What is this? a new teaching! With authority he commandeth even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." Three dispensations have been vouchsafed to men; so three periods or epochs of miracles have been noted in human history; and these have ranged in cycles of about seventy years each around the lives of those personages who appeared together on the mount of Transfiguration—Moses, Elijah, and Jesus Christ.

2. Again, our Lord's miracles were designed to *lift the world out of the destructive ruin of sin.*

The truth is, the race is all now under the crushing weight of the fall of our first parents from holiness. Oh, how mysterious, and yet how balefully prevalent, is sin! It runs in the river, it falls in the rain, it lurks in the flower, it roars in the storm, it sighs in the wind; it is everywhere, all-pervading, all-diffusive. It causes every sickness, it racks every nerve that twinges with pain, it bends the bone of every deformity, it shrivels the tendon of every weakness, it lifts the eyelid for every tear that falls, it rings each funeral bell, it digs all the graves; it marshals every army that goes forth to slaughter men, it whirls every maelstrom, stirs up every tornado, kindles every mountain that burns, and rocks every earthquake. All that we dread comes, in this sin-cursed world to the sin-cursed race, from the devil, who is the author of confusion. There is a famine: we feel it is because the earth is under the wrath of God. There is a

pestilence: we feel it is because the air is under the pressure of retribution. There is anguish and injustice, lying and murder, suffering and wrong everywhere, because law has been broken and penalty has been let loose upon the transgressors. The devil laughs, the grave cries, "Give," damnation slumbers not, and the world is rushing forward to meet its doom.

Into this state of things came Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary, the Son of God. Against the whole array of wickedness and wailing and woe he set himself on the instant of his arrival. One blast of a trumpet was heard on the field. All the world looked up and saw the Prince had come! With the entire power of the celestial universe behind him he entered the conflict. "It pleased the Father that in him all fulness should dwell—the fulness of the Godhead bodily." So he came as the commander of the Lord's hosts. His voice was heard now; not a noisy voice, but a voice still and small, for it was not his business to "cry in the streets." The tones of it, however, had unwonted power, for the orders it issued were unusual, the combinations of attack were fresh, and Satan soon began to experience the almost unendurable pressure.

3. Just here we perceive another direction of purpose in these miracles of Jesus. They were designed to exhibit his *entire supremacy* in the governing of the world.

No illustration of this can be found more vivid than that which is offered by the cure of the poor

creature possessed by the devil. The story is told in the chapter we are now studying. A perfect blaze of splendid miracles shone before the dazzled eyes of the crowd in Capernaum all that day. But it was not the cure of Peter's wife's mother, nor the healing of such as were afflicted with ordinary diseases, that most arrested attention. It was the disclosure of the fact that the two highest antagonists in the realms of light and darkness, good and evil, heaven and hell, were now openly matched against each other in the streets of their town, and Jesus was triumphant.

First there came the parley, and the abject cry of the devil for an armistice in the fight: "And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, Let us alone! what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him."

Satan admits supremacy, and supplicates a favor of Immanuel. He says he knows the being who is now overmastering him, and he publicly calls Jesus "the Holy One of God." And yet our Lord will have no words with him; he says, "Be still, and get out of this man! Have no more talk about it! Out with you!"

Then came the full admission, and the report spread concerning a new revelation, and a new

prophet: "And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they obey him. And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee." From this time onward, there was only one story to be told. The holy war goes on. The kingdom of darkness is not yet overthrown, but it soon will be. With his earliest miracle, Christ showed with what sort of weapons he meant now to oppose sin and all the results of sin. He went to the house of a village maiden, and wrought his first wonder at a wedding. Thus he set his seal on lawful marriage, put his stigma on divorce, and proclaimed an end to lawlessness, license, and lust. Thus every miracle struck at some sin and proclaimed some new law of love and truth.

Every sick man healed was redeemed from one of the consequences of sin. The sea was calmed as a rebuke to the wild powers of nature which had grown turbulent in this world cursed by sin. The feeding of the hungry thousands told of gospel plenty, and said want would be banished when men ceased to sin. Satan withered hands: Christ healed them. Satan palsied feet and ankles: Christ loosened them into strength. Satan put out eyes, stopped ears, silenced tongues; Jesus came to set all free again. Ah, what a close that day at Capernaum had! What rejoicings there must have been in many a dwelling! How swiftly the Lord's hand

went forth scattering generous benedictions wherever it touched! How still the demons were before their Master!

“And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.”

A single message remains to be suggested as we close our study. It is not enough for us simply to admit the divinity or even the godhead of our Lord, at the conclusion of our day at Capernaum. This will not satisfy any soul's deepest need. Miracles are more than evidences when they have parables in them. A supercilious spirit of patronage will sometimes attempt to compliment Christianity, as the best religion ever offered to human reason. But this is nothing but self-conceit blinding itself with the brilliance of its own flattery. Canon Liddon said shrewdly, long ago: “When one drops down from the exalted notion of the true God, to the lower plane of Deism, he is on the fair way to simple hero-worship of which himself is the hero.” The wonders which Jesus wrought in those hours were disclosures of divine grace as well as of divine power. The study of them will be lost if it does not lead each heart to penitence for sin, and prayer for a new life.



## IV.

## HEALING A PARABLE OF PARDON.

“AND THERE CAME A LEPER TO HIM, BESEECHING HIM, AND KNEELING DOWN TO HIM, AND SAYING UNTO HIM, IF THOU WILT, THOU CANST MAKE ME CLEAN.”—*Mark* 1:40.

ONE of the principles of God's government in this world, frequently exhibited in the Scriptures, is to involve a greater thing in a less. Hence, we often find in the quietest narratives of the New Testament a deep spiritual significance. When once this is disclosed to us, the mere commonplace story of the event passes out of notice into comparative insignificance. It makes us think of the Eastern fable of a vessel fished out of the sea, forth from which appeared a *genie*, whose rising figure became a cloud so large that it seemed as if it never could be closed back into its prison. This is a type of much of the inspired history. For when even an ordinary event is fairly opened, there comes to view an unexpected and extraordinary mystery of intelligent meaning which cannot afterwards be concealed from our admiration, but really remains the chief object of our notice.

I. For an illustration, take this story of the man cured of his leprosy by our Lord Jesus Christ. We might have deemed such an incident a mere proof of the prevalence of this awful disease. And we should have said that his relatives and townsmen

were to be congratulated heartily upon the generous opportuneness of the Saviour's presence and power. But, a moment after, we discover that the leper has been more than cured; he has been converted, and now becomes an heir of heaven through divine grace.

We find ourselves constrained to believe that this miracle of healing has been wrought *in order* to the greater miracle of pardoning his sin and regenerating his heart. The white and mutilated limbs of the man's whole nature have, all on a sudden, thrown off their death and corruption, and he is now spiritually free and clean. So there is here what might be called a parable in the miracle.

This principle has an almost limitless illustration in the gospel narratives. Something greater than what appears may be expected to come out of what appears. We may well stand waiting and remain watching; for there is much of that of which Ezekiel's vision of a "wheel in the middle of a wheel" was designed to be a type. We need to unfold what the inner wheel has to reveal before we can say we fully appreciate any event. It is all intelligently planned; for "the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels," and "their wings were full of eyes round about."

It is very easy to say this happens so. Let us look at another instance then. A poor blind man is seen groping about the streets of Jerusalem. This was a frequent sight in that city, and we should make no special comment upon it. But now we read on in the story: "And his disciples asked him,

saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."

After this, we learn that the Lord opens his eyes. That old man's life becomes transfigured. In the end, he is pronounced a believer, and all his sins are pardoned. He had been born blind *in order* that God might be glorified in his salvation. A nameless Jew thereafter ranks with Cyrus, who was named before his birth, and with Jeremiah, who was sanctified before he was created. His history, as if at a divine touch, springs clear up out of everyday life: he has been assigned a part and a place in the infinite purpose of the Almighty. He suffered that he might be crowned.

All this is seen more clearly still when we choose some familiar narrative, and dwell upon even its minor details. Bartimeus' blindness helps us somewhat; but the dullness of the disciples who hindered him makes us see more evidently than ever the hindrances which over-fastidious professors of religion put in the way of anxious sinners; the casting away of his garment when he ran to Jesus pictures the sacrifice any earnest seeker will make in order to be sure of salvation.

Just so, dwell for a moment upon the account of the man cured of the palsy, as repeated by Luke. What a parable it makes! There is the helplessness of the sinner in the paralysis of sin: there is the zeal of friends in hurrying a hopeless case to

Christ: there is the faith of one in dead earnest breaking his way through all obstacles: there is the quick obedience of a soul that stands and walks at the first divine command: there is the applause of sympathetic believers who glorify God when a lost soul is saved.

Now what needs to be noted is that this is true of all of the miracles wrought by Jesus himself. To each of them there was an external appearance, so that to the natural sense it was a wonder; and then there was just as truly to each of them an internal meaning, none the less wonderful, but when fitly interpreted all the more glorious. The miracles were parables.

This gives us the reason why the accounts of these signs when expounded in detail and (as some term it) "spiritualized," become such vivid illustrations of what is experimental and evangelical. The outer or temporal benefit includes what is internal and religious. Each of these miracles of personal healing resembles the man who is the subject of it, in that it has a soul and a body, and the soul has infinitely the greater value of the two. The gospel student is apt to be surprised when he earliest discovers this; but it always proves edifying to a devout Christian to discover, upon patient examination of almost any one of these stories of cure, how fit a figure of conversion from sin it becomes, and how felicitously all its circumstances range themselves in to show the processes of renewal by grace.

For instance, the restoration of a cripple's with-

ered hand makes us think of a sinner's inability supplemented by the sovereignty of divine grace.

The raising of a dead Lazarus to new life reminds us of the tearing away of the cerements of old sin and death, a grave of corruption broken, and the fresh blood of spiritual vitality sent joyously coursing through the veins of an existence, nobler and more welcome now than ever.

It would be foolish to assert that all this is the fruit of an ingenious knack at preaching, and illustration-finding, and to frame an objection out of a compliment to ministers who can force a few verses to teach almost anything they please. A remarkable instance is directly within our reach, to show that our Lord blamed his disciples for not seeing and not remembering the parable of the leaven he had put in his miracle of feeding the five thousand with the loaves. It is enough to reply to this cavil by reminding those who suggest it that it will certainly not hold elsewhere. No matter how shrewd the man of the pulpit may be, he will test his powers in vain upon the miracles which any one other than Christ himself ever wrought. Let the plagues of Moses, for example, be forced to preach the gospel; let the destruction of Ahab's fifties by Elijah be compelled to teach faith and repentance; see what can be made of Elisha's causing the iron to swim! Then turn to the poor woman creeping up in the press to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, and mark what a difference!

II. It is likely that with these illustrations the principle is now made perfectly clear. Let us move

on at once to seek for the suggestions which come from it for practical use.

1. First of all, we may learn to congratulate ourselves upon *the voluminous increase given for our service of fresh illustrations of gospel truth.*

Let parents remember this in their instruction of the children. We recognize the eminent help we receive from our Lord's parables in exhibiting to human understanding man's ruin and Christ's salvation. Now here are more parables, and all of them are brilliantly evangelical. Hence when our familiar stories become feeble for the moment, through men's familiarity with them, right alongside we find miracles almost numberless which are parables also, fresh and beautiful.

2. Again: we learn that *our Lord's actions are to be studied as well as his speech.*

It was said of him that he spake as never man spake before. It is just as true, and in like manner instructive, that he wrought miracles as never man wrought them before. So in his action there was speech. He once told his disciples, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." And he might have added of his deeds also which he performed in their presence something quite as suggestive in explanation; because he himself was "the Word," they were word, and "the Word was God."

We see a lame man healed: so we instantly discover that the warm love of God for the cripple's soul is kindled in the regard he feels for his body. He who says, "Arise, take up thy bed and walk,"

is the same who has power to forgive sins. Thus the danger and the death of one's spiritual being are always hinted at in the plain efforts to check infirmity or remove disease.

The inner meaning of our Lord's action is like the fire in the burning bush at Horeb; it shines through it, while it does not consume it. It is not at all inferior because it is interior. The flame of new significance does not hide, but only illumines the wonderful work; and then the fair light falls on everything at once all around.

3. Then, next to this, we may learn that *there is a personal adversary of our Lord Jesus Christ in this world, against whose power the work and speech alike of his life are arrayed.*

Most of us have seen a great many paintings and engravings of these striking and dramatic scenes of the New Testament. The figure of our divine Master performing his wonderful works has always been a favorite theme in Christian art. But one of the parties, who in every instance was present, we have rarely if ever seen drawn in any representation upon the canvas. Just out of sight, yet beholding the whole miracle, must have stood Satan, the recognized prince of the powers of the air. So we may well bear in mind that the great "signs" Jesus wrought were more than his mere credentials as an ambassador from heaven; they were more than personal benefits bestowed upon human recipients; they were each in turn tremendous onslaughts upon the kingdom of darkness, direct attacks upon Beelzebub, king in the realm of Belial.

There is no one thing, which comes to light in the New Testament more plainly, than the explicit acknowledgment of a personal antagonist of God in this world, every energy of whose wily intelligence is constantly in exercise to thwart the purposes of grace in the gospel. Mysterious as it may seem to be, it is surely revealed that there is a devil here loose among men, and always contending for their bodies and souls. Why the Almighty permits this conflict, even for a season, we may not be able to understand; he might most assuredly sweep away Apollyon and all his legions with the same breath with which he created them. But he prefers rather to meet him as a foe for a recognized while, and even sometimes to suffer him to win a victory.

The very phraseology of the gospels proves and illustrates this. Satan is mentioned by name over and over again. Simon was told he desired to "sift" him. He put the betrayal into the heart of Judas. He gave Ananias his lie, and Peter his denial. And nowhere does this conflict come into more conspicuous exhibition than in the stories of the miracles. The picture of our Lord's earthly ministry is like that which the ancient prophet saw in his vision: "And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him." Jesus was the acknowledged adversary of the devil from the beginning. All the wonderful works he wrought were meant to shake the hold of the prince of evil upon the fallen world.



4. This will open the way for a fourth lesson: we now begin to understand *why Jesus speaks in such a direct and personal manner when he works his miracles of relief.*

Of course, this comes to view most plainly whenever he is curing demoniacs. If he says, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit," we all understand that he is talking to a demon. But do we remember he once said, "Peace, be still," when he seemed to be rebuking the waves on the Sea of Galilee, and does it not help us somewhat to think that he was not talking to mere water, but to the devil beneath it? So with sickness and pain and want. Jesus evidently considered every sick man or blind man or crippled man as being in sin and under Satan's power. He needed pardon as well as cure. Satan had bound him, Christ came to loose him from his bonds. We have a positive statement of this in the story which is recorded by Luke:

"And behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God." They found fault with him for this miracle, and he defended himself by saying he had been fighting his usual foe:

"And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these

eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath-day? And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him."

5. Finally, we learn from this discussion. *what is the superlative excellence of the miracles of our Lord Jesus as studies*: they are redemptive and evangelical, and all tell the story of the cross on which the Saviour died.

This must have been what Christ meant when, in the account of miracles he directed to be sent back to John the Baptist, he put this remarkable sentence: "and the poor have the gospel preached to them." The truth is, the miracles preached the gospel quite as much as anything else. To redeem from sin was the simple but sublime purpose of them all.

Hence the extreme guilt of that generation for rejecting him. Not because he was a mere healer of diseases, but because he was a physician of souls, was he of so much importance. So he said, "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father." He could not have meant to call notice to the mere showiness of the wonders he had wrought; he was reproaching them because they turned away from the inner teaching of the parables within his miracles.

So now; men's guilt in refusing Christ does not lie in the mere rejection of miracles as evidences,

but of miracles as gospel sermons. It is not just because they will not accept the offer of a Saviour who heals a withered hand, that men are condemned; but because they will not receive him who restores a soul from the withering influence of sin. This is counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing.

Hence, the value of Jesus' intercession still. Everything conspires to lift the cross before the eyes of men. The centre of the created universe is at Calvary. To redeem you and me from the otherwise incurable leprosy of sin, Jesus died and rose again; and that resurrection was the grandest miracle of all, and contains in it the image for the finest parable of all.

The day of showy wonder-working is ended long ago, for God has now no new dispensation to send to men. But the day of wonder-teaching still continues. He that can cure leprosy can also forgive sin. And our prayer is only that here put on record: "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean!" And to any sincere soul that lifts it, he will certainly put forth his hand and will say, "I will; be thou clean!"

## V.

## REASONS IN RESERVE.

“BUT THERE WERE CERTAIN OF THE SCRIBES SITTING THERE,  
AND REASONING IN THEIR HEARTS.”—*Mark 2:6.*

OUR study to-day is designed to cover the entire account of the miracle of healing wrought for the cure of the man who was “sick of a palsy.” But our practical aim will be to dwell particularly on one feature in the behavior of some of the by-standers.

It is said, that when, in Queen Elizabeth’s time, a statute was announced commanding all people to come to church, the papists sent to Rome to know the Pope’s pleasure. He returned to them this answer: “Bid the Catholics in England give me their hearts, and the Queen may have all the rest of them.”

All true religion is located in the heart. Where the human heart goes, the human life will go. The New Testament is a revelation addressed to the heart. Our Lord Jesus Christ was “set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign to be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” A most interesting illustration of this is found in that chapter of Mark’s Gospel which comes under our study to-day. The crowd was so great that those in Capernaum who wished to have their friends healed of disease

could not get through the press. Four persons there were who ingeniously clambered up on the roof, bearing a helpless paralytic, whom they let down by ropes into the area of the courtyard where Jesus was. Our Lord not only healed the man of his palsy, but forgave him his sins. This seems to have especially provoked certain of the bystanders, who, not choosing to express their animosities publicly, contented themselves with "reasoning in their hearts."

"And when he entered again into Capernaum after some days, it was noised that he was in the house. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, no, not even about the door: and he spake the word unto them. And they come, bringing unto him a man sick of the palsy, borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the crowd, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed whereon the sick of the palsy lay. And Jesus seeing their faith saith unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins are forgiven."

This story is remarkable for the exhibition it makes: (1) Of enterprise in bringing a helpless soul to the Saviour: how many ingenuities there are for reaching men when only the friends around them are in earnest; (2) of the intimate connection existing between sin and suffering: our Lord's action in bestowing pardon with the cure was strictly logical; (3) of the great advantage it is to any man to have Christians for companions, to become friends in his

need: this palsied creature was healed because of the faith other people had; (4) of the force of mean motives in driving men to reject Christ: these scribes were moved by arguments which they cherished, but concealed from sight.

Upon this last point it seems worth while to dwell for a little while just by itself. Let us group the illustrations of the narrative around two simple propositions in turn.

I. The worst opposition which Christians have to meet in offering the gospel to men is found in the mental reservations of its rejectors, and the sullen silence of their hearts.

1. To begin with, there are unspoken objections which influence, if they do not control, one's intellectual views. Men insist that there are discrepancies in the records of the Old and New Testaments which vitiate their truth, and, if generally known, would mock their claim to exact inspiration. Other men make great parade in private over difficulties in doctrine, and challenge attention to the fact that theologians differ in relation to almost all the cardinal points of what is called the evangelical system. Still others cavil at the inconsistencies of church-members, and rail out against them for hypocrisy, if only they can manage to secure a safe and credulous audience that dares not contradict them. Hints and innuendoes are the usual signs of this disturbed and unwholesome state of mind.

Where do the young men of the present day obtain so much skeptical information? It is thrust

in upon them by the public press. Doubts drop down like loose feathers wherever croaking ravens are wont to fly. Evil is lodged upon mind and soul from every source. Lectures are reported which would never have had an audience but for the penny-a-liner's necessities. And sometimes reviews of public speeches insult readers with blasphemy.

But why is it that these reasons are so often held in reserve? Why does the man preserve his sullen demeanor without a word? (1) Because he is not exactly certain he can state them: it is not everybody who can say clearly what he does not believe; (2) because he feels a misgiving that they may not stand when some one a little more scholarly gets hold of them; (3) and because he suspects that, if he goes so far in his small infidelity, he really will have to go farther or else give it up.

2. There are unconscious prejudices which arouse one's temper. Some persons conceive a violent spite at what they assert is a continuous rebuke whenever Christian life is praised or commended. This is not a new thing in history. Classic annals tell us that an unlettered countryman gave his vote against Aristides at the ostracism, because, as he frankly said, he was tired of hearing him called "The Just." Other persons burn with implacable memories of indiscreet zeal practised upon them by those who supposed they were dutifully obeying the command, "Go, speak to that young man." They recite the grievance of

revival extravagances, which they deemed offensive and never to be forgotten. They rehearse the biographies of preachers who bullied the patient congregations, and then ran into immorality and deplorable scandal. They plead rashness as an excuse for reserve.

3. There are unacknowledged sins which sway one's career. Come back to the story here in Mark's narrative. "But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak? he blasphemeth: who can forgive sins but one, even God?"

Hear the comments of these scribes accusing Jesus of blasphemy! Violent clamors for moral and theological perfectness are raised by many whose sole aim is to divert attention from some secret indulgences of their own. These people reason in their hearts.

Sometimes in modern life a very showy conflict with Satan is kept up before the public, in order to conceal the fact of one's friendship with him. It reminds us of plays in which the actors personate the devil fencing with some good antagonist behind the footlights, a knight, perhaps, the pink of virtue, battling fiercely with the demon clad in robe of fire. No one engaged for his soul could appear more bravely in earnest. But we are struck with a certain kind of wariness, which they both show in their hitting. Sparks fly from the weapons, but blood does not seem to be drawn. And if afterwards we were to go behind the scenes, there we should find those high-tempered combat-



ants in a most surprising state of reconciliation; honorable knight and fiery devil seated in a friendly way at the table.

4. There results an unsubdued will sullenly closing one's lips. Many men live a double life; they mean to be courteous, but on religious matters they cultivate a cool, proud reserve. It often surprises us to find our Christian endeavors so ineffective with apparently kind, open, intelligent people.

What is the real reason? Because the heart is what governs, and logic is not addressed to the heart. Arguments are made and meant for the intellect, and lose weight in the tenuous atmosphere of the feelings. It shows no difference whether we drop down feathers or dollars through the vacuum of an air-pump.

II. Thus we reach our second proposition: All these reasons in reserve avail nothing to men, the moment the contest is seen to be, as it always is, a contest with God, and not man.

1. Look at the facts here; let us read over the remaining verses together:

“And straightway Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, saith unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sin (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy

house. And he arose, and straightway took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion."

Jesus understood those scribes (1) divinely: he "perceived in his spirit." He understood them (2) thoroughly: he saw what was "within themselves." He understood them (3) at once; note that old word "immediately." God knows all our surmises and suspicions.

Jesus peremptorily challenged those scribes in their logic. (1.) He announced his discovery. They were "amazed;" literally, thunderstruck. (2.) He accepted their condition. They looked on while he healed the man by miracle. (3.) He defeated them utterly. We read that "they all glorified God."

2. Now let us draw a few final inferences from the whole story. This scene is repeated every day in the full sight of a patient God. Human nature is always the same along the ages.

(1.) There cannot possibly be any reasoning in one's heart which our omniscient Judge is not able instantly to perceive and to answer. Once a French soldier fell asleep on his post, and was brought up for trial by court-martial. The first witness called was the Emperor Napoleon. "I was visiting the sentinels' outposts," he said; "I saw this soldier myself."

(2.) True prudence consists in outspoken candor. "Come, let us reason together." Sometimes objections vanish with the statement; for

they seem so insignificant when expressed. Mere articulation of difficulties often clears them of confusion.

(3.) Sullen reserve surely runs to swift ruin. The difference between an ignorant prejudice and a willful conceit is shown in this: ignorance stands with its back to the sun, and so, if it advances, moves on in the line of its own shadow only a step deeper; but churlish conceit walks straight away into a forest of doubts, till its own shadow is darkened with other shadows gloomier still. Hence, a confessed ignorance is altogether more hopeful for good, because all it has to do is to turn to the light. Sullen obstinacy has to retrace its path, and so journey clear back to where it started. It was considerations of this sort which forced the bright remark that "an ingenuous intellect is often better than an ingenious one."

(4.) Reasons in reserve have really nothing to do with actual life or eternal prospects. When was it discovered that one man is relieved from the obligation of being honest, because another man lies? Just how does "foreordination" or the "Trinity," if the doctrines are true, hinder repentance or faith?

## VI.

## HEEDFUL HEARING.

“IF ANY MAN HAVE EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR.”—*Mark 4:23.*

AT the end of the familiar parable of the sower our Lord seems to have summed up all its meaning into a single counsel. “Take heed what ye hear” is the form in which it appears in Mark’s Gospel; “Take heed how ye hear” is the record of Luke.

I. Let us seek in the beginning to discriminate and classify the ordinary hearers of the word as they show themselves in the sight of the preacher.

You have possibly looked down from a hillside upon a forest-grove in the country and seen the wind of summer stealing over the tops of the trees. You may have marked how each one of them preserves its own individuality. The elm bends, the aspen trembles, the willow waves, the evergreen moans; but the light-hearted poplar stands up straight and stiff, while the obstinate oak only settles its roots the deeper and erects its branches for a vigorous resistance. In this would be found a fair similitude by which to describe an ordinary Christian congregation in these modern times, and by which to discriminate the listeners with a view to their appropriate classification.

It may never have occurred to some, who are in the habit of attendance upon divine service and gazing unhindered upon the conspicuous speaker in

the pulpit, that he sees from his outlook quite as clearly as they do from theirs. If one who can read human countenances well were only for one Sabbath to have a seat in the desk, he would be struck with surprise perhaps; certainly he would gain some positively new ideas: for he would see all conditions of men represented. He would behold moral characteristics, personal peculiarities, and professional habits most evidently displayed. Under the presentation of close-fitting truth he would discover that exceedingly diverse impressions are produced upon different hearers.

1. For one class, he would be sure to see the *listless* hearers. He might discover in various parts of the audience-room those whose countenances would defy all study. They are perfect blanks. No more life appears than there would be discovered in a gallery of statuary. Some will be asleep. Some there will be who hear the sound of the words, but so inattentively and unintelligently that nothing is regarded as it passes their ears. The sentences fall on their organs like the ordinary ticking of a clock; they disturb no sensibility whatsoever. We should judge that they attracted no attention of any sort, if it were not that the eyes flash up suddenly with an eager curiosity, if for some reason the sound happens to stop.

It is by no means needful that one should be in a slumber in order to be a listless hearer. He may keep his look full on the speaker, and yet not heedfully receive a single syllable from his lips. Now it would be trifling to pause here and rebuke this

kind of inattention. But one might be suffered to say that it is not fair play to meet any preacher in such a manner, and then dispose of him with a hard criticism as having been unusually dull. Who has been the duller of the two? If the sermon be a good one, then all the people ought to attend to it that nothing be lost. If it be a poor one, they certainly ought to attend to it the more closely, or they will not catch even its excellent, and perhaps redeeming, quotations from somebody else.

2. Next, this visitor in the pulpit would notice the *criticising* hearers. It is not worth while just now to seem to refer to those who cavil at the ideas presented, or find fault in turn with the preacher's gestures, his voice, his use or disuse of a manuscript, his reading of the hymns, his management of the large Bible, or the mechanical forms of his prayers. These are all minor matters, and it is generally understood now that ministers are willing that people shall do about as they please in dealing with them. But the more dangerous habit of some is to lose all matter in mere manner. For instance, a strong and eloquent appeal, or an exhibition of brilliant imagination, is apt to excite them. Listening intently, they go away pleased with what they term the excellence of the discourse. Or perhaps a logical man with a theological turn plods through his half-hour in search of a doctrine. They listen after a fashion; they believe all he says; they did before; but still they are not happy; he is pronounced dull and uninteresting. So it is always the man and not the truth which is taken

in. The message he has brought falls to the ground dead, pierced in a hundred places by the small shot of a mere sporting criticism.

3. Yet a third class might be singled out, the *suspicious* hearers. These are continually on the lookout, not exactly in our times for heterodoxy, but for eccentricities. They are afraid the preacher will say something inconsistent with the established views they cherish. At the present day people love beyond everything else to have their ministers proclaim authoritatively from the pulpit what they believe in the pews. And sometimes they are anxious for fear he is on the verge of offering something else. He is in danger of touching political issues, or he will oppose evangelical tent-work, or he will not come out strongly enough on the subject of total abstinence.

Perhaps this is natural; but it strikes one sometimes that there is very little use in preaching to those whose minds are made up. It is apparent that there are men and women who settle beforehand two decisions every time they go to church: one is, that certain theoretic or practical views ought not to be presented from the pulpit; the other is, that they are going to be now. Time never wears away their solicitude nor diminishes their feeling of prejudice or doubt. They sit in painful uncertainty and uneasiness through sermon after sermon.

A single remark is all that is necessary to make here: it is better generally to listen to what *is* said rather than to what is not; and it is always safer to

remember that "it will be time enough for a man to decide whether he will bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's image when he sees the servants splitting the wood to heat the fiery furnace."

4. Then there is a fourth class, the *distributing* hearers. Some most devout people always listen for the sake of the rest of the congregation. They imagine that the burden of applying the sermon to those at whom they judge it is directed by their minister rests wholly upon them. They would be perfectly willing to walk right up after service to the exact individual, and say, as Nathan did to David, "Thou art the man!" Or perhaps a duty is pressed and an appeal made. These persons will specify instantly what somebody else ought to give or to do. That was Sydney Smith's experience when he was a preacher. He said, "If I were to declare that A is in trouble, B would instantly reply, 'C ought to go and help him.'"

Just let every hearer think to himself as he plants his family in the pew, "This discourse is primarily meant for me. If the hopes of which it speaks may be legitimately applied to my comfort, I will receive them gratefully and joyfully at the hand of the Lord; if the dangers of which it speaks are around me, I, who now am thinking I stand, will take heed lest I fall; if the duties which it inculcates are such as I can perform, I will try to set about them; if the sins it represents are such as I commit, I will pray for pardon; and so may God help me to-day to take heed how and what I hear!"

II. Let us seek now, in the second place, to dis-



criminate and classify the ordinary hearers of the word as they appear in the sight of the world at large.

Here comes in the question as to results rather than mere behavior. We fall back upon the parable of the sower; it was given as our Saviour's illustration of the effect of the truth as it is thrown upon human hearts like seed upon different soils.

1. To begin with, there are the *wayside* hearers. Let us read over the old story and lay alongside of the description at once our Lord's interpretation:

“And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine, Hearken: Behold, there went out a sower to sow. And it came to pass as he sowed, some fell by the wayside, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables? The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the wayside, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.”

The preacher who sows successfully is accustomed to choose that kind of seed which he wisely judges is best adapted to the soil where he is to scatter it. Then he spreads it with an open hand. But the hearts of some of his hearers have been so run over and trampled upon by evil passions, desires, and prejudices, that they have become hard as a beaten highway which stretches along by the side of the ploughed land. Truth falls at the first only on the surface. Perhaps, if it were allowed to lie

there even for a brief while, it might find its way in, for there is a very vigorous vitality in God's utterances to men. But the devil is on the watch; he comes and snatches it away, and then the path is blank and barren as before, and the labor of sowing is lost.

King Agrippa is instanced to us as an example. He went with great pomp to hear the apostle Paul preach. That earnest and powerful pleader laid the truth on his heart as if he would plough and harrow it into his life. But the devil's birds were near to pick up the seed. Pride came with her glittering pinions and chirped in his ear, "Thou art a king, but who is this tent-maker?" Lust croaked behind pride and had something to say about giving up Berenice. So they came one after another, picked up the grain, and flew away.

2. Then our Lord mentions the *stony-ground* hearers, and afterwards tells his disciples what he means:

"And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth; but when the sun was up it was scorched; and because it had no root it withered away. And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground, who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness, and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time; afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended."

From the very fact of the soil's meagreness, in

such cases the growth of grain seems always astonishingly rapid, for the earth is all mould, and the rock beneath it keeps the heat of the noontide longer. Shallow hearts are generally warm and full of impulse. Let the wind now blow and the rains fall and the hot sun shine, and if the ground were only deep and solid the very blast would settle the roots more firmly, the showers would stay to give permanent nourishment, and the strong light would develop the thrifty life faster. But this stony ground has only a deceitful surface-soil; so the wind loosens, the rain washes, the sun withers. Thus it comes about that sometimes the best helps hinder.

Paul had some of these hearers among his audiences in Galatia: "Ye did run well; what did hinder you?" Christ had some among his followers in Galilee; he gave them deeper doctrines than they could shelter or support in their merely superficial experience: "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

3. Next, our Lord classifies the *thorn-choked hearers*. A peculiar kind of thorn in that country grows suddenly and rankly, and seems to love the borders of wheat-fields. The farmers cut away the too prolific stalks, but the roots put forth fresh shoots at once with a strangling and tangling violence that crowds everything else down.

"And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other

things, entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. And he said unto them, he that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Perhaps this class of hearers is more widely represented in our times than any one of the others. A sort of religious impression is very readily produced in ordinary promiscuous assemblies. Some men and more women are exceedingly sympathetic and emotional creatures. It is a sight often to be seen, that of a listener weeping and agitated under the faithful presentation of the truth. Men become alarmed for their future safety. Generous souls sometimes feel the baseness of their ingratitude to God. These go away from the sanctuary full of solemn resolutions. Thoughts of sober life, of practical duty, of pious endeavor, of heavenly love, settle upon their souls. But the morning of the busy week of worldly work dawns, and before the noon comes they are just as hard and just as perverse as ever. Oh, how many Sundays have actually been slain by the wicked Mondays that followed them!

Demas' history has been offered us for an illustration of this short-lived sort of emotion, in one melancholy sentence of Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed unto Thessalonica." Perhaps the saddest of all experiences we have to meet is found in this watching of people who promise so much, but who come to so little.

4. Then our Saviour speaks of the *good-ground*

hearers in the parable. But for such, seed-sowing would be a failure.

“And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that did spring up, and increased, and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some a hundred. And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

The great source of comfort to a preacher of the gospel is found here; the principal field of his labor is good ground. He is sustained by two promises, given him in the Bible long ago.

One is about the seed he sows: “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it.”

The other is about the sower: “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves *with him.*”

III. Let us, now in the third place, look upon those who hear the word, as they appear in the sight of God.

Men are very much mistaken, if they suppose that these Sunday services are mere entertainments

with which to while away an unoccupied hour. Very vivid and very graphic are the words in the Fourteenth Psalm: "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God." He looks down now upon every gathered audience of men; and he pronounces upon their forms of listening to the truth.

Suffer me, in closing this exposition, to restate a few of the simple principles which lie at the basis of all duty in listening to the truth, and which will show how God himself considers an assemblage gathered for his worship, and what he thinks of the relations between the pulpit and the pews in a modern congregation.

I. The first of these is this: *a preacher of the gospel is an authorized messenger from heaven to men.*

He is not, therefore, to be reckoned as a mere platform-man, delivering his own solitary views, and whose utterances are to be registered and weighed according to his eloquence or ability alone. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." It is neither intelligent nor apt for us to say of a minister in the pulpit (if he be really about his business) "He thinks so and so." For it is not his thoughts he is offering for general approval or consideration, but God's thoughts to men. The same mistake was made more than two thousand years ago, and then the Lord in person took occasion to speak out; this is what he said to Ezekiel:

“Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit beside thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not. And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.”

2. Another principle, just as simple as this, needs to be put alongside of it: *the minister's message is to be received from the Old and New Testament precisely as if God spoke to men now.*

The Bible is cosmopolitan and perennial. It never grows antiquated or obsolete. “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel, let him be accursed!” an inspired apostle said that! God's revelation to men admits and counsels that all intelligent listeners are to try the doctrine to see that it comes from above; but nowhere does it say that any one is to try the preachers beyond this one line—are they men of God?

3. Yet a third principle is to be mentioned with the others: *the constituted method under the gospel for communication between earth and heaven is preaching.*

Then, in heaven's name, let Christian men and women pray more for the preachers! In early ages, the Almighty spoke by visions and dreams; we do not understand that he ever does this now; he speaks by his word. He has chosen living men to go to men; he has given them a book; he has organized around them a church, which is Christ's body, the fulness of him who filleth all in all. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." If we use the press, then the press must preach. If we use music, then the singers must preach. Eleven times in succession does Jeremiah repeat the one declaration from God himself: "I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them."

"Take heed, therefore, how ye hear." "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few."



## VII.

## THE HOME MISSION.

"HOWBEIT JESUS SUFFERED HIM NOT, BUT SAITH UNTO HIM, GO HOME TO THY FRIENDS, AND TELL THEM HOW GREAT THINGS THE LORD HATH DONE FOR THEE, AND HATH HAD COMPASSION ON THEE."—*Mark* 5:19.

THE first preacher of the gospel in the town of Sychar, we remember, was a suddenly converted woman, concerning whom very hard stories had formerly been told. She had been fortunate enough to meet Jesus out near Jacob's well, and had received his command instantly upon her conversion, "Go, call thy husband, and come hither." She obeyed; and the record informs us that she became the instrument of spiritual renewal to more people than any one else clear down to the day of Pentecost.

This woman may be considered the earliest home missionary in history; for she went with the gospel to her own nation, to her own city, to her own family, to her own husband.

In the same way it might be said that the apostle Andrew took his first lesson in foreign-mission work from a single experience in the home field; for the moment he was himself converted to Christ, he started off on the errand of finding his own brother Simon. His relationship to this man gave him a peculiar hold upon him for good influence. The family organization has been constructed for special

duty, and so stands forever charged with its performance. It is designed to supplement and intensify the energies of the visible church. To win towards that which is better, and to warn away from that which is worse, is one of the sweetest and tenderest offices.

This reaches farther than just to the relations of children and parents. Pilate's wife was impelled by her suffering and solicitude to go with advice to him, even when he was on the judgment-seat, that he have nothing to do with the just man he was going to crucify; she would have saved her husband, if he had only listened to her on the very verge of his crime. Our home influences are often the most powerful forces in the moulding and fixing of our lives for this world and that to come.

In one sense, surely, the home field is better than the foreign; it is nearer, to begin with, and then everybody knows the language at once. Men and women are needed everywhere, but their own families around them sometimes afford opportunities of usefulness equal to any offered in Ooroomiah or Japan.

Now this line of remark is started by a single verse put on record at the end of the story of the demoniac, who was cured by Jesus and restored to his right mind. This man wanted to link his lot at once with Jesus' work, and go around with him. "Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." This direction is made

even more specific in Luke's narrative, where the word "house" is employed. The man's services of affectionate gratitude are acknowledged and accepted; but he is instantly assigned to the home field, and cheerfully departs to his work.

In the story of Christ's healing of the leper we have observed that he gave to that unfortunate creature, now fortunate indeed in that he was cured, precisely the opposite advice. He went even further than this, and laid upon him a positive prohibition: "And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; and saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter."

The commentaries are full of attempts to render the actions of the Saviour consistent; some of the efforts are very laborious; really, the most commonplace is the best.

"Our Lord took different methods of dealing with different patients whom he healed. On some he laid the injunction of silence; others he allowed to spread the news of their cures as being witnesses of his power and goodness. He took, we cannot doubt, the circumstances of the country where the miracle was wrought into account; as well as what was expedient for the kingdom of God, and for the

person healed. It was not enough for the man to tell his friends at home what great things the Lord, or God, had wrought for him through Jesus, but how Jesus had mercy on him. By dwelling on the first he might become self-important, but would be kept humbled by speaking of the compassion of Jesus. We seem to perceive that our Lord was willing to trust him as a messenger to go before his face, and there was probably a germ of spiritual life implanted in him."

It is set down among eastern proverbs that whenever a person gets in a hurry he is sure to take a roundabout way. Certainly, so much as this is true, "he that believeth shall not be confounded," because he "shall not make haste." Whoever expects to attain to a height of showy endeavor will have to begin with souls which are close beside him and within his reach. If he finds success there, perhaps he will be satisfied to work on, and just leave his ambition for showy fields to others.

It is pitiful to see a grown-up man sighing for the unattainable and the dim, flattening his anxious forehead against the window-pane in sentimental sadness, half visionary and half peevish, because the churches will not start a fresh station for him among the tropical islands, so far, oh! so far away, where his wistful eyes seem to see the waving palms, while, close beside him at the moment, waits a soul hungry for the gospel, a soul whose sensibilities would be stirred to their very depths just to hear him speak for Christ. An

aged father, sitting in his chair there, thoroughly accessible; a godless sister, confessedly absorbed in frivolity and fashion, yet herself worthy of better things; a worldly brother, immersed in business and distracted with care; a prayerless mother, an unconverted servant, a willful and undisciplined child; are not these as welcome for an enterprise of faith and supplication as Bulgarians or Zulus? Think of a conversion occurring under our own roof!

There may not be so much conspicuousness, and there never is likely to be so much romance, in the work of teaching one's young brother or sister as in taking a tract-district or managing a department in a reform school; but often more good can be done thus. At any rate, a more melancholy spectacle cannot be found than that presented by a living Christian wasting his time and energy in looking up work far away in this world when so much is to be discovered lying directly under his eyes.

Why do not all perceive this and learn the lesson which our Lord taught that demoniac out of whom he cast the legion of devils? Most of us have read in the "Pilgrim's Progress" about the man with the muckrake, who at last had reached such a pass, with searching for straws and sticks and dust, that, as Bunyan tells us, he could look no way but downwards. Might there not be a profitable picture drawn of those in our day whose eyes, with long indulgence of dreamy gazing into the clouds, have become unable to look any way but

upwards, quite across over the heads of all their proper duties standing directly before them?

The family organization is designed to afford manifest assistance in the conversion of souls. First obligation lies for us all just here. No apology of zeal exhausted elsewhere will be accepted for deliberate rejection of this. That will be a sorrowful wail to be lifted by-and-by, no matter even if outside toil has in some measure hindered vigilance of the household: "They made me the keeper of the vineyards; mine own vineyard have I not kept."

But now arises the practical question: What can one do in bringing the home ones into a religious life? This man here in the story of the miracle was commanded to go home and tell what the Lord had done for him. "*Tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee.*" That was what David did: "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." That was what Hezekiah did: "The Lord was ready to save me; therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord." That was what Nebuchadnezzar did: "I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me." This was exactly what the Samaritan woman did. If we read the story of Simon Peter's conversion carefully, we shall find that Andrew did two things that morning after his own interview with the Messiah: going immediately to find his brother, he first taught him, and

then he "brought" him. Instruction first, then persuasion.

That Christian worker will mistake the position seriously who supposes that all which his fellow-men need is mere information of a Saviour opportunely arrived from heaven and now proffering pardon for their sins. Wilfulness is too firmly entrenched in the city of Mansoul to yield to a simple herald's blowing of his trumpet on the outside of the wall. Very many are "hearers only" of the word, who are not ready to become "doers" also, till after something like a siege has begun to be felt and the regular approaches and the heavy guns are seen.

The human soul needs truth more than argument, personal sympathy more than exegesis, a Redeemer more than a Messiah, a radical righteousness more than a mere pattern for conduct. So on its own part, what it has to render is penitence before adhesion, confession rather than consecration, admission of guilt and imploring of forgiveness as the concomitant of faith.

Hence there will be found as much necessity for strenuous energy of personal influence in some cases as for clear utterances of truth. Many a young man has gone home from a public service in such a mood of mind as that, helped, he might have been converted the same hour; and hindered, might have gone down into the utter night.

No; what we have called "the home mission" includes mothers' prayers and fathers' counsels, as well as a sister's winning and a brother's bringing

to Jesus. Religious training is of inestimable worth. Home influences for the right are one of our most priceless of privileges. We cannot help hoping, as we leave this most pathetic story, that this poor demoniac, now sitting at Jesus' feet, brought his whole family to the Master.

Simon Peter told Cornelius and those who were with him that one of the chief characteristics of Jesus Christ's career was found in the fact that he "went about doing good; for God was with him." Out of that expression has come one of our stock exhortations in conference meetings and public addresses.

Once, when our old pastor in Vermont gave out this verse in the Acts for his text, I listened with much care, being a young man then and looking forward to the ministry. Across these forty years now I can recall only the first head of his sermon. "To begin with," said he, "a Christian, in order to go about and do good, must *go about and do no harm.*" That is certainly a prime condition of all religious serviceableness at the present day. To keep going around without hurting anybody is as essential to piety as it is to an electric motor or a buzz-saw. The word "usefulness" does not occur in the Bible; but mention is often made of "temperance" and of "moderation." An incessant activity, which comes to no safe or profitable end, only reminds one of Carlyle's quaint description of a balky horse: "all move and no go."

My greatest discouragement has always been with those busy creatures who use up most of their



time and force in seeking out spheres of effort for which they are under profoundest conviction they have no calling. Sunday-school classes? "Oh, no; never could get on with children." Tract-distribution? "No; the embarrassment of a naturally timid constitution would forbid that." Public prayer and social exhortation? "No; want of fluency in utterance would hinder, and perhaps experience would prove rather thin for edification." Charity work? "No; too much sensibility; poverty, pain, wretchedness make one sick, you know." Thus they dispose of the entire round of duty, and feel a solemn sense of satisfaction in having shown that they have no gift for anything whatever.

Job, if he had happened to run across a few of these modern believers in his day, would have had no difficulty surely in filling his "mouth with arguments" by merely picking up the crumbs of objection which would roll off from the edges of unnecessary discussion. Of all spiritual exercises known to man, this ceaseless reiteration of reasons for going about and doing nothing is certainly the poorest.

We may not all be called to go on a foreign mission to China nor on a domestic mission to Dakota; we might as well let the consideration of "divine calls" alone till the calls come. What we can do now, every one, is to seek to comfort and to lift, to convert and to save, the soul that stands next to us. Christ did that, and so "God was with him."

In all effective Christian effort what is wanted is some small measure of the same enthusiasm that we have in our mystic dreams to be put into our prosaic duties. Once, when a company of tourists were on board of a Bungagunga Indiaman, straight out at sea, not far from Ceylon, the conversation commenced concerning the familiar missionary hymn; this soon ran into dispute as to whether the poetic odor—"the spicy breezes"—of the lyric could be recognized miles off the island. One old traveller slipped quietly up to the deck and rubbed a little gracious anointing of cinnamon oil over the hammock nettings on the weather side. And not long afterward, when the romantic landsmen came up for their rest from heat and dispute, there arose cries of deepest satisfaction from those who had been contending, with their arguments, for what was now evidenced by the smell.

It is not necessary to go to Ceylon in order to find souls to save. Prayerful ingenuity can furnish cinnamon perfume this side of the Mediterranean, if one has the grand love of Christ in his heart which makes all labor lovely.

Our study is ended and our instruction closes where it began: "Go to thy house unto thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and how he had mercy on thee. And he went his way, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel."

## VIII.

## "WHO TOUCHED ME?"

"FOR SHE SAID, IF I MAY TOUCH BUT HIS CLOTHES, I SHALL BE WHOLE."—*Mark* 5:28.

IT would seem fair to say that whatever belongs to a life is appropriate to put into a biography. Especially true would such a statement be, when made concerning a man like Simon Peter. For, at forty years old, this fisherman had to be reconstructed from a Galilean peasant into a Christian apostle; and the transitions needed were so rapid that our imagination is fairly arrested with the details of the educational process. The influences which moulded an uncouth disposition like his, the occasions which disciplined that temper of his, the incidents which instructed his mind, are all of singular and abiding interest, and may be studied at length.

Now this story of the woman healed in answer to her touch upon the hem of Jesus' garment, as a mere matter of fact, is a chapter in Christ's life. But Simon Peter was present, and took a not very creditable part in the conversation; he also observed all the details of the miraculous transaction; and there is reason to conclude, from a cautious study of his active life in some subsequent years, that he received at this time certain impressions which powerfully swayed his entire public career.

So we may as well note a few lessons that he would be sure to catch, and put them on record.

I. First of all, he learned that *a close follower of Christ Jesus must in doing good be no respecter of persons.*

An unfortunate female is introduced suddenly into the inspired history, of whom we never hear anything afterwards, and of whom we have never learned anything before. Eusebius casually mentions that in his day, somewhere near the beginning of the fourth century, there was pointed out a monument, commemorating her miraculous cure; but he gives no information concerning her residence, or antecedents, or family connection. Another historian tells us that the statue was of bronze, and represented her as in the act of touching the fringe of the Saviour's garment. And then another says that a memorial so convincing of the truth of the miracle waked the anger of Julian the Apostate, and that he tore it down and destroyed it.

We know nothing authentic about the woman herself. Legends, of no value however, assert that her name was Veronica, and that a house of abode was assigned to her in Cæsarea Philippi. She passes away from the Scripture record just as she enters it, without an introduction to us. For all time to come, she was to take her own place with the Samaritan at the well, and with the Syrophenician who had great faith, among that mysterious but attractive group of unnamed and nameless women in the New Testament, unhistoric forever elsewhere, and honored in our recollection only because the

generous love of the Redeemer lifted their brief biographies into the sacred and conspicuous record of his companionship.

So this was one of the instances in which Simon Peter learned that Christian charity and pitiful help knows no distinction between strangers and home-born. Any one who is in trouble may come and touch the hem of the Saviour's garment, just as this woman did.

II. He learned a second lesson: that *the kingdom of divine providence works harmoniously into the kingdom of divine grace.*

For observe the apparently accidental, but wonderfully opportune, presence of Jesus Christ in that neighborhood where this burdened woman met him. He was at that moment on another errand; indeed, he was in pursuit of another miracle. This cure was only an additional effort—a mere side-stroke of grace, a by-play of help, a sort of parenthesis of pitifulness for one in trouble.

He had started for the house of Jairus, where he was engaged by his promise to raise his dead daughter to life. This interruption occurred in the public highway casually, we should say, and without premeditation. But here Peter saw clearly that there could be no such things as accidents in the government of a wise God.

One gracious purpose always includes others, if they are necessary to it. And providence waits on grace in the shaping of the events. Most of us remember an ancient prophet who saw in his vision by the river a wheel within a wheel; the symbol of

a celestial superintendence inscrutably working out minute details within even the most intricate and exalted sweeps of vast counsels of wisdom.

So here: we find a miracle within a miracle; and that it did not come about by any happening, or any inadvertence, we can prove from just one slight turn of expression in the literal record; for we are told that, when this woman learned of Jesus' presence, near and available, she went forth apparently of her own prompting in order that she might find him and make her experiment of touching his garment. The entire gospel is found in the one sentence which describes her endeavor: "When she heard, she came." Nobody was ever converted, or helped, or cured, by accident. There are fixed means of grace. Those who hear of them must come to them. And when the heart has a purpose of surrender in it, providence will open the way.

III. Yet another lesson did Simon Peter learn that day: *the help of Jesus Christ comes in at the moment of human hopelessness.*

Let us trace out the particulars which show the pitiable condition of this woman. It would be difficult to gather upon any individual a greater aggregate of terrible inflictions. She was evidently frightfully diseased: "twelve years" of unrelieved endurance had proved her distemper to be chronic. She was poor: in the vain conflict she had "spent all she had" upon physicians. Moreover, she was discouraged because they did her no good: "nothing bettered, she the rather grew worse." She had

become enfeebled with pain: the surgeons had done their worst as well as their best; she had "suffered many things of them." She was always ceremonially unclean: by edict of Levitical law she was exposed to penalty simply for going out into the street. And then she was only a woman anyway: everybody turned impatiently against a woman in those days.

All these particulars stood in the way of such an invalid as she was, coming to a Rabbi for help. But who does not see that every one of them proved an argument with Jesus Christ, rather than a bar? No one need ever consider that distresses of any sort keep a sufferer away from a Saviour like ours. The path which Jesus took that day was purposely laid in the direction, where this afflicted woman would be surest to meet him, if she went forth in faith.

IV. This leads to a new lesson: Peter learned that *even feeble faith, if only real, will be graciously accepted by God.*

Observe the simplicity of the logic through which this troubled creature urged up her timid confidence to so bold an undertaking. She did not pause to argue concerning anything except the exact way of getting to Jesus. The philosophy of dealing with an incurable malady she knew nothing about. She only said this, "If I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be whole."

Matthew and Mark alone record this remark of the woman. The cure was what Luke, being a

physician, would dwell more upon; thus he thinks less of the mental process which went before it.

But how do we suppose anybody knew she had communed with her own heart in this way before her action had made her known? Most likely, she rehearsed her experiences afterwards to all the disciples, and talked to the people around, who heard of the cure. It may be she told them with tears in her eyes what a conflict she had had before it was possible to persuade herself to come out into the presence and exposure of all that crowd. Her intention was to mingle quietly among the throng with the rest, creep in behind Jesus, touch his outer garment lightly, unperceived, and then retire again without giving any trouble or attracting any notice. She imagined that would be all which was necessary to cure her, and she would be forgotten.

We perceive here, in one act, both the strength and the weakness of this woman's faith. She was confident that she would find herself whole, if she could only touch him; and that was no mean amount of true belief. But she does not seem to have gone so far above that mere conjecture (as it were) as even to hope that her exigency could be known by Christ without her touching him. Conversation, however, she had no thought of. Perhaps her delicacy forbade her to indicate the infirmity which distressed her life. Perhaps she feared his displeasure when he should learn she was ceremonially defiled, and would make him also unclean if she came into contact with his person. Perhaps



she was timid in the midst of an uncontrollable crowd in the tumultuous street. At all events, her argument seems to have amounted merely to this general surmise:

“I am in a terribly hard strait; if I could only reach this Nazarene teacher, it is certain I could be relieved; my chances do not promise much, but they promise something; I will go to him.”

V. Simon then had a fresh lesson to learn: that *all the work of Jesus Christ is thorough, whether for body or soul.*

This woman's faith was selfish and superstitious; but it was accepted for her perfect cure. She managed to touch Christ's garment, no one perceiving her inconspicuous approach, and no one hindering her unobtrusive departure; yet she was healed, and Jesus answered: “Be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole.”

When the Saviour's words fall on our ears, we are certain of an abrupt change passing over the entire narrative. Our notion of it may have been up to this point only as of an interesting physical recovery. But here we suddenly discern there was lying underneath the recital a new and spiritual meaning. The faith seems to reach her religious state as a pardoned sinner before God.

We hasten back for an explanation of the mystery; and at the beginning of the story we find one little circumstance, almost insignificant and often unnoticed in the thought of any rapid reader, yet at this point full of the profoundest meaning. The woman here tells how she planned to lay her finger

upon the *hem* of Jesus' garment. According to Levitical law, each Israelite was bidden to attach to his external mantle a fringe or tassel, bordered with blue ribbon, to remind him that he was separate or holy unto God. Upon most robes there were two of these; one of which came up in the ordinary folding of the cloth around the person somewhere near one's shoulder. This was what the woman touched. And here was the evidence that her thought was in good measure religious. She seems to have had some feeble apprehension of Christ's sacerdotal character as a true priest unto God, which she makes known by this quick and delicate recognition of one of its sublimest prerogatives.

Here, then, is the gospel logic, and its fine result. Out of infinite peril and need the distressed soul looks up to Christ as an authoritative High-priest, and exclaims, "I must just find my way to him, and touch his garment's hem." If it does not thus reason, it is because it has not yet felt its primal danger. And so it is left to suffer on and suffer on, and no one will pity its distress, for its distress does not deserve to be pitied. If a soul has not learned by this time what a poor, miserable, painful, hopeless, incurable thing *sin* is, and must forever be, then God will sovereignly leave it to journey around like this pitiable woman among earthly helps and betrayals, nothing bettered and rather growing worse, until it will at last find out that awful fact, and be ready to be saved by him.

How affecting it seems, to think that not only

the great sorrow of that rich ruler was known to Jesus, but even this concealed malady of a poor nameless woman; the secret trial and the open bereavement alike! We are not forced to inform him concerning these experiences under which we are harassed; he understands our affliction the instant we ask relief. Our Lord never called any one before by the name he gave this woman; nor ever after did he address any one as "daughter." New relationships are constituted in every case, however, when one comes penitently in faith to him.

VI. Still another lesson must Simon Peter have learned here: *a keen discrimination is observed between showy and genuine piety.*

A most singular arrest was made upon this woman, as she went hurrying away out of sight. It is no difficult thing to imagine a joy deep as hers, though it would be impossible to picture it with mere forms of words. A sense of serene gladness must have pervaded her whole being, when she became conscious that the burden of a half score of years was rolled off in an hour. Just as she, therefore, was stealing away modestly into her own retirement, that she might rejoice in seclusion, there was heard behind her a startling inquiry. Jesus said abruptly: "Who touched me?"

To this at first no one gave reply, for a mute wonder lay upon the minds of those nearest to him—wonder, not that any one of those Capernaum people had come into contact with him however violently, but that he should put so preposterous a question in a company so dense in the street. In

one of the gospels, the word used means *stifled*; the multitudes stifled or suffocated him. Simon Peter it was who at last broke this embarrassing silence. He seemed to imagine that he ought to administer impliedly a rebuke for such hasty flash of impatience. So, denying for himself, he exclaimed,

“Master, the multitude throng thee, and press thee; and sayest thou, Who touched me? Thou seest the multitude thronging thee!”

It is interesting to notice that our Lord passes no censure on Peter in this instance, though the answer he made was very much like impertinence; but he still insists on his question,

“Somebody hath touched me, for I perceive that virtue hath gone out of me!”

Here is disclosed the intimation that it is possible for human beings to throng Christ, even so closely as to jostle him, and yet not one fairly touch the hem of his garment without his notice. “The Lord knoweth them that are his.” He was well acquainted at the moment with that nameless woman; for the one striking thing of all which she did was this touching him in faith to ask a favor.

We might just as well make this short question a motto of untold meaning for all time in churches. It would serve searchingly for each Communion occasion. Through and through the assemblies Christ might almost seem to be passing, as he asks, “Who of all these people, that throng me in such ordinances, have actually touched me with the finger of their faith on the hem of my garment?” The great respectable world follow on after Christ

even now; large congregations jostle him, and each other, in high strivings of conspicuous charities and forms and outward observances, under the urgency of education, under the press of curiosity, under the attraction of sensibility, under the excitement of example; but who lays his life down in surrender? Who rests his soul upon the atonement for deliverance from the chronic distemper of sin?

To answer this inquiry, there is found one here, and another there; a son, a daughter, in one household, a father, or a mother, in another. Whole families, in these nominally Christian communities, crowd the house of prayer; but when the broken bread and the cup of wine go around asking close questions, the discrimination among them is very sharp, and not rarely the decision is painful.

VII. There is at least one more lesson which Peter learned: *the impossibility of serving Jesus Christ fully out of sight.*

This woman worked her way through the crowd quietly, and quietly she expected to withdraw from danger of notice. Just there it was determined to stop her progress, and bring her forward to be recognized. There must have been some great reason for this; for every instant of delay was of intense importance to Jairus, whose maiden daughter was at the point of death. That reason now transpires. This invalid came for her blessing in secret; she must here consent to be rewarded openly. When the question was asked, she perceived that she was discovered. She came forward kneeling at Jesus' feet, and owned everything she had attempted.

He gently compelled her openly to confess in the hearing of the people her full surrender.

It would seem as if the Lord Jesus wanted to make the personal acquaintance of this stranger. She came behind him; he invited her to stand before. He called this nameless creature into conspicuous notice. Evidently he meant to direct her heart, and confirm her experience. By forcing her to explain her conduct, he fastened her attention upon two facts: that she had come to him in absolute hopelessness, in the high venture of a tremulous faith: that she was going away in the joy of a complete and permanent relief.

She would have lost more than half her blessing, if she had just retreated out of sight with only her bodily ailment cured. The immeasurable advantage of such a bold committal of herself to Christ must be apparent at a glance. There is even a noticeable delicacy in our Lord's action; he chose the exact moment for his call, when she had already received his favor. She would have been frightened, if he had challenged her so when she was creeping up behind in timid experiment. He waited till she was healed; then she was confident and would feel bolder. Grace always goes before duty. God never calls any one to profess his name in public, until he has bestowed the gift of his recognition. Then he asks a return. It is a weak Christian indeed who hopes to serve Christ out of sight. A grateful heart will hear him inquiring, "Who touched me?" and in turn will wish to fall at his feet, and tell him "all the truth."

These are some of the lessons which Simon Peter must have learned while he was waiting in the street for this woman's cure. His story has been introduced merely because it would be likely to seem vivid and clear to us to imagine what so observing a bystander as he was always, might gain from what was passing so swiftly before him. The same lessons are ours to learn also, however. The miracle is a parable, as are all the others which Jesus Christ wrought. For the cure of Satan's worst disease in the human heart—sin against God's law, with all its pollution and its peril—there is positively no relief but that which is given when the touch of an unwavering faith is laid on his garment, and his priestly atonement is received.

“We may not climb the heavenly steeps, to bring the Lord  
Christ down;

In vain we search the lowest deeps, for him no depths can  
drown.

But warm, sweet, tender, even yet a present help is he;

And faith has yet its Olivet, and love its Galilee.

The healing of the seamless dress is by our beds of pain;

We touch him in life's throng and press, and we are whole  
again.”

## IX.

## HOW TO MAKE MEN REPENT.

“AND THEY WENT OUT, AND PREACHED THAT MEN SHOULD REPENT.”—*Mark 6:12.*

Two things in the record made of the disciples' tour into Galilee will attract attention: one is, the purpose of their preaching; the other is, the instrument furnished for rendering it efficacious. “And they went out, and preached that men should repent.” Then they enforced the doctrine by working miracles. “And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.”

It does not seem easy, at first sight, to trace the exact connection between great signs and wonders and the peculiar inner experience of mind and heart which we call penitence for sin. Some have been satisfied to say that these followers of Jesus evidenced their whole mission as from him by the power they exhibited, and then drove their hearers towards the particular duty of repentance by exhortation and appeal.

But is there no closer link in the logic than that? Let us take up a veritable case of conviction of sin and see what it was which induced the feeling. It has been recorded of no less a person than Simon Peter, one of these very disciples now going forth at the Lord's command, that he fell into the



most violent prostration of spirit in view of his personal unworthiness on a remembered occasion, when Jesus wrought the miracle of an extraordinary draught of fishes: "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." All the explanation we have to offer of this singular conclusion from such premises is found in the fact that God was evidently disclosed before the eyes of his creature, and at once Simon saw his wickedness in the full light of the display.

Put with this the experience of Job: we all recall how he was pestered and argued with by his unwise friends, until his whole being was exasperated and sore; then the Lord in person answered him out of the whirlwind, and, to our amazement, Job replies under deepest conviction of sin: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Here again we see plainly that it is the disclosure of God's majesty, as before it was of God's power, which has constrained a sinful mortal to discover and acknowledge his transgressions.

A like incident in the career of the prophet Isaiah will add a new illustration. He saw in the temple a great vision of the Lord of hosts; the seraphim were singing, but he could not join in their song; he tells us his experience: "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King,

the Lord of hosts." He discovered his own secret sins in the light of God's countenance. The divine holiness was too much for him. It pierced through to his conscience with the sharp arrow of conviction, so that he flung himself down in a tremor of fright, remorse, and apprehension. He rushed at once into a frank admission of his hopeless exposure to the wrath of God.

It would seem, therefore, that we might be ready for the distinct enunciation of a proposition which would be of greatest help just now when teachers and pastors are asking how the communities, far and wide, may be made to feel their need of a Saviour, by being made to see their sins. If Scripture is to be trusted, then this is true: real conviction of sin is best produced by an exhibition of the divine character and attributes.

Lest there should be any misapprehension, perhaps it will be prudent at this point to say that there are sometimes intermediate steps leading up to this experience. Real conviction of sin as manifested by others is often of value, for it makes us think of God. We are creatures of sympathy as well as of imitation. A woman, looking straight upwards on the street, will stop an anxious crowd, and set them looking upwards too. So a man, thoroughly frightened, will force a hundred men into an inexplicable alarm around him. A small child, bitterly crying in a railroad station over the departure of his mother's coffin to be buried, will fill scores of eyes with tears, all the more if the sobs are quiet and the grief is dull and desolate. It

is not to be denied at all that religious life and sensibility communicate themselves along the line from one human being to another.

One of the most celebrated metropolitan preachers of England has published a sermon with seven texts, which, after all, are but one sentence with three words in it: "I have sinned." He takes up the story of Pharaoh: "And Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked." Then he analyzes the character of Balaam: "And Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now, therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again." After this he examines the confession of Saul: "And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people and obeyed their voice." Then he exhibits the meaning of Achan, searching the acknowledgment carefully: "And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done." Over in the New Testament he finds the admission made of his folly by Judas: "Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that." He alludes to Job; "I have sinned;

what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men? Why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burden to myself?" And he ends with the penitence of the prodigal son: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee." Out of all this he constructs a discourse as odd as it must have been powerful when he delivered it.

In one of the bright books of modern literature I have met the tale of a clergyman who, as a memento or symbol of some committed sin, known only to himself, wore constantly a black serge veil. Never was he seen, at home or abroad, without this solemn sign of acknowledgment and penitence over his face. It was related further that the effect of such a sable reminder of guilt as well as of common exposure was very impressive upon the people among whom he ministered. Every one who approached him felt summoned to institute an inquiry whether he himself was not wearing a like mask to cover some personal wickedness; or whether, at all events, he had not yet some undiscovered wrong, over which he was trying to stretch the folds of a cautious concealment. It never proved a welcome sight for any one; for it set the entire congregation upon a grave search for secret transgressions, individual or social, which, behind one veil or another, they were covering from the eyes of their fellow-men deep in their hearts. It was a strange way of influencing men; but it owed its power, we cannot doubt, to the silent suggestion it made of a judg-

ment by God which the conscience recognized as right and irrevocable.

The connection, therefore, between the miracles these disciples were commissioned to work and the specific doctrine they were commissioned to preach, was closer than a mere evidential proof. When they showed God's holiness, or his power, the people felt and admitted their wickedness.

We might be perfectly willing to leave these teachings of the Scripture to work their way, and ask the teachers in the classes, and the preachers in the pulpits, always to hold up Christ in objective exhibition, if they would hope to work evangelical repentance, if it were not for one unfortunate perversity of human minds in considering plain truth. Men throw back the counsels of the Bible with the assertion that circumstances are different now, and so will need different dealings. When we start to teach inquirers, it appears almost irresistible for us to attempt to show them their guilt by a series of expostulations or reproaches. We pelt them with indiscriminate accusations. We press them most vigorously with enumerations of their personal crimes; we exhort them to remember the Sabbaths they have broken, the mockeries in prayer they have lifted, the duties they have shunned, the lusts they have indulged; and then we assure them that God is angry at wicked people every day, and will send them down into the lowest hell, if they do not speedily repent. This may be all true; but the likelihood is, it will stir up bad temper and start argument. None of us relish being arraigned by our

equals; it certainly exasperates most people to be told such things by one of their fellow-men. If what we really desire is the sad sincerity of a penitent surrender to a Saviour, willing to take the worst malefactors, we shall reach it better by holding that Saviour's holy life and character directly up before one's open eyes.

So all that remains needful for me now is to show, by a few familiar instances in modern life, that the principle holds just as true in our times as ever it did in days long ago.

Of course, it becomes necessary to note, that God manifests himself to men now not in visions, trances, or dreams, but with providential and spiritual disclosures of his purpose concerning them. We must take everything into account; the one object of a divine interposition being to force unconcerned people to notice the infinite perfections of their Maker, we must leave to his inexhaustible resources the methods of his approach. His multitudinous instruments will have to be watched;—sometimes a person, sometimes a book, sometimes an accident, sometimes an inexplicable impression, sometimes a sermon; whatever it may be, let a thoughtful mind observe just the one end God is aiming at.

Take, for one example, the remembered instance of the conversion of Elizabeth Wallbridge, the "Dairyman's Daughter," related by herself in the tract. She gives her artless account in one of her later letters to her pastor. A strange clergyman happened to preach in the village pulpit. She was

foolishly arrayed that day, and went with a vain, proud heart to the service.

“At length the clergyman gave out his text: ‘Be ye clothed with humility.’ He drew a comparison between the clothing of the body and that of the soul. At a very early part of his discourse, I began to feel ashamed of my passion for fine dressing and apparel; but when he came to describe the garment of salvation with which a Christian is clothed, I felt a powerful discovery of the nakedness of my own soul. I saw that I had neither the humility mentioned in the text, nor any one part of the true Christian character. I looked at my gay dress, and blushed for shame on account of my pride. I looked at the minister, and he seemed to be as a messenger sent from heaven to open my eyes. I looked at the congregation, and wondered whether any one else felt as I did. I looked at my heart, and it appeared full of iniquity. I trembled as he spoke, and yet I felt a great drawing of heart to the words he uttered.

“He opened the riches of divine grace in God’s method of saving the sinner. I was astonished at what I had been doing all the days of my life. He described the meek, lowly, and humble example of Christ; I felt proud, lofty, vain, and self-consequential. He represented Christ as ‘Wisdom;’ I felt my ignorance. He held him forth as ‘Righteousness;’ I was convinced of my own guilt. He proved him to be ‘Sanctification;’ I saw my corruption. He proclaimed him as ‘Redemption;’ I felt my slavery to sin, and my captivity to Satan. He concluded

with an animated address to sinners, in which he exhorted them to flee from the wrath to come, to cast off the love of outward ornaments, to put on Christ, and be clothed with true humility."

Here is exactly the illustration we want. This preacher held up Jesus Christ; and this sinner saw herself the moment he made her see the purity and perfectness of the Saviour. His divine holiness forced her to recognize her utter defilement. So each attribute disclosed brought with its discovery the sense and sting of deepest conviction of sin. We must hold up Christ, and then comes the promise: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

For it is the strange property of this spectacle, as seen by the guilty soul of man, that it heals with the same force as that with which it wounds. It beckons with the same hand that bruises. The holiness of God humiliates one who is penitent, and yet at the same instant it brings him purity by pardon. Nowhere is this one attribute so illustriously presented as in the crucifixion of God's only-begotten Son. For the sake of providing an atonement which should avail to banish sin from the human race, infinite holiness came to the cross: and by the cross we are redeemed. Jesus Christ's death shames us and saves us by the same wonderful disclosure.

"Thus, while his death my sin displays in all its blackest hue,  
Such is the mystery of grace, it seals my pardon too."



## X.

## TAKING UP ONE'S CROSS.

"WHOSOEVER WILL COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME."—*Mark* 8:34.

ONE expression there is in this verse which, when carefully analyzed, will be found to furnish an intelligible and authoritative answer to the question how one can become a Christian. The application is universal, for it says, "Whosoever." If, therefore, one is clear that a true religious life claims separation from the world, and that it includes a radical and extensive change of purpose and behavior, and if, having fully counted the cost, he yet desires to take a permanent stand for Christ, then here is a disclosure to him of the precise way in which to accomplish it.

Think the entire verse over, pausing upon the particulars, and you will perceive that it embraces three simple counsels in a single sentence: "And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself—let him take up his cross—let him follow me." The direction is for every one alike: "And this he said to them all." There is no royal road to salvation other than this; the common path is really the king's highway.

I. The first counsel to an inquirer then is, "Let

him deny himself." A general form of expression, but not difficult to explain. The precept is meant to rebuke self-will, self-indulgence, and self-righteousness.

1. Earliest of all, self-will. When our Saviour taught his disciples to pray, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," he knew he struck at the root of all wrong in this world. Sin is nothing but the setting of a will against a will—placing the will of the creature in antagonism and opposition to the will of the Creator. Break human will, and the unfallen Eden returns again.

The old shepherd out on the hillside, talking with his son, was asked, "Father, what is a cross?" He chose two spears out of the rank grass near by; one was very long, so long that he was hardly able to touch the two ends of it with his hands stretched out; the other was short, a mere bit of stalk between his fingers. Putting the one against the other, he bade the boy tell where it was; and indeed he could not reply, for he could not see it at all. It lay so along upon the other that his eyes missed it altogether. Then the man placed it lengthwise over the long one. "Ah, I see it now," said the lad, "for it goes right the other way, and it makes a cross." Then the shepherd told him wisely that a human will was very short, and with God's will behind it made a right line of life; but forced into variance and rebellion, it formed what men call a cross. So a great many people make their own crosses.

2. Next to self-will, self-indulgence stands in

the way of one's coming after Christ; and this likewise must be denied. Men must smite down their pride, their passions, their appetites, and their ambitions, whenever and wherever they interfere with genuine obedience. There are no flowery beds of ease upon which Christians can hope to be carried softly to glory. The kingdom of heaven is one that suffereth violence, and it is the violent alone who take it by force. "Give what thou commandest," prayed the penitent Augustine, "and then command what thou wilt."

In the time of the crusades, every broken down cavalier who found his fortunes wrecked, or who felt that his fame was tarnished, started on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Of course he had no heart in the journey; but it was profitable to wear the white emblem of the crucifixion on the shoulder, and thus to seem like a true devotee going to the sepulchre of Jesus. Then all along the way across the continent the good pious people were accustomed to give a pilgrim food and shelter. So it served the purpose of these lazy hypocrites to go slowly, and not go very far at a time; and they fairly swarmed in the villages and towns where there were most Christians to entertain them. Now in the old Norman French language the name of the Holy Land is *Sainte Terre*; and as these wretched idlers were ostensibly going to Jerusalem, they were called saunterers. Thus came into use our new word "saunter," which means to loiter or to linger. Oh, how many foolish persons there are now-a-days who think they can go sauntering along to the

heavenly Jerusalem! Our Saviour says, "Let him deny himself."

3. Self-righteousness comes next to this, and must certainly be denied, for it is more fatally injurious than all the rest. It is not possible that any man should be saved by his own works, for he cannot atone for his own sins. If we are saved at all, it must be through the abounding grace of Jesus Christ, God's crucified Son.

Poor Martin Luther, creeping painfully for penance along the stone steps of Pilate's staircase in Rome, upon his bare knees, awakes our sympathy; and yet we ourselves try, in ways only a little less gross, though none the less agonizing and none the less futile, to make peace with our Maker. Meantime the heralds of the gospel are proclaiming, "By grace are ye saved through faith." Tell the world that infant-drowning in the Ganges will earn admission into heaven, and awful as may be the agony of a mother's broken heart, the river will swim with perishing children. And still Christ keeps saying, "Look unto me and be saved." Madam Guyon puts peas in her shoes and mingles colquintida with her drink, and the picture of the heroic woman is inexpressibly sad, for she certainly ought to have known that salvation was always perfectly free. God declares that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." When the missionaries read that verse from Isaiah, to the Nestorian heathen, two priests turned around abruptly, asking, "Is that in the Bible?" Reading it for themselves, they hung their heads and went away thoughtful and silent.

II. We must come back to the verse: the next thing to be told to an inquirer is that he must take up the cross. Perhaps it will be easier to understand this if we look at the symbol for a moment, and then afterwards we can develop the doctrine taught.

1. Most of us have seen in the window that beautiful figure cut in cardboard, representing a cross so twined with a vine running around it that the light shone in through the interstices and drew the outlines as of a shaded picture against the glass. Underneath was the Latin motto, "*Teneo et Teneor.*" In this there was indicated the twofold use of this sacred emblem: "I bear, and I am borne." As for a Christian being borne on the cross, that is, being crucified actually, no one needs to make any mistake in this day of gospel grace: Christ was crucified in our behalf, once for all. It is the holding up of one's cross which is suggested here in the verse; and a vivid illustration of what is meant might be found in the story of Simon the Cyrenian, whom the Jews or the soldiers compelled to come up behind Jesus, at the moment when his strength gave way, and to help carry the heavy timber upon which our Saviour was about to be nailed. (See Luke 23:26.)

It was the custom in those cruel times to make a condemned criminal, on the way to execution, transport the cross to the place outside the city wall where it was to be planted. To bear such a burden with the malefactor was to share in his shame. And the direction we are studying can signify no

less than that every Christian is expected to fare with his Lord, even at the lowest of His fortunes in this wicked world. We must be willing to meet the absolutely last extreme of self-sacrifice, no matter how humiliating it may be, in order to show we love and obey our blessed Master.

2. The doctrine, therefore, which the use of this symbol inculcates is very far-reaching and peremptory. Generally there is to be found in the path of every follower of the Lord Jesus great, and often disagreeable, duty to be done. This it is easy to call his "cross," to be taken up and borne faithfully to the end.

A father is perplexed because he feels that he must begin family prayer the moment he becomes a Christian. A student knows that if he gets an education he will have to be a preacher. A mother understands that she must dress her children more modestly, and in some cases change their companionships and alter their amusements, the moment she joins the church. A business man sees that he will be compelled to break up his partnership, and possibly relinquish a profitable business, if he declares for Christ. A young girl is afraid of the anger of her ungodly father if she says she means to lead a religious life. In the bright book, "School-days at Rugby," little Arthur is dreadfully troubled to know what he will do when he goes to bed before all the other boys, for he supposes they will laugh when they see him kneel down to say his prayers.

These are what is meant here by "crosses."

And the verse says plainly that they are not to be dreaded, nor shirked, nor denied; they are to be taken up and borne bravely and cheerfully.

III. So we find a final lesson in the verse: each inquirer must be told that when he has denied himself and taken up his daily cross, he is to go on and "follow" Jesus wherever he leads. Hence there are two things involved: study of him, and imitation.

1. For help in our careful study of Jesus Christ, four pictures of his life have been furnished us. Now each person must examine for himself. We want to see how tenderly he wept with those sorrowing sisters at Bethany, and how brave and tearless he was in his own troubles. We need to watch how often he prayed and how patiently he taught the multitudes. We are to learn of him, for he was meek and lowly of heart. See how he controlled his temper under provocation, how gentle and kind he was to the poor, how forgiving he showed himself to his enemies, how true to his friends.

2. But mere knowledge of his sweetness and beauty of character would not be enough; we must become like him ourselves. Every Christian has to be patient and assiduous in removing all the hindrances, so that the Sun of Righteousness may shine upon him with its clear and luminous brightness. He must pray for help, and try to grow more like his Model. And then perhaps some day he will be surprised to discover that his life shines as Moses' face did when he came down from the mountain where he had seen God.

## XI.

## A CHILD FOR A TEXT.

“WHOSOEVER SHALL RECEIVE ONE OF SUCH CHILDREN IN MY NAME, RECEIVETH ME: AND WHOSOEVER SHALL RECEIVE ME, RECEIVETH NOT ME, BUT HIM THAT SENT ME.”—*Mark 9:37.*

THE passage upon the study of which we now enter is certainly severe in its warnings and intricate in its terms of speech. It seems to say that the Almighty God, who created the human race and set the solitary in families, holds every adult person responsible for the present well-being and the future salvation of even the youngest creatures that can enter the church now, or that in his grace can be redeemed by Christ.

It is best to be clear and orderly from the start; so we may just as well confine our exposition for a single discourse to these three particulars, all of which are announced to us in the course of three or four verses in the closest connection:

I. The property-value of virtuous and wholesome offspring in Christian households:

II. The organic relation of all Christian infants to what is called here “the kingdom of heaven:”

III. The principle on which children should be received by Christian parents to the full glory of God.

There is little more needed than simple explanation and illustration as we take up these in turn.

I. By the property-value of virtuous and whole-



some offspring, I mean the real worth and welcome of children in any well-ordered household. "Lo, children are the heritage of the Lord. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them."

Hanging on the wall of my study, in full view as I write, is a fine photograph, the title of which it may be interesting to some of my young readers to translate for themselves, "*Cornelie Montrant ses Bijoux.*"

It represents a courtly and beautiful woman seated at a slender table. She is most gorgeously dressed, and positively resplendent with rings, bracelets, and circlets of pearls. Before her stands another female, plainly adorned, holding two noble boys by the hand. Anybody's attention would be arrested by the singular contrast in the apparel of these two elderly persons, but more especially by the manly mien and attitude of the two lads. There is that in their countenances which rivets notice. Each seems the embodiment of a hope and the realization of a promise. There is apparent at a glance the fact that they have been admirably trained in the past, and are going to make their mark in the future. Silently enough does that exquisite group stand, but a swift imagination instantly reads its meaning.

But not the picture, the story is what I want for my purpose now. Cornelia, who is here "showing her jewels," was the daughter of Scipio Africanus, left at the death of her husband in care of twelve children, of whom she sadly lost all but three. One married eventually, and two sons alone remained to

her widowhood. The world claimed her in its proudest circles; wealth lay at her feet; kings sought her in a new marriage. She relinquished all for her children. And so carefully did she rear them, that even when all admitted they were of the loftiest blood and of the happiest dispositions, it still remained confessed among the Roman historians that they owed more of their excellence to education than to nature. Of course they bore their father's name, and according to the custom of those times were called "The Gracchi."

Now the story runs that one time a proud lady from Campania came to make her a visit. It appears that the two women fell to talking about ornaments and rich robes and costly stones. The guest must have led the way in such a conversation, for people generally love most to speak of what they possess; and Cornelia dressed exceedingly plainly, without knot, fillet, or necklace. By-and-by the Campania lady abruptly asked her where her jewels were. The Roman mother replied she would show them soon, and listlessly kept up the foolish gossip to gain time and not get quite off the subject.

She was waiting for the boys to come home from school. When she heard their rapid step, she withdrew a moment, then returned with her sons, one on each side, as in my picture, and tranquilly said, "These are *my* jewels!"

Years passed on. The after life of Tiberius and Caius, these were their names, met every expectation. They grew up among the best men of the

nation. They died early, but she had the extreme satisfaction of knowing that the tears of a mourning people fell in the grave with her own. And when she too reached the end of her life, the Roman senators raised a magnificent statue in her honor, and placed on it the inscription, "To Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi." Thus it came about as a somewhat curious fact that a parent received the name of her offspring as being even worthier than her own.

Just now we happen to hear much about the troublesomeness of children. Some of us think we would rather pledge ourselves, if a new picture were to be outlined, to produce three or four Campanian ladies to sit for the model, than one Cornelia.

In my early life, I remember I used to think there was something weird and strange in a book I never looked into then, called "Prideaux's Connexions." They told me it contained the history of those solemn centuries between the Old and the New Testament. There was a kind of hush in my mind when I thought of the slow fall of the prophetic curtain on the awful words of Malachi! For four hundred years, now, men were not going to hear another word from God! When should the stillness ever be broken again by a new revelation?

Perhaps this is what even to this day makes the final verse of the Old Testament so unspeakably suggestive: "And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children

to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

We must lose no time in laying alongside of this passage in Mark that which is parallel to it in Matthew's story. We wish especially to notice the exquisite parable used by our Lord:

“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”

Here was Jesus Christ, holding a little boy by the hand, and saying, He is certainly “lost,” but I came to “save” him; saved he shall be, and all that are like him; who shall hinder? “Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”

So then we have the full suggestion. In addition to the worth of a child in its promise and prospect of a fine and fruitful manhood, of itself so valuable that a nation has a thousand times in history honored a faithful mother for her splendid gift to the race—over and above all that is the fact

that, even if a baby dies before it has reached maturity in years, it is sure to be saved by Immanuel's blood.

II. Such a statement leads us on at once, of necessity, to inquire, What are the organic relations of infants to the "kingdom of God"? What did Jesus Christ mean when he said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven"?

Once in the course of my ministry I asked a large Bible-class of adult men and women this question, as we were studying the tenth verse of the eighteenth chapter of Matthew's gospel with the connection:

Did Jesus, when he mentioned "little ones" in this, as well as in the sixth verse, mean children in years, or children in religious experience—boys and girls, like the one whose hand he held, or only those persons who had just become proselytes, Christians who had only lately confessed him, and were as yet immature?

There was quite a serious silence at this moment, but I paused quietly for a reply. Some said one thing; some another. One told a little story about a pupil in an institution for the deaf and dumb who wrote on the blackboard, in answer to the hard puzzle of a visitor, "Short of information on that point!" But one quiet man, reading over the sixth verse, found the words, "these little ones which believe in me;" and he said, "Of course those could not be mere children in years."

To this some one replied suddenly, "But what he had there before them was truly a little boy; and

he declared, Whosoever shall humble himself as *this* little child, and he said, Whoso shall receive one *such little child*; he must have meant real young boys and girls. It seems to me Jesus could not have meant that Christians were children, but that children were Christians, in the sense that Christ came to save every one of them, they were all his; anybody that received a little child, received *him*."

It became necessary for me to call attention to one of the most interesting usages of language at the time when the New Testament was written. Little children, too young to put forth any intellectual act of faith, were yet called *believers*. It was quite in keeping with the custom that our Saviour spoke of "such as" that little boy, when he added, "which believe in me." Illustrations could be found everywhere in early Christian literature. But the best to hand just now I thought I could bring them from the inscriptions upon tombs.

I had then a book on my table which I had been reading with great interest. I had returned from a journey over the sea only a few weeks before, and I had studied the old slabs which had been brought up from the galleries of the catacombs and arranged in one of the rooms of the Vatican Museum.

It was very easy to select these epitaphs and others:

"Here lies Sosimus, a believing child of believing parents (*fidelis ex fidelibus*); he lived two years, one month, and twenty-five days."

"Here is buried Achilla, a neophyte (newly

planted; see Romans 6: 5), dying aged one year and five months."

"Here rests in peace Urcia Florintina, *fidelis* (a believer or a faithful); she lived five years, eight months, and eight days."

"To Pisentus, an innocent (*innocens*), living one year, eight months, and thirteen days; a neophyte."

That is to say, children of Christians were called often Christian children. Our Saviour seems merely to have accepted the current methods of speech as to the name he applied; he certainly was talking of boys and girls. What he had there before his disciples (a sort of object-teaching, as usual with him) was not a feeble believer, or a late and immature convert, but a little live child. An interesting, though not altogether reliable, tradition of ecclesiastical history declares that this lad, when he grew up, became the martyr Ignatius, and was, in the dreadful persecution, thrown to the wild beasts, and perished at the Coliseum at Rome.

Almost all the creeds of Christendom unite in this one article, and record it as the fixed belief of the churches of every name, that all *little children, dying before they have reached the years of wilful sin, are redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.*

Here some one interrupted me to suggest that this would not make it so; the world might be mistaken.

To which I answered that nothing was more settled than that God had promised to be with his people in all ages by the presence of his Spirit;

he would guide them into "all truth," and he would show them "things to come." If, therefore, all the Christians in the world, and everywhere, and always, believed that the Scriptures taught a certain doctrine, we might consider it as a revealed truth of God. (I did not choose to quote the Latin rule—*ab omnibus, ubique, semper.*)

One formula is as good as another for illustration. Take the words of that one which has been most misquoted and most misunderstood:

"Elect infants, dying in infancy, are saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how he pleaseth."

When I quoted this, I perceived, by a slight stir of feeling, that more than curiosity was awakened. I went on to say in comment that infants were included in the primal condemnation of our race by no intelligent act or consent of their own. They never heard of Adam. There was no antecedent improbability in the way of their being cleansed from it, by no intelligent act or consent of their own, should they never have heard of Christ. Nobody could be saved without the atonement. As to the method of its application to unconscious babes, no information has been given. But Jesus said two things: that "little ones" were "lost," and he came to "save" them. This is precisely what some creeds say, this one in particular.

Again came that calm, respectful, but persistent voice from the class, "Yes; but it says *elect* infants."

If it had said "young children," as Jesus did, I



replied, would we have to say some children are not young? If it had said beloved infants, would we be compelled to infer some were unbeloved? Are we driven to suppose that the framers of the Westminster Confession considered some children to be non-elect?

Historically, that is not the fact. They meant no such implication. The curious habit of those excellent men seems to have been just to state a thing, and draw no inferences and forestall no inferences from it. And in their anxiety to assert that all infants were saved, and to give the reason for it in the same compact formula, they did leave room for this ingenuity of cavil. Still, all they said was that every infant needs to be saved, no infant can be saved except through the atonement, and each infant who is saved is a proof and an illustration of the sovereign, undeserved, and unconstrained grace of God.

So let us understand that Jesus was speaking at that moment of actual children, such as was the boy he used for his text; "little ones that believe in me" were little *faithfuls of those in the faith* as children of believers, under training and prayer and home influences for good. It was concerning these that he said those strange words: "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." It is almost impossible to find an expression elastic enough to cover the significance of a score of passages in which the *kingdom of heaven* and the *kingdom of God* appear as forms of familiar speech. Sometimes the term means the church; sometimes it means the spiritual

government of God within a single heart; sometimes it means the celestial city.

It certainly refers to a dominion of religious quality, reaching on, from original rebelliousness and corruption, to conversion and measurable sanctification, and then reaching along in mysterious splendor far away towards the presence of the redeemed on high. It must be considered as a real kingdom set up in the heart, organized into the church, and perfected in heaven, where the King already resides. Thus its sway extends over nature, grace, and glory. Children, therefore, are its infant subjects and have the right of citizenship in it, and dying in infancy, they die true members of God's great invisible church on the earth.

III. Many questions yet remain, but we cannot delay to consider them now. We must come to the third particular mentioned in the outset: the principle on which Christian infants are to be received by believers. "And he took a child and set him in the midst of them; and when he had taken him in his arms he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me; and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me."

It would seem from this that our whole piety is at stake. Our children represent Jesus Christ in person, and not him alone, but his Father likewise. If we do not receive these little ones as they ought to be received, then we do not receive Christ himself aright; and the peril appears very alarming: "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my

name, receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea.”

The main inquiry, therefore, is as to what we shall do with the children committed to us. The Scripture word is “receiveth.” What does it imply?

Some receive children in the name of necessity. They must be endured as needful nuisances until they are grown up. Most of their training is to be paid for or shirked. Oftentimes children are the least to be noticed and the last, of all classes of human beings possessed of souls and destined for eternity.

Some receive them in the name of the world. A father is suddenly elate with the thought that now he has a boy, the firm shall never lose a partner, the family stock shall still have a scion to keep up the homestead. A mother rejoices, as she clasps her daughter to her bosom, that there will be an entrance made into society by-and-by, over which she even now yearns with mingled tenderness and pride. So the infant begins its career of gayety and greed.

Some receive children in the name of themselves. Men and women take a selfish pleasure in their own offspring. They love to accept their caresses. God have mercy on such as feel nothing of this sensibility! But if the feeling goes no higher than this, they cherish living beings only as toys.

The true principle is found in the statement that children are to be received into protection from the devil and into consecration unto Christ. Let every young Christian child be borne at once beneath the dawn of the Sun of Righteousness, so that the day-spring from on high may visit it early. God seems to say to every Christian parent as Pharaoh's daughter said to the mother of Moses, "Take this child away and nurse it *for me!*"

There is something wonderfully impressive in this thought of our joint ownership with the Almighty in the care of our little ones when we have received them in his name. Our families would be better nurseries for truth and holiness if we only kept such a purpose in view as this, and we should grow nobler ourselves. There is nothing higher in human nature than fatherhood and motherhood. The head of a Christian household is royaller than the ruler of a kingdom. Never was England's King George more princely than when he was speaking of his children to the friends whom he trusted. Once a fine lady was talking jocosely to him about her native country Scotland. Suddenly the king grew serious and became silent. She, supposing that he was impressed by her remarks concerning that part of his kingdom, said, "Your majesty, I presume, is thinking of the Land of the North." He paused for a few moments, then said gently, with his eyes moist with tears, "The princes are abroad just now, and I was entreating God to protect and bless my dear boys!"

## XII.

## STUMBLING-STONES AND MILL-STONES.

“AND WHOSOEVER SHALL OFFEND ONE OF THESE LITTLE ONES THAT BELIEVE IN ME, IT IS BETTER FOR HIM THAT A MILL-STONE WERE HANGED ABOUT HIS NECK AND HE WERE CAST INTO THE SEA.”—*Mark 9:42.*

ENOUGH has been said in a previous discourse to make it quite clear that our Lord was talking about infant children at the time in which he spoke these words to his disciples. We have seen also that an indescribable advantage is given to those of such tender years; the Saviour loves a child because it belongs to him and is a subject of the kingdom of heaven. But an interesting note has come to me just now, which calls for a reopening of the study so soon closed, and perhaps so abruptly:

“My Dear Pastor: I am always afraid of appearing in any degree captious; but I am frank to say that, after the discussion was over some weeks ago, concerning the salvation of children, I did not feel fully satisfied. Is there no definite Scripture argument on this point? Are we left to mere conjecture, in the absence of all texts? I have studied the standards of our church, and they give me little comfort. The phraseology there awakes cavils instead of hopes. Do tell me something in the Bible to read and remember.”

Nobody has any right to find fault with this continued eagerness and uneasiness in the mind of a

parent bereaved. Death in a household! How awful the thought, and yet how frequent is the sight! A lightning-stroke in the forest were less devastating—a wild beast's incursions in a garden, the raid of an enemy into a hamlet of peace.

But suppose death takes a child instead of an old man full of years—what then? Worse and worse, you answer. What has the poor babe done to deserve it? See it now, in imagination, as yesterday it sat on its mother's knee, every quivering muscle playing with wild excitement under the rare and rollicking sport of leaping and crowing with you; eyes flashing, dimples twinkling, hands flying, all alive with reckless overflow of infant fun. Now go and see how still it is, under the white cloth, chill and silent, and withal so little too, so harmless, so inoffensive. In the very candor of common sense, does it not seem as if a mistake had been made somewhere? If it had to die, did it have to live? Why was it born? Half the human family die under five years old. What a waste!

Now, it must be admitted, though these inquiries put in such a murmuring way are very heterodox, they are also very human. But let us not be in haste. This morning I saw a poor brute-mother driven through the street, lowing piteously for her offspring, which was led away to the block. On my walk here to-night I passed a willow-tree which seemed very sad with the plaintive chirp of a sparrow over its mate.

“The air is full of farewells to the dying  
And mournings for the dead.”

But we are neither birds nor cattle. God loves his own image in man, respects it better than we think. There is that which our friend inquires for in the revealed Word, and when it is brought before our understanding we shall rest.

We might as well take up the story of this same chapter again. There remain several considerations to which not much thought could be given before. And above everything else we must use some parallel passages, specially that in Matthew's gospel; for we need to comprehend what Jesus said about stumbling-stones and guardian angels and a few other things besides.

I. Let us begin with that startling declaration about the mill-stone. I have chosen the text from the ordinary version; but we must observe that the new Revision has suggested some interesting changes in the rendering. For example, the familiar word "offends" and the other like it, "offences," quite disappear. Thus the verse reads, as changed, in the gospel of Mark: "And whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it were better for him if a great mill-stone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the sea." And thus the same reads in Matthew also: "And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me: but whoso shall cause one of these little ones which believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great mill-stone should be hanged about his neck and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea."

Of course, we have been told a hundred times

that *to offend* here means to do what would cause to stumble, what would create a scandal; and a *scandal* is a stumbling-block or a stumbling-stone. And most persons will be glad when the time comes for these alterations to appear in the Bibles with the accurate translation. To offend a child, in the sense noted, means to cause one of God's little ones to stumble on the road to heaven so as to fail of entering; no possible reference can be intended as to merely crossing a child's will, or disappointing its wishes, in the course of parental government. While human nature is what it is, children, like everybody else, will have to be fretted, and perhaps irritated or even affronted, for their own improvement and best good. The warning put forward here does not touch that at all.

The real force of the teaching that our Lord offers is found in the fact that God loves these little ones, and purposes to cleanse them from all taint of sin received in their nature at the Fall, to arouse their ambition for a true, pure life of loyal love to himself, to keep them in the ways of pleasantness and the paths of peace, and ultimately to lead them safe into heaven by his persistent grace. And neither men nor devils are permitted to hinder him in this determined plan. Two effective processes of protection he openly discloses in this chapter. One he is now describing, the other he touches afterwards.

To "cause one of these little ones to stumble" is to lay some obstacle, some small stone or the like, in the path they are following, so as they shall trip



over it and fall into wrong-doing or wrong associations. Such an act is perilous, and Jesus Christ says it shall be punished in each case: "it must be that the occasions of stumbling come," for character must be tested, and discipline will be needed for every soul, young or old; "but woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh!"

Then follows a figure of speech by which is indicated the severity of divine retribution; and I do not hesitate to say that it seems to me one of the most weird and awful metaphors in the whole Bible as a picture of hopeless destruction. It is likely that a sort of antithesis is meant to be hinted in the contrast between such a small stone as would be necessary to overthrow a child and such a large one as would be used in executing a criminal. A "mill-stone" corresponds to a "stumbling-stone" in the rhetorical use of the words. "A great mill-stone" is the expression in the Revision, and the margin reads "mill-stone turned by an ass;" the reference is to the donkey-mill as opposed to the hand-mill, which of course was much smaller in weight and size. Drowning was a singular form of capital punishment not used among the Jews, but so familiar among the other nations around that the practice gave origin to a proverb signifying utter ruin.

We are told that, in order to put a test to any metaphor, we must make a picture of it. We seem to see a culprit already condemned, standing on a precipice, just before he is cast off the rocky edge into the ocean beneath. His neck is held fast in

the hole at the centre; he is not bearing the mill-stone, it is bearing him instead. It is fastened around him; this word "hung" is the one employed when descriptions are given of a criminal actually bound or nailed to the cross of crucifixion; he cannot get away from the tree. We witness the dreadful plunge, and shudder as we notice how the tremendous stone strikes the water. Imagination adds what is unseen to complete the horror. For we think of the long journey down through an untold waste of waves to the bottom, until the end is reached in silence and mysterious darkness. The word is "depth"—the depths of the sea. The water closes over the man. No one ever hears of him again.

Now understand: after all, this awful punishment is not what God threatens; that is something worse. For we read only a step farther, and we find that God's wrath is so heavy upon one who stumbles a little child, and so makes him lose heaven, that it would be "better for him" only to be "sunk in the depth of the sea" instead.

Now we begin to comprehend why this chapter moves on so solemnly to its close with a series of warnings about "plucking out eyes" and "cutting off arms," so far as is needful to keep away from hell-fire and to cease from driving others into it.

Here was Jesus Christ holding a little boy by the hand and talking about "hell-fire"!

He says, Any one who receiveth such a child as this, receiveth me. I tell you it is a tremendous thing to keep out of hell and get to heaven. If

your hand hinders, cut the hand off; if your eye hinders, pluck it out; if your foot hinders, cast it away from you. And I tell you it is a tremendous thing to get a child out of hell and into heaven; and whoever hinders one of these little ones, it were better for him to be flung into the sea with a mill-stone around his neck; for I came to save them; God loves them; the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost.

II. Concerning such children, then, our Lord speaks when he says, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

"Their angels" does not mean their souls, the glorified or redeemed spirits. The Word of God never calls a man's soul his angel. Even in that one verse where it seems to occur the name does not mean this. When Rhoda told the disciples that Peter stood at the door, and they replied, "It is his angel," they did not intend to intimate that Peter was dead and this was his ghost; they thought it was his guardian angel. This belief was fixed among the Jews; and they in their vast surprise explosively uttered it.

It is heterodox enough to teach a child to sing, "I want to be an angel." Angels are different in many respects from human beings. They neither marry nor are given in marriage. They were all created at the same time. No angel was ever a child; no child will ever be an angel—to say that he will is folly.

Our most careful expositors agree that Jesus refers directly in this verse to the prevalent popular conception concerning guardian angels. Elsewhere we are told in the Bible that angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." And the promise is as old as the Old Testament almost, "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways; they shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."

This is the other process of efficient protection afforded by God himself to which allusion was made before. With a full understanding of the exposures of little ones, the Almighty seems also here to have anticipated the New Testament in the figure employed in the Old. He uses a similar form of speech as to the peril of dashing their feet "against a stone."

In that grand moment of announcing that children are heirs of salvation, our Lord asserts that they are put under watch from on high.

And to this there is added a thought of exquisite significance to those who feel ever anxious about their little ones. The angels which have them in special charge are those who enjoy the nearest favor of God. They "do always behold" his face. This is an Eastern figure. To behold a king's face denotes exceeding advancement in grades of honor near his person. And here Jesus says, God sends his very Presence Angels to take care of children. As one of our profoundest commentators says, "The fundamental idea is that the highest angels

of God in heaven represent the smallest subjects of his kingdom on earth. Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth!"

Matchless comfort there is in all these reflections for a troubled parent of a child! If he lives, God's angels have him in charge. If he dies, God takes him to himself, for it is not his will that even one of them all should perish.

III. For this is our third and final consideration now: the positive salvation of infant children according to a triumphant declaration of our Lord Jesus Christ himself as he closes this passage on which we have been dwelling so long.

We have to go out of the gospel of Mark to find it, but it follows the parable we have already quoted from Matthew:

"Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

How different, in the case of children, is the confidence we feel, and have a right to feel, at a funeral! When a mature man dies, we can only say, we hope; when an infant dies, we can say, we know. For our Lord Jesus Christ has solemnly declared, "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." No man can read the heart of another man. We can hardly read our own. One may possibly say, "Lord, Lord," all his life, and yet be among those to whom the Lord will say, "I never knew

you." Some unrepented, unforgiven sin, like the old transgression of Moses, may be enough to keep one out of the land of promise. That is why we are exhorted to make our calling and election *sure*. The Bible speaks of an assurance of hope and an assurance of faith, but never of an assurance of knowledge. One can have, by God's grace, so much faith as to feel pretty certain. Some can go a great ways in that and enjoy deservedly a mighty comfort in it. But for most of us the same stumbling story will have to be told. Through much tribulation we enter the kingdom of heaven. Children are otherwise. The kingdom of heaven is "of such."

And so when we gaze up through the clouds after our lost child, we can say, as did David, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me!"

## XIII.

## CHILDREN IN HEAVEN.

"SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN TO COME UNTO ME, AND FORBID THEM NOT: FOR OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD."—*Mark* 10:14.

VISITING one day among my congregation, I fell in upon one of our families in whose order, intelligence, and grace I very much rejoiced. Years seemed to make no difference with those people. Always with the same sparkle of gladness they bade their pastor welcome. The word went all over the house in five minutes, and down two stairs at a time came little flying feet from the nursery, and soon afterwards the slower, life-weary feet of the aged grandmother. None of them would ever suffer me to go away without my greeting and my prayer.

One day as I sat there with a dear young girl in my lap, there arose a conversation so peculiar in some respects that I went home and wrote it down.

The mother observed that her little daughter was somewhat less exuberant than usual, and remarked that she had been trying to comfort her under the burden of a great sorrow that day. Her favorite bird had suddenly died, and the child's heart was almost broken.

"And would you believe," said this most faithful and gifted woman, "I have been actually at my wits' end to know what to say! When the baby died"—alas for the shadow that flew and flitted

unconsciously across that dear face at the mere reminiscence!—"I told her that Jesus had taken our infant boy; she must be a good girl, and she would certainly have her brother again, for he was safe now all this time in heaven. I made her try to think of him as we do ourselves, as if he was only away for a while. But when it comes to talking to her about this bird, I really do not know what to say. For what she wants is to *have it back again*, and I cannot get beyond that!"

I can hardly say now, at this distance of time, why this should have moved me so. I put the child down and went to the window to compose myself. Then, as I faced the mother again, I could only exclaim, "Oh, how terrible it would be to us, *who must have our dead back again*, if there were nothing better than a poetic *birds' heaven* to think of!"

That Christian woman looked up into my face and said quietly, "When I strained my eyes over the edge of the grave, that awful October afternoon, I thought for a moment I should go crazy. But I seemed suddenly to see, as I peered through my veil, an opening on the other side. I suppose there must have been a vague remembrance of those Scripture words about Jesus breaking the bars asunder. I knew he did not break the bars on this side ever; but a rift appeared to be plain beyond it. And so I have imagined ever since. When we closed up the grave there was not anybody there. Our little boy went quietly out through the rough door, as Jesus did. I have only now to return to



my work bravely, labor on my few days, get these other children on as best I can. Then I shall *get my boy back again.*"

"But," I asked, "does your curiosity never attempt to follow him? Do you never find yourself wondering what he is about all these years?"

"Oh, yes, I know what you mean," she replied cheerfully. "I guess I do!

'Day after day I think what he is doing  
In those bright realms of air.'

I admit I would be glad to know more if I might. But it gives me unspeakable comfort just to know he is safe. Funeral addresses do not go for much generally, I suppose, for one's grief is so bewildering. But I have often thought over what you said here then."

What I had said was simple enough. I remember I was standing where I could see the sweet face of the dead child, and I called attention to its placidness. It seemed to wear an expression of solid comfort, as if the boy knew he was the only being in the house out of danger. No more likelihood of trouble now! No more possibility of loss; no more danger of pain, weariness, or woe; no more temptation; no more sorrow; no more sin!

The quotation of those two lines from Longfellow's noble poem entitled "Resignation" made the mother go on with the other verses:

"She is not dead, the child of our affection,  
But gone unto that school  
Where she no longer needs our poor protection,  
And Christ himself doth rule.

“In that great cloister’s stillness and seclusion,  
By guardian angels led,  
Safe from temptation, safe from sin’s pollution,  
She lives whom we call dead.

“Not as a child shall we again behold her;  
For when, with raptures wild,  
In our embraces we again enfold her,  
She will not be a child,

“But a fair maiden in her Father’s mansion,  
Clothed with celestial grace;  
And beautiful with all the soul’s expansion  
Shall we behold her face.”

Then she suddenly put to me the question:

“Now what I want to know is, do you accept the philosophy, or theology, or what not, of this statement? Are our children growing away from us all the time? If their school is so much better than ours, will they not be quite ahead of us when we meet them?”

My first comment on this inquiry was concerning its exceeding naturalness. How utterly unappeased is the feeling of a mother for her child which she has lost!

I once removed the bodies of two infant sisters of mine to a new burial plot we had purchased. When at the evening I returned from the work, and told our mother what I found among the fragments of the coffins, deposited nineteen years before, she quietly inquired, “Did you see any signs of *hair*? they say that lasts the longest; Martha Louisa had beautiful hair.” And in the twilight there we sat, I a grown man, and my beloved and honored mother, aged in years but not in feeling, looking out

across the summer fields and far on across other fields, clear across till eyes failed, and faith saw "sweet fields beyond the swelling flood." Then did she run simply and garrulously on, in the dear egotism of her reminiscences, telling how the children behaved and how they differed. She had forgotten nothing, nothing, never could forget. And out of this I gained the grandest lesson I ever learned. I never read the verses at monthly concert without thinking of it: "But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, *they may forget*, yet will I not forget thee! Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me."

From this we passed to discuss the inquiry presented by the poem: Do children die and remain children; or are they "at school," as the verse says? Do they grow in stature when they are out of the body? When the resurrection body comes up from the tomb will it be a child's form and figure, as it was when it was deposited there? All these things we talked over.

Some points were beyond our reach. But if I remember rightly, we agreed in our belief that the main notion of the poem must be quite correct. "The child" would be "a fair maiden" when its face should be seen again.

To one present who remarked that the feeling was disappointing somewhat, and not altogether

welcome, I could only answer that many a parent in this life wished he could keep his infant children from growing half as fast as they did. Why, our three-year-old pet becomes a wilful young woman before we get through with her. We wish she might stop a while just as she is.

I remember once in the studio of Hiram Powers, in Florence, he introduced me to his mature daughter, a matronly woman. "Oh, how they do grow!" said he. Then he beckoned me to a desk in the corner, and took out from enveloping wool in a box one of the most exquisitely sculptured hands I ever saw—a mere hand up to the wrist, cut in purest marble—an infant's hand, with dimpled fingers—matchlessly beautiful. "There," said he; "they get away so fast that I *stopped* that one," nodding his head towards her, "when she was three years old!"

That seems to be the only way to stop them. Now all this is a mere matter of personal feeling; and sentiments will differ as people differ. I think, for one, I should love better in heaven to sit by the side of a grown child rather than an infant; indeed, by a mature companion rather than a helpless child. We do not feel dismayed or frightened when our boys or girls come home to us after long education at school or college. We rejoice to discover that all these graces of mind and person belong to us. They disclose themselves with a sweet surprise more and more every day.

Oh, I long to see one face, inexpressibly dear to me once, mourned for many a year since!

“ Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand,  
And the sound of a voice that is still !”

And what I want most is to hear what he will be able to tell me of these days that have passed. His mind has been enlarging, his soul has been growing ; every weakness will have passed away. I want to see Jesus of Nazareth first of all, “ my blessed, blessed Master.” Then next to that I am going to find one I know of. I hope he has advanced peerlessly. I am not afraid of that.

“ There, in love's unclouded reign,  
Parted hands shall meet again !”

Our lesson from all this is to push on as fast and as far as we can here. I know a widow with an only son, whom she sent to the university. Privately, during his absence in term-time, she procured a tutor and began sturdy study herself. She said she knew “ he would be far ahead of her, but she believed he would love her the more, the more she tried to keep up with him.” He that would enter the kingdom of heaven must do it as a little child. It is grace and graces, not scholarship and learning, that are found on the pages of celestial text-books. These we may in our measure learn. Let a bereaved believer say courageously, “ I have one child at court; I have given a maid of honor for the royal presence-chamber. Let me wait a little while, and I shall find her a princess, and together we may serve the KING !”

Furthermore, we may think of little children as happy in the presence of God. Wild, dreamy notions some people get, under the half-maddening in-

fluence of bereavement. Said a mother to me once, "What sort of work do you imagine my little girl will have walking around among the patriarchs? She was always a timid child; she will cry for me half the time. Oh, what a terrible business this is all around!"

We cannot transfer our notions of this life over into that. We must not materialize everything so. God will see to it that our children are in proper company and under proper care. I sincerely hope they are all as ignorant of us as we are of them; for I confess I often fear that, if they know how we behave here, after we lose them, they will be unhappy even in heaven, if that can be so. I sometimes prefer to think that the redeemed, mature and young both, are graciously precluded from seeing much of what transpires here on the earth. They remember us, watch for us, love us, and will know us when we come. But I almost hope the knowledge ends there; for they will have lost feeling for our suffering if they continue happy while they see our unchecked tears.

I once said to a widow that she was mourning too deeply and too long. She replied that she could not, of herself, right up at once, she had so leaned upon her husband. "What did he use to do?" I asked. "Well, what you would call a mere nothing," she answered; "he used to say that it made him very unhappy to see me in tears." "So you think he has forgotten all that now," I suggested, "or else you are unkind to him."

I cannot now recall at length half that was said

on this theme that evening in our interview. I only mention a little story that was repeated and touched me much.

A mother lost a precious little girl; grieved terribly; could not sleep; one night had a dream. She saw heaven. There seemed to be a procession before the throne. A great throng of children were marching, each crowned, clad in white, singing. All bore lamps, lit and shining. Among them at last came her own little girl. But she looked troubled when she saw her mother, though she loved her, and kissed her as she used to at good-night prayers. Then the watchful woman observed also that her lamp was very dim compared with the others. She asked her why. Then the dear child replied, "They tell me that you put the light out with your tears!"

## XIV.

## A DEFECTIVE CHARACTER.

“THEN JESUS BEHOLDING HIM LOVED HIM, AND SAID UNTO HIM, ONE THING THOU LACKEST.”—*Mark 10:21.*

IN the community at large there are plainly two classes of persons concerning whose moral character we cannot easily make a mistake. The one is made up of those who are practically wicked, grossly vicious in daily life. The other class is made up of Christians. Devout in demeanor, they are aiming, with sometimes a poor success perhaps, but with unceasing constancy, to know the right and do it.

But between these two classes lies a third, made up of such as appear to flit in manifest fickleness from one extreme to the other. We can hardly venture to pronounce upon their moral posture in the sight of a holy God.

Why do we need to pronounce? What business is it of ours? Because we feel it to be our duty to exhort all men to obedience and bid them come to love and peace in the gospel; and, just in the moment of approach, these persons turn suddenly upon us with the startling question, “What have we been doing now?”

It requires a careful discrimination to avoid being staggered by such a challenge. One needs to keep calm and clear while he says, “God judges people for *not* doing as well as for doing.” Much



there may be in any given young man to admire, much to praise, much to commend, while at the same moment he may be (in his character before God) faulty and wrong. He may be fatally losing all his vantage-ground of virtue just through lack of decision to become religious.

I. Now in the narrative before us, of which our text forms the centre and the key, we are presented with the picture of one of this medium class of characters. The incident is dramatic and striking. It will aid much in our analysis if we carefully read it over together.

“And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” Matthew says this was “a young man,” and Luke adds that he was “a ruler.” Not unlikely he was an *archon* in some synagogue, or perhaps a peer in the Sanhedrin. “And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God.” Jesus notices, first, the form of his address, then takes up his question. Here is an incidental argument for our Lord’s divinity. Jesus was either “God” or not “good.” “Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor thy father and mother.” The Jews train their children carefully in all the moralities prescribed by the Decalogue. Our Lord quotes only the second table of the law in this instance. “And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my

youth." The young man could answer all this easily. He had most likely lived with the strictest justice as between man and man. Matthew adds, "What lack I yet?" which expression Mark omits. "Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me." The new Revision omits the expression "take up the cross" as not in the Greek. Our Lord kindly puts in one encouragement: the ruler should have his money again, to be paid in the coin of the kingdom of heaven. "And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions." This is the end of the story. This young ruler is never mentioned again. From this time he drops out of history and we know him no more.

II. We are now ready to take up the study of the practical lessons suggested, one after another, by the whole incident.

1. In all God's dealing with men there is *one element of religious character for which he invariably looks*. Men are influenced by a showy exterior; God sees the heart. "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

What is this element? A comparison of the different parts of this story will answer the question. We must also connect the incident closely with the previous instruction which the disciples had just been receiving on the subject of a childlike surren-

der of one's self completely to Christ as the Master (see Mark 10:15). Immediately after this the striking and dramatic scene is presented by all three evangelists. It offers therefore an exceedingly pertinent illustration of the exact doctrine our Lord had pressed. "A little child" has a single peculiarity as its controlling characteristic: it loves, trusts, and obeys its parent. Its motive of life is sincere affection for him above anything else. This is what God demands of his children: a full, filial regard for his honor, his commandments, and his affectionate approval. "A son honoreth his father and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you." How do we know the young ruler did not possess this? He certainly seems like a thoughtful, amiable, virtuous person. But he owned that he still lacked something. Christ told him he lacked "one thing." And the fact was, he went away from the interview indignantly setting his stubborn heart more on the world and less on Jesus than when he came. The expression here is, "his countenance fell." The word "sad" is the same as that rendered "lowering" when the Saviour was talking about the sky. The signs of a storm were on his face, the gloom of a heavy wrath and disappointment was in his heart.

2. Let us take up a second lesson: *no other quality of mind or heart, no other characteristic, no other grouping of elements of character, can atone for the lack of just this one.*

Piety is the significant disposition which registers the value of everything else. Take any amount of ciphers and arrange them carefully in a line; they will represent nothing till you place a numeral figure at their head. We call that a "significant" figure; it gives reckoning of value to all the others. Now, with it at the head, each one of the ciphers increases it tenfold, while without it ten times as many ciphers would go for naught. The wiser a man is, the more distinguished a man is, the more wealthy a man is, the more lovely a man is—provided the consecration of his entire heart is rendered—the more helpful and useful he is as a Christian. But the moment this consecration disappears, all these advantages are turned suddenly into dangers, for they work on the adverse side. Satan's gifts helped him to be a worse devil.

We recognize the same principle in ordinary life. Suppose a journeyman, wilful and self-satisfied, comes to one of us and asks for employment. We go to a master-mechanic seeking work for him in his poverty. Each one in turn says he is well acquainted with the man, but will have nothing to do with him. Now we begin to expostulate: "Is he not skilful? is he not industrious? is he not honest? is he not a kind neighbor? is he not sober?" All this is true, comes the reply; "but the man will not obey orders." The prime quality of a workman is gone; that lack vitiates all the rest; he breeds insubordination wherever he goes. His excellences simply render him dangerous.

The worst is that God himself gives all these

characteristics on which moral men pride themselves, and they wickedly turn them against him. It has happened that one man has interfered sometimes to reconcile another man with his disinherited son. For many years under the home roof he was unfilial, abusive, alienated from all who loved him there. The father admits that he has rejected him at last. The neighbor inquires, "Is he not educated so as to be an honor to you? is he not a most agreeable companion? are not his manners gentlemanly? is he not the very likeness of yourself in form and mien? how can you keep him away from your heart?" And the father answers in sad sincerity of pity and love, "All that you say is true; and it was myself who gave him these accomplishments: I educated my boys all alike, but this one turned against me. I love him, but he hates me; no matter how courteous he is to strangers, he villifies me here before the others: till he changes from a prodigal to a son, he is only a peril and a disturbance in the house: he is all the worse in that he knows so well how to be better."

We actually stand ready to go a step farther than this in our judgment. We demand a severer measure of retribution upon the man who insists on our forbearance with him in crime on the ground of his ordinary virtues in behavior. Here is a soldier fighting against his country; the community shuts its doors on him while he is under arms; it rejects the traitor most promptly from all citizenship. "Why is this?" you ask. "Is he not brave? is he not educated in the highest academy

of the land? is he not persevering? is he not gentlemanly in demeanor? is he not chivalrous, the very soul of honor with his comrades?" Certainly he is all this. But he fights under the wrong banner. He is only a polished rebel, a cultivated villain, a talented renegade. All the worse that he has so many good qualities; they ought to have held him steadfast to principle; they only now make him a more dangerous man. One thing he lacks, and that wanting, the rest are ruined, and he merits greater shame.

3. So we reach, as our third lesson, this: *such a defective character as is here pictured has to be reckoned according to its defect, to the exclusion of its excellences.*

There may be a *very showy morality* without any true religion. Here was a young man of great prominence and promise. He said he had kept the law. Let us see.

"Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

We see on the instant that, at his own showing, he had obeyed only the second table. He had never kept the first commandment; he had another God than Jehovah; his covetousness was idolatry. The intensely legal spirit he exhibited would have

been pitiable at the best; but what shall we say of it when we find it was hollow from the beginning? He was not moral: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

Grant him now the best estimate we can give. Admit that this ruler of the Jews was unimpeachable before his fellow-men as to any of the dealings, amenities, or courtesies of every-day life. Correct in deportment and gentle in demeanor, let us accept his account of himself: over his entire history he can look and find no blot on the record to bring a blush to his cheek. Frank in speech, graceful in behavior, unbroken in integrity, ingenuous and open-hearted, he wins every companion to become a cordial brother and makes every acquaintance a friend. And yet with all this morality we know he was not a Christian man.

There may be a *very splendid manhood* without any true religion. We have reason to think this person had hardly entered his prime. Ardent and light-hearted, he had much in the future to hope for, much in the present to enjoy. He stood high in society. He was opulent; his notorious wealth rendered him conspicuous. The community looked up to him as a very respectable man, and doubtless flattered so distinguished a citizen with every mark of consideration.

But in some way he had privately come to the consciousness that there was one thing he lacked. He heard of this Galilean rabbi. He went forth to inquire of him the path to eternal life. By this

very act he acknowledged himself yet an unconverted man. He was a notable person in men's eyes, but not a Christian.

There may be *an unquestionable orthodoxy* without any true religion. This young ruler lived in an exceedingly confused period. That generation was historically volatile and frivolous. He moved in the world of fashion; he might easily have fallen into the prevalent mood of unbelief. All the refined and cultivated people of that time were either cold formalists or philosophic materialists. The most popular disbelief was represented in the creed of the Sadducees; these were brilliant, witty, and speculative; but they rejected the doctrine of the immortality of the human soul. They denied the "eternal life" which this man came to inquire about.

But he was not as yet a converted man. In this day, when there is so much of the same sort of unbelief as well as of reckless free-thinking, one certainly is to be congratulated who holds steadily to the ancient faith of the fathers and firmly believes the Bible. Still, with this story before his eyes, we may ask him to remember that more is needed to become a Christian.

There may be *deep conviction of need* in the soul without any true religion. Never forget the errand of this young man nor the manner in which he discharged it (Mark 10:17). See his *zeal*; he came to *Jesus*. See his *haste*; he came *running*. See his *courage*; he was *out in the highway*, conspicuous to all. See his *humility*; he *kneeled* at Jesus' feet. See his *anxiety*; he waited for no circumlocution,



but pushed his question straight towards the "eternal life" he longed for.

Such nobleness as this rebukes the timid trimming of many a young man who is afraid to be deemed an inquirer. When it is the tremendous interests of the soul which are at stake, it is as absurd as it is cowardly to be ashamed. But do not let us forget that although this ruler was deeply excited about his eternal welfare, that did not secure his salvation: he was not yet a Christian man; one thing he lacked.

There may be even *a measure of favor with God* and yet no personal religion. Strange words are these that we meet in this story: "Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him." It was a love of benevolence, but not of complacency. Our Lord desired to do him good. His human heart was yearning over him as once it yearned over Jerusalem when he wept at the prospect of its doom.

God is on the side of virtue as opposed to vice always. He welcomes even imperfect morality. He is pleased with gentle manners and kindness of heart rather than with coarseness and malicious spite. Honesty is the best policy, to say nothing of principle. The general providence of God favors it more than wickedness or deceit. But beyond this external regard our Lord could have had no favor for this young man. He saw he was a legalist, a moralist, and self-deceived at that. He pitied him quite as much as he loved him. Old Thomas Boston says, commenting on this passage, "Many are the devil's lions, filling the place where they live

with the noise of their revels and riotings; but this young man was one of the devil's lambs, going to hell without letting the world hear the sound of his feet."

Our study of this story must, for the present, be arrested here. I shall have gained a great point if I have shown any young man or woman, any one of maturer age, any one of white hairs and furrowed forehead, that it is possible to be completely deceived in reference to one's own state before God. To some it may seem severe that we need to say to those who are lovely in life and amiable in all their associations that they are not necessarily nearer heaven for all their loveliness. "One thing thou lackest." That one thing is an entire surrender of self to Jesus Christ.

## XV.

## STIFLED CONVICTIONS.

“AND HE WAS SAD AT THAT SAYING, AND WENT AWAY GRIEVED;  
FOR HE HAD GREAT POSSESSIONS.”—*Mark* 10:22.

THIS story of the young ruler ought to be read as it now appears in the new Revision; for there have been necessitated in the phraseology some renderings which the great scholars say are quite important.

“And behold, one came to him and said, Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why askest thou me concerning that which is good? One there is who is good: but if thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? And Jesus said, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I observed: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. But when the young man heard the saying he went away sorrowful; for he was one that had great possessions.”

Notice that the “good” is left off from the Mas-

ter's name. There is a complete alteration of the sense in the next clause: "Why callest thou me good?" Then also the whole phrase "from my youth up" is suffered to disappear. All these variations will be found to give aid in the exposition as we proceed in the study of the particulars.

This man evidently started out with an anxious determination and an eager purpose to put the claims of Jesus Christ under investigation for the sake of deepening his own spiritual life. Mark tells us, as he relates the incident, that "Jesus, beholding him, loved him;" that is, so amiable was his demeanor that our Lord was moved with a real regard in all his further conversation. And we shall not miss the point of such a story if we take it to be instructive as to religious convictions.

I. First, we must look at the picture for the illustration which it furnishes as to THE WAY IN WHICH MEN'S CONVICTIONS ARE TESTED. The test here proposed was meant to include at least these three elements:

1. The young ruler was told to *sell all he had*. Our notion of a lot in life like his naturally suggests that he was living in Oriental luxury and surrounded by all the privileges of a patrician in Jerusalem of that day, a member of the Sanhedrin of the highest social position. It is possible that he had beautified for himself a palace with everything in it that opulence could buy; that he had adorned the various rooms with wealth of art and curiously wrought the floor with an affluence of mosaic designs; that he had hung the windows with

fringed curtains and covered the couches with purple. Outside of this dwelling he may have owned his parks and his gardens, chariots and slaves. Whatever form his possessions had assumed, the command was imperiously laid upon him demanding swift obedience: he must turn them instantly back into money again. The mansion must be sold; the flowers, the groves, the paintings, the jewels must pass out of his hands.

2. Then he was to *give all his wealth to the poor*. The store of his acquisitions would have to go, not to his old friends, not even to his relatives or heirs, nor to his peers in social life, but to common people, to those upon whom he doubtless had been educated to look with feelings of deepest repugnance and supercilious disdain. All his precious treasure must go to please and comfort new owners whom he disliked.

Our Saviour did here interpose one measure of relief; he gave to him a thought, a sentiment, a hope, a promise. He assured this astonished inquirer that in the end he should be no loser by the generosity which impoverished him and disinherited his family; he should have for his reward "treasure in heaven." But to appreciate this in those days required great confidence and a much clearer view of the gospel covenant than this legal-minded man could easily be supposed to possess in circumstances like those which surrounded him. Houses and lands get a good name everywhere; they are called "real estate" even by us, and it is difficult to let go of them even when one dies; but celestial riches

are vague and distant, intangible quite to the faith of some men.

3. Then this ruler was told that he must *join his life to that of Jesus*, whatever its fortunes might be. "Come, follow me!" These words in the Greek are very sharp and strong; they constitute a startling challenge, a sort of double cry, a gesture of peremptory beckoning: "Hither, behind me!" He must become a pauper by his own deliberate act, and trust this wandering rabbi not only for his eternal salvation, but for his daily bread. That involved an entire change of life and purpose.

For all the time Jesus Christ kept professing himself to be an absolutely homeless man. "Master, where dwellest thou?" was the question addressed to him once, to which he answered, "The Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." This rich and comfortable young Jew could do nothing but leave his friends, home, and ease, turn his back for ever upon all his previous haunts and habits, associations and opinions, commit his career blindly to the leadership of a teacher disowned and cast out by his own relatives as well as by all the chiefs of the nation.

Now, putting all three of these requisitions together and making the case our own, we shall see the extreme forcefulness of such a test as this. How would we, who think ourselves so brave in surrendering a portion of our wealth or energy or comfort to Christ, like to have our consecration made literal and exhaustive at once? How would we bear a proposition to sell our houses and our

stores, our stocks and our jewels, our lands and our securities, part with the home our children and perhaps our parents were born in, the homestead where one's father had lived and one's mother had prayed, then become a wanderer on the earth for Christ's sake, taking up our cross willingly just to follow him?

II. Such a question leads us onward a step. In the second place, the history of this young ruler gives us an illustration of THE WAY IN WHICH MEN'S RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS ARE DISCLOSED AS WELL AS TESTED.

It needed but a moment of consideration to show him he was self-deceived. He saddened at the saying of Christ; he lowered as the sky does before rain. Doubtless he paused an instant, pondered the words, made definite decision, and then, with a troubled look in his eyes, began to withdraw from the circle of disciples, utterly unable to abide the test.

I. But observe, *it had at all events enlightened his mind.* When he came to Jesus he appeared willing to know his duty; now he knew it. He grew perfectly clear as to what was meant by becoming a follower of such a teacher, and he perceived his grand mistake in supposing he had had any real desire to do so. He saw the hollowness of his own moralities, the meagreness of his attainments, the insincerity of his questions. He was not a candidate for eternal life. The law he had boldly declared he had kept all his life now simply slew his claims. All these things he had not kept from his

youth up, for the obedience that was involved reached to the innermost heart; just there he failed.

You may possibly ask just here, Would our Lord have suffered the ruler to go on and complete an actual sale, if he had displayed a willingness to do so? And if the man had done it, Would that have secured for him "eternal life"? Could he have bought his way into heaven?

There is no answer for such a question, but I am sure you are on the instant reminded of the extraordinary test once brought to Abraham to try his faith. The call came for him to sacrifice his only son Isaac as a burnt-offering. He raised the knife to kill him, as he had been commanded. But at the moment the acquiescence showed completeness a voice from the sky forbade the act; a ram became the victim. The will was accepted for the deed. When one surrenders himself as a disciple to the Lord Jesus Christ, he must do it with all that it involves. The gift of zeal, strength, life, and fortune must be absolute. But the Almighty Will may not call for the expenditure of every farthing on the instant; indeed, he often leaves his children in happy charge of the bulk of their wealth for days and years; but he certainly demands the spirit of entire surrender at once. For sometimes what is offered him he takes without the least reserve. This young man had no such wish or purpose in his heart. Without any apology, without even an explanation, he abruptly left the spot. He saw in his own disposition what he never saw before: his desires were selfish and base.



2. Another result of this test on that ruler's life was this: *he became thoroughly satisfied that Jesus desired to save his soul.* This he must have seen in the kindness with which he was received, and certainly in the regretful affection there was exhibited towards him. Not a sign of rebuke for his insincerity is administered; he is constituted his own instructor, and so he becomes his own judge. Our Lord even tries to help him up to the point of gracious surrender. Really Jesus did in this case more than he did for Peter or Matthew, for James, Andrew, or John. To these disciples he only said as he called them into his service, "Follow me," and they gave up all. When this man turned away from the test he must have felt in his innermost soul that he was now disappointing the real desire of that group of friends in his behalf.

It is likely that some of you are making inquiry here as to what bearing this story has upon young men of modern times. You know it is customary for the monastic orders to find one of their stock arguments here in defence of their poverty and seclusion. Must men be hopelessly poor in order to live Christians? Let it be borne in mind with all luminousness that the one thing which our Lord told this young man was lacking in him was not poverty but piety. Renunciation of wealth must not be called his virtue but his test. It was not his possessions or his office that kept him out of eternal life; it was his love of them. You will lose the entire force of this narrative if you discharge its meaning on the money. Anything else would have

answered as well, if a disclosure of his real mind had been wrought by it. What Christ wanted was the young man himself, and not the mere wealth he owned. '

3. Yet a third result of the test was to *fling the youthful ruler on his own responsibility*. There was for him no evading of the issue after this. Looking down into his own soul, there he saw himself. He discovered that avarice or greed of gold sat upon the throne of his whole being. Moral courage, amiability, prudence, consistency, wakened conscience, all pined in dungeon confinement under its sway. And a worse fact than this became also suddenly apparent: he accepted intelligently the pitiable state of things he had hitherto unconsciously avoided or endured. Then he had deceived himself, sinning in ignorance and in secret; now he was perfectly informed, and yet he sinned with a deliberate understanding of the wickedness. Once he had been unwarily entangled by the Delilah of covetousness, but there was some hope that he would burst the green withes with which she had caused his limbs to be cunningly bound. Now he voluntarily laid his head in her lap where she might cut off the sacred lock of his strength, and so cripple for ever his manhood, put out his eyes, and consign him to dreadful shame.

Thus the full responsibility of his action is seen to be his own in all its reach. Base as he knew his real master to be, this man was content to bend in obeisance to him. He had kneeled to Christ; he now grovels in the dust to Greed. He offered to be

a servant to God; here he ends by becoming a slave to Mammon. There is reason to conclude, moreover, that he actually wished or hoped that his folly could ever after be concealed; that he seriously repented that moment of weak solicitude in which he had gone forth so publicly to consult Christ upon the open roadway. He came courageous; he departed a coward. Still with all this, recollect, no fresh quality had been instilled into his character; only an old one was disclosed that had been there before.

4. A final result remains to be noticed: *the convictions he came with were confirmed.* One might imagine, perhaps, that this young man, having had his spiritual eyes opened to see the mistake he had committed in seeking eternal life through this great Teacher, when he was so miserably heartless in his request for it, would now go away positively glad to have escaped the trap which he conjectured had been suddenly sprung upon him to render him poor in an instant, and would volubly congratulate himself on not having yielded to so radical a demand.

But such is not the usual action of conscience in these cases of religious anxiety. Convictions of sin are always deepened by stifling their poignancy. A duty rejected is a duty doubled; for another obligation comes now, that of repentance over the denial and the delay. A shallow sense of resentment, when one has been counselled against inner prejudices and traditions, may quiet some of the first longings; but a sense of the old pain follows closely on; and then self-condemnations and bitter-

nesses of regret become established in his soul. It might generally be assumed as settled that it is only a question of time with such an inquirer how soon he will see his just condemnation face to face. "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after." Useless experience of pain must be gone over.

III. We close our study of the story just here; but there is an IMPORTANT SERIES OF REFLECTIONS SUGGESTED by such a theme. Some of so appropriate a group for this age of ours ought to be mentioned surely.

I. We see, for one thing, *how solemn and yet how valuable a benediction it is to any man to be thrown under conviction of sin.* Whenever the Spirit of the living God is really striving with the mind and conscience of a human being bound to the judgment-seat of Christ, illumining his heart and constraining him to inquire what he must do in order to inherit eternal life, he has his open chance for salvation by the atonement which that God has proclaimed he will accept. It changes from the mere fitful emotion of fear or sensibility into a profound business transaction, in the midst of which one settles for ever what a soul like his is worth, and what he proposes to give in exchange for a future fitting its immortality. No matter then if his whole existence is arrested, his spirit tossed tumultuously with anguish until slumber forsakes his bed, and terrible wrath glooms out upon him like thunder-clouds from an offended heaven; better is it for him to be awakened by a gracious con-

sternation that almost tears him to pieces than for him to sleep on in the frozen insensibility of a false security of peace.

2. Then again we discover here *what an amazing extent such an experience of self-deception can go.* How little of his own heart this young ruler knew! He supposed all the time that he was very good, very pious, very satisfactory every way, even when he was so surprisingly dissatisfied. His pitiable correctness of a mere external demeanor he had been bold enough to offer to God, as if it were worth counting! He was as startled now to find out its worthlessness as was Nicodemus, a fellow-member of the same Sanhedrin, to learn, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." There must be a radical alteration in one's whole being before he can be sure of eternal life on any terms. That change he cannot work for himself; he must accept it and seek for it as a gift entirely of God's grace. It is astonishing to think that some very amiable persons now imagine that if they offer generous alms to poor people, and keep courteous to the rich and just to everybody, they are all right in the sight of their Maker. They openly live, as this young ruler openly said, in the full profession of a stupendous self-righteousness, as silly as it is finally fatal.

3. So we have a third lesson. *What a mercy it is that the Spirit of God is wise enough to find for each man his true test!* That has power to show him just what he is. You will mistake this story if you conclude that wealth is always proposed as the

touchstone. Not by any manner of means. Here is, for example, one person in society whose ingratiating manners or bland converse render him the charm of every assembly he enters; the voice comes to him with no reference to luxurious surroundings of silver or gold; it says, "Love not the world, but relinquish its gayeties, forsake its amusements, forego its companionships." Usually the tests are so commonplace that they elude observation unless one is on the alert for their disclosure. A man in ordinary business life is bidden to refuse a bargain which will be profitable, to cease from the practice of using false trade-marks, to give up the customs of a lucrative but iniquitous traffic. It is not the obedience to these demands of principle that makes the man a Christian; it is the application of them that brings out to light the fact that such a man is not, and never has been, a Christian, and that it is certainly time he should admit it and set about becoming a child of God.

4. Learn here also that *every mere moralist has some weak side upon which he may be approached by the adversary*. When that is reached the man succumbs. Generally a person's weakest point is that one on which he particularly prides himself he is the most secure: "Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

5. Reflect, once more, upon *the impressiveness of that moment in which a convicted man first sees his own heart*. Look upon that agitated ruler as he stands pondering the question which the Lord has given him! Men are often caught so in these mod-

ern times. The whole future of their souls turns upon a decision made in ten seconds by the clock. The providence of God is always working up towards such crises. It is possible some souls have the decision upon their hands this very hour.

6. Finally, we learn that *the supreme question in all these cases is, Will the man go on or go back?* That young ruler went back; so he lost his chance. How will it be with ourselves here to-night?

Oh, it is always so easy to find a way to do the right thing, if only one has the will! God helps. Decisions on which life and eternity turn have been made on the simplest form of speech. Dean Stanley tells the tale of a woman who found her way from the distant wilds of Asia to her husband's home in England by constantly repeating the only two words she knew in our language, "Gilbert" and "London." He uses this pathetic incident to illustrate how much a seeker after God might do for himself if he would only put into practice again and again the very simplest and shortest notions he has of Christ and Christ's goodness. Let every one here try to frame a prayer in which he can end his indecision with one word of irrevocable surrender. Say, "I am a sinner and I have sinned; take me as I am, penitent and believing; take me with my heart and soul and life, and pardon me, and save me for ever! Amen."

## XVI.

## THE SIGHTLESS SINNER, BARTIMEUS.

"BLIND BARTIMEUS, THE SON OF TIMEUS, SAT BY THE HIGHWAY SIDE BEGGING."—*Mark* 10:46.

THAT the cure of Bartimeus was a veritable miracle no one can reasonably doubt. The man was a well-known beggar. His father's name as well as his own is given. He had doubtless been blind for a long time, and many a person in the crowd had seen him there by the gate day after day. The vast multitude could have borne immediate and uproarious testimony to the deception if either the disability or the relief of it had been feigned.

In our study of the story we might as well take into consideration the facts first, and then learn the lesson afterwards. That is to say, let us in the outset attend to the miracle *as a wonder*, and so we shall appreciate it better *as a parable*.

I. We look closely at Bartimeus on this occasion. It is true that Jesus is the centre of the picture, as he always is. But this miracle is peculiar in that the details of it are more than usually brilliant as an illustration of simple human nature in the one who receives the advantage of it.

1. The *state* of this poor creature is given at a stroke of the pen. It would be difficult to crowd more biography into one verse than we find in Mark's narrative: "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."

He was *sightless*. He had come to be called by that name: "blind Bartimeus." He was a *pauper*. "Begging" was his business. He was a *professional mendicant*. We do not look upon him as one who had got behindhand a little, and so was out on the streets for a day or two, until he could get into employment. He "sat by the highway side begging."

He was *helpless*. There is no evidence that he had any friends who cared for him; they would have made themselves conspicuous after his cure, if there had been many of them. It is likely this man went to his regular stand every morning; beside him lay his staff, and in his lap lay the pouch into which was thrown the pittance he managed to live upon.

He was *hopeless*. It was impossible for him to do anything; he could not see to learn a trade.

He was *unpopular*. Anybody had a right to snub him the moment he said a word: "And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace."

He was *uneasy* and fiercely on the alert to better his condition. What arrested his attention was the unusual crowd: "And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant." He did not hear Jesus, but he heard those who followed Jesus. His whole soul was alive and anxious for some relief.

2. Now notice his *action*. Here we need the

verse which has just been quoted from Luke's gospel for a link between the two apparently disjointed verses of Mark's: "And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." How this man "heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth" is shown there; the multitude told him so.

Bartimeus *sought information*. He was not too proud to acknowledge he did not know. Two things there were which it would be impossible for him ever to find out by himself: he would have to be instructed concerning the wonderful and beautiful and valuable gift of seeing by those who understood it; and he would have to be informed that this Nazarene rabbi could remove the disability, and that just at the moment he was "nigh" Jericho. Does any one suppose this poor beggar got offended because some one insisted that he was sightless? If a neighbor had showed himself a little friendly and proposed to lead him up for a cure, would Bartimeus simply spite him for being impatient about other people's concerns?

Then, next, this blind man began to *ask for help*: "And many charged him that he should hold his peace; but he cried the more a great deal, 'Thou son of David, have mercy on me.'"

His request was singularly comprehensive and intelligent. Whether he fully understood its reach or not, the language he employed took in the human nature and the divine nature of our Lord at once. "Jesus" was a man; the "Son of David" was God's Messiah.

His cry was personal and direct: "Have mercy on me." He wastes no time in graceful opening or becoming close; what he wanted he tells.

His prayer was courageous and importunate. What these people could in such a case mean passes comprehension; one would think everybody might rejoice at a chance of getting that old blind beggar away from begging at the gates of Jericho. But they only made the poor fellow think he had done the right thing after all.

Bartimeus then "*rose and came to Jesus.*" It would have been the height of folly for him to say to himself, "If it is the will of this rabbi to open my eyes, he can do it from a distance just as well as if I were there." For the wonderful fact was that Jesus had checked his steps and was now waiting for him, and had even commanded him to be called: "And Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee."

Then also this blind man *put away the hindrance* which it was likely would delay him in going for his cure: "And he, casting away his garment, rose and came to Jesus." This was his loose outside robe, such as is customarily worn even by the lowest class of people in that country, their protection from the sunshine in the daytime and their covering from the chill dews of the night—a simple garment, no doubt, but almost indispensable to him. Still, if it interfered with the restoration of his eyesight, it could well be spared.

3. Notice, in the next place, Bartimeus' *full*

*surrender*: "And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight."

Two things are to be noted in this remarkable speech. We shall not understand either of them unless we keep in mind the most singular question which Jesus puts to the man the moment he comes within hearing. It was not because he did not know this beggar's condition that our Lord asked him so abruptly what he would have him to do. It must have been because he desired to fasten his faith upon one chief object of supreme desire. There was no end to the wants of Bartimeus: he wanted food, friends, clothing, home, everything that anybody demands in order to make a mendicant a man. But, more than all besides, he wanted eyesight; and he found that out when he went in upon his own soul to make inquiry. This explains his reply.

He speaks with a *declaration*: "Lord." This address, most inadequately rendered here in Mark's gospel, means far more than mere respect. The term in Luke is different from this; here it is actually the same as that Mary Magdalene uses when she discovers that one she thought was the gardener is Jesus: "Rabboni!" There is concentrated in just a single word a whole burst of generous and affectionate feeling: "My Master!" Faith, reverence, love unspeakable, adoring wonder were in that word.

He speaks with an *ellipsis*. As before we found more in his utterance than we expected, so now we

find less. Bartimeus does not reply directly to our Lord's question. He cannot: how could he know what a miracle-worker should do? All he knew was what he himself wanted to be done. So his answer would read in full, "I do not understand what thou wilt do, nor even what I would have thee to do—oh, do anything, anything—that I might receive my sight!"

4. Once more, notice Bartimeus' *cure*: "And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus in the way." It was instantaneous: "immediately." It was perfect: "whole." It was sovereign: "Go thy way." It was complete, including salvation: "Thy faith hath saved thee."

5. Lastly, notice the man's *experience*. Luke adds a few particulars more: "And immediately he received his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God." He was full of joy; a new world had been suddenly opened upon him. He was obedient; he followed Jesus as a disciple. He was grateful; he glorified God. He was zealous. In Matthew's gospel we are told that there were "two" men sitting there that day in their blindness and begging. Then there was, as there always is, "another man" close at hand for Bartimeus to work upon immediately. We may be sure he left not so much as one blind man in all Jericho without the knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth. "Oh, that all the blind but knew him and would be

advised by me! Surely would they hasten to him; he would cause them all to see!" That comrade of his was cured and converted the same hour. We cannot help thinking Bartimeus had something to do with it. And what a work those two persons could do now in the old sad city!

II. So much then concerning this miracle as a wonder; let us now study its lessons as a parable. It very beautifully pictures the steps of a sinner coming for spiritual relief to Jesus—the state, the action, the surrender, the cure, the experience. Indeed, this was a real part of the story that day.

1. *Sightlessness is the symbol of sin.* Not darkness now, for Christ has come. "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." The trouble is in the heart. The world is not darkened, but the race of sinners has been blinded. The calamity is not in the sky, but in the eyes of men's souls. Who did this? "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

2. *Sin destroys the whole nature.* We do not say Bartimeus was injured in any of his senses except his eyes. But his blindness made him a beggar. His touch, hearing, and taste may have been perfect; indeed, they may have been rendered sensitive, sharp, and alert more than usual. But he

walked as a blind man, he reasoned as a blind man, he thought as a blind man, and he went to his regular stand as a blind man, and then begged.

3. *Awakening of sinners is often due to Christian fidelity.* When this poor blind world hears the rush of faithful footsteps following on after the Master it will be sure to ask anxiously what it means.

4. *In the salvation of his soul the sinner has a work to do.* It is of no use to fall back on one's blindness; the first step is to confess blindness and go to Christ for help.

5. *Prayer is indispensable in every case.* No one can be saved who will not ask for salvation. The petition might well become a "cry." And whatever hinders, let the man continue to pray, and pray "the more a great deal."

6. *All hindrances must be put away if one is in earnest to be saved.* Many a man has seemed to start well, but has been tangled in the running by his garments of respectability, fame, fortune, social standing, literary eminence, or pleasant companionship. One may obtain the "whole world" and lose "his own soul."

7. *Fesus is always ready to save any one who cries to him.* Oh, most impressive moment is that when the Lord of glory pauses in the way and commands a soul "to be called"!

8. *Unqualified acceptance of Christ in all his offices is the essential condition of acceptance by him.* The sinner must say, "Lord," "Jesus of Nazareth," "Son of David," and "Rabboni."

9. *Experience of salvation is the instrument to use*

in our efforts to save others. "Once I was blind, now I see;" the best argument in the world for blind men is in that word. And the best word for sinners is, "Christ hath saved me."

"Blind Bartimeus at the gates  
Of Jericho in darkness waits;  
He hears the crowd—he hears a breath  
Say, "It is Christ of Nazareth!"  
And calls in tones of agony,  
*Ἰησοῦ, ἐλέησόν με!*\*

"The thronging multitudes increase;  
Blind Bartimeus, hold thy peace!  
But still above the noisy crowd  
The beggar's cry is shrill and loud,  
Until they say, "He calleth thee!"  
*Θάρσει, ἔγειραι, φωνεῖ σε!*†

"Then saith the Christ, as silent stands  
The crowd, "What wilt thou at my hands?"  
And he replies, "Oh, give me light!  
Rabbi, restore the blind man's sight!"  
And Jesus answers, "Ἔπαγε;  
*Ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέ σε!*‡

"Ye that have eyes, yet cannot see,  
In darkness and in misery,  
Recall those mighty Voices Three,  
*Ἰησοῦ, ἐλέησόν με!*  
*Θάρσει, ἔγειραι, ὕπαγε!*  
*Ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέ σε!*"

\* "Jesus, have mercy on me!"

† "Be comforted; rise, He calleth thee!"

‡ "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole."



## XVII.

## CHRIST ENTERING JERUSALEM.

"BLESSED BE THE KINGDOM OF OUR FATHER DAVID, THAT COMETH IN THE NAME OF THE LORD: HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST."—  
*Mark 11:10.*

WE have now in the progress of our study reached the most picturesque event of our Saviour's life. Indeed, there is no other instance in which he deliberately prepared a spectacle to touch the imagination or to attract popular applause. Hitherto he had come into the sacred city and gone out of it again at his will, without any seeking of conspicuousness or any recognition of his Messiahship by the throngs of the people.

On the contrary, it would appear to have been his endeavor to force even his disciples to keep secret the few grand displays he had arranged for their confirmation. Over and over again he bade the invalids he healed to tell no man of his miraculous work. The three favored followers who witnessed the transfiguration were commanded to keep the story concealed.

But now Jesus shows a sudden reversal of his policy. He makes a direct and public defiance of the chief priests in the presence of their bigoted adherents; he advances his claims to be the successor of David on the throne of Israel, the long-predicted Messiah for the nation. After this there is

no retreat, no rescue, no hesitation. At last his "hour" has come.

The Scriptural record of this triumphal entry into Jerusalem is not without difficulties in details, but it is an incidental proof of the ease of reconciliation to an honest mind.

It is noticeable that all four of the evangelists give accounts of the incident, but that John omits many of the details, and dwells more particularly upon its being a confirmation of prophecy, and as caused especially by the recent raising of Lazarus from the grave. He mentions, also, the despair of the Pharisees, who exclaimed, "Behold, how ye prevail nothing; lo, the world is gone out after him." Matthew quotes with him the passage from Zechariah. Luke states that the *owners* of the colt asked the question anticipated by the Saviour. He affirms, too, that the multitudes were moved to their enthusiasm by the mighty works they had seen; and he records the remonstrance of the Pharisees, "Master, rebuke thy disciples," and the Master's reply, "I tell you, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

We can confine ourselves just now to the enumeration of some lessons about which we shall be all agreed.

I. This story exhibits Christ's *foreknowledge of all ordinary events*. He tells his disciples as they set forth to do this errand just what will happen. "And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage, and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto

them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him and bring him. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him, and straightway he will send him hither."

From the plain of Jericho, distant nearly eighteen miles from the Holy City, a long ascent brings the traveller to the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, or Olivet, as it is also called; that is, olive ground. The most eastern village, probably here named first in accordance with the time of arrival, is Bethphage, "house or place of unripe figs," near to which was Bethany, or the "house of dates," the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Bethany lay on the eastern slope of Mt. Olivet, distant about a mile and three-quarters from the city. The pilgrims had thus travelled about sixteen miles.

It is the wonderful particularity with which our Lord relates the incidents of this errand that attracts attention now. The disciples were to go on till they reached a cross-road; it was to be found this side of the village, and not beyond it; there they should see an ass, which should be tied, and by the side of which a colt should be standing. Furthermore, the conversation of the owners was given word for word, and the disciples were instructed what to reply so as to secure assent. Here is a marvellous illustration of our Lord's knowledge of coming events as well as of human nature. An-

other instance of the same sort is found in the narrative of his obtaining a guest-chamber for the Last Supper.

Now if any one asserts that this is trifling, it is needful only to answer that just because these matters are so simple and apparently trivial, it becomes impossible to predict their occurrence except under the supernatural spirit of prophecy. And we urgently insist that this artless story helps us to understand what the apostle meant when, speaking some years after this of Jesus Christ, he declared that in him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge: for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

II. The story presents to view *Christ's sovereignty over all men*. "And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without, in a place where two ways met: and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go."

No conjecture has ever been hazarded concerning these people who seem to have owned the animal the disciples borrowed. But the striking thing to be noticed is found in their instantaneous acquiescence in the act, the moment the simple words are spoken which our Lord told the disciples to use. It made no difference that they were perfect strangers to the messengers or their Master; it seems to have been enough for them to be informed that the "Lord hath need."

Matthew Henry calls attention to the fact that "Christ went upon the water in a borrowed boat, ate the Passover in a borrowed chamber, was buried in a borrowed sepulchre, and here rode upon a borrowed ass." There is a sense in which it may be said that the great God never needs anything. "I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine and the fulness thereof." But he loves to give those who love him a chance to think themselves serviceable. And this might well be the motto of every true Christian life: Surrender always when "the Lord hath need."

III. Then again, this story discloses Christ's *power over all the brute creation*. "And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees and strewed them in the way."

No other instance of Jesus' riding on an animal of any sort has been recorded in his history; and of all, this must have been a beast most difficult to employ in a confused pageant. Mark and Luke both mention that the colt had never been broken in nor even ridden before. Matthew adds that it was so young as still to be running with its mother; and Zechariah had called it a "foal."

Now it cannot be deemed a straining of the

proper sense here if we call attention to the manifest miracle wrought upon such a creature. For the uproarious shouts of the multitude, and the shrill singing of the children, and the palms and the showy garments and the wild excitement all around, render it one of the most wonderful of all considerations that this ass's colt, the very type of uncontrollableness and caprice, should become, as if in an instant, tame and steady for the Master's service. It is because this part of the narrative is so minute and unexpected that it has always attracted the surprised attention of simple rural readers of the Bible, who are aware what it is to manage so irascible a creature and one so generally malicious. They perceive quickly why such an incident, unappreciated at the time, afterwards is found to have made an impression so deep as to be mentioned alongside of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. "These things understood not his disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him. The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of the grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record."

IV. Once more, this story illustrates Christ's *majesty as the Messiah of God*. Two of the evangelists quote at this point the Old Testament prophecy concerning this triumphal entry into Jerusalem: "And they that went before and they that followed cried, saying, Hosanna: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the

kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest."

We recall the similar instances of Jesus' carefulness in gathering up the various passages of Scripture which still remained waiting to be fulfilled, when, hanging upon the cross, he exclaimed, "I thirst." It was not his habit thus to speak of his lowest bodily wants; and we should be surprised, and even remain at a loss for explanation of this cry, if we were not explicitly told that he uttered it in order that "the Scriptures might be fulfilled."

So here: our Lord remembered one prediction which needed to be noticed at this exact crisis of his history. He rides into the city, not for any vain bravado, but because "it is written." It would not be fair to argue strongly for the truth of Jesus' claims just from this pageant of entering Jerusalem upon an animal such as kings used; for any impostor could have read Zechariah's prediction and then laid himself out to fulfil it. It is simply just, however, to assert that in this singular blending of the lofty with the lowly our Lord shows the kingliness of his nature and the royalty of his office. He rides upon a monarch's beast of burden, but he is accompanied by the most unroyal of retinues. We must look beneath the surface if we hope fully to understand this demonstration. He is a king, but he apes no show of a triumph. Still, there is a majesty in the apparent meanness, easy to be discovered through the humility of demeanor which tempers the display.

And we may just pause a moment to catch our

best lesson: "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

V. This story likewise shows Jesus' *force to reveal human character*. It was predicted of our Lord that by him should "the thoughts of many hearts be revealed." In the experience of three classes of people here recorded this is evidently fulfilled: "And when he was come into Jerusalem all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee." "And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! they were sore displeased."

One group cried "Hosanna!" another group coldly questioned, "Who is this?" and a third group became malignant and "were sore displeased." We can have no doubt that Jesus Christ anticipated all this division of sentiment. It was what usually happened whenever he appeared pub-



licly. "Now, when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast-day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man."

It is likely that these three classes of persons will always be disclosed the moment the name of Jesus Christ is preached. What is in the human heart will come out into an unconscious display. "Hosanna" means, "Save, we beseech." Only those who are of the truth will hear the Lord's voice and be saved.

VI. Still further: this story proves Christ's *fitness to evoke religious enthusiasm*. All the four evangelists record the words of the people on this excited occasion; so that we know they quoted the ancient ascription of praise to the Messiah, and undoubtedly intended to ascribe their highest honors to Jesus as the Christ of God: "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord. God is the Lord, which hath showed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee. Oh, give thanks unto the Lord: for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."

The scene which rises on our imaginations is full of the loftiest exhilaration. Those hosts of Passover pilgrims sang and shouted, cast their garments in the dust, and made the air tremulous with the wa-

ving of their triumphal palms. Their adoring acceptance of this Nazarene rabbi drove the chief priests into unreasoning anger. They even tried to force Jesus to stop the mouths of the populace; but he told them that if this natural and proper enthusiasm should be repressed, when redemption had come, the "very stones would cry out."

It is a frightful mistake to suppose, and a wilful perversion to assert, that Christianity as a scheme of faith is tame, insipid, and lifeless. It cannot be considered even witty to quote in such a connection Job's petulant words: "Can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt? or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" For the fact is, the religion of Jesus Christ lifts the heart and satisfies the soul better than anything else ever known to fallen and saddened men. The gospel restores the race and purifies the world. There is nothing lacking in the prophet's description of its welcome results: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

VII. Finally, this story suggests Christ's *silent inquisition for wrong-doing*. We get the expression from the Old Testament: "When he maketh inquisition for blood he remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble."

Among all the striking pictures which this entry of Jesus into Jerusalem presents, not one can be found more impressive than that which is the quietest and the last. "And Jesus entered into Jerusa-

lem and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the even-tide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve."

He came into the temple, looked around, *said nothing*, and departed. He had a way of looking thus: at his disciples once with anger and with grief; at Simon Peter once; "he turned and looked upon Peter;" so here he looked on the merchandise, the stalls, the tables, in his Father's house! Retribution was coming on the morrow.

XVIII.

“THE HEAD OF THE CORNER.”

“AND HAVE YE NOT READ THIS SCRIPTURE: THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED IS BECOME THE HEAD OF THE CORNER?”—*Mark 12:10.*

THE wife of Thomas Carlyle—a personality and a character of as much force in her way as her husband—writes in her journal that on a certain occasion she had been to hear a scientific lecture in Exeter Hall in London; it seems to have been delivered by one of the nobility of the realm, who gave a somewhat unexpectedly religious turn to it in the development or application of his subject. This is what the brisk lady wrote: “The crowd was immense and the applause terrific; but one thing rather puzzled me: at every mention of the name of ‘Christ’ (and there was far too much of that), the clapping and the stamping rose to such a pitch that one expected always it must end in *hip, hip, hurrah!* Did the Young Men’s Christian Association take his lordship’s recognition of ‘Christ’ as a personal compliment? Or did it strike them with admiration that a British lord should know about Christ?”

There is a painful amount of this kind of toadyism to be discovered at the present day in the applause granted to men of conspicuousness, either social or scientific, because they patronizingly admit

the general claims of the gospel to a recognition among so-called thinkers on the public platform. The old question is asked with the same sniff of superciliousness it had years ago, "Have any of the rulers believed on Him?" As if men's belief settled the fact of our Lord's supremacy!

The rulers never did believe on Jesus: so much the worse for the rulers! Here is a passage of Mark's gospel coming regularly under our study this morning, and giving an account of the way in which the Saviour boldly challenged such insufferable conceit. Two things come before us; with helpful texts from other sources they will claim special attention: a New Testament parable and an Old Testament Psalm. The one is what an old divine used to call any quotation from the Bible he made as a proof-text, "the clincher" of the other. Let us look at the details of the story first; then we shall be ready to consider the admonition our Lord intends by it. "And he began to speak unto them by parables."

I. The picture suggested by the scene which Christ calls up into imagination would be likely to cause surprise, or be termed an exaggeration, if it were laid anywhere outside of Palestine. Down even to the present time customs remain very much the same as in Christ's day in that oppressed country.

1. The insecurity of property and person is proverbial. The Scripture record might be incorporated into the ordinary guide-books. Thieves and murderers throng the tourist's path all the way

down "from Jerusalem to Jericho," across the plain of Esdraelon to Mt. Carmel, and along the entire declivities beside the Sea of Galilee. No man, stranger or home-born, can know himself to be safe. An attack may always be expected, provided a surprise is possible or a treachery promises adequate success in the pilfering of a purse.

2. There has been in all ages a special confusion of iniquitous dealing in respect to real estate. Thievery and violence seem to be the rule in the East, peace and possession the exception. Something is to be charged to the Government; the laws are indefinite and bribery is rife; indeed, the Government sets the example of systematized crime. In all history of the Holy Land, from Christ's time to ours, the rulers have been organized for official robbery and outrage. No titles are secure, even when one has paid for his vineyard or his building-plot.

3. Then, too, the custom of committing all oversight and control of farms and orchards to underlings makes the matter a great deal worse. Absenteeism is a fruitful reason for crime. "A certain man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it and digged a place for the winefat and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen and went into a far country." The parable of the vineyard, which appears in the three synoptical gospels, was the more readily understood because "the song of my beloved touching his vineyard," in Isaiah, must have been familiar to Christ's hearers. As there "the vineyard of the Lord of

hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant," so here the vineyard stands for the theocratic nation, for God's peculiar people; and as there the genuine grapes are displaced by wild grapes, so here there is no return to the owner.

"And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him and beat him and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others, beating some and killing some. Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the husbandmen and will give the vineyard unto others."

Those men in charge of the vineyard, to whom messenger after messenger had been sent, and who now were peremptorily addressed by the owner with a final demand in the august person of his son, are represented as communing with each other, and saying, as they laid the wiles of their conspiracy, what might be construed into an utterance of their belief that, if this one inheritor were only dead, all heirship would be extinguished. More than one

parable of our Lord assumes precisely this exposure to plunder and murder from one's own employés. To this there could be no barrier, and for it there could be neither remedy nor redress before the law.

4. Still, so far as we can learn, there was no ground for hope of success in this plot. No enactment has come down to us which would sustain such an entailment or division or heirship as those infamous creatures assumed. Luke's language (20:14) agrees with Mark's; but Matthew (21:38) says, "Let us seize on his inheritance." This suggests the true interpretation. The husbandmen had no countenance in the common law; they intended to say that they would make the vineyard theirs by violence, and hold it by any extremities of force. It was a singularly stupid plan; it could not have even a plausible look anywhere but in that wretched region. It assumed an absence of justice, an insecurity of possession, an immunity for the worst crime, positively Oriental in its toleration of rapine and murder.

5. Add to this the fact that in those early days, when invention had not yet brought firearms into use, the measures taken for homicide were brutal and hard beyond description. Not even spears or daggers or knives are used there for assassination now any more than they used to be. The coarse, rude weapon for murder is a club or bludgeon of the roughest sort. The Bedouins will have a gun on their shoulders, but will knock their victim on the head with a knotted stick all the same. The description left on record by the Psalmist is true to



this day: "He sitteth in the lurking-places of the villages; in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly\* as a lion in his den; he lieth in wait to catch the poor; he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth and humbleth himself that the poor may fall by his strong ones. He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it."

6. Hence this frightful picture was a tremendous invective as well as a vivid illustration when employed by our Lord. He used it for a similitude in one of his most direct and forcible arraignments of the Jewish nation for their blind, dull, coarse, criminal rejection of God's only-begotten Son, despatched them from high heaven to secure his Father's rights from those who had grasped after heirship by murder. It would seem as if the very least he would or could do would be to thrust a gang so execrable out of the vineyard and give it to others.

II. We turn now to the second branch of the story. Our Lord suddenly drops his figure and leaves the parable altogether, finishing his application with a quotation from one of the most familiar of the Psalms: "And have ye not read this Scripture, The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner? This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people, for they knew that he had spoken the parable

against them; and they left him and went their way.”

1. Thus he illustrates his position. He claims a Messianic Psalm for himself. Matthew tells us he said to those hearers of his in plain words that he was speaking this parable concerning them. And he chooses to show them that for himself there was no fear of the future: “Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.” The “son” of the story who got murder instead of “reverence” is heard of no more. But the Son of God, though “rejected” now, should one day come to his place of honor. They understood him very well, for in an alarmed sort of murmur they said, “God forbid!”

2. Thus he predicts his eventful triumph. There is a tradition of the Jewish rabbis which relates the history of a wonderful stone, prepared, as they say, for use in the building of Solomon’s temple. Each block for that matchless edifice was shaped and fitted for its particular place, and came away from the distant quarry marked for the masons. But this one was so different from any other that no one knew what to do with it. Beautiful indeed it was, carved with figures of exquisite loveliness and grace; but it had no fellow; it fitted nowhere; and at last the impatient and perplexed workmen flung it aside as only a splendid piece of

folly. Years passed while the proud structure was going up without the sound of axe or hammer. During all the time this despised fragment of rock was lying in the valley of Jehoshaphat covered with dirt and moss. Then came the day of dedication; the vast throng arrived to see what the Israelites were wont to call "the noblest fabric under the sun." There it stood crowning the mountain's ridge and shining with whiteness of silver and yellowness of gold. The wondering multitude gazed admiringly upon its magnificent proportions, grand in their splendor of marble. But when one said that the east tower was unfinished, or at least looked so, the chief architect grew impatient again, and replied that Solomon was wise, but a builder must admit there was a gap in his plans. By-and-by the king drew near in person; with his retinue he rode directly to the incomplete spot, as if he there expected most to be pleased. "Why is this neglect?" he asked in tones of indignant surprise: "where is the piece I sent for the head of this corner?" Then suddenly the frightened workmen bethought themselves of that rejected stone which they had been spurning as worthless. They sought it again, cleared it from its defilement, swung it fairly up into its place, and found it was indeed the top-stone, fitted so as to give the last grace to the whole.

3. Thus Jesus also clinches his argument. He made his audience see that he was fulfilling every necessity of the Messial's office and answering to every prediction made of him, even down to the receiving of the "rejection" at their hands as they

were now giving it to him. They were educated in the ancient oracles of God, and were wont to admit the bearing of every sentence and verse of prophecy. And when this strange, intrepid Galilean asked them, "Did ye never read in the Scripture?" they saw that he knew his vantage with the people, and would be strong enough to hold it against their violence or treachery. There was force in argument when one brought up a text inspired.

What filled those hearers with wrath was the implication that an unknown Israelite had turned against his own nation and was claiming a Messiahship which would utterly destroy all the selfish hopes they had been reared to cherish. What the Jews wanted was not the glory of God in the establishment of a new kingdom of grace; they wished for the identical kingdom which their fathers had had when David shone in royal splendor and Solomon covered Jerusalem with glory. They had schooled themselves to believe that they owned this entire sovereignty already. They had no notion of surrendering the preëminence even to God's Son.

And this is the old story of debased human nature. The moment a man begins to consider himself master and owner of the mercies which a beneficent God is bidding him occupy till he come; the moment he gives loose rein to his pride because of his spiritual or temporal advantage over others; the moment he claims that the silver and the gold gathered into his coffers, the acres of land and the

piles of houses that he controls, the love of his wife and the tenderness of his children, are only the proper blessings that belong to his merit; that moment he has need to listen to that ancient cry out of heaven: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me." For the tremendous question to be answered as men lift up their proud foreheads in wealth and power is this: "What hast thou that thou hast not received? Who owns this that thou hast?" They are like the wicked husbandmen who said openly, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance." And then the Lord will simply change his stewards: "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons."

4. Thus likewise our Lord enlightened their consciences. There is something more than logical defeat in their manner after this conversation; there is spiritual dismay and consternation. "They knew that he had spoken this parable against them." It was necessary to silence this terrible voice of denunciation. But like all time-servers, they were afraid of the popular cry. So they stood convicted and stubborn and dared his wrath.

It is useless for us to waste any more time in the contemplation of these Pharisees who now deliberately set themselves to complete the picture Jesus had drawn of them in his parable, and murder the messenger God had sent them as the last he should ever send, saying, "Surely they will reverence my Son." To us they appear like the picture which

the mystic St. Theresa said she saw "with the eyes of her soul" the moment she faced a certain priest whom she was accustomed to meet daily; he was fair and in his morality even stern, sanctimonious in devotion; but she declared she always saw two devils encompassing his neck, with their horns interlocked irresistibly above his beautiful head.

Our concern is no longer with them; we have a lesson for our own souls to learn. God says to us in these latter days, and with all the more force now that the claims of Jesus Christ to be the true Messiah are acknowledged, "Surely they will reverence my Son." Will we listen to the voice from heaven, or will we first fall on the stone which the builders rejected, and then invite it to fall upon us and "grind us to powder"? We have the authority of Lord Bacon for asserting that in no instance to be found in the range of classical literature, not even in the poetical works of the ancients where the heroes are mentioned by name, do we discover that any of them besides Diomedes ever offered an act of violence to any one of their deities, bad as they were; and Diomedes suffered punishments the most cruel afterwards for his impiety, being at last put to death by his soldiers. Thus the heathen showed a most salutary and exemplary caution as to revering with a becoming awe the gods they worshipped. Alas for the daring of a mortal's contempt when Jesus, God's only-begotten Son, is spurned, reviled, rejected!

There is another lesson for us to learn: see what pains a wicked man will take to spite the Saviour

who came to save him. Look at this zealous crowd of conspirators who are planning to betray Jesus Christ: "And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor." It was a wise comment made by old Kenelm Digby years and years ago as he looked around upon the souls wasting their energies in disputing an undoubted message of mercy from heaven: "Men take more pains," said he sadly, "to lose themselves than would be requisite to keep them in the right road!" We see the same perversity in our day. Oh, how hard men will work—men who might be saved, who might be saved!—oh, how hard they will work and conspire and plan and toil just to be *dammèd!*

Cannot we be convinced also, as we study this story, that we do not need to cringe and beseech for a little notice for "Christ" from a skeptic, a philosopher, or a duke? Jesus has already become the "Head of the corner." This entire world measures its dates by the year when he was born. The whole race is divided into Christians and heathen, a division as sharp in intelligence as it is in worth or manhood. We do not bend to earthly grandeur nor blush for our Lord's shame any more. Godfrey de Bouillon, the first king of Christian Jerusalem, never wore any crown; he suffered no one to put a diadem on his head, for he said he could not wear gold on the spot where his Lord wore only thorns. A like loyalty of true chivalric

devotion characterized his successor on the same throne, Baldwin; for, when under pressure of the patriarch he felt it was necessary to assume his place among sovereigns by a public coronation, he went down from the capital to modest Bethlehem, that the pageant might be performed where his King, the King of kings, was born. The nations are becoming Christian; the day is near for the seventh of God's angels to shout and for the great voices in heaven to say, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

Finally, we learn the infinite peril of any further delay. This question of accepting Christ as our Saviour and Surety or of rejecting him presses for a swift and permanent decision. It is hard and dreadful to fall upon a stone; what if the stone becomes active and of itself falls upon us? It hurts, it bruises, it maims, it cripples just to be "broken;" what must it be for one to be "ground into powder"?

One of the best of modern preachers of England tells us that, away up in a lonely Highland valley, beneath a tall black cliff, weather-worn and cracked and seamed, he once saw lying at the foot, resting on the greensward that crept round its base, a huge rock which had apparently fallen with terrible violence from the face of the precipice. He learned that a shepherd had been passing exactly there at the awful moment; and suddenly, when the finger of God's will touched it, rending it from its ancient bed in the everlasting rock, it came down, leaping



and bounding from pinnacle to pinnacle; it struck the unfortunate man and literally ground him to powder. *The fragments lie underneath it now!*

That is the figure: like that is the fate of those on whose final impenitence falls the wrath of God for the rejection of his Son. A wild and weird image it is for even rhetoric to use; but it is not our human simile by choice, it is Christ's. He will be a bruised brother at the best who falls on the stone that the builders rejected; but he will be ground to powder on whom the "head stone of the corner" falls!

## XIX.

## THE GREAT COMMANDMENT.

“WHICH IS THE FIRST COMMANDMENT OF ALL?”—*Mark 12:28.*

THERE often arises an outcry when settled opinions are questioned, and when decisions made by those old in power are deliberately subjected to investigation as if they were no better than any other man's and no more sacred. Archbishop Leighton, speaking of the times before the appearance of the Wesleys and their coadjutors, says: “The church was a fair carcass without a spirit.” This statement the annalist Burnet confirms: “The clergy had less authority, and were under more contempt, than those of any other church in Europe; for they were much the more remiss in their labors and the least severe in their lives.” Into the midst of this apathy and worldliness came those preachers, with torches in their hands which both lighted and burned the people in the depths of their souls. There was a tempest of wrath in England.

It seems sometimes like a thankless task to attempt to arouse a whole community or generation of people from the gathered apathy and traditions of unspiritual ages. Indeed, for a while it seems as if we were making matters worse.

But no modern picture can fittingly represent the alarm and consternation of those scribes and

Pharisees into the midst of whose fine-spun theories and absurd practices came the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. Think of the explosiveness of a statement of doctrine and duty like that in the chapter before us to-day. No wonder it threw those hearers into sullen silence so deep that they could ask no more questions. Let us take it up for examination, point by point.

I. What was the scheme of religious life which our Lord proposed to put in the place of the whole system of Judaism as it now confronted him? This must come up as our earliest question for an answer.

1. He reduced the prolixity and confusion of enactments at once. Those lawyers, that is to say, the scribes of the law, had gone far away already from the Ten Commandments of Moses; they had enough matter in their hands for five hundred more Decalogues. The air around them was fairly thick and dusty with smoke from their hair-splitting debate and denunciation. Jesus made short work with their glosses, giving only two laws in place of a thousand: love to God, love to one's neighbor. "And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength; this is the first commandment.

And the second is like, namely this, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.'

Martin Luther once wrote: "The words of the apostle Paul are not dead words; they are living creatures, they have hands and feet." Who can measure the power of the words Jesus Christ spoke, according to an estimate like this? For they were more than living creatures; he said himself, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." In this is found the reason of his popularity outside of the aristocratic circles in Judæa; "the common people heard him gladly." Dean Stanley noticed when he was travelling in the Orient one constant gesture used in the Mussulman devotions; it was to place the hands near the ears, as if to listen for some possible messengers or messages from the other world. That is the natural and instinctive attitude for a sincere soul to assume. The moment we can secure a fit standing-spot above and beyond the stir and the noise, the confusions and the dissipations, of this mortal world, we put our hand to our ear; for we long to receive truth and love from on high. In Jesus' preaching the populace knew they had what was trustworthy. He came within a common man's reach, and fought out his spiritual battles with him.

2. Then, besides reducing the number of the enactments, our Lord carefully exhibited the spirit which was underlying the principle that was pecu-

liar to both. Love was shown to be the fulfilling of the law. "And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth, for there is one God: and there is none other but he; and to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the soul and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Love, then, nothing more, nothing less, is the basis of obedience and the foundation of all our hope of salvation; not duty, not liberality, not self-sacrifice, but love—honest affection into which we put at least these four elements, the most important in our entire being: heart, soul, mind, and strength. The love God requires must be perfect in each particular; otherwise it is no better than what the scribes in Christ's time had. They claimed that their legalism grew out of love.

II. Now, in the second place, we need to ask how one having this masterful love can keep it from being rendered useless by his own act.

1. It may lose the "heart" out of it. It was fabled that Mohammed's coffin was suspended in the air half way between heaven and earth; that is no place for a Christian surely while he is alive. Christ said, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Look at the account given of the military people who wanted to make David king: "All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect heart to Hebron to make David king over all Israel: and all the rest also of Israel were of one

heart to make David king." They kept rank, shoulder to shoulder. That was the way to march up to the coronation of a monarch. "They were not of double heart:" alongside of that expression in the margin you will find this, "without a heart and a heart." No man can love God with a heart for him and another heart for somebody or something else. See how fine seems the zeal of Naaman when he scoops up some loads of earth from the soil of Israel, that he may bear it over into Syria for an altar to Jehovah; and now see how he takes the whole worth out of it by the absurd proposition that, when his royal master walks in procession to the temple of Rimmon, he may be permitted to go as he always went, kneeling down to the idol with the rest of the heathen worshippers!

2. This love may likewise lose the "soul" out of it. We always expect to see some generous sensibility in the behavior of true men and women. If the world is commonplace, it is refreshing to see now and then some little measure of sentiment and imagination and feeling. We like to read that upon Jenny Lind's coffin was silently laid at her funeral, by Otto Goldschmidt, her husband, a wreath of myrtle made from a tree planted years ago by the great singer herself in the shape of a tiny twig plucked from her wedding wreath. It seems beautiful and pathetic to know that such things in our day can be found as genuine affection reaching across from the bridal to the tomb, faithful to remember youth and brightness even after they have faded and vanished for ever. True affection always

has a purpose in it too, unfaltering, unwavering, persistent to the end. A carrier pigeon was picked up in New Jersey the other day. An investigation showed that it had been released with nine others from a town in the southern part of the State and had become lost from the rest. These birds never give up their search for the point they are seeking to reach. It had flown on and on till it became exhausted, when it fell and evidently died of starvation. Ought not a human being to have as much principle and direct grit of determination as a bird going home to a nest? When the heart is gone, and so there is no interest in loving, and the soul is gone, and there is no purpose in loving, where is love?

3. Then this love may be injured by losing the "mind" out of it. All true affection is intelligent. We say "love is blind," but what we mean is that it is blind to faults; love is wise and alert, and constant in perceiving excellences. Defections from the true doctrines of the Scriptures are inevitably followed by a low state of piety. A man becomes a backslider the moment he drops into insecurity of conviction. In some quarters at the present day it is deemed an evidence of growth in Christian life to speak lightly of confessions and catechisms; will men be thoughtful enough to remember that the great work of this world has been accomplished by those who really had something to believe and consistently believed it? A creed gives courage. Every genuine worker for Jesus Christ takes what Jesus said to be truth, and he turns to it for guid-

ance and inspiration. At the basis of even a prayer-meeting there needs to be an intellectual conception of the gospel methods and plans of grace. This is what gives consistency to character in any child of God. What vitiates so much of our modern devotion is mere emotion as opposed to steady principle in the performance of drudgery. "I ministered once," said Bishop Huntington, "in a church where a pew stood for a million of dollars. There were generous men and saintly women among them not a few. But it only happened once in nine years that, after I had announced an offering for a following Sunday, a person stopped after the service to say, 'I must be absent next Sunday and wish you to take my gift now.' She was not a Samaritan, but a cook, and she was to be absent to cook a rich man's dinner, and I had some reason to suspect that her gift was larger than his."

III. Now comes our third question: How should this love be exercised? This brings us straight to the eleventh commandment, which our Lord declares is new in some respects, but in its spirit is like the rest of the Decalogue: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." We are bidden to love our neighbor as ourselves.

I. Who is our neighbor? The answer to this is found in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). Our neighbors, primarily and etymologically speaking, are the men, women, or children



who stand nearest to us in the ordinary relations of life. But, judging from the particulars of our Lord's story, we ought to give more pertinence to the thought of need on their part and of fitness and ability on our part to bring help. Those who are a step lower in good fortune or happy lot than ours would seem to claim special interposition. The one grand question God is asking of this world at the present moment is this: What shall the strong do for the weak?

2. What are we to do for our neighbor? The answer to all such questions is found in the Golden Rule: "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful."

There is certainly something more intended in this extensive deliverance than a recommendation to Christians to be liberal in the contributions needed by ordinary charitable institutions or methods of supply. Underlying the facts are supposed to be feelings. The Bible statement is, "Blessed is he

that *considereth* the poor." Surely that refers to more than money. We must do to our neighbor the thing we should wish him to do to us if positions were exactly reversed in each case: we are to comfort his body, aid his estate, enlighten his mind, advance his interests, and save his soul. There is a story that a priest stood upon the scaffold with Joan of Arc till his very garments took fire with the flames which were consuming her, so zealous was he for her conversion.

IV. Only one more question remains to be answered: Does the possession of this love as a principle of life make a man a Christian?

1. Let us observe thoughtfully what the Saviour says to the Jewish scribe with whom he had been talking: "And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." This language is pictorial; it represents the man, like Hopeful in the "Pilgrim's Progress," as walking on towards the Celestial City; and thus conceived, he was probably making conscientious search after truth and righteousness. In his intellectual belief he made a very excellent confession. He told the Lord that to do what he had announced was beyond anything his religion so far had had to offer; it was worth more than all sacrifices and ceremonial performances. If he went forth, on that memorable occasion, determined to live what he had just now openly acknowledged, and if he followed out the purpose with prayer and repentant confession, then he certainly became a true believer in Jesus.

2. But we must go farther for ourselves before we decide; for we have had more light than that scribe of Israel's law. Jesus said unto him, "This do, and thou shalt live." And yet all the time we must remember that the love to one's neighbor grows out of the love to God as its first condition; we must love our neighbor because we love God, for his own sake; we must love our neighbor because the neighbor has relations to God just as sacred as ours; we must love him for God's sake.

3. Again: it is not what we do for any one that saves our souls. Faith and repentance, not works of benevolence or charity, are the established conditions of our receiving the atonement Jesus made for sin on the cross; and that is what makes a man a genuine Christian. We open our hearts to God's love for us, and then out of the fulness of a new divine love in ourselves we begin to love others; that is the love which counts, not to make us Christians, but to show we are such. The order of experience is unalterable. "None know how to prize the Saviour," wrote the good Lady Huntingdon, "but such as are zealous in pious works for others."

4. So, finally, our greatest danger is disclosed at once in this exercise of doing good to those around us. It comes from the tendency of our nature to thrust *self* forward into every religious experience. It is so easy to grow complacent over our attainments or exploits, when really they rise up out of our pity or our pride of patronage. In the most industrious moments we have there will sometimes

come a sense of sweet self-congratulation as we think how good and amiable we are.

It is related of the great sculptor Michael Angelo that when at work he wore over his forehead, fastened to his artist's cap, a lighted candle, in order that no shadow of himself might fall on his work! It was a beautiful custom and spoke a more eloquent lesson than he knew! For the shadows that fall on our work—how often they fall from ourselves! It is the quiet work we do because we love the Master that tells on an unconverted soul standing close by; he sees that we love him when each feature of his face constitutes a provocation; for he sees we love God.

“There is no end to the sky, and the stars are everywhere,  
And time is eternity and the here is over there;  
For the common deeds of the common day  
Are ringing bells in the far-away.”

## XX.

## TROUBLE JUST AHEAD.

“TELL US, WHEN SHALL THESE THINGS BE? AND WHAT SHALL BE THE SIGN WHEN ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE FULFILLED?”—

*Mark 13:4.*

THE chapter before us is not easy of interpretation in many of its particulars, because the suggestions of doctrine glide so imperceptibly and fitfully between the predictions of Jerusalem's downfall and the prophecies of the world's end that we cannot always fix their exact application. It appears as if it might be as well on the present occasion to occupy ourselves with what is plain and practical, and not lose our time in speculation upon what is not certainly revealed.

I. We learn, in the beginning, that Jerusalem was openly announced as doomed to fall before it fell. Some specific incidents were related beforehand which would test the prophetic power of Jesus Christ there at once, and put within reach of his disciples a confutation or a confirmation of his claims. “And as he went out of the temple one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.”

It hardly needs to be stated, for the whole mat-

ter is so familiar, that the predictions of this city's overthrow showed that our Lord spoke with a perfect knowledge of the events he mentioned as coming on the earth. The site of that old town is a well-known fact; no one thinks of disputing the locality. The historic books of the Jews tell how Jerusalem was overthrown by the Romans. Any one can ask and answer whether the stones are large, whether they are in position or not. The city lies "on heaps." Mt. Zion is "ploughed." The temple is gone. Those vast walls are scattered. Some few stones of prodigious size yet remain in what were the foundations of the edifices and in the cavernous substructions underground. No one can pass out of the modern Jaffa gate and push on around along the declivity of Zion till he enters again the gate of Stephen without unconsciously saying to himself, "See what manner of stones!"

II. We learn next, as we continue to read the verses, that it is lawful to inquire for the time of fulfilment of Scriptural prophecy. It is not right to attempt to set it, but if it can be ascertained, so much the better for our understanding, and in that direction our duty lies. "And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?"

No one can look upon that most interesting picture suggested here, of Jesus sitting tranquilly among his eager disciples and answering their ques-

tions concerning the future, and draw any other inference than that of the Master's full consent to their curiosity. On the contrary, he tells them most important facts concerning the great times coming.

It is absurd to say, just because some persons have uttered wild things and confounded the frightened people with a storm of words without knowledge, that no one is permitted to study prophecy. What does the apostle John say? "Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and that keep those things which are written therein, for the time is at hand."

III. We learn also just here that there will be one special token of the world's end which will not fail: "the gospel must first be published among all nations." Very carefully chosen is this phraseology. We are not told here that all nations are to be converted by the gospel before the true Christ shall come again, but that they are all to hear it. It would seem as if it could not be a difficult thing to decide so evident a fact as this assumes whenever it should occur. Most of us would no doubt be surprised to learn how many of the nations on the face of the earth have really already heard the tidings of salvation, and it is not impossible that the joyous moment is very nigh. It is time certainly to be thoughtful.

It is within the memory of almost all of us that the fixed, and with some good old men the stereotyped, prayer for monthly concert for many a year was that God would open China to the gospel and

break down the barriers in Japan. Now there is in most of the world nothing in the way except the hardness of men's hearts. Growth has been made in evangelizing effort that startles us when we think of it. Lately, the conversion of a nation in a day, as once seemed to be the case in Madagascar, has come to appear less and less strange. Spiritual uprisings of whole peoples at a time have been recorded in our generation.

IV. We learn also that when the end of the world draws nigh it will be heralded and accompanied with most dire convulsions and troubles: "For in those days shall be affliction such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be. And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days."

It cannot be stated precisely what is intended in these awful sentences of prediction. Families are to be broken up by treachery among the members; nations are to be disrupted by wars and insurrections; the solid earth will shake, and the mountains and islands will be moved out of their places; the world will stagger like a drunken man; there will be distress and wrath, and the sea and the waves will be roaring; and men's hearts will be failing them with fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. (Luke 21:25.) The descriptions of the great day of the Lord are the strangest and the strongest in the Bible: the sun will be black and the stars will fall out of the



sky; the heavens will depart as a scroll (Isa. 34:4); then there shall be nothing between us and the face of God. (Rev. 6:12-17.)

How much of all this is figurative and how much is literal no one can tell. It is enough for us to know that the day of judgment will afford no proper time for tranquil thinking, for believing in a Saviour, for saving repentance of one's sins.

V. So we are ready for our final lesson from the passage: Men need to prepare for such a day as this before it shall prove to be too late. It is easy for us to see now the relevancy of what has been said by the royal preacher (Prov. 22:3), "A prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself." There is but one refuge for any human soul: Christ is our hiding-place; he will preserve us from trouble. (Psa. 32:7.) If we believe in him we are safe.

It is revealed in the Scriptures that the coming of our Lord to judge the world will find some men in a condition of apathy and listlessness. They will be eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. (Matt. 24:37-39.) They will be buying and selling, planting and building, as they were in Lot's time. (Luke 17:28-30.) Better for us, who are studying to know God's will this impressive hour, to call on the Lord at once and be secure in him. For it is also revealed in the Scriptures that those who are the true children of God will be glad when they see all these awful wonders begin to arrive. So Jesus says, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh."

“ We picture death as coming to destroy; let us rather picture Christ as coming to save. We think of death as ending; let us rather think of life as beginning, and that more abundantly. We think of losing; let us think of gaining. We think of parting; let us think of meeting. We think of going away; let us think of arriving. And as the voice of death whispers, ‘ You must go from earth,’ let us hear the voice of Christ saying, ‘ You are but coming to me.’ ” These were the bright words of Norman McLeod; and those of Richard Baxter were like them, only more full of longing still: “ Haste, O my Saviour, the time of thy return! Delay not, lest the living give up hope. Oh, hasten that great resurrection-day when the seed thou sowedst corruptible shall come forth incorruptible, and the graves that retain but dust shall return their glorious ones, thy destined Bride ! ”

## XXI.

## OUR ABSENT LORD.

“FOR THE SON OF MAN IS AS A MAN TAKING A FAR JOURNEY, WHO LEFT HIS HOUSE AND GAVE AUTHORITY TO HIS SERVANTS, AND TO EVERY MAN HIS WORK, AND COMMANDED THE PORTER TO WATCH.”—*Mark 13:34.*

No one can read the New Testament without perceiving that the calls of divine grace are persistent and unceremonious, as if there might be danger in the delay of acceptance. Sinners are urged to immediate repentance of their sins before it is too late to avail for their salvation. Haste is becoming necessary with each passing moment; the crisis is at hand.

What crisis? When the texts are grouped together it ought to be apparent to every one that there are three motives addressed by three formulas of warning, and not just one alone. The ungodly man is told that *his time of spiritual probation may be short*—he may die: “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work nor device nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest;” that *his chance of divine help may be forfeited*—the Holy Ghost may withdraw: “And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man;” that *his career may be cut short by the abrupt end of the world*—Christ may come to judgment: “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the

day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." These three—death, reprobation, and the second advent—are often confounded in pulpit appeals and parental admonitions which it is hoped will incite to obedience and lead perishing souls into new life. But many of the verses are not by any possibility of fair interpretation to be discharged of meaning by referring them to the mere risk of one's dying at an unforeseen date, and so losing his opportunity. Some men are lost before they die: "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." And some women too: "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." Some persons are not going to die at all: "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." Some will go to heaven without ever having been buried: "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

The parable, which pictures our divine Redeemer as planning to revisit this world of ours, cannot be discharged of its meaning by a reference to the ordinary risks of human mortality. Its theme is not man's dying, but Christ's coming.

Doubtless we shall be able to reach the whole significance of its teaching to us better by an orderly rehearsal of the lessons to be learned from it under careful exposition.

I. To begin with, Christ is represented as a householder on a journey with the evident purpose of returning: "For the Son of man is as a man

taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch."

1. It is not fair to look petulantly upon Jesus as a mere "absentee" lord of the soil. We must not say jealous things about his "reaping where he has not sown." For he made this world; he has ransomed the race; he has suffered wonderfully to save souls; and he rightly owns what he has purchased.

2. It must be remembered that Christ went away for a most gracious purpose in behalf of his people: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." He makes the point explicitly in order to lift the depressed spirits of his followers. The presence and official work of the Third Person of the Trinity would at this moment be more to their advantage than that of the Second. The Comforter would do more for them than he could. Moreover, he was personally needed elsewhere in their behalf. He was going away to "prepare a place" for them; he would "come again."

3. It is better to wait and pray for his return than to cavil at his departure.

"Coming! coming! Oh, is it so?

Do we hear the sound of thy chariot wheels?

Saviour, all else that we long to know

We will leave till thy wiser love reveals.

"The hours pass slowly; the morning chime

Is long in sounding. But let us wait;

Soon we shall come to the end of time

And see the Lord at the golden gate."

II. To every one "our absent Lord" has given his own work to do: "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even or at midnight or at the cock-crowing or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."

1. There is a work to be wrought on ourselves. Our bodies are to be exercised and skilled for service: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Our minds are to be developed and embellished for God's praise. One of our Lord's parables spoken on this very occasion has actually added to our language the new word "talents" as signifying intellectual gifts. Our souls are to be sanctified wholly: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. There is also a work to be wrought upon others and for others. The poor are to be succored, the weak to be strengthened, the ignorant to be taught, the sorrowful to be comforted. This is the significance of that other parable our Lord spoke on this same occasion. He declares that not doing is to be reckoned as well as doing, and that everything is to be reckoned as "unto me" or "not unto me."

3. There is another work to be wrought for God's glory. "Man's chief end is to glorify God

and to enjoy him for ever." Our whole life is to be consecrated to this, even down to the particulars of eating and drinking. "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." We cannot increase God's "inherent" glory, but we can augment his "declarative" glory. That is to say, we cannot bring him more glory, but we can show the glory he has. That is what the third parable our Lord gave must mean: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom." The virgins were expected to swell the brilliant train of the bridegroom and make the night shine with their torches as the procession drew near. They did not make his marriage splendid, but they lit up the splendor it had.

III. Our "absent Lord" is surely coming back again to this world. This is the subject of the whole parable. Every sentence in it is meant to teach and impress that fact.

1. He predicted his second advent only a few days before in the plainest words: "Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I."

The language Jesus used in this remembered declaration is not at all figurative; it all goes together as a statement of fact. He said, literally, he would send the Comforter, and the Holy Spirit came in person on the Day of Pentecost. And just

as literally did he say he would himself return at the appointed time.

2. He asseverated the certainty and solemnity of his own promise, as if he foresaw some would deny or doubt it: "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away." This was indorsing the covenant engagement by a new oath; "because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself." Christ was the "Word," and so what he said would stand for ever, when the grass should wither and the flower should fade.

3. He left behind him vivid descriptions of the momentous day on which he should arrive: "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory." In these words, however, he does little more than repeat the vigorous language of the Old Testament prophet: "I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set and the books were opened." Our Lord makes a reference to this ancient prediction and accompanies it with vivid details.

4. He even sent back word from heaven by an



angel to say this. While the disciples wistfully stood gazing after the ascending Redeemer, there suddenly appeared two messengers from Jesus himself with a gracious rebuke for their forgetfulness of his promise and a quick renewal of it: "And while they looked steadfastly towards heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." It should be "this same Jesus" who should come back, and he should come "in like manner" as they had seen him depart. Is it possible that any Christian now, after all this, should doubt that our Saviour will be on earth again by-and-by?

IV. The exact hour in which "our absent Lord" will arrive is not announced: "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is."

1. Jesus asserted that he did not know it himself. The disciples once asked him about this: "And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ: and shall deceive many.

And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." Luke records the impression made by this conversation more fully, as he commences the book of the Acts: "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power."

Thus Jesus taught plainly that God the Father had kept this one secret in his own solemn reserve. He may have meant that in his subordinate office as the anointed Christ he had not been made acquainted with this specific date; or that he was not commissioned to declare it as part of his gospel message, it being unknown to the plan; or that, in assuming human nature as the Son of man, his divine omniscience was limited in this and like particulars. It is enough for us to understand that here is a decided rebuff for the modern curiosity which assumes to fix times and seasons that Jesus himself said had not been revealed to him.

2. But our Saviour declares that his coming might be looked for at any moment, morning or midnight, evening or cock-crowing. It would assuredly be sudden. The figure is employed more than once in the Scriptures of "a thief in the night." Peter in his Epistle only quotes our Lord's own language: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the

heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

3. Moreover, Christ told his disciples that there would be tokens of the nearness of this great day by which it might be recognized when it should be close at hand: "Now learn a parable of the fig-tree. When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: so ye, in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors." These signs would be as clearly discerned as shoots on fig-trees in the opening summer. He mentioned some of them explicitly: "And there shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." We may admit that "wars and rumors of wars," earthquakes, famines, falling stars, and pestilences, together with "great signs in heaven and earth," are alarming disclosures; but will any one doubt that such phenomena are conspicuous at least?

4. So Jesus insisted that men were bound to be wise in noting these signs and be ready. People who could shrewdly and correctly predict changes in the weather just by observing the color of the sky, so as to say that one day would be fair and another

would be foul, our Saviour called "hypocrites" if they could not with equal alertness of skill "discern the signs of the times."

V. The greatest peril is that, when "our absent Lord" comes, men will be taken unawares: "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants and to eat and drink with the drunken, the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

1. The instinctive tendency of the human heart is to procrastinate in the performance of religious work. So, when the reckoning is demanded, souls are surprised. If all the good resolutions that have been made by members of the church of God had been executed in their due time, the millennial glory would long ago have gleamed on every hill and shone in every valley.

2. Time glides mysteriously on with no reference to daring delay. The grave, like the horse-leech's daughter, cries, Give, give! and damnation slumbereth not; but men sleep clear up to the edge of divine judgment. They did in Noah's time, and in Lot's, when a less catastrophe was at hand; and so it will be when the Son of man is revealed.

3. Christians ought to hold in memory the repeated admonitions they have received. Walter Scott wrote on his dial-plate the two Greek words

which mean "the night cometh," so that he might keep eternity in mind whenever he saw the hours of time flitting by. Evidently the apostle Paul feels that he has the right to press peculiarly pertinent and solemn appeals upon those who had enjoyed the advantage of such long instruction.

4. There is no second chance offered after the first is lost. When Christ comes foolish virgins will have no time to run for oil to pour into their lightless lamps. A forfeited life cannot be allowed any opportunity for retrieval. Where the tree falls, north or south, there it must lie, whether the full fruit has been ripened on its branches or not.

VI. The final counsel left behind him by "our absent Lord" is for all to watch: "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

1. Christ's coming would seem to be the highest anticipation for true believers. When he appears, saints will appear with him in glory. This is the "blessed hope" of the church along the ages: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

2. It might clear an inquirer's experience to think of this coming of Jesus. Does one love to "watch" for him? In the autobiography of Frances Ridley Havergal we are told of the years during which she sought sadly for peace at the cross. At

last one of her teachers put this question to her: "Why cannot you trust yourself to your Saviour at once? Supposing that now, at this moment, Christ were to come in the clouds of heaven and take up his redeemed, could you not trust him? Would not his call, his promise, be enough for you? Could you not commit your soul to him, to your Saviour, Jesus?" This lifted the cloud; she tells the story herself: "Then came a flash of hope across me which made me feel literally breathless. I remember how my heart beat. 'I *could* surely,' was my response; and I left her suddenly and ran away up stairs to think it out. I flung myself on my knees in my room and strove to realize the sudden hope. I was very happy at last. I could commit my soul to Jesus. I did not, and need not, fear his coming. I could trust him with my all for eternity. It was so utterly new to have any bright thoughts about religion that I could hardly believe it could be so, that I had really gained such a step. Then and there I committed my soul to the Saviour, I do not mean to say without *any* trembling or fear, but I did—and earth and heaven seemed bright from that moment—*I did trust the Lord Jesus.*"

## XXII.

## A WOMAN'S MEMORIAL.

"SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD."—*Mark* 14:8.

WHILE Jesus was at Bethany, the guest of a wealthy man named Simon, and was one day sitting at meat, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, came behind him and suddenly poured costly ointment upon his head.

Concerning this action a difference of opinion instantly arose among the disciples. Complaint was made as to the pecuniary extravagance of her offering. The perfume was known to be unusually expensive, and "some" of those who commented seemed to think the price of it would better have been devoted to helping the poor in that forlorn village.

Jesus, however, at once took up the defence of the woman. He applauded her behavior as growing out of her exceeding love. He even went so far as to declare that her name would be handed down with honorable commendation to all ages just for this affectionate devotion.

So suggestive a discussion, ending with so extraordinary an encomium, cannot fail to have in it some excellent lessons for us all. It well exhibits in a single illustration the appropriateness, the motive, the measure, and the reward of Christian zeal.

I. We start out with a recognition, on our part, of a settled rule of activity. All of Christ's friends are expected to do something for him.

1. Work and sacrifice are not inconsistent with even the highest spirituality. For this is the same Mary whose other story is so familiar to us all. She was the one who used to sit at Jesus' feet in all the serene quiet of communion with her Lord; yet now who would say that Mary at the Master's head might not be as fine a theme for the artist's pencil? Piety is practical, and practical piety is not the less picturesque and attractive because it has in such an instance become demonstrative.

2. Our Lord always needed help while he was on the earth. There were rich women among those whom he had aided, at whose generous hands he received money. And his cause needs help now. It may seem very sweet to sit still and sing and pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done." But how long is it going to be before the kingdom will come unless more of the Lord's will is done on the earth than some of his people are doing?

3. It is a mere temptation of the devil to assert that one's work for Jesus Christ is vitiated by the full gladness a loving soul feels in it. Some timid and self-distrustful believers are stumbled by the fear that their sacrifices for our blessed Master are meritless because they enjoy making them. There used to be rehearsed an old legend of an aged prophetess passing through a crowd with a censer of fire in one hand and a pitcher of water in the other. Being asked why she carried so singular a burden,



she replied, "This fire is to burn heaven with, and this water is to quench hell with; so that men may hereafter serve God without desire for reward or fear of retribution." Such a speech may appear becoming for a mere devotee's utterance, but there is no warrant for anything like it in the Bible. Heaven is offered for our encouragement in zeal. Hell is often exhibited that it might be feared.

II. Next to this the story of the alabaster-box suggests a lesson concerning the motive which underlies all true Christian activity.

1. In the case of this woman, we are told that her action grew out of her grateful affection for her Lord. Every gesture shows her tenderness; she wiped his very feet with her own hair. This was what gave her offering its supreme value. A box of expensive perfume is worth no more in coin because one of God's poverty-stricken creatures furnishes it for the Redeemer's head. Indeed, Christ was never in the habit of estimating and registering conduct in that way. Simon's banquet on this occasion, we cannot doubt, cost more than Mary's ointment; but we might never have heard of the feast if the alabaster-box had not been broken.

2. Herein lies the principle which has for all ages the widest application. It is not so much what we do for our Saviour, nor the way in which we do it, as it is the feeling which prompts us in the doing of anything, that receives his welcome. It is the affection pervading the zeal which renders the zeal precious. There will be found a fresh

illustration in the other instance recorded of a woman who did for Jesus an act quite similar to this, and in her turn received extraordinary approval. "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

3. It may as well be expected that the kindness which proceeds from pure love will sometimes meet with misconstruction. Those who look upon a zeal far beyond their own in disinterested affection will frequently be overheard to pass uncharitable mis-judgments upon it. "And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her." Now in this is found a very interesting comment upon what is called "the speech of people." For on comparing one gospel with another we discover that the "some" were but one person, and that it was only Judas Iscariot after all, on this occasion, who took the lead in assigning wrong motives to the woman, and he did not so much care for the poor as he did for his own bag of treasure. This churlishness and jealousy furnishes a new illustration of weak human nature. We ought not to regard it. No matter how much our humble endeavors to honor our Lord Jesus may be derided, it will be helpful to remember they are fully appreciated by him.

4. This is the principle which uplifts and enno-

bles even commonplace zeal. When true, honest love is the motive, do we not all agree that it is slight ministrations more than great conspicuous efforts which touch the heart of one who receives them? The more unnoticed to every eye except ours, the more dear are the glances of tenderness we receive. It is the delicacy, not the bulk, of the kindness which constitutes its charm. Just to surprise one of our devoted friends in an unobtrusive act of generosity gives us more heartfelt gratification than to get from his hand in public an expected gift of even a hundred-fold cost.

5. Moreover, it is just this motive which, above all others, can render a soul alert in discovering the delicate and right thing to do. Some persons seem to have an instinct in choosing gifts, in speaking a word of welcome or of praise; they always appear graceful in their attentions and wonderfully alert in finding out the precise act to evidence their affectionate feeling. Some kind of strange spiritual penetration led this woman to come in at the opportune instant and do an act which would have been pronounced bold by any one else. Our divine Lord caught the significance of her peculiar gift: "She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body for the burying." Her heart had interpreted to her his present crisis. It was this foresight of his coming death that constituted the unction a sacrament, so that Jesus could accept it without suspicion or shame. Alford on this passage says, "I can hardly think that our Lord would have said this unless there had been in

Mary's mind a distinct reference to his burial in doing the act; all the company surely knew well that his death by crucifixion was near at hand. Can we suppose one who so closely observed his words as Mary not to have been possessed with the thought of that which was about to happen?" This may be true; but we cannot help thinking that the woman knew, out of her great love, what was appropriate under the circumstances. Genuine affection is educating and refining; and many a Christian, who a little while before wondered how he might be useful ever at all, finds himself suddenly leading the rest in his sweet, gentle achievements.

III. In the next place, there is a lesson in this story concerning the measure of Christian zeal. It is contained in the simple text chosen for our present comment: "She hath done what she could."

1. It would not be fair to underrate what this woman did do under the circumstances. There was something that seemed a little like extravagance in her lavish expenditure. For the money value of her offering was, according to the estimate pronounced upon it there on the spot by those who knew, not far from fifty dollars. We are to take into account her previous history and characteristics. Of this alabaster-box it needs to be remarked that it might more properly have been called a phial or a jar. It was one of those small vessels, rare, luxurious, and costly, wont in such days to be sought and cherished by silly and vain girls, containing curiously perfumed cosmetics used by Orientals for meretricious toilets. She showed not

only her regard for Jesus, who had given her a new heart, by bringing to him the adornment she had once coveted for herself, but she also evidenced her willingness and zeal in surrendering what was simply worldly for her own use, and perhaps wicked in its employment as an allurement to wrong.

2. The main suggestion, however, is full of comfort, for it affords us the opportunity of settling for once and for ever the principle that it is the willing heart which Christ accepts. The language employed in the approval is more significant than at first one would think. In the original word and idiom there is the implication of a far-reaching\* exhaustiveness in her generosity; literally rendered it would read, "She hath done what she *hath*." That is to say, she did as much as her entire ability permitted; she used all she possessed—all the wealth she had, all the education she had, all the ingenuity she had, all the opportunity she had, all the penetration she had, all the courage she had—all the possibilities she had of any sort. This woman was commended because she did everything within her power to do in order to manifest her loyal affection for Jesus her Master. The comfort in such an announcement is easy to attain. Not every one is gifted with the talents of all those we long to imitate. But we ought to be satisfied when we feel that Jesus is saying of us that we are doing what we can. Most pathetic are those quiet comments often made at one of our frequent funerals: "She was not a genius, but she kept up a noble zeal of thoughtful sagacity; she was not wealthy,

but she gave always what cost her some sacrifice; she was not conspicuous, but there are poor people who will miss her much when the winter comes: she did what she could." There is great help in remembering that this was in substance what the Saviour said concerning this forlorn woman.

3. Still it would not be fair to dismiss the record without one caution. This whole incident will be most shamefully abused and ruinously perverted if it be turned away from its legitimate employment, and in that way forced to favor sinful ease or listless indulgence. It relaxes nothing; really, it bids us do more and more. Shifting the claim from mere obligation of duty, and passing it over to affectionateness of inexhaustible love for God and man, only makes the demand sharper. Before any modern Christian can solace his soul with saying, "I have actually done what I could," he must make himself sure that all has been done that could be done. The legend upon the sepulchre of Adam Clarke is a burning candle with the motto, "I am consumed away for another."

4. Hence the counsel leads us straight to self-examination. It is possible there may be as much in a widow's mite as in a millionaire's fortune; that comes out in the end of the twelfth chapter, which we do well to recall. Before either the widow or the rich man is permitted to cry out, "I have done what I could," the widow must put in her mite and the rich man must put in the proper proportion of his fortune. It is high time that believers began to measure their benefactions by the benefits they

receive. It might be a salutary exercise always to drop our benevolent contributions in the plate with the same hand which we use when we take the bread and wine at the sacrament of Communion.

IV. The final lesson of this story is concerning the reward of Christian zeal. Higher encomium was never pronounced than that which this woman received from the Master: "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

1. It was Jesus that gave the approval. Set that over against the fault-finding of Judas! If we do our duty, we have a right to appeal away from anybody who carps. When Christ justifies, who is he that condemns? Some of us have read of the ancient classic orator who, having no favor in the theatre, went into the temple and gestured before the statues of the gods; he said they better understood him. Thus may maligned believers retire from the world that misjudges them and comfort themselves with Jesus' recognition.

2. Jesus said this woman should be remembered very widely—wherever the gospel should go. Men know what is good and fine when they see it, and they stand ready to commend it. Even Lord Byron had wit enough to see that

"The drying up a single tear has more  
Of honest fame than shedding seas of gore."

Some of the grandest lives in history have had only little show to make. Care-burdened women, inva-

lids on couches, ill-clad and ill-fed sons of toil, maid-servants, man-servants, apprentices, and hirelings with few unoccupied hours, timid hearts, uneducated minds, sailors kept on ships, soldiers held in garrison—these, with only a poor chance, have done such service that the world remembers them with its widest renown.

3. It was just this parable of Jesus' which became Mary's memorial. A word sometimes lasts longer than a marble slab. We must learn to be content with the approval of God and our own consciences. Nothing will ever be forgotten that is worth a record in God's book. Those who die in the Lord will find their works follow them, and the worthy fame remains behind: "The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot." Only we are to recollect that love alone gives character and value to all zeal. That was a most suggestive remark of old Thomas à Kempis: "He doeth much who loveth much, and he also doeth much who doeth well."



## XXIII.

## SACRAMENTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

“AND AS THEY DID EAT JESUS TOOK BREAD, AND BLESSED AND  
BRAKE IT, AND GAVE IT TO THEM, AND SAID, TAKE, EAT: THIS  
IS MY BODY.”—*Mark 14:22.*

IN order that there should be no occasion for the reproach to be raised against him, our Lord chose the time, occasion, and general ceremonies of the Passover for the basis of the new institution of a festival for use in the New Testament church. This is the reason why the date is affixed as “the first day of unleavened bread.” And this is the explanation of the apostle’s announcement, “Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us.” The Saviour chose this form of procedure that he might show the identity of the two dispensations at once.

The next step in the story of Mark, as he pictures the preparation made, relates the incident of the disciples’ application to a Jerusalem stranger for hospitality. The feast itself had to be observed in the city; but Jesus found his entertainment during most of this final week among the poor friends he had in a neighboring village. Bethany and Bethphage are mentioned in the Talmud with emphatic honor, because in their deepest poverty they were celebrated for the hospitality they showed to the homeless pilgrims. But our Lord seems to have wished to be with his disciples only, on this occa-

sion, rather than with generous friends outside of the walls. Who this "goodman of the house" was, from whom he had now to ask the somewhat extensive accommodations for his company of thirteen persons, we are not informed.

But here we may learn how surely the Lord Jesus knows who loves him and foresees who will receive him. The disciples could not be of any help in finding a place by themselves; but they had lately learned that their divine Master had a way of recognizing those with whom he understood he would be welcome to make his abode.

We may notice also the quaint form of instruction employed here; for it well illustrates two things at once: the foreknowledge of Jesus in some things, and the willingness of his perhaps secret followers. Suppose it had happened that in all this afternoon no man "bearing a pitcher of water" had appeared, what would the disciples have concluded? Or suppose they had found such a man, but that he had replied he had no guest-chamber? They must have noted the risk, and yet we see no sign of any hesitation in their obedience. They had already been put to a somewhat similar test once before, when he was going to ride in triumph into Jerusalem on a beast they were sent to procure.

A choice lesson for all Christians might be learned from the unquestioning acquiescence of these men. They could not know just where to go in their search for a room; but they did know enough to start in their search for the man with a

pitcher. They obeyed as far as they understood, and so were taught step by step. This was always the rule of Christ: obey first, and find out afterwards: "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me." The taking of the yoke was put before the learning about the duty; then a willing spirit would speedily find the path opening just ahead. No matter how mysterious divine providences are to human eyes, revelations of divine purpose always come in the line of a filial obedience. If a man will only begin to do God's will as far on as he perceives what it is, he will soon know all he needs to know of the different doctrines that lie before him, although yet undisclosed.

But we leave all this now; for our better concern is with the institution which was at that time given to believers for all the ages.

The old word "sacrament" is not a felicitous one at the best; it comes almost directly from the Latin language, and was employed by the Roman soldiers to describe their martial oath; that is to say, the engagement in which they swore to be faithful to their leader and loyal to their Government. As now used by the churches it has much the same meaning, although it has passed from a secular to a spiritual application. It is deemed to be the symbolic act by which is shown our allegiance to an unseen commander, Jesus, the Captain of our salvation.

I. Let us seek a few suggestions concerning sacraments in general; then we can notice that which is specially under our present study in the

chapter. Only two are recognized now, Baptism and Communion.

I. Concerning these I remark, first, that they do not receive any authority nor derive any efficacy nor confer any benefits whatever from their inherent or intrinsic force as religious ceremonies.

In Baptism the element is water, and it is nothing more nor less than water. It would be no better for having come from the Jordan, no holier for having been prayed over by a priest in a dead language.

In the Communion the elements are bread and wine. The bread our Lord took and brake was just the common bread set before him at the usual Passover feast. Our bread is no worse because it has been raised or leavened, nor would it be any more sacred if it had been fashioned in the form of a thin wafer. The wine which our Lord poured out, giving thanks, was what he found on the table. Ours is no more strengthening because it may be stronger, nor would it be spoiled by being absolutely fresh from the grapes. What we want is plain bread and wine.

Nor are the effects mystic or miraculous. Baptism does not wash away sin really, though it signifies washing. The Lord's Supper never makes us actually feed upon Christ, though it symbolizes the satisfaction of a hungry soul. In themselves the ordinances are simply signs.

Does any one ask how we know this? The answer is easily brought from the history. Simon Magus was surely baptized; yet the apostle in so

many words told him he was still "in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity." There is every reason to believe that those apostates, Her-mogenes, Philetus, and Hymenæus, were often at "the breaking of bread," and yet Paul tells us he had "delivered them to Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme." Ordinances did them no good.

In truth, these are only forms. They do not cause or effect regeneration; they are only the symbols of it. They are to believers in the New Testament what the rainbow is in the Old. That beautiful arch in the heavens reminds of the past and brings promise for the future; but in itself it is nothing more than the refraction and reflection of light in the raindrops. It never had any power to prevent a deluge in these centuries long gone, although it is set to show that God intends to prevent one from coming again; it does not make the Almighty merciful, but it shows he is so. In like manner the ordinances do not effectually make us friends of Jesus Christ nor make him ours; but they shine out as signs to show we are reconciled and are at one with each other. Rightly used, such symbols give comfort, but not inherently.

2. So I remark again that these sacraments do not take their authority or efficacy from any connection with the administrator.

As they are now employed in all branches of the church, no truly educated believer desires to receive them at the hands of any one save those who are set apart in an orderly way to the ministry. But if the

ordained officer of the congregation should afterwards prove to be only a hypocrite and a sinner, such ordinances themselves would not thereby be invalidated. His baptism would not have to be repeated, nor would private Christians be obnoxious to censure for having partaken of wine poured by his hand, or bread broken, at the celebration of the Supper.

The reasoning which leads to this conclusion is all the more cogent because it is so simple. If the minister's moral qualities come into our estimate of the validity of his official work, where shall an anxious scrutiny be permitted to rest? How can we ever know certainly that we are safe? Who knows the real character of any human being? A man must have some measure of error in him as long as he is mortal and un sanctified; and where is toleration of imperfection to end? We must remember that these ordinances are seals; and if the great seal of the realm be applied to any parchment of our rights by a commissioned representative of the crown, it will stand, no matter if the wicked creature shall afterwards be thrown into a dungeon for his crimes.

3. For, let me remark again, these sacraments derive all the efficacy and authority they possess from their institution by Christ.

“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you;” these are the words of the inspired apostle on this head. No more proof needs to be adduced. Tradition has handed them down to us, that is true; but all the tradition we

acknowledge took them from only one hand, that of our divine Lord. It is well known that the so-called Catholic Church numbers five more sacraments than the Protestant to which we belong. But Jesus Christ gave to believers only two; any beyond these have a very short and low pedigree. He instituted Baptism, and he turned the Passover into the Supper which bears his own name.

Furthermore, in order to give value to these ordinances he sanctioned them by the gift of the Holy Ghost to pervade and enliven them. Through the presence of this Comforter, the Third Person of this Adorable Trinity, "the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers." By this Spirit they are made efficacious.

II. We come now, leaving such general considerations, to examine more particularly the second one of the sacraments, the institution of which forms the theme to be taught and studied to-day. The Communion ordinance, like the Passover, was meant to be "a memorial for all generations." It is an emblematic festival, the object of which is to awake emotion, to stimulate hope and love, by reminding us of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which he made atonement for our sins. It addresses the imagination, the intellect, and the heart, all at once.

1. As addressed to the imagination, it is an exhibition and furnishes a picture. We see before us bread and wine; the one is broken and the other poured out; the one is eaten and the other is drunk. We thus "show the Lord's death till he come."

And we partake of these elements to prove we appropriate the benefits of what the Saviour did in our behalf.

Hence we understand at once what is the proper meditation for an earnest Christian at the table. Vividly conceiving the events of this Redeemer's suffering, we try to keep saying to ourselves, "All this is for me; bread for me, wine for me; so the life is for me and the covenant is for me; and I take it now with a reverent and joyous faith."

2. As addressed to the intellect next, this festival is an argument and offers a powerful proof. Few men are there who can honestly say they have always been equally undisturbed by doubts. It is difficult to walk by faith without sight. Sometimes the temptations of Satan are so severe that the mind becomes dull and half bewildered. The whole fabric of Christianity seems to be shaking and trembling, as the temple did in Isaiah's vision, when even "the posts of the door moved, and the house was filled with smoke." What if everything should prove to have been a fable? What if Jesus Christ never lived after all?

Just there this feast comes in as a commonplace fact. For these hundreds of years it has been celebrated in the same way and with the same purpose. Following it up along the lines of history, we come directly to the story of our Lord's crucifixion. If Jesus lived, labored, preached, wrought miracles, died on the cross, as this ceremony is sure to declare wherever one finds it, then Christianity is true. The entire feast is traced to the apostles, and they



tell us they received it from the Lord Jesus Christ as they delivered it unto us. If now we grow confused, we at once ask the question, What started this ceremony all over the world through the ages? Where did the Lord's Supper come from? Thus the argument becomes cogent all the more because of its availableness with plain people. If there never was any Declaration of Independence, where did the celebration of the Fourth of July have its beginning? If there never was a Guy Fawkes conspiracy, how did children first learn to talk about the "guys" of the "fifth of November"? Just so we reason, if Jesus was never crucified, who invented Communion?

3. Finally, as addressed to the heart, this ordinance is a stimulus and incites us to zeal. It arouses the Christian's affectionate nature, it kindles his fervors, it inflames his emotion. This it does in two ways: by the experience it offers and the prospect it shows.

The experience it offers is supremely spiritual. We come into a Prince's banqueting-house, and his banner over us is love. We think a great deal; we say nothing. Our covenant is like that of a bride made at the marriage altar; it does not need the words of a pledge; the vow is to be found more in the hand that holds a hand and is still.

The prospect this feast shows is spiritual also. For the Supper is a type as well as a memorial; it looks forward as well as backward. It seems to open the gates of pearl and permit us to gain glimpses of the radiant light shining at the mar-

riage supper of the Lamb. We find ourselves in the companionship of the redeemed in heaven as well as on earth. The good and the great of all ages are around us even now. And we think of the day coming soon when we shall reach our rest above.

It is in the light of such considerations as these that we estimate the guilt of some who wilfully neglect this ordinance even at the moment when they claim covenant mercies as the children of God. It is like a soldier's refusal to stand by his colors while the entire army is taking the sacramental oath on the eve of a critical battle.

It is in this light also that we estimate the mistake of some of God's dear children who think they can be perfectly safe without openly confessing their Lord. Jesus Christ once said, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." If one's soul is wholly committed on the Lord's side, why does he not put his life there also? Who will be content as a bride without the ceremony of marriage giving the name and honor?

## XXIV.

## A TRAITOR'S KISS IN GETHSEMANE.

“AND HE THAT BETRAYED HIM HAD GIVEN THEM A TOKEN, SAYING, WHOMSOEVER I SHALL KISS, THAT SAME IS HE; TAKE HIM, AND LEAD HIM AWAY SAFELY.”—*Mark* 14:44.

IMMEDIATELY after Jesus had concluded the administration of what we now call the Lord's Supper, and had offered his intercessory prayer for the disciples and the church at large, he led the little band that followed him across the gully of the brook Kidron. Almost at once, at the rounding up of the hill, he entered the small inclosure which they knew had become familiar to him as a place of meditation and prayer to his Father. He soon lapsed into silence and waited for the scenes of his betrayal to be moved on at the will that was higher than his own. “And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here while I shall pray.”

It is a striking fact that so many of the localities in which the incidents of our Saviour's life are commemorated had names of such deep significance, by which they are known even now. There was Bethlehem, for the earliest example; it means “house of bread;” and there he was born who said, I am “the true bread from heaven.” Then there was Nazareth, the word meaning the “town of branches;” and in this village he was reared of

whom the prophet had declared: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." The name Gethsemane means "an oil press;" and here it was that Jesus found the "press" he was to tread alone in his conflict at last.

1. Very mute is the witness that this old world bears of its interest in the gospel of redemption. "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

Not many years ago, on the occasion of our first visit to Jerusalem, a company of us—American tourists all—planned to spend a few hours of the Lord's day in a very familiar religious service inside of the traditional place which the Latins have fenced about as being upon the exact site of the Garden of Gethsemane. It is perhaps sixty steps square, as one would pace it, surrounded by a high white wall on every side, pierced for an iron door. An old monk keeps it, and generally a stranger finds no difficulty in obtaining access to it at any time.

At four o'clock we quietly took our way out as usual by St. Stephen's Gate, following the steep path down across the stone bridge, over the dry gully where perhaps once was the little Kidron. We entered the inclosure and filed along through some straight paths separated by slender picket fences, until quite in the back part we came to some long benches of stone under the shadow of the wall nearest the city.

Upon and before these we sat, a goodly gath-

ering of twenty souls. In simple-hearted respect for each other, we preserved a decorous silence while we read for ourselves the story of Jesus' agony.

Before a great while the aged guide came towards us, calling attention to the fact that a stone pavement, made of large rough slabs, had been laid upon the exact track which the traitor Judas took as he advanced to salute his Master with his hypocritical kiss. This flagged way was upon the outside of the garden wall, crossing one end of it nearly the entire distance. It was distinguished in its infancy, not only by this exclusion from the sacred precinct, but by the name the monks had given it—the *terra damnata*, or the "accursed spot" of the betrayal.

2. It is always a fine compliment to any man's likeness to Jesus when his enemies admit that the surest place in which to find him, even for his arrest, is that where he is habituated to go for his prayers. "And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples. Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons."

It grew very vivid to our imagination now. We could easily seem to see the procession of torches and lanterns as the priests and Pharisees and soldiers must have moved along beneath the olive-trees under the full Passover moon. They perhaps thought that he would hide himself somewhere in

a rock-crevice or a tomb, and they would have to institute a search. We found there now eight venerable olives of unusual size, rough, hollowed out, gnarled, very old indeed, no doubt; but all they suggested to us was the fine grouping such trees would always have made for a retreat in which to pray; and we imagined our Lord advancing from among them as he confronted the array, Judas in the lead: "And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him and lead him away safely. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, Master; and kissed him."

One swift moment there was in which he stood calmly looking. "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them." In an instant after, his enemies fell backward, cowed and prostrated under the simple weight of his voice. "As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward and fell to the ground."

There was doubtless, in this revelation of himself on the part of Jesus, a disclosure of his moral majesty as a man, his conscious innocence, his dauntless courage, his boldness in an immediate surrender for trial. But beyond that we are not ready to deny that there was also a manifestation of his divine resources of power. He appears to

have meant that they should know beyond a peradventure that his suffering was voluntary, and that he was acting without any constraint in laying down his life, now that his hour had come. Had he willed to resist the ruffians that attacked him, he could have summoned twelve legions of angels for his defence. Nay, he could have openly withstood them with the same omnipotence with which he healed an ugly wound in Malchus' ear, which Simon's rashness had inflicted.

3. And we might as well pause to put the question: If but a look of the Saviour could sweep bigots and soldiers to the dust in headlong confusion, how will wicked men be able to endure the sight of the same face when they shall be compelled to see him whom they have pierced?

It was while we were thinking and talking quite gently there together about the wrestle and the bloody sweat that the question arose whether it could be likely that these very trees, standing in the garden at present, were among those which stood on the spot at that time. The first impulse would be to answer, No. For several of us remembered that Josephus had recorded that Titus, after he conquered the city, issued orders to his soldiers to set the whole suburbs of Jerusalem on fire. This was scarcely forty years after the ascension of Christ; by the same historian the thoroughness of the devastation is announced in language which cannot be misunderstood. He says: "All the trees that grew about the city within a distance of a hundred furlongs had their branches hewn off; the

trees being cut down, the suburbs were stripped naked." Still, these eight monarchs of the garden might have sprouted from the same roots. Even melancholy Job had good notions about trees: "For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth and the stock thereof die in the ground, yet through the scent of water it will bud and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?" It certainly is in evidence that these olives, surely the oldest-looking that any man ever saw, with their dark green foliage silvered only where the slight wind turned up the leaves, have given taxes for their fruit more than twelve hundred years, since the Saracens took the city.

But "man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?" Such a question sent us back thinking of Judas. Now there are in the gospel narrative some very singular forms of expression concerning the ignorance of the other disciples as to this man's treachery. They seem never to understand Jesus when he gives warning about the expected betrayal. It has to be explained afterwards, when they come to think of what he said so clearly, and yet they did not have a suspicion. When Judas arose from the table and went out, John says they concluded Jesus had whispered a word to him about something needed for the feast, and the man had gone after it. And it is likely that not until these disciples saw the ruined creature standing there did



they suspect his awful sin. "And Judas . . . stood with them." This was the announcement of his desperate crime. When that man, standing there now in the white moonlight, should go away, out of the circle of his old associations into his new, they felt that he was for ever lost and doomed, even before he was dead. Perhaps no one of them ever saw a real reprobate before; they all saw one now. So when inspiration raises the question, "Man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?" inspiration also answers concerning this one, "Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place."

4. Alas! how awful must the future "place" of any one be when a pitiful Saviour has to say of him it were better not to be than to be where he is!—"It had been good for that man if he had not been born."

I am sure no one of us who were present that day is ever to forget the hour we spent in Gethsemane. We soon started the precious old hymn "Alas! and did my Saviour bleed?" to the tune "Avon," and sang the verses through to the end, though many a voice faltered in some notes. It seemed just like a Communion season, without bread or wine. Then we closed the meeting with the hymn "Did Christ o'er sinners weep?"

5. That Christian who would live closest to Christ must earliest enter into the sufferings of Christ, before he can hope to receive his share in the glory that shall follow. Gethsemane is the garden to come on in order immediately next to Eden; the garden of the burial is third, and then

Paradise opens its gates as the garden of the Lord.

The old monk leaned over the fence, attentively regarding us the while. I fancied there was something gentler than usual in his manner towards us as he gave us some flowers on the way out. He permitted us to pick with our own hands some few leaves from the aged trees; and he gave me a fragrant bunch of mignonette to press in my Bible.

Such experiences as this cannot fail to mould the future of any child of God. Along the years we have met each other since then. I believe each one of that small company recognizes as the chief question for admonition in all time to come—a question prompting him evermore to renewed devotion, a question crowded with significant memory of both comfort and warning—"Did not I see thee in the garden with him?"

## XXV.

## MISUNDERSTOOD TO THE END.

“AGAIN THE HIGH PRIEST ASKED HIM, AND SAID UNTO HIM, ART THOU THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE BLESSED?”—*Mark* 14:61.

It seems natural to expect, now that Jesus has come before the highest and most dignified court of his nation, that he will secure some consideration and be treated with a measure of regard for his rights. His enemies will be there, but his friends likewise will be there to stand by him; and in the end he will receive a patient and fair hearing, such as he never has had yet.

But now we look in upon the chamber in the high priest's palace, and Jesus seems to be entirely alone. No picture of him can be found elsewhere in the Bible so indescribably pathetic. He has not one friend in that room. The court which is to examine him has prejudged his case already. These members of the council have assembled suddenly, not to consider, but to condemn. The whole transaction is only a miserable farce and a travesty of justice.

Why? The answer is easy: Jesus Christ was above the comprehension of his generation. He was misunderstood in the beginning; here now we discover that he was misunderstood to the end. Ten verses of this chapter contain a description of

five misconceptions, every one of which was in policy a blunder and in nature a crime.

I. We may find profit in tracing these out, each in its turn; then we shall be able to draw for ourselves the lessons of instruction which are conveyed by an incident so suggestive.

1. To begin with, these bigoted rulers misunderstood the entire life of Jesus Christ. The facts which came to their ears were distorted and confusing. These people longed to entrap so dangerous a preacher in the midst of some political disturbance, some social misdemeanor, so that they could make him obnoxious to the Roman law. Hence they sought help from the bystanders and the populace at large. They wished some one to accuse him of a capital crime, and then he could be put to death by the governor.

Witnesses enough they were able to secure; but the trouble with them was they differed so in their testimony; "their witness agreed not together." Each man had his own story to tell. Popular imagination was wild over this Nazarene rabbi. Nobody ever had thoroughly understood the mystery of his career. His life had run on since the day when he had earliest made himself manifest to John the Baptist down by the Jordan, and always he was talking of some crisis in the near future which he called his "hour." He intimated that he was in secret and deadly conflict with a being of whom he spoke as "the prince of this world," and sometimes as the head of an unseen host, "the powers of the air." Little by little this strange

teacher continued to sunder himself from all around him. By-and-by his work, as it drew near its completeness, began to cut him loose from one association after another; he never married, he had no earthly home. He became a pilgrim and a sojourner, with nowhere to lay his head. As we read the inspired story we notice how inexplicably the minor characters in the drama pass away without apology or explanation. John the Baptist is abruptly beheaded. Joseph, his reputed father, dies quietly out of history. Simon Peter denies him, Judas betrays him, and the rest of the disciples forsake him. And here at last he stands before the Sanhedrin without an adherent. He could have said in the words of the evangelic prophet: "I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with me." Nobody understood his life.

2. Then add to this, in the second place, the fact that these sagacious-looking councillors totally misunderstood the doctrines which Jesus had been preaching. They brought in at last a company of ill-disposed people who were willing to characterize, or rather to caricature, our Lord's public declarations and give them their worst meaning: "And there stood up certain and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands. And not even so did their witness agree together."

Of course these malicious creatures could not agree with each other, for no one of them had any

intelligent notion of what these words signified. One of the evangelists tells us afterwards that Jesus was speaking of the temple of his body, which was to lie in the grave for three days and then be raised into a new and glorious body. Our Lord foresaw plainly all the sad, painful, and humiliating circumstances of his crucifixion and burial. This indeed was what made his experience so solitary.

The anticipation of evil which is sure to come upon ourselves is frequently more severe and difficult to bear than the evil itself. The imagination dwells upon the horror and clothes it with a ten-fold pain. A gloomy dread creeps over and into the whole soul. There is just this difference between the actual sufferings of a sentient man and an unintelligent brute. The one knows what is at hand; the other suspects nothing till it comes. Abraham going with his son into the mountain for the commanded sacrifice of his first-born doubtless had far more exquisite torture than did the ram in the thicket which at last proved to be the selected victim. The Saviour was omniscient concerning his work of atonement. He knew every pang of body, mind, and soul he was before long to bear.

In this his secret was unshared. It is of no use to say that more than once he vividly pictured to those around him the woes he was to meet. Even the disciples did not appreciate his meaning in the descriptions he gave of his coming death. If they accepted the fact that he would be betrayed and then killed through the instigation of the priests, their minds fell far short of comprehending his

depth of foreseen sorrow. We should be ready to say they considered much of his language as the outflow of a sensitive and foreboding spirit. On one occasion Simon Peter thought he was unusually depressed; he took him aside and began to chide him for his unnecessary melancholy: "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee!"

So there he stood before the council, a solemn and burdened man. Back into himself he was compelled to go, thinking perhaps without any expectation of ever being pitied or understood: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." Unable to make himself understood, he fell into the silence of his own reserve.

3. And then, we notice next, even his silence was misunderstood: "And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace and answered nothing." From our knowledge of ordinary human nature, we should surmise that this ecclesiastic deemed Jesus surly and morose-tempered. He may have imagined that this dangerous rabbi, now suddenly interrupted in his popularity with the common people who heard him gladly, had become petulant or sullen. But the fact is, they all misunderstood the errand the Saviour came upon. What good would it do for him now to talk? Suppose it had been possible for the Son of man, thus already in the very grip of his enemies and feeling their violence, to set himself free from them by force of

argument or by witchery of eloquent speech, what good would it do? Jesus Christ came to this world to die; he must die.

All these sufferings he was now enduring, all he was going to meet at the Place of a Skull, were penal and expiatory. He was a substitute for others. For himself he had no penalty to pay; he had no ill-desert whatever. With an infinite exaltation of character, and with a perfect purity of life which no one of our fallen race could imitate or even appreciate, and within his heart cherishing an infinite abhorrence of evil which no one could either share or understand, he yet stood voluntarily in the place of an entire world already condemned; he was therefore logically a culprit before the broken law of God.

This it was now quite unnecessary to talk about in the presence of the Sanhedrin; conversation only availed to hinder the inevitable and to prolong an undignified scuffle in a court without jurisdiction. He must have felt a kind of relief as he noticed that events were hastening. But it saddens us to imagine the weight of unshared grief this silence imposed on one so placed at the moment. John had not yet grown courageous enough to come in; Simon Peter was out in the quadrangle swearing he never knew him.

Now there is a difference that we all comprehend between being alone and being lonely. A traveller upon his journey is alone, but not necessarily lonely, for he may have dear memories of the home he has left as well as bright anticipations



of the rest he is nearing; and so the inner world of his imagination is peopled anew with welcome companionship. So a fisherman, out in his little boat upon the solemn ocean, even though he may be like a mere speck on the waves, is not lonely, no matter how distantly alone he is, for he knows that the spark he sees far away, as the night creeps on, is a light in the window of his hut, set for his welcome when his nets bring in the evening meal. There is a separation which after all is not solitude; and any man of sensibility can be reserved without being lonesome, for a true heart recreates the circle from which it is sundered.

But Jesus Christ at this crisis-moment knew that the circle which once trusted him was broken and scattered. He had said some time before that this would be so: "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." There was not one human being on this entire planet with any kind of genuine association with him in accomplishing his "decease at Jerusalem." What then was the use of talking any more? He was simply fulfilling a fragment of old prophecy, spoken more than seven hundred years before: "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." (Isa. 53:7.)

4. We must connect with this, in the fourth place, the fact that this council misunderstood the entire purpose of our Lord: "Again the high priest

asked him, and saith unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven." This time, now that the questions had ceased to be merely personal and had become official, Jesus cordially and candidly made answer. And nothing in all this story shows the blindness and ignorance of those masters in Israel so evidently as their awful rage at what he said: "And the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What further need have we of witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be worthy of death."

They sought to know whether Jesus claimed to be the nation's Messiah; and the instant he bore his testimony faithfully and acknowledged his divine lineage and commission as the Son of God and Judge of the world, they raised the cry of blasphemy. From this time there was no hope of deliverance for him.

So the grand purpose of redemption proceeded. The ancient scape-goat, after the hands of the priest had put the sins of the congregation on its head, was driven away, solitary, into the wilderness. That doomed creature was meant to be in this particular a precise type of the Christ. Our Saviour bore the sins of the whole world in his own person. Simon the Cyrenian helped him to carry the cross, but no one helped him to carry the curse. This one victim was the only victim on the altar. He stood between our fallen race and

the majesty of the law they had broken. Moses once tried to endure a burden like this fifteen centuries before, and he tried bravely too; but he broke down under it, and cried out unto a merciful God, "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me." But Jesus could not be allowed to break; a divine purpose upheld him and urged him on; he was obliged to bear it to the end, to suffer and be strong.

Those rulers in the Sanhedrin were too bigoted and dull to understand that. There was no one among them to appreciate his purpose any more than to share it. Nor anywhere else: the wicked world mocked the Immanuel who was dying to save it. Never had a deliverer such trouble to find captives to free; never had a teacher such difficulty to gather pupils to teach; never had prince such hindrance in seeking paupers to enrich; never had any giver such infinite trials in discovering receivers for the inestimable gifts he longed to bestow. No wonder he was silent; no wonder he lived apart; it was natural for him to say, "The prince of this world cometh, and he hath nothing in me." He felt he had no part nor lot in the administration of such a kingdom of misrule as the earth seemed now to be under. He was "separate from sinners" and yet he was suffering for sinners' sakes, and still those sinners went on sinning and misjudging him.

5. And thus we reach the fifth and worst of those misconceptions intimated to us in the passage we are studying. The chief priests and the people

they influenced misunderstood the temper of their illustrious captive. They thought he was a man of like passions with themselves. At once they commenced a series of small insults and petty acts of violence totally unworthy of the occasion and the court. "And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophecy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands." Think of this as a form of treatment for the real Redeemer of the world! They had not discovered the actual issue; they had not grasped the position. Such feeble wounds for a spirit like his were more insignificant than the stinging of an insect.

He was too far above that wretched crowd to feel provoked. Great thinkers are always solitary. Great thoughts lift men out of the region of little contumelies. We see this even in common history. The complaint most frequently uttered by Napoleon Bonaparte at St. Helena was, "Men do not understand me." So said Kepler when he put forth his volume at which his contemporaries laughed: "Whether it will be read by the future or the present age I have no care; if God has waited so long for an observer, I can afford to wait for one who knows what I mean."

Jesus had no heart to resent these contemptible wrongs. One answer he made is recorded by the evangelist John, but does not appear here. When a blow fell upon him at the high priest's direct order, he replied calmly, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest

thou me?" For the rest he had no harshness, no rejoinder, no resistance. "When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." So he went on with his work: went from this council-room to Pilate's judgment-hall; went on to Calvary and the cross.

II. Hence, good Christian friends, now that our patient exposition is ended, we have only to receive a few lessons of practical bearing for ourselves.

1. We can understand at last that the type of religious separateness for each believer is found in this experience of Jesus Christ. He was solitary, not because of his superciliousness, but because of his sanctity. It was not because he was odd or singular that these people misunderstood him to the end, but because he was so good, so generous, so gentle, and so pure.

2. We see likewise that it is gentleness always which makes men genuinely great. We need not hesitate to declare that there never has been so much as one other force which swayed the world as this closing scene of Jesus' career has swayed it. There now his life stands, out in the twilight of that council-chamber. It was a sad life, but it was a noble one. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ." Keep a scene like this before your eyes; gaze on that Saviour till you begin at last to understand "the Son of the Blessed."

## XXVI.

## CHRIST'S KINGSHIP AND KINGDOM.

“AND PILATE ASKED HIM, ART THOU THE KING OF THE JEWS?  
AND HE ANSWERING SAID UNTO HIM, THOU SAYEST IT.”—*Mark*  
15:2.

IN the first commentary that I opened for study of this passage I found a full-paged illustration. It represented the Roman judgment-hall. The governor was upon the raised platform; the Saviour was just below him, standing on the floor. No guards were in the room; no disciples were beside Jesus; no courtiers were around Pilate. Only these two figures confronted each other. Pilate leans forward anxious, his hands on his knees. Jesus is intrepidly facing him, his arms pinioned with thongs behind his back. The title is “Jesus before Pilate.”

It is a scene full of meaning. I marvel that the artists do not attempt it oftener. But we turn from the picture abruptly, for it has more to teach by its suggestion than by its mere lines of drawing. It is plain that this whole story centres on the question which the Roman governor put to our Lord concerning his being the King of the Jews; to which question Jesus returned answer that he was a king. And out of a statement so astonishing grows the subsequent conversation. Pilate in sarcasm calls Jesus by the name twice in his public address to the infuriated people; this seems to inflame their

wrath more than anything else he did. They catch up the nickname and begin to make sport savagely with the notion; they crown his forehead with a prickly wreath; they put a walking-staff in his hand for a mock sceptre; they contrive somehow to get a gown of royal purple to put on him instead of his own seamless robe; and then with many a ribald shout of laughter they awake the echoes of the streets with their cry, "Hail, King of the Jews!" It is evident that this name forms the incident of the occasion.

I. Let us fix our attention, first, upon the royal proclamation which our Saviour made in his answer to the interrogation of Pilate.

1. He gave as the description of his kingdom that it was not of this world. Pilate said, "Art thou a king?" Jesus gave him the reply that indicated the strongest kind of asseveration, "Thou sayest that I am a king." But he added, "My kingdom is not from hence." Now we are aware that every monarch must have some sort of "divine right" to rule on a throne; what was the right that Jesus here asserted as his own?

It might have been the right of possession. He might have shown this Roman governor that he owned these people, for with him were "the oracles of God," which they revered as supreme. He could have said to him, "I am that Messiah who was predicted by their prophets to reign." But then Pilate, the ignorant unbeliever, could have answered to this, "I do not recognize the right of even the Jews' Messiah to be a king."

It might have been the right of conquest. Jesus might have told him that he had subjected these people by his miracles, that he proved divine authority by wielding divine power. But to this Pilate had for a ready reply the woful fact that it was the Jews who had already delivered this so-called Messiah into his hands. They had declared they would not have him to reign over them, and were now seeking his death.

It might have been the right of acceptance; for Christ in sober earnest could have appealed away from priests to populace, and reminded Pilate that once on the shore of Gennesaret the people's enthusiasm had reached such a height that he had been obliged to withdraw himself miraculously from the multitudes lest they should make him a king "by force;" and just now, only yesterday, as it were, right here out near the brook Kidron, men, women, and children had strewn his path through the valley of Jehoshaphat with olive-branches and palms, and had spread their garments under the feet of the borrowed beast he rode in a royal triumph even into the gate of Jerusalem. But here, again, Pilate was at liberty to interrupt him with a fine sarcasm in the suggestion that he had better settle such matters with Herod, the regular heir; for there seemed for thrones now rather too many kings of the Jews to go round.

What Jesus did assert in his own behalf was the right of personal genuineness as a man, and hence as the king of men. He explained a confusion in appearances by showing that his kingdom was not



material nor temporal, not even hereditary or belligerent. It was "not of this world," not "from hence." It was a sovereignty in the hearts of human beings; it was, in one word, the kingdom of truth among men. The heathen governor, of course, did not dare dispute this; indeed, he hardly knew what it meant. He swiftly closed that interview by asking the memorable question, "What is truth?"

2. Understanding, therefore, precisely what Jesus in this definite proclamation of his sovereignty claimed as the basis of his divine right, we are prepared to ask, What was the nature of his kingdom?

It was spiritual in every particular. It did not need any fleet or flag; it would not want either army or arsenal; it did not propose to collect customs or make treaties. This imperial officer saw clearly that Jesus offered no menace to Cæsar. His errand was not political, but personal and religious. The kingdom he was establishing over Judæa and the world was exactly that which Satan had promised him when tempted in the wilderness, that which he had then contemptuously repudiated because he would take no authority or office from the tempter's hands nor accept any of the devil's conditions annexed to the tender.

And yet this kingdom was to be organic to the last degree of institution. It would have its laws, its orders, and its rulers. It openly announced that it would lay its hand on men and money, lands and seas, in order that it might use them as means of advancement in raising the race to the image of

God in purity and holiness and strength. The one purpose of the organization should be moral and religious; it would be an agency and instrument for the propagation of the highest ends among men; it would labor to secure the true, the good, and the beautiful in all the world till the race of fallen humanity should be redeemed. So ran the whole tenor of Christ's proclamation; and we now see that this kingdom of truth was simply what we call the invisible church.

II. Let us then study the process by which this kingdom, of which Jesus was the king, was established on the earth.

1. In the beginning Christ united a few true men to himself for the sake of the work they could do and the help they could bring him. It was not the coming together of a people, who, as soon as they began to feel the need of government, elected a king. Christ was the earliest and the only king this kingdom ever had; the king lived before the kingdom had any subjects. But when Jesus came forward to redeem souls from sin, and so make men true and pure, he selected a band of workers as his associates in propagating the truth which should make men free.

2. Then, second, he joined these to each other by rendering them efficient in the instant conversion of souls. He chose Andrew, and at once managed it so that Andrew "found" Simon. He chose Philip, and in twenty-four hours Philip "found" Nathanael. And right here, in order to show everybody the principle on which this extension of his

spiritual sway must proceed, he took pains to say why Nathanael was accepted in particular—he was an Israelite without guile; that is, he was an un-reproached, genuine, just, true man, precisely what every one needed to be in a kingdom of truth, whose subjects must be simply true.

3. So by slow accretions the slender community was collected; an inconspicuous realm was growing around a crownless Monarch. Now there must be begun a process of disentanglement from the world. It is necessary that we should recollect that these disciples and converts were not at all united to each other before they were united to Christ. It was by being united to him that they became united to each other. Jesus taught them; but it was not his doctrine that organized them. Jesus lived blamelessly in their sight; but it was not his example that organized them. It was his personal kingship in the truth that organized them; for that made them one with him, and so with each other one and with all that came after. It challenged an immediate and intelligent separation of each one by himself from all the word and works the great antagonist of good was using for the soul's destruction. Christ struck at those mixed multitudes of hypocrites with terrible violence: "Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a

liar and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not."

It was thus that our Lord kept winning accessions to his kingdom by an exalted purity and strength of truth in himself; he united his followers to him by incorporating his own life in them, and in the same form of mysterious union he bound them to each other. This point is insisted upon in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. He was rebuking some that were insincere and encouraging others who were growing in genuineness: "But ye have not so learned Christ, if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another." All believers were to be true because Christ was true. They were members of each other, as limbs of the same body; branches of each other, because all of them were branches of Christ the one true vine.

4. Then, in the fourth place, a tremendous sifting of the entire community ensued. Suddenly this great Teacher, on one or two historic occasions, put forth the most revolutionary doctrines in his preaching publicly—all true and orthodox and right, but extreme and radical and calculated to test their obedience and love to the last degree.

For example, this: "The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven; not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever."

The result of such strong doctrine was to stumble many of his friends. "Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not." The point which our Lord pressed was that of a supreme and vital union to himself. Those who took their chances in the kingdom of truth must be "in Christ Jesus;" for he was the king, and the king was truth. It was impossible that all of this crowd should have

wit enough to understand him. And some went away; and some stayed and grew mystic in love for him personally, so as to lose truth in mere attachment to Jesus. "From that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go! thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."

5. Then the next step, now become essential, was for our Lord to disappear from their sympathy and sight. There was springing up, naturally enough, a human regard, a manly friendship, a fraternal tenderness, which was diverting his adherents from truth alone—truth, solitary, grand, and simple, as the gift of God to men. So Jesus told the company one day as they sat together that he should leave them soon. We have all read the tale, and we remember how this almost broke their hearts; it appeared to them as if the light and warmth of the sun had gone out of the sky at once. Why was this departure "expedient"? The verse so often quoted from one of the later epistles shows how these early believers understood it afterwards: "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." It was essential that every real Christian should be satisfied with the truth—pure truth. Souls must learn to know and love Jesus as the king of the kingdom; not as a historic head or a personal friend,

but as the embodiment of the truth as it ever should be and remain in the thoughts and lives of men.

Then there remained very little more for the Saviour to do before he left his disciples; one promise and one prayer, however, he gave to them. The promise was that the Spirit of God, the Third Person in the Trinity, should come in his place and be loyally subject to himself: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me. . . Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I that he shall take of mine and shall show it unto you." The prayer was that grand intercession found in the seventeenth chapter of the gospel of John; recall its phraseology just for one moment: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee, and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even

as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

6. Finally, Jesus went away as he said and the promised Comforter came. The kingdom of truth, so far as its earthly management historically was concerned, was passed over to the Third Person of the adorable Godhead in the place of the Second. On the great day of Pentecost the Holy Ghost descended. He remains here still, the Vicegerent in the kingdom of truth, of which our sovereign Lord Jesus Christ ever abides the only adorable King. Now, with a passionate love and loyalty and longing, true believers lose not one moment more in any wistful gazing up into heaven. Christ is formed in them, the hope of glory, a present help and joy in their hearts. He is the truth, and they are a true generation, and so he is with them still. And for Christ's sake, for Christ's dear sake, because he said so, they gather now and then around a table with bread and wine on it, and they meet and greet each other like the nobles of an absent monarch whom they expect to be with them again before long, coming back to his own. They are all one in Christ Jesus, and he is going to be evermore one with them.

So we see, once for all, what it is that we ask when we pray, as we do daily, "Thy kingdom come." We want the conversion of souls to a standard of truth; more subjects in this realm of



Christ's truth; more pure women and more honest men; maidens fair-foreheaded in honor, and lads that will scorn to lie; more genuineness through and through, the world seeing us walking in the light; more glory for Christ's covenant, more graces for Christ's people, and more jewels for Christ's crown.

So likewise we see what it is that becomes the overmastering motive of Christian experience to which the last and tenderest appeal of the pulpit is to be made: it is love and loyalty at its highest in the heart of any true man, love of and loyalty to the truth. If this does not avail to stir a Christian to liberality, to fidelity, to self-sacrifice, then there is no hope for him. History makes record that when Cæsar's legion mutinied, no argument from interest or reason could persuade the malcontents to lay down the arms of their rebellion; but the moment he addressed them as "Quirites," the tumult was hushed. The human heart is mysterious in its emotions, but it answers to one name at least if it be genuine in its devotion. It may not avail to plead for the sake of mere commercial or commonplace benefits; but whenever that call comes forth, "Ye that are Christ's, now serve him!" there will be heard a deep response in every loyal soul. Say to each one, "Christian! what hath thy Lord of truth done for thee?" Back on his fealty he falls, his heart full of longing, his eyes moist with tears. For a man is in the truth and of the truth when he belongs to the kingdom of truth of which Jesus Christ is the King, and never before. "Every one that is of the truth heareth his voice."

## XXVII.

## THE SCENE AT CALVARY.

“AND THEY BRING HIM UNTO THE PLACE GOLGOTHA, WHICH IS, BEING INTERPRETED, THE PLACE OF A SKULL.”—*Mark 15:22.*

THE Mohammedans believe that Jesus Christ did not die, but that he mysteriously ascended unhurt into heaven; and then, it is said, Judas Iscariot was suddenly changed into his likeness and crucified in his place. This seems a very silly fable, intended to give relief from what they deemed too shameful to bear.

There is no way of escaping the humiliation of the cross except by glorying in it. The crucifixion of Jesus is everything to us or it is nothing. The moment one decides to rest his eternal salvation upon the promises and provisions of the gospel, he accepts all that this deed of shame involves. He need have no care as to what others around him think of it; to him Christ crucified is “the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

I. What was crucifixion? To the devout Christian every item of information he can gain concerning that dread scene at Calvary is of the utmost value.

i. It was foreign in every sense in its infliction upon our Lord. This kind of capital punishment was Roman and not Jewish. The ancient Latin writers have employed the strongest of all their

terms of opprobrium in speaking of it; they call it "the worst punishment in the world." Moreover, it was not intended for citizens of creditable condition, but for bondmen of the very lowest classes. There was ignominy in it as well as pain. Indeed, except in rarest instances, it was not inflicted for political misdemeanors, but only for the meanest and most heinous of crimes. Jesus was not one who should have been considered exposed to it.

2. It was excessively cruel in its details. The word which it has given to our English language indicates its severity. To be "excruciated" simply means to be in suffering like that of crucifixion; it signifies the extreme anguish to which human sensibility can go. The criminal was usually violently scourged, to begin with, then stretched on his back along the perpendicular beam. Both of his hands, being extended upon the bar which ran transversely over this, were spiked through to its extremities. And in like manner the feet were nailed below. "They pierced my hands and my feet."

3. It was long and lingering in its operation. Severe as these wounds were, they could never be very dangerous. Hardly more than a few drops of blood fell from them. It would have been too much of a merciful indulgence for this mode of execution to make any of its agonizing strokes immediately fatal. Death did not ensue sometimes until after several days of torture. Even then it was brought on by weakness and starvation, coupled with the low fever which the inflammation from

the wounds sooner or later produced. The great suffering was caused by the constrained posture on the cross, the soreness of the members from the nails, and of the back from the welts raised by the whips in the scourging. Every motion brought with it only anguish without relief. Thus the poor body was permitted to hang, with no respite and no hope, through the night and through the day, in the chilliness of the evening, in the heat of the noon, until death put an end to consciousness and to life.

4. Such a punishment powerfully arrested the popular imagination as a spectacle. Sometimes the military men put on guard were compelled to accelerate the final agony by brutally beating the legs of the victims with bludgeons till the bones were crushed and the sudden shocks produced collapse. No wonder people called this "the most cruel, the worst possible fate." It is on record that a soldier once said that, of all the awful sounds human ears could be forced to listen to, the most terrible out of hell were those pitiable cries, in the solemn silence of the midnight, from the lonely hill where crucified men were hanging in agonies out of which they could not even die while a breath to suffer with remained.

5. So we see whence came the suggestion of a crucifix as a symbol of faith and patience. It is not likely that the physical pains of our Lord were the severest he had to bear; but they certainly have availed from the earliest time to move the hearts of the simple-minded common people. Nor is this

all: there are moments of deep spiritual feeling when even the most cultivated penitent will find an argument in the "agony and the bloody sweat" as well as in the "cross and passion" of the divine Redeemer. The Scriptures leave us often in the greatest doubt and mystery as to Jesus' mental state when he was dying; but many passages dwell with much particularity of detail upon his bodily distress. The very appearance of hideous emaciation that would follow from the strained position of the person was predicted a thousand years before Jesus was born: (Psa. 22:14-17). The popular mind is moved by such a picture; but the mistake might easily be made of trusting a crucifix in an impulse of superstition, instead of Christ on a principle of faith.

II. So much, then, as to the manner of our Lord's crucifixion; now comes up for our study a far more interesting question concerning its meaning.

1. Considered merely as a matter of historic incident, the death of Jesus Christ is of little, if any, spiritual value. Doubtless there were other executions at Golgotha, before and after this one, equally painful and equally iniquitous—for the Roman Government in Palestine was never free from charges of injustice. We do not care, however, to remember the sufferers' names. As a part of the world's annals Pilate's behavior is nothing but one of the ten thousand instances of judicial indecision and popular fury which have disgraced our race. And Christ's crucifixion is but one more wail of abused humanity, if we contemplate it alone.

2. We must consider this event as a matter of theological doctrine. When history is so momentous and so mysterious as this, we are compelled to read below the surface and between the lines. The death of our Lord does not stand by itself. He was not crucified to meet any necessities of Pilate's consulship or of the Roman Empire or the Jewish monarchy. He was "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" in order that he should suffer precisely as he did: (Acts 2:23). Men wreaked their violent passions upon him, and it was by wicked and responsible hands he was crucified and slain. Messiah was "cut off, but not for himself;" (Dan. 9:26). The wisdom of God overruled the wrath of his murderers to the divine glory and the salvation of men. One of the ancient commentators springs up almost out of sober exposition into the realm of song as he exclaims: "In their frantic anger they pluck to pieces the Rose of Sharon; but by so doing they only display the brilliance of every petal. In their fury they break a diamond into fragments; by which they only cause it to show its genuineness by its sparkling splinters. They are anxious to tear from Immanuel's head the last remnant of a crown; but they only lift the veil from the forehead of his majesty!"

3. More than anything else we must also consider the crucifixion of Jesus as a matter of vicarious atonement. There is something very fine in the quiet simplicity with which one of the apostles explained this entire scene at Calvary: "All have sinned." Christ died to be "a propitiation through

faith in his blood:" (Rom. 3:23-26.) Pilate wrote an inscription to put over the head of the Saviour; according to a Roman custom, this was designed to explain the transaction to all who stood by. But though he printed it broadly in three languages, he did not reach the real meaning in so much as one of them. 'The true inscription on the cross would be, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." These are the words which would give the scene at Calvary its eternal interpretation before the church and the ages. The very voice of Immanuel himself, as he seems to speak out of the midst of his suffering, is: "See! I have taken away the handwriting that was against you and have nailed it to my cross." (Col. 2:13, 14). The one word which describes the whole gospel plan of salvation is *substitution*. Christ was sinless, yet he suffered: we are sinful, yet we go free.

4. This will lead at last to our consideration of the crucifixion as a matter of personal experience. Believers all glory in the cross. Many a deathbed has been illumined by its light. Many a sorrowful and lonely heart has been encouraged by the remembrance of it. There have been old men, just trembling on the verge of the tomb, whose eyes filled with the tears of grateful gladness as they died thinking of it. There have arisen voices from around the stake in the midst of the martyr's flames, singing praises to Him who hung upon it. Many a bowed sinner has come forth into freedom as he laid his burden at the foot of the cross.

This personal experience begins with self-renun-

ciation. Every other reliance must absolutely be surrendered and each soul must become content to owe its salvation to Jesus Christ's merits, not to its own. Such humility as this requires is not always reached. Missionaries tell us there is a ceremony in Japan, even at this day, in which the cross of the Christian faith is annually brought out before the people and thrown on the pavement in the public road, so that their feet in passing must necessarily trample upon it. Surely this seems a senseless blasphemy. But it is hardly beyond the spitefulness of many who reject the offer of a vicarious atonement. To those who accept Jesus for salvation the "offence of the cross is ceased."

Then this personal experience proceeds with the penitent surrender and confession of guilt. Every soul recognizes the Saviour as the substitute for itself.

"'T was for my sins my dearest Lord hung on the curséd tree,  
And groaned away a dying life for thee, my soul, for thee!"

We feel intelligently sure that faith may lay its hand on the head of this one Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. Away with all useless bullocks and goats and turtle-doves! Away with feasts and fasts and penances, with hired masses and votive candles for prayers! Away with priestly intercession and drone of ritual! Jesus Christ on the cross is the Way, the Truth, and the Life! All down the ages the testimony comes that men in every station in society and in all conceivable circumstances have found at the foot of the



cross what they have found nowhere else—joy and pardon and peace. Types and symbols find their meaning and their explanation in Christ alone.

So this personal experience continues to the end with a deep solicitude against lapsing into sin again. When we picture the scene at Calvary we grow indignant at those who were concerned in the cruelty. But what if there had been one there so malignant as to wish for a re-arrest of Jesus after the resurrection, and then for a new crucifixion on the same cross! The Scripture gives warning against apostates; it is impossible, "if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame."

## XXVIII.

## LESSONS AT THE SEPULCHRE.

"YE SEEK JESUS OF NAZARETH, WHICH WAS CRUCIFIED. HE IS RISEN; HE IS NOT HERE. BEHOLD THE PLACE WHERE THEY LAID HIM."—*Mark* 16:6.

THERE is in the city of Jerusalem an ancient edifice called the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Beneath its dome, so the garrulous guardians will tell you, is the exact site of that tomb in which our Saviour was laid. Indeed, they will show you a structure of stone which they assert is the hewn rock prepared by Joseph of Arimathæa for his own burial, but given on the eventful evening of the crucifixion day as a receptacle for the body of Jesus.

For fifteen hundred years the tradition has been preserved. The great body of Eastern Christians even now accept it as trustworthy. Many, however, of cooler judgment, have been led to question the accuracy of very much of Oriental topography, and entertain small respect for pretty nearly all the Palestine shrines. There is suspicion that this spot has fixed itself in the popular mind quite as effectually through mere assertion, which is all the bolder because of the lucrative income, as through any logic of argument or record of history. The discussions have grown intricate and sometimes waxed even violent. In proportion to the want of any real information have so-called scholars seemed

willing to press to unwarrantable extremes the conjectures they at first only hazarded. Pride of individual opinions has acted in some cases disastrously. And perhaps there is no spectacle more humiliating to be seen in all Christendom than the actual hand-and-foot conflicts between the rival sects on each Easter day as they fight for precedence in ceremonial within those old walls, while outside, all over the world, with equal animosity and bitterness, disputants who rule the schools contend as to whether the sepulchre was ever in that neighborhood at all. One cannot help being grateful over the mystery; for if such profane folly is wrought because of an imaginary locality, what might be feared in case there should be a discovery of the true!

Thus much seems credible: there was once a structure in this part of the city, of what sort does not appear, afterwards destroyed. The Roman emperor Hadrian erected upon its ruins a temple for the worship of the heathen goddess Venus. That in turn crumbled away, and upon its foundations the Emperor Constantine built a Christian church. As to the one question, however, whether the sepulchre of Jesus was in the rock underneath each of these edifices all the while, nobody can furnish or find any positive proof. Most of the prelatical writers, high in ecclesiastical reverence, think they may implicitly trust the statement of Mother Church. Many of the evangelical and Protestant writers simply reject the tradition as being unimportant and unauthentic, and declare that the exact place where Christ was laid cannot now, and will never, be

known. In repeating the invitation of the text, "Behold the place where they laid him," I have no purpose in mind, therefore, to lead you into curious inquiries concerning the mere form, locality, or history of Joseph's garden or the stone chamber generously opened for the deposit of Jesus' remains. The lines of that inclosure are certainly obliterated now and the grave is no more.

But the imagination will do all needed service in reproducing, as far as is necessary for any legitimate end, the august spectacle which alone illumines the spot. That tomb was the local link between the humiliation and the exaltation of our divine Lord. The turning moment of his history was passed in the dark inclosure of what we call a grave. No human grave, however, was ever like that before, but every Christian grave has been like that since. And he who will come now and see where the Lord lay, may see with hopeful and happy eyes the place where each one is going to lie who sleeps in Jesus.

For the Scriptural narrative labors to be clear upon two points, not one only. It is interesting to notice how the inspired writers reverse our usual conceptions of the close of human life. We are wont to expatiate little upon a man's future as he draws his final breath. We dwell almost morbidly upon his failing powers and lonesome departure. But we are sure to hurry into conspicuousness and show almost at once thereafter. We hush up decorously the details of death, and reserve our parade for funerals.

But the sacred record concerning the Lord Jesus is found to glance briefly upon the circumstances of his burial; it continues its wonderful minuteness of description up to the last word, and then resumes the particulars the moment he rises again. That is to say, the stress of the history rests upon proving, first, that he truly died, and next, that he really rose again upon the third day. So that when one comes to see the place where the Lord lay, he looks upon a grave *with two openings*—one through which a human being entered; the other which he broke as he left, and which remains uncl<sup>o</sup>sed. Hence we learn at such a spot the lesson which entirely revolutionizes the ordinary processes of thought. No event in the history of our race is so fraught with meaning to upset traditions, imaginations, customs, as this of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We find in the Word of God two representations of this period of human existence that seem to be in many respects contradictory. The one declares life to be a mere delusion, a valueless vanity and vexation. The other says life is an infinitely precious possession to us all. There was nothing for which the ancient people of God were taught to pray more earnestly than for length of days. Indeed, the pledge of this was what made welcome "the first commandment with promise." And yet Moses, the great Hebrew lawgiver, expressed the utter contempt of a disgusted heart when he sang in his Psalm, "We spend our years as a tale that is told." No reward offered under the gospel is so

princely and so priceless as the promise of life. Yet the soberest of all the apostles warns us that our life is "only as a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." If there be any confusion or antagonism in these estimates it must be grounded just here. We judge of our life according to the point from which we view it. We prize it when we remember we are to part with it so *soon*. We despise it when we remember we must part with it so *certainly*. And there will always be this contradictiveness of sentiment in the mind of any person who does not tone it with the grand conviction of an intelligent hereafter.

It is true none of us are willing to submit to the inevitable necessity of dying either timidly or tamely. We call our tremendous foe by bad names, and then we confront him as bravely as we can. In one notable instance, at least, has even the father of lies told the truth: "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." It would almost seem true that Death has in some instances been thwarted for a season by human courage and will. It is possible to ward off fatal disease for a time, and so redeem a few years more from the power of the grave. But such an effort never ends in any permanent triumph. All the world learned that long ago. Even the ancient mythologist erected no temple to Death. No sacrifices were ever to be brought to Mors. He was understood as gathering his own victims at his own will. They considered him "a grim monster," inexorable to all entreaty and deaf to all prayers.

And so far the heathen were right. Neither force nor propitiation can deliver us from the shadow Death sends creeping on towards our feet. But surely we do not need to keep thinking of it! Anybody will be public benefactor enough to stop tolling the bell! We shrink back with a kind of violent instinct from that horrible iteration which, as we read, a certain monarch commanded; a herald was to enter his apartment each morning, saying, "Remember, O king, thou art mortal!" We know this is true; but we can refuse to be told of it. Two feeble little ingenuities of our own invention we are wont to practice, just to cover up the sight we mean not to see.

One of them is a mere effort to render death less displeasing in its external forms. We choose the most exquisite spots for our places of burial. We plant them with rarest and fairest flowers. We adorn them with statuary, shining white among the trees, and with fountains playing in the willowy vistas. We chase coffins with silver and crown hearses with plumes. But this ends only in folly. Nobody grows any more willing to die for thinking of the fine funeral. Nor indeed are the footfalls of Death any softer for all the richness of the carpet along which he comes. His knock at the portal is no gentler for all that he covers his skeleton hand with the folds of black velvet.

So we try again. We cannot ward off, but we can cover up. We cunningly insist that we can thwart the malice, if not the power, of that advancing doom which warns us as it nears us. We

cannot stop the nearing; we can stop the warning. We cannot stay the nightfall; but we can silence the clock. If Death comes, he shall be made to come stealthily. So we announce it ungentle and against good-breeding to speak of any one's growing old. With all passionateness of attachment we will cling to every shred of our lives. There was terrible irony, whether he intended it or not, in those words of our Lord, "Let the dead bury their dead." That is what we are all doing. It has been the prominent occupation of the busy generations one by one. Yet we wise, shifty people propose definitely that we will keep in ignorance of what the whole world around us is at!

Now it is well to question at this point with careful analysis such a feeling of repugnance and recoil. Why are we so subject to bondage through fear of death? It cannot be the apprehension of mere physical pain at the moment of departure. We are assured by those of widest observation and wisest skill that the pangs of dying are rarely severe. Nature makes kind provision for these final hours, and frequently they are the most positively painless the sufferer has known for days and years. Not unlikely many of us here have endured already more than yet remains for us to meet when we come to die. Rather do our agitations seem to rise from a vague, undefined anxiety concerning what lies beyond death. And if that could just be relieved, most of us would listen to the summons heroically, and some would bid it cheerful welcome.

Hence one of the most hopeful, helpful verses in



the Bible is that in which we are told that our Lord Jesus Christ came to this world in human, mortal form, that he might become the avowed and eternal antagonist of the destroyer: "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

When Jesus died upon the cross all nature shuddered. An exultant earthquake held revel among the rending rocks. Hell was jubilant with victory. Satan had delight in seeing the heavens darkened. For the three predicted days his realm was in the ecstasy of triumph. His enemy slept heavily in the hewn rock of the Arimathæan. And we are ready to admit, if there had been no first Easter morning to come, the wail of the race could never have been hushed.

But that stone was eventually rolled away in the dawn of the new Sabbath. Forth came the living Saviour from the abode of the dead. And he did not come alone. Some other people rose with him, came out of their graves, went up into the city. It matters not who they were. It was not the fact that a few nameless old persons had escaped which took the alarm to hell. A stupendous announcement preceded that: **THE LORD HAD RISEN IN-DEED!** He broke the bars of that awful prison-house. Nay, more; he rent them away with him; he bore the gates off from the hinges; he left the

grave with the wall all prostrate on the farther side!

And since then there has been no death such as it used to be. "What seems so is *transition*." The Nazarene's last wonder on the earth was his greatest. Come, then, "see the place where the Lord lay." It is not so frightful a place after all. Penitence at the cross, a true hope of pardon, faith in the atonement, these can calm every human heart and remove all its wild alarms. Death is at last swallowed up in victory!

The practical reach and profit of this fresh revelation concerning another world is almost beyond estimate. It relieves our intolerable dread, when any little distemper arouses a pain, when some muscle or nerve seems reluctant in its function and gives us premonition of infirmity. It soothes our hearts in bereavement; for the parted and the pure shall meet again. Them that sleep in Jesus he will bring with him when he comes. Immortality seems so real, earth seems so little and so low, trials seem so insignificant, for heaven is at hand.

There are thoughtful moments which come to most men and women who have arrived at middle life or gone beyond it, when serious counsel presses them. The restless ambitions of their earlier years have pretty much run their course and ceased to be motive powers. Slowly and pensively they have watched the companions of their youth dropping away. Their views of men, manners, measures have become modified much. They live now in their children. That moment in which they re-

hearse the past with some dear old lingering friend is full of sweetness and charity. On the whole, however, they look forward. There yet seems room for generous purpose; a few noble ends remain to be served; there is hope of a measure of modest usefulness; there can be counsels offered, prayers lifted—by God's blessing, souls saved.

But in the distance the trees which line our ordinary pathways in the journey appear more beautiful with autumn leaves than with spring blossoms. Nor are the landscapes any the less lovely because they happen to be russet and brown, for the fruits are coming in. Such people ought always to be Christian believers. When we see the events and the years flitting by us there is nothing for any one to say but this, and fine it is to say it, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

There is no alarm in fading graces or failing strength, nor even any night in the grave, provided we can see the luminous dawn of the resurrection beyond it. Let the index-finger of our faith point forward. There is left us this: we can do good a little while longer; we can grow better and purer; then, when God will, we can go home.

And when that solemn hush of dissolution comes there is a beloved Presence near by and a helping hand to lay hold of ours. Then a Christian quotes the wonderful engagements of a covenant-keeping God. He murmurs to himself as his pulses

beat low, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness." And so he sings:

When my last hour is close at hand,  
My last sad journey taken,  
Do thou, Lord Jesus! by me stand;  
Let me not be forsaken.  
O Lord! my spirit I resign  
Into thy loving hands divine;  
'Tis safe within thy keeping.

I shall not in the grave remain,  
Since thou death's bonds hast severed:  
By hope with thee to rise again  
From fear of death delivered,  
I'll come to thee, where'er thou art,  
Live with thee, from thee never part;  
Therefore I die in rapture.

And so to Jesus Christ I'll go,  
My longing arms extending;  
So fall asleep, in slumber deep,  
Slumber that knows no ending,  
Till Jesus Christ, God's only Son,  
Opens the gates of bliss, leads on  
To heaven, to life eternal.

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