



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

BX9178  
Chap. .... Copyright No. ....

Shelf. R. 5858

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

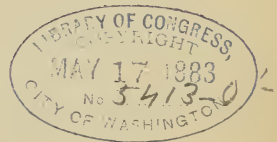
# STUDIES

OF

# NEGLECTED TEXTS.

BY  
*Charles Seymour*  
(CHAS.) S. ROBINSON, D. D.

*Pastor of the Memorial Church, New York city.*



AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,

150 NASSAU STREET, NEW YORK.

[1883]

THE LIBRARY  
OF CONGRESS  
—  
WASHINGTON

BX9172  
.R58S8

COPYRIGHT, 1883.  
BY AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.



H. B. P. 14 Nov. 1914

## PREFATORY NOTE.

THIS volume of sermons, selected from those delivered in the course of ordinary pastoral work, is peculiar in that the discourses are founded upon passages of Scripture seldom chosen for the pulpit. It is hoped that some freshness may be secured, and a wider study of God's Word may be encouraged by this suggestion of neglected texts.

CHAS. S. ROBINSON.

MEMORIAL CHURCH,  
New York, February 22, 1883.

# CONTENTS.

---

I.—THE VALE OF TEARS . . . . .	I
“Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them: who, passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.” <i>Psalm</i> 84:5, 6.	
II.—BARABBAS OR CHRIST? . . . . .	12
“Not this man, but Barabbas.” <i>John</i> 18:40.	
III.—THE IMMORTALITY OF THE AFFECTIONS . . . . .	22
“Your heart shall live for ever.” <i>Psalm</i> 22:26.	
IV.—SCIENCE AND THE CHURCH . . . . .	37
“And the earth helped the woman.” <i>Revelation</i> 12:16.	
V.—THE GIFT OF SNOW. . . . .	52
“He giveth snow like wool.” <i>Psalm</i> 147:16.	
VI.—JOHN FIRST, THEN JESUS. . . . .	64
“Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.” <i>John</i> 3:28.	
VII.—TWO PULPITS . . . . .	75
“And immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.” <i>Luke</i> 13:13.	
VIII.—CHRISTIAN DEBT . . . . .	85
“I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. <i>Romans</i> 1:14.	
IX.—FIVE PARADOXES . . . . .	95
“And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.” <i>John</i> 11:15.	
X.—THE CHIEF PRIESTS’ STORY . . . . .	106
“His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.” <i>Matthew</i> 28:11-15.	

- XI.—A POSSIBLE CASTAWAY . . . . . 116  
 "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." 1 *Corinthians* 9:27.
- XII.—GOD FOUND UNSOUGHT . . . . . 126  
 "But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me." *Romans* 10:20.
- XIII.—PERISHED THOUGHTS . . . . . 137  
 "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." *Psalms* 146:4.
- XIV.—COVETOUSNESS IS IDOLATRY . . . . . 149  
 "Covetousness, which is idolatry." *Colossians* 3:5.
- XV.—TOILING IN ROWING . . . . . 159  
 "He saw them toiling in rowing." *Mark* 6:48.
- XVI.—DARK, AND JESUS ABSENT . . . . . 169  
 "And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them." *John* 6:17.
- XVII.—POLITENESS AND PIETY . . . . . 181  
 "I doubted of such manner of questions." *Acts* 25:20.
- XVIII.—DRAWING LIGHTNING . . . . . 191  
 "And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children." *Luke* 1:17.
- XIX.—THE FAMILY FESTIVAL . . . . . 202  
 "If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me, that he might run to Bethlehem his city; for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family." 1 *Samuel* 20:6.
- XX.—THE IDEAL CHRIST . . . . . 216  
 "What think ye of Christ?" *Matthew* 22:42.
- XXI.—NEVER THIS WAY AGAIN . . . . . 225  
 "Ye shall henceforth return no more that way." *Deuteronomy* 17:16.
- XXII.—NEVER THIS WAY BEFORE . . . . . 234  
 "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." *Joshua* 3:4.

XXIII.—WISER THAN ONE'S TEACHERS . . . . . 246

"I have more understanding than all my teachers; for thy testimonies are my meditation." *Psalms* 119:99.

XXIV.—THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT . . . . . 260

"And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine." *Matthew* 7:28.

XXV.—THE HARVEST COVENANT . . . . . 270

"While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." *Genesis* 8:22.

XXVI.—FIGHTING BEASTS AT EPHESUS . . . . . 283

"If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage it me?" *1 Corinthians* 15:32.

XXVII.—THE SIGH OF JESUS . . . . . 294

"And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened." *Mark* 7:34.

XXVIII.—FOUR PATRIARCHS . . . . . 302

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at." *Acts* 17:30.

XXIX.—THE THRONE AND THE RAINBOW . . . . . 310

"And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald." *Revelation* 4:3.

STUDIES OF  
NEGLECTED TEXTS.

---

I.

THE VALE OF TEARS.

“BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE STRENGTH IS IN THEE ; IN WHOSE HEART ARE THE WAYS OF THEM : WHO, PASSING THROUGH THE VALLEY OF BACA, MAKE IT A WELL ; THE RAIN ALSO FILLETH THE POOLS.”—*Psalm* 84 : 5, 6.

To most Scripture readers this seems a confused passage. In our English version the sentences come to us clogged with italics, thus showing that even the venerable translators found it obscure, and did their best to give it clearness. Many interpretations have been offered, the best of which are these:—

1. Some have said that Baca is a real place—bearing, down even to modern times, a somewhat similar designation—a plain now called Wady Bakaa, lying in Northern Palestine, on the direct route of the pilgrims who came up to the Pass-over Feasts. In explanation of the name, which certainly means *weeping*, they tell the interesting story of a Bedouin, who, fleeing before his enemy,

---

Baca-trees.In valle Lachrymarum.

---

lost here his favorite dromedary, and fell into tears, not only because of his broken attachment, but because of his inevitable capture in the deprivation of his means of escape.

2. Others have said that the reference is to any valley of Baca-trees, or mulberries. These would be of frequent occurrence on any line of travel around Jerusalem, and would be sought for defence in the middle of the day, when the sun's rays were hottest, and for encampment at night, when the company made a halt. And in order to explain the allusion in the name, they remind us of the fact that the mulberry-tree, whenever any one of its twigs or leaves is wounded, exudes from the cut copious drops of thick sap, falling like tears on the sward beneath.

3. Still others say that this language is wholly figurative. There may, or may not, be an indirect allusion to some locality or some familiar landscape; but the meaning is simply tropical. It is intended to present an image of human life. The old Latin Vulgate, and all the ancient versions, render the expression—*in valle lachrymarum*. There originated our common metaphor, when we call this world "a vale of tears." It is offered in evidence that this is the true explanation, that the compact sentiment of the Psalm is held in better connection by it than by any other. The inspired writer seems to be contrasting the experience of one who felt joyous and glad beneath the canopy of God's sanctuary, with that of one, still out in

---

A world of trouble.Twilight on water.

---

the distance, undergoing the vicissitudes of gloom and desertion. And these he uses with a wide reach of meaning, as significant of the desolations of this world when compared with the felicities of that which lies high above it.

Accepting this last—this figurative—interpretation of the text, it would be easy for us to state its instruction in one comprehensive proposition. But we shall be better able to pass in review some of the exquisite delicacies of the expression if we work up to our end in a series of simple observations.

I. Let us begin with this: EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN MUST EXPECT TO HAVE HIS OWN PRIVATE "VALLEY OF BACA."

Any one may start brightly in the career of the new life; but sooner or later he will come to low ground. The high, beautiful prospects will be lost. The air will become stifling and dull. The path will grow miry, and obstacles will be in the way. It is not possible that he should be prepared for the journey beforehand. There is no pattern of religious experience which can be passed along from one to another for study.

There is positively neither map nor guide-book in this earthly vale of tears. Have you ever happened to notice, as you stood on the shore of the sea near nightfall, how the line of tremulous twilight, reflected in the water, seemed to lead the eyes straight on over the quivering waves to the sun itself? You called your companions to ob-



---

Individual experience.

Christ went before.

serve it. They admired the beautiful train of shining splendor. Yet no one of them saw exactly the same beam of rays you did. No two persons could stand so close to each other as to render the angle of their vision identical. Each saw his own. Exquisite type this of "the path of the just" shining more and more "to the perfect day"—its brilliance, its restlessness, its clear outlines.

But no two believers can ever either see or travel the same. Every Christian has his personal path of experience drawn for him as he looks towards the Sun of Righteousness. He will find it from the beginning a lit way, but sooner or later he will learn it is a lonely one. It will be traced by the one Saviour; it will be trod by the one saint to the end.

*But even this shows the intelligence which is resident in our trials.* Nothing happens; all is ordered. And one of our arguments to prove we are in the true way is found in the discovery that it leads through roughness and confusion. If it ever grows easy and luxurious, we may fear we have wandered.

*And this is the way along which our Saviour went before us.* He was "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." In the Pilgrim's Progress, Christiana kept bidding her children notice that here was where their father had journeyed and met the giants. We must learn to discern the tracks of Jesus. "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."



Festival-pilgrims.

Rests by the way.

II. This leads us on to say: EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN MUST EXPECT TO "PASS THROUGH" HIS VALLEY OF BACA.

Jerusalem lay on the top of a hill. It was surrounded with mountains, traversed by ravines and gorges. Valleys, sunless and barren, seemed most unwelcome roadways; but they afforded the surest and shortest approaches to Zion. The steps were often rugged and toilsome. But there was no possible way of going round the mountains. Straight up over them the festival-pilgrims forced their advance. And these were the times when they sang their cheerfullest Psalms—this one among them.

*There is no mountain without its valley.* Our finest off-looks of experience are found when we have risen to the summit of the hardest passes, "And felt upon our foreheads bare the benedictions of the air."

*And by the grace of God rests have been allowed by the way.* Shadows of the great rock in the weary land may be discovered even close by the spots where balsam-trees weep tears. Notable seasons of remembrance have we all of halts for refreshment we have already enjoyed. We could tell bright stories about them if we would. Somewhere I have read that a company of travel-worn Indians were fleeing from their foes through a desolate region of our own country in the Southwest. Suddenly they came upon a beautiful spring in the waste. Their chief struck his spear in the sward,

---

“Alabama!”

Wells in the valley.

---

crying, “Alabama! Alabama!”—Here let us rest! let us rest! Thus could the soul of each true believer recount the incidents of his traverse, and learn to put new names on the spiritual map he cherishes. Here he has no continuing city; he seeks one to come.

III. Now a third observation: EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN MUST EXPECT TO FIND “A WELL” IN EACH VALLEY OF BACA.

Water is an Oriental luxury. It is not necessary for us to study up the many pilgrim-routes through Palestine to find a ravine arid and waterless enough for our figure; for everywhere in those regions the need is poorly supplied. That is the reason why fountains were considered precious enough to be fought for in Jacob’s time. More vivid illustration of relief bursting out in the midst of difficulty, or of solace in suffering, or of refreshment in weariness, than this here in the text, could not be discovered. No words could bear a more delightful blessing for their burden than these: “I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.”

*In every sorrow there is some mitigation.* It is a homely philosophy to press, but honest and true: “Men will not see the bright light which is in the cloud.” There is a peevish egotism in the human heart when under trial. It refuses, like a sullen child, to see the injustice of its petulant complaint.

---

Cannon-ball in Crimea.Hagar's mistake.

---

It sits disconsolately down, finding fault with its harassments and pains, as if they were severer than it could bear, or than any one else was ever called to bear. "Doest thou well to be angry?" expostulated God with Jonah, when he had just withered his gourd. And Jonah answered, "I do well to be angry, even unto death."

*Sometimes, again, trouble opens sluices of joy in our experience quite new.* It was one of the incidents in the Crimean war, that a soldier lay famishing with thirst, and complaining bitterly, as a cannon-ball tore past him, that he was still left under fire. Meantime the missile of iron buried itself in the cliff-side behind him, splintered the rock, disclosed a spring, and sent close to his hot lips a full stream of water for his refreshment. Most of us have watched almost breathlessly as some tremendous providence shattered hope or health, or comfort or home, and yet found we were still alive afterwards, and indeed surrounded with blessings of which we never knew the existence before, and never felt the power till now.

*We must always search deeply all around our afflictions.* It will be foolish to miss the benefit which may be close behind them just for lack of looking it up. Hagar, out in the wilderness, simply threw her child away in desperation, because the water was spent in her bottle, and she would not consent to see him die. Instead of diligently persisting in a search to find drink for him, she slowly went away, a bow-shot off, and covered up

---

Valleys are wells.The Conference meeting.

---

her face. Now that was no way to get help. Ishmael himself was more than fifteen years old, and she was a grown up woman. One would think they might both have looked around a little more before getting discouraged. For one thing is certain from the way the story turns out; there was a fine spring of water close within their reach all the time. God knew that when he suffered her to go forth with the lad. It is worth while in every instance to search divine disciplines diligently; for in all this vale of tears there is nothing more certain than copious fountains of refreshment, if only we industriously look them up.

IV. Still another lesson: EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN MAY FORCE EVEN THE VALLEY OF BACA TO BECOME HIS WELL.

For the strange, bright phraseology of this text is often missed. I heard six cultivated speakers once in a conference meeting comment upon it, and all to edification; but not one of them got the verse right. It reads thus: "Who, passing through the valley of Baca, make *it* a well; the rain also filleth the pools." Here the statement seems sharply clear that in some way or other one is made happy, not only in despite of trouble, but by means of it: this may be to many a secret; but "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and his covenant is to make them know it." It was once actually given as a riddle how a man could tear a lion in pieces and find honey, so that out of an eater should come forth sweetness. And not every-

---

Strength in God.Samson's jaw-bone.

---

body could guess it then. And not everybody can guess now how a valley of tears can be a fountain of joy, unless he gives it much study.

Two conditions of success in finding out the blessedness of sorrow are indicated here in these verses of the text. One is, full trust in divine providence; the other is, habitual repose upon divine wisdom. Note the two expressions at the beginning: "Blessed is the man *whose strength is in thee*;" and "Blessed is the man *in whose heart are the ways of them*: who, passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well."

The first of these means that a believer is to commit his whole case into the hands of God. All weakness himself, his strength is in God. More and more as he advances, he surrenders self and leans on God. That is the significance of the next verse: "They go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." The moment any Christian in simple-hearted confidence commits himself to divine providence, he discovers the absolutely limitless reach of that statement with which this wonderful old Psalm closes: "The Lord God is a Sun and Shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." This positive self-surrender is one of the conditions of forcing sorrow to minister comfort. It is compelling the weapon, which slays thousands of Philistines, to pour forth a fountain for our thirst.

And the other condition is habitual repose on



Habitual repose.

The Mount of God.

divine wisdom. For this is the exact reference of the expression, "in whose heart are the *ways* of them." The word "ways," refers to *habits* of thinking, doing, and feeling. Trust in God cannot be exercised by fits and starts. It is not a thing of impulse, but of steady, every-day principle.

With these two conditions met, any believer can turn his valleys of weeping into fountains of refreshment always. He must trust God to do his part, and God will never fail. "The rain also filleth the pools." He may never know just how the joy he feels is fed by unseen sluices of comfort; but he will feel it just the same. Who does not know these times of ineffable mystery; when the soul, all subdued and solemn, is broken, wounded, and yet exalted and serene; ready in its own measure to say with the brave apostle, "I take pleasure in distresses; most gladly will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; when I am weak, I am strong."

V. Only one observation more: EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN WILL FIND HIS VALLEY OF BACA ENDING ON THE MOUNT OF GOD.

We have quoted the verse before: "They go from strength to strength; *every one of them* appeareth before God." They increase in faith; they luxuriate in fruitage; they vanish in fruition. "Thou wilt guide me by thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory." Gaining as he goes, the steady believer recruits as he rests, and sings as he suffers. By and by he reaches his goal. The valley

The beautiful gates.

Explanation at last.

of Baca is "passed through." Then he stands in the full light of God, and shines as he enters.

One supreme moment there is to each faithful Christian's existence, forward to which he may often with profit even now summon himself to look. It will be the finest moment of his earthly life, and it will be the final one. Through one valley, and over one hill after another, he will journey, oftentimes shining, oftentimes shadowed, perhaps worn and weary all the difficult way. But he will, one sweet sunlit morning, really reach the beautiful gates, "on golden hinges turning." It would not be a wonder if, amid even the rejoicings he hears from the near throng that welcome him, he should ask just one flashing instant of review to look behind him over the long, devious path he has trodden. *Then he will understand it at last.* It may not have been what he would have chosen; but its discipline was profitable, and now its end is peace—eternal, sacred, sure.

"Along my earthly way how many clouds are spread!

Darkness, with scarce one cheerful ray, seems gathering o'er  
my head.

Yet, Father, thou art Love; oh, hide not from my view!

But when I look, in prayer, above, appear in mercy through.

My pathway is not hid; thou knowest all my need;

And I would do as Israel did—follow where thou wilt lead.

Lead me, and then my feet shall never, never stray;

But safely I shall reach the seat of happiness and day.

And, oh! from that bright throne I shall look back and see  
The path I went, and that alone was the right path for me."

## II.

### BARABBAS OR CHRIST?

“NOT THIS MAN, BUT BARABBAS.”—*John 18:40.*

OUR purpose in taking up the narrative of Jesus' arraignment before the civil power in Jerusalem will be simple, and it is best that in the outset it should be made explicitly clear. It affords the most vivid illustration in the New Testament of just two great moral lessons: Pilate's behavior shows *the wicked wrong of indecision*, and the chief priests' choice of Barabbas' release shows *the utter ruin of a wrong decision*. These will become apparent, each in its turn, as we study the story.

I. Earliest of all, let us group together the incidents of the history, so that their order may be seen.

Observe the rapid action of the priests. “-And straightway in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes, and the whole council, held a consultation, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him up to Pilate.” It must have been very late on Thursday night when the great council finished the condemnation of their prisoner. But the moment that was over, the priests hurried him at dawn into the presence of the Roman governor. Their feet ran to evil, and they made haste to shed innocent blood.

Now comes the providential moment for Pilate. For the wisdom of God so orders it that this man shall be able to meet his tremendous responsibility



---

Mere punctilios.Shirking responsibility.

---

unembarrassed by a mob for his audience. These zealots, like all creatures who have the form of godliness, but deny the power thereof, are so emphatically pious that even in the midst of murder they pause on a punctilio; they will not enter the judgment-hall lest they should be so defiled that they could not eat the passover. This left Pilate the chance calmly to converse with Jesus alone.

Then succeeds the pitiable period of subterfuge which always follows a shirked duty. Convinced of our Lord's innocence, Pilate proposed that his official authority should just be counted out in this matter. He bade the chief priests take their prisoner themselves, and deal with him as they pleased. To this he received a reply which showed their savage animosity, and at the same instant disclosed the use they meant to make of his power. They cried out that the only reason why they had consulted him at all was found in the unlawfulness of killing a man without due form of procedure under imperial authority.

Next to this is recorded the attempt of the governor to shift his responsibility. Pilate learned, from the mere chance use of a word, that Jesus was from Galilee; and as this province was in the jurisdiction of Herod, the titular monarch of the Jews, he sent his prisoner under a guard over to the other palace. The king was quite glad to see this Nazarene prophet, and tried to get him to work a miracle, but did not succeed in evoking so much as a word from his lips. Thus was fulfilled the ancient

---

Isaiah's prophecy.A robber offered.

---

Scripture: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." But before the return, this apostate Israelite put a slight on Jesus' kingly claims, so that Pilate might know how much in derision he held them. The soldiers mocked him, arraying him in a gorgeous robe, and then led him back into the presence of the governor again.

At his wits' end, Pilate at last proposes a compromise. He remembered that there was a custom, lately brought over from Italy into Palestine, of freeing some one of the State's prisoners every year at Passover as a matter of proconsular clemency. He offered to let Jesus go under this rule. Such a procedure would be equivalent to pronouncing him technically a criminal, and yet his life would be spared. But the subtle priests put the people up to refuse this favor flatly. Then Pilate determined to give them an alternative so repulsive that they would be forced to accept. There was a wretched malefactor, Barabbas by name—a thief, a rebel, and a murderer, all in one; Pilate said, "Choose between these two; I am going to free one of them." They chose without hesitation: "Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber."

At this juncture the governor's wife meets him with a warning from a dream. He had returned to the judgment-seat, and was just about to pro-

---

A wife's dream.Pilate's hypocrisy.

---

nounce the decision. His wife interrupted: "Have thou nothing to do with that just man." This threw Pilate into a frantic irresolution once more. A second time he left the room, and went forth to expostulate with the infuriated crowd at the door. With renewed urgency he pressed upon their consideration the half-threat that he would let loose on them this wretch Barabbas, if they persisted in demanding Jesus' death. This only exasperated the temper of those belligerent bigots so that they cried the more, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

At last this bewildered judge gave his reluctant consent to their clamors. But in the act of condemnation he did the foolishlest thing of all he did that awful day. He took water and washed his hands before the mob, declaring hypocritically that he was innocent of the blood of the just person he was delivering up to their spite.

II. Thus we reach the crisis of events in the spiritual career of that ruler and of that nation.

1. Observe the singular picture. It is all in one verse of the Scripture. "And Pilate, wishing to content the multitude, released unto them Barabbas, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified."

Two men, now in the same moment, appear in public on the steps of the Prætorium: Jesus and Barabbas.

One of them was the Son of God, the Saviour of men. "Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith

---

Ecce Homo !Malebranche's philosophy.

---

unto them, Behold the man !” Art has tried to reproduce this scene. Doré has painted the whole of it; Guido Reni has painted the head with thorns around the forehead. Others have made similar attempts according to their fancy or their ability. It is a spectacle which attracts and discourages. Beyond them all, however, lies the fact which each Christian will be likely to fashion before his own imagination. Jesus comes forth with his reed and his robe: *Ecce Homo !*

Barabbas alongside ! This creature has never been a favorite with artists. He was a paltry wretch any way, thrust up into a fictitious importance by the supreme occasion. We suppose him to have been quite a commonplace impostor. *Bar* means son; *Abba* some interpret here as father. Very likely he chose his own name as a false Messiah, “Son of the Father;” indeed, some of the ancient manuscripts call him “Jesus Barabbas.” He does not pose picturesquely; look at him !

2. The moral of this scene turns upon the wilful choice made between these two leaders, the real and the pretended Christ. Now let it be said here that the whole history is often repeated even in these modern times. It is unwise to lose the lesson taught us by rushing off into pious execration of those bigoted Jews. Men had better look into their own hearts. In his introduction to the study of metaphysics, Malebranche remarks very quietly, “It is not into a strange country that such guides as these volumes of mine will conduct you; but it is into

James Russell Lowell.

Choice fixes character.

your own, in which, not unlikely, you are a stranger." It will be well to bear in mind that the decision is offered and made between Jesus and Barabbas whenever the Lord of glory is represented in a principle, in an institution, in a truth, in a person. This is the grand question along the ages:

"Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,  
 In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the Good or Evil  
 side;  
 Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the  
 bloom or blight,  
 Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the  
 right;  
 And the choice goes by for ever, 'twixt that Darkness and  
 that Light.  
 Then it is the brave man chooses, while the coward stands  
 aside,  
 Doubting in his abject spirit till his Lord is crucified:  
 For Humanity sweeps onward; where to-day the martyr  
 stands,  
 On the morrow crouches Judas, with the silver in his hands.  
 It is ours to save our brethren; ours with peace and love to  
 win  
 Their darkened heart from error, ere they harden it to sin;  
 But if before his duty man with listless spirit stands,  
 Ere long the Great Avenger takes the work from out his  
 hands."

So let us pause right here to inquire what this decision involves for those who make it. The illustration is helpful, and we can still employ it.

Dwell a moment upon the deliberateness of the choice which the multitude made that day. The exhibition was perfectly intelligible: it always is.



---

"His blood be on us."

No retreat possible.

---

There is Barabbas! there is Christ! When a sharp moral crisis is reached, men generally know the side they ought to choose. Right and wrong, truth and error, sin and holiness, the world or God—this is just the old Jerusalem scene back again. Such a choice fixes character. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." When one wills strongly, he moulds himself into the likeness of the thing he chooses. The old Castilian proverb says, "Every man is the son of his own work."

Then observe the responsibility of the choice between Barabbas and Christ. The chief priests declared they would take it. "Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children." Pilate could ruin no soul but his own. In the end Jesus' blood rested upon the nation that slew him. Oh, what a history! a land without a nation—a nation without a land! All the vast future swung on the hinge of that choice.

Note, therefore, the reach of this choice. It exhausted all the chances. Once—on that Friday morning early—those two men stood side by side, and Pilate asked the question, "Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you?" It was never possible after that to traverse the same spiritual ground of alternative again. Whoever chooses the wrong must go and fare for good or ill with the thing he has chosen. The thief becomes Master, the murderer Lord. In this case we must remember that the character of Barabbas was in no respect changed by the foolish leadership thrust upon

---

Apes and lions.The secret of the choice.

---

him. His historic record remained unalterable. Hence, the Jews at this instant gave up everything at once. They even denied Herod as king. In their eagerness to crucify Jesus, they told Pilate with a scream of surrender that henceforth they had "no king but Cæsar." They perilled all they had; and the die was cast.

We need not make any pretence of mystery in seeking after the philosophy of this decision. It does seem wonderful to find that any one could cry out for some more publicity of this suppressed Barabbas. Poor creature! when he came out there on the steps, and cast his eye over the shouting multitude, he must have been surprised beyond the power of words to express at this sudden disclosure of his undeserved popularity. "The emperor can make an ape be called a lion," once said Gregory the Great, "but he cannot make him become one." The applause of the populace could not make this Barabbas a noble, when he was just a thief. The secret of the absurd choice published that day so vociferously, when the miscreant impostor came to the front, is found in the fact that the people did not choose *for him* at all, but chose *against Christ*. They would not have this Man to reign over them. Anything, anything to be rid of accepting Jesus of Nazareth as their spiritual King. It is not true always that men love the evil they seem to clamor for; in many instances the explanation of their apparent preference is found in simple hatred of the truth which confronts them.

III. We are ready now to receive the full teaching of the story: our two lessons appear plainly.

1. We see the wicked wrong of indecision. We are agreed that Pilate wished to let Jesus go. But when he gave him up to the spite of his murderers, he himself shared the crime. The ancient psalm might have uttered its reproach in his ears: "When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him." Thus he destroyed his character. Trimming, injustice, cruelty: step by step he went down, till he added a scourging which nobody demanded. "The facility with which we commit certain sins," says Augustine, "is a punishment for sins already committed." Thus he also destroyed his reputation. One man there has been whose name was put in an epistle just for a black background on which to write a name that was white. Our Lord Jesus Christ witnessed a good confession "before Pontius Pilate." So the Roman governor's history was made permanent, that its sin might render Jesus' purity conspicuous. And the same name is put in the Apostles' Creed that all Christendom might hold it in "everlasting fame" of infamy: we believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, who was "crucified under Pontius Pilate." So wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this man hath done be told for a memorial of him.

2. We see, finally, the utter ruin of a wrong decision. It cannot be complained that these people did not know their own minds. They did not



---

Goethe's sad estimate.Irretrievable error.

---

exhibit the least vacillation. Their persistency seems marvellous. They chose firmly, even when the future of their souls as well as that of their nation hung on their choice. There is nothing unusual in this. Goethe commences the fifth book of his autobiography with these somewhat discouraging words: "Every bird has its decoy, and every man is led and misled in a way peculiar to himself." We need not pause to discuss here the width of application such a statement might have; it was true of Pontius Pilate; it was true of that infuriated crowd clamoring for Barabbas before Christ.

Never mind them now. Do not waste any more thought upon the fierce base actors in that crucifixion scene: think of yourselves: "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live." We have our one chance; it will be a sad thing to lose it. It was a wise observation once made by an old man who had seen the world at its best and worst, "The sense of an irretrievable error in life, fastening upon the mind, is a foretaste of hell." To-day there is hope, if you choose quickly. There stands Barabbas—there stands Christ. Is it needful that another should tell you that Barabbas will never satisfy your longing? You need the full revelation of God in your soul; there is your rest.

### III.

#### THE IMMORTALITY OF THE AFFECTIONS.

“YOUR HEART SHALL LIVE FOR EVER.”—*Psalm 22 : 26.*

THE heart has been employed by the inspired writers as the symbol of human affections. But to this there is added the suggestion of some high relations which we sustain to our Maker. So the heart of man is said to be tried by God—to be opened, established, enlightened, strengthened, searched by God. David counsels that we walk before God with all our heart. Moses says we should serve God with all our heart. Solomon advises that we trust God with all our heart. And Jesus, the great Teacher, commands that we love God with all our heart. Thus, almost universally, we find the term *heart* joined in some experimental sense with the name of God. Its primary employment in Scripture, therefore, may be assumed as religious.

Hence, our text finds an exact and almost exhaustive parallel in the language of another Psalm, “Your heart shall live that seek God.” It asserts the absolute indestructibility of our religious affections. It would seem as if we might reach the fulness of its meaning better by working up to it through the intervening lessons.

I. Begin with this: In general the verse teaches that there is one thing, even in this fleeting world, which is immortal.

“The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” Man wears on his forehead the crown of his regnant majesty; for his nature is undying. Some cities he builds fade into forgetfulness like the frail fabrics of a dream. But not an individual among the throngs who have crowded the earth with population, not one soul from the multitudes which have inhabited the globe since the far beginning, has ever yet passed out of existence. No such thing as a human being's gliding away from conscious life is admitted in the Old or the New Testament. A soul's state can be changed, but its nature is unalterable. No man can just avoid the issue, and slip unnoticed out into the utter dark.

It is not worth our while here to ring the changes on this awful word *for ever*. It can have but one signification, and we accept it as it stands. The little lad, nameless and unhistoric, who furnished his five loaves and two fishes on the shore of Tiberias, is alive to-day, just as each one of the five thousand men, besides the women and children, whom his generosity helped to feed, is living also. Not even foreboding limits that fixed future. No sadder words of dismay were ever spoken than those of the old philosopher, Seneca: “I once, trusting to the arguments of others, flattered myself with the prospect of a sure life beyond the grave, and then I longed for death; but now I have been suddenly awaked, and so I have lost that beautiful dream.” That made no difference with the result: Seneca is

---

The soul's death.

Everlasting life.

---

living just the same somewhere, and knows now what *for ever* means.

II. In the second place, it is helpful to learn here that the text draws a distinction between life and mere existence.

Into this word *live* we must suffer a new increment of meaning to enter also. The fiat went forth early, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." But the further revelation of God's will convinces us that the significance of such a threat is, not that the transgressor shall be struck out of being, but that he shall endure a living death. A conscious existence shall be opened upon his intensified and still conscious experience, which shall absorb all his powers of vitality in the reception of retribution for what he has done. Hence, to offset such reach of meaning in the word *die*, we find, everywhere in the New Testament and the Old, a vast reach of significance attached to this correlate word, *live*. "He that believeth on me," said the Saviour, "hath everlasting life." There can be no value in further speculation; we must go at once to the Word of God for all positive doctrine. And here, in the Bible, we meet a new disclosure, startling in its admonition, and, in many of its phases, suggestive of alarm; yet, on the whole, of inestimable comfort and help.

We are informed that these hearts of ours may have one of two moral states. Whichever of these is possessed as a permanent character, decides destiny. The heart that "seeks God" enters immedi-

ately into the nearness of God's presence, where there is fulness of joy. The heart that wilfully refuses to "seek God" is forced into the darkness of utter banishment from God for the unending future. To the first of these conditions the Scriptures have given the name of *life*; to the second, *death*.

Before me, then, I see two doors—one of gold, and one of iron. I do not know altogether where they lead. I learn soon enough to be sure, however, that behind the dark gate of iron there is not one thing I want, and everything I dread. Behind the shining portal of gold there is a blessed hope and home, which will be all my soul can ever desire. Now I can swing either of these on its hinges and pass through. As a free-willed creature, I am told I can be permitted to take my choice. If I "seek God," I go to the golden door, for there is where God resides. If not, I go to the iron one. But the death I find, in the one case, is not simply annihilation; and the life I reach, in the other, is not merely prolonged existence.

III. This is sober doctrine: so observe, in the third place, the text evidences its authority by language peremptory and plain.

It is not necessary to claim that the word *shall*, here used, is of itself sovereign and conclusive. But the form of speech employed is not that of prediction so much as that of promise: our translators must have meant to show us their confident belief that here the Holy Spirit intended more than just to say that our hearts *will* live for ever.

The expression resembles that of our Lord: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he *shall live* for ever." This is his covenant promise. But, lest I should seem to strain the language, it may be well to insist that there are three fixed laws of human nature, which, fairly working together, render it absolutely certain that our affections will survive the shock of death and reassert themselves hereafter.

1. One is the law of *habit*. We recognize a sailor by his unconscious gait on the street, gained by long years of tossing upon the ship's deck. We are willing to take oath in a court of justice as to the authenticity of a merchant's signature. And the pressure of such a law holds all the more surely in our mental and moral nature than in our physical. Indeed, the power and permanency of its results are much more extensive when the natures are higher, finer, and more sensitive to external influences. Loves are stronger, and hates are more inveterate, than simple habits of body and mind.

Hence, we have all observed that, when persons are dying, some predominant tastes and feelings they have cherished become singularly manifest. We exclaim, "The ruling passion is strong in death." Those likes and dislikes which reappear amid the bewilderments of the final agony, and imperatively master the man in his mortal hour, driving their fierce way so sharply up to the very edge of the tomb, will inevitably be reproduced



beyond it. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

2. Another law is that of *exercise*. The swiftness of the weaver, the delicacy of the musician's touch, the boldness of the painter, the sinewy force of the smith, are all due to much growth gained from vigorous and persistent repetition. We say at once, "Practice makes perfect." Under this law the memory is often so wonderfully strengthened that it disdains data of aid. The reasoning faculties become able to conduct long and intricate processes of argument without chance of mistake, and even in defiance of fatigue.

But now the most curious working of this law of exercise will appear in the fact that, when our affections are wrought upon, their increase is supreme. One's prejudices become his master: he cannot unlearn what he has been learning. Love increases the power of loving just by continuance in loving. Hate grows malignantly venomous before one knows how much his better nature is overcome; so that, at the last moment, a wicked man discovers he is not under his own control. What he likes, he must continue to like; what he dislikes, he must continue to dislike. To will is present with him, perhaps, but how to perform that which is good, he finds not; the evil which he would not do, he does; he recognizes, then, a law in his members warring against the law of his

mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin. He has educated and exercised his affections, until now they defy him: they are his despot, and he is their slave.

3. Then there is the law of *association*. Most of all, this is subtle and forceful. When its action reaches a man's moral and mental natures working together, it seems almost irresistible. If you part in a certain room with a friend, that room, ever after, brings your friend and your parting to your memory. The strongest associations we have come from the senses of hearing and smell. The sound of the hymn your mother used to sing will fill your eyes with tears. The scent of a flower from the doorway of the old homestead will be enough to send you back into years of thoughtful reminiscence.

In the case of repeated sinful indulgences, which (it may be) a penitent man is laboring hard to subdue, this law plays the part of an incendiary wind at a fire. It finds one spark remaining among the embers, and fans it into a flame. Before one is aware of it, all his bad passions are in conflagration anew. The drunkard feels his appetite raging just at the merest clink of glasses. The reluctant gambler is greedy for vicious gratification at the simple sight of the innocent cards in a parlor. So invincible is the pressure of evil associations that they appear part of one's self; the man cries out for help: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"



---

 The threefold cord.

 Our grave is waiting.
 

---

Thus we see that these three laws, so far from interfering in any degree with each other, actually intertwine themselves together and accelerate the action of each other. "A threefold cord is not quickly broken." When, all at once, they lay hold of our affections, there is no possible escape from them; through this present life, over the barriers into the life beyond, they force their way. Hence comes the fulfilment of the proverb, "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins; he shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray."

IV. In the fourth place, the text teaches that human immortality is quite independent of all accidents and surroundings.

"Our life," said Augustine, "is so brief and insecure that I know not whether to call it a dying life or a living death." We are sure at this moment that somewhere among the meadows or forests of this planet, or down on the moist floor of the sea, there is one narrow pathetic spot of earth eventually to become sacred with the deposit of our mortal dust during the days or years in which it may lie waiting for the trumpet that is to summon us to final judgment. One chamber there is to-day, somewhere beneath an unrecognized roof, that is by and by to grow august and solemn with the entering in of the inevitable shadow. But neither that room nor that tomb can forcibly hold the disembodied spirit for an hour. "Man dieth and wasteth away;"

---

"Mine—not me!"

The soul alone immortal.

---

but there yet remains the question, "Where is he?"

For it is not in the body that our immortality resides; hence the shattering of the outward semblance of a man has no effect whatever upon the indefeasible and inalienable perpetuity of the affections. "Your heart shall live for ever:" that heart is *yourself*.

"The purple stream, which through my vessels glides  
 Dull and unconscious, flows like common tides;  
 These pipes, through which the circling juices play,  
 Are not that thinking I—no more than they;  
 This frame, compacted with transcendent skill,  
 Of moving joints obedient to my will,  
 Nursed from the fruitful glebe, like yonder tree,  
 Waxes and wastes—I call it mine, not me!"

Here, then, comes out the last and exhaustive statement of doctrine in the passage we are studying. Let us read the whole verse: "The meek shall eat and be satisfied; they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live for ever." This is exactly what the other verse I have quoted says, "Your heart shall live that seek God." Even in the world, which, with "all the works that are therein, shall be burned up," there is one thing that is sure to stand—immortal man. There is one thing in man, only one, which is immortal—the soul. There is one thing in the soul in which immortal life resides—the heart. That is to say, human affections will exist for ever in the line of their "seeking." You look upward and seem to

see your Maker; some feeling within you either dilates with welcome, or shrinks with recoil: call this *yourself*, if you prefer: whatever it is, it will live for ever, because it fully and filially turns to God, or it deliberately turns away from God. Whatever your *heart* is, it will never die.

And that heart, therefore, is independent of all surroundings. It carries human existence with it in despite of all changes in the perishable universe around it. Just as in every kingdom there is a capital, and in the capital a palace, and in the palace a throne-room, and in the throne-room a monarch—so in the realm of divine government there is one capital—man; and in man a palace—the soul; and in the soul a throne-room—his heart. Now in the fires of that conflagration-day the city may burn, and the palace may be consumed; but the throne-room shall never perish, for the King is in it, and we know the King never dies. "Your heart shall live for ever."

V. Finally, our text fixes all its force by an immediate application of its doctrine to such as are meek enough to receive it.

It is likely that we all know how easy and loose seems the ordinary use of grammatical forms in the simple Hebrew tongue. So we should hardly be willing to peril much upon the strictness of these pronouns we find in the verse of the text. Still, it would be rash to say there is no significance whatever in the sudden changes from the first and third persons to the second and the plural. The word

---

Treasure fixes the heart.Insatiate longing.

---

*your* occurs nowhere else in the whole Psalm. The address is as surprising as it is abrupt: "*Your* heart shall live for ever." And if now we are to understand that the change is made for the purpose of intensifying the admonition by rendering it more direct through all ages of human history, then there follow some important inferences.

1. For example, this: If your heart is to live for ever, then much consideration ought to be given to your aims in this life, for they are fashioning the heart that is to be immortal. The purposes which we strive for sometimes strike back powerfully upon our affections: "For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also." It is indispensable that we see how a treasure so fixes a heart as that, when the treasure fails, the heart goes right along craving it, and missing it, and mourning for it with an unappeased hunger. Love of power breeds arrogance, and love of wealth breeds avarice. Then when the world passes away and the lust thereof—when gold and silver are burned up, when partisanship has vanished, and the generation we dominated has died—then the misfortune is that the heart must go on sighing in an eternal widowhood of insatiate wishing for what is lost; for it is fashioned to entertain nothing else now.

That is to say, the superior has yielded to the inferior, the lofty has gone down headlong to the low, the spiritual has subjected itself to the sway of the animal, the whole nature has been first debased, corrupted and defiled, and then, in its utter

ruin of spiritual drunkenness and opium-eating, is dismissed to an immortality of unsatisfied desolation, which hereafter it cannot even shed.

2. Again, if our heart is to live for ever, then our companionships ought to be chosen with a view to the far future which is coming. Some men and women strive very hard to get into what they are wont to call "society." And some toil harder still to remain in. Now it should be known that almost any one can buy in, generally at a good price, as the world goes. The word *parvenu* means one lately brought in; and there are parvenus all around us who frankly tell us that the after years grow rather expensive for those who hope for a permanency. After a while, it is likely that a good many become ennuyed, and wonder whether it makes a profitable investment. For, on some day of disclosure, a man overhears the remark that society cherishes his cards more than it does his children, prefers his wine to his wife, and really loves his dinner-table more that it does himself.

Just there comes the discovery that he cannot retreat. Such is the power of social ambition, that the heart is compelled to drop down when its idol is pitched over on its face. The heart fares as fares the world it has sought. But the worst is, the heart cannot be allowed to die: it lives and suffers; sees old enemies triumphant; feels the same ugly jealousies it had long ago; hankers for what is for ever out of its reach, and enters an eternity where it is alone.

3. Once more: If our heart is to live for ever, then some care should be had concerning the processes of education by which our affections are trained. Alas, how many men and women there are busily engaged in making hearts which will be terrible things to live alone with by and by! These corrupt tastes and perverse habits; all these mean associations and sharpened desires; this petulance, maliciousness, peevishness; these dull beatings of the mind up and down through mere business machinery; these miserable little petty rivalries of dress and demeanor and equipage; all imbedded in the heart—fixed, even now, in its fibre and substance, and to be one time offered as our sole dependence—this is our education for eternity.

Among the Hartz Mountains, in Germany, there is one spot up to which tourists are often asked to walk in the after part of the day, in order that they may see what is called the spectre of the Brocken. A vast reach of hills appears, terraced away into the distance, across whose blue expanse a great figure in human shape is seen moving. Now it requires some little attention before one can discover that this phenomenon is only his own shadow projected by the sun behind his back. That brow, whose nod seems as if it might shake the universe, is simply his own forehead; that hand, which might grapple with the Titans, is only his own with the staff in it that he climbed up by; and that foot, whose tread beats the forests, is only his own, sadly fatigued, too, with the unusual toil.



Hearts can be changed.

Queen Elizabeth's portrait.

Here is our picture for study. This heart of ours is eventually projected forward upon the mountains of an unexplored eternity. Even at the present moment it begins to exhibit the vastness of its future. It is not *this* arm you are training, but that of yonder giant; it is not *this* foot you are leading onward, but that of the giant. It is not this life at all, but that other life, wherein lies the majesty, and wherein centres the hope, of your entire being.

4. So, at last, if our hearts are to live for ever, then surely, it is now time some hearts were changed powerfully by the Spirit of divine grace. It is too late to mould them over, or to educate them again. The ancient Romans would not suffer the figure or the name of Mors to be cut on medals or seals; but they died, nevertheless, as die other men. One may shut his eyes when falling down a precipice, but if he were stone-blind, it would not hinder his being dashed to pieces. Queen Elizabeth of England, imperious in rebellion at some pitiless and unflattering effects of light, commanded the artist to paint her portrait without shadows; he complied, but the picture appeared without features. Life must be painted with death beside it.

There is something exquisitely pathetic in the remembrance of Christian people that these words of our text may be considered the very last words of our dying Redeemer to men. For we all know that he repeated the twenty-second Psalm to him-

---

Christ on the cross.

The "vainglory of life."

self while upon the cross. One loud cry, rapidly rehearsing the opening verse, tells us how he so-laced the sufferings of his dying with the prayer it contains. A moment—just a moment—he turned from his God to his people; then this counsel was spoken to the world and the ages. Long years previous to this he had asked, "My son, give me thine heart." Only the warning now remained to be uttered: "Your heart shall live for ever." There is a Persian proverb which says, "The heart is the only thing that is better by being broken." And the Scripture furnishes us the words of surrender: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God! thou wilt not despise."

A few years more, and all that now dazzles and delights will have vanished. Do not set these living hearts upon it. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

## IV.

### SCIENCE AND THE CHURCH.

“AND THE EARTH HELPED THE WOMAN.”—*Revelation 12 : 16.*

It is to be supposed that you all know what such a text means, in general particulars. The “woman” mentioned here is a symbol of the New Testament church. She is represented as pursued by the devil, who ejects from his mouth a river of water after her. Just then the earth opens; the deluge is swallowed up; so the woman is saved.

Hence we can catch from so rapidly flitting a vision at least as much as this welcome proposition: Nature is on the side of genuine religion; science is ready now to be helpful to the church when it needs succor.

That is to say, true science may be trusted. Thus far in history it has been really friendly to “the faith once delivered to the saints;” its revelations have ever shown a most delightful submission to the inspired record. The moment any new fact has been heralded as a discovery, that fact has been investigated by earnest thinkers; and as soon as it has been registered and understood, it has ranged itself among the corroborations of revealed truth.

Such a statement may strike some people with a sudden surprise; for they have been wont to consider Christian believers afraid of scientific discussion altogether. But the church has never become thoroughly frightened by what scoffers have had to

---

The sensitive plant.

Newton and Laplace.

---

say. There is no reason for a spasm of alarm now. The sensitive plant is not more delicate in its quick recognitions of the master of the garden where it grows, when it bends in modest obeisance to his lightest finger's touch, than all the disclosures of a true science have been in their surrender to the Word.

I. Hence it might be wise for us, in the first place, to allude to the somewhat ungenerous way in which the woman has been treating the earth in modern times.

There is a violence of prejudice in the minds of a great many of God's people which is almost inexplicable. From the outset they suspect all offers of help from the world of natural research. Now the day has passed for a mere show of bigotry. The dawn of discovery has arrived, and people will just be laughed at who think scientific men are going to be put down by either traditions or dogmatic theologies of the schools. Whoever considers that his opinions are settled beyond modification is simply a conceited or obstinate debater. Philosophers themselves have often had to yield in their hypotheses. For new elements enter the discussion with each year of God's grace.

Sir Isaac Newton predicted that by and by this universe would get so far involved and entangled by certain "perturbations" among the planets, which he detected and described, that God's own hand would need to be interposed to rectify the impending ruin. Now Laplace, coming a few

---

Adjustments in nature.Unfortunate mistakes.

---

seasons later along the ages, showed beyond a contradiction that the Almighty foreknew all these errors and disturbances, and really had made provision to meet them from the first by a series of most marvellous adjustments. The universe had a sort of self-regulating compensation working among its own forces, and so would keep itself safe.

Now if skilled philosophers have to be thus modest in dealing with each other, how much more wary ought the rank and file of mere theologians to be! For they are a class of scholars who do not claim to be experts in the details of the material sciences. Hence come the humiliating mistakes many of them make in the rapid attacks of their belligerent arguments. Perhaps they are not to be blamed for not being intelligent in the denunciations of their witty paragraphs; for time and opportunity may not have been permitted them for full investigation. But it is beyond the claim of logical charity to assert that a man is not to blame for attempting replies that are unintelligent. What right, for example, has a clergyman now to construct a tremendous philippic against geology, boldly basing his reasonings upon a statement so sweeping as this: "It is the constant language of geologists that among all the fossils no young have been found"? Could a patient geologist do anything more with such an adversary than quietly to count him out of the scholarly debate?

And further: there would be some additional reason for flexibility of belief on the part of reli-

---

Traditional expositions.

Illustrations from science.

---

gious expositors found in the fact that men of science are generally quite reverent in their estimates of God's exact Word, no matter how relentless they may be in their rejections of traditional expositions which that Word has received. If they take up a new Commentary, just issued from the press, they show a most gratifying respect for those pathetic, grand old lines in large type across the top of each page; it is the uninspired fine print at the bottom that they criticise. Hence the theologians' tears!

Is it not time that religious people recognize the lapse of time and the growth of ages? Some things have come to light which Turretin and Luther and Calvin did not know, or they very likely would never have written what they did. It would not be fair to assert that scientists are accustomed to present these new facts in discovery in a derisive or cool-blooded way. Indeed, they frequently suggest upon their own pages some ingenious comments which they appear to hope will reconcile the fresh information from nature with the inspired writings, which they do not deny have come from the same supreme Author. It is not a rare thing to record that now and then expositors have been glad to acknowledge that some of their most brilliant illustrations of truth have been furnished to them by men who are popularly reported as being unfriendly to the evangelical faith. It is neither a modest nor a generous act to raise a hue and cry against such wise and scholarly students as are trying to elucidate Scripture itself as well as



---

Who finds the diamonds ?

God will take care of Moses.

---

nature. The true prudence for us all would be to welcome aid in any difficult field of labor, no matter whence it comes. A fact is a fact, as a diamond is a diamond, and both are valuable; and it would be a sheer waste of time to inquire jealously the color of the first searcher who found either.

Let those who unearth the sculptures of Nineveh, who explore the streets of Pompeii, or bring home to us the buried treasures of Egypt, publish freely all they can learn. There was a day when the gold and silver of Pharaoh's people went into the heaps of money contributed for building the tabernacle of God in the wilderness; there need be no fear but that all the discoveries of every science in turn, as soon as they have become fixed and tabulated by scientists themselves, will range their valuable brightness where they can best beautify the temple of God's Word. Let ethnology investigate and classify the races; Paul's speech at Athens is not going to be ruined. Let geology dig the planet through and through; we need never tremble for the Pentateuch; God will be wise enough to take care of Moses. For he is not going to suffer the kingdom of grace to be overthrown by contradictions that men will discover in the kingdom of nature; he is King in both kingdoms, and Christ once said that even Beelzebub could not stand, divided against himself.

II. Now let us seek, in the second place, suggesting just a possible illustration under each head, some few of the forms of actual help which natural

---

Unconscious prophecies.When was light created?

---

science of every sort has already furnished, thus exhibiting its real friendliness.

1. To begin with, let us consider *its answer to what have been termed the "unconscious prophecies" of the Bible.*

It is a most remarkable fact that in none of its dogmatical statements does the Word of God cross any defined line of physical discovery. We may even go farther than this. Not only do the Scriptures preserve a calm integrity in all these exposures, unsullied by any contradiction, but now we find, with the newer revelations of science, some frequent anticipations of their existence hinted in the obscure language of the inspired volume. This proves that what human ingenuity with laborious investigation has acquired was long ago understood in the Supreme Mind which held care over the sacred penmen. Every now and then we discover that some fine element or fact or truth or relation, which has just come to knowledge so as to be announced in the school-books, was really implied or involved in the singular expressions holy men employed under the guidance of the Spirit.

Take, for an example, the distinction which is made in the opening chapters of Genesis between solar light and that primitive illumination which existed before the sun. Moses, as you will remember, tells us that light was created on the first day, while the sun and moon were not created till afterwards, on the fourth. Here infidelity has carped, and even the Christian world has grown timid and

---

Fossil animals' eyes.

"Light-bearers."

perplexed. Now what does science have to say? It points to us the remains of animals which lived in the long ages before man was brought into being; and it calls our attention to the fact that these fossil creatures have undoubted eyes, some of them eyes almost innumerably multiplied. Now eyes, of course, prove that light was in existence then in some form. But this could not have been sunlight; for geologists have settled that the deposits of coal, made at something like the same period, were composed of woody fibre which never grew in the ordinary sunshine. There was once a period, therefore, in which light existed which was not sunshine; two distinct sciences have helped each other to that conclusion. And then lately light has been proved to be not a substance at all, but only a series of waves produced and transmitted in and along through an invisible and tenuous fluid pervading the universe as the air does the sky. Then to all this information generously furnished by astronomy, geology, and botany, comes philology to add that the word in the Pentateuch which Moses employs means not lights but "light-bearers." Here we perceive that what has taken four sciences four thousand years to discover must have been known beforehand and ordered by the same God who, after having created the world, inspired the Bible.

2. In the second place, the church has occasion to thank science for its help in giving *a constant rebuke to impertinent cavils* which petulant objectors are in the habit of urging.

There is a species of minor criticisms put forward with harmful ingenuity at the present day, which, though exceedingly trivial, do yet in their results become vexatious. They will pass the notice of a thoroughly intelligent or candid man, for he will not believe them to have been seriously pressed; but they are the arguments which powerfully move small minds, for they are easily grasped and held with much tenacity. To the educated Bible student they resemble only insects of little bulk, though of vast activity; and he hardly deems it needful more than to smite them with the open palm of his hand when they come singing in his ear, only that their sting proves annoying and sometimes leaves a mean irritation behind it.

Voltaire founded an argument against the truthfulness of the Old Testament upon what he termed the ignorant mistakes of the writers who composed the various books. Among these he instanced the expression of Solomon in the Proverbs, "Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color *in the glass.*" Now, said this witty Frenchman, Solomon could not have been the wise man he was reputed to be, or else he would have been fully informed that glass was not known as a substance until long after he was dead; it was invented subsequent to the date of his somewhat fragmentary book. Every little infidel of course instantly took up the little joke, and compared his error with the discovery of a water-mark in the paper on which a forgery is written, fixing the fraud by the date disclosed.

---

When was glass invented ?

An indignant onset.

---

Now science stepped into the controversy, not precisely for the Bible's sake in that skeptical age, but for its own. Chronology settled that Solomon lived about 1004 B. C. Then a historian proved that glass was in use among the Egyptians far before that time, for he had found pictures of glass-blowing in the ruins of temples sculptured on the stone slabs. Archæology followed with an exhibition of a glass signet engraved with a monarch's name, and dated 1500 B. C.; this was discovered in ancient Thebes. And to this there was added the fact, announced by the expedition just returning from Egypt, that there were glass beads buried with the mummies they began to unroll. At this moment also came in philology to say that Solomon had not in fact mentioned the name of glass at all in his proverb; the original Hebrew word meant *cup*, a mere drinking-vessel of any material; the wise man had warned against wine "when it giveth its color *in the cup*." Thus, again, four distinct sciences in turn took up the contemptible little cavil and silenced it.

It seems a waste of energy; but this has often been the result of such a demonstration. Whenever the criticisms have become really offensive and troublesome, science has turned terribly around upon them, and with an indignant and impetuous onset has swept them into utter annihilation in a moment, as the full thunderburst of a trained broadside from a seventy-four-gun ship would sweep away a gnat. One might assert that so much effort was



quite needless; but, at any rate, it is edifying to see how able science is to do it; and it is comforting to know the Bible has an ally so faithful, with resources so ready in the hour of peril and so formidable to its foes.

3. Once more: consider science as exemplifying its friendliness for the church in *the illustration of difficult doctrines* which it furnishes.

It is not asserted just now that natural analogies stand for proofs of anything revealed in the Scriptures; but they do in some cases seem to show that the Author of the Bible is the Supreme Architect of the universe; they disclose the same hand.

It does not matter where we seek for examples. The resurrection of the body, perhaps one of the doctrines of the New Testament the most mysterious, was quite a fresh revelation to the world at large. It is a hard matter of belief to many a perplexed mind now. But it is no harder than the mystery of a tree's growth from the seed; and this is the figure which the apostle Paul used for his help in explaining it. The entire theory of a plant's changes, when the grain dies in order that it may be alive again, is inexplicable; but this is what our divine Lord employed in order to clear the mystery a little. Singularly enough, though both of these strange matters are beyond our reach, the one appears to throw illumination upon the other. The worm, changing to the butterfly, the butterfly to the worm again, are beyond the limits of our philosophy; but it is the chrysalis which



gives us our vividest emblem by which to set forth the notion of immortality. Thus science brings a most generous help to revelation by even its suggestion of an equal difficulty in dealing with its intricate problems. For in these matters of everyday observation there seems to be a hint that we all belong to the same system and are fashioned by the same omnipotent hand. There are reserves in science into which the all-wise Creator retires as he does in revelation.

4. In the fourth place, let us be ready to acknowledge the help we receive *in the reconciliation which science offers concerning the paradoxes of reason and faith* in the Scriptures.

We are all well aware that for many generations the one supreme cavil levelled against Christianity has been that those who are rational creatures of a reasoning God are urged to believe what they are frankly told they cannot understand. And the demand has been pressed that religious people should be prepared to offer the same proofs—that is, the same sort of proofs—that science offers for its propositions.

How signal the rebuke has been, whenever this challenge has been accepted, we need not now pause to recall. How lamentably short our scientific creeds would become, if we should in our school-books for the children carry out this principle, we are compelled in all modesty to confess. We should have to deny the growing of the grass, the falling of the rain, the circulation of our blood, the bursting of an

---

Who squares the circle?

Three are one; one is three.

---

acorn, the instinct of a spider, the freezing of a lake: all these would have to be discarded as incredible and unknown. And as for mathematics, it would become necessary to give up Euclid after he finished with straight lines; for no one can possibly get rid of that uncomfortable decimal in the squaring of the circle; and until that is done, all subsequent propositions must halt in their logic. The fact is, the fall of Lucifer from heaven is no more mysterious than the disappearance of the seventh Pleiad.

Now we do not say that this relieves the difficulty; but it helps us to be patient with some of the worst paradoxes we are compelled to face. And when shrewd and ingenious intellect is invoked in order to ridicule our sublime doctrines, it lifts the burden a little to be able to shift the field of conflict. We find in the revealed Word the statement that our Maker is "the Light of the world." Vivid indeed is the illustration offered by optical science just at this point. Here are three primary colors entering in to produce perfect white—the blue, the yellow, and the red. The natural philosopher places before our eyes a broad disk of metal; he paints on it segments of color in due proportion, running from circumference to centre and ending at a point; then he whirls the disk like a wheel on its axis; the colors disappear, and the metal shines whiter than a silver shield. We cannot understand it; but the fact is the three elements have blended into one whole: *three are one, and one is three.* Then

Little arithmetical puzzles.

Obscure passages.

the lecturer tells us that the red gives off all the heat in the sun's ray, the yellow spreads all the illumination, the blue effects the chemical changes in living organisms. He says we read by the yellow ray, but we should shiver without the red, and we should wither and die without the blue. They are all needed as colors, and they all work together as one beam of sunlight. Now it is not contended that this is an explanation of the Scriptural doctrine of the Trinity of God's being; but this we do insist upon: whenever cavillers demand scientific reasoning, because they cannot believe what they do not understand, it does seem as if we might wait for them to play their little arithmetical puzzles about three are one and one is three off upon the spectrum before they try them on the Trinity. And we go a single step farther: we cannot help thinking, in view of such astonishing analogies, that it must have been infinite wisdom which said, "God is light."

5. Finally, let us consider the friendliness of science as manifested *in the positive help which it offers in the interpretation of obscure passages* in the Word itself.

The command was early given, "Search the Scriptures." We do search; yet all our study sometimes is insufficient to unravel the difficulties in forms of expression, and in allusions to unrecognized or unknown circumstances which surrounded the sacred writer when he penned a given text. The disclosures which have been offered us in late years

Cuneiform inscriptions.

The cross in the rocks.

by men not usually enumerated among Scriptural expositors are almost innumerable.

Think of the helpfulness of Layard's discoveries at Nineveh to the students in explaining the books of Jonah and Nahum. So of the other forgotten cities and empires; we are to read concerning the fall of Tyre, the overthrow of Egypt, the extinction of Edom, the destruction of Babylon, in the light of late investigations of the ruins in those lands, all made in the interest of science. These inscriptions found on monuments and tombs, written in wedge-shaped characters—as unintelligible to ordinary minds as a modern telegraphic despatch to a Greenlander—are all brought and laid at the feet of the eternal Word. More and more of these are coming to our knowledge each year, and more and more historic passages are growing clear.

Just in this way, according to its nature, each one of the sciences in turn becomes friendly and valuable to the gospel. Chemistry expounds those texts which tell of the world's destruction by fire. Astronomy gives immediate relief in explaining what is to be understood when Moses mentions a firmament. And surely we need not remind candid people of the new views which geology in reverent hands is flinging on all the early annals of the Deluge and Creation, and how the later revelations appear almost to point out evidences of the story of the cross even in the strata underground.

Thus the earth helps the woman even now. Every new discovery in the realm of physical

---

The handmaid of Faith.

Wild sea-birds.

---

knowledge may be treated as the old ones have been, scouted and abused as being the ally of the infidel. But by and by it will push its unobtrusive way forward till it will be recognized as a friend, prove itself useful, and be amply praised. Then we shall know that all along true Science has been the handmaid of the true Faith.

“It is said that a hundred thousand birds fly against the lights of the lighthouses along our Atlantic coast, and are killed annually.” So says a slip cut from this morning’s newspaper. We need not be afraid in these excited times that the capacious cavillers will disturb our hope. The dark wild birds of the ocean keep coming in from the mysterious caverns; they seem to hate the glitter of the lenses. They will continue to dash themselves upon the thick panes of glass in the windows. But they usually end by beating their wings to pieces on the unyielding crystal till they fall dead in the surf rolling below. Not a ray of brightness has been dimmed, not one ship in the offing has been lured into peril. All that we have to do is to keep the lamps trimmed in the Lord’s lantern.

## V.

### THE GIFT OF SNOW.

“HE GIVETH SNOW LIKE WOOL.”—*Psalms* 147 : 16.

WE should have a very inadequate notion of the climate in Palestine if we attempted to picture it as entirely tropical. Syria, as a whole, lies in a latitude similar in many respects to this part of our own land. To be sure, some parts of it are warmer than others; but in the northern regions, and especially in the hilly countries, storms of severest violence are of frequent occurrence.

Only one instance of an actually severe snow-storm is found in the Bible history. (2 Samuel 23 : 20.) But all through the Scriptures allusions are made to frost and ice as being the common natural phenomena of those countries. In earlier times, it is likely, snow fell much more heavily there than now. Yet, even down to the present time, ice from Lebanon is considered quite an important commodity of traffic, and is sold in the summer at Damascus, and conveyed as far as Cairo.

Hence no surprise needs to be felt at finding here, in one of the ancient psalms, prepared for solemn worship in the sanctuary, a declaration fitted for a winter's day, a song of praise appropriate for those who have reached the house of God through the violence of a storm: “He giveth snow like wool; he scattereth the hoar-frost like ashes; he casteth forth his ice like morsels; who can stand



---

A chilled shepherd.Divine handiwork in nature.

---

before his cold?" Our purpose, on this occasion, is something more than merely to repeat the ascription as a part of our own worship. We can seek lessons of spiritual good from a quiet contemplation of precisely the same spectacle as that which inspired the author of the Psalms. We can picture that chilled shepherd out on the hillside, pitying and gathering in his flocks, and noting how like to the wool they wear is the snow that falls on it. And it cannot fail to set us an admirable example of devotion to God, if we think of him thus catching images of praise even as he faces the sleety flakes, and singing them as he shivers.

Four attributes of God, at the narrowest reckoning, find their illustration and plain exhibition in the snow.

I. The first of these is his OMNIPRESENCE.

Our thought takes its power and force from the exact phraseology of the text. Nothing, in all the round of our observation, would seem to be more lawless, more tumultuous, or more confused, than a snowstorm in progress. But here, in the inspired Word, we are suddenly informed that each one of these drifting flakes is a present from God: "He *giveth* snow like wool."

1. Sometimes it seems as if we were *less observant* of divine handiwork in nature than Old Testament Christians used to be. Ancient believers were wont to ponder the processes of every-day life most intently, and that for the mere purpose of recognizing an almighty hand in them. They saw Jeho-

vah in his works. They listened to his voice in the hum of insects, the song of birds, the sighing of the trees. They imagined his glances in the serene flashing of the stars.

2. Sometimes it seems as if we were *most absurdly concerned* lest the dignity of God should not be preserved in the minute management of things. We think of him as the storm peals along the mountain ridges, or as the ocean rolls up its vast waves into fury. But we appear to demand always in our meditations that the phenomena shall be majestic and grand. Whereas, we might often behold quite as interesting disclosures of divine presence in the slighter and more delicate occurrences, as the seasons in turn pass us by. Indeed, the argument is direct from near to remote, from the little to the large.

“No lily-muffled hum of summer bee,  
But finds some coupling with the spinning stars;  
No pebble at your foot, but proves a sphere;  
No chaffinch, but implies the cherubim.”

3. Sometimes it seems as if we were *positively afraid* to put God at peril by admitting that he is personally responsible for all his universe. True, skeptical analysis has all along been trying to force its way fiercely through the web of revelation, with the injurious hope of tangling some of its threads. But it has invariably happened that the more clear are the expositions of trustworthy science, the safer is the Bible. We may securely trust to Omnipotence to vindicate Omniscience. Said Aristotle

---

God defends snowflakes.

Snow is warm as fur.

---

long ago, "There is nothing interpolated, or without connection, in nature, as sometimes there is in a bad play."

We may be satisfied that God will put forth all the energies of heaven itself in behalf of even one flake of snow, if unbelieving science is venturesome enough to make an attack on the laws which threw it into crystal form; for he knows and keeps tally of them all, not carelessly, but with a purpose. He issues each of the millions upon millions of them as a mint-master issues his coins. He weighs them with his own hand, and strikes them in his own image.

II. In the second place, God's BENEFICENCE finds an illustration in the snow.

We might expect this from the outset, for all God's gifts are designed to bless us and do us good. Concerning which note the philosophy, as well as the argument from it.

1. The philosophy of God's benediction in these bewildering flakes carries with it an interesting surprise. We are wont to associate cold only with a winter's depth of snow. But surely the earliest of our youthful studies is enough to inform us that, by its singular constitution, snow for a field-covering is as warm as fur. It keeps the ground from freezing, and so preserves the life of seeds and trees. A coverlet of down would not be more welcome or more effectual than that which a thoughtful Providence has furnished for many a delicate plant and many a burrowing animal

---

Trust and do.Frederika Bremer.

---

through the severity of a December's frost and chills.

2. The argument from this has two branches; it demands implicit confidence in God; it counsels generous remembrance of others around us. It is all put in one verse of the Bible: *trust* and *do*—"Trust in the Lord, and do good."

In his familiar appeal to his disciples, our Saviour spoke literal words of admonition. He meant what he said about the sparrows and the numbering of hairs. Poor people are sometimes frightened by a snowstorm. Why so? It is one of God's arguments to show he loves them. He is seeing to it that they shall not suffer next year. And if God is so beneficent to us, we ought to be painstakingly beneficent to each other. I have often observed that the poor are very generous to the poor. That is right. "Be kindly affectioned one towards another, with brotherly love." They must be very gentle, charitable people in the cold country of Sweden, for one of their writers says with singular beauty of expression, "The great feature of our northern life is our conquered winter." Little ministries of affection can conquer two winters at one time; the winter of the year, when snow is falling, and the winter of a heart, when the chill of the world is on it. A generous word or deed can change a disposition; sometimes I think I have seen it almost change the weather!

III. Yet again: the GENTLENESS of God finds an illustration in the falling of the snow.

God's gentleness.

Our daily mercies.

Think of it—the ear cannot detect even one sound now, though the roadways are fast filling up. Noiselessly the flakes in the air follow each other down, bruising nothing, shaking nothing, leaving everything covered with softness and beauty.

1. Thus always appears God's gentleness *in nature*. The more ponderous the wheels of the seasons, the more silently they seem to work on their axles. The great results of divine skill are presented before us without any groan of weariness, any fuss of vanity, any flutter of applause. Alas! if we were only meeker in temper and modest in mien, we should do all our work with far more quietness, and far less silliness of show!

2. Thus always appears God's gentleness *in providence*, also. When King David wrote that fine line, "Thy gentleness hath made me great," it seemed only a brief acknowledgment. But it covered all his personal history, the entire range of his life, along which the divine hand had led him from the sheep-cote to the palace. Who cannot reiterate such a statement? The silent benedictions of prosperous living have fallen upon our path. All that imagination could suggest, all that legitimate desire could covet—friends, children, books, paintings—how our comforts do aggregate inconspicuously, till we can hardly tell where the things in our beautiful houses come from! Our mercies have been God's gifts; and they could not have arrived more softly or more sovereignly, if they had simply been snowed down in the night.

---

"A brooding voice."

Retreat from Moscow.

---

3. Thus always appears God's gentleness *in grace*, likewise. It is true that the voice of the gospel has sometimes to be the startling summons of divine displeasure in order to arouse a determinate sleeper. But the moment the man is really awake, the tones change to tenderness and pleading. This is what old John Bunyan means when he says so truly—"By his common call, God gives nothing; by his special call, he always has something to give; he has also a brooding voice for them that are under his wing; and he has an outcry to give the alarm whenever he seeth the enemy coming." Really, God seems to bestow his costliest instruction and most admirable graces when the soul, like Mary of Bethany, sits quietly at his feet to receive them.

4. Thus always appears God's gentleness *in retribution*, too. Here the ancient proverb fairly touches the Scriptural. "The feet of the avenging deities are shod with wool," said the classic poet. "He giveth snow like wool," says the text. The silent reprobations of divine wrath fell down behind one ambitious invader, forcing his way across a continent for pillage. The barriers of snow were constructed unperceivedly. Each flying flake was a judgment, each drift was a barricade, each whorl was a rampart. Moscow could be set on fire, but there was not flame enough in the air to melt even one of the white shrouds which waited for the soldiers on their desolate return.

So the path of private wickedness is often quiet-



---

A blocked way.

Ninety-three forms.

---

ly hedged up behind the sinner. When by and by he turns in it and expects to retrace his steps, it has become too late; retribution has fallen unseen; the way is blocked.

IV. In the fourth place, the HOLINESS of God finds a fitting illustration in the snow.

We judge of an artist's taste, his intelligence, his character, by just the paintings which come forth from his pencil. Why not learn our Creator's finest attribute from the forms of wonderful beauty we see in creation? And if we put Nature and the Word together, they will teach us much about the fact and about the figure.

1. In the beginning, about the *fact*. Snowflakes have been caught at the moment of falling; and while they glistened in unbroken beauty upon a surface of black velvet, the scientists have classified the shapes of the crystals. Ninety-three exquisite forms of star and cross and crown, and what not else, they have put on the catalogue already. There never was a mechanician with so excellent an eye-glass, or so steady a nerve, that he could cut a pattern which would not be rude in outline and rough in surface beside one of these. And then especially the cleanliness of a field thus newly covered is a display of spotless purity inimitable and unmistakable. All these white blossoms of winter falling around us, like fruitful petals from a tree of life, or like feathers from the wing of almighty protection; all this exquisite frost-work on the window; all these lodged rainbows in the icicles, and these jewels in

---

The whiteness of beauty.Perfect purity.

---

the silver drapery along the eaves; all this pluming of the gate-posts, like the helmets of hussars; all this crowning of the mountains and this fringing of the streams; all this is just the clear presenting to us of God in his works, the imaging forth of his character.

2. Hence we might expect that the Scripture would take up the *figure*. Great significance is there in the fact that the Bible uses such emblems to represent moral distinctions in this life, and their results in the life to come. On the one hand, light; on the other hand, darkness: "children of light," and "children of darkness;" a "kingdom of light," and a "kingdom of darkness." In the grand future, "light unapproachable and full of glory;" "outer darkness." There can be no understanding of these expressions without our remembering that life is light, and darkness is sin.

Snow has been chosen as the symbol of *the gospel of redemption*. The stream of salvation is offered: "Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field?" So the promise is couched: "As the snow cometh down from heaven, so shall my word be which goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall accomplish that whereto I sent it." The gospel has no tinge of earthliness in it. "The word of the Lord is very pure."

Snow has also been used to symbol *the standard of complete sanctification*. God engages nothing, will accept nothing, but perfect purity in his people.

---

“Whiter than snow.”

What is the blackest thing?

---

“Come, now, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.” Oh, what a rebuke one gets sometimes, as he looks forth from the casement on a winter’s morning, and sees the undefiled sheet of shining whiteness with which God has covered the seams and rocks and pools of the rough road in the night! “Whiter than snow”—how far off are we yet from it!

Snow, moreover, has been selected as the symbol of *ultimate attainment in grace*. The promise goes exactly alongside of the demand. God means one time to say to every redeemed soul, as the Spouse says to the Bride in the Canticles, “Thou art all fair, my love! There is no spot in thee!” Jesus’ robe of righteousness is absolutely white. How many of you know what is the *blackest* thing on this earth? It was a child’s question once, as the family sat by the fireside. And one guessed that it was the jet-stone in the brooch; and another said it must be the pupil of an Indian’s eye; and another mentioned the down upon a raven’s feather; and another spoke of a sable seal’s fur. But the father, who was something of a naturalist in his own quiet way, replied, “No; it is not a hue of any life or any living thing; it is the actual shadow of death; it is the sign of sickness and the sure signal of doom; and this it is: of one plant there is a flower which in health is beautiful as a star, but the moment it is blighted it moulds, and in that mould there is found a malignant centre of blackness.” There is only one spot of spiritual blackness in all

---

Sin is a blight.The white robes.

---

the universe, and that is found in the blight of a ruined soul, and the name of it is *sin*! Take sin away, and the soul is as pure as the "few in Sardis" who did not defile their garments, and now walk with Christ in white.

Snow, therefore, has been given us likewise as a symbol of *faith's final reward*. There is nothing black in the celestial city. Three distinct visions of God, as he appears in heaven, have been vouchsafed on earth to mortal eyes: one to Daniel in Babylon, one to Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, one to John on the Isle of Patmos. These men all put on record what in that supreme moment they saw. They differ in some particulars. But the one thing they all noticed, the one thing they agreed in thinking to be the transcendent height of the celestial spectacle, was the raiment of glorious apparel which was worn by the exalted Redeemer. The glistening garments, such as no fuller could whiten them, they thought made up the supernatural beauty of heaven itself. It is singular to note how they fastened on the same language, but all they could say of it in turn was, "His garment was white as snow."

Oh, what a question for every Christian to ask: Will I ever enter that region of purity, share in that splendor, shine in that light? Moses and Elias on the mountain were clad in the same garments as Jesus; they appeared with him in glory. Thus are all the redeemed, holy and undefiled; they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb.

---

Meetness for heaven.Snow once defiled.

---

“The white-robed saints, the throne-steps singing under,  
Their state all meekly wear;  
Their pauseless praise rolls up from hearts that wonder  
That ever they came there!”

It must be remembered that heaven is less a place than a state, less a state than a character. How we shall get there is not so much of a question as what we shall be when we get there; for this last question comes earliest and settles the other. He that has the meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light need hardly concern himself about the inheritance; that will come.

Reflect, for a closing moment, upon the ineffable sadness of even one spot on a soul. Snow, once defiled, cannot ever get pure again. God's inexhaustible grace alone can cover it over. Alas for the careless heart that dares to keep tampering with sin!

## VI.

### JOHN FIRST, THEN JESUS.

“YE YOURSELVES BEAR ME WITNESS, THAT I SAID, I AM NOT THE CHRIST, BUT THAT I AM SENT BEFORE HIM.”—*John* 3:28.

No one can study the gospel history closely and consecutively without remarking the peculiarly dramatic way in which the two greatest personages of the New Testament are brought alongside of each other. The biography of the one glides into that of the other, until at last a martyrdom crowns the Baptist's career, his disciples turn at once to the new Master who succeeds him, John disappears, and Jesus becomes the sole Teacher.

It may be profitable to devote an entire discourse to an inquiry concerning the relationship which these two preachers officially sustained to each other. We shall find, after a rehearsal of what John taught and of what Jesus taught, that one of the most significant matters of information in the sacred history is found in the order preserved between them. John's message belongs first; Christ's comes second. This is the meaning of the verse that will serve us for a text. “There arose a questioning on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purifying. And they came unto John, and said to him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou hast borne witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it have been given him from heaven.



---

What did John preach ?The law against sin.

---

Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.”

I. Our earliest question is this: What did John the Baptist preach? The record of his life is before us, and we are able to answer at once.

1. *He delivered the whole law against sin.* No man ever did his duty with a more unmistakable thoroughness. He denounced iniquity wherever he detected it, even in the conduct of King Herod (Mark 6:18-20). He dared the Pharisees, and threatened them with wrath to come (Luke 3:7). He showed how the reach of the divine enactment extended even across the words and thoughts of men (Matt. 3:8, 9). He counselled carefulness and circumspection in all walks of ordinary life, under the consciousness of a final account to be rendered. “And the multitudes asked him, saying, What then must we do? And he answered and said unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath food, let him do likewise. And there came also publicans to be baptized, and they said unto him, Master, what must we do? And he said unto them, Extort no more than that which is appointed you. And soldiers also asked him, saying, And we, what must we do? And he said, Do violence to no man, neither exact anything wrongfully; and be content with your wages.” Thus he aroused the consciences of the people, until the whole region round about went down to the Jordan to be baptized for the remission of their sins.

2. *He made a demand for immediate repentance* (Matt. 3:2). He insisted upon entire sincerity in the confession of wickedness, so that repentance should evidence its permanence by bringing forth the fruits of a new life. "He said therefore to the multitudes that went out to be baptized of him, Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And even now is the axe also laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." The forbearance of God was designed only to give opportunity for a quick return to him (Matt. 3:10). For eventually the wicked should be positively turned into hell (Luke 3:17). Thus John seemed like Elijah the Tishbite, the stern prophet of the Old Testament, summoning the whole nation to a responsible audience with God in reference to personal guilt.

3. *He heralded Jesus as the Messiah predicted of old* (Matt. 3:3). In this way he connected Moses with Christ. For himself, he took pains to withdraw and resist every claim (John 1:20). Once he felt that the populace were imagining a vain thing; and he would not suffer them even to "muse in their hearts" that he was the Christ. "And as the people were in expectation, and all men reasoned in their hearts concerning John, whether haply he

---

Chaff burned up.

"The Lamb of God."

were the Christ, John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but there cometh he that is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose, he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, thoroughly to cleanse his threshing-floor, and to gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire." With the frankest of self-surrender he told all who listened to him that Jesus would eventually come to the authoritative headship, and he himself would soon disappear. "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." Thus he gave a forward look to all his denunciations of sin, and talked of the true baptism cleansing from it.

4. *He announced the special office of Jesus as a Redeemer of men.* "On the morrow he seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is become before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not; but that he should be made manifest to Israel, for this cause came I baptizing with water. And John bare witness, saying, I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, he said unto

---

 What did Jesus teach?

 Necessity of the atonement.
 

---

me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." Thus he prepared the way for a gospel which based all its invitations of peace upon the doctrine of sacrifice, by offering Jesus as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." Twice he bore this witness to all his disciples.

II. Now what did Jesus teach when it came his turn? Much of his early ministry overlapped John's for a brief period, and the two men frequently came into closest contact with each other.

1. Christ *testified to the entire accuracy of John's doctrine.* "This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." He accepted the ministry of his forerunner without one question or deprecation from beginning to end, and paid him the highest encomium ever received among men "born of women."

2. He *proclaimed the full necessity of an atonement.* Not even John exceeded Christ in the unsparing denunciation of sin, and in the assertion of the absolute hopelessness of salvation for any one unless he should be spiritually renewed. "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into

the kingdom of God." He took the greatest pains to show that he had no purpose to abrogate the law of Moses (Matt. 5: 17-19). Christ asserted over and over again that all men had been condemned already by the divine law.

3. He *declared that the necessary sacrifice was now to be accomplished by himself.* "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him. He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only-begotten Son of God." It shocked and stumbled his disciples, but he persisted in declaring that he came into the world to die. He was to be "lifted up," in order that all men might be permitted and persuaded to come unto him for complete redemption.

4. He *thus raised no new issues between men and God,* but the rather *narrowed down all the old into one;* he made it clear that faith was to be the instrument of salvation (John 6: 28, 29). He offered the freest gospel for men that human heart could wish, or human tongue could describe. His word of fulness and triumph was the one word "whosoever." But he left no chance of mistake to those who might suppose a simple issue was a weak one; men had nothing to do but believe; but if they refused to believe, the wrath of God was still abiding on them



---

John must come first.

Law first, then the Gospel.

---

(John 3:18). Christ's very last words to the world were only the same, repeating the sharp, uncompromising alternative: Believe, and be saved; refuse, and be lost (Mark 16:16).

III. Thus, then, we reach the conclusion that, so far as Jesus' teaching and John's teaching had value in the New Testament, the point of greatest importance is the order between them. John's came earliest in fact, and earliest in logical necessity.

1. The *historic position of the two men* is enough to show all that is here claimed. There is an order in doctrine under the gospel arrangement as strict as the order in demonstration of problems in Euclid's Geometry. Our Lord's life was part of his teachings to men; and that life must be looked upon as a unique whole. But each step depended upon whatever steps went before. It is a fact that John (as Jesus said) was the greatest among those born of women; and it is a fact that John (as he said himself) was not worthy to unloose the shoe's latchet of Jesus. But John's work was a necessity and a solemn prerequisite to the work of Jesus in its true order.

2. The *similar form of procedure* which in all their teaching these two preachers preserved, adds confirmation to the proof. John presented the law first, then the gospel; but his office was plainly to press the law into prominence. Jesus presented the law first, then the gospel; but his office was to bring the gospel into prominence. In both cases the law came earliest. Indeed, there was a definite and recorded moment in which Jesus began to dwell



more upon gospel themes in distinction from law themes. "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." This was after he had delivered the whole Sermon on the Mount. He now, "from that time forth," began to teach his disciples concerning a melancholy series of sufferings he must personally pass through.

3. Our conclusion, therefore, is inevitable and clear. There remains no reason now why a single proposition should not be framed for permanent recollection and use. It could be fervently wished that all Christian workers would appreciate its majesty, and feel the weight of its pressure. It might be written over the door of every preacher's study, and upon the lid of every teacher's desk: "*Law-work precedes gospel-work in all God's dealings with souls.*"

We are ready, therefore, to draw some practical inferences from this discussion, which, it may be hoped, will give explanation and help.

1. We see why religious instruction in our day sometimes appears so tame, and proves so inefficacious. It is because Christian people preach Jesus without John. What the divines of the last century called *doing law-work* is becoming a lost art. The Lord does not seem to be in the "still small voice," because men miss the preparation of wind, earthquake, and fire.

---

Why so slow in finding peace.

Why so much backsliding.

---

2. We see why inquirers are so slow in finding peace at the cross. Peace? why there has been no disturbance. Peace? they are not agitated. There has been nothing to awaken conscience; sinners have heard the "very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument." They are even informed that their repentance will come later, their conviction of sin will grow deeper by and by. So Jesus is put before John; and all the time the soul feels sure that its guilt needs sterner dealing.

3. We see why there is so much of unrest and misgiving among Christian people. Some of them, it may be, have been seeking only an experience. They do not know either Jesus or John. They have no intelligent sense of Christ's legal work in bearing the curse of the law in their behalf. Hence they labor to keep up a mere fire of fervor in their souls. They have studied regeneration more than justification; and it is by justification that one finds peace. So, not united consciously to Christ as a Surety, they are not sure. A lonely controversy it is they are waging. It is possible that they are working out their own salvation with fear and trembling, with no settled confidence that God is working in them to will or to do of his own good pleasure.

4. We see why backsliding is so frequent as the sin of converts. Some have never been taught what leaving first love implies. Has any one told them what they fall back to when they fall? Some-

Untempered mortar.

Hope lost : what then ?

body may have been daubing with untempered mortar, and the wall of experience cannot stand the hailstones of every-day exposure. "Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it."

A young Christian sometimes says in a plaintive way, "I think I shall give up my hope." Has he settled what he is going to take up? Christian duty may be irksome, and Christian fidelity may be vexatious; but we must remember that one cannot fall clear away out of God's notice; he can only slide back from Jesus to John. And there stands John, ready as ever to thunder on about the axe lying at the tree-root and the unquenchable fire! Is the Law a better companion than the Gospel? "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries. A man that hath set at naught Moses' law dieth without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done de-

---

The beginning of new life.

John decreases : Christ increases.

---

spite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that said, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense. And again, the Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

5. Finally, we see how the new life begins and continues, according to the revealed plan. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." The whole process seems to be delineated in these two verses; the order of experience is this—faith, justification, peace, joy, hope, and glory. First John, then Jesus: down by the Jordan with the stern law-preacher we remain long enough for thorough searching and honest penitence; then he points us to the Lamb of God; now we turn away from John to Jesus; so John decreases, and so increases Christ. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

## VII.

### TWO PULPITS.

“AND IMMEDIATELY SHE WAS MADE STRAIGHT, AND GLORIFIED  
GOD.”—*Luke 13:13.*

OF course we understand that, in all the stories of cures related by the physician Luke in his Gospel with professional detail, the main lesson for us to learn is concerning the wonderful love and grace of our Saviour in the healing of these distressed sufferers they brought to him. Jesus identified himself so closely with our poor, afflicted human nature that no one can mistake for a moment the fulfilment of the ancient prophecy: “When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.”

So sure am I that nothing of our Lord's tenderness or generosity will be lost by any loyal students of the Bible, that I think I may venture, on a single occasion, to invite attention to the faith and activity of those who received the gift of healing, and thus seek some instruction for all Christian people under stress of sickness or hindered by incurable disease.

The text occurs in the midst of the account given of a most lamentable case of long-continued

---

A sad case.Anonymous believers.

---

debility. "And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. And behold a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years; and she was bowed together, and could in no wise lift herself up. And when Jesus saw her, he called her, and said to her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands upon her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God."

I. Observe one thing at the outset: how many *anonymous* believers there are in the Bible record who give help all along the ages.

Put alongside of this story the account previously given of the man healed of leprosy, and the other man at the same time cured of palsy. Of this last we have precisely the same record: "And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God." In close connection with these cases there are mentioned "multitudes," but no personal particulars are furnished. Nobody knows him who suffered so with the leprosy, nobody owns the afflicted creature who was paralyzed, nobody can tell where this wretched woman came from. Nothing is said about any individual to whom that eventful day was the beginning of renewed life. No name, no history, no after career; but we suppose that these cripples are in heaven now, and we know that their story has helped thousands to be patient and cheerful on the way thither.

The pages of God's Word are crowded with such



---

Who wrote Psalm 116?Sinning and sinking.

---

incidents. The woman of Samaria, the man of God that came to Eli, the lad who gave his bread and fishes at Tiberias—all these have had a mention, but nothing more to identify them in the inspired annals. It is really of little consequence who we are; it matters more what we are. The ancient saint is nameless who gave us a portion of his history in the 116th Psalm; it is enough for our encouragement to be assured that any one could have passed through an experience of deliverance which would enable him to say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee: the Lord preserveth the simple; I was brought low, and he helped me!"

II. Observe, in the second place, that even in extreme *hopelessness* of disease one may exhibit a supreme and illustrious faith.

This woman was evidently in a most deplorable condition; she was actually doubled up with deformity. So that leper's case was as bad as bad could be; he was incurable and loathsome. Nor was the man in palsy much better off; he could not move, nor had he any prospect of recovery. But in all these instances our Lord found faith enough for his acceptance. And so he healed the troubled sufferers, and forgave them, and handed their names down into history among the brightest of believers witnessing to his grace.

There are two dangers usually to be apprehended in the case of those who are afflicted severely with sickness, especially if it be prolonged

---

Bishop Hall's remark.

Cowper's experience.

---

into invalidhood and continued pain, sinning and sinking; and either of these would be fatal to all true advancement.

When a believer is smitten terribly, he is not always just in the mood to be reasonable. Every nerve is quivering with agony; he cannot see the wisdom nor the fairness of its infliction. "None out of hell," says good Bishop Hall, "have suffered so much as some of God's children." And when, in the depths of a new and overwhelming desolation, the afflicted man marks only the clouds of his trouble, it is possible that his patience should give way, and that his wilfulness should explode into almost impious violence of passionate rebellion. There is no relief in this, and it is a sin.

The more common danger for a Christian under trial is that he shall sink into a state of stupor, of listlessness, or despair. A great numbness settles upon the soul. There are pains which lie a great distance lower than the bottom of the grave. The poet Cowper, tearing out a leaf from his own awful experience, says, "There are as truly things which it is not lawful for man to utter as those were which Paul heard and saw in the third heaven; if the ladder of Christian life reaches, as I suppose it does, to the very presence of God, it nevertheless has its foot in the very abyss." Under an abiding blackness of darkness like this, some believers cannot prevail upon themselves to look towards any proffered light. It seems to them that something has got astray, the universe is misruled by a fate,

---

“Well waited is well done.”

Pain is an ordination.

---

the devil is triumphant, and it is no use to fight; it is just as well to cover up one's face. So they reason and grow sullen.

Now against both of these baleful postures of mind, the passionate and the listless, does this thought of preaching the gospel from a pulpit of patient suffering for the great glory of God array itself. It is wise to keep in mind the fact that souls may be won to the cross by a life on a sick-bed just as well as by a life in a cathedral desk. Pure submission is as good as going on a foreign mission.

“So speak we fervent: I have learned by knocking at heaven's gate

The meaning of one golden word that shines above it—  
‘Wait!’

For, with the Master whom we serve, is not to ride or run,  
But only to abide his will—well waited is well done!”

III. Right here, therefore, observe, in the third place, an explanation is offered of the mystery and the purpose of *suffering*.

Pain is a sort of ordination to the Christian ministry. It furnishes a true believer with a new pulpit to preach from. A wise man will do better to learn this lesson early. These cripples suddenly had their own lives opened upon their full understanding. They discovered that they had not been put upon by some blind calamity, or beaten and abused by some fierce fate; they had been employed for the glory of God. The whole scene makes us think of that other instance recorded by the evangelist John (9: 1-3). The disciples thought that a

---

Whitefield's platform.Elizabeth Wallbridge's chair.

---

man had been born blind because he or his parents had sinned; our Lord replied that he had been suffering all this time for God's glory, "That the works of God should be made manifest in him."

I am anxious now to bring this thought close to our own minds and hearts at once. In the rooms of the American Tract Society, in New York, were until lately standing two objects which I studied for some meditative years, once a month, at a committee meeting. One is a slight framework of tough wood, a few feet high, so bound together with hasps and hinges as to be taken down and folded in the hand. This was Whitefield's travelling-pulpit; the one he used when, denied access to the churches, he harangued the thousands in the open air, on the moors of England. You will think of this modern apostle, lifted up upon the small platform, with the throngs of eager people around him; or hurrying from one field to another, bearing his Bible in his arms; ever on the move, toiling with herculean energy, and a force like that of a giant. There, in that rude pulpit, is the symbol of all which is active and fiery in dauntless Christian zeal.

But now look again: in the centre of this framework, resting upon the slender platform where the living preacher used to stand, you will see a chair—a plain, straight-backed, armed, cottage-chair; rough, simple, meagrely cushioned, unvarnished, and stiff. It was the seat in which Elizabeth Wallbridge, "the dairyman's daughter," sat and coughed and whispered, and from which she went only at

---

A chronic invalid.Doddridge's last wish.

---

her last hour to the couch on which she died. Here again is a *pulpit*; and it is the symbol of a life quiet and unromantic and hard in all Christian endurance. Every word that invalid woman uttered—every patient night she suffered—was a gospel sermon. In a hundred languages the life of that servant of God has preached to millions of souls the riches of Christ's glory and grace. And of these two pulpits, which is the most honorable is known only to God, who undoubtedly accepted and consecrated them both. The one is suggestive of the ministry of speech, the other of the ministry of submission.

IV. Hence, we may easily learn what might be one of the most profitable *occupations* of a chronic invalid.

No one can preach from any pulpit without the proper measure of study. Sick people are always in danger of becoming egotistic and selfish; and the best relief from that is for each child of God to busy himself in laboring for others' salvation. Said the intelligent Doddridge, even while he was lingering in the last hours of his life, "My soul is vigorous and healthy, notwithstanding the hastening decay of this frail and tottering body; it is not for the love of sunshine, or the variety of meats, that I desire life, but if it please God that I may render him a little more service." Such a purpose as this will lead a Christian to thoughtful examination of what will make his efforts most pertinent.

He will study doctrine. His own disciplines

---

Neander's motto.A valiant brother.

---

soften his heart, bend his will, humble his intellect, quicken his trust, and so render the whole man more docile than ever before. And now the great central truths of our religion are his delight. He does not want the mere poetry of the gospel; he cannot use it; he wants the deepest sense of it, and that comes better through logic and argument. Men and women, who turn from didactic discussion in health, will in sickness read elaborate treatises upon the two covenants, and talk about the plan of grace in redemption. "It is the heart," once said the historian Neander, "that makes the theologian."

He will study experience too. A month ago I saw a brave soldier of the cross who had been passing through a fiery history of years with broken health, which had taken him from the pulpit of his usefulness and bidden him look into the grave season after season. He was now only able to stand, and sought a new field. Only yesterday he visited me again; in his feebleness he lay on my couch while he talked. He had just come from putting the wife of his manhood, his patient helper and the stay of his home, in the Bedlam of a mad-house. Poor in spirit and poor in purse, broken-hearted and alone, he feared he should fail utterly. Yet there he lay, and spoke hopefully and gently. Oh, that valiant brother, quivering in every muscle, but bold and firm in his trustful courage, preached to me in my study as I know I never preached in our church!

V. Some people recover from long illness; Christ



heals them, as he did these men in the story. So there is one more lesson for convalescents: what are they *going to do* with their lives hereafter?

There is a fine significance in the phraseology employed in this story. That whole town seems to have been aroused by Jesus' work of healing in the midst of their multitudes. The paralytic "departed, glorifying God." And then all the people "glorified God." To be sure, there was one ruler in the synagogue who carped at the healing as a breaking of the Sabbath-day commandment. "But the Lord answered him, and said, Ye hypocrites, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound, lo, these eighteen years, to have been loosed from this bond on the day of the sabbath? And as he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame: and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him." The whole community became exhilarated; and now all the healed ones had the use of another pulpit.

"It is a solemn thing to die," said Schiller; "but it is a more solemn thing to live." We know the story of the Scotch mother whose child an eagle stole away; half maddened, she saw the bird reach its eyrie far up the cliff. No one could scale the rock. In distraction she prayed all the day. An old sailor climbed after it, and crept down dizzily from the height. There, on her outstretched arms,

---

The Scotch mother.A life given back.

---

as she plead with closed eyes, he laid her babe. She rose in majesty of self-denial, and took it (as she had been taught in that land) to her minister that it might be baptized. She would not kiss it till it had been solemnly dedicated unto God!

What shall a man do with a *life* given back to him? Now it returns with all its vast possibilities for good. What sort of preacher must he be whose career has been consecrated to two pulpits in turn? We make our honest resolutions, and plan for a new and vigorous endeavor. But when the healthful heart begins its beats again, we forget the discipline, and refuse the vow. "I will go into thy house with burnt-offerings; I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble. Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."

## VIII.

### CHRISTIAN DEBT.

"I AM DEBTOR BOTH TO THE GREEKS AND TO THE BARBARIANS, BOTH TO THE WISE AND TO THE UNWISE."—*Romans* I : 14.

WHEN a footpad starts to relieve a frightened traveller of his purse, he says to himself, as a sort of explanation and excuse, "The world owes me a living, and a living I must have." He quietly assumes that the whole human race is *in debt to him*, and he is at liberty to collect what is his own. Surely a slender philosophy, but he imagines it to be very profound.

Not all of us are as frank in our statement as he; but many a one cherishes the same feeling. Not always in mere matters of pecuniary dealing does our self-assertion burst forth; more frequently, indeed, in the subtler relations of life is its mysterious influence felt.

A scholar in his retirement murmurs, as he gazes upon his unsold volume, "The world owes me fame and a hearing!" The woman of fashion, as she pushes her way into avenues of conspicuousness and display, stubbornly declares, "The world owes me a position!" The politician excitedly clamors for votes, for he insists, "The world owes me a place!" Thus we all seem to have some little darling superiority of our own, to which, when out of observation, we are wont to chirp and bring seeds, as diligently as children to their caged birds. We

are sure meanwhile that the day will come in which the whole community shall see we have been sheltering an excellence which is the rarest in plumage and has the sweetest of notes.

The ancients were wont in classic times to exercise themselves much in the attempt to answer the technical question, What is a man? One said, It is the animal which laughs. Another said, It is the animal who cooks his food. The genus seemed easy enough to find; it was the differentia which was so difficult to state. It would not have been singular, after all, if, on this easy principle of defining, they had declared, Man is the animal who *never is appreciated*. For the truth is, there is no one characteristic of our race so distinct and so universal as this sense of injustice. The lion seems satisfied with the estimate of his roaring. The lamb seems content with the praise given to its gambols. But there lives not the man who seems restful under the estimate he receives. Every one is sure that there are unreckoned virtues in his character, or unnoticed merits in his life, put at too low price on the register. His excellences, like artists' pictures, never take prizes, simply because hung in a poor light. Hence the public does not respect him as he deserves. And if that great burden-bearer—the world—should attempt to pay all the bills for undervaluation presented to it from day to day, it would be wearied with clamors, and hopelessly bankrupt in a single generation.

Now precisely here the gospel meets our race.

---

“The world owes me.”

Christ discharges debt.

---

It finds everybody complaining. When Jesus, the Son of God, hears the cry, “The world owes me,” he answers, “Well, I will pay you all it owes; I will assume the entire debt; I will discharge the obligation; I will pour out upon you such a wealth of resource that the balance due shall be reversed; then you will in turn owe the world.”

Let an illustration or two show precisely what is meant by this. Here is a man who has been wont to say, “The world owes me a competence, for it is the duty of the strong to take care of the weak.” To him Christ says in the gospel, “I admit that principle. So I accept that responsibility. I am going to render you strong. You shall have all you need. ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.’ Concern yourself no more about money. Pour it out for all good ends without stint. If you implicitly trust me, I will see that the treasure never fails. You are now stronger than the strongest. Remember steadfastly your own principle. You owe the world a living. I have furnished you with vast resources. You are to spread the kingdom which crowns you.”

Just so of everything else. Indeed, wealth is the lowest of all matters of consideration. If one demands happiness, influence, position, the gospel bestows it beyond any measurement. If he wants rest, Christ gives it to him, be he never so weary and heavy laden. Every lawful claim of the soul is met. All its powers are refined and exalted. Its

---

The strong must care for the weak.

Paul owed everybody.

---

tastes are first elevated, and then gratified. Indeed, all that it ever says the world owes it is generously paid; and then is so copiously transcended that the obligation rushes across the ledger into a new balance. And now it is the Christian man who is in debt, and that upon his own showing; for he is strong, and the strong are to care for the weak.

The question now naturally arises as to the parties who hold our obligations. To whom are these kind and industrious offices of payment due? This leads us straight to the phraseology of the verse in which our text is found. The apostle specifies the ranks and the races he owes. He says, "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." And he afterwards adds, "to the Jew and the Gentile." You know very well the reach of these most extensive classifications. According to the habits of speech in those days, all people were Barbarians who were not Greeks; all were Gentiles who were not Jews; all were unwise (that is, unenlightened in the gospel) who were not wise. Hence our conclusion is clear. He meant, simply, *he owed everybody*. He left no form of words unused which could possibly widen the embrace of his admitted obligation. As he says elsewhere, he was to "do good to *all men*." It was as if he intended to say, "I admit my field is the world; my debt sweeps across the continents and seas; my subjects of effort are all mankind."

At such a moment all Christianity is embodied



in Paul. The genius of our sublime faith speaks thus to every one of us: "You are in a world full of conventionalities and trifles. Let there be no vain strife about names and offices and grades. Render to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. Give every man what belongs to him, and rather more than less, with a generous acknowledgment and a large-hearted charity. In communities where mere etiquette is almost a fine art in its mock dignity; where routine shapes manners, and moulds even the government, you must expect to meet discontent. For there are always some petulant men and women who will not mourn, no matter who laments; some who will not be persuaded to dance, no matter who pipes. Do your duty nevertheless. Better be patient and courteous everywhere. Be behind others in nothing. Be beforehand with all in manly politeness and integrity. 'Owe no man anything, but to love one another.' Love is the fulfilling of the law, and ye are the children of God!"

How can a counsel so extraordinary as this be followed with any hope of success? In reply, let me call you to observe the fine example set before the ages by this very man Paul. A most remarkable passage in one of his letters is enough to bring the whole to light. We find him defending himself against those who accused him of self-seeking and money-making in his Christian work. Admitting freely, and even taking pains to force by a threefold

argument, the claim he had to live on the gospel, and take pay as a preacher, he yet threw aside the demand. He went to tent-making to earn support. It was, as he said, better for him to die than to give any caviller a chance to gainsay the gospel. So he kept free.

Imagine, now, an insignificant-looking man, short in stature, worn in mien, humble in dress, habitually feeble in health, with a bent figure and weak eyes! Picture him as he rises to speak words like these, and note the nobleness of indignant feeling with which his entire frame would dilate: "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some!"

Singular and emphatic reversal is this of the human clamor. Here is one man, at any rate, who has risen out of the range of sickly sentimentalism. He nowhere intimates that anybody owes him anything. Here is one man who considers himself paid up. The sight is much to edification. Breaking its way right up through the lackadaisical sense of injury, the moaning want of appreciation, this

---

“I am debtor.”

Lesson learned too late.

---

courage shifts the burden of obligation in an instant and addresses itself to discharge it. “*I am debtor,*” he says. The disclosure startles you. It looks like manhood. The whine is gone. The cringe is rejected. The Master stands revealed and admitted.

Let me ask you to notice that my short text to-day is simply tremendous as a proclamation of purpose on human lips. The burden of suggestion swells the words. Take a great thought like that Paul had when he said, “I am debtor,” a thought full of self-denial, full of toil, full of faith and effort and prayer, full of suffering and of strifes, full of patience life-long, death-ending. Hold it up till you see its inimitable majesty. Study it earnestly, till your heart is swayed with fitting admiration. Now try to condense and compact it into one poor little vocable, like that familiar and despised word *debt*, and then mark how the living sentence will dilate with ponderous meaning. He who thus pledges himself to good; he who chooses that utterance for the motto of his life, will stand up crowned among his fellows, every inch revealed a king of men!

The purpose of all which has thus far been said is this: There is a lesson of deepest importance here to all young Christians. Religious life is certain to be moulded by the ideal one has of it, and the principle which he makes to underlie it at the start. “It is to be lamented,” said a wise old scholar of a former generation, as he lay on his death-bed, “that men seem never to know to what end they were

Instant obligation.

"How much owest thou?"

born into the world until they are just ready to go out of it." The ordinary conception is, that duties will be disclosed as maturity advances; that obligations will multiply with the mere flow of years. Whereas the fact is, that each Christian enters the new life immediately and overwhelmingly in debt. The stroke of a die which stamps a coin in the mint, fits it for circulation and renders it instantaneously money. And just so the force of sovereign grace, which seals a soul with the image of Christ, consecrates it instantly for all time and eternity to his work. "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever." The central thought, therefore, sends its circulation through all the veins and arteries of the new existence.

We know, even in our worldly observation, that a child of opulent parents, who goes forth into life saying, "*The world owes me* honor and ease and flattery and place," will make a very different man from the child of many prayers, who enters the conflict, saying, "*I owe the world* a work and a duty." The plain account of debt and credit settles the future. So I say again, the gospel sets the Christian on the search, not how much he may claim in the wrestle of existence, but how much he may give; not how much the world owes him, but how infinitely much he owes the world, for which Christ died. Doing good to everybody we can reach, with all our body, soul, and spirit, with the help of God, and for the glory of God, is what we are here on earth for. Every moment we put off beginning to

---

Sir Walter Scott.Industry and thrift.

---

do it is just so much lost time to be redeemed. The gospel falls from heaven like a winged benediction upon our souls. It renews our powers; it exalts our capabilities; it permeates our dispositions; it refines our emotions; it ennobles our aims. And then it just binds us over, once and for ever, to entire service of God.

There is something instructive in those historic instances of heroic zeal when men have put forth all their energies to pay their debts. Sir Walter Scott once tried to rest his half-delirious brain. But he had no time to be sick, as the outstanding obligations matured. "This is folly," said he to the startled servant, as he sprang up from the couch; "bring in the pens and paper!" There is no fertility of genius like the pressure of a great debt. Necessity is the mother of invention.

And then note, also, the industry and thrift it promotes. That man pays most of his dues whose unfailing hammer rings earliest in the morning and latest at night. He lessens debt the most whose shuttle weaves the most yards in faithful toil. Diligence in business keeps the bailiff a stranger. Put this familiar commonplace of philosophy alongside of devout Christian life, and so learn the lesson. A child of God who really feels that he is a debtor to the whole world will surely find some shrewd way of his own to discharge the duty. That man who is always searching painfully and asking at random for a chance to do something, and yet never satisfies himself he has discovered the field for which he has



Spiritual repudiation.

A church debt.

a talent, has no true feeling of pressure. He is only working on a dastardly and shameful principle of spiritual repudiation, under the plausible plea that he cannot find his creditors!

Sometimes you notice on the corner of the street a fine edifice springing up. You are told it is a new church coming into being. Once a pastor was asked, as he stood unrecognized upon the walls, "When will this building be completed?" He easily gave the time. "Will the congregation be in debt?" continued the stranger. "Oh yes, awfully," answered the thoughtful man; "sometimes it frightens me to think of it!" Then came the question, "Why did you begin, when you had not the money?" Then the minister of God answered, "Oh, we have money enough; we shall have no such debt as that; but think, think *how much a church like this is going to owe the community and the world!* How they will look to us for man's love and God's grace!"

Oh, my brethren, I think of our own sweet, bright trust we have taken in charge! *Is our church debt paid?* Not money, but love, zeal, effort. "How much owest thou my Lord?" Souls around us are looking for us to help them. I put it to you all calmly and plainly—*the true test of piety is a sense of debtorship to souls.* You will find a Christian ever on one only errand. He will say with the sainted Brainerd, "Anything, anything for thee, O God! Let me and mine be nothing, only that thy kingdom may come!"



## IX.

### FIVE PARADOXES.

“AND I AM GLAD FOR YOUR SAKES THAT I WAS NOT THERE, TO THE INTENT YE MAY BELIEVE; NEVERTHELESS LET US GO UNTO HIM.”—*John* II:15.

THE word *paradox* means an apparent contradiction. In stating a paradox one would be quite likely so to arrange his expressions as that the two members of his sentence should seem to cross each other. As, for example, the apostle says, “When I am weak, then am I strong.” Or, again, “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live.” The one term here would appear to deny the exact meaning of the other. And there is need always of some intervening explanation.

In the single verse of our text we find no less than five paradoxes. They are disclosed in the words, but interpreted in the deeds, of Jesus himself. If their force and significance be carefully studied, they will help our understanding of many a mystery in the providential dealings of God.

I. The first one of them is this: IN THE LIFE OF AN INTELLIGENT BELIEVER GLADNESS SOMETIMES GROWS OUT OF GRIEF.

The disciples came with bad news to Jesus. They told him that Lazarus, one of his dear friends, was ill. Knowing his strong attachment to that little family in Bethany, they were quite prepared for an exhibition of his emotion, perhaps even as

---

“I am glad.”

The lowest form of experience.

---

startling as that he manifested afterwards at the time of the burial. Then, we remember, it is recorded, “Jesus wept.” But now, although we perfectly understand that Jesus was aware that Lazarus was more than sick—indeed, he was dead—we see that, instead of an outbreak, he simply remarks, as if nowise disturbed, “I am *glad*.”

The explanation of this extraordinary reply is quite at hand. Jesus saw in the sickness and death of his friend more than a personal bereavement. He recognized another fine opportunity of glorifying God. He looked beyond that sick-bed to the sepulchre, beyond the sepulchre to the miraculous resurrection. He foresaw that all the pain he now felt, all the suffering Lazarus had had, all the anguish of the mourning sisters, would eventually turn to the spiritual advantage of those who were now weeping. Along the distant ages saints would be kindled and quickened by the story, and the Father of all would in the end gain new lustre of praise.

Really, this is the lowest form of true Christian experience. It means no more nor less than that our light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. God is pleased to be praised in the minor music of sorrow quite as much as in the ordinary strains of livelier joy. The Christian life is on a high plane. And if afflictions can be made to bring a great advantage by simply waiting a while, then the question resolves itself into a mere transaction of profit and loss. “No chastening for the present

Glorying in tribulation.

Intense individuality.

seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness in them which are exercised thereby." So, when any genuine believer is like his Lord in understanding and temper, he will not swoon into tears of lamentation as he is informed of heavy sorrow. He will be so penetrating in his foresight of another chance to glorify God that he will surprise the bearers of evil tidings with the quiet words, "I am glad." He will glory in tribulations; he will even take pleasure in distresses.

II. The next paradox in the text is this: ONE'S ADVANTAGE IS SOMETIMES HID UNDERNEATH ANOTHER'S TRIALS.

"I am glad *for your sakes*," said Jesus. Very likely those men were surprised to hear him announce he had not intended to be at hand to prevent Lazarus' death; but surely they must have been still more surprised to be told it was *for their sakes* he was rejoicing. For what had they to do with the matter? It was a sad thing for the sisters, a mournful thing for Jesus, and a painful thing for Lazarus; but how did it touch them? Further conversation soon disclosed to them, however, that in the purpose of good for which that affliction was sent to Mary and Martha, they were also included most intimately.

In the economy of God's plan it is never to be forgotten that all believers are perfectly independent of each other. To his own Master every one standeth or falleth. And yet there can be no doubt

Law of vicarious suffering.

Two inferences.

that the trials of one person are often intended to benefit another. It does not merely happen so; it is ordered so. One law of vicarious suffering holds the entire race. A parent suffers for a child; a child for a parent. God seeks sometimes to instruct the best of his people in an unexpected and indirect way. The infant of David's sin was taken away, and that brought the guilty monarch to terms. There is a deep sense in which it is true that an innocent babe was made the author of the fifty-first Psalm. Joseph was sold into Egyptian bondage that Jacob's descendants should go into Palestine. Daniel must pass a frightful night in the den of lions, in order that Nebuchadnezzar might be converted.

Two inferences may be suggested here. The one is this: *When we are in deepest affliction, it is quite possible our sorrow is sent in some measure for another's advantage.* It nowise assumes guilt when one is in pain. It may be so; and inquiry is always in order. But possibly the lesson is to be learned by others. Peter's imprisonment may have been needed to discipline Rhoda's faith. Paul's confinement may have been ordered for the jailer's conversion to Christ. I venture to say Martha and Mary lived to see the day when they were perfectly satisfied to remember they had wept and groaned at the burial of their only brother for the sake of educating and disciplining Matthew and Peter and John.

The other inference is this: *When others are afflicted, it may possibly be they are suffering for our*

---

Achan's sin looked up.Christ delays on purpose.

---

*sakes.* Let us be thoughtful, then, in the presence of any great sorrow, and seek early to learn all we can from it. They were not sinners above all the world on whom the tower of Siloam fell. When Joshua's heart is broken, and with rended garments he lies in despair upon his face; when the elders of Israel put dust on their heads, and mourn in desolation; it is high time for us to be asking whether, in our tents, we have any Babylonish garment, or wedge of gold, which may have been the guilty cause of all their troubles.

III. Then there is a third paradox in the text: INCREASE OF A CHRISTIAN'S SORROW SOMETIMES ALLEVIATES IT.

If any one of these disciples had been asked his honest opinion as to this illness of Lazarus, he would quite likely have replied, Indeed it was all bad, heart-rending and disastrous; but the most unfortunate circumstance in the whole affair was the absence of Jesus: how could it have happened so? It may readily be imagined, then, how extreme would be their wonder when Christ told them he had stayed away on purpose. Nay, he knew more of the matter now than they did. He had been acquainted all along with the desperate character of the disease, and yet had coolly delayed his journey for two whole days: now it was too late, for the sufferer was dead. They had been ready to say, as the sisters said the moment they had a chance, "Lord, *if thou hadst been here*, our brother had not died." Jesus seemed to be reading their thoughts,

---

A strange comfort.New explanation.

---

for he remarked, "I am glad *I was not there.*" Then they saw he had kept away simply that Lazarus might die.

Just at that moment a strange sort of comfort entered their hearts. They were worse off than they had supposed, but they were better off, too. Up to the instant of this vast disclosure they had looked upon Lazarus' dangerous sickness as one of the hard calamities of domestic life, and Jesus' absence as a most melancholy accident. Now they perceived that the divine knowledge embraced this also, the divine wisdom was dealing with it, and the divine mercy was going to turn it into fine advantage. They were far worse off, in that the situation was more desperate; they were far better off, in that they saw God himself was undoubtedly master of the situation.

Here, then, is disclosed to our understanding a remarkable principle. It is the desire of a brave man to face his own trials, and bear them without complaint. But when the strain becomes more severe, we fly to seek heavenly help. We say, If Jesus were here he would relieve us at once. Suddenly the affliction grows deeper still, and we become persuaded Jesus does not mean to interpose. Read one of these verses over carefully; when Christ "had heard therefore that he was sick, *he abode two days still in the same place where he was.*" Was there ever a more astonishing inconsequence? Why, here is one of the plainest cases of unanswered prayer we ever heard of! A decided refusal! As you read on,



---

 Mysteries of God's purposes.

 Faith at school.
 

---

however, you become most thoroughly persuaded that the thing is removed from the region of accident. The entire threads of information and influence are in the almighty hand. The event rises out from mere human calamity, and ranges itself among the grand mysteries of God's purpose.

This is what I mean by saying that the believer's affliction is sometimes alleviated by being intensified. Lazarus' illness may be taken for a mere annoyance or a vexation; but Lazarus' positive death, especially after we discover that the Lord knew all about it forty-eight hours before, opens our eyes to see divine wisdom has unflinching hold of the reins. A great sorrow, with a *purpose* in it, is easier to bear than a smaller one which seems to have no aim now, and promise no benefit hereafter.

IV. This leads us on, both in fact and in instruction, to the fourth paradox in the text: IN THE TRUE BELIEVER'S EXPERIENCE DOUBT IS SOMETIMES EMPLOYED TO DEEPEN TRUST.

"I am glad for your sakes I was not there," said Jesus, "to the intent ye may *believe*." The same thought is expressed afterwards in his address to Martha: "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest *believe*, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" The one simple intention of all this heart-rending bereavement was to increase the *faith* of those who felt it. This was accomplished by permitting them to imagine for a while they were forgotten of God. Jesus suffered the sisters in Bethany just to doubt him during those two critical days of

---

A mother and child.Cedar carvings out of knots.

---

waiting, knowing full well that his immediate disclosure of greater love thereafter would work a joyous return of their confidence.

The process finds its simplest illustration in familiar life, in the seeming withdrawal of a mother from her child, who has grown careless of her presence in the room. She covers her face for a brief instant, that the child may run inquiringly and impulsively into her embrace, loving her all the more because it had fancied it had lost her. So God says, "In a little wrath I hid my face for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I draw thee." So far as our personal religious experience is concerned, there may be considered to be only two beings in existence, God and the child of God. The saint deals with the Saviour in the spirit of intense individualism. Each believer needed a whole atonement and an entire Redeemer at the beginning; and he needs exactly the same unto the extreme end. And the purpose of all discipline, the solitary aim, is the "perfecting of our faith." Through all the days and hours of our sojourning here, be they few or many, the work of moulding our character goes on. All the providences which any believer meets are strokes of tools that are fitting him for a place in the spiritual temple of the redeemed. Says a quaint old divine, "All the carvings of heaven are made out of *knots*; the temple of God is a cedar one, but the cedars were all gnarly trees before he cut them down." Earthly perplexity is therefore a heavenly discipline. The

---

The word "nevertheless."

Four weary days.

---

way to make a careless Christian careful is to increase his cares. The way to render faith confident and unbroken is to make large demands upon it by onsets of trying doubt.

V. The fifth and final paradox in our text is this: ABSOLUTE HOPELESSNESS AND HELPLESSNESS ARE THE CONDITIONS OF HOPE AND HELP.

The turning-point of this interesting story, as it here culminates, is found in the word *nevertheless*. "I am glad I was not there then," Jesus says; "nevertheless let us go there now." It seems like a signal of retraction. He had disclosed his knowledge of their deepening trouble; he had made them understand that for two whole days he had contemplated the gloom of the eternal shadow as it stealthily approached that beloved circle just over the Mount of Olives; and all this for a reason, for a good reason; but the time had arrived for him now to reverse his own action. So he goes in rapid travel up those rugged slopes of rock to Bethany; goes in danger to himself to help his friends; goes with the expectation of working one of the most stupendous miracles he ever wrought, and all this to remedy what his own delay had permitted. By this time Martha and Mary had given up all hope; but Hope was on the way. By this time they were beyond all help; yet Help was on the way. When Lazarus is dead Jesus sets out for Bethany. For four weary days that body will lie in the grave. But on the next day Immanuel will arrive. And there will be a fine sight for the universe to see,

---

“I am the resurrection.”

Rutherford's comment.

---

when, out on the crags that tear that frightful road up in the way from Jericho, he will stand to utter those precious words of welcome, “I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”

So with us all, one after another of our props must drop away. Little by little we must be let down from earthly hopes and helps. At last we are shut up to God. Then even he leads us deeper into the dark. But at last our feet are planted down upon the Rock of Ages, and we can expect to stand. And the thing to remember is, in all our bewildering experiences, that while the sorrow keeps increasing, Jesus intentionally keeps away, so that our entire reserve of human reliances is used up. When the case becomes utterly desperate, we may be sure he has started for Bethany, and will soon be here for our relief. So, with our confidence unbroken, we may as well be getting ready, like Martha, to go forth at once to meet him.

There is with Christ no such thing as unanswered prayer. When considering the hesitation and delay of our Saviour with the Syrophœnician woman, the acute Rutherford remarks that he never could see any signs of inattention. “It is said he *answered* not a word, but nowhere is it said he *heard* not. These two differ very much. Christ often heareth when he doth not answer; then his not answering is an answer, and it speaks thus, Pray on, go on, and cry, for the Lord holdeth his

---

“Knock and knock.”

No more paradoxes.

---

door fast bolted, not to keep you out, but that you may knock and knock, and by and by it shall be opened unto you.”

Never believe, my Christian friend, that there is even one moment in all your life in which your Lord disregards or forgets you. Mary and Martha sat by Lazarus' bedside, and saw the fire wane and go out in his eye; and so they wrote bitter things in their sore hearts against Jesus. Most likely they said to each other, He has found other friends elsewhere. And yet all this while Jesus and his disciples were together talking about them, and planning about them, a week's journey away!

Here, then, we see how full of biographical experience even one sentence can be. Five contradictions in appearance, but all explained easily. Oh, when these paradoxes are quite ended, how clear our lives will seem!

“The path of sorrow, and that path alone,  
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown.”

## X.

### THE CHIEF PRIESTS' STORY.

"NOW WHEN THEY WERE GOING, BEHOLD, SOME OF THE WATCH CAME INTO THE CITY, AND SHEWED UNTO THE CHIEF PRIESTS ALL THE THINGS THAT WERE DONE. AND WHEN THEY WERE ASSEMBLED WITH THE ELDERS, AND HAD TAKEN COUNSEL, THEY GAVE LARGE MONEY UNTO THE SOLDIERS, SAYING, SAY YE, HIS DISCIPLES CAME BY NIGHT, AND STOLE HIM AWAY WHILE WE SLEPT. AND IF THIS COME TO THE GOVERNOR'S EARS, WE WILL PERSUADE HIM, AND SECURE YOU. SO THEY TOOK THE MONEY, AND DID AS THEY WERE TAUGHT; AND THIS SAYING IS COMMONLY REPORTED AMONG THE JEWS UNTIL THIS DAY."—*Matthew 28: 11-15.*

LIGHT is the remedy for darkness, not for blindness. It would be folly to say to a man whose physical organs of sight were growing sore and poor that he needed more sunshine. Indeed, this might be his ruin, and it would certainly be his exasperation in sensitive moments.

Gospel truth is the remedy for spiritual ignorance, not for human perversity. A hard will might be expected to grow harder under the full pressure of obligation to yield. Yet the duty of New Testament preachers is plain; they must keep urging the evidences of Christianity upon men's notice, whether they will hear or forbear. One perverse soul's obstinacy cannot prevent another soul's belief. These chief priests may have shut their eyes tight in the full blaze of illumination; but that would not make Jerusalem dark in the daytime.

Moreover, even they recognized the force of



---

The ancient lie.The new version.

---

logic as an element of influence in swaying masses of men. It is quite clear that they knew some disposal must be made of the issues raised concerning Jesus' death and resurrection. These would have to be met by some sort of rebuttal or counter-statement. So they resorted to the subterfuge of an actually invented lie.

And now, eighteen hundred years afterwards, we are compelled to treat this tale of the opposition among the historic incidents of that day. It is submitted as one of the issues to be tested and settled, like the rest, by the ordinary rules of investigation in courts of justice.

I. Let us begin with an exact understanding of the whole story at once. It is recorded by Matthew alone: and thus in the new revision:

“Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city, and told unto the chief priests all the things that were come to pass. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and rid you of care. So they took the money, and did as they were taught; and this saying was spread abroad among the Jews, and continueth until this day.”

On the evening of Friday Jesus had been hastily buried. Saturday was, as it is now, the Hebrew Sabbath, and the day then began with the evening

---

The strict dates.

The careful precautions.

---

before; that is, it was Sabbath on Friday evening at sundown. These disciples, in common with all their nation, had been trained to keep that closing day of the week with great strictness. They thought it would be wicked to use holy time in making preparations for permanent interment. So, as best they could, they wound up the body Joseph begged of Pilate, and laid it in this generous counsellor's tomb. They expected to return and to complete their work on Sunday morning.

Now, at this juncture in the affairs, the chief priests make it evident that they had kept warily on the watch for all which occurred. A suspicion arose in their minds. Some of them remembered that Jesus had declared he would rise again in three days. So they went to Pilate asking that a guard might be set at the sepulchre until the critical date of the third day had passed. Their wish was granted. Sixteen men, divided into four fours—the so-called “quaternions” of a Roman military watch—were assigned to the duty, and took their regular turns as sentinels on the spot.

Moreover, the unusual precaution was added of sealing up the entrance to the enclosure. Most likely they rolled up the stone before the opening of Joseph's new excavation in the rock, then passed a strong cord around it, fastening the ends at either side, and covering the knots with balls of wet clay, on which they stamped some official letter or sign; if the grave were disturbed, this would show it, no matter who the parties might be.

---

Christ really died.

This is the only story.

---

When Sunday morning dawned, the tomb was found open, the buried body was gone. Aware that some explanation must instantly be made, the chief priests circulated the story which Matthew records. They said that the soldiers fell asleep, and then the friends of Jesus came secretly and stole the body away. The military guard admitted this statement publicly, and so helped on the tale.

Before we submit this fabrication to the test of argument as a "case" in jurisprudence, it may be just as well to note two interesting points made by it at the beginning. This story settles, at any rate, the fact of Christ's actual death and burial. In the recital, everybody admitted he was truly crucified, really dead at last in the grave. It was agreed on all hands that he had predicted his own rising upon the third day. With equal acquiescence, it was understood that on Sunday morning the body was missing. This is worth the recollection: for so much of either gospel history or doctrine as rests in the death of Jesus upon the cross may for evermore be considered as established by his enemies beyond a cavil.

Further: since the chief priests put their case on the best basis they had, it must follow that, if this subterfuge of theirs fails, all presumption is against any process of denial. They asserted, and this is all they said in explanation of the most stupendous miracle the universe ever knew, that the disciples secretly stole and made away with Jesus' body. If such a story cannot be now credited, then

---

A cross-examination.Want of motive.

---

there is an end of all counter-evidence to be adduced by those who would deny the doctrine of our Lord's resurrection.

II. Coolly and dispassionately it becomes us to weigh the tale, therefore, on its own merits. This case, if it be good for anything, will bear the same cross-examination and analysis as others in the annals of important jurisprudence. And candor is compelled instantly to admit it labors under serious embarrassments.

1. In the very outset, the *antecedent improbability* of particulars crushes it. How came a trained watch all to go to sleep? Would the whole band of sixteen men be likely to fall away at once, and remain in slumber a time long enough for this amount of labor? This was noisy work, and took some numbers to do it; yet it would have to be done leisurely. Who folded up the napkin, and arranged the grave-clothes so methodically in the dark? And, if the Roman soldiers were asleep, how did they know anything about it?

2. But go a step farther: the immediate followers of Jesus had no *motive* to steal the body of their Lord. They must have believed him to be either a true man or an impostor. If they now gave him up as an impostor when they saw him die, then the sooner he was out of all remembrance and notice for ever, the better for them; the more effectually he was buried and forgotten, the easier for their disappointment and shame. They surely did not need or wish to follow up a deceiver; they did not want

---

No evidence of a plan.

This tale never tested.

---

his memory on their hands. On the other side, if they believed him true, they had only to wait till he should vindicate himself. Whatever the supposition as to the state of these men's minds, to go and purloin the dead body was the worst policy for them. For this admitted and agreed that he was a liar; it accepted the taunt of his infamous crucifixion; it confessed he was a mere man.

3. Nor is this all: it is evident from the entire story told here in its artless naturalness that the disciples had no sort of concerted *plan* to do any such thing. Why, they had his body full in their power after Joseph begged it on Friday evening: how was it possible that the idea should strike them to go and pilfer it away on Saturday? Who was it that did the stealing? Not Peter: for no one can doubt his utter ignorance and unconsciousness, as he arrived on Sunday morning, breathlessly rushing into the sepulchre unbidden. Nor John: he knew nothing about a disappearance of the body, for he ran with the greatest surprise to see if the opened grave was empty. Nor Thomas: for he obstinately refused to surrender his confidence in anything on the subject until he had put his finger in the print of the nails. Surely, not the women: for the mother of Jesus was entirely ignorant of any such connivance. These poverty-stricken friends of Christ spent their time and their scant money in gathering expensive spices and myrrh just to embalm the body. We cannot mistake their unsophisticated surprise.

4. Again: the Jews *never told* this tale in any



---

The Sanhedrim silent.Risk to the soldiers.

---

judicial audience or court, so that it could be subjected to cross-examination. Stealing this body was a capital crime; yet not one of these accused disciples was ever arrested for its commission. The chief persecutors among them pressed these Christians most cruelly before and after the ascension, while they preached the resurrection from the dead; they charged them with every conceivable crime; but it is marvellous to notice that this pretended fraud they never ventured to mention again. They did not so much as once use the tale in rebutting evidence offered them. We know very well from the Acts and the Epistles that the main doctrine, for which during forty years these disciples contended, was the actual resurrection of Jesus. They had no end of taunts, gibes, and arguments to answer. But this story of theft in the night they were never called upon officially to deny. To have proved it would have overturned the entire Christian religion in one sweep. But, after this first lie in Jerusalem, the Sanhedrim preserved a discreet silence. Nowhere else in the Bible do we find any allusion to this fabrication.

5. To all this now add the consideration that there was awful risk to the *soldiers*, if this story were true. Death was in every instance the punishment for a Roman sentinel who slept on his post. To suffer an escape like this was unpardonable. But if the story was *not* true, there was no peril in it. They could be hired to repeat it as often as was necessary, and they could do so fearlessly. That is,



---

The Passover moon.The sleepless people.

---

they would tell it out around among the populace loosely; for all they had to do, if ever brought to the governor or pressed to trial on the charge, was to deny it again, and say they were only lying; punishment belonged to the sleeping, which they would assert they did not do; not to the falsehood, which they would admit. Certainly, if such a confession had been honest, they would have conspired to help each other keep the secret for their life's sake.

6. Further: the inherent *impossibility* of the act itself cannot be left out of sight. This was only two nights after the Passover, and that feast was always observed at the full of the moon. That garden, therefore, was filled with white light. It would have been fatal to any man or woman to be caught on such an errand. Joseph lived close beside the city, most likely; Jerusalem was crowded at the time with a vast throng of unusual pilgrims. It was jubilee year, and there were greater numbers in attendance at the festival. Mountains and valleys on every side of the town were occupied with booths and tents of excited travellers. The people must have been alert and frightened. Oh, the majesty and the horror of that whole day! The curtain of the temple was torn in two—the holiest place was in full display before the profane eyes—rocks were split, graves were opened, old dead Hebrews had been up from their tombs, and had been seen walking in the streets! And if there was one spot more than another likely to be under malevolent and curious scrutiny, it was that where this Nazarene

---

Disposal of the body.The story breaks down.

---

prophet was laid. Any suspicious movement would have been observed by a score of eyes.

7. Then what could have been done with the *body* after the disciples had got it in possession! In all ages of mysterious history of crime, how many midnight machinations have been defeated and exposed because the presence of a human body was involved! It seems as if death would never be kept secret. In that land, too, where such strict regulations existed, so superstitious and exact, where every one shunned contact because of ceremonial uncleanness, how could those frightened Galileans have relieved themselves of a burden so awkward after they had passed the precincts of the garden? If discovered, what was there so fatal to their faith, as well as to themselves, as this half-buried body of that crucified Nazarene?

There seems hardly any need of pursuing so idle and so ill-contrived a tale with such seriousness. But remember this is all the evidence which has ever been offered in these eighteen centuries to explain the stupendous fact that on Sunday morning the new sepulchre of Joseph was found tenantless. In a word, it is the entire defence in this supposed case of jurisprudence. Justin Martyr and Tertullian, the historians of the second and third centuries, tell us that the Jews sent this story by letter around through all the East. Even in our time, the descendants of those people stubbornly insist that it is true. If, therefore, the story breaks down, the entire case against the gospel is lost.

---

A fact and a doctrine.

Turks' proverb.

---

So let us bear in mind that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is more than a fact; it is a doctrine. And once admitted, it will surely take all the other Christian doctrines in its train. Just let me know that Jesus himself folded that napkin, burst those stony barriers of the sepulchre, and led captivity captive, and then I know that the atonement is perfected. Man may find his way unhindered in returning unto God, and through penitence and faith sin may be checked, Satan conquered, and heaven set open for ever!

With such a gospel, why does any one wait? Even the Turks say in a proverb, "Hold thy mantle wide open when Heaven is raining gold!"

Here is offered to our blind and helpless race a full disclosure of the future so longed for and needed. "Christ rose, and I shall surely rise." Is it the work of wise men to reject a hope so resplendent? But that hope, like the doctrine, does not go or come alone; it carries a train after it. "If only in this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." If only in that life we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most mean and most selfish. It would be a strange thing to see in the Father's house one who never served the Father here, nor ever loved his Son!

## XI.

### A POSSIBLE CASTAWAY.

“BUT I KEEP UNDER MY BODY, AND BRING IT INTO SUBJECTION : LEST THAT BY ANY MEANS, WHEN I HAVE PREACHED TO OTHERS, I MYSELF SHOULD BE A CASTAWAY.”—I *Corinthians* 9:27.

It seems that on more than one occasion the apostle Paul was accused of making gain out of godliness, and forcing a personal support from his profession as a preacher. In the verses with which the text is connected he turns upon his maligners with a tremendous argument in vindication of his career. He bids them take his whole life into the closest examination. He challenges the minutest scrutiny. And in his final declaration he discloses clearly what had been his aim and his method, and what was his anxiety.

I. His *aim*, from the beginning, had been only the salvation of souls; he wanted, by all means, to “save some.” “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

1. This single purpose he asserts more plainly still in some previous verses of the same chapter. “For though I was free from all men, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;”

---

Paul wanted to "save some."

Self-renunciation necessary.

---

to them that are without law, as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law." He wanted to *gain* the Jews; he wanted to *gain* the Gentiles; he wanted to *gain* all he possibly could. He understood this to be the one purpose of God in the gospel plan. He knew it to be the one office of spiritual doctrine and activity. He accepted it as the sole end of the ministry of reconciliation. He directed all his energy to gain somebody.

2. He intimates at this point, however, that there is an almost infinite variety allowable in the use of means for such a work. Individual talent could find wide use for all its powers. Personal tact was of greatest value. The history of his times was precisely like that of ours, so far as human nature was concerned. In all ages of the church, conversation, literature, correspondence, gifts of scholarship, embellishments of art—indeed, the entire round of cultivated acquirements—would have a welcome and efficient place in God's service, if only one would be willing to be, as Paul said he himself was, "made all things to all men," in the consecrated hope of being able in the end just to "save some."

3. He shows, in this connection, that self-renunciation must be the first condition of success. "For the gospel's sake" Paul was content to be "servant unto all" that he "might gain the more." That is to say, he adapted his means to his end. We are not to understand him as declaring he was hypo-



---

Only some would be saved.

Figures from the prize-ring.

---

critical or insincere. He employed Jewish arguments and Jewish influential appeals with Jews, in order to reach their hearts; Gentile with Gentiles. He was weak in dealing with the weak; he grew pitiful and gentle with those feeble or timid people who needed forbearance and patience in instruction. For in his heart of hearts he knew that at the best only "some" among them would be saved. Many would resist the Spirit of grace in spite of all he could do; but woe would be to him if he did not instantly preach the gospel; necessity was laid upon him so to do.

II. With this aim, Paul now proceeds to tell us concerning his *methods* of self-training and discipline. "And I do all things for the gospel's sake, that I may be a joint partaker thereof. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run, that ye may attain. And every man that striveth in the games is temperate in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible."

1. It becomes us just here thoroughly to understand what the apostle means, before we attempt to apply his admonition. It is always interesting to notice how perfectly free from all mere fastidiousness Paul is in his writings. He would just as willingly take his rhetorical figures from the prize-ring as from any other source, if he found what he wanted there. Here he chooses two of the ordinary games of those times—racing and boxing. And appealing to the popular knowledge of athletes'



---

True self-control.Laborious discipline.

---

habits, he throws his whole force upon the one element of *self-control*. That is what the word "temperance" means. No doubt it refers to drinking too much intoxicating liquor; for it has to do with everything that debases or injures one by its misuse. So, likewise, it refers to gluttony and to licentious habits of any sort whatsoever. The language is explicit: "Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things."

2. Hence our lesson becomes the more valuable because of its wider reach. It is neither wise nor fair to limit the argument to be drawn from all sources as against indulgence in what will weaken. It is within our modern knowledge that stroke-oarsmen, and "the eleven of all England," and prize-walkers in the rinks, all go into instant and desperate training for a match the moment the preliminaries are arranged, whatever the belt or the premium or the "crown" shall be. Soldiers are subjected to what some would consider violent drill with the musket and the sword, with the caisson and the carriage, with the horses and the mules, with the spades and the pickaxes. Business men give hours to laborious discipline. Sailors are kept for years before the mast. Every man, whatever his vocation in this great rough-and-tumble of a world, prepares for his approaching competitions, and surrenders himself to the care and regimen of a strict life. This is done "to obtain a corruptible crown;" we are seeking to obtain one which is "incorruptible."

---

Successful fishermen.Hit under the eye.

---

3. And still beyond this lies the law of Christian example. No class in the community believe in the attainments of experience more implicitly than athletic people do. No man in this lower line of usefulness which we call *advice* is more sage than a prize-fighter. Athletes are creatures of rules in training. Even successful fishermen become opinionated, and believe no flies in nature are as good to allure fishes as those which their own dexterity makes out of humming-bird feathers. Such persons hold to the principle that there is profitable and available gain in what has been tried once and has proved successful. It sounds almost professional, as if a master-spirit in the race and arena were speaking, when we listen to Paul saying, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly: so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." The new version of this passage is very striking: "I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage." "Buffet" is a good, dignified rendering. The word has this meaning in other connections; but as a boxer's term it means "hit with heavy blows," especially, "hit under the eye," "give a black eye," and the like. The reason for such carefulness is given afterwards at the close of the next chapter: "Give no occasion of stumbling, either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God: even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved. Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ."

---

Paul continued anxious.What is a castaway ?

---

III. With all this definiteness of aim, and with all this self-control in method, the apostle, in the third place, avows that he still was anxious. He frankly owns that he had, and had need of, watchfulness in his every-day personal conflict. "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

1. Here, again, we must get at the exact meaning of the words before we attempt to draw the lessons. This word "castaway" can, in such a connection, have but one signification. Paul was afraid that his soul, if neglected, might be lost in despite of all his previous history and effort. Dean Alford tells us that an examination of combatants who had gained victories took place after the contests were closed; and then, if it could be found that any one of them had contended unlawfully, that is, against the rules of the arena, he was deprived of the prize, and might be driven with disgrace from the games. So a Christian preacher, having announced to others the conditions of the strife against sin, must abide by them in person; if he failed, through unfaithfulness or unfairness, he would become a "castaway." This word is given elsewhere, "reprobate." In the new version it is translated, "rejected," as its meaning here. "I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air: but I buffet my body, and bring it unto bondage: lest by any

---

A great scholar may be lost.

A conspicuous leader.

---

means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.”

2. Hence our lessons now are unspeakably solemn. It needs only that they be stated slowly in their order for our admonition.

(1.) It is possible for a great scholar, highly educated in religious truth, to become a castaway. Paul was brought up at Gamaliel's feet. He had a wide acquaintance with literature. We find him quoting poets, speaking foreign languages, writing argumentative epistles. He could reason with Israelites in their synagogues; he could cope with the philosophers at Athens. But he says he has yet to keep his body under, or he shall become a castaway.

(2.) It is possible for a mature grown man, long under disciplinary training, to become a castaway. There is a tradition that the apostle was born in the second year of our Christian era. If so, he was drawing near threescore now. It would seem as if this man, already elderly if not old, might have gained perfect mastery of himself by mere effort of will by this time. Calmness and repose are the fruits of reflection. Furthermore, youthful lusts burn out and fade out of themselves after a while. But this Christian preacher never forgot that he grew angry in the quarrel with Barnabas, only just a little time before he penned this letter to Corinth. So he needed all the remaining years to keep buffeting his body and watching for life.

(3.) It is possible for a leader, widely loved and followed as a pattern of excellence, to become a

---

Danger of apostasy.A popular preacher.

---

castaway. It is startling to think of such a man as Paul in danger of apostasy. What throngs of people over the then known world had heard him preach, and gratefully accepted him as one of the chiefs in the church! How Timothy loved him, how Luke trusted him, how Mark believed in him! Yet in the very next chapter after this Paul says, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

(4.) It is possible for a preacher, extraordinarily powerful and popular, to become a castaway. Does any one doubt the eminence of this man in public speech? Paul was proud and sensitive, and in those days men ridiculed one who preached so humbling a gospel as he announced he was going to proclaim as much as was in him to do. It was the theme of his discourses that moulded him more and more to the likeness of Christ, who spake as never man spake. It is of no use to assert that after his conversion these besetting sins had no power over Paul; he insists that they never lost their power. Subdued indeed, and under control—glorious control for a mere man—were all his evil passions; but they were not eradicated. They were held in check, not by their own weakness, but by the superior strength of "Christ formed in him, the hope of glory." Yet ever and anon they burst forth afresh, and made him tremble before the rush of their onset. And once at least he lifted his hands with a gesture of half-desperation to say plaintively enough, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver



---

A serpent loose.Twenty years' experience.

---

me from the body of this death!" But even then he did not yield to their violence. Paul was no man to lie down supinely, and be bound unresistingly captive. He seems to be always so on the alert that he could catch the serpent of his besetting sin by the neck, just as it was springing to throw its coils around him, and thrust it hissing beneath the bars of its cage again; then he would stand upright and stamp his heel upon the hasp. And only waiting after his severe conflict to murmur, "I thank God, who giveth me the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," back to his duty of preaching he goes once more, and undauntedly seizing that little, despised gospel theme of a crucified Redeemer, he holds it up in both his hands, and turns it over and over in the radiant light of his great eloquence until it sparkles again and again with new lustre, and makes even his attenuated figure glow with an unconscious but glorious beauty. Oh, if it seems shameful to imagine such a man becoming a castaway, think the rather, then, of many a popular idol since, preaching sermons like driven lightning, with all the flashing brilliance of the truth, and even with something of its awful stroke, who has gone down into sorrow and shame!

(5.) It is possible for a member of a Christian church, actually somewhat advanced in spiritual experience, to become a castaway. For twenty years now this apostle had been moving on in lines of instruction and growth, since the day when at Stephen's martyrdom the witnesses flung their gar-



A Bengal tiger.

Is it worth a struggle?

ments at his feet. He avows his assurance of faith; but he predicates it upon his "temperance," and trusts himself only because he is keeping his body under. They tell us that the tiger can never be tamed fully; he may be cowed by superior force, but his nature can never be wholly changed; let him but once lap blood on his tongue, and all his old violence is aroused; he is no longer the cringing puppet of the menagerie show, but the bold, fiery beast which prowled in the jungles of Bengal. Such is the human heart; and Paul knew that from the most lamentable of all experiences. So he just patiently labored on to keep his body under, in the pathetic and trustful hope he might at last be saved.

There is only one suggestion more to be added to all this. If such a man as Paul had to struggle in long conflict lest he should be a castaway at the last, how will it fare with those who make no beginning? "If the righteous be scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

## XII.

### GOD FOUND UNSOUGHT.

“BUT ESAIAS IS VERY BOLD, AND SAITH, I WAS FOUND OF THEM THAT SOUGHT ME NOT; I WAS MADE MANIFEST UNTO THEM THAT ASKED NOT AFTER ME.”—*Romans* 10:20.

IT is a singular thing to find one inspired writer calling another inspired writer “bold.” But we are not to understand that the apostle doubted what the prophet said. A quotation with approval marks agreement. Nor could it have been that Paul feared some would think Isaiah had hazarded a perilous statement. He had no reason to imagine so intelligent a servant of God would be extravagant in language, or rhetorically unguarded in forms of expression, no matter how intricate or difficult might be the principle of divine procedure which he was seeking to reveal.

In giving his opinion so frankly as to the prophet's boldness, it is likely that Paul merely recalled two exceedingly commonplace, but most important considerations concerning the time in which Isaiah lived. Then it was a bold thing to say that God had rejected the Jews and chosen the Gentiles; for all appearances rendered such a conjecture intrinsically improbable, there being then really no signs of a revolution like that. Moreover, a statement so sweeping and so wounding would anger that entire nation, and thus imperil the popularity of the prophet, as well as his life.

---

Paul quotes Isaiah.Faces in a glass.

---

But Isaiah did say it, and Paul here repeats it in the New Testament; and it seems a very bold thing for either of them to leave on record in a public epistle. Read the text over, and then try to accept this stupendous, this reiterated utterance as the announcement of a fact in the government of God: namely, that he is really found sometimes by those who are not experimentally seeking him; that he is manifest unto those who are not consciously asking after him. That is to say, there is a sovereign love of God which goes out after a human soul before that soul has even so far started out for God as to wish for him. The mercy of our Heavenly Father comes down in the cool of the day, like the voice of one walking in the lost Paradise of this world, looking after those who are trying to hide from a presence they dread. He awakens the careless soul by new revelations of old truth; he arrests the wilful soul rushing headlong into ruin by the exercise of his divine energy; he persistently agitates the dull soul by monitions of conscience; thus he purposes to lead men to seek him, by seeking them beforehand.

This is the doctrine of our text; and my work would be finished at this point of the amazing disclosure, if it were not for the perversity of some who are like unto men beholding their natural faces in a glass, and then going their way, and straightway forgetting what manner of men they are. There are hearers of the word who are very slow at becoming doers also. I believe the truth will be

---

God still reigns.Benares near to heaven.

---

more effectually reached if in our line of thought we start at a distance, and work our way in quiet advance up to it.

I. Let us begin with this: *God has never yet relinquished his hold upon the entire human race.* He claims to be still the undisturbed and rightful Monarch of the universe.

This planet we live upon was created absolutely pure. There is now no star in all of the shining host above more spotless in its brightness than this was in the hour when the sons of God shouted for joy over the earliest sight of it. Just then sin entered the human heart. That ruined the race. Then the world too was cursed, and man was cursed, and woman was cursed; and the young earth "swung blind and blackening in the moonless air."

But the Almighty has not yet given it away to destruction. It lies within his dominions. And even at the worst moment, when an imperial Satan seems to rule, the Angel of the Lord stands by to rebuke and resist him. Believe me, that man is safest who wanders where his true Prince waits. He is nearest his home who is on the frontiers with the army, rather than in the capital with the usurper. God is certainly going to repossess his own; and he is the safest who stands closest to God. The poor, ignorant people in the Hindoo land assert that Benares is the very centre of the earth, eight hundred thousand steps nearer heaven above than any other spot the sun looks down upon. Ah, it is not

---

Immanuel the Prince.God does not consult kings.

---

heaven one needs to think about; Immanuel is heaven; one step nearer to the Captain of our salvation is farther towards triumph and rest than twenty others, even if a soldier marched straight towards the gates of pearl with his lonely banner flying.

II. In the second place, I observe that *God even now asserts his full right to a special people of his own in the midst of earthly rebellion and disownment of his Son.*

Jehovah is the God of gods. He asks no questions, and discusses none, as to this primary demand. His call is, Who is on the side of the Lord? A nation he means to have, gathered out of all nations, gathered into one nation, of which he is the Monarch, and to which he means in his own good time to give the supreme power. Hence he asserts authority in a land, without consulting the poor magnates at the head of it. He offers no explanation and makes no apology. You remember he commissioned Jonah to go to Nineveh, when the so-called king of that great city was neither a Jew nor a proselyte. Just so he sent Moses into Egypt with orders to Pharaoh to dismiss a million of his subjects for ever on a single night's notice. It made no difference whatever that the king said he did not know who this Jehovah—the God his bricklayers worshipped—was; the Maker of the universe assumed that it was the business of all his intelligent creatures to understand the authority which belonged to a monarch like him. He assumes that

---

Who is on the Lord's side?

God's choices.

---

same preëminence now. 'The only question that can arise is one of individual bearing, Who shall rally first around his standard, and serve him?

And this he decides himself: "For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek. For the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Nor does he leave this choice to a mere chance acceptance. He institutes a great organism of promulgation. He commissions a ministry of reconciliation to make known his will widely. Into this office he summons his agents sovereignly. What looks like accident is purpose. Jesus perhaps sees Nathaniel under a tree, sitting unconscious of divine discovery, an Israelite without guile; to him he says, Follow thou me. And this is the usual rule of celestial selection. Does God need a king? Then the ruddy-cheeked son of Jesse is anointed, the last and least of the shepherd-boys in that wondering circle of brothers, and the one most unlikely to be called to a throne. Does God need a captain? Then he enters the Syrian army for a convert, and washes Naaman of a leprosy, in order to fit him to build an altar in the sight of a heathen host. Does God need a priest? He summons Melchizedek, officially a man "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." Does God need a prophet? Then shall the unwilling lips of Balaam be turned from



cursing into blessing. Does God need an apostle? Then while anxious disciples begin to cast unauthorized lots over Matthias, he is prostrating a fiery persecutor on the road to Damascus, and transmuting Saul into Paul, so that he may send to the Gentiles a new ambassador for Christ. Does God need a grand leader for all ages? Then will he bid the youthful Abram arise, get himself out of his country, going whither he knows not, but becoming at the last the Father of the Faithful, and a "Friend of God." Thus does he gather his agents at his own sovereign will, often unexpectedly to themselves, as well as surprisingly to others. Literally, he is found of those who sought him not, and made manifest unto them that asked not after him.

III. Observe now, in the third place, as we advance, that *the all-wise God has originated and announced a plan by which he may bring his people to himself without any failure.*

It would not do to leave this to ordinary contingencies. There was too much at stake. Three steps are assumed as parts of such a redemption, each of which is absolutely necessary. One is, the conviction of all men that they are entirely ruined and condemned under sin. Another is, the providing of an atonement on the basis of which the divine law may be sustained, and yet the transgressor of it once more received into favor. And the other is, the gracious constraining of wilful men, the arrest and conversion of individuals, one by one. These preliminaries have been met.

---

Men condemned already.

“Weeping Cross.”

---

Let us remember, then, that in all this dealing with sinful and rebellious hearts God assumes at the start they are utterly lost.

We are condemned already. The wrath of God abideth on every one of us. Mercy gives no promise, heaven suffers no peace. Hell is our portion. There is no hiding for sin. No escape from its penalty is possible. He who breaks the divine law is like a thief breaking a window to steal; there remains ever the evidence of the shivered glass, and God will surely find the culprit by the cut on his hand.

Now let us remember that God prefers to save the transgressor, rather than punish him.

God says he takes no pleasure in the infliction of penalty. The death of the wicked is no comfort to him. He has proffered a way of escape. “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” And this is the only way. No promise can be found in the Bible which is not builded upon this old rock of doctrine: “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” We are justified by faith in the merits of a crucified Redeemer. And this is a strictly individual matter. Each person must repent of sin, and accept of this free atonement. It cannot be done by proxy.

And then let us remember that human will is stubborn, and always refuses free grace.

“The way to heaven is by Weeping Cross.” That does not seem to be a popular way. Men

never did love it at all. Of themselves they would reject it one by one. Just here enters the greatest mystery of the gospel. A certain spiritual pressure is exerted by God himself. He interposes in the interest of every soul that lingers in acceptance. No matter how apathetic, no matter how wild, no matter how independent or proud any will may be, almighty sovereignty lays a firm, quiet hand upon it at once. "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." The Holy Ghost, the third Person in the adorable Trinity, comes down to constrain the surrender of the disobedient heart.

IV. This leads us rapidly forward. In the fourth place, I remark that in the carrying out of God's plan of grace as he gathers a people for himself, *he sometimes strives directly with ungodly and impenitent men, without their expecting it, and even without their understanding it.* Thus it is that he is often "found of those who sought him not."

You see he has a right to everybody, and when he desires a man he sends for him. Whom does he send? The Holy Spirit, as I have intimated just now. No actual force is employed, but certain processes of his own are put into operation. The mind becomes agitated in new forms. The conscience is aroused into unusual sensibility. The heart is suddenly possessed of a fresh experience. The sinner does not always know precisely what all this means, but he feels a surprising impelling power active in the very centre of his being. He is awakened to

see his own needs. He begins to be uneasy about the future. He is constrained to reflect upon the issues of another life.

Now the important thing to be noticed in all this experience is the amazing fact that it is God in person who is stirring this man up so. He is making himself to be found, even when the man is not seeking after him. These inward monitions, these secret impressions of conviction, are straight from high heaven. A merely ordinary reverence would constrain the decency of a more than ordinary notice of such emotions. God acts very gently. There are in every-day life two ways of waking a man out of dangerous slumber: one is violent, one is very considerate. You may shout in his ear, or you may shake rudely his person; that will surely arouse him of course. But you may bring a lit lamp into the room, and leave it there burning; that will awake him too; and he ought to thank you for being so kind about it. This is the way in which God works with many men in a crisis of their spiritual history. He utters no harsh outcry, but he lets in the light of truth. And now if they go on dangerously indolent and sluggard still, he means that at least they shall be uneasy in their dreams.

Furthermore, providence sometimes works in with grace. An adversity or a blessing, a deliverance or a discipline, the loss of a beloved friend or the conversion of a child, a startling accident in the community—any of these events which arouse the feeling or arrest the attention—God uses as an in-

---

God's providences.The man has a chance.

---

strument in the awakening of the soul. The one urgent need is that we see how far he advances, and where he stops. He aims only to lead men to the beginning of their work; he does not propose to do it for them. He says to those who seek him not, Seek me. He calls to the prayerless, Pray. He cries to the thoughtless, Think. And that is all he does.

V. In the fifth and last place, then, I observe that this moment, in which the Spirit of God is striving, *is the moment above all others in which to yield to his call.*

For now, at any rate, if never before, a man has a chance. If God is sincere, he offers personal pardon now. It is a solemn, but not an unwelcome thing to know that God is at this instant looking at you, just as he looked at Simon Peter out from the hall of judgment. Moreover, it gives much help to feel God is on your side, and aiding you powerfully by his influence. If you are ever going to be a Christian, now must be the easiest time. Divine invitations grow significant when God stands by a soul and encourages it with affectionate urgency. When you awake to discover that the Almighty God has come after you, before you even began to go after him; when you perceive he is found by you before you sought him; when you actually hear him saying, Call upon me, I am near—oh, in a moment of such vast disclosure, it does seem that your heart must be aroused to the immediate surrender he demands!

Times of visitation.

Hands stretched out.

Nor can it be forgotten that such times of visitation are full of extreme peril, as a matter of course. Alternatives must be forced in every case. A victory of sin strengthens a bad passion. A rejection of Christ adds a new transgression. Putting off a surrender now, makes it far more likely that you will put it off again. The old Spanish proverb says, "The road of By-and-by leads to the town of Never." Half way to Jesus Christ is a dreadful place. "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

How amazing is the thought, as one looks off upon a human being, that God has come for him before he has even started for God! How it stimulates Christian zeal to imagine that the Holy Spirit is in advance of us already!

This most interesting chapter closes with a wonderful presentation of divine tenderness and compassion. A rhetorical figure, matchlessly beautiful, gives it a fitting utterance. "All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." The eternal Jehovah becomes a suppliant at the will of the creatures himself has made! He asks favors of them. He is found of those who did not seek him. It would seem as if the very least thing any one could do would be to yield to his wishes, and move towards the outstretched arms that offer a welcome.



### XIII.

#### PERISHED THOUGHTS.

“HIS BREATH GOETH FORTH, HE RETURNETH TO HIS EARTH ;  
IN THAT VERY DAY HIS THOUGHTS PERISH.”—*Psalm 146:4.*

A LATE writer, popular and beloved, is known to have announced to some intimate friends only a few hours before he suddenly died that he was going to begin writing another volume at once; his thoughts were all ready. We ourselves understand enough concerning literary work to know that each undertaking of this sort is the result of patient reflection in the author's imagination before it comes forth into book-form, and lies in our hands to be read. It exists in his purpose as an entire artistic composition of parts previous to its disclosure as a finished story offered to public acceptance.

If, now, it happens that life ends in the midst of those important days lying between the conception and the execution of the plan, it is a somewhat curious question to ask and to answer, What becomes of the thought which seems to have perished? Where do unfulfilled plans go when they vanish?

We have not been without illustrious examples of such a sort before, either in the lighter or the graver undertakings of human genius. What ever became of the last half of Addison Alexander's commentary on Matthew? Where are the final chapters of Charles Dickens' story of "Edwin Drood"? There can be no doubt that authors have notions, more or less clearly defined, of their exact

---

Ideals before realization.The Laocoon group.

---

purposes in all such literary creations. Indeed, we have been taught to believe that everything artistic exists as an ideal before it exists as a realization. And if the realization has been interrupted or disordered, are we always secure that we can refer back to the lost ideal?

An imaginative visitor may pause now in the shadow of the moonlit Parthenon at Athens, so exquisitely lovely even in its ruins, and wonder what it must have been in the day of its matchless splendor. But he will be likely to wonder more as he tries to think what the beautiful edifice must have been in the mental picture which rose radiantly before the eyes of the architect, when as yet not even a stone had been quarried for the substance of it. And now that we know, just within a few years for the first time discovered, that there is not a straight line in the building, but that each upright and each level is upon a beautiful curve, are we certain that we have recovered all the secrets of the vanished plan? Still, there is so much comfort as this in our disappointment: we know the glory of the old building was attained because it was perfected in its ideal by an artist great enough to conceal his art.

Now, it so happens that in material constructions it may be possible for the plans of one genius to be supplemented and carried into success by another. A sculptor has been discovered brave enough to attempt to restore the Laocoon group, although, even now, some doubt whether he has put the boy's

---

Cologne Cathedral.

Elijah's body.

arm up against the snake, where it ought to be. It would seem as if the same man could have finished it creditably if the original artist had died before it was done. Within a remembered season Cologne Cathedral has been completed after nearly four hundred years of long toiling, but we are told now that the name of the master-builder has actually been forgotten in the meantime. That was no disaster specially. Solid stone a hundred courses high could not fail to contain some sort of prophecy in itself of the remaining hundred courses to follow; and certain forms of tracery and buttress would, by fixed rules of art, require fashions of pinnacle and spire which almost any one else could be ingenious enough to suggest.

But in literature the case is different. Each architect of biography, be it of fictitious biography in a tale or of actual in a career, carries his plan in his own bosom, and rarely so much as sketches it on tracing-paper. It is not easy, therefore, for another to find or finish a perished thought which an author has failed to put into intelligible realization.

So our question returns: What does become of purposes or plans distinctly outlined by the originator, but never receiving embodiment? Sometimes it seems as if they might be recovered if we go and search for them, as the fifty men went over the land looking for Elijah's body lest it should be lost, having fallen on some lonely mountain or some desolate plain. Sometimes it strikes us that they may be imagined to go where the Lost Chord went which

the poet bewailed in the song. The singer sits down again by the keys, and tries all possible combinations of tones; oh, the indescribable richness of unexhausted harmonies which are found by the wandering fingers as they grow passionately vagrant among the notes! But never returns exactly that one lost chord; it glided away off over the edge of the instrument. It will not be found till the new life begins. So music and verse sit gazing afar like two mourners.

Sometimes we feel conscious that we have killed our own thoughts with inadequate incarnation. Our plans have not been successes; our lives have been failures. Few people could say of any part of their work as Gluck said of his "Armida," with an indomitable sense of power and a daring sense of satisfaction, "I have composed this piece in a manner which will prevent its growing old." He told Marie Antoinette, "Madame, the opera is already finished; and, indeed, it is superb!" To the most of us such language seems conceited. Even those who labor honestly in this world are often compelled to own that at no time have they ever reached their ideals of excellence.

"I wonder if ever a song was sung  
But the singer's heart sang sweeter?  
I wonder if ever a rhyme was rung  
But the thought surpassed the metre?  
I wonder if ever a sculptor wrought  
Till the cold stone echoed his ardent thought?  
Or if ever a painter, with light and shade,  
The dream of his inmost heart portrayed?"

---

Purposes are immortal.

Emerson's remark.

---

Now it does not seem possible that any real thought with a purpose in it could be allowed to pass away out of existence. That would be a poor conclusion, when we know that even speech is imperishable. Every vibration of a human voice is held by the air somewhere in its depths. We would rather believe that all thoughts become incarnate in some life here or elsewhere. Thoughts unexpressed and unembodied form part of the permanent furniture of the soul they reside in. They go to make up the abiding elements of its future character and experience in an unseen world beyond this. Thoughts that are published in life and endeavor are lodged in the hearts of those who receive and welcome them. Emerson is quoted as saying, "No man has a prosperity so high or firm but two or three words can dishearten it. There is no calamity which right words will not begin to redress." A lonely man will be comforted, a sad man may be cheered, an ignorant man may be taught, a cowed man may be lifted, a penitent man may be led to seek pardon and find peace—all with a word, just one word with a thought in it spoken charitably. So it does not seem possible that real honest plans for good should die and be buried.

Let us see whether Christian faith has not something to say in such circumstances far better than this. Start with the rule enunciated thus: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedi-



---

Workmen buried.Work goes on.

---

ence of Christ." Let us see to it that our thoughts are worth saving, and then we may be absolutely certain that they will not be suffered to vanish out of the universe. "God buries his workmen, but carries on his work." And he does this by the thoughts which seem lost; just as seed seems lost sometimes, when it is under the soil making ready for the harvest. No one can trustfully read his Bible without becoming sure that one of the gladdest of all surprises in the new life will be found in the return to us of those fond and patient purposes, now in full accomplishment, which we once mourned over as having died without a sign.

It is time that we come to a plain exposition of the verse that has been chosen for a text. It is still more suggestive when taken in the connection where it appears than when it is repeated alone:

"Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God: which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever."

This fragment of an Old Testament Psalm contains a fine high contrast between the life of man and the life of God. We are not to trust even princes; we are to trust the Maker of heaven and earth and seas. Men vanish; God endures. And besides



---

Weaving shining cloth.

This life projected in another.

---

these general admonitions the text offers at least two special suggestions of much interest.

One of them is found in the meaning of the word we are dwelling upon so steadily, the word here rendered "thoughts." It comes from a verb which means to weave shining cloth. It signifies, therefore, for its primary definition, splendid fabrics for garments to be fashioned for one's self. Hence, it would refer here in its tropical sense to such thoughts as are purposeful and personal; intentions in which one's self resides, plans which might be assumed to be influential and abiding in one's life, as well as famous in the estimates of others. We must understand that the lamentation over these, which makes the Psalm appear so melancholy, is owing to the supreme excellence and unusual brilliancy of the thoughts that are represented as perishing. The best plans men have are sometimes lost even while the men are alive, and in a sense are always lost when the men die.

The second suggestion with special meaning in this text has reference to the word rendered "perish." We remember that the Bible has much to say, first and last, about a permanent future in which what is done in this life is projected and preserved in another. The Word of God offers a wide range of illustration to show the power of a good thought, and the peril of an evil one. So we feel certain that the assertion which the verse seems to make must have some sort of limitation; it cannot signify more than that the thinker's control over

Ships lost at sea.

Antwerp bells.

his purposes will perish, even though the purposes move on; perhaps we might say they cease to be "his" thoughts.

Hence, now our question returns: What becomes of the thoughts which have never received an embodiment? Are any thoughts ever actually lost, as ships are lost at sea with not even so much as a sign washed ashore, or a floating bottle to show how and where they foundered? We are ready to give this an answer at last.

To the natural gifts of the wisest man the world ever knew, was once added the singular endowment of inspiration to enable him to say with the authority it claimed, "The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord; but the words of the pure are pleasant words." Thoughts are coined into words in order that mental wealth might be put into circulation. Sometimes, however, the highest thoughts disdain language; and so it happens that these seem most surely to be lost when the superior thinkers vanish.

It has often been noticed by tourists in Antwerp that the multitudinous and beautiful spires in the air overhead appear at nightfall to be actually conversing as the chimes call and answer to each other. One of the bells bears the inscription slightly changed from an old Psalm: *Non sunt loquellæ neque sermones; audiantur voces eorum*—"There is no speech nor language; but let their voices be heard." Nothing is more impressive than the silence which succeeds as nightfall rushes into the night. Thus

---

Sounds in the air.The opened books.

---

often supreme minds appear to be in converse over the heads of the common people. A cynical tongue might say these are the best thoughts humanity is capable of thinking; but most of them perish at the time because of lack of listeners, and they all perish at the last, as the fall of darkness puts an end to the day.

Not certainly so: many visitors remember the bells with sweet devotion as the finest thing in Antwerp; and some believe that bells grow stronger and mellower with ringing. Thoughts either go forth into activity, or they remain in the thinker's soul as part of its future. Indeed, whatever their fate, they continue as the man's permanent possession. For mental wealth alone of all values known to man increases by retention, and increases doubly by expenditure. Nobody ever lost a thought by imparting it; he only fixes it and strengthens it. These fugitive purposes go where the owner goes, and fare with him for a future they help to make. We may be sure that it will be one of the most wonderful disclosures of the day of judgment, when it comes with the full exhibition of the opened books, how many human souls have been solaced and saved by mere "pleasant words" with a pure thought conveyed in them and a warm heart behind them.

Once in a Sunday-school the superintendent told the usual story about two lads, starting in much the same circumstances, one of whom reached a maturity honored and prosperous, the other of whom came up into a manhood vicious and unthanked;

---

A good thought put in.

The Madonna and the camel.

---

and he asked, of course, for an explanation. A hand went up, and an answer was given which showed by its wisdom how the child is sometimes veritably the *vates* of the man in spiritual penetration: "Please, sir, I suppose somebody put a good thought in the best boy's heart when he was growing!"

It is not always necessary that thoughts should be put into words in order to be influential. Frederick W. Robertson tells us, in his lectures on poetry, of two paintings which had been a power in his life. One was a Madonna at Blenheim, that he "could not gaze upon without being conscious of a calming influence;" and the other was the print of a dying camel out in the desert, anticipating hopelessly its doom from the vultures. "You cannot look at this picture," he remarks, "without a vivid sense and conception of despair; you go through street after street before the impression ceases to haunt you." It is certain that there have been worse paintings even than this. The artist may have put in a face just one leer of luxury or lust; and that has lodged in the heart of a passer-by a foul thought with a hurt and a ruin to purity in it, when the hand which turned the wicked expression has been dead a hundred or five hundred years. The painter perished; the thought moves on.

This must be the reason why so many admonitions are given concerning evil and injurious thoughts, over which, after he has uttered them, the mischievous thinker's control ceases. The com-

Russian proverb.

Goethe's birds pecking.

mon people in Russia have a proverb that says, "A fool may throw a stone in a pond; it may take seven sages to pull it out." We are held to a stern responsibility for our intentions: "the thought of foolishness is sin." It will not do to leave the emissaries of Satan at liberty to fling fire around at will just because their own hearts are burning with baleful purposes. The murderers must be held in hand, and the brands must be quenched. Simon Magus must be exhorted to pray God that the thoughts of his heart might be forgiven him. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Where do great men get their noblest ideas? Michael Angelo produced such exquisite faces that Fiesole declared he must have been in paradise to borrow them. A watchful heart will find God furnishing thoughts for such a generous service. "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary; he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned." One wonders whether Goethe had not been lately reading that verse when he said that his best thoughts always came to him unawares, like birds pecking at his windows and saying, "Here we are!"

It is not worth while to homilize in such matters. Cannot every man see for himself that evil



thoughts are to be eschewed? Defile no other soul's purity with an oath or a jest which may sting the conscience or stain it. Choose thoughts elevated and good, for one must reside with them in life beyond this. Carry the best purposes into instant execution under personal supervision. Do not put so important a matter as the cheering of a mourner or the salvation of a soul into the risks of a volume of "remains;" it is like leaving much money and a grand purpose to the hazards of a last will and testament; the much money may quite likely be welcomed, but the invaluable purpose may not be understood.

Then when the time comes for departure there will be no surprise or regret, no confusion or hurry. One can just take his ease and leisure in dying. That is the most awful and majestic thing a human being is ever called to do. Too many people depart undignifiedly, they are so driven at the last.

Schubert passed away at the early age of thirty-two; but he had worked hard. And when the tidings came, Schumann was heard to say, "He has done enough!"



## XIV.

### COVETOUSNESS IS IDOLATRY.

“COVETOUSNESS, WHICH IS IDOLATRY.”—*Colossians* 3 : 5.

WE all think we have some clear notions concerning this particular sin which is mentioned in the text. Even our home dictionaries give us synonyms for the word of no mistakable meaning. Covetousness is defined, “avarice, parsimoniousness, penuriousness, niggardliness, miserliness.” Of its nature we have no kind of doubt. Of its moral character before God we consider ourselves quite informed. Of its general results upon human life and destiny we could predicate much from our own observation.

But I presume that many of the ordinary readers of the Bible have passed this little clause of a verse without much depth of reflection upon the most singular implication found in it. It may even now strike not a few with surprise to be told that covetousness is *idolatry*. Idolatry is the earliest thing mentioned in the Decalogue, and coveting is the latest. It may never have occurred to us all to observe that the two tables of the law bend around to touch each other so closely that he who breaks the tenth commandment breaks the first as well.

This unusual statement of the text, however, does not stand altogether alone. We are told dis-

Gold is like a god.

Divine attributes.

tinctly in another Epistle, "This ye know, that no *covetous man who is an idolater*, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." Thus we learn that the inordinate love of wealth, and the insatiate pursuit of it, are simply heathenish and are (under inspired authority) put on the same level of estimate as bowing down to stone images or offering sacrifices to deities of wood.

However startling this phraseology may appear at first, it is certainly easy to point out, by instancing a few particulars in analysis, the plain reason for such an application of terms. Gold seems in many respects very like a god—not the only living and true God, but some human conception of the Deity, resembling those of the savage or unchristianized regions of the world.

I. No matter where we begin; take the ATTRIBUTES IT POSSESSES, if you will, for examination.

1. *Omniscience*, for example; wealth seems to know everything on the instant it occurs. Let a new island be discovered in some far-off sea—let a new invention find the light from some ingenious engineer's garret—let a new process of easier working out of old results be suggested—let a new machine be put on wheels: indeed, let any novelty whatsoever present itself in history, and wealth will be quite aware of it immediately. You cannot keep any plan, purpose, or line of business secret, if there is really any money in it. Gold has a million eyes: it sees in the dark; it infringes patents, preëmpts islands, plants itself over hidden

---

Laying Roman roads.

Gold seems omnipotent.

---

mines. It knows everything by instinct, it pushes forward almost as if it were an all-seeing deity.

2. Of course, *omnipresence* follows. To some adventurers nothing seems more surprising than the sudden appearance of Mammon everywhere without notice. The quietest hamlet at the foot of the mountains is invaded at will. Greed and avarice lay hold of what busy enterprise leaves untouched. It is said that the Northern Germans always knew that imperial domination was on its way to their subjugation whenever they perceived the workmen coming to lay the flagstones of the Roman roads into their precincts. The least opening for business, the merest crevice of commerce, simply invites competition, and so wealth rushes in on the instant. "Mammon wins its way where seraphs might despair."

3. *Omnipotence*, likewise: oh, how many of us know to our sorrow the power of riches! the overmastering, crushing opposition it sets up before every poor man's enterprise! It does seem so like a god! The oldest book in the Bible is that which tells Job's story: and Eliphaz exclaimed even then, "As for the mighty man, he had the earth, and the honorable man dwelt in it." There has been no essential change in these forty centuries. Gold rules the world. Gold owns the land, inhabits the palaces, buys up the offices of the nation, sways the mighty sceptre of social influence, and becomes the master of men.

Who can wonder, then, that the unthinking

world at large grow idolatrous before this deity or demon of Gold? These are the attributes of a god. It seems almost as if the notable vision of the seer in Patmos had come back again: "And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns upon his heads; and his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven and did cast them to the earth."

II. Let us pass on a step. It is easy to predict that an image, set up and reputed to possess such attributes, should demand reverence. And I remark, in the second place, that wealth assumes to be a god, and oftentimes really appears to be one, because of the **WORSHIP IT ATTRACTS.**

1. In my day I have lingered outside of heathen temples of more than one faith in the lands of the heathen. And I have heard for many an hour the wild and incoherent cries of the devotees, who screamed to the praise of the golden idols before which they danced. I soberly assure you, the resemblance is most pitiful and painful, when in our streets the hideous screams and blasphemies of those are heard who gamble the hours away in the temples of Mammon. The roar of excited, half-delirious men who clamor with each other in the death-grapple of competition—alas, how little does it differ from the insane cries of the audience in the theatre, who for the space of two hours cried, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

2. Worse than all, this cannot be called mere

Elijah at Carmel.

"They have their reward."

lip-service. The worshippers of gold are desperately in earnest. Men have scattered their brains in suicide on the doorsteps after an unsuccessful prayer. Oh, I say again, how little does this differ from the conduct of the priests on Mount Carmel in Elijah's day, who cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with lancets and knives till the blood gushed out upon them, shouting, "O Baal, hear us, O Baal, hear us," from the morning even until noon! Alas, men of the world are all absorbed in their orgies before the altar: they leap up upon it, they weep and wring their hands, and no man is ashamed of his zeal! Body and soul, he kneels before the image of wealth he has created.

III. In the third place, wealth seems very like a god in the FAVORS IT BESTOWS. It would not be fair to say there is no reward given for fidelity to Mammon. There is much to admire in a successful career.

There is the fine residence, the beautiful equipage, the gorgeous apparel, the dainty viand, and the flowing wine; there is the envy of one's not-quite-so-rich neighbor; there is the tremulous obeisance of the seedy gentleman, the obsequious flattery of the lady whose charms have faded; there is the adulation of the crowd in the street when one's livery flashes by; there is the opening among the ignorant populace when the magnate goes in to deposit his dainty ballot; there is the awful flutter in the market when the millionaire appears in the

---

The world likes priestcraft.

Heathen temples.

---

board; there is the cringe of one's ancient enemies, the solitudes of one's poor friends; there are the rustle of the silks and the bow of the usher when the great purse marches up the aisle of the church; there is the mighty banquet where one can be made to imagine by soft compliments that he has rare gifts of oratory even when he stammers; and there is the fine funeral with the carriages, the silver nails, and the plumes; and there is the monument of marble and all the lies on it. Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward!

Wealth, as a deity, is not remarkably beneficent; but it would be uncandid to say that it has nothing to bestow on its faithful devotees. It is said the world likes priestcraft. And we know that the priest has power according to his nearness to his deity, and according to the faith of the admiring populace around him. And hence there is no hierarchy so absolutely revered, feared, and obeyed, in this age of ours, as that which hovers around, ministrant and servitor, in the grand temples of Gold.

IV. One more remark: wealth seems very like a god because of the SCOURGES IT INFLICTS.

“The dark places of the earth are full of cruelty.” This is the usual text chosen when one wishes to preach upon the peculiarities of heathenism. The gods which men fashion for themselves to worship have always been remarkable for their uncouth forms. Even the nations highest in artistic taste and intelligent skill have images most repulsive and obscene. The temples of India, China, and



---

Devouring devotees.Fattening for sacrifice.

---

Japan are said to be almost miracles of grace and architectural beauty; but the deities set up within their shrines are simply monsters.

Now the significance of this is found in the fact that all the deities of the heathen are clothed with attributes the most malignant and cruel. They are supposed to crush, maltreat, sometimes even to eat, their subjects. They are bloody, and hateful in every characteristic. Power, even wisdom, they are said to possess, but no mercy, no beneficence, no love. Strange is it to find that Mammon is well typed in these gods of the heathen. It is the most noticeable characteristic of the god of this world that he loves to trample upon and devour his devotees with awful cruelty.

One strong, clear declaration has been made in God's Word: "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall." You notice that no violent means of chastisement are indicated. We are not told that God will send upon him a deluge, or a rain of fire, or a gaping earthquake: the words are simple enough, "He shall fall." There was one god of old whose habit has been described to us in the language of his worshippers. He was wont to send viands from the table of his own luxury to feed his devotees: thus he fattened them for a sudden sacrifice on his own altar.

There are some sins which seem to have been considered by the Almighty quite sufficient for their own punishment. Pride is one of them; anger is another: *passion* means suffering. So here: this

---

Balloons in thin air.

A mistaken emperor.

---

trusting in riches appears to possess a kind of inflated power to balloon one up to a height so ineffable that he suffocates in the thin air and falls with headlong precipitation into the ruin he merits. It is pitiful to see how rich men hasten to pitch on each other when any one falls into difficulty. The horrible heartlessness with which a neighborhood will devour a broken estate reminds any thoughtful man of the days of the fabled furies. Hell itself is not more greedy than wealth and fashion smacking their lips over a cannibal feast when a new man is slain.

There is no need of going any farther in this analysis. Wealth in the centre of power and worship seems so like a god that covetousness might just as well be called Idolatry.

1. See, then, the reason why God is so violent in striking at this sin. It is the most direct offence that can be given to him. It sets up another god before him and in the place of him. It renders to wealth what belongs to him exclusively and alone. Is it any wonder, then, that he lets loose upon this awful sin the entire range of his divine wrath? Cannot one hear him every instant crying out, "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." He will have none of this divided devotion. One of the Roman emperors declared his willingness to set up an image of Jesus along with those of Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn. It would not do then; it will not do now. God will have all, or none.

2. You see, too, how covetousness destroys per-

---

Common insincerity.Gold in one's mouth.

---

sonal grace and piety. How can one be a Christian and an idolater? What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Hence insincerity is the common characteristic of the world and the church. We carp at hypocrisy, and then fall into it. We rail at the heartlessness of fashion, and are the first to put on its garments. We sneer at the hollowness of all the world, and then become hollow. We seem in this age of sham and pretence actually to prefer that which we know is gilded, and then we murmur because it is not gold.

Meantime the world is in want; meantime the cry of sin and shame rises around us. The heart is hardened under the tread of the diligent fiends that possess it. It will not do to pass off from ourselves these words of warning; sin does not always depend upon amount of possessions; it is as easy to be poor and covetous as it is to be rich and covetous. He is an idolater who is covetous at all. Does any one ask, Who is covetous? The answer is clear, He is covetous who decides for Mammon as against God. He is covetous whose piety is chilled by gold; he is covetous for whom Christ is not a sufficiency when gold fails.

3. See, likewise, how covetousness ruins all one's future. It leaves him to his chosen god: "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone." I have just read of a dying man who deceived his physician, putting a piece of gold in the recesses of his mouth at the last, saying, "This I am going to take with me!" Alas, I have watched the ingenious under-

---

“Pan is dead.”

Malachi's counsel.

---

takers, and I have more than once observed that shrouds have no pockets. When one's god is gone, where is he?

4. Finally, we see how it is that covetousness prevents all hope of progress in any church. You might as well have an image in the pulpit as a minister; you might as well have a sacrifice as a sermon; you might as well join hands and dance in heathen orgies, as meet for conference and prayer. For, you see, another god is worshipped—not Jehovah. “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

## XV.

### TOILING IN ROWING.

“HE SAW THEM TOILING IN ROWING.”—*Mark 6:48.*

FINER picture there cannot be than that which rises upon our imagination as we read the familiar story so graphically recorded by the evangelist Mark—the story of our Saviour’s walking on the sea for the relief of his imperilled disciples.

The artist’s pencil loves such scenes of mingled grace and grandeur, and is ready to spring with instinctive eagerness to fasten upon the canvas that tempestuous lake, with the little vessel working its laborious way across the waves—the band of frightened fishermen gazing through the gloom in the hours beyond midnight, and still more terror-stricken than ever when it is their fortune to catch the first glimpse of him who is their Helper and their Hope—and that peerless form of the Son of Man, treading majestically the fluid floor beneath his feet, literally making “darkness his secret place and his pavilion round about him dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.”

We all know the history of this transaction in its general details clearly enough for every purpose of our present need. He whose figure stands central in the scriptural picture is the joy of our hearts and the desire of our souls. It cannot be doubted that he has meant to leave in this mere relation of

---

The great miracle.

The disciples reluctant.

---

fact a communication of doctrine for exactly such times as ours.

Our divine Lord had just then been feeding the five thousand with miraculous loaves and fishes. Startled into adoring wonder, the enthusiastic multitudes were ready to attempt an insurrection on his account, and would perforce have proclaimed him king; a proceeding to the success of which, however sudden and preposterous, his immediate and best acquainted followers at the time were in no wise loath. But his hour was not yet come either for reigning or for suffering death. He disposed of the embarrassing question very adroitly. Hurrying the disciples into their boat, and urging them out upon the lake for their homeward journey, he remained to disperse the vast throng, which, if he had given consent, would instantly have crowned him.

The reluctant fishermen may have had some premonition of the coming storm; or they may have been curious to know what ingenuity of extrication he would use next; or they may even have been moved with an affectionate solicitude concerning his being left behind unassisted and unprotected in that desolate region. At all events, it appears that they did not depart easily; but with their usual docility they did at last set sail from the shore.

The hint we have of their unwillingness to go alone has been given in the form of the expression, "He constrained them to depart." On a former occasion Jesus was with them in person when they



---

“Peace, be still!”

Looking two ways.

---

were exposed to shipwreck upon this same volatile sea; it would seem as if they could not fail, in their present foreboding of peril, to remember how essential to their rescue then had been the actually omnipotent presence of Immanuel in the boat. This adventure would be sure to suggest that; and they must have intensely wished he were going along. He who could comfort their weary hearts by sleeping on a pillow to show he was human, could easily now confirm their frightened hearts by saying, “Peace, be still,” to show he was divine.

Perhaps it was only some vague imagination of an impending calamity which made them afraid to start, for they were experienced sailors upon that lake for many years. These men embarked at twilight. Ordinarily a fair wind would have run them into Capernaum, “over against Bethsaida,” as the marginal note explains, long before midnight. But sails proved to be useless in such a squall as this upon the Sea of Galilee, and a violent gale, blowing directly in their faces, made even their oars of little or no avail. The height of the dramatic picture in the story is reached about eight or nine hours after their departure.

It falls in with my present purpose, as I seek to draw from a story like this our spiritual lesson to learn, to ask you to look two ways at nearly the same time. I want to keep your minds intent upon the disciples; but I must not allow you to lose sight of Jesus meanwhile. And I catch at a suggestive figure I have met somewhere, and I invite you to

Double mirrors.

Rapid transitions.

consider the part which our Saviour took in the entire transaction, and the part which his followers took, as reflecting light upon each other. So we will seem to stand between, turning our glance either way at will; as we might stand between two mirrors set face to face, all there is imaged in one of them just as easy to be seen in the other.

Looking in one direction, we seem to see Christ in the lonely mountain shadows praying. Looking in the other, we see the small vessel containing the disciples far away from the shore, and wholly without shelter. It is evident the sturdy men are in trouble. Under the Passover moon, despite the storm, we can catch a glimpse now and then between the rifts of that dimly-defined boat urging its difficult way across the tumultuous billows. It was "in the fourth watch"—between three and six o'clock in the morning—and still they remain at their distressful task. They were now, according to the measurement mentioned by the evangelist, not far from half way across. And the vision we have of them shows us an anxious crew imperilled, tired, depressed, and differing among themselves.

I. Here let us gain our earliest lesson of spiritual instruction. We have an interesting illustration of *the effect of rapid transitions in outward circumstances upon internal religious experience.*

That day had been a great day to those disciples. In the morning they had returned from their extensive preaching tour, and begun to tell Jesus of their extraordinary success. He had withdrawn

---

The Golan mountain.The chill sea.

---

them from the busy city over into this retired neighborhood, and had actually commenced a quiet conversation with them. On the slope of the mountains of Golan they had spent a happy hour or two in sympathetic communion with their Master. But a little after noon they heard the confused murmurings of a gathering throng on the edge of the wood. The people, curiously eager, had followed them up. Jesus went forth from among the secluding trees, and down on the shining beach, to give them food and invitation, in the tireless spirit of the gospel. Then the eyes of the disciples were surprised and gladdened with the spectacle of a miracle more magnificent than any they ever before had seen. The enthusiasm was overwhelming and intense, and the fervors of their souls must have kindled to the highest reach. As they joined in with Jesus in the exhausting labors his zeal led him to undertake, they were quickened to exertions which really wore out their strength in the delight which they awakened.

Out here on the chill water the disciples had no cheering alleviation of their work whatsoever. They had no sunshine in the sky or in their hearts. This task of rowing an exposed boat in a storm was the old, dull, unromantic drudgery of former days, when fishing was their business. Comfortless, wet to the skin with spray, cut to the bone by the raw spring wind, can we wonder that they speedily became fatigued, disgusted, petulant?

II. So there is another lesson to be learned, and

---

Wistful souls.Weary bodies.

---

this must be kept helpfully beside the former. We see *the close and somewhat humiliating connection between wistful souls and weary bodies* which always has to be recognized.

This word *toiling* is quite inadequate to express the full force of the term Mark employs. One of the oldest of the English versions has it, "harassing themselves." Tyndale renders it, "troubled." Alford suggests, "distressed," which is the best word of all, and the one which our new revision adopts—"distressed in rowing." Those skilled fishermen evidently had a hard time of it. They needed to put forth the most violent and persistent efforts in order to keep the small boat from being dashed to pieces before the hurricane. And of course they became positively tired out, and their faith had something like a melancholy failure.

In religious experience we are often more disheartened than we need to be, because some perverse disposition misleads us to contrast our states of low enjoyment with remembered disclosures of high exhilaration under extraordinary excitement. The midnight of commonplace rowing appears more gloomy and unwelcome just because the previous noon was so abundantly blessed with gifts and graces. Our fervors seem hopelessly dull simply because they were so lately revived into unusual strain, and are now worn out by the exalted indulgence. The changes begun in the circumstances are continued in our bodies, and so these moods grow reciprocally depressing. What we mourn

Frames of desolate feeling.

Phenomenal earthliness.

over as base coldness, sometimes is nothing but natural reaction. Oftentimes our most heavy seasons of despondency are brought about by mere physical illness, or unusual prostration from distemper or overwork.

III. Add to this now a third lesson. We see that *mere frames of desolate feeling give by no means a release from the pressure of diligent duty.*

That these disciples were impatient or even unbelieving offers us no reason to suppose they were so foolish as to imagine they might lay their oars in the bottom of the boat and let everything drift. The evangelist John adds one little expression not repeated by any of the others: "And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them." The implication here is that they knew he was sure to come before long. Their duty and their need was to continue to do for themselves precisely what they knew he would wish, and what they remembered he had commanded. Every ingenuity of their profession was at once to be invoked. Whatever knowledge they possessed of the lake eddies or the land inlets would have to be put in requisition. Sinewy strokes and alert steering were both in demand, rather more now than ever.

We are frequently in this life called to meet the discouragement arising from the beclouding of our best opportunities by some unexpected and altogether phenomenal earthliness of mist and storm. Just at the moment when everything seems as if it ought to promise the most success, there comes a



---

Jesus sees us.Rutherford's simile.

---

blight and a blast of cold air to chill all our fervors and bear us down into discouragement and impetuous complaint. But this does not release us from duty. On the contrary, we are under heavier responsibility than ever before. We must toil on in our rowing, and keep an alert lookout for Jesus, who may be on his way towards us at any moment of the night.

IV. This leads us to another lesson suggested in the narrative: *Jesus Christ, even in darkness, knows who has need of him.*

“He saw them toiling;” so we read, and then we reflect how little reason these men had for being melancholy. Glancing again back over the waves, we see Jesus on his knees for a while, praying, no doubt, for them as well as for others, and anon rising to begin the peerless walk upon the waters which has made that night historic for the ages. We need not lose such a lesson, for it enters into the whole round of our spiritual life. Pious Samuel Rutherford gives us a counsel on this point, and couches it in a nautical figure, too: “In our fluctuations of feeling,” says he, “it is well to remember that Jesus admits no change in his affections; your heart is not the compass Christ saileth by.” Our vicissitudes toss only ourselves, and overturn only our pride, and that not perilously. Jesus’ care remains steady. If it be dark, and he has not yet arrived, we may be always certain it is because he pauses among the trees to pray. We are to keep working and watching; for when he sees we are



---

“Would have passed by.”

Isaiah's cheer.

---

ready to receive him, he will start directly towards us on the sea.

V. One more lesson there is, therefore, which we all can easily learn from the story. We see that *Jesus Christ sometimes delays his coming to believers till he is sure of a welcome.*

“He would have passed by them;” so we read again. What can this be supposed to mean? When, walking on the waves, he did arrive at the boat-side, did he propose to give those forlorn men the go-by? No; he did it only to call into exercise the longing love which he knew they felt for him, and so to get their earnest invitation to come into the vessel. This expression is like that used when speaking of his behavior on the walk to Emmaus: “He made as though he would have gone farther.” Such a mere feint of disregarding his people has the same purpose as the angel's demand in the wrestle with Jacob: he exclaimed, “Let me go,” in order that the man might cling to him the more closely, and be bold in replying, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”

We arrest the study of this story just here, although there remains much instruction worthy of attention hereafter.

The lesson which comes home best and clearest to the individual believer is found in the words of the ancient prophet: “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall

---

“It is I.”

Immediate deliverance.

---

not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.”

And the lesson which reaches the church at large is like this, and indeed it is the same old seer who has uttered it: “O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.”

Only one sentence closes this narrative, but it tells us all we need to know; their patient faith was rewarded: “Then they willingly received him into the ship; and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.”

## XVI.

### DARK, AND JESUS ABSENT.

“AND IT WAS NOW DARK, AND JESUS WAS NOT COME TO THEM.”—  
*John 6:17.*

IT was a moonlight night: this we know because the date was just before Passover, and that feast was always celebrated at the full of the moon. But this suggests a somewhat unusual darkness in the heavens upon this occasion; for the weather certainly needed to be exceedingly tempestuous and cloudy in order to cover a sky so clear and beautiful as that of Palestine when the moon was shining in its supreme strength.

There was trouble underneath the boat, too: “And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship; and they were afraid.”

A single expression here calls for a comment. Some interpreters assert that there is no necessity of crediting Jesus with a miracle of treading upon the water, for no one of the evangelists declares that he did that; the story means to say that he walked along the shore above or over the sea; that is, he reached the disciples by going around on the cliff which looked out across the water. One would like to know, then, how it happened that these men were frightened so, and why they imagined they

---

“Laughable insults.”

A cheerless winter.

---

saw a phantom. A very commonplace piece of business it might be, to be sure, to work one's way from Bethsaida to Capernaum by land; but if the night was stormy at all, the disciples would find it difficult to detect the figure of a man, two or three miles off, high up on the rocks. Such feats of exposition try us almost as much as the suggestion of a supernatural walking on water. They have been characterized forcibly, if not elegantly, as “laughable insults on logic, hermeneutics, good sense, and honesty.” Any one can get rid of a miracle by Jesus, if he plays with this sort of jugglery in language; but really it seems as if it would be necessary after that to get rid of inventing a miracle for John; for how can we explain his writing a record of inspired nonsense like the verses we have just quoted? Some of us will prefer to believe that, while the disciples were toiling in rowing on that tempest-tossed sea, our Lord in person came to their rescue, as the plain narrative indicates, by making his pathway in the waters. “He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.” For it is in this vast strength of interposition we propose to find very comfortable instruction in religious experience.

So now, as we move forward, we accept that small boat of the disciples as our symbol, and the way in which the Saviour treated it as his symbol; and thus we expect to learn a most profitable lesson for immediate service. There are those who are getting into low spirits along the cheerless course

---

What did those men do?

They kept on rowing.

---

of these winter months through which we are passing. We have been praying for a long period that God's set time for favoring his Zion might speedily arrive. And still the Spirit of reviving grace lingers away. It is dark, and Jesus has not yet come to us. We are impatient because it appears to us he remains away in the Golan mountains too long; why tarries he in coming?

It is well for all Christians to keep their temper and grow more cheerful-hearted. Let us believe that our Lord remembers us, nevertheless. For a single moment of careful observation let our eyes turn to look out upon those disciples once more. What are their prospects? That depends upon what they are doing; and just there comes in our question to be answered in detail: In these depressing hours what are we to suppose it is they are doing? This is what the story will teach.

I. For one thing, we feel sure that *they kept on rowing*. We are told elsewhere that Jesus saw them toiling in rowing.

A good lesson: with all their fatigue, with all their depression of spirits, with all their loneliness, they never so much as once intermitted their cool, commonplace labor. Every picture we have of them there in the boat shows them bending their stalwart arms with sinewy impulse to the same old ordinary stroke. The regularity of Peter's pull is matched by that of John. Those experienced fishermen had been out on that boisterous sheet of water too many times together not to know that their



---

Fidelity to unromantic duty.They headed for shore.

---

only safety was to be found in propelling the craft fast enough to steer across the waves. They really knew nothing better to do than to act as if it were sunshine and daytime all around them; and there was nothing else that could be done.

It might as well be understood once for all that there is nothing more valuable to the church of God than a great commonplace fidelity to unromantic duty. If those men, trained to every mood of that lake, knew that they must move on, or die, then surely it is high time that those who are in the church should become aware that especially in seasons of exposure there is deliverance in steadfastness alone. Genius will not help as just sober consistency will. While some are foolish and frantic enough to go off on the search for new measures, those Christian hearts will be the wisest which keep pleading at the family altars and patiently lingering in the circles of devotion. They do more to help in desperate days and nights who are always in their places teaching the children and succoring the poor.

II. Then, in the second place, we observe that these disciples persistently *headed the boat for the shore* towards which they started in obedience to Christ's command.

There is no hint of their raising an unauthorized question concerning the expedient of beaching their vessel on some nearer strand; they pushed for home. Nor do we find them trying to turn back to Bethsaida; they set their course for the other side. It might be that help would come from that direc-



---

Peter's wife's mother.

Perverted purposes.

---

tion; certainly none would come from any other. The clouds hid the stars, but it was possible that somebody would put a beacon on the Capernaum inlet where they were accustomed to land, and that might act as the guide for their steersman. Peter's wife's mother resided in that city; perhaps they could catch the glimmer of a light from the window, in the instant of a casual break in the gloom. It would be better not to lose the chance, at any rate; so they persistently headed against the sea, and aimed to come to land as near as possible to the spot where Jesus was to be.

Now, my Christian friends, I do not think I need to turn each one of these particulars with such painstaking upon ourselves. "Providence always helps the provident the most." God has given us practical means to use for the edification of each other and the conversion of souls. We are to persist in the ordinary activities of the gospel. But that does not mean that if souls are not converted we may consider it a poor time for evangelization, and just turn to something else. We are not only to keep on rowing, but to steer our unwavering course for the shore precisely as if we were surrounded with successes. It is not to be supposed for a moment that any church can say, "Now the Lord is not going to revive us this winter; so we can have a series of lectures, or fairs, or exhibitions instead: we will devote our energies to the increase of the audience and the enlivening of the services and the social entertainment of strangers." We have but

---

Bail out all water.Prudence and piety.

---

one purpose, and our eye must not lose sight of that; all the rest will come in due time. Christians must aim directly for the conversion of souls, and look not to the right nor the left away from that: we may yet see a light.

III. Once more we look off at those disciples; and now we find them heroically toiling to *bail out the water* that may in even the least measure have gotten inside of the boat.

It is impossible for us to conceive of such a scene without imagining that the chief thing, while the storm was raging, would be for them to guard against the billows beating inside of their little vessel. They must watch with utmost seriousness of vigilance against being overturned or swamped. If it seems interesting to think of these practical men so tenderly attached to Jesus as that they long for his coming more and more passionately as the night wanes, it seems yet more interesting to think of them as being still sensible of the peril of suffering the waves to gather weight in the bottom of the boat. It arrests our attention how intimately they mingle their prudence with their piety. If the cold gusts of wind fling the deluges of spray over them till they are soaked and chill, they may bend their heads to receive the blast, but that will not hinder them from carefully scooping out all the water which, in despite of their best efforts, will keep trickling in. The wilder the rush of the storm, the more calmly strenuous their endeavors to resist the entrance of the dangerous sea. It troubles them

---

Keep worldliness outside.

Keep a lookout for Jesus.

---

that Jesus does not arrive; but that is no reason why they should forget that the waves will never harm them if only forced back to the outside of the vessel where they belong.

No church was ever swamped by worldliness so long as it was not suffered to lay hold of the members of it. It is when the spirit of greed and of fashion, of rank and of lust, creeps in over the proper barriers erected between the church and the world that the grand peril is at its height. Among all the sea-going vessels, little and large, which have sunk in the waves and are now lying down on the solemn floor of the ocean, not so much as one, even since the dawn of creation, was foundered by the storm as long as it was kept on the outside of it; it was always the water inside which made the trouble. And of all the churches which have perished, since the day when the seven that received the letters in the Apocalypse went out of existence, not one ever was destroyed by the world beating upon it only from the outside; it has been the rush of worldliness, stealing at first through little crevices of cupidity and appetite, that has finally overwhelmed it. Our duty is to watch our own hearts cautiously, and help those around us to press back the stream.

IV. Now, for a fourth time, we look at the disciples there in the boat to see what they are doing; for here is one of our very best lessons: they are *keeping up a firm lookout for Jesus.*

With all their eagerness in guarding against

Labor and watch.

Signs of nearness.

danger, with all their athletic endeavors to urge the craft ahead, they do not for an instant forget to continue a keen watch for the arrival of their Master. He was certainly coming; they all believed that most steadily. The very phraseology of the verse indicates this; they said he "was not come," as if that was the remarkable thing of the hour; it was as if they had said that he had not yet come, although he was expected. I do not think they knew just how he was likeliest to get to them out there on the water, but I have no doubt that they had an abiding impression he would in some way interpose for their relief and rescue.

Of course every true Christian catches the figure easily. While we labor we must watch. Believers are to keep up a sharp lookout for any evidences of the advent of the Saviour with a fresh disclosure of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit for our help and comfort. There are always signs of his nearness, and the alert soul will be the one first to discern them. We can imagine we see Simon Peter every now and then standing up in the boat, and flinging his anxious inquiry into the dark and over the stern and all around the narrow horizon, searching for the appearance of a Form he knew. And then, in his turn, we can seem to see John covering his eyes with his hand and trying to peer into the glooms and thickening shadows lying heavily on the tossing tumults of water; we almost fancy we detect in this beloved disciple a fond determination to penetrate the darkness by sheer force of an affec-

---

Watching and waiting.Croaking is unprofitable.

---

tionate and wistful desire which he had to behold him on whose bosom he had for so many a day already learned to lean. So with all the rest; they looked after One whom they longed so much to welcome. Thus Christians must watch while they wait. It is not likely that those disciples had very much heart for singing that tempestuous night; but in that is our advantage. There is a song for each of us in times like these we deplore; and we might just as well keep it up in chorus: "I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope: my soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning."

V. There is yet another lesson for us to learn: we cast the eyes of our imagination out once more over the lake, and we notice that those disciples are *cheering up each other* and trying to put an end to their melancholy spirits.

Nobody ever did any good in this world by taking the heart out of other people. Croaking and dismal foreboding never so much as comforted a soul, much less converted one. If anybody in that boat that night became timid, we have no doubt that the others said to him, "Jesus will be here to help." If anybody grew listless, some one would speak up, "It will not be long now before he will come." If anybody got discouraged, another would exclaim, "Most likely he is actually on his way about this time." And if anybody fell into doubt, we may be sure they all would say,



“Why, he always did come when he promised he would.” It does seem as if the least any real child of God could do in sad and heavy times is to encourage the one who stands next to him. Let us have done with lugubrious lamentation. It is better to say over the promises, and cheer up each other. This deploring a storm has the curious effect always of making the air appear colder and the blast heavier; and this unevenness of stroke makes the boat rock more, and that lets in the water faster, as well as whisks the chill spray worse in our faces. Sometimes just one word of hope and joy, of grateful reminiscence or glad expectation, forces us all to forget the discomfort. And then you ought to notice how the oars leap into concert again, and the ship goes straight ahead. And before we know it almost, some one speaks up with a great peace in his heart, “Jesus is here !”

Thus now we leave the story: our lessons are learned. It is these five things we have noticed in turn—just these five things in the behavior of the disciples—which we are to do right along: they kept on rowing, they headed the boat for the shore, they patiently bailed out the water, they looked constantly for Jesus, and they cheered up each other by the way. What renders these five things so instructive is the simple consideration that precisely these are what they would have done if Jesus had been with them all the time; only instead of watching for him they would have waited upon him. It is for us, now while God seems to withhold and de-



---

The timid and the listless.

Comfort and warning.

---

lay his blessing for the trial of our faith, not to settle down into supineness and petulant complaint, but to move forward in fidelity to do precisely what we would do if we were in the midst of a revival, and souls were hurrying by the scores into the kingdom.

Hence, let every timid believer be *comforted* by this story. Jesus' prayer has been heard in the mountain; his footstep will soon be felt on the sea. You are weary; but you must wait.

Let every listless Christian be *warned* by this story. It is dark, and you complain that Jesus has not yet come to you. Would you know him if he did come this moment? We are told that when even some of these disciples first discovered their divine Master through the gloom, they were frightened and imagined he was a ghost! I can hardly believe they were all so dull as that. But those who thus missed him misused him. Oh, it is a shame indeed to suppose that some will be surprised if the Holy Spirit is given in answer to our wishes: they are not ready!

Let every earnest inquirer be *encouraged* by this little story. It is dark, and you too are saying that Jesus has not yet come to you. He may be sovereignly waiting till your heart shall really long for him. It would be worse for you now to reject your convictions and give over seeking for his presence. Times of religious interest are most solemn and precious to any soul. Say this to yourself in sincerity: "I may have been seeking an experience,

---

“Out in the dark.”

Renan's lament.

---

instead of Christ; I will move on and do my duty in God's fear, precisely as if I had the experience I long for; O thou Christ of God, I give myself, soul and body, unto thee *out in the dark*, wherever thou art; take me as thou wilt!”

Let every unawakened sinner be *admonished* by this story. It is very dark when Jesus has not come to any soul; but, oh, it will be darker, darker, if he should never come to you! There is a record of a famous preacher that he once asked and answered his own question: “What can a man do when death comes? Let him just pluck up his courage, and depart.” And this is all that a Christless soul has to say to souls entering an unknown future without Christ!

Sadder words were never spoken than those which at this moment come to us through the public prints as the final utterance of one who was a leader in skepticism ten years ago; he says, “We are living on the perfume of an empty vase. Our children will have to live on the shadow of a shadow. Their children, I fear, will have to subsist on something less.”

It is dark until Jesus arrives; it is frightfully dark if he never comes at all: but when he is once inside of the life-boat of those who love him, all is bright, and joy comes with the morning.

## XVII.

### POLITENESS AND PIETY.

“I DOUBTED OF SUCH MANNER OF QUESTIONS.”—*Acts 25: 20.*

A SIMPLE rehearsal of perhaps familiar history is all that will be necessary to show the exact meaning and relevancy of this text. When, in the course of the political changes of the time, the Roman governor Felix was displaced, a man by the name of Porcius Festus was appointed in his room. At once the enemies of the Apostle Paul sought to resume the persecutions they had been forced to slacken for the last two years. Festus promised early attention to the matter. And indeed, only eight or ten days after his arrival in Cæsarea, he summoned the prisoner before him, and reopened the proceedings. But he found himself surrounded with a chain of perplexities, and was actually at his wits' end, by reason of Felix's previous mismanagement of the case. Still he kept his word fairly, and in the audience he granted suffered the malignant Jews, who had come down from Jerusalem to lay their accusations against the apostle, to make their entire plea unhindered. They demanded that he should be put to death for heresy, sacrilege, and treason.

Now anybody who ever saw the painful indecision and the ludicrous awkwardness of a thorough-bred politician suddenly forced to consider and answer a religious question which some incon-

---

A thorough-bred politician.

An atrocious plot.

---

siderate auditor thrust up to him on the platform, can quite appreciate the embarrassment of Festus under such an array of charges. Of treason he could form some sort of judgment; but what did he know about heresy or sacrilege? And further: he was acute enough to see that the only way in which these Hebrews could sustain the complaint of treason was by showing that Paul claimed one Jesus of Nazareth to be king of the Jews. And even this seemed as much a religious question, to that heathen governor, as any of the rest. Manifestly the whole thing was altogether out of his range.

But it was of some value to this newly-arrived ruler that he should make friends with the people he was expected to manage. And he was surprised to find that the first act of government he sought to exercise should put him at such a pitiable disadvantage before he had been in the province a fortnight. Plainly he had expected the difficulty would prove to be political, or at any rate judicial; and hence, in his line. The first thing he proposed was that Paul should go up to Jerusalem, and be regularly tried by the Sanhedrim. But the apostle discovered that underneath this lay an atrocious plot to assassinate him on the journey. So he made a final decision, withdrew from Festus' jurisdiction, and appealed to Cæsar at Rome. This changed the venue of the entire accusation, and removed him from the province to the capital. Here fell a new embarrassment upon this unfortunate governor.

By law Festus was compelled to send with every

---

Herod Agrippa's visit.Festus takes his chance.

---

prisoner the full report of his case, accompanied with the documents, to the emperor. This forced him to recapitulate Felix's misdoings before he came into power. And no one can tell what he would have done during the impressive season of delay before the sea-voyage began, if there had not occurred at the moment an incident most opportune, and promising to be most hopeful.

Herod Agrippa, the nominal king of the Jews in the line, suddenly avowed his intention of paying a visit to Festus. This pleased the governor exceedingly; not only because it was a great compliment to him before all the Jewish people that their monarch in person came to pay him court; but because he perceived that Agrippa's acquaintance with the Jewish religion would help him in the rehearsal of this most intricate case of Paul. This man, born in Tarsus, was a "citizen of no mean city." He had his rights. Nay, more; he had had his wrongs. And Festus was sure he did not know how to defend the one for him, or how to extenuate the other. But Agrippa, an educated Jew, would understand all the complications that so confused him. So he meant the king should have some work to do on his visit. He waited for quite a little while, until his royal guest had become somewhat familiar with him. Then, in private conversation one day, he began just as if he was telling an interesting little story.

Thus he related it: "There is a certain man here—one of your people—left in bonds by my pre-



---

Traversing Felix's record.A courtier's wariness.

---

decessor Felix. When I was up in Jerusalem, the other day, the elders and chief priests told me they had a judgment against him. I replied that it was not our custom in Italy to deliver any man to die till he had a fair chance to meet his accusers face to face. He had a right to prepare his own answer to the charges. But as soon as I could, after I came to Cæsarea—the very next day, I believe—I ordered up the case before me. To my amazement I found, as the witnesses gave their testimony, that the accusation was not at all what I supposed. They had certain questions against him of *their own*—religious entirely—about one Jesus, who was put to death when Pontius Pilate was out here, but whom this man Paul affirmed to be alive still. I asked him to go to Jerusalem and be tried there, because *I doubted of such manner of questions*; really, I felt seriously embarrassed, for religion has not hitherto been of any special interest to me, as I do not mind telling you now we are together here. But this Paul turned around upon me, as he had a right to do, I admit, and appealed his case to Cæsar. This gave me a new worry; for Felix had managed the thing very badly. I dislike exceedingly to send on a report of the facts. To be sure, Felix is quite a used-up man now; but things change so at Rome, one never knows who will come to the surface next; and I would not like to offend him. It seems to me you might settle this matter among yourselves. I have no gift at religious dispute. I do not understand the difficulty. I could study it up, you know, but



---

Religious questions are delicate.

One's "peculiar superstition."

---

it would hardly pay for the effort. Now what shall I do in the premises? 'These questions they have raised against him are *of their own superstition*; they are out of my way of thinking altogether.'

To this frank proposition the king answered that he should much like to see Paul, and hear what he had to say for himself. Nothing could have pleased Festus better. Immediate arrangements were made for a public interview—a sort of informal and unauthoritative rehearsal of the case.

We do not need to go any farther with the story now. The pertinency of the mere expression chosen for our present text becomes already apparent. Festus is the type of a large class of decorous, educated, polite persons who look upon *religious questions as belonging solely to religious people*. They "doubt of such manner of questions." They really believe that they dispose of them and of all matters concerning a devout or Christian life, in a fitting, courteous, and altogether satisfactory sort of way, when they treat them with a polite forbearance. They will sometimes indulge in a patronizing little discussion; they will listen to a debate; but when invited personally to the tests of a religious experience, they admit they do not understand them, are not interested in them, and respectfully remand all consideration of them fully to such people as will give them intelligent appreciation, and to whose peculiar "superstition" they belong.

Now we do not need even to seem to imply reproach upon the disposition or character of this

class of persons. There is chance here to put in an honest word even for Festus. History makes a very creditable record of his administration, as well as of his reputation generally for fairness, candor, courage, and gentlemanly demeanor to all. The very details we have been reciting show him in an amiable light. And we are far enough from saying that those of whom he is so affecting an example are all bad men. Their characteristic seems to be mere intellectual indolence, or indifference to religious life.

We may lose power by a diffusiveness of our illustration. Out from the circle of our own acquaintance let us single some one man as a type. Let him be educated, refined, courteous. Let him be correct in all the outward moralities of citizenship and the gentle amenities of his family relations. He is kind and considerate. But he truly conceives of all real religious principles and duties as out of his personal concern or responsibility.

You may ask, What does a man like this say in explanation of the *phenomena* he sees? He has not, like Festus in Judea, just arrived. He is not a stranger in Christendom. He has lived, perhaps, for years within the sound of Christmas bells and Easter anthems. His whole early life has been passed within the reach of gospel practices and customs. He has grown up under the force and fervency of religious appeal. He was married by a minister; he heard a sermon and a prayer at his old father's funeral. He has seen and read part of the Bible, and has noticed many of his neighbors wend-

---

Unoffensive piety.

Paul "beside himself."

---

ing their way to church; sometimes he has even gone with them. Now the question is, What does he think of all these things?

In answer, it must be said that much will depend upon the prime consideration how far they seem likely to go. As long as Agrippa was his companion, Festus must have discovered nothing to inflame his jealousy. For the king was one of that cool sort of religious Pharisees who in all ages hold their piety quite quietly in hand. The Roman governor might ride with him in his sanctimonious chariot all day long, and never be so excited as even for once to catch hold of the reins for fear of collision. But when the Apostle Paul began to preach, and great, honest words of argument and burning appeal began to fly around the audience-chamber, he was forced out of his discreet reserve, and exclaimed, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." While the king had the hold of him, he simply returned a polite patronage, and bore with him as one who had a whim of religion; but when the Christian preacher spoke in earnest, he flew into violence and anger.

And this pretty well represents the feeling with which many men of the world regard the ordinary phenomena of a religious life. They are scrupulously polite towards Christians. Indeed, they conceive of them kindly and pitifully as a self-restricted, enthusiastic sort of people, having "certain questions of their own superstition." Some of them are excellent neighbors and worthy citizens. Church

---

Tasteful and tame devotion.An awkward necessity.

---

order is a decent thing. Some parts of divine service are very beautiful if managed with taste. Only let a man keep within bounds and avoid reckless excitement. There is such a thing as going too far, and so becoming obtrusive. That is to say, they look upon religious questions as belonging to other people and not to them. The only interest they have in such things is discoverable when they happen to run across their prejudices or practices. And then they intimate with a cool politeness that good breeding may be shown even in one's style of piety; it is best always to be careful, or one may unconsciously become coarse.

It cannot have escaped the notice of any one, in our study thus far of this man Festus, that there does not seem to have even for once passed across his mind the thought of his examining Christianity, or listening to Paul, or comparing views of life and duty with Agrippa, or of anything else, for the sake of securing *his own soul's* salvation, or recognizing his relation to the God that made him. For all his conduct betrays, you might as well think of him as of one raised above the awkward necessity of being saved, like those poor people who were continually vexing their rulers with "questions of their own superstition." And this is the exact lack to be observed always in many men of the world. They contemplate religion as simply one phase of human nature, with which they have nothing in common, and which they mean to treat kindly and with polite forbearance.

---

Did Festus have a soul ?

Other people's business.

---

One would think these calm philosophers had forgotten that they had any souls of their own. It is one of the most astonishing presentations of human nature, this apathy of personal feeling, this gentlemanly pronouncement upon other people's religion, without so much as a suspicion that one's self is under criticism; this imperturbable discharge of all pressing appeal by the cool remark, "I doubted of such manner of questions." What can any intelligent man mean by admitting he is an immortal being, but does not consider eternity of any special interest ?

It so happens that one of the principles of our religion requires us to arouse others from this neglect. He that hears for himself is bidden to say, "Come," to the rest. Here is seen another step of this polite forbearance. We summon men to think, to investigate, to decide. They reply, "There are ever so many sects in the church; for one, I doubt of such manner of questions. There are ever so many creeds in the church; I doubt of such manner of questions. There are ever so many practices and rituals in the church; I doubt of such manner of questions. There are ever so many inconsistencies in the church; indeed, I believe I doubt of all such manner of questions; they are out of my line of thinking; they belong to other people."

One feels tempted to reply, "Well, does your soul also belong to other people; does your Maker belong to other people; does heaven's glory belong to other people; or earth's work, or hell's wailing



and woe? How did you reach that serene height of undisturbed satisfaction, your past flawless, your present unrepined, your future secure, so that you can look down upon human passion and conflict and toil, and smile as you say, 'These all seem to have some questions of their own superstition'?" It is the part of simple kindness to move on, even at the risk of being impolite. The danger is too urgent; the duty is too pressing; the sanctions are too heavy. Men err if they suppose that becoming a Christian can be contemplated as one criticises a new painting with an eye-glass, or looking through his hand. It is not a thing so artistically outside of the connoisseur as that; not, so long as he has a soul, or is bound to God's bar; not, so long as character settles destiny; not, so long as God's Son is at one's side claiming to be heard.

"No lukewarm seeker," said John Randolph of Roanoke, "ever became a real Christian; for from the days of John the Baptist until now 'the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force;' a text which I read five hundred times before I had even the slightest conception of its application."

Believe me, while such tremendous possibilities are crowded into the little period we call life, and such destinies into the existence beyond it, no man has any reason or right to say, "I doubt of such manner of questions."



## XVIII.

### DRAWING LIGHTNING.

“AND HE SHALL GO BEFORE HIM IN THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ELIAS, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS TO THE CHILDREN.”—*Luke 1:17.*

SCIENCE tells us that the best defence against lightning in a thunder-storm is found, not in defiance of it, but in a silent discharge of it. Go right towards it fearlessly with a pointed platina wire, and we shall learn that it will follow a fixed law of harmless dispersion.

Is there any way by which the power of one of God's curses can be drawn, so as to avert the terrible stroke of divine wrath? Let us see.

This text refers us directly back to the final utterance of the Old Testament. There are four books in the Bible which end with a curse: Malachi, Lamentations, Isaiah, and Ecclesiastes. The Hebrew scribes were always accustomed to repeat the verse just before the last in these cases, so as to close the reading with something besides a malediction. It is not easy to see how this helps the matter in the present instance; for the preceding prediction seems to have been uttered merely to introduce the warning. And perhaps it is just as profitable to believe that the best way to avoid the judgments of God is to guard carefully against deserving them.

After the last seer under the ancient dispensation

---

The Old Testament curse.The New Testament blessing.

---

had spoken the words which the evangelist quotes, the heavens were closed for four hundred years. Jehovah had not another message to send. His people had offended him. Justice comes almost fiercely forth, and bars the gate of revelation, because children are despised. And not until four centuries of silence had given time for repentance would those bolts be withdrawn. Even then it is a little child who advances to turn the massive key. History wanders sadly in confusion among the captivities and Maccabean usurpations. Only an infant can join the Testaments. Luke is the next man to Malachi. The sternest of all Israel's prophets reappears in the sternest of all heralds to the church. "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come."

The wonderful suggestiveness of this passage, however, is found in its theme. A wild threat, four hundred years old, is suddenly removed in a flash of benediction. The curse in Malachi is omitted in Luke—the lightning is drawn. The gospel fulfils the law when it accepts children. God receives the fathers into favor and communion again when their hearts are turned to their offspring.

This is the doctrine of the text. Hence, I present to you now, as a legitimate subject of consideration, the work of the Sunday-school organization; *it discharges harmlessly the Old Testament maledictions, and it becomes the instrument of fulfilling the benedictions of the New.* It is the world's helper and

the church's servant. You will see this with all clearness, if you examine those who are the subjects of its effort, and what it proposes to do with them.

I. The subjects of Sunday-school effort are, of course, understood to be the young of our race. Oftentimes these are the least noticed and the last noticed of all classes of beings with souls. And yet there is no truth more settled than that *civilization*, *chivalry*, and *Christianity* reach their highest culmination in the caring for children.

1. Civilization is traced by marking the progress of history. We may read the records of human life, profoundly probing for the motives of men, analyzing conventional laws, rules, and customs, until at last we venture to say, from a wide induction of particulars, we are beginning to learn the steps of advancement among the nations. And now it has come to be confessed by the wisest philosophers that the clearest evidence of a lofty civilization for any people in any age or clime is found in the provisions which are made for little children. Savages bind up their infants with afflictive thongs of bark, as the most expeditious disposal to be made of them. Never till a land has leisure, never till a nation has refinement, never till most of the steps upward have been taken in the way towards exalted attainment, does there come even one look of appreciation or sympathy for these "feeble folk" of society more than the merest necessities of existence or the exigencies of convenience require.

He who, with kind heart and subtle ingenuity

---

—Toys for children.

—Woman's honor for offspring.

---

of invention, sits down at his desk to illuminate a juvenile volume with an extraordinary frontispiece, or who toils at his bench to construct a mechanical toy for a little child, is in one sense both the product and the type of the truest and the highest civilized humanity.

2. Chivalry has always claimed to have gone somewhat beyond what mere civilization requires. It has presented as the supreme excellence of manhood, that it recognize woman's worth, that it labor to secure the amelioration of woman's lot, that it freely yield to woman's wish every equalization of privilege, and that it have respect to woman's weakness with all indulgence and affection. It will accept no apology for a lack in this generous form of consideration. It rejects with instinctive repugnance and horror all the learning of Socrates, all his wisdom, all his morality, because it discovers that he positively sold his own wife at a price. Chivalry is accustomed to say, Let woman cease to be both a slave and a toy; give her the place she deserves in the social realm; let her become regnant as God made her regal; then the summit will be reached, and society will have advanced to its highest meridian.

But when we are ready to accept this as final, and actually begin to honor the sex we deem noblest, suddenly we discover there is that which the honored sex honors in its own behalf. Look up as we ought at woman, and we find woman not looking down upon us, but looking upward still.

---

Wordsworth's aphorism.Infants baptized in sunshine.

---

Crown a mother, and she will put the diadem on the head of her boy, and bid you observe how like a little prince he wears it. Give her a deed of untold wealth, and she will endorse it for her children before she puts it in the safe. She tells you there is something higher than herself. With quicker intuition and profounder wisdom she stands ready to teach you that "the child is father of the man." To respect woman and not respect children is an impossibility. As society becomes vicious, women are professedly adored; but homes are broken, and children are considered nuisances. And if an oracle can ever instruct a devotee at all, then chivalry ought to have certainly learned by this time, from the voice of woman herself, that no sentiment of devotion to her can be lofty till it begins to honor and love her children as she honors and loves them.

3. Christianity enters at this point to accept and repeat the lesson. Up to the moment in which a nation becomes evangelized, all reference to the young springs not from interest in them, but only from the interest which the community has in its own well-being. Christianity takes up children in its arms, as Christ did, for childhood's sake. Within a few years some in this land of gospel light have come near enough to the Sun of Righteousness to learn that he desires to shine most benignantly upon the little ones, and wants us to do as they do in some Eastern lands with infants, hurry them out at birth where the first ray of the day-spring from on high may visit them. When wealth



has multiplied and industry has prospered; when science has increased and education become easy, at last the Sunday-school has reached all adequate recognition, and the best minds are laboring in its behalf. Music, literature, and the mechanical arts are under steady tribute. "The hearts of the fathers" are in some measure turned to the children.

And now I am ready to say that herein lies the glory of the American Church; we are foremost in the Sunday-school work. If some great catastrophe of nature were to bury us under, as a second Herculaneum or Pompeii, and the antiquarians of a far-future generation were to unearth our records, found, as they would be, in the market and in the sanctuary, in the dwelling and in the street, in the metropolitan centres and in the rural divergencies, all along and over the country—it would not be the proud structures of our architects, nor the fine paintings of our artists; it would not be the princely mansions of our opulent merchants, the thronged libraries, the crowded marts, the curious museums; it would not be the triumphs of our engineering skill, nor our inventions of ingenious tools, nor even the gatherings of highest learning in our universities and academies; not one nor all of these would be our best evidence of civilization; not one would settle the question of either our advancement in real chivalry or Christianity. Our reputation would have to stand or fall upon the relics which would remain, to show before that enlightened age



A Christmas-tree.

A waste of children.

what we had been doing for children in this. It is to be hoped that they would fall upon a toy-shop or a depository of juvenile books.

There can really be no denial of the affirmation that the highest reach of a Christian civilization is presented in a Christmas-tree at an anniversary of a Sunday-school. A most excellent study for any thoughtful man is that tall evergreen, with its non-descript fruit shining upon it, and the Bethlehem carol stirring its branches!

II. Thus much, then, concerning children as the subjects of our labor. Let us now inquire concerning the nature of the work we desire and propose to do in their behalf. This is no less than to *seek out*, to *educate*, and to *redeem* children.

I. To seek them out—it may possibly make one smile to speak of seeking out children in neighborhoods like ours, where in all likelihood there are more quivers and more arrows in each quiver than anywhere else in the known world. Children positively swarm wherever you go. The cities are crowded; the unhealthiest localities and the unfittest households generally the most so. And the villages likewise are thronged. "Happy is the people that is in such a case."

But this involves new responsibility. Half these children die before five years of age. Not far from one in seven is buried before it ever sees its anniversary birthday. What a waste, if God sends them only as he sends the great tree-loads of spring blossoms for the comparatively little fruit! But he

---

Are we crown-makers ?Who does the teaching ?

---

does not. He cares for the least of them, though he gives the living multitude to the world with all munificence of profusion. Some he takes home early, and himself teaches. Some he leaves here for you and me to teach. All these need to be interested and attracted. In the verse from Malachi, which the angel quotes only partially in our text, it is intimated that the hearts of the children need to be turned to their fathers also. They must be sought out and brought under the power of the gospel. They never will be until Christians become more Christlike. Brazilian rivers are full of diamonds; what then? The costliest jewels will only drift down the current and be lost in the sands, unless somebody goes to crown-making, and gathers them carefully up.

2. To educate them, then, becomes another part of this work. And I make bold to say that there is no one agency which is doing more in this direction than the Sunday-school. This will appear if you consider the class of instructors, the lesson they inculcate, the text-book they use, and the spirit by which they are actuated.

*Who are the teachers in our Sunday-schools?* Inquire them out in turn. Any pastor or superintendent can inform you. The best zeal and the truest efficiency of the church at large are there. God has wonderfully quickened the hearts of his people latterly in this respect. The chief impression left by the last mighty revival in our land was concerning the power of individual effort on the

---

What is it that is taught?The one text-book.

---

part of the lay membership in our Christian congregations.

*What is the lesson they are trying to impart?* You know very well that the questions which pass for study and answer between instructors and pupils in these classes are those that concern the deepest needs and the loftiest aspirations of the human soul. The tremendous problems of sin and salvation are the staple of close converse. If you draw nigh, so as to overhear any recitation, you will listen only to the story of the cross told over and over again, now by the parable, now by the history, now by the type. What a discipline is this for stimulating and directing thought, with such teachers and such themes! How the intelligence is awakened, how the mind is educated—*educated*, drawn out—into the exercise of its best powers!

*What is the text-book they are accustomed to employ?* The Bible alone. The multitudinous appliances for help have increased wonderfully during the last few years, and yet all of them are only intended to magnify and explain the Word of God. The augmented and oftentimes mysterious influence of a Sunday-school lesson has this simple explanation: it is as if God spoke, not man. The truth which is brought to bear upon the heart and understanding of the children is immediately authenticated and accompanied by a vital force from heaven itself. The arguments for everything just, honest, pure, and of good report, are not drawn from a mere code of morals, or backed by mere considerations of ex-

pediency; they are quickened by the unseen energy of inspiration which pervades them.

*What is the spirit by which they are actuated?* Look in for a moment, in imagination, upon a working and effective Sunday-school. Mark one peculiarity in attitude. The pupil, in the intensity of his interest, has leaned forward from the bench; and the instructor, in the absorption of his subject, has bent forward from the chair, and that circle of foreheads almost touch each other. We, who are a little enthusiastic in such matters, call that characteristic posture the "Sunday-school Arch." You never find it except at the seats of the most intelligent and faithful teachers. Remember that they have studied that lesson most carefully, and that their whole hearts are in the duty they are doing. Remember that they have wrestled in earnest prayer on bended knees before their Lord that very morning, pleading for all needed assistance. Then bear in mind that their pupils love them, honor them, and now listen with all the inquisitiveness of kindled desire to learn something new and fresh. And the eyes fill sometimes with the suffusion of tender appeal and affectionate exhortation. Ah, is not this the place in which to educate a soul for God?

3. To redeem children, however, is the main end. And I put the question with all earnestness to any thoughtful and candid man, Where will you find a plan which has more hopefulness in it than this? God converts souls; our office is to lead them up under the force of the means of grace. And is

---

The bow of the covenant.

Another John needed?

---

there not in this Sunday-school Arch a fitting symbol of the divine promise, the very bow of the ancient covenant, bending over these young immortals, with its benediction of peace? Keep a child there, in that focus of intense spiritual heat and light, aglow for a term of years. Let him grow up under it. Let that immature form become manlier, and perforce straighten somewhat with tallness; and that other form that has been bending with eagerness begin to stoop with age; and still let the patient process be continued and never relax until the place is changed, and the pupil becomes a teacher, and, beginning with a little group, makes and tends a new arch of his own; what will be the result of all this pressure of training in the truth? Go ask church records what it has been. Read the names of those who come from the Sabbath-classes into communion and membership.

My Christian friend, how much are you doing in this day of gospel privilege to bring the hearts of fathers back to their children? Do we need another prophet, with his hairy raiment and his leathern girdle, to come forth from the wilderness?

## XIX.

### THE FAMILY FESTIVAL.

“IF THY FATHER AT ALL MISS ME, THEN SAY, DAVID EARNESTLY ASKED LEAVE OF ME, THAT HE MIGHT RUN TO BETHLEHEM HIS CITY: FOR THERE IS A YEARLY SACRIFICE THERE FOR ALL THE FAMILY.”—I *Samuel* 20:6.

THE word in this verse rendered “sacrifice” is in the margin of our English Bibles rendered with somewhat greater felicity “feast.” There comes to view, therefore, in the narrative an unusually interesting fact; namely, that the family of Jesse, out of which the ruddy-cheeked herd-boy had been chosen and anointed as a successor of Saul upon the throne, continued to keep up their residence in Bethlehem, and carefully observed the household festivals through the year, as in earlier days they had been accustomed.

The members of that scattered circle summoned each other regularly to a social reunion annually. We infer that Jesse himself was at this period not living, for at the mention of him last given in the Scriptures he was considered an elderly man; and now, in the latter part of the chapter before us, Jonathan tells Saul that this invitation which made David’s place vacant had proceeded from his “brother,” and he had asked his permission to go and see his, “brethren.” It may have been that the home was partially broken, but the remnant of the family patiently kept up the customs.

Each year, from all our central and crowded



---

Going home.

"Count up your mercies."

cities, there is pouring forth a positive exodus of people, going down into the rural neighborhoods where their fathers have lived and died, in order that they may meet together and freshen the cherished associations of their youth: generally it is the old boys and girls who are the first and the faithfullest in these annual flittings—those whose years are multiplying upon their heads, but whose young hearts persistently refuse to grow chill or forgetful nevertheless.

I. In the outset let us notice some few of the **ADVANTAGES** found in the observance of this yearly thanksgiving festival, that will serve to every thoughtful mind as arguments for its perpetuation among a loyal and Christian people summoned to public worship.

I. Of course, first and chief of these is the consideration that for all God's love and care for us there is due at least *full acknowledgment* of the hand which has given them to us.

"Be careful for nothing" is the encouraging admonition of inspired Scripture; "but in everything by prayer and supplication, with *thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known unto God." It is only a mere brute's heart which rests satisfied with the acorns that feed its gluttony, with never a grateful look upward into the branches of the generous oak from which they drop. One motto will in almost all cases bring cheer and comfort to believing hearts in this world of worry and complaining: "Count up your mercies." A day in each year is

surely not too much to be given to this formal rehearsal before God of our plentiful gains and prosperities.

The widening of the obligation, and the observance also, from the family to the community is quite easy in this yearly sacrifice of adoring praise. When the plough is laid aside, and even the busy flail is still; when the autumn fruits are all safely housed under sure shelter, and even the Indian Summer is over; when the glorious crisp frosts have come, filling the veins with vigor and the step with a more elastic spring; then, indeed, it is a sight worth looking at and admiring, to see a great people, summoned by their chief magistrate, coming up devoutly to thank a beneficent Creator for his patient care of them all. It gives hope for the future in its decent recognition of the past.

2. In the second place, there is manifest advantage in these annual festivals growing out of *the cultivation of our domestic affections* and the perpetuation of our home tastes and feelings.

It mingles religion with our best sympathies. He cannot be called a manly man who did not feel himself a weaker man from the month when his praying mother died and was buried, or who does not feel himself a stronger, braver, better man, if now perhaps the beloved old voice still lives to be his counsel and his inspiration.

To be sure, fall business is apt to be heavy just about this time. But we old boys and old girls are not surprised to find the clerks coming in the count-

---

"God bless our home!"

Ancestral memories.

---

ing-room with a pleasant request for one day's absence. We have no pride that gets mortified or abashed if they happen to find tears in our eyes at the moment. For quite unexpectedly, perhaps, there came among the business letters this very morning a singular little missive, asking us ourselves to be on hand certainly in November, for all the rest were coming home.

"Home!" Oh, word of unspeakable meaning! and we fold up the paper reverently, and whisper, "God in heaven bless the dear old soul! Going home? Of course, we are going home just as long as the mother will write that there is still a home to go to!" And that is the exact instant, as I said, when the clerks come up to the mahogany desk and want a day's vacation to go home. They look quite sympathetic as they see our moist eyes; and, sure enough, it is an opportune time for them to make application. We say, We will see; and in our heart of hearts we find our opinion rising for those excellent fellows who are decent enough to want to go home too, just as long as they have any; and we can manage it, if we try.

3. Again: there is a manifest advantage in these thanksgiving festivals found in the *perpetuation of ancestral memories* to which they are calculated most strongly to minister.

It is instinctive in the heart of every true man and woman to desire to live beyond the limits of an immediate generation. Some of us, who are not ready to confess we have been particularly ambi-

Lois and Eunice.

A line of genealogy.

tious or inordinately vain, do yet honestly feel it would be a sad mortification and a sore disappointment to be, even after some few years, forgotten. We toil hard for many a season to keep our name unsullied and preserve our fair fame unstained for the sake of our offspring. Elderly people, I judge, are more thoughtful and appreciative in this respect than there is reason to expect children will be. Where there is one boy who really feels the worth of the education which the young Timothy received, I suspect there are a sorrowful score of Loises and Eunices who modestly believe their own "unfeigned faith" ought to count for more than it does. It is a little pathetic to find these faithful old wives, even in late widowhood, still insisting that the new generation should at least remember the best deeds and the truest lives of the past. Very beautiful is that quiet assertion now and then, "Your father, my boys, used to think and say so and so;" just as if that ought to settle it without any more talk. Thanksgiving times are excellent as reminders of a vanished generation of worthy ones and beloved.

Now in this there is not such pride as needs rebuke, nor any such sensibility as needs to make one ashamed, but a keen and far-sighted recognition of a profound truth; namely, that a nation of people grows by the gathered accretions of individuals; a line of genealogy is elevated in worth by the aggregated worth of such men and women as compose it. Children will be builded up more on that principle

---

True patriotism.Thanksgiving Day.

---

if they are kept in mind that they have ancestors whose names are in the annals of a decent past. He stands on a high, noble vantage-ground whose forefathers have been worth remembering.

4. And this leads me on to mention a fourth advantage derived from this annual feast; namely, the opportunity it offers for *kindling and quickening a true patriotism* in the hearts of the people.

Thanksgiving Day is to us what the Feasts of Tabernacles were to God's ancient nation. Those taught them, and they in their turn taught their children, that all prosperity came from heaven. Each good and perfect gift was from the Father of lights, with whom was no variableness, neither shadow of turning. When a grateful community comes bringing in with its harvest offerings the expression of its thanks, God smiles a recognition of welcome in return.

Hence, Thanksgiving Day is a symbol of religious liberty and popular freedom. All there is in our republican institutions that is priceless to our hearts is commemorated in the festival. Every cordial observance of it is just a sedate and dignified way of handing over to our children these sanctified memories of a worthy political past as well as a beloved and holy reverence of our homes.

So I cannot but feel how eminently fit it is that the custom has passed in late years out from the hands of local governors of States into the hands of our President in person; and that, entirely unconstrained by law, only prompted by that excellent



public opinion which, when it is what it should be, renders law unnecessary, our chief magistrate has now in charge the usage of appointing one day for the whole Union on which to meet and acknowledge God.

In our country this is the only point at which the Church and State come in contact; may there never be so much as one other!

They say this of Scotland: so customary is family prayer all through the villages, that if one could stand on an elevation overlooking the town at the going down of the sun, he would hear sober sound of human voices reading the Bible in hushed murmurs together. Then, in the next moment, there would swell upward one full volume of singing from the Psalms of David; and then there would follow a stillness deep and unbroken, while the one voice of leadership recognized under each roof implored the evening benediction and merciful pardon of the sins committed in the busy hurries of the day.

Oh, how grand and how welcome to us on this honored day it is to recollect that the whole great nation is on its knees, and that our countrymen over the world are singing an anthem just as we are!

II. With this exhibition of manifest advantages I can hardly need to argue further for such observance of the day. But some of us cannot observe it this year as we could wish. If we go with David at all on his errand, it must be in imagination only. And I think it will be profitable now to ask and answer where he did go.



Bethlehem of old.

Rural homes.

I. To *his own city*, first—so the story says; and that city was Bethlehem, a poor little town any way; but it was *his*, and that was enough. And I think of those villages, and some smaller towns, where you and I were born. And for one I own quite readily to-day that, if some things were as they used to be in times I could tell you of, no prospect of entertainment in a king's palace could keep me from saying as David did to the king's son in that fond request, "Let me go, I pray thee; for our family hath a sacrifice in the city; and my brother, he hath commanded me to be there; and now, if I have found favor in thine eyes, let me get away, I pray thee, and see my brethren."

Some of us feel very glad we were reared in the country rather than in the city; we cherish a loving regard for the prosperity of our old birthplaces. It matters nothing how widely asunder the homes we live in now are from those where our associations were in childhood; right through the dark shines the beautiful vision each one of us recognizes for his own. Not in person, but in spirit, a few of us are going to be there. The shutters on the old church, I am sure, need fixing; the minister ought to have a small parcel of books for his library, or a chance to look at a new Review; there are old stones in the graveyard that might just as well be lifted up; and the schoolhouse deserves a new bell. It is becoming to be a little public-spirited when one thinks of his native place.

In every rope on every vessel in the British

British ropes.

Three thousand years ago.

navy, the world over, there is always twisted one red strand—one fibre of slender body, but of imperishable color. And in every line of manly or womanly feeling—no matter how rude, no matter how delicately fashioned—there should always be twined a fine, sweet element of reverent honor and love for one's birthplace. The hills are fairer in the blue distance there than anywhere else; the blossoms are thicker, the autumn leaves are richer, the wells are cooler, the frosts are crisper, the snows are purer, the homes are brighter, and even the graveyard is the dearest on earth. One feels often like uttering over again the simple-minded and wise words of old Barzillai, "Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother."

2. In the second place, I suppose David went straight as was possible to *his own home* in Bethlehem. When we visited that very forlorn little village, some years ago, we used to look around and wonder where it was that Jesse lived. It was a great while since. Over the top of the page where our text is, I find B. C. 1062; just now it is A. D. 1882; David's festival was about three thousand years earlier than ours. There is not even a tradition of the old spot on which the dwelling stood. Nor is this of much moment; perhaps you will like better to think of your own homestead than of David's.

But into these thoughts there would certainly

Eliab and Shammah.

The kitchen-chamber.

come minglings of personality as well as reminiscence. Ah, I venture to say that David, escaping for a day from all the frightful dangers of Saul's palace, would with rarest interest rehearse, amid the sweet welcomes of his Bethlehem home, those many troublous experiences he had had. How eagerly now would Eliab listen, and how affectionately, let us believe, would Shammah make comment. What a comfort to be once in the old circle again, where one could be safe and happy!

No appliances are within our reach so easy of employment and so sure in result as these thanksgiving associations and usages observed carefully. Once in a year at least the fetters of business care drop off, and the worn man becomes a sort of hero on a family triumph, and is refreshed by becoming a child again. You will not get your best good from going home to the rest, unless you will go out in the barn and try the ladder, and over the orchard and climb the trees, and down on the pond for a thoroughly respectable slide. If you take your dignity with you, you had better give your ticket to some poor man who will use it legitimately. You will not enjoy the old house at all, unless you can get up stairs into the kitchen-chamber, and seem to hear the rain come drumming on the shingles.

3. Then, finally, I imagine David would want to go to *the various houses of his brethren*. I take this from the fact that this day's invitation was given by his brother. And I judge there were in Jesse's family customs like those in Job's; they took

Job's family.

House-bond and woof.

a turn in giving the yearly entertainment: "And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them."

I speak very deliberately when I say this now: I do not know how I could ever be made to care for any one, or even to trust him, who suffers himself to be estranged without awful cause from those old boys who slept with him in the room next the sky, and heard in the winter frost the weird cracking of the beams overhead, as they told the stories before going to sleep. I do not see how he could hope that pure starlight, like a shower of benediction, could ever fall upon him again on the other side of the roof. God gives men these sensibilities; and woe to him that defies his noblest nature in checking them! Let us get together, if we can, and keep together, God willing, for many and many a fond year yet!

Do you observe how queer these conferences are growing to be as time proceeds? Something fresh is revealed every year when the old boys and the old girls come home. What an eager interest when we try to teach our children to know each other, and love the aged faces we meet there! How the eyes glisten and the hearts leap as we tell the little family secrets while the children are out-doors beyond hearing! Husband means *house-bond*, and wife means *woof*; it is well to weave the affections together by this mutual love.

How odd it seems to see William's children!

Home talks.

The thanksgiving prayer.

The modern book is full of conceits about "Helen's Babies;" they are just nothing to these quaint specimens which sister Martha brings up here to greet us on Thanksgiving. How wonderful are our confidences! "Stephen, your oldest boy is a splendid fellow; what are you going to do now that he is through college? Minister? Well, that is good! It is worth working for, as you have: and we will all be proud of him." "Kate, how does Charley get on with that velocipede? Mother says that your Gertrude has joined the church. And something else, too? You surprise me! Why, how old is she? Oh, how they do keep growing up! When did that happen? And do you approve of the young man?"

And then the dinner: and the eldest carves; and Stephen's educated boy, that is going to be the minister, asks the blessing in his grandfather's place. And then the snow-fort, and then the hot chestnuts at the evening fire; and then the stories, and the never-forgotten evening song which Kate's Gertrude makes ring again when she touches the air, and which Stephen breaks down in, as he remembers father's bass twenty years ago. So then comes the thanksgiving prayer that mother chooses shall be made by the firstborn who now is the high priest of the family. And then comes the sand-man with weights for little eyes; and so to bed where no cars rumble across trembling tracks, but a deep, abiding stillness that folds an unusual rest around our weary limbs. Then the cheery Good-by for a long year in



---

“Old boys and girls.”

George Macdonald.

---

the morning; and the rapid return to work and to duty, with the heart warmer, and the whole soul filled with a kinder gentleness and a more thorough consecration for the days to come.

Keep it up, old boys and girls! In despite of all you can do, these things and these chances will vanish soon. No assiduity can for ever preserve them. Some of us sit sadly such days as these in our town homes, tenderly recollecting what used to be, when the anniversaries come around. The circle is no longer within reach. A meagre occupation is left to us after church; but we tell our children stories about the old times till they are tired and gone. George Macdonald says he does not think any man is compelled to bid Good-by to his childhood; every one may feel young in the morning, middle-aged in the afternoon, and old at night. It will not matter much that these reminiscent rehearsals force us to feel a little older on Thanksgiving evenings; the young people listen with eagerness of interest. By and by they vanish, and the day ends.

Then there are two things we do for ourselves. First, we remember those who are off on David's errand, and those who are scattered just as we are. God's best benediction, now, be on each old face dear and sweet in the homestead to-day, wherever it is! Many years may those remain who still linger in the scenes of our youth! Many a comfort may there be for all those who have been smitten in God's gentleness with trouble. Here are greet-



---

A wish for dear friends.

A wish for ourselves.

---

ings for the growing children. And here, from a hundred true hearts that never think of wavering in affectionate allegiance to our own city or to our own home, we send around by the mercy-seat our Heavenly Father's blessing to those who are gathered under the early home-roof far away !

Then the other thing some of us do is to sit down after dark in the twilight and think it all over, and wonder why we are growing better and better *so slowly*, when we have had such extraordinary chances. What prayers have been following us all along ! What a heritage of advantage we have had ! We seem to see the old village again, the home, the church, the bridge, the court-house, the graveyard. And we come up out of the reverie, thanking God we once did have such a circle of faces to look upon, and praying him humbly over and over again that we may be able still to keep the faith, to live penitently and purely, so that by and by we may hope to look upon them all once more in God's shining and without shame !

## XX.

### THE IDEAL CHRIST.

“WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?”—*Matthew 22:42.*

THERE are Scottish graveyards which have become worn by the feet of hurrying men of business, so that the flat slabs of stone are quite defaced. Walter Scott pictures an enthusiastic antiquarian lying prone upon the monuments, cleaning out and cutting anew the faded inscriptions, while the bustling throngs press on him on every hand, insisting upon their right of way across where he lies.

It is not to be suffered that this trite question of the New Testament shall be remanded to the past and forgotten. It was not a mere quibble put to puzzle the Pharisees of our Lord's time only. It is the real, living question of to-day. And one might do a much worse thing than to employ his hours, even on his knees, deepening the letters in the great highways of history, no matter how rudely he may be jostled by other interests that claim human attention. For the unanswered question of the race is this: What think ye of Christ?

I. Some people do not think much about him any way. Their minds are preoccupied; they think of something else.

1. These Pharisees were evidently stunned by our Lord's inquiry. Let us read the story:

“Now while the Pharisees were gathered to-

---

The Pharisees stunned.

B. C. or A. D.?

gether Jesus asked them a question, saying, What think ye of the Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet? If David then calleth him Lord, how is he his son? And no one was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions."

2. We meet those in our time who have reached no convictions worth recording. I once asked a man what he thought, and he replied frankly, "I suppose I never do think of Jesus Christ." Then I inquired when he was born. He gave the date—1843. "B. C. or A. D.?" I kept on. He smiled, as if he conjectured I might deem him an antediluvian. But I asked soberly, "Before Christ or After Christ?" He was silent, and I continued, "Have you been dating letters for twenty intelligent years without even reflecting that you were daily commemorating the nativity of Jesus Christ? Have you actually formed no opinion concerning that personage whose advent among men changed the reckoning of time, whose birthday shook the race into a new era, as his crucifixion shook the planet with a new earthquake?"

3. It is not the part of a wise man to miss such a question as this. The moment one reaches the summit of an Alpine height he inevitably casts his eyes down over the landscape, and the first conspic-

---

A Christian land.Good King Arthur.

---

uous thing he sees is a Christian church with a cross upon its steeple. So here at home: the moment one leaves the town for the country he passes a cemetery with the words of Jesus Christ carved over its entrance, and the cross of Jesus Christ on its graves. Is it possible that any man should meet the Christian religion directly face to face, and never make any disposal of it in his mind?

II. Some do think: and now it is of much importance that we inquire what they think.

1. There is a *historic* ideal of Christ. It admits all the facts of his biography. He was born at Bethlehem, reared at Nazareth, crucified at Jerusalem; and after he had risen from the dead, he ascended to heaven from a mount near Bethany. So much is cordially accepted; and most admit that he wrought miracles, preached the gospel, and founded a religion which is what we see now.

All this is good as far as it goes. But as ideals always influence, and almost always sway, one's purpose, mould his character, and so fix his life, it must be confessed that the result in this instance is only a bare hero-worship. I do not see how it even differs from the notion of a Mohammedan except in choosing the Nazarene Jesus instead of Mohammed, and making a shrine of Jerusalem instead of Mecca. I do not think it helps one's salvation, or cleanses his nature, any more than did the love and longing of the ancient Britons, who believed that good King Arthur achieved matchless excellence, and who fondly anticipated his return one time to

---

The theologic ideal.

The poetic ideal.

---

gather his knights anew at the remembered Round Table.

2. There is also a *theologic* ideal of Christ. Our forefathers were under the teaching and preaching of a generation of system-makers and defenders. They were taught to know the difference between Socinianism and Sabellianism to a hair. They could explain how a sinful tendency was morally worse than a tendency to sin. A rather doleful time that seems to some of us now; but it had its advantages. People grew philosophical, and talked of fate and divine foreknowledge, free-will, and sovereignty at the Thanksgivings.

All this is good also as far as it goes. But such a conception of Jesus of Nazareth, when left alone, is only enough to render an individual a mere polemic or disputant. A cold and cheerless dogmatism is the result. The intellect is moved, not the heart. It is conceivable that Aaron Burr should be as orthodox as his grandfather Jonathan Edwards, and yet remain the wicked creature he was. Paul told the Philippians that some were preaching Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to his bonds. It is evident that a man may hold and proclaim the doctrines commonly considered evangelical, and be nowise bettered by them.

3. Then, likewise, there is a *poetic* ideal of Christ. A soft style of speech and behavior indicate a measure of sentimentalism, and there come to the front in hymns and Bible-readings the expres-

---

“Nursery endearments.”

Abelard and Heloise.

---

sions of gushing attachment which Chalmers, whose robust piety could hardly endure them patiently, used to call “nursery endearments.” Really, it is not so much Jesus Christ that these enthusiasts love as the imaginative picture of Christ which they invest with all that their hearts admire.

Here falls into play one of the brightest and sweetest of human endowments. We have a power of investiture by which the imagination surrounds a beloved object with unreal and extravagant excellences. It is an amiable and useful characteristic, and claims charity even when it seems at fault. A mother deems her babe the prettiest child there ever was. It may not be so, but it hurts no one for her to think so; and it is a wonderful comfort to her. An obedient son honors his father before all other men. We see thus in those we admire the merits we wish to see. Tales are constructed to show how a hero invests a heroine with fancied beauty and imagined gifts far beyond her desert. I have seen visiting cards lying upon the sumptuous tomb of Abelard and Heloise in the cemetery of Père la Chaise in Paris. The romance of the world has thrown a glamour of attractiveness around that splendid grave. And yet history says that Abelard was a priest who would better have been about worthier business, and Heloise was (to other people) exceedingly plain and tame; and the story does not bear looking into.

A good thing can be perverted. And this quality or habit of ours is perverted when one imagines



---

Dreamy experience.The evangelic ideal.

---

a Jesus to suit himself. The result is enthusiasm merely mystic or emotional. It may run, as it often does, into simple poetry, and be satisfied with forms and festivals; revel in colors of altar-cloths, and strains of choral music; and lose truth and life in a vain round of ritual. Or it may run, as it often does, into a dreamy experience, and be satisfied with gushes of feeling; shudder at mentioning sin more than at committing it; clamor that conversion begins a new life which hides for ever the bad past; claim a second conversion which fixes the future beyond a peradventure of falling away; and then, after all, end in such a "holiness" as generates and invites license.

4. Then there is an *evangelic* ideal of Christ. And this is what the Scriptures disclose to us with the plainest study. It finds all it has; and it finds this in the four Gospels, with what the Epistles were inspired to add in wise interpretation. And, of course, the first thing it finds (and this is where it totally differs from those other ideals) is the fact that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer and the Sacrifice for *sin*. It holds all the history; it gladly receives the theology; it accepts all the poetry; but beyond everything else, it grows solemn as it sees that God's only-begotten Son lived and died to make an atonement for human transgression, and set our souls free from a merited hell.

The result here is a career. He who puts off the old man with his deeds, and puts on the new man who is renewed after the image of Christ, con-

---

"A man in Christ."

The ice palace.

---

structs a fresh life at once, and enters upon its duties and responsibilities, its gentle faith, its rapt devotion, its energetic activities, its glowing hopes. He is thenceforward "a man in Christ." He sees that one peerless life in the New Testament moving before him; he has no wish more pervading and swaying than simply to become like it, and plant his own feet in the prints of the beloved Master's!

III. Now, in conclusion, let us ask what this will do for us. It seems so little; but, oh, it is so much! *Christ in a life*—look to see what that means.

In the papers, not long since, was an account given of a palace of ice, constructed for the entertainment of a Russian prince. There it stood, brilliant as crystal, bright in its blue transparency on all its turrets and towers. But it appeared so cold and hard and cheerless that no one would go inside. Then, at nightfall, came a lad with a torch—no, only a taper—a mere lit candle; he went through the door, and in an excited instant the singular structure shone through all its substance with warmth and homelike welcome. Only a taper! But the palace was illuminated, for it was made so that it *could* shine. So with any character constructed out of intellect or accomplishment alone; it may have thought and energy, force and loveliness. But it demands and needs the true ideal of a living Christ inside of it:

"The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin—  
The light of the world is Jesus!"

---

Ideals control life.Abraham left Terah.

---

1. Observe, then, how thinking affects character; ideals control life. Some say it makes no difference what a man believes if he is only sincere in his faith. Alas, it makes all the difference in the world! "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Character decides destiny, too. So the more sincere one is, if he be in error, the worse it is for him. "What think ye of Christ?"

2. Observe also that one may study his ideal through his personal experience and character; and that is the safest way. Just inquire what your notion of Christ is doing for you in the long run. It is of far less moment what a man believes or does, than what he is. And he is what his ideal makes him to be. So he may know unmistakably whether his views are correct by examining whether they are making him gentler and purer; whether they are milding his temper and mellowing his charity; whether they are kindling his hope of the life to come, and loosening his hold on the life that now is.

3. Observe that the only safety for a young believer is found in accepting the scriptural Christ for his all in all. Never mind what tradition says. Abraham left his own father Terah when he became certain that Terah was going to stay and die in Charran. Is Jesus Christ your sacrifice as well as your model? Do not let men confuse you by asking if you believe in a dead Christ. No, you do not; but you ought to believe in a dying Christ, and now living.

Aristotle's maxim.

The question reversed.

4. Observe how pitifully the world's hero-worship contrasts with the Christian's love. It was an old maxim of Aristotle that the fondness for imitation is in man's nature from his infancy, and herein he differs from all other living creatures. It did not need that a great philosopher should tell us this, we see it everywhere. But the chief lack is a model. Humboldt travelled the world over, and saw everything; and he recorded in his diary at the last what sounds almost like an aphorism: "The finest fruit earth holds up to its Maker is a man!" It is possible he found one, but he happens not to have mentioned his name. People have extraordinary notions of what constitutes greatness. History says that in the ninth century the Poles elected Lasko II. for their king because he won a foot-race. Francis I., writing to the emperor Charles V., signed himself "the first gentleman in France." Meantime, there stands the Christ! His friends love him supremely, and are not ashamed of him. *Ecce homo!*

5. Finally: observe that by and by this great question of the ages will be reversed; and then it will be of the highest moment to ask, What does Christ think of me? This is what we sing:

"Till then—nor is my boasting vain—  
Till then I boast a Saviour slain!  
And, oh, may this my glory be,  
That Christ is not ashamed of me!"

## XXI.

### NEVER THIS WAY AGAIN.

“YE SHALL HENCEFORTH RETURN NO MORE THAT WAY.” — *Deuteronomy* 17:16.

WE are told that at one of those splendid pageants in Berlin, not long ago, the wife of the English ambassador unfortunately unfastened the necklace she was wearing, and lost a costly pearl somewhere in the roadway. Perhaps it might have been regained if a serious search had been in order at such a time. But the grand procession must hurry along, and a lost place in the rank was of more account than a lost pearl. They did not return by the same way.

We may be in equal peril if an accident should occur in this ceaseless rush of our years. And most of us know that valuable reflections are apt to be dropped carelessly in the dust in such gay life of the holidays as these which usher out and usher in the rapid seasons. It is certainly wise—and to some meditative people even welcome—to note a few quiet lessons suggested, and keep them to think over.

“Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.” It is not necessary now to trace the historical connection of this fragment of a verse. It will be enough for our present use to know that it contains the thought which renders it appropriate for a motto with an admonition in it for the close of the year.

---

Taking spiritual stock.An old experience.

---

There was a moral juncture of affairs in the circumstances of God's chosen people which led Moses to say to them that hereafter they ought to be exceedingly careful how they behaved, for they could not now go over the ground again with new decisions. They must take their choice, and be ready to stand by it in all the future.

I. It is now a most significant time for *the taking of spiritual stock*. Most religious people would be glad to know just where they are, and how the balance stands.

They tell us that established merchants often die of remnants. Besides the yearly account of true sales, it is sometimes discreet to make a sudden vendue and clear out lumber. This figure fairly holds in our religious and moral career. It is weary work, that of stubbornly fighting on, in one's old age, against those habits, passions, and associations which years of listless indulgence have bulked in upon our nature. It is better just to have a clearing out, even if one is afraid he may be suffocated with the lifted dust. Many a Christian man is hindered in growth by reason of his proud trying to retain an old experience, of which he can make nothing valuable, but which he thinks he is bound to defend for consistency's sake.

A brave man need not lie down supinely and admit he has lost mastery of himself. Indeed, that is not his greatest peril. Some persons are more exposed to ruin from mere reaction resulting from mastery regained. The most to be apprehended is



Heroic treatment.

Colton's suggestion.

that one will suffer the work of self-renovation to be put off so long that when he really accomplishes it (if he does) he will be compelled to loosen and uproot his whole being in order to tear out his besetting sin.

Most likely any courageous follower of the Lord can come off victor over his baser self if he will use the heroic treatment, as the surgeons call it, and force lancet and actual cautery into service. He can pluck out a right eye and cut off a right hand at an instant stroke, and burn out the sockets with a whisk of pain, and suffer far less in the aggregate of anguish than he has been causelessly suffering during some sad years of nursing the ancient hope that he supposed he gained in his youth in some forgotten revival.

The thoughtful author of "Lacon" has given us a somewhat forcible figure. He intimates that men go to the bad and the worst only when they delay this energetic treatment too long. Suppose a man's dead appetites and slain passions and amputated desires are lying diseased around him; then it may come to pass that his remaining vitality shall become tainted with the corruption he creates: so when it is too late to begin, he ends. He obtains safety of a very doubtful and precarious sort, like that some surgeons have wrought out in lingering campaigns. Not a few soldiers have died from the pestilences which hospitals have bred.

It would seem to be the part of true wisdom to forestall such a catastrophe in earlier stages; to be-

gin the renovation while the sinews are still braced and the constitution unimpaired.

II. Then, again, this is a good time for us to *give over lackadaisical complainings about short chances in the past*. You will not have to take the same chances again.

A few words may well be uttered here about some men "of whom more might have been made." I do not believe that our world will ever be essentially poorer out of any accidental loss it has experienced in people who "never had the great luck some others had."

Real worth, like the water of mountain springs in rocks, has a way of showing that it is apt to ooze. It will insinuate itself into all sorts of crevices, and so force a chance. And I feel certain that the great wise God always keeps his eye on promising cases; if those firkins at Cana of Galilee had not been known to hold water safely under ordinary tests of pressure, we may be sure that Jesus would never have trusted them to hold the wine he created.

There are mournful misanthropes in middle life all around us, setting up for premature age, singing dirges over buried ambitions and grand purposes nipped, whose milestones of failure should surely be marked, not with opportunities denied, but with opportunities rejected and despised. They starve to-day for having superciliously refused to pick up small coins, which Providence flung in their plain path as they hurried on, expecting in some pitiful vanity to be invited to pick up fortunes of useful-

Victor Hugo.

Work not yet done.

ness instead, before long. So they say with something of an injured air that they would think it their due that they might try life over again from childhood.

“Ye shall henceforth return no more by that way” of youth. But does anybody really mean to say he wants to do that? Remember those cheery words of the Frenchman, Victor Hugo. He confessed to one of his close friends that the most disagreeable advance in age to him had been that from thirty-nine to forty. “But,” said his companion, “I should think it a great deal brighter to be forty than fifty.” “Not at all,” replied Hugo gayly; “forty years is the old age of youth, while fifty is the youth of old age.” Ah, just think how many fine chances yet wait for a brave heart in the beautiful future which we hope to enter on after next New Year’s day!

III. It is best for us now, also, to *keep a clear lookout for what is still ahead*. Almost all of us have some past worth looking over. But the glory of every true life is in the time to come.

There is a vast deal of work on this earth which has never been done by anybody yet. If a painter were asked what was the finest landscape in all the world, he would most likely refer us to some famous picture in a gallery, taking mighty pains, meanwhile, to mention the artist’s name; for he would suppose that you inquired after something that had been put on canvas. If a traveller were asked the same question, he would instance some noted neigh-

---

Force of tradition.Room for original discovery.

---

borhood he had explored; for he had perhaps been wishing some one would go and sketch the scene as he saw it; he was thinking of what had not yet been done. Thus an uneasy generation is divided, so heavy on us is the force of tradition, and so materialistic have we become in our forms of thought.

Beyond either of these replies there remains a vast unreckoned region, which the painters have never painted and the travellers have never visited. After the discovery of such a marvel as the Yosemite Valley, or the Yellowstone Canyon, room for a chastened imagination is left to assert that not unlikely many unexplored solitudes yet exist upon this planet more rich in revelation of beauty than anything pen or pencil has ever brought to light. The artists may keep pushing along; there are enough pictures to paint.

And let brave men keep pushing along, too. There are enough deeds to do, and helps to render, even in the tamest sort of life.

And then beyond! for, at any rate, this is true: divine displays of providence and grace are by no means at an end for even a Christian's original discovery. History has something to say; and experience may have more; but God has not yet exhausted himself in apocalypses of splendid radiance to his waiting people. There certainly is, in the distance, that which "eye hath not seen nor ear heard." And wise men, while the years chime on, might well think of a readiness to make the great journey and meet the revelations.

---

Who wants to go back ?The lost rings.

---

IV. Once more: by this time we ought to learn *to estimate results and forget processes*. We do really respect hills that we have climbed painfully over; but it awakes no emotion in others when we keep rehearsing the steps which we took, and the snows we met, and the winds that we resisted. Wiser is it always to let the dead past bury its dead out of sight.

“Ye shall henceforth return no more that way;” and to some the past year has been a year of trouble; so it is fair to ask, Who wants to return that way? But it is not necessary to talk continually about faded flowers and departed joys and thwarted hopes.

Did you never imagine what you might have been—that is, imagine what your life might have been, if it had been *different* a great many years ago? Did you ever seek to analyze this half-wistful, half-impetuous emotion which flits through your being as you survey a worried past, and try to detect the exact spot where your entire history turned? This reminds me of an incident in my early experience. I once had for a brief companionship a sweet friend, a relative, on a visit where I was residing. We used to go out rowing together. She had a way of dallying with her hand in the water over the side of the boat. One time she lost all the rings off from her fingers in an instant. Out of sight of course hopelessly they fell to the bottom. But whenever we rowed across that place again, she would gaze restlessly over the edge, trying to search the very lowest depths of the lake. I have even



Unpopular endeavor.

Ships on the stocks.

seen her suddenly bare her arm, as if she had caught a gleam of the jewels down in among the weeds, and was going to grasp after them yet! It is a great mockery, this clutching after youth and hope and joy and vanished ambition, when one has come to be an elderly and weather-beaten man.

“Ye shall henceforth return no more that way;” and to some the past year has been a year of conflict; and who wants to go over all that again? Many a man has to give himself to unpopular endeavor: he is obliged to differ with those whom he loves. It matters little whether one triumphs or fails in such enterprises; the weariness of the contention even for truth bears heavily upon him. Please you remember, moments of success are not always moments of happiness; much depends on what the success has cost.

“Ye shall henceforth return no more that way;” to some the past year has been one of self-discipline. How much it costs just to make a slender progress in divine things! The bravery of young Christians is very beautiful, but it often renders us sad. So the timidity of old Christians seems to many quite unnecessary. There are ships on the stocks which wonder that the proud barques afloat ever spring a leak; but when they have themselves tried the raging of the high seas, they wonder that any timbers ever hang together.

V. Finally: this is the time in which to *inquire after work yet left unfinished.*

Here let us understand each other clearly.



---

Who does God's will ?The woman of Tekoa.

---

Many persons think that life is only a season for endurance. They say, "Thy will be done," as if they supposed God's will was to be done by simply letting God do it; so they resolve zeal into mere resignation, and imagine they have now reached the chief end of man when they exist without whining.

There is much work to be done for others; and there is never more than one chance to do the work of any one moment. In this is serious admonition at the close of a year. "Ye shall henceforth return no more that way." And all that is left for us to do is a mere gathering up of unfulfilled resolutions. These we may humbly bring with us again to God's altar of service, and ask him just to grant us one more moment in which to urge them to completion.

There is much work to be done for one's self. Here I reach a solemn warning for those who close the year as yet unconverted to God. Twelve months more have flitted rapidly by, and still no purpose has been carried out of yielding your heart to duty. And now the verse comes soberly: "Ye shall henceforth return no more that way." Great advantages of time have been positively wasted.

The woman of Tekoa made one matchless suggestion in her parable. The past was irreparable, but the future remained: "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him."

## XXII.

### NEVER THIS WAY BEFORE.

"YE HAVE NOT PASSED THIS WAY HERETOFORE."—*Joshua* 3:4.

It is interesting sometimes, after a grand concert, to study the vast organ whose tones have been accompanying the singers with such matchless power of adaptation of its variety of music. There it stands, a marvel of pipes and keys, but a silent thing of metal and wood. It must have been the artist that forced the difference between the modulations, for the instrument is inert and still.

After a while we fall to thinking again how much of possibility of music there is in every organ, limited by the mere range of mechanical size and capacity. The fingers of each skilful player glide up and down along the keys, always caught, however, with a new disappointment by that stubborn block of jet placed at either end of the board for a check; for even the greatest organ has surely its limits. The music all lies between those two boundaries, of which the feet touch one and the hands touch the other.

It is very much the same with human existence. This life of ours is an inert, wooden thing of itself. What shall be made of it depends upon the man; and men differ as much as musicians do.

Furthermore, the imagination is arrested by the thought of a *lost chord* now and then, which must

---

An organ's range.New Year's calls.

---

certainly lie over the edge of the instrument. There may be bright bird-songs unsung in the one direction; there may be solemn dirges unuttered in the other. As the Psalm says of the stars, "There is no speech nor language, and their voice is not heard." One wonders whether there are not some possibilities of sentient human life that never have found any utterance.

Nor does the change of position bring any alteration. Move an instrument north or south, put it in the sunshine or in the shadow, we shall never touch more than the seven octaves, after all. There is the limit of possibility, or of what men call the chances. And life is just like it; for, while men vary, there yet remains a stop in the line of exploits, careers, and even of lofty attainment.

It is time for many of us who are pushing on into middle life to have done with some ordinary shams. Much meaning might be found in the quaint figure of the prophet, "Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not. Yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." Just for a moment let us look back to the final week of the last year.

You remember you and I were doing then pretty much what we begin now to do again. We were making out the list for our New Year's calls. We were reared in the day when these fine decencies were observed. We were unaccountably fatigued in our getting around afterward. We said the town

---

Discovery of displacement.Subterfuges of old age.

---

is large and residences are growing more distant. Now we pick up that old list for revising. It pays a compliment to your manly feeling that you are moved as you pencil off two or three old names of those who have vanished out of sight.

Furthermore, we have been along these years arrested by discovery of displacement. We fell into conversation with one who began business about the time we did. It struck us that his words of congratulation were querulous and feeble. He was bent somewhat; a few hairs on his head were quite white. We said to ourselves, "He is ageing a good deal." And then there was a young man in the room at the moment. He seemed bright and cheery. He rehearsed his prospects. And you and I, despite of our affection for him, felt a small sense of crowding; so many new men were out in the field of competition.

When we arrived at our home, and sat at the fireside that evening, we did not seek to conceal that wear and tear had begun to tell a little, for some casual infirmities put in their appearance. Funny subterfuges of self-deception had failed. We saw that, in our laborious lives, we had been attempting to realize on the future before it was due, and had discounted strength for present investment.

For another thing, our children seemed to be so old, and then they talked so wisely—great grown girls, noble boys, men now worthy of recognition; but ours, nevertheless. And we fell to thinking

---

Our Saviour's appearance.Joshua's command.

---

that perhaps the best thing we longed for now in all this world was that these sons might always return from their New Year's calls as sober and as pure as they were then, and that these daughters might ever be as willing to come and sit before the fire with us, contented in our love. For we detected an eager craving after them, and a feverish sort of fear that they would be flying out of the nest soon.

More than one commentator has, first and last, called attention to the awkward mistake which some of the Jews made when they spoke to our Saviour, "Thou art not yet fifty years old." Of course, he was not. Perhaps he had the fatigued look or the anxious face of an elderly man, and this may have deceived them. More likely he wore the unspeakable dignity of character or of mien which always makes men seem venerable. Even then, fifty years of history does not render one an old man. The very best of his life may yet be ahead. There are still fine deeds to be done and grand words still to be spoken.

Whether there will be much aid in the developing of our present thought from the story out of which the motto is selected now depends upon our familiarity with the circumstances. The Children of Israel were just going to cross the Jordan. It was a prospect, of course, calculated to try the stoutest heart among them. Their wise leader, Joshua, sent out word that they were to "sanctify themselves," and so make ready for the supreme

effort of their experience. It will be good New Year's reading to go over that third chapter of the book in the Old Testament which bears his name, for a review.

“And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host; and they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go; for ye have not passed this way heretofore.”

Now we need not dwell upon this narrative in detail any farther than it will serve us for an occasional illustration. We shall do well to catch a few lessons for spiritual good from it.

1. “Ye have not passed this way heretofore.” Then it does now seem likely that the good Lord expects to give us one more chance.

We are all continually entering upon fresh paths, which really afterwards turn out to be old ones in a new form. Religious experience moves by crises. We might remember that Israel had, not many years before, gone across this same desert, and been turned abruptly back to Sinai again, because of rebelliousness in their will. Now they were to go into Canaan, but by another route altogether.

We are always commencing new enterprises. We start new business undertakings; we adopt new



---

New experiences.Time unexhausted.

---

professions; we choose new localities; we build new dwellings, and inhabit new homesteads.

We are always beginning new experiences. Joys come suddenly, and sorrows fall without any notice beforehand. We are summoned again and again to gird ourselves up to some fresh endurance. None of us can escape new decisions, on which our after life must turn.

We are always entering upon new periods of time. Anniversary days mark the recurrence of events and afford opportunities for reflection. Birthdays and death days are full of meaning.

What we ought to remember is the undoubted fact that in this twelvemonth to come we shall find ourselves travelling over pretty much the same route we went last year. There will not be anything extraordinarily surprising. Differences will be in the details.

2. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." Then, in the fresh chance God is giving, he offers himself to be our helper and friend.

Suppose we come back to the quaint figure with which we started. Wild as it seemed, and perhaps odd, it had a lesson in it, presenting familiarly our most serious reflection. These seven octaves mentioned, of life and the organ alike, are chosen out of the eternities lying close around. Time, time—unused, unexhausted, and unknown—sweeps about our poor little seven decades of living, and will keep its course resistlessly on after the end is reached, just as it ran its course before we were born into its be-

---

The programme of life.

Receive a teacher.

---

ginning. Thus all the songs we sing, the wails we utter, and the prayers we make must choose expression somewhere among the combinations of seventy years allotted to each creature, and they have but one chance at a time. We are marched up according to programme, and play our tune, like so many performers in a concert given in the presence of God.

Oh, how many a musician has desired, after a public pageant, to play his parts over again, believing he could have done them accurately and well but for a small misunderstanding about a repeat. Imagination peers out into the past, and there come no tidings, and there seems no power of reparation. But God has spoken concerning the future, and there at last we reach comfort in the truth. "Ye shall henceforth return no more that way;" but there is a way, far stretching out before us, in which some new adventure may be tried.

During this year the concert will be repeated. The programme remains in good measure unchanged. We failed last year. The chances of life are open again. God offers to help us along. Our parts are to be played over. Will we accept a teacher this time, or not?

3. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." Then, surely, the gifts of God's love on ahead of us have not been appropriated by others nor exhausted by ourselves.

There comes a day in which any one can afford to be honestly simple and unaffected in all his sur-

---

A silly paradox.Wishing and want.

---

roundings, and relinquish this folly of laboring to keep up appearances for mere show. Generally speaking, men around us are pressing a silly paradox. They appear to want everything now, and yet desire to exhaust the treasures of the future also, and that at once. In such work they declare that they are only preparing for their old age. They are using up valuable force in making ready for a start in life by and by; that happy start they propose to make some fine morning from the summit of an attained ambition, with the full admiration of the world.

Alas! why cannot every one see that misery sits at the top of life's lonely ladder? For comfort inhabits the rounds all the way up. And when all that men hope for is reached, there must remain for their experience thereafter only what they fear. He is in the most lamentable condition who at middle life is exactly where time cannot improve him, and cannot fail to impair; where all the changes are forced to be for the worse, for want of space to be better; where every feeling strengthened by long habit is offended because the man is pained to spend the gains he has spared; where every remaining chance which comes shall necessarily betray rather than befriend; and all this simply because he has at last reached the pinnacle of what he has considered success, and wishing being exhausted, want is sure to begin. Having lived on anticipation, he is actually disappointed since there remains nothing more to be gained.

---

Folly of jealousy.

Follow God's ark.

---

Hence, prudence counsels that we give over the suicidal struggle for a future which we hope to make for ourselves, and live while we have present life to enjoy from God's hand. More pitiful folly still is that which jealousy engenders; for the man has ingeniously wasted his time in distancing others, who, when distanced, are dead. He has triumphed, but nobody is in the grand procession which he had imagined would immediately be formed in his honor. It makes a poor show to have no king dragging on behind the chariot.

4. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore," but it is well to remember that the ark has not passed this way heretofore, either.

It is significant here to notice that these people were told to accept God's guidance implicitly. They were to bear the ark of the covenant directly to the front, and follow it without any question. Indeed, they were forbidden to approach nearer to it in the course than a full thousand yards, lest the track it took should be missed or grow confused. "Come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go, for ye have not passed this way heretofore." The first time they had essayed to enter Canaan, their own folly had hindered. Now they were to be led by the sign of God's un-failing love. Herein is instruction for wise men along the ages.

It is not probable that there will be to many of us anything singular in the year before us; but there may be a consciousness in our hearts that the

---

“A word behind thee.”

God's anointing.

---

windings of the path will vary, after we settle a question so unique and revolutionary as this about the leadership we are purposing to follow: “Thine eyes shall see thy teachers, and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left.” It makes life a new thing to put the ark on before it.

Let perfect love cast out all fear. Why are God's people ever frightened? Is it not possible for them to watch with him just for an hour? “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Is not God king of the kingdom? For that kingdom all things are now working, from the least to the largest, from the vilest to the best. Ills that have never happened have disturbed some hearts more than their heaviest disciplines.

You see a young minstrel playing on the harp before an insane monarch. The king exercises his fearful ingenuity in flinging javelins at the singer's head. You say impulsively, The young man is bound to die! And the young man seems actually to agree with you: “And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines.” The fact is, however, that he is perfectly safe. Do you know why? Because he has had drops of oil on his forehead. Saul cannot kill David. Samuel anointed him to be king; and God's word would be



---

God's purpose in a life.The fallen bird.

---

absolutely broken if one of those javelins should hit. David swears, "Truly as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death." But that step was a throne-step! God's purpose, infolded in a human life, renders the life immortal. "The Christian cannot die before his time;" that time God fixes.

5. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." Now, with the ark on ahead, the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Thus we may reach our best lesson to-day: take the full cheer and comfort of faith. Let us rest in the love that holds us, and understand its every pressure as being in our interest and for our help. Once I remember I picked up a small bird which had fallen on the pavement by my feet. I sought to reinstate it among the branches overhead; but the creature could not appreciate my generosity, and with passionate eagerness struggled to escape. I began unconsciously to talk aloud to it, "Poor, silly thing! Why do you not trust your best friend? All I want is to get you up again in the fork of the tree. You are making it harder for me, by dashing so against my fingers; for I am obliged to hold you firmly, and you do all the hurting yourself." Why is it we all struggle so, when the Lord is giving us help?

Now I do not say that this is the exact image which the prophet had in mind, but it must have been something like it, when Jehovah told him to speak to Israel: "They shall tremble as a bird out



---

Happy New Year.Paul Fleming.

---

of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith the Lord." And I do know that thus the good Lord did often deal with his chosen people in those old hard days, and they quite misunderstood him.

And I know, and just now am more concerned to know, that frequently he does thus deal with the individual Christian. He takes us in his own kind hands, and would never cause us a pain but that we struggle and resist him so that he is compelled to be firm. He is trying to put us up in the nest of safety and holiness, and you may be assured he will not cease because of our unreasoning alarms.

Thus, then, I close my sermon. Let us offer our neighborly greetings for this Happy New Year with a glad cheerfulness. We enter upon untrodden paths; but the skies are bright, and Heaven is nearer, and the good God is overhead.

It is likely most of us will recall the story of Longfellow in his romance. Paul Fleming entered that little chapel of Saint Gilgen. On the tomb above his head was the inscription, "Look not mournfully into the past; it comes not back again. Wisely improve the present; it is thine. Go forth to meet the shadowy future without fear and with a manly heart." It was as if a voice came into his ear from the dead, and the anguish of his thoughts was still.

## XXIII.

### WISER THAN ONE'S TEACHERS.

"I HAVE MORE UNDERSTANDING THAN ALL MY TEACHERS: FOR THY TESTIMONIES ARE MY MEDITATION."—*Psalm 119:99.*

PRINCE GEORGE once asked Handel how he liked his playing upon the violoncello. "Why," said the flustered musician, "your highness plays like a prince!" This answer was very ingenious. It reminds most of us of the way in which our poor selves have sometimes writhed dexterously out of trouble when embarrassing inquiries have been put to us concerning preachers and superintendents and convention men generally, who want to know how they have been getting on, when they have just descended from the platform.

We may as well be candid: there are some excellent Christians who cannot talk to children; there are godly exhorters who bungle terribly in the attempt to teach classes; and every one knows there are trained ministers among the highest of all in the profession who do not preach to edification. What is the matter? It is not safe to attempt a full answer to such a question. Even our Lord predicted that some one would surely say to him, "Physician, heal thyself."

Perhaps it would be just as well for us now to begin with studying the account given of Jesus Christ's first discourse in his neighbors' presence,

the earliest address he made in the village where he was reared. It is easy to think that all of us public men, accustomed to speaking, may gain a lesson which will give superior help to us, if we try in humility and patience to learn it from the Master: "Thou, therefore, which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?"

1. Let us notice that Jesus Christ began his work with a quotation from the Bible.

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised: to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth."

The first public act he performed was this: "He opened the book, he found the place." And the record asserts that, when he simply showed in the

---

A young preacher.

Our larger Bible.

---

hearing of the people how these predictions had now found their fulfilment, they "wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth."

It is always an occasion of interest when a young preacher appears in the pulpit for the first time at home; and there can be no doubt that the picturesque-ness of this scene will arrest many minds. And from such a beginning it would be easy to go on with the history of Jesus, and note the wonderful tenderness and the awful strength of his sermons. But in this discourse I am anxious to save all space so as to develop a single thought to better satisfaction. As our Lord began, so he continued. He emphatically preached the Word. And a lesson of the utmost importance and simplicity is found in that evident fact. The source of all Christian power is in the Bible.

2. It is well to keep in mind that we have a much larger Bible than Jesus had; for we have the New Testament as well as the Old. We have what he spoke, as well as what he expounded. The Old Testament is more voluminous than the New; but, for real work, the New is better than the Old. It is admitted on all sides now that it is not what we say about the truth that helps and saves souls, but the truth. The Bible of Jesus had much to tell about Jesus in those early days; but in our Bible we have Jesus fully revealed for human need. Very beautiful and instructive is the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah; but the nineteenth chapter of John is better still.

Help in texts.

Difficult questions.

3. When people come to us for help, the thing to do is simply to find something in the Word for them. Once, in my early ministry, a man entered my study with concern for his soul in every line of his face. I talked to him for an hour, and could do nothing to relieve or direct his mind. In desperation, I then did what I ought to have done in the beginning. I found the fifteenth chapter of Luke, and read him all the three parables one after another. Then at last he felt the full, free, exhaustless grace of the Saviour; he found that just because he had been lost he was precious; just because he had wandered he was sought; just because he was a prodigal he was beloved; his very vileness was his argument, his wickedness made him welcome, his penitence was his plea, and God's unforgetting grace and love gave him hope and security.

4. Curious and difficult questions that Christians ask, have the simplest sort of answers in the Word. As to grounding our hope firmly, Matthew 7 : 24 is better than anything we can say ourselves. To encourage a man who fears ridicule, Mark 10 : 48 is excellent and effective. Exodus 2 : 1-10 is a far better illustration of God's care of children than that stock story of the "little child in the cornfield." Once a member of our church came to me to ask what she ought to try to look at when she shut her eyes in prayer. And all I could think of was to read her two or three verses about Bartimeus. A smile ran over her whole face, as she rose suddenly, and said, "Good-morning." Then I asked

Speculation and conjecture.

Seeking conviction.

whether her question had got the answer. "Oh, yes!" she replied gratefully; "I ought to see what the blind man did before his eyes were opened; he saw he was blind, and he *seemed* to see Jesus there waiting to be prayed to."

We may speculate and conjecture as we will; it is not always certain our conclusions are right or safe. But the clear revelation of God's will, laid alongside of human want, is the efficient instrumentality, and the only one, that will prove reliable. Once a mother told her pastor that she was troubled about her daughter, who was going to join the church. "She has not conviction enough," was the complaint; "and yet I have talked to her about her sins over and over again, setting them all in order before her till both of us were in tears; oh, what can I do more?" Then he gave her in her own hands a Bible, and he read aloud to her slowly Isaiah 6:1-5. She saw without any word of his that the prophet became intelligent as the sight of God flashed before him, and grew penitent at the moment when the seraphim cried "Holy." Then he turned to Job 42:5, 6. She saw in silence that the patriarch repented, not when his exasperating friends pelted him with accusations, but when his eyes were opened to see God. She went away quietly to talk with a wondering and awe-struck heart about the *holiness of Jehovah*; thus her child melted into contrition before the vision, and wept as she said, "Thou hast set our secret sins in the light of thy countenance."



Saving a suicide.

Particular passages.

5. Of course, then, we learn that we must be exceedingly familiar with God's Word in order to use it skilfully. For the times arrive often very suddenly in which we are called to make answer or to give advice; and to work powerfully, one must work ingeniously. The gifted authoress of "English Hands and Hearts" once saw a man close by the brink of a river, and believed he was going to commit suicide. It seemed perfectly clear to her that, if she should appear to suspect his purpose, he would avoid her and wait till she passed out of sight. So she quietly kept on her walk, but as it approached the spot where he was watching, she read aloud, as if just to herself, Psalm 46:4. It was all she could do. Two years afterwards a speaker in Exeter Hall related the incident in his own sad life, and told how the text saved him and converted him, and now he added the wish that he might some time know the Christian woman who had done him the favor. So they met and clasped hands, and thanked God together. But how did she happen to know the right verse then?

Such a thing did not *happen*. That lady knew her Bible thoroughly. We must waste no time in looking up passages. Suppose one tells us that he does not believe in prayer; our instinct would be, possibly, to set about an argument with him. But it would be much better to have your thumb, as it were, in an instant upon Matthew 7:7-14, or Luke 11:1-13, or Mark 7:24-30, or Luke 18:1-14.

6. We should be patient in instructing others

how and where to find the proper passages for Christian effort. It is our custom to put young persons into offices of responsibility for the sake of disciplining them in doing good. And sometimes we feel that those who are truly pious, but are measurably illiterate, may be employed as teachers or as Bible-women in reaching the poor.

Such Christians need to be helped vigorously. For it is one of the heaviest experiences we ever have, to stand in the midnight before a medicine-closet and try to think of the right relief when a dear friend is suffering; oh, the exact help is here, but what is it? I may give the wrong thing, and work awful mischief! But it is worse to turn over the pages of the Bible piteously at a loss for a chapter. Suppose a mother has lost a child; there is comfort for her in 2 Samuel 12 : 15-23; but I would rather read Matthew 18 : 1-14 first, and then I would add 2 Kings 4 : 18-37. If a failing invalid asks for reading, not every young Christian knows that 2 Corinthians 4 : 6-18 will bring comfort, though John 14 is familiar. The 51st Psalm is better for a truly penitent sinner than "Just as I am" on a card. Some Sunday-school children might be of service in reclaiming backsliders, if they only remembered to read Matthew 26 : 69-75; it will prove better than even John 21 : 15-19, which is good. To a distressed poor person who doubts God's love, Matthew 6 : 25-34 will be appropriate; and families that feel anxious about the absent ones will like the 91st Psalm for a reassurance. Surely we might all aid

each other by suggesting what we have found to be useful under circumstances common to those who are out at work.

7. There are two ways of reading the Bible. One way is to go through it blindly and unintelligently, in obedience to the feeling that it is our duty to read it daily. The other, and better way, is to read it from love of it, with a heartfelt appreciation of its truth and beauty. In this latter way gospel truth becomes a part of our being and our history.

A friend told me that he once saw a Bible checked like a tourist's guide-book, the owner of which called his attention to two pencil-marks in Solomon's Song, showing that he had got so far on in reading the volume through twice. He admitted that often he found it dull, but he continued because he knew it was his duty. He was doing his task of persistent perusal with not the least possible interest in the chapters over which his eyes were roaming, and apparently with no sense of the connection between truth and life. This may be an extreme case; at any rate, most Christians who feel listless while studying the Word of God are not quite so frank in confessing it. Meantime it is soberly asserted that the more advanced believers among the churches are fond beyond power of words to express, in their affection for favorite divisions of the Scriptures. Their private Bibles would open of themselves at their familiar chapters. There is a quaint story told of a pastor who went in to see his old bed-ridden parishioner, and finding in

---

“Tried and Proved.”

Selden's choice reliance.

---

her Testament some marks along the page, asked what they could mean. Here was a capital P: “Oh, that means *precious*,” she said. There was a letter T with the P: “That means *tried and proved*,” she continued.

Such experience is far beyond mere story-telling. In the Temple Church of London, in a shadowed aisle to the left of the great altar, is a white marble monument erected to the memory of one whom John Milton called “the chief of learned men reputed in England.” John Selden was one of the most extraordinary scholars that Britain has produced. The volumes which he poured forth in an endless stream were filled with research and discrimination. Of one of these—a work on the Law of Nature and of Nations—Hallam said it was among the greatest achievements in erudition any Englishman has performed. This most excellent man comes down to our times by his “Table-Talk.” Coleridge once remarked about this, as he laid it aside after a thoughtful perusal, “There is more weighty bul- lion sense in this book than I ever found in the same number of pages of any uninspired writer.” To Archbishop Usher, who preached his funeral sermon in the church where he now lies, this learned man Selden said just before he died, “I have surveyed most of the learning that is among the sons of men, but I cannot recollect any passage out of all my books and papers whereon I can rest my soul, save this from the sacred Scriptures: ‘For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath ap-

peared 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, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.' "

8. There must be, therefore, some texts that have a history of their own. Dr. James Hamilton makes the suggestion that if all the verses which have comforted God's people were illuminated, as the monks in the Middle Ages were wont to illuminate certain passages in manuscripts, few parts of the Bible would be left without pictorial lights.

Would it not be a profitable exercise—it certainly would be an interesting one—to gather together the parts of the Word of God which have been helpful and dear to individual Christians along the ages? How many histories, for instance, have been poured into the 51st Psalm! John Rogers recited it to himself all the way down to the stake. Œcolampadius, the reformer, panting for his breath, yet persisted in saying verse after verse of it, till he died with the words still on his lips. The Lady Jane Grey asked the headsman to wait for her a decorous moment in which to say her Miserere; then she bound her eyes calmly, and laid her head on the block. So this same dear old Psalm was read at his request to Dr. Arnold of



Rugby on his death-bed. Thus it seems instinct with a life of its own.

9. Here would be a fresh and quite safe use to make of Christian biography. Many a volume might be read to profit just with the purpose of ascertaining favorite passages of Scripture which have proved helpful under peculiar exigencies to any believer. Oliver Cromwell once read aloud Philippians 4:11-13, and then remarked, "There, in the day when my poor child died, this Scripture did go nigh to save my life." The venerable Augustine was converted by Romans 13:11-14. One biographer tells us that the poet Cowper was brought to Christ by reading Romans 3:24. Matthew Henry wrote a record of himself in a diary he kept at about thirteen years of age: "I think it was three years ago that I began to be convinced, hearing a sermon by my father on Psalm 51:17. I think it was that by which I was melted; afterwards I began to inquire after Christ."

Even this matter of texts preached from with remarkable results would give the verses interest, if we would look them up. As, for example, Deuteronomy 32:35, "Their foot shall slide in due time," which was the text for one of Jonathan Edwards' most famous discourses. In the midst of his words that day the people actually rose up from their pews, so awful was the impression produced by them. Whitefield was once preaching at Exeter, on Psalm 51:17, "A broken and a contrite heart." He says that after the service a man came up to him with a



pocketful of stones, and a big one in his hand, and told him in tears, "Sir, I came here to hear you this day with a view to break your head, but by the grace of God you have broken my heart."

10. We might as well give over looking for mere novelty. For possibly the best exercise of all, both for the sake of awaking our interest in particular passages, and of gathering a list of effective verses for actual use, would be that of setting down in a written record all texts which we have found to accomplish permanent good, and do real service for souls. For men and women are very nearly alike, and what has helped one will be likeliest to help another in the same mood or the same exigency. Some of us have been down by the seashore, perhaps, and have noticed the great mass of what seems mere rubbish cast up on the shore. It was all nothing to you, this heap of refuse remnants of ships. But along came an old sailor, and asked you, "Do you see that spar over yonder with a knot of rope around the middle of it? That brought a mother and her baby ashore last week from a shipwreck." Now you looked again, of course; nay, you went and cut a piece off from the beam to carry home. You could never make that stick commonplace or insignificant hereafter, if you tried. The lives it saved went into its history.

Just so with many passages of God's inspired Word. They may seem all alike to us in our dullness of indifference, until suddenly we discover what they have done. Then many a verse springs out

into a marvellous impressiveness and beauty. It has brought some tired Christian ashore from the deep waters of trouble, or delivered him from the wreck of a shattered hope. What did good once will do the same sort of good again.

II. Finally, we can find here the explanation we seek for some failures that appear so mysterious, and for some successes that are so admirable. Those Christians have done most service who have in every instance trusted the Word for the power of the truth in it.

Dr. James W. Alexander put in one of his letters, near the end of his career, the statement that, if he were to live his public life over again, he would dwell more upon the familiar parts and passages of the Bible, like the story of the ark, the draught of fishes, or the parable of the prodigal son. That is, he would preach more of the Word of God in its pure, clear utterances of truth for souls. When the saintly Dr. Cutler of Brooklyn died, the Sunday-school remembered that he used to come in every now and then during the years of his history and repeat just a single verse from the superintendent's desk; and the next Lord's day after the funeral they marched up in front of it in a long line, and each scholar quoted any of the texts that he could recollect. The older people positively sat there and wept, as they saw how much there was of the Bible in the hearts of their children which this one pastor had planted. Yet he was a very timid and old-fashioned man; he said he had no gift

at talking to children; he could only repeat God's Word. Is there anybody now who is ready to say that was not enough for some good?

Some of us have seen those curious hammers and drills and saws prepared for surgeons and dentists, which differ from others looking like them in that when used they are put into connection with an electric battery; thus they have all the force of common instruments of the same sort, and then they have the additional force of the lightning which runs in them. So of the Word of God: counsels, cautions, and comforts from the Scriptures have all the meaning and all the pertinent wisdom which other sage cautions and counsels and comforts have; but more than that, they exercise an unseen sway over the human soul, subtle and irresistible, because of the resident inspiration of the Holy Ghost which is in them. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

So now we come back, humbly enough, to the acknowledgment with which we began: "Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts."

## XXIV.

### THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

“AND IT CAME TO PASS WHEN JESUS HAD ENDED THESE SAYINGS, THE PEOPLE WERE ASTONISHED AT HIS DOCTRINE.”—*Matthew* 7: 28.

MANY of the sublimest lessons that have ever been learned by human hearts have been taken from that discourse of our divine Lord delivered before the multitudes from his hill-pulpit upon the spur of Hattin. And many of the bitterest criticisms upon Christianity at large that ever fell from human lips have pointed their sharpness with quotations from the same matchless source. Are we all sure we understand this remarkable sermon as a whole? While we read the various chapters and verses, it is as if we had been going through the rooms of a grand and beautiful palace one by one; now it is worth while to stand off outside, as it were, and contemplate the architecture which the edifice displays.

I. Let us begin with noting some few CHARACTERISTICS which the Sermon on the Mount possesses. That will bring us on to the consideration of the end which our Lord most likely had in view.

I. The wonderful *literary beauty of the language* cannot have been unobserved by any one. From the Beatitudes, which sing their exquisite song at the beginning, to the matchless peroration that builds its two houses at the end, there is an unbro-

---

Desultory arrangement.No atonement.

---

ken strain of elevated imagery, felicitous expression, and stirring thought, which even in the translation makes our rugged Saxon rich and musical.

2. Then we have all remarked the *desultory arrangement* and the apparently disconnected progress of ideas. To some this may have seemed disjointed and fragmentary. How much of it is owing to the oral form of perpetuating its particulars until they might be gathered into a written gospel, we cannot now say. Luke's version does not at all contradict Matthew's; but it is certainly far briefer, and in some points differs from it. It is possible there was much more of the sermon, which neither of these evangelists recorded.

3. Chiefly, however, all of us have perceived *the one great absence* in this discourse, I might almost say *lack*, as we contemplate it from our Christian outlook. From beginning to end there is no allusion to the atonement made by our Redeemer. If scholars read alongside of it the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, or the fifty-fifth, their minds will be arrested by the consideration that the one does not at all answer to the other; these are not on the same theme. Christ is here as the preaching prophet, not in any disclosure as the atoning priest. There is not so much as a single word which says that a divine Saviour has come to die for men's sins, or that men need such interposition. Regeneration is not alluded to, faith is not clearly counselled, repentance is put on the low plane of asking pardon for our mistakes, and the Holy Spirit's name is not



---

A supercilious assertion.

Reach of requirement.

---

even mentioned. Yet this discourse was preached *after* the midnight talk with Nicodemus, and after John the Baptist had told the nation this was the Lamb of God to take away sin.

4. Hence, *the history of the sermon* affords a conspicuous example of the way in which men sometimes pervert God's Word. For those skeptical moralists who reject the notion of sin—of the awful curse denounced on sin and due to it, of the need and provision of a ransom from sin, of the Spirit's washing of a soul from sin by the blood of a sacrificial atonement—calmly and superciliously appeal away from all warning by saying, "Our sufficient creed is the Sermon on the Mount."

5. Most of us would admit this statement, for we remember a startling and supernatural *reach of requirement* in this discourse. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." If any man can and will obey that command, it is evident he will be saved. "Perfect as God." That is enough, certainly. But can a mere man meet that condition? Our Lord closed his sermon with the words, "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock." Surely, it is easy enough for any one to hear them, but is it so easy for any one to do them? What says the apostle? "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith



A perfect character.

A rule of life.

of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

II. This leads us forward to the second subject of consideration: What was the PURPOSE of this Sermon on the Mount? Evidently it had some peculiar aim; it comes in at a peculiar juncture of the history; it has a peculiar power. All men admire it; but, singularly enough, there is a species of dread in the admiration.

I. We find in it the *description of a character*. What do we understand when we hear people speak of a “character” in history, or in a tale? They mean a personage, an individual, known by some distinctive marks. William the Silent was a character in the Rise of the Dutch Republic. Ready-to-halt was a character in the Pilgrim’s Progress. The Sermon on the Mount pictures a character perfectly easy to recognize anywhere *if we could meet it*.

The Beatitudes tell his qualities, and the two houses show his end. He must be “pure in heart” and “poor in spirit.” He must be “meek” and “merciful.” He must keep the whole law of God, even to the thoughts and intents of his heart. That is, as we have quoted, he must be perfect as his “Father in heaven.”

2. We find in this discourse, also, *a rule of life*. What do we mean by a “life”? The chemist analyzes a flower, and informs us it consists of so much nitrogen, so much carbon, so much coloring matter. When we obtain his recipe, we go to an apothecary’s and purchase so much nitrogen, so much carbon,

---

This sermon not a code.

A standard of attainment.

---

so much coloring matter; we bray them in a mortar with a pestle. We fail to make them mix into a fuchsia or a dahlia, for all we can do. Gases and earths are not flowers. Nor can we do better by getting a fairer start. The dried anatomy of an herbarium looks like a flower; nay, it used to be a flower; but it cannot be made a flower now. What we want is the mysterious thing which we call *life*.

The Sermon on the Mount is not a code, to be analyzed and exhibited as a dry list of enactments; it is legislation ready to be incarnated in a living man. It is a thing to be acted and breathed as well as read and quoted. Jesus of Nazareth lived this wonderful discourse. Nobody else ever did. But he put it forth *to be* lived by everybody under the New Testament dispensation.

3. We find here likewise *a standard of spiritual and experimental attainment*. To be reached? No, after steadiest and most prayerful study we are forced to the conclusion that the standard is exhibited in order to let us know we *cannot* reach it; that is, to show us what it is that God demands of all his creatures which fallen men and women cannot possibly meet. This sermon is a mere reiteration of the old law of Moses without losing an "iota" or a "horn" on a letter, and then an extension of its requirements to the very thoughts of our hearts; and that, to prove we cannot keep it.

We must have this matter perfectly clear in our own minds before we attempt to proceed any farther. At the funeral lately attended of a moral and

---

An unerring eye.Paul's ignominious failure.

---

most upright man, the officiating clergyman took occasion to say something like this: "Our friend and neighbor, whom it hath pleased Almighty God to remove from us, was by occupation a mason and builder. He was noted for one personal peculiarity; it used to be said of him that his eye was as good as a rule. He could detect the swerving of a hair's breadth from the true line of any timber he set in its socket, of any course of stone he ever laid in its bed. Now it is not too much for me, on this solemn occasion, to remark concerning him that he took the same wonderful accuracy with him into his life before God and man. He squared his whole career by the unerring judgment of his spiritual eye; and so he lived in a correctness of career as a citizen, a husband, a father, a friend, which no man can hereafter question."

Very well: no one desires to question such a statement as to any departed neighbor or friend; but this is not enough; it will not do to trust a spiritual eye alone, no matter how cautiously it looks along the lines of one's existence. There is not a capitalist in the street who would put his money in an edifice which the contractor told him he was going to build with his "eye" for a rule of regulation and measurement. The Apostle Paul once made the same attempt, so he tells us, and failed somewhat ignominiously. This is what he says of that dreary old time before he became acquainted with the moral law of God: "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin

---

Sin exceeding sinful.

The law slew him.

---

revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.”

What he means by this statement is, that when he was an exemplary Pharisee only, punctiliously discharging his duties as a mere moralist, he supposed he was doing very well. But in later times, when he came to know what the law of God really was, two results instantly followed: one was, that he saw the hollowness of his previous professions; the commandment, which he had imagined was given him to live by, he found was unto death: the other was, that his sin within his heart became exasperated by the law which checked it, and rose with mighty violence of anger against it; indeed, he would never have known how strong his passions were but for the rebellion they instigated through his whole being. Thus the law took occasion and slew him. It was so perfect that it discouraged, destroyed, and enraged him at the same moment. So he became, and so he was shown to be, one of the most exceedingly sinful of men; that was the way in which the law of God worked with him: sin revived, and he died.

---

A level and plumb-line.A terrible standard.

---

4. We find in this sermon of Christ, therefore, *an instrument of condemnation*. If we may come back to the figure already employed, we should say that in all character-building the law, which Jesus announced in that discourse, was, from its beginning to its end, designed as a spirit-level, a plumb-line, and a straight-edge, all in one: its purpose was to show that human nature at its highest was neither perpendicular, horizontal, nor consistent even to itself in its segments. The moment an unerring standard should be applied to it, it would be condemned. We believe our divine Lord pronounced those words of his at the beginning of his ministry in order to make it clear for ever that men would need an atonement for sin outside of themselves. The Sermon on the Mount is a proclamation of inability and an annunciation of doom. It must have been the discovery of this fact which led one, after many years of desperate denial of any need of a Saviour's dying on the cross, to exclaim with deepest emotions of undisguised alarm, "God grant that when my soul shall stand at the judgment-seat, it will not have to be judged by that awful Sermon on the Mount, with no help outside of it!"

It is astonishing that any man can take comfort in turning away from the gospel scheme of atonement, and resting on this sermon for peace; for there are verses in it crowded and awful with monitions of coming wrath. It would seem as if its purpose must have been to convince every human



---

Every mouth is stopped.

An incitement to holiness.

---

being of sin hopelessly: "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." We find we cannot trust our own consciences, the standard is higher than we supposed. We discover weaknesses and wrongs in our hearts which we did not suspect; we get provoked by being told how far away from perfection we are. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, 'Thou shalt not covet.'" With this knowledge inevitably comes a sense of deserved retribution. Any one who enters fully into the spirit of this discourse finds himself rushing rapidly through the line of experience which the Apostle Paul depicts in the Epistle to the Romans. These clear, sharp sentences show him his own heart: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

5. Finally, we find in this discourse *an incitement to holiness*. Those who listened to Jesus that day must have said to one another, "This man knows what he speaks, and lives what he preaches; salvation is in him!" They would not be as intelligent as we are, for the whole gospel had not yet been made clear to them. It is certain, however, that they would turn earnestly to him for disclosures of help. They would feel that, if anybody could save, he could. "For he taught them as one having au-



---

All concluded under sin.The sermon a song.

---

thority, and not as the scribes." If Paul had lived and written earlier, some of those listeners would surely have quoted his words while Christ was talking: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

We ourselves can now understand better even than they did the meaning of Jesus' solemn sermon. "But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." Now we know all God *wants* of us. Much as it is—oh, how fearfully much—we are glad that we know it all. And, knowing it, we learn how Jesus Christ takes up our hopelessness, and gives us salvation by his death. "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."

Our whole attitude is changed; we can rest on a Saviour to make up for our deficiencies. So there comes a gleam of hope in the distance. Oh, shall I ever be like Immanuel, the Son of God? "But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

So, to the true believer, out of the eater comes forth sweetness; the Sermon on the Mount becomes the very song of the soul.

## THE HARVEST COVENANT.

“WHILE THE EARTH REMAINETH, SEEDTIME AND HARVEST, AND COLD AND HEAT, AND SUMMER AND WINTER, AND DAY AND NIGHT, SHALL NOT CEASE.”—*Genesis 8:22.*

It appears that the rude ark, which bore up the fortunes and persons of our human race when the Deluge swept over the world, rested at last on the summit of Ararat. After the waters had subsided, command came for departure.

“And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons’ wives with him: every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark. And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord, and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savor; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth: neither will I again smite any more everything living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease.”

I find in the margin of our Bible the date affixed to this transaction to be 2348 B. C. Easy addition brings out the fact that already more than four thou-

---

Four thousand years' test.A feeble philosophy.

---

sand seasons have come and gone, each one of which has offered its measure of proof that divine fidelity has in no instance failed. Our confidence is altogether unbroken: indeed, we have come to consider it quite a matter of course that industry in the spring-time will certainly be rewarded in the autumn.

Let us enter upon the study of the verse in some orderly way. There are just two lessons in the development of it on which I propose to dwell—providence and purpose. And these are the customary admonitions that are urged every fall of the year. God's providence exhibits his faithfulness; and in this there is comfort. So his purpose exhibits his wisdom; and in this there is counsel.

I. We may as well commence with this: EVERY HARVEST TEACHES THE FACT OF GOD'S WISE PROVIDENCE—the rule and care he exercises over the mysterious works of his hand even to the least creature.

You know it was the remark of an ancient skeptic that the Almighty made our world at first as a shipwright makes a vessel, and laid out upon it the commensurate supervision; but that was all he did in its behalf; he then just sent it forth to fare for itself among the waves of existence, leaving human free-will to be the further pilot and stand at the helm of history. There are those even in our day who are willing to adopt this feeble philosophy; who assert that they believe special providence a mere notion.

Surely, while we are gratefully bringing in the

sheaves of a prosperous harvest we do not need any serious refutation of such a statement. But it is curious to notice how God himself replies to it. He always chooses the weaker things of this world to confound the mightier. He plants the argument on a single leaf, and announces a fine challenge for the pride of questioning science to answer: "Who hath divided a watercourse for the overflowing of waters, or a way for the lightning of thunder; to cause it to rain on the earth, where no man is; on the wilderness, wherein there is no man; to satisfy the desolate and waste ground; and to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth? Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew?"

Imagine yourself to-day beneath a tree on the hillside, with these fading leaves of the autumn around you. Think of the interminable forests which one time overspread this continent where we dwell in luxuriant plenty, and the foliage of which sprang into life with a new budding each spring-time. See if you can count the buds which formed upon the branches through the "wilderness wherein there is no man," in the mighty centuries before America was discovered.

Now the Lord told Job out of the whirlwind that he had watched every one of those leaves during all the months it fluttered in the sunshine. He said he had sent to it rations of rain and drops of enlivening dew. No eye but his ever saw it; but he worked with just as much patience, finishing

---

The main argument.Seedtime and harvest.

---

every veinlet and blade from stem to border as perfectly as if the boughs were going to be on exhibition before the universe. So he touched the colors and trimmed around the edges of whole forests-full of foliage for four thousand years.

And I do insist to-day that if the Almighty God took such amazing pains as this in the arrangement of his argument, and if he urged his conclusion with the magnificent gesticulation of a whirlwind, it must be worth our while to attend to him. This same eternal Jehovah, who led Israel through the desert of Sinai; the same ineffable God, whose radiant presence shook the mercy-seat between the cherubim in the Holy of Holies; the same mysterious Being who, before the world was spoken into existence, occupied the throne in heaven when warring angels plotted to overthrow it—he it is who puts forth his hand in the early year to cover each tree with its wealth of foliage like a shadowing shroud. And upon that covenant of nature, fulfilled without one failure from creation's dawn even until now, he plants the whole doctrine of special providence.

To be sure, we must add to this the continuance of care down to the end. Let your imagination go one step farther with the feeble leaf we have been following in its career. It appears from another glance at our text that seedtime cannot claim any advantage over the harvest. The same hand, which trimmed the husks of green buds away from the opening blossom, presides over all the fruitful development, and at the last tinges the borders of the

leaves with most wonderful pencillings of light. His hand shakes the boughs in the autumn, and by the same law that brings forth Mazzaroth in his season, that guides Arcturus with his sons, conducts the trembling things to their forest grave at the foot of the trunk they had aided to foster. God buries all these leaves unhelped and alone. He is doing this all the time, far up in sylvan solitudes where never the eyes of a man have glanced, where the brook from the mountains "sings on and skips on, nor knows its loneliness." It is when a Christian contemplates such minute and delicate providences as the covenant of nature discloses that he understands the extraordinary personifications of the ancient imagery. The whole earth seems to be intelligently cheerful in the companionship of its benefactor: "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

The great practical force of all this any one can see at the first glance. Our Lord announced it in his Sermon on the Mount long ago: "And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"



---

God's definite purpose.

Division of labor.

---

II. But now let us couple with this thought another that is with equal clearness suggested in the text: EVERY HARVEST TEACHES THE FACT OF GOD'S DEFINITE PURPOSE, as well as God's special providence—the direct aim he has given to every one of his creatures.

You may be surprised at a statement like this, for no season seems to an unthinking mind so reckless and wild as the autumn. A platoon of soldiers firing at random would not be more promiscuously destructive than these harvest months appear to be. We have actually named them “the fall of the year.” For everything around us is just dropping out of service—blasted and swept away.

To understand this you must go back to that principle of division of labor which men have adopted in their mechanical arts for greater efficiency of human skill. The labors of the year are distributed. God gives to each one of his creatures its own individual work to do. Across the plain, and through the forest, and over the meadow, and along the hillside—everywhere you find laborers commissioned from heaven; not one of them impertinently trying to accomplish its neighbor's tasks, not one of them carelessly trying to throw off its own. Special results seem expected according to special investments of duty. Nature never made such a mistaken demand as to ask of the corn anything but its kernel, or of grass-spears anything more than their grain. Brambles are accepted when they bring in their berries just the same as

---

The singing voices.

“Wonders underground.”

---

vines when they bring in their grapes. And although this whole earth has been cursed by justice avenging man's sin, you cannot fail, after all, to mark that the annual fruits have been rendered wondrously well. The singing voices of the harvest have only one anthem to-day; every plant and tree and shrub and flower lifts its own solo of ascription, saying cheerfully, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”

Has it ever occurred to you how much the Almighty God really took in hand when he uttered the words of our text? He definitely engaged that there should never be any deluge again, that no overthrow of natural law should disturb the seasons, and that now for all future time this planet of ours should behave like an obedient child to the husbandman who trusted it with grain in hope of fidelity at the harvest. Just suppose he forgot his covenant only once!

“Oh, how awful is the thought of the wonders underground!  
Of the mystic changes wrought in the silent dark profound!  
How each thing is upward tending by necessity decreed,  
And the world's support depending on the shooting of a seed!”

One vast, magnificent purpose has kept everything in exact order during all these years of divine fidelity. And the single point you need to observe most closely is this: he has expected every one of his creatures to be as faithful to a purpose as he has been.

Take one of the most insignificant flowers in the

---

A flower's private history.Self-sacrifice in nature.

---

meadow for an illustration. Let a naturalist tell you of the private history it has wrought out since the spring opened. Let him show you how the leaves were held out on either side, like palms of two hands, just to catch the falling showers in their hollow; how they drew in unreckoned moisture by a million ducts unseen, transmitting it hastily into their great laboratory; how they distilled it and mingled and separated it and saturated it with sunshine and with mould, until it was ready to be lodged upon the spot where it was needed as an increment of growth; how they labored on thus for months, till the day arrived for a supreme effort to give forth a blossom; and then how they borrowed this little substance from the soil, and received that little substance from the atmosphere, and commissioned fluid messengers to go down to the roots for help; how they mysteriously wrought with exquisite skill the delicate tissues into new forms of beauty, until at last the petals and pistils came forward into life, and the field grew brilliant with a fresh flower.

That entire meadow could go on repeating the lesson. Let us remember that each small spear and leaflet, when it found that its parent stalk no longer had need of it—indeed, would be better if it would put itself out of the way—quietly sacrificed itself for the general good, dropped off the stem to let sunshine come unhindered. So the seed—that one great, precious thing, the seed—had its chance to be fashioned and ripened to fulness and grace.

---

Aimless men.

"This one thing I do."

You may learn thus very easily, by inquiring at each door of existence of Science, who is keeper of them all, that God has given for every one of his creations its fixed work in the orderly round of effort, as well as in the narrower circles of reciprocal duty.

There are men in the walks of every-day existence around us who have positively no aim whatever to their lives. You can remember more than one by name, I presume, to whom wealth had fallen by inheritance; pampered all his days and years of opening manhood until he stood in virile strength, he held within his reach ten thousand appliances for good. But what was his occupation? Ceaseless rounds of mere inane exercise. He had but this prayer, "Give me each day my daily bread," and that was addressed to his servants, and not to his God. The cycle of the twelve hours was spent in alluring to himself pleasures whose very luxury made them wearisome.

Contrast with such a life that of the earnest Paul, saying, as he hastens on his errands of mercy, "This one thing I do." Purpose is what registers manhood. When any Christian just lays both of his hands to some worthy effort, and determines that it shall eventually be accomplished—if the Lord will permit—there you easily predict perfection of force. No matter what it costs, let a man sacrifice external shows, as a tree surrenders beautiful leaves, in order to fashion great results. Nothing in this world is worth having unless it costs

---

Martyrs, though no stake.

What is your purpose ?

---

something. Sometimes there is presented us a fine picture in even that sublime self-sacrifice required to further a good end. Many a man has lived a martyr without being burned at any stake. He has given and surrendered and toiled away out of sight, and then seen others go in on the honors of his success. God alone keeps the records of unwritten history with accuracy. "And the harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels." Then all the fruits will be hanging on the right trees.

I am ready, my dear Christian friends, to close this sermon. Am I mistaken in supposing that you are in a thoughtful mood to-day? You have come up to this house of prayer cheerfully. Are not your hearts softened a little, so that you can take home with you a generous and devout sentiment for future use in meditation !

This rehearsal of the Covenant of Nature cannot fail to have kindled your minds with grateful admiration of the divine faithfulness in keeping up its promises for so many generations of plenty. But with the remembrance of God's providence ought also to be cherished remembrances of his purpose. Here alone can men even feebly imitate him. What are you doing from year to year? Round what determinate purpose of good are you folding the leaves of your labor? To what spiritual efforts are you bending your patient energies as Christian men and women? Is your life thoroughly religious?

You are familiar with the book of Ruth. You call it a sweet, beautiful idyl. But in the whole of



---

A greeting for Boaz.Considering the poor.

---

it you will find no verse finer than this record of a harvest: "And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you: and they answered him, The Lord bless thee." Think of it, what a flood of illustration such greetings fling upon the relations of that Eastern farmer Boaz with his hands! That good-morning of his was, "The Lord be with you;" and their reverent reply was, "The Lord bless thee." Not a sign of cant can you discover here, nor even a touch of sanctimoniousness. How familiarly affectionate and devout must have been the terms of association between this master and those who served him in the field!

And that leads to another suggestion. The Bible says this: "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in the time of trouble." Not *pitieth* the poor, not *supporteth* the poor, but considereth the poor; that is, cares for them, thinks of them, and treats them like men. You know how rugged, as a book for reading, Leviticus sometimes seems to be; but occasionally you fall upon some such singular passages as these among others: "And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God. When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a



---

The Israelite law.

"The Gospel of Leviticus."

sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive-tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing."

How kind and gentle this is! There is actually a poetic beauty in it. It is like that sunshiny smile we mark on the face of a laboring-man when the hesitant nurse has ventured to let him fondle his firstborn babe in his burly hands. Such verses must be those which old Thomas Berridge called "the Gospel of Leviticus."

And then once more: if God is so faithful to the Covenant of Nature, what shall narrow our confidence in him under the Covenant of Grace? For he has chosen the same forms of speech in them both: "For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. 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:

---

A garnerful of souls.

A strain passed in silence.

---

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."

In our ordinary church life, as the summer is the harvest-time for the granary, so the winters are the harvest-time for the Lord. Oh, how I wish this season might bring us in a garnerful of souls!

It is a pathetic tale to tell, but I do not vouch for its absolute truth, that once a famous composer wrote a great anthem to be sung at a festival. He sought to picture the scenes of the final judgment, and introduced a strain of music representing the solemn lamentations of the lost. But no singer was found willing to take such a part. So the wailings and woes were omitted; and when the passage was reached, the leader simply beat the time in silence till the awful chasm was passed, and the musicians took up gloriously the strains of celestial unison lying on the other side of it, "The shout of them that triumph, and the song of them who feast."

Oh, that in our Song of the Seasons this year there might be found not so much as one to sing that solemn habitual strain, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

## XXVI.

### FIGHTING BEASTS AT EPHEBUS.

“IF AFTER THE MANNER OF MEN I HAVE FOUGHT WITH BEASTS AT EPHEBUS, WHAT ADVANTAGETH IT ME?”—1 *Corinthians* 15:32.

It would be greatly to the satisfaction of our curiosity if we could mention exactly what was the historic form of trial which the Apostle Paul underwent in the old city of Ephesus. He says he fought with beasts. It is quite true that one of the most common and most severe methods of persecution employed by the imperial tyrants of those days was to condemn the faithful Christians to engage wild animals of the most savage sort in the arenas where professional gladiators had been wont hitherto to furnish brutal exhibitions for popular amusement. And there is an interpretation of this passage which insists that Paul was once compelled to fight literally with wild beasts, being driven into a theatre wherein the infuriated creatures had been let loose, half maddened by long previous starvation in their dens.

Indeed, imagination has caught up the story, and given us many of its details. There is on record in one of the early historical volumes, compiled in a marvel-loving age that flourished among myths and dim traditions, a tale containing all the particulars of this terrible exposure and admirable triumph of the apostle. From this we learn that he

---

The ancient tradition.

Figure, not fact.

---

braved the beasts most dauntlessly in the attack; and, while the audience waited to see him torn in pieces, he suddenly invoked the powerful interposition of high heaven with a wonderful gesture of his outstretched hand. The suppliant animals refused to do him harm. Lions came cringing to his feet, and, like so many tame dogs, began licking his wounds where the scourge-blows had broken the skin. This would be interesting, if it were true.

It so happens that we have in a letter written to these same Corinthians a complete catalogue of Paul's sufferings. He even arranges them in specific classes, as if an arithmetical enumeration of persecutions would be impressive. And fighting in the arena is not so much as mentioned among them. He counts he was three times beaten with rods, five times scourged, stoned once, shipwrecked on three occasions; he adds that he was in perils from his own nation and from the heathen, in the cities and in the wilderness, on land and on sea, among false brethren and among robbers; but he nowhere intimates that he was ever forced into conflict with the beasts of the amphitheatre in Ephesus or anywhere else in his life.

We understand this text, therefore, as taking its figurative form from one of the most familiar spectacles which met him on his journeys, and as describing in most vivid simile some violent oppositions into which he was thrust with men—men as hungry for his destruction as wild beasts might be conceived to be for his blood.

---

The Ephesian silversmiths.

"Pressed out of measure."

Now, turning to the Acts, where the circumstances of his stay within the precincts of Ephesus have been related by Luke, we discover that his quarrel was with certain silversmiths, who made their living by the sale of shrines for the goddess Diana. The earliest result of the preaching of Christ by the apostle was to break the entire confidence of the common people in all forms of idolatry; and so the regular trade languished. This these craftsmen indignantly resented, and their influence was sufficient to excite a riot over the whole city. The mob rushed to the theatre, and with utmost uproar, very like that of unintelligent beasts, worked off their passion in simply shouting, for two entire hours without intermission, their poor little creed, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

That the apostle was in utmost danger at the time is evident from the allusion he makes in the commencement of his second letter: "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us: ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf."

With such an interpretation of the words, then,

---

What good does fighting do?

One's "soul among lions."

---

you see that the question of the text comes legitimately within the reach of every Christian put under severe conflict. Even Paul did not crave this fierceness of resistance, unless some profit was to be gained from it in the end. When any good man is forced into a fight, the instinct of neighbors is to say to him, Now stand your ground: do be a man: flinch at nothing: hold your own! Meanwhile the man himself would fain ask, in the brief intervals of breathing-time, But what sort of good does it do? "If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me?"

For example: suppose a Christian has become in any such form or measure the representative of a principle that he has raised up for himself enemies and is now beleaguered with foes. Suppose him to be as hardly beset as was the Psalmist, when he cried out sadly, "My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword." In such a stress, what is he to do? When one is beneath the weight of slander; when he feels the malignant fire and strife of tongues, and yet knows at the moment that he holds in the secrecy of his own possession some documents or some evidences which would clear his case and bring him triumph, surely it requires more of grace than ordinary men have to remain tranquil and await the slow developments of divine providence. What good does it do to fight?

Now and then, too, we find a person under deep



---

The sea beating a rock-ledge.

Caroline Fry.

---

agitation and conflict from some old memory of pain, or bereavement, or betrayal, which will not be laid in peace. Many lives there are—brave and patient, for all their appearance of unrest—which have spent forlorn years in trying to overcome some vast sorrow, as the sea does when it rolls and sobs and moans against the rock-ledge that it is never able to melt. Oh, how easy it is to talk of affliction, how easy to weep tears, and repeat beautiful verses of hymns! But men have not yet known the meaning of mourning, until they have ceased to whisper about it—until they have walked the street in the midnight alone, and cried out in pain for a face that was hidden, and sighed aloud for a heart that was still. Not a shadow between the Christian's face and God's, mind you: the fight is not there. The wild beasts are in your own unhealed heart, broken years ago!

Suppose, once more, that these terrible conflicts are the inevitable offspring of our temperament, our disposition, the remaining corruptions of our nature. Let me call your attention to that most instructive incident which has been quoted from the biography of Caroline Fry. While one time very ill, she was told that she was likely now to die; at the best her hours were to be very few. She replied instantly and with fervor that she hoped she might die soon and suddenly. Afterwards she learned that this answer had struck some listeners with surprise. So she wrote thus: "As many will hear, and will not understand why I want no time

---

A sudden death.A heavy sense of sin.

---

of preparation, often desired by those far holier than I, I will tell you why, and shall tell others, and so shall you. It is not because I am so holy, but because I am so sinful. The peculiar character of my religious experience has always been a deep, an agonizing sense of sin; the sin of yesterday, of to-day, confessed with anguish hard to be endured and cries for pardon that could not be unheard; each day cleansed anew in Jesus' blood, and each day more and more hateful in mine own sight. What can I do in death that I have not done in life? What can I do during this week, when I am told I cannot live, other than I did last week when I knew it not? Alas, there is but one thing left undone—to serve him better; and the death-bed is no place for that: therefore I say, if I am not ready now, I shall not be by delay, so far as I have to do with it: if the Lord has more to do in me, that is his part; I need not beseech him not to spoil his work by too much haste." A few days later, just before she did die, she added further this sentence: "I wish there should be no mistake about the reason of my desire to depart and be with Christ: I confess myself the vilest, chiefest of sinners: I desire to go to him that I may be rid of the burden of my sin, the sin of my nature; not the past, repented of every day, but the present hourly, momentary sin, which I do commit or which I can commit, the very sense of which does at times drive me almost half mad with grief."

Now while many a Christian will pronounce such an experience morbid, there will be some who

---

"Its own bitterness."

A manly reminiscence.

---

will appreciate it fully. So of almost all these we have indicated. Every heart knoweth its own bitterness; it may not understand that of other hearts quite as well. The question returns, If after the manner of men Christians fight beasts within and without, what advantage is such conflict to them? It so happens that the inquiry has a right noble answer.

1. First of all, there is *the fine possession of a manly reminiscence*. We always have a high respect for a difficulty we have actually surmounted. We love to cherish some little secret of success, so that (if we would) we might make a riddle out of it, as Samson did after he had found some honey in the lion's carcass. Evermore there remains deep in our hearts the joyous consciousness for once at least of having stood true when under fire. Let the world gibe, we know now that we are not cowards. And in our prayers we can repeat the Psalmist's words, "For by thee I have run through a troop, and by my God have I leaped over a wall."

2. Then there is also *the advantage of a quickened growth in grace*. In all processes of advancement in real piety there is something to be taken away and something to be attained. Spiritual egotism must be rooted out earliest, for only with self-renunciation can the divine life so much as begin. True grace thrives best after the last remnant of our conceit is gone. Then a Christian actually pities and prays for and loves his tormentors; like the woodman's sandal-tree accepting the axe, he pours forth

---

Burkitt's experience.

The "three mighty men."

the best odors of his heart even on the sharp edge of the accusation which wounds him. The devout Burkitt has left behind him the record in his private journal that there were certain persons whom he knew who, for the injuries they had done him, first found place in his prayers. Conflict makes men sober and thoughtful; then it makes them gentle and kind; then it makes them forbearing and charitable.

3. Such qualities are full of force: so again, there must be reckoned advantage from conflict in *the power it brings for leadership among men*. When any great stress is on the community, it generally shows quite soon who are fitted for command. Men trust the veterans from hard-fought fields. Let me read to you a story from the Chronicles of Israel; it will teach you how men believe in men.

"And Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruah, was chief among three. And he lifted up his spear against three hundred, and slew them, and had the name among three. Was he not most honorable of three? therefore he was their captain: howbeit he attained not unto the first three. And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts, he slew two lionlike men of Moab: he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow. And he slew an Egyptian, a goodly man: and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own

David and Saul.

Fellowship with Christ.

spear. These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and had the name among three mighty men."

The truth is, the world knows its heroes and heroines when it does happen to find them, and pronounces upon their merits. But let me read to you again an old and familiar story; and so we shall learn how character is deepened, how champions in needy times are made.

"And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine. And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee."

4. Then, likewise, there is advantage derived from this fact: *conflict brings the believer into fellowship with Jesus Christ*, the Apostle and High Priest of our profession. Therein is inspiration. "For

---

“Contradiction of sinners.”

The heavenly outlook.

---

consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” Those who are persecuted for Christ’s sake receive precisely what he received: the disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord. Hence the apostle speaks plainly, “Rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad with exceeding joy.”

5. Finally, let us remember that conflict with earthly beasts *renders more luminously welcome the heavenly outlook*. Among those fine predictions that are given to encourage our hearts, one verse appears with this same similitude: “No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there.” Hence, all that other life will be peace and rest and satisfaction.

Just here a comment upon the text itself may be needful. As it stands in the chapter, it seems to be connected with the entire argument for the resurrection of the body: “If the dead rise not:” but it is better to link this clause with what comes after. Thus: “If the dead rise not, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.” The thought will be the same, no matter which way the words are taken. Paul argues the resurrection from a score of sources; and we have been assuming it as a proved doctrine from the beginning. If the dead rise not, the fighting with beasts is indeed folly; these advantages all assume the gladness of that other life for reward.

Especially this one we are dwelling upon now.



Pilgrims in Beulah-land.

Mr. Valiant-for-truth.

After this unceasing worry and weariness of contention, then comes peace, *peace!* How pitiful will the price seem which now appears so hard in present payment! How welcome will the quiet seem after the battle has been fought, and when the victors come forward to receive crowns!

I like sometimes to read over those wonderful speeches which John Bunyan puts in the mouth of his pilgrims in the Beulah-land: "After this it was noised abroad that Mr. Valiant-for-truth was taken with a summons by the same post as the other, and had this for a token that the summons was true, that his pitcher was broken at the fountain. When he understood it, he called for his friends, and told them of it. Then said he, 'I am going to my Father's; and though with great difficulty I have got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought his battles who will now be my rewarder.' When the day that he must go hence was come, many accompanied him to the river-side, into which as he went he said, 'Death, where is thy sting?' And as he went down deeper he said, 'Grave, where is thy victory?' So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side."

## XXVII.

### THE SIGH OF JESUS.

“AND LOOKING UP TO HEAVEN, HE SIGHED.”—*Mark 7:34*.

It has been recorded that our Lord Jesus Christ while on the earth “marvelled” twice: once at the greatness of a man’s faith (Matt. 8 : 10), and once at the greatness of the lack of faith (Mark 6 : 6). Twice, also, it is said that he “groaned:” once at a man’s death (John 11 : 33), and once at the same man’s resurrection (John 11 : 38). And twice we read that he “sighed:” once when he denied a miracle (Mark 8 : 12), and once when he wrought one (Mark 7 : 34). Of all the disciples Simon Peter alone, who is supposed to have given the facts of his Gospel to Mark, seems to have noticed and remembered this.

I. The general *study of the story* would furnish several very excellent and edifying lessons suggested by our Lord’s action in working this miracle upon the shore of Decapolis.

1. We might note, earliest, the wide reach of the Master’s zeal: “And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the Sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis.” Jesus had just come from Tyre and Sidon, clear across in a heathen land; he was now in the midst of some Greek settlements on the eastern shore of the Sea of Tiberias. We see how he appears thus going upon a foreign mission.

---

Need of friendly offices.Ingenuity of real sympathy.

---

2. Then, next, we might dwell upon the need of friendly offices in apparently hopeless cases. "And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him." At least two very important things these neighbors or comrades did for the dumb stammerer who was healed that day: they "bring," and they "beseech." We do not see how he could have reached his divine Helper or made known his wants without their assistance.

3. We might also mention, just here, the manipulations of our Saviour as illustrating the ingenuity of real sympathy. "And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue." It appears to have been a matter of care with Jesus that he should so vary his forms of procedure in working these many miracles that people should never come to think he had any fixed or indispensable method of cure. In this case surely he employed the most commonplace and simple means for help.

4. Even better still is our next lesson: we observe our Lord's respect for every one's private reserves of experience. "And he took him aside from the multitude privately." In order to avoid the conspicuousness of the action, he led this stranger away from the observation of the crowd. No doubt he wished the man to feel that he owed everything he received to this Galilean friend he had found. Jesus' performance was so very strange that it re-

quired an almost childlike trust in a stranger, for one to suffer himself to be put in such circumstances, and remain content while a bodily infirmity like this should be treated. We shall surely do better always, when we bring souls to the Saviour, if we respect the delicacy of their organization, and take them aside.

5. Now we notice the naturalness of all great services of good. "And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened." The lesson which we learned before, when Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus, is repeated here: at the supremely majestic moments of his life our Lord became simpler in utterance and behavior than at any other time. He fell back on the sweet and pathetic speech of his mother-tongue.

6. Again: we learn here the risks of every high and new attainment. "And his ears were opened, and the bond of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it. And they were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh even the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak." Imagination might be suffered to have a little indulgence, as we think of this deaf and dumb man so suddenly permitted to speak and to hear. What will he do with his gifts? He will be sure to hear some things now, in the unsuspecting companies who used to know him,

---

What deaf men escape.

Why did Jesus sigh?

which will hardly be to his edification. Before his relatives are accustomed to remembering that he can listen, they will blurt out some of the old comments upon his behavior. Deaf men lose a great deal, no doubt; some things they could afford to lose. And it comes to light in this story, also, that the fresh gift of articulate speech was rather abused by the man himself. His benefactor had some reasons for wishing the matter kept quiet. We feel that the dumb man strained his privilege of talking.

II. The singular *peculiarity of this story*, however, is what might be made the subject of more extended remark in a homiletic treatment. Three things meet us in their turn.

I. A *question* stands at the beginning: Why did our Lord sigh when he was looking up to heaven? We are surprised in an instance like this, for the occasion was such as that we should expect him to rejoice, rather than grow melancholy. He was at that moment about to confer a favor of the greatest magnitude, and relieve a trouble of the longest continuance. Every one is aware of the pleasure it gives to bring cure to a chronic weakness, or give a hope in the place of a humiliation. Somehow our Saviour seems depressed, and we look for a reason. But in the narrative there is furnished not even so much as a hint for our help. It is always difficult for any one to analyze the inner experience of Jesus to any degree that is satisfactory, because he brings it up to the surface of revelation so rarely. Possibly that is exactly why we prize so very much the

Ejaculatory prayer.

Some conjectures.

occasions on which he permits us to look into his heart and understand him.

2. We are left in this case to *conjecture*. And, in a general way, perhaps it would be enough to say that there was something like an ejaculatory prayer in this sigh of Jesus' soul; but, more likely, there was in it the outbreathing of sad and weary sympathy with the suffering of a fallen race like ours.

It may be he sighed because there was so much trouble in the world everywhere. What the Old Testament deemed characteristic of the Messiah, the New Testament deemed important enough to quote and apply directly to Jesus: "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." It seemed impossible for him to go or to be anywhere without their bringing hopeless invalids up to him.

It may be he sighed because there were many who made such poor work in dealing with their trouble. Men and women are not very brave in bearing pain. They are never extraordinarily ingenious in finding alleviations or extrications. Most afflicted people think they have a wider claim and a deeper suffering than anybody ever had except Jeremiah, whom they quote: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."

It may be he sighed because he could not altogether alleviate the trouble he found. Some worries were quite beyond the reach of his power. He



---

Alleviation sometimes impossible.Trouble starts with sin.

---

did not come to change the course of human affairs. Men are free agents; Jesus could not keep drunkards from killing themselves with strong drink if they would do it. It was not his errand on earth to crush in order to constrain. Afflictions are disciplines, and our Lord had no commission to abolish them. He came bringing the gospel, which in its own way would give relief; but for some things his tenderness would have to wait. So he must stand by and see those in tears and pain whom he tenderly loved. In the case of Mary and Martha his sympathy was so keen that he wept just as they did.

It may be he sighed because the trouble he met always had its origin and its aggravation in sin. This was the one thing which his adorable Father hated, and against which he was a "consuming fire." If men were obedient, there would be less worry. All those people that Jesus found in the cities of Phœnicians and Greeks, as well as all that he knew in his own land, were condemned by the holy law of his Father. They were living in defiance of his commandments day by day. He was trying to compel them to perceive this. But his parables hardened them.

It may be he sighed because so few persons were willing to forsake the sins which made the trouble. He said once plainly, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." There was room for them in the love of a pardoning God. It strikes even us that the generation he found was singularly unamiable and unapproachable. But thought-

---

Marius at Carthage.We need to "sigh" more.

---

ful Christians wonder, after all, whether it was any worse than this of ours. Greater light will fasten deeper responsibility, and our light is very bright.

It may be he sighed because the spectacle of a ruined and rebellious world saddened him. When the old prophet came back from captivity and found Jerusalem in fragments; when Marius returned and sat down among the broken stones of Carthage, we are not surprised to be told that they wept, though both were brave men. But these give but feeble illustration of the passionate mourning of soul which must have swept over the mind and heart of Jesus, who knew what this earth had been when it came forth pure from the creating hand of his Father. No wonder he walked heavily depressed and mournful all through his career.

3. It is time to end conjecture, and come at once now to the *admonition* we find here in the story. We need not lose our pertinent instruction in the picturesqueness of the scene; the rather, it may be hoped that the counsels will gain force.

Christians need more "sighs." There was a day when Jehovah sent an angel with an ink-horn by his side through Jerusalem, to set a mark upon the foreheads of those who, in their sad hearts, kept up a great, masterful, pitiful yearning for sinners' conversion, and a cry against the abominations of sin.

Christians must follow sighs with more "looking up to heaven." They are "a royal priesthood," and they have an office of intercession to

---

Sighing is praying.

"Sighing shall flee away."

exercise. The church will prosper when the Saviour sees that "the priests sigh," and "all the people sigh," and keep asking, "See, O Lord, and consider." "The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness. All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul: see, O Lord, and consider; for I am become vile."

Christians may cheer themselves with the prospect of a new life in which sighing shall be neither needed nor known. The Saviour shall then have seen of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped: then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. 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."

## XXVIII.

### FOUR PATRIARCHS.

“AND THE TIMES OF THIS IGNORANCE GOD WINKED AT; BUT NOW COMMANDETH ALL MEN EVERYWHERE TO REPENT.”—*Acts* 17:30.

MOST of us remember the year in which many Christians, the world over, were occupied with studying the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. It may be worth while to group together the stories of these great men, in order to quiet a few misgivings which have arisen. It cannot be doubted that the general necessities of the case required teachers to put a great deal of real praise, first and last, upon the character of each patriarch as it passed into analysis. At the same time, most of us will admit that we found a considerable number of knotty questions to answer. Specially, the details of immoral actions committed have cost us no little discussion with our classes all along the way.

I. What are these sins of the patriarchs? Will they amount to much when examined in the light of a devout scholarship?

Take, for example, the prevarication recorded of Abram in the twelfth chapter of Genesis: there we are told that “the Father of the Faithful” actually lied, and forced Sarai his wife to lie; and then reaped the advantage of his and her dishonor in gifts of oxen, sheep, and camels. Nor was that the

end of it. Not content with a wrong so disastrous with Pharaoh, he repeated the experiment afterwards with Abimelech. He proclaimed that his wife was his sister, and so exposed her to temptation and insulting proposals from the king of Gerar. Now, while we were studying that wonderful illustration of obedience in the offering of Isaac, we were obliged to remember that Abraham's life would have rounded out better if only he had always been straightforward in his speech.

Then, it does seem singular that Isaac must be caught perpetrating the same folly-stricken crime in the same way. Ninety-four years had passed, and now this second patriarch tells Abimelech that his wife is his sister, as did his father before him. It is quite possible that such falsehood escapes severer animadversion, because we are more arrested, in this tame life of Isaac, by the behavior of his two sons in that birthright affair. Even this suggests great weakness. Rebekah surely was in the conspiracy outwitting Esau; and we cannot help believing that all the career of those young men was warped by lack of proper control from their easy-going parents. One feels inclined to repeat in regard to Isaac the solemn arraignment that afterwards was made of the priest Eli: "For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

As Jacob began, he continued. His biography is a connected rehearsal of untrue words and unfair

---

Joseph's prevarication.A sin is a sin.

---

dealings. He stole his brother's blessing, and he tricked Laban out of his profit in the sheep. He forgot his early covenant. He indulged in a selfish partiality for Rachel's son. It has been a profound embarrassment for honest teachers to show how the Lord could choose such a man for so splendid a place in the infinite plans by which he was moving the race.

Next in the worrying line came Joseph; he called his brothers "spies," although he knew they told the truth when they protested they were "true men." He charged Judah with coming to "see the nakedness of the land," when he was perfectly intelligent concerning their errand to "buy food." He thrust Simeon into prison on a lying accusation; he caused his cup to be put in Benjamin's sack, in order that he might arraign him for the theft of it afterwards.

Our trouble with all these commonplace matters has been their pettiness. While we were talking about such great leading personages, it was pitiable to have to pause and tell those conscientious children they must respect them all in despite of their meannesses.

II. What are we to do with these historic facts when there is raised a question of morals? Are there any principles on which we may rest for some sort of satisfactory explanation?

1. For one thing, let us make no hesitation in pronouncing a sin to be a sin. For even a patriarch, it is not right to lie, or to deceive, or to cheat,



---

“Fatal imposture of words.”

The Bible non-committal.

---

or to make a false accusation. It cannot be necessary to employ what old Dr. South has named “the fatal imposture of words.” What is not right is wicked: “Woe unto them who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.” It has nowhere been revealed that we, in these later days of human history, are set at the task of defending those venerable servants of Jehovah from the buzzing of critics. But surely, if we attempt to perform it, the most ungracious method of procedure we could invent would be the denial of moral quality to the acts they exhibited. Our duty is to find out for ourselves and for others the real law of holy living, and then set all our energies into exercise in trying by Christ’s grace to reach obedience to it. The poorest of occupations for a man bound to the judgment is apologizing for sin. We can endure these imperfections if the Almighty endured them.

2. Then again: we must notice, and call others to notice, how non-committal the Bible is at times; it never approves these recorded instances of unrighteous dealing. See what discrimination was observed in the case of Abraham’s second prevarication. No comforting comment is made upon his ingenuity; but Abimelech is actually excused from blame: “And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart.” So no extenuation is offered for Sarai or her husband; the most we can discover is a charita-

---

God keeping silence.

Righteous retributions.

---

ble reserve. Indeed, we feel that the end is not at hand: Abraham will hear about this again. The whole story compels one to think of that high challenge in the fiftieth Psalm: "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee and set them in order before thine eyes." Such a verse as this needs study. Men infer that God is weak or unheeding, because they themselves condone a wrong when it appears politic to pass it by. But evidently when God says nothing about wickedness, he is waiting in his anger for the time of reckoning yet to come. I know nothing among all the disclosures of the Old Testament more awful than this dark warning in the silence of God. "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after."

3. And this leads us to notice, in the third place, that some help of exposition may be gained from the accounts of retributions received for these sins. They were not left altogether unpunished. Think of Abram's shame when he found that "the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife." Remember the "grief of mind" Isaac and Rebekah had over the hateful "daughters of Heth" Esau brought into the family. Mark that poetic justice revealed when Jacob is made to pour out his ill-gotten wealth, like life-blood from his veins, to propitiate his Edomite brother, his costly presents wet with his bitterest

---

The early standard.Casuistry unsettled.

---

tears. Recall the passionate vexation of Joseph because his firstborn, Manasseh, was disinherited in favor of Ephraim. In almost all cases recorded in the Pentateuch, one might find that sin eventually reached its limit and then found retribution. This is what the verse I have quoted means at the end: "I will reprove thee, and set them"—the sins committed, that is—"in order before thine eyes."

4. Once more: may we not even go so far as to admit that the standard of moral behavior was slightly different in those early ages? Men are to be judged according to the light they have. Real right is always the same, but the revelation of right was not then as clear as it is now, under the New Testament. It certainly seems charitable to remember that the education of the world has been advanced on the usual plan—line upon line, and precept upon precept. Men were taught and forborne with, and led along like children, all through the Old Testament. Paul says, "The law was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ." Even now, what we call in ethics "The Law of Veracity" is not settled. Casuists differ about "The Law of Liberty." "The Law of Property" could not have been respected intelligently, while the principle of retaliation was tolerated in the common statute. These four patriarchs stood at the head of the age in which they lived; but the age was backward. They ought to be called great men; but they would have been greater if these sins had never been committed. Are we not told in this text of ours that

once in history there were "times of ignorance" which even God "winked at"?

5. As to the divine selection of such imperfect creatures for agents in the plan of redemption, we are at liberty to insist upon the principle that God always chooses men for availability, and not for goodness. He brings forward this one here, and that one there, in order to accomplish his purpose; he grounds his preference upon their fitness to compass his ends. So in our analysis of scriptural character, we ought to look for the better qualities—Abraham's faith, Isaac's devoutness, Jacob's energy, Joseph's prudence—and other things like these, if we ask why God put such men in leading positions. If we go on looking always for virtue, seeking invariably for perfectness, and searching for striking evidences of sainthood in the divinely-chosen instruments of history, we shall often be simply disappointed. For God seems to have desired serviceableness, and to have condescended to employ imperfect and faulty men.

6. Finally, we can press the principle without limit that every man is now to be judged in the clearness of a greater light of revelation than ever before. It is no use to say for an excuse, "A patriarch did this or that;" we might as well cry out that on one occasion Paul showed ill-temper, and on one occasion Peter solemnly denied his Lord. "What is that to thee? Follow thou me." The historic characters of Scripture were never set up for our patterns. "Who art thou that judgest another

---

Christiana of Sweden.Our greater light.

---

man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth." It is a foolish waste of valuable time to sit criticising men that lived as long before Christ as we have lived since; we had better look at ourselves. We ought to be far better than these patriarchs. Christiana of Sweden wrote wisely: "Conscience is the only looking-glass that never deceives nor flatters." A calm contemplation of our own imperfection will prove that we have something more profitable to do than carping at Jacob's tricks or Abraham's follies: "The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."

With the path of life drawn plain and straight before our vision, and the sunshine of the gospel over it, clear and crystal, it may be that in the final judgment one false thought will count for more than Abram's prevarication, one polite "fib in society" for more than Joseph's mistaken policy with his brethren, one vengeful wish in our hearts for more than those crimes which led to David's struggles of penitence and contrition in the fifty-first Psalm.

## XXIX.

### THE THRONE AND THE RAINBOW.

“AND THERE WAS A RAINBOW ROUND ABOUT THE THRONE, IN SIGHT LIKE UNTO AN EMERALD.”—*Revelation 4:3.*

IT is evident that heaven itself was more than once actually exhibited to the apostle John in the Isle of Patmos. A fact so extraordinary cannot be lightly passed by. If it be lawful for him to tell what he saw, and for us to listen, then surely the Apocalypse will prove one of the most profitable books in the Bible for study.

We must discriminate concerning the chapters. On one occasion we find he is bidden to record his visions for an especial transmission to the churches: “Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.” On another occasion we find he is checked peremptorily just as he is about to put his pen to paper: “And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.” Unhallowed curiosity is forbidden; but certainly we ought to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Our text introduces us to one of the most brilliant of all the spectacles he ever witnessed; let us



---

The brilliant scene.Ezekiel's vision.

---

read the whole passage: "After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the Spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald."

Most Scripture students would be reminded immediately of a similar description given by the prophet Ezekiel: "And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. And I saw as the color of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake."

In both of these visions, the one in the Old Testament, the other in the New, our attention is at-

---

Throne means government.

Jasper and sardius.

---

tracted by the throne and the rainbow as the most conspicuous objects; but we cannot help thinking also that the position of these as related to each other is significant; for John repeats what Ezekiel says twice, that the rainbow was "round about" the throne.

So I judge that, after we have studied the meaning of the first symbol and the second symbol, we shall be glad to dwell upon the collocation of the two symbols.

I. In the beginning, then, let us look up at this wonderful throne. Of course, we understand such a thing to be the symbol of GOVERNMENT—of the divine government in the universe—for that Being in the seat of royalty is God. But what do the other emblems mean? The whole chapter seems to glitter with a blaze of precious jewels, some of them with strange names.

1. Observe, for example, that the exalted monarch is said to be "like a jasper and a sardine stone." I am not disposed to be fanciful in interpretation of Scripture, but I find the soberest commentators agreed in declaring that what is here called a "jasper" must be the diamond, and the "sardius" is only what we call a carnelian, that is, a *flesh-colored* gem in hue, as the word signifies. And hence these expositors would have us believe that this Personage, with a divine brightness and a human moderation in his look, is no one other than "the Lamb in the midst of the throne" whom John saw in his subsequent visions, and whom we recog-

A splendid government.

The royal retinue.

nize now as our Lord Jesus Christ, "God over all and blessed for ever."

So the earliest point I desire to make in this sermon, and with which, if I could, I would like powerfully to engage your attention, is this: the supreme advantage we have in knowing that we are under a splendid and sufficient government in this world of ours, where all appears so confused and independent. I confess my mind grows restful and glad when I look up and seem to see this dazzling diamond of infinite perfection subduing itself to my weak comprehension till it looks like a carnelian which I can gaze upon constantly, and yet live.

2. Then, next to this, observe in like manner the attendants which are represented as forming the king's retinue: "And round about the throne were four and twenty thrones: and upon the thrones I saw four and twenty elders sitting, arrayed in white garments; and on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceed lightnings and voices and thunders. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God."

Here again is a disclosure upon which it will cheer the Christian's heart to dwell. This is more than a splendid government; it must be amazingly potent and irresistibly strong. The very nobles are crowned, and wear royal raiment; their ordinary seats are thrones. It is a comfort to be assured that all these mutterings of foolish defiance in the earthly air are certain to find "thunderings" above them

---

“Full of eyes.”

“How doth God know?”

---

to be their sufficient answer in the great day of decision.

3. But does God know what his wicked and wilful creatures are doing so far away from his presence? That leads us forward another step in the vision, and we observe that this must be a very watchful government; the language is quite peculiar: there was “before the throne, as it were a glassy sea like unto crystal; and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face as of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, having each one of them six wings, are full of eyes round about and within.”

We cannot delay to examine in turn every one of these interesting symbols. It must be enough to say that the lion is the chief of wild beasts, as the ox is the chief of those tamed and domestic; the eagle is the king of the air, and man is the monarch among created things: each is sovereign and supreme of his kind, for the Lord God could receive no less into his court for his servants. But the main particular to notice in this description is the suggestion—here twice made—that they were all “full of eyes,” and the floor beneath the throne was of glass as transparent as crystal.

“And thou sayest, How doth God know? can he judge through the dark cloud?” That is the

human mistake which wicked men make, and so they grow bold in sin. But now this vision teaches that earth can always and everywhere be seen from heaven. The attendants of God's sovereignty are full of eyes, and the pavement is not a cloud, but a glass film. Not a saint shall suffer, not a sinner can sin, but that these eyes shall see, and these faithful voices shall announce it all.

4. Observe, once more, that this is an unimpeachable government. These living creatures are worshipping while watching: "they have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, which was and which is and which is to come. And when the living creatures shall give glory and honor and thanks to him that sitteth on the throne, to him that liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders shall fall down before him that sitteth on the throne, and shall worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power: for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they were, and were created."

No one can know better than those nearest to a monarch how pure he is. This king in the throne never broke one of his promises, never deceived one of his subjects, never forgot one of his creatures in its time of possible need.

For one, I could not live if I were an atheist; I could not be satisfied with just being a deist; I can

---

The rainbow means a covenant.

A bow over the Bible.

---

be thoroughly content only when I am a Christian, positively subject to Christ; for then I understand that I am under a government, splendid, strong, watchful, and unimpeached; and so am perfectly safe.

II. Thus much does this first symbol in the vision teach. Now we come to study the second: the "rainbow, in sight like unto an emerald." This represents a COVENANT, as the other represented a rule. I do not need more than to turn your attention back to the familiar words recorded in the book of Genesis: "And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth."

Here now we suddenly find that the rainbow spans not only nature, but even the Bible also; it reaches from Genesis to Revelation; it shines from the Pentateuch to the Apocalypse.

1. Observe then, first, that the ancient covenant



---

Noah's sign repeated for John.

Thaumas and Electra.

---

of creation has in it the promise of the covenant of grace. This is Noah's bow repeated with fresh and better engagements for John.

Let me call your attention to the strange way in which God has written his divine law upon the fleshly tables of the hearts of men. Even in natural religion, so called to distinguish it from revealed, there are glimmering signs of the gospel. The heathen had in their mythological annals the story of Iris. This divine being was said to have been the child of *Thaumas*—that is, Wonder—and of *Electra*—that is, Brightness, and her own name Iris signifies *word*, or speech. What is this except to say that the beautiful brightness bent across the storm was meant for the inarticulate word of a covenant engagement?

So the Hindoos call the rainbow "the weapon of Indras," the Germans named it *Bifrost*, or "the living way;" and the Samoieds said that it was "the border of the Supreme God's robe." Thus everywhere among men this arch of prismatic color on the cloud seems to have kept its place as a recognized sign of a divine covenant. The human soul has been determined to see in it something beyond the ordinary course of nature; it was more than a spectacle, it was more than a phenomenon; it was a promise.

2. But now notice again, that its appearance just here in John's vision is welcomed more for its graciousness than for its antiquity. No one can read the Bible without noticing more and more

---

The God of nature and grace.

Isaiah's prediction.

---

plainly that the God of nature desires to transfer the allegiance of his creatures so that they may fully recognize him as the God of grace. Every now and then the links between the two kingdoms are exhibited to our clear perception. It is out of the whirlwind that Jehovah talks to Job concerning his sins.

Now would any one assert that it was a mere poetic conceit which led Isaiah to cast his predictions in the language of Moses when he was foretelling the grand glories of the visions of John? What can be finer for our present illustration, as we are looking up at this rainbow round about the throne, than those old words of the prophet written before Jesus was born, fifteen centuries after the deluge, and seven centuries previous to the Apocalypse, yet announcing the same promise?

“For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee.”

Here the Almighty reasons across from nature

---

God's covenant complete.

The Eye of Jehovah.

---

to grace along the similitude of the rainbow. It is as if he said: "I have once destroyed the world, but I will never do such a thing again; I have kept my covenant in that matter, and there is the sign; so I will keep my covenant engagement to save souls from wrath; and that mortals may trust me I will employ the same sign; the rainbow I once set in the cloud I now draw round my throne."

3. Once more: observe how well this vision teaches us that God's covenant is completed. If one climbs a hill at sunset, he can see more than half of the arch across the cloud. If a man should go to the other side of this round world, he could conceive that the ends of the rainbow he might be looking at were resting on the reversed ends of ours. The circle would appear to be unbroken. And a perfect circle is the finest figure we could imagine of the covenant of God's love fully complete.

Now understand: this rainbow is a circle; it goes around the throne. The conception fairly dazzles our imagination as we fancy ourselves looking up into heaven, and seeing such a vast emerald band of brilliance sweeping above and below the seat of the Monarch. One of the great German commentators likens it to the Eye of Jehovah: we see him face to face—Iris looks up to meet Iris looking down. Oh, it is wonderful thus to think of God's creature gazing unabashed at his Creator, the child of grace turning his eyes towards his Father who invites him!

4. In the fourth place, the symbols here em-

---

The green color.

The covenant immutable.

---

ployed seem to teach that this is an abiding covenant: it will stand for ever. Our attention is arrested by the unusual color which is particularly mentioned. Only one of the seven in the spectrum is represented—green; this is the hue of the emerald. Dean Alford suggests that the vision in this instance did not show the rainbow with all the ordinary divisions of the prism; this singular rainbow was only green, the other colors were invisible.

It will not do to pass by the historic fact that in oriental countries this one color out from the rest is the emblem of unchangeableness. It signifies fidelity, incorruptible and for ever to be trusted. The ancient Hindoos portrayed the tireless chariot of the sun as drawn by seven green horses. In many of the imperial courts green is the exclusive tint for turbans and robes to be worn by the sovereigns and the reigning families. A religious sacredness is sometimes attached to it. Only the family of Mohammed, the lineal descendants of the great prophet, are permitted to wear it in their dresses among the faithful followers of Islam throughout all lands where that system of belief and worship is considered as established.

Now it is not likely that our impressions gained from the vision we are studying will be as vivid and permanent as were those of some who earliest read the account of it; we shall not be influenced perhaps so much by this single particular of color; but it would be folly to lose the force of it altogether; we

certainly can rejoice in the thought that our Maker is a covenant-keeping God. Even though the instruction comes from no higher source than the hue of the rainbow, immutability is welcome.

5. Only one more lesson remains: that is, this covenant is to each of us individual and personal. We know how the prismatic spectrum is formed; the sun's rays strike on the shower-drops and are so refracted and reflected that the beam is divided and the colors come apart. Thus we see the circular line of light forming a vast circumference of which our own eye is the exact centre. Each beholder is the master and owner of his particular arch in the heavens. Thus it comes to pass that we are sure no two persons ever see the same iris even on the clouds of the same storm, though they are almost side by side in their outlook; for there are different drops which fall into the angle of range, and different sunbeams to touch them.

Do not waste this conception in admiration of the beautiful phenomenon of nature. God's covenant is made with a generous distribution of grace, but to each reception and bestowment of favor there are only two parties—himself and a single believer. My covenant of redemption and sanctification, like my rainbow, is simply and always my own, and yours is all your own. Each one of us needs a whole promise; but the great good Sun of Righteousness has enough beams to shine brightly on us all.

III. Thus now we have reached the third and



---

The two symbols.Promise and Majesty.

---

last point for our consideration mentioned in the beginning; namely, the COLLOCATION of the two symbols. The rainbow was "round about the throne." Whatever was included in the emblematic teaching of the throne as an oriental sign of kingly rule must be considered as modified by whatever was included in the teaching of the rainbow as the symbol of kingly promise. For the throne did not embrace the rainbow, but the rainbow embraced the throne.

We must get this clear in the outset. The throne signified, as we have seen, a government—splendid, strong, watchful, and unimpeached. The rainbow signified a covenant—old in origin, gracious in nature, complete in revelation, abiding in duration, and personal in ownership. Now we are told that this covenant has this government enclosed within it. So we are prepared to draw from this some fresh practical lessons.

1. First, *God's promise surrounds God's majesty.* It is possible to receive and to hold the idea of our Maker as truly merciful and kind even in the moment of his most sovereign and most mysterious discipline. But often the mind becomes beclouded, and needs a reiteration—a reassertion—of the old fixed truths of the gospel. There could have been conceived no method more effective than the early plan of perpetuating a covenant engagement by a conspicuous memorial in the sky, and then passing it across from nature into grace. Now we know that mercy is "round about" sovereignty, and



Homer's Iliad.

The Word and the Name.

measures it in exercise, so that we are at liberty to talk about "sovereign grace."

Furthermore, thus and thus only does it seem to us possible for God to speak to all nations on the face of the earth at once and intelligibly. Ever since the sinful folly of Babel men have been confused in language; they have to communicate with each other by signs. So God gave a sign which all alike could read. This beautiful bow in the heavens was a sentence without syllables, a covenant that could be read without speech. Even the heathen saw that. A familiar and most remarkable passage in Homer's Iliad speaks of the "rainbow which Jove fixed in the cloud as a sign to men of many languages." No matter what tongue men use, they can understand this token. For at last we see as well as feel what we sing in the Psalm, "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven."

The ancient Rabbins used to render the verse in Genesis concerning the rainbow thus: "It shall be a sign between my word and all the earth." So now we look up at this vision of John, and we learn to rest in our Creator. We are not left to vague considerations of Jehovah's consistency with his own character, or, as we sometimes phrase it, "his name;" we dwell upon his uttered and recorded language of blessing: "Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." The Word is "round about" the Name; the rainbow is round about the throne.

2. Next to this lesson comes another of equal

welcome: we learn that *God's grace surrounds God's justice*. We lift our eyes, and see this rainbow as really the most conspicuous thing in the vision. Its vast emerald arch shines all around the supreme tribunal on the floor of crystal. The suggestion is immediately clear; it is a comfort that we are now under the New Testament. The storm which Noah's rainbow pledged should never return was but a deluge of water; the rainbow we are looking at here is a pledge against a deluge of wrath. Hence, the scene becomes evangelical; the gospel includes and fulfils the law.

Take an actual expression of fact as an explanation of the mystery which the vision pictures. You will remember that very singular passage in the prophecy of Hosea, in which, after the most severe denunciations of the tribe of Ephraim for their sins, the Almighty is represented as yearning over them still, reluctant to inflict the punishments he had threatened, and at the last suddenly reversing his decision, and offering favor: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah; how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city." To put such language into this spectacle which John describes is simply to say that Justice in the throne rose up demanding

Mercy and Wrath.

The Lamb crowned.

retribution upon the transgressors: but Grace in the rainbow interposed and restrained the infliction of the penalty.

God's mercy tempers God's wrath; he is God and not man, and so the infinite mystery is provided for by an atonement for the iniquity which merited the judgment of destruction. This is the reason why the story in the Apocalypse goes on with the song of the singing legions of God, ascribing glory and honor to him who sits in the throne. This explains why the form is that of the Lamb instead of the Lion of Judah. But Jesus, the Christ of God, has received as yet only a portion of what is coming to him; and the rainbow remains shining still as a sign that all the rest of it will arrive in due time: "Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man."

Hence, we conclude that the throne is here exhibited for the sake of the rainbow; the covenant remains, as it were, holding the justice; the Lamb of God is crowned because, by the grace of God, he has tasted death for every man who will receive him.

3. Once more: we learn from this scene that

Love and Power.

The other instance.

*God's love surrounds God's power.* Love is symbolized in the rainbow, and power in the throne; and the rainbow is round about the throne. The attribute of omnipotence is not a pleasant one in itself to contemplate. If we should look up at this glorious spectacle and see only the throne, we might be frightened. We should be hushed into trembling silence before the thunder which shakes the cedars, tosses the waves of the ocean, and counts the mountains but as a very little thing. But we see the bow round about the throne; our eyes behold and our hearts believe that whatever is alarming in our thought of the Supreme Being who rules us is embraced in a beautiful circle of emerald promise which gives peace. And this is better than to be told merely by words. The venerable Hooker was uttering something more than a simple rule of rhetoric when he once said, "What we drink in at our ears doth not so piercingly enter as what the mind doth conceive by sight." It does not seem as if any one could ever forget this arch of promise above and around this seat of power.

Nor is this all: I am constrained to bring before your remembrance another reference in this same Apocalypse, the only instance besides this in which the rainbow is mentioned; here the teaching will be found to be similar: "And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire."

What makes such language of symbolic description so significant is the fact that this angel was at the moment going forth from heaven on an errand of retribution. His purpose is clear; he is to inflict divine judgments upon the guilty. Yet we see that even around his head is the rainbow of covenant grace also. It is plain that the Holy Ghost would have us understand that always and everywhere love is the companion and the restraint of power; it embraces and surrounds its exercise even in doom.

The ancient Hebrews had one doxology which it was prescribed that every one should use whose heart desired devoutly to praise the Almighty on the departure of a storm. Every worshipper must sing, on the instant the rainbow appeared along the surface of the retreating cloud, "Blessed be thou, Jehovah our God, King of eternity, ever mindful of thy covenant, faithful in thy promise, firm in thy word." How much more fitting is such an ascription, when we see the rainbow in these gospel days. We need nevermore be alarmed when we think of the omnipotent Deity of earth and heaven; all the power we dread is engaged on our side, and remains pledged for our safety and our salvation.

"The light of love is round his feet, his paths are never dim;  
And he comes nigh to us when we dare not come nigh to him."

4. Finally, we learn from this scene that in heaven *God's glory surrounds God's children*. For just look up and see the position and collocation of

---

The twelve thrones.Saints shall judge angels.

---

these two objects; the emerald ring is all around the sapphire seat of royalty. Then we recall the astonishing words which our divine Lord once spoke to his disciples: "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." I am not certain that I know altogether just what that declaration means. There is another verse much resembling it in the epistle to the Laodiceans which has been put in this same book of Revelation: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Such language is astonishing and beyond all precedent mysterious. Only one thing appears plain; it does not seem as if the verses could mean anything less than that all those who love God and are the co-heirs with Jesus Christ shall be with him where he is, and shall share in his glory. Even the sober-minded Paul asks the question, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? know ye not that we shall judge angels?"

We look up again at this spectacle before it leaves our eyes. The throne is inside of the rainbow: the saints are beside the Lamb in the throne; whoever, therefore, is in the throne has the rainbow around him; each child of God is a child of the covenant, well-ordered and sure. We may care little for the implied princeship; but, oh, it will be



---

Saved by grace.

Throned with Jesus.

---

glorious to be sure we are under the shining of the emerald ring. Saved by grace, and throned with Jesus—that is heaven. And they who have left us are now safe; the throne is fixed, and round the throne there is the rainbow of the covenant, “in sight like unto an emerald.”

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 021 623 678 6

