

EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ST. LUKE

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ELIJAH COME AGAIN

'There was, in the days of Herod the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. 6. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. 7. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren; and they both were now well stricken in years. 8. And it came to pass, that, while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, 9. According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. 10. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. 11. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. 13. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. 14. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. 15. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. 16. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. 17. And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.'

Luke 1:5-17

The difference between the style of Luke's preface (vs. 1-4) and the subsequent chapters relating to the Nativity suggests that these are drawn from some Hebrew source. They are saturated with Old Testament phraseology and constructions, and are evidently translated by Luke. It is impossible to say whence they came, but no one is more likely to have been their original narrator than Mary herself. Elisabeth or Zacharias must have communicated the facts in this chapter, for there is no indication that those contained in this passage, at all events, were known to any but these two.

If we were considering a fictitious story, we should note the artistic skill which prepared for the appearance of the hero by the introduction first of his satellite; but the order of the narrative is due, not to artistic skill, but to the divinely ordered sequence of events. It was fitting that John's office as Forerunner should begin even before his birth. So the story of his entrance into the world prepares for that of the birth which hallows all births.

I. We have first a beautiful outline picture of the quiet home in the hill country. The husband and wife were both of priestly descent, and in their modest lives, away among the hills, were lovely types of Old Testament godliness. That they are pronounced 'blameless' militates against no doctrine of universal sinfulness. It is not to be taken as dogma at all, but as the expression of God's merciful estimate of His servants' characters. These two simple saints lived, as all married believers should do, yoked together in the sweet exercise of godliness, and helping each other to all high and noble things. Hideous corruption of wedlock reigned round them. Such profanations of it as were shown later by Herod and Herodias, Agrippa and Bernice, were but too common; but in that quiet nook these two dwelt 'as heirs together of the grace of life,' and their prayers were not hindered.

The most of the priests who appear in the Gospels are heartless formalists, if not worse; yet not only Annas and Caiaphas and their spiritual kindred ministered at the altar, but there were some in whose hearts the ancient fire burned. In times of religious declension, the few who still are true are mostly in obscure corners, and live quiet lives, like springs of fresh water rising in the midst of a salt ocean. John thus sprang from parents in whom the old system had done all that it could do. In his origin, as in himself, he represented the consummate flower of Judaism, and discharged its highest office in pointing to the coming One.

This 'blameless' pair had a crook in their lot. Childlessness was then an especial sorrow, and many a prayer had gone up from both that their solitary home might be gladdened by children's patter and prattle. But their disappointed hope had not made them sour, nor turned their hearts from God. If they prayed about it, they would not murmur at it, and they were not thereby hindered from 'walking in all God's commandments and ordinances blameless.' Let us learn that unfulfilled wishes are not to clog our devotion, nor to silence our prayers, nor to slacken our running the race set before us.

II. We are carried away from the home among the hills to the crowded Temple courts. The devout priest has come up to the city, leaving his aged wife in solitude, for his turn of service has arrived. Details of the arrangements of the sacerdotal 'courses' need not detain us. We need only note that the office of burning incense was regarded as an honour, was determined by lot, and took place at the morning and evening sacrifice. So Zacharias, with his censer in his hand, went to the altar which stood in front of the veil, flanked on the right hand by the table of shewbread, and on the left by the great lamp-stand. The place, his occupation, the murmur of many praying voices without, would all tend to raise his thoughts to God; and the curling incense, as it ascended, would truly symbolise the going up of his heart in aspiration, desire, and trust. Such a man could not do his work heartlessly or formally.

Mark the manner of the angel's appearance. He was not seen as in the act of coming, but was suddenly made visible standing by the altar, as if he had been stationed there before; and what had happened was not that he came, but that Zacharias's eyes were opened. So, when Elisha's servant was terrified at the sight of the besiegers, the prophet prayed that his eyes might be opened, and when they were, he saw what had been there before, 'the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire.' Not the Temple courts only, but all places are full of divine messengers, and we should see them if our vision was purged. But such considerations are not to weaken the supernatural element in the appearance of this angel with his message. He was sent, whatever that may mean in regard to beings whose relation to place must be different from ours. He had an utterance of God's will to impart.

It has often been objected to these chapters that they are full of angelic appearances, which modern thought deems suspicious. But surely if the birth of Jesus was what we hold it to have been, the coming into human life of the Incarnate Son of God, it is not legend that angel wings gleam in their whiteness all through the story, and angel voices adore the Lord of men as well as angels, and angel eyes gaze on His cradle, and learn new lessons there.

III. We have next the angel's message. The devoutest heart is conscious of shrinking dread when brought face to face with celestial brightness that has overflowed into our darkness. So 'Fear not' is the first word on the messenger's lips, and one can fancy the accent of sweetness and the calm of heart which followed. It has

often been thought that Zacharias had been praying for offspring while he was burning incense; but the narrative does not say so, and besides the fact that he had ceased to hope for children (as is shown by his incredulity), surely it casts a slur on his religious character to suppose that personal wishes were uppermost at so sacred a moment. Prayers that he had long ago put aside as finally refused, now started to life again. God delays often, but He does not forget. Blessings may come to-day as the result of old prayers which have almost passed from our memory and our hope.

Observe how brief is the announcement of the child's birth, important as that was to the father's heart, and how the prophecy lingers on the child's future work, which is important for the world. His name, character, and work in general are first spoken, and then his specific office as the Forerunner is delineated at the close. The name is significant. 'John' means 'The Lord is gracious.' It was an omen, a condensed prophecy, the fulfilment of which stretched beyond its bearer to Him as whose precursor alone was John a token of God's grace.

His character (ver. 15) puts first 'great in the sight of the Lord.' Then there are some whom God recognises as great, small as we all are before Him. And His estimate of greatness is not the world's estimate. How Herod or Pilate or Caesar, or philosophers at Athens, or rabbis in Jerusalem would have scoffed if they had been pointed to the gaunt ascetic pouring out words which they would have thought wild, to a crowd of Jews, and been told that that was the greatest man in the world (except One)! The elements of greatness in the estimate of God which is truth, are devotion to His service, burning convictions, intense moral earnestness, superiority to sensuous delights, clear recognition of Jesus, and humble self-abnegation before Him. These are not the elements recognised in the world's Pantheon. Let us take God's standard.

John was to be a Nazarite, living not for the senses, but the soul, as all God's great ones have to be. The form may vary, but the substance of the vow of abstinence remains for all Christians. To put the heel on the animal within, and keep it well chained up, is indispensable, if we are ever to know the buoyant inspiration which comes from a sacred source than the fumes of the wine-cup. Like John, we must flee the one if we would have the other, and be 'filled with the Holy Ghost.'

The consequence of his character is seen in his work, as described

generally in verse 16. Only such a man can effect such a change, in a time of religious decay, as to turn many to God. It needs a strong arm to check the downward movement and to reverse it. No one who is himself entangled in sense, and but partially filled with God's Spirit, will wield great influence for good. It takes a Hercules to stop the chariot racing down hill, and God's Herculeses are all made on one pattern, in so far that they scorn delights, and empty themselves of self and sense that they may be filled with the Spirit.

John's specific office is described in verse 17, with allusion to the closing prophecy of Malachi. That prophecy had kindled an expectation that Elijah, in person, would precede Messiah. John was like a reincarnation of the stern prophet. He came in a similar epoch. His characteristic, like Elijah's, was 'power,' not gentleness. If the earlier prophet had to beard Ahab and Jezebel, the second Elijah had Herod and Herodias. Both haunted the desert, both pealed out thunders of rebuke. Both shook the nation, and stirred conscience. No two figures in Scripture are truer brethren in spirit than Elijah the Tishbite and John the Baptist.

His great work is to go before the Messiah, and to prepare Israel for its King. Observe that the name of the coming One is not mentioned in verse 17. 'Him' is enough. Zacharias knew who 'He' was. But observe, too, that the same mysterious person is distinctly called 'The Lord,' which in this connection, and having regard to the original prophecy in Malachi, can only be the divine name. So, in some fashion not yet made plain, Messiah's advent was to be the Lord's coming to His people, and John was the Forerunner, in some sense, of Jehovah Himself.

But the way in which Israel was to be prepared is further specified in the middle clauses of the verse, which are also based on Malachi's words. The interpretation of 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children' is very doubtful; but the best explanation seems to be that the phrase means to bring back to the descendants of the ancient fathers of the nation the ancestral faith and obedience. They are to be truly Abraham's seed, because they do the works and cherish the faith of Abraham. The words imply the same truth which John afterwards launched as a keen-edged dart, 'Think not to say, We have Abraham to our father.' Descent after the flesh should lead to kindred in spirit. If it does not, it is nought.

To turn 'the disobedient to the wisdom of the just' is practically

the same change, only regarded from another point of view. John was sent to effect repentance, that change of mind and heart by which the disobedient to the commands of God should be brought to possess and exercise the moral and religious discernment which dwells only in the spirits of the righteous. Disobedience is folly. True wisdom cannot be divorced from rectitude. Real rectitude cannot live apart from obedience to God.

Such was God's intention in sending John. How sadly the real effects of his mission contrast with its design! So completely can men thwart God, as Jesus said in reference to John's mission, 'The Pharisees and lawyers frustrated the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.' Let us take heed lest we bring to nothing, so far as we are concerned, His gracious purpose of redemption in Christ!

TRUE GREATNESS

He shall be great in the sight of the Lord.'--LUKE 1:15.

So spake the angel who foretold the birth of John the Baptist. 'In the sight of the Lord'--then men are not on a dead level in His eyes. Though He is so high and we are so low, the country beneath Him that He looks down upon is not flattened to Him, as it is to us from an elevation, but there are greater and smaller men in His sight, too. No epithet is more misused and misapplied than that of 'a great man.' It is flung about indiscriminately as ribbons and orders are by some petty State. Every little man that makes a noise for a while gets it hung round his neck. Think what a set they are that are gathered in the world's Valhalla, and honoured as the world's great men! The mass of people are so much on a level, and that level is so low, that an inch above the average looks gigantic. But the tallest blade of grass gets mown down by the scythe, and withers as quickly as the rest of its green companions, and goes its way into the oven as surely. There is the world's false estimate of greatness and there is God's estimate. If we want to know what the elements of true greatness are, we may well turn to the life of this man, of whom the prophecy went before him that he should be 'great in the sight of the Lord.' That is gold that will stand the test.

We may remember, too, that Jesus Christ, looking back on the career to which the angel was looking forward, endorsed the prophecy and declared that it had become a fact, and that 'of them that were born of women there had not arisen a greater than John the Baptist.' With the illumination of His eulogium we may turn to this life, then, and gather some lessons for our own guidance.

I. First, we note in John unwavering and immovable firmness and courage.

'What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?' Nay! an iron pillar that stood firm whatsoever winds blew against it. This, as I take it, is in some true sense the basis of all moral greatness--that a man should have a grip which cannot be loosened, like that of the cuttle-fish with all its tentacles round its prey, upon the truths that dominate his being and make him a hero. 'If you want me to weep,' said the old artist-poet, 'there must be tears in your own eyes.' If you want me to believe, you yourself must be aflame with conviction which has penetrated to the very

marrow of your bones. And so, as I take it, the first requisite either for power with others, or for greatness in a man's own development of character, is that there shall be this unwavering firmness of grasp of clearly-apprehended truths, and unflinching boldness of devotion to them.

I need not remind you how magnificently, all through the life of our typical example, this quality was stamped upon every utterance and every act. It reached its climax, no doubt, in his bearding Herod and Herodias. But moral characteristics do not reach a climax unless there has been much underground building to bear the lofty pinnacle; and no man, when great occasions come to him, develops a courage and an unwavering confidence which are strange to his habitual life. There must be the underground building; and there must have been many a fighting down of fears, many a curbing of tremors, many a rebuke of hesitations and doubts in the gaunt, desert-loving prophet, before he was man enough to stand before Herod and say, 'It is not lawful for thee to have her.'

No doubt there is much to be laid to the account of temperament, but whatever their temperament may be, the way to this unwavering courage and firm, clear ring of indubitable certainty, is open to every Christian man and woman; and it is our own fault, our own sin, and our own weakness, if we do not possess these qualities. Temperament! what on earth is the good of our religion if it is not to modify and govern our temperament? Has a man a right to jib on one side, and give up the attempt to clear the fence, because he feels that in his own natural disposition there is little power to take the leap? Surely not. Jesus Christ came here for the very purpose of making our weakness strong, and if we have a firm hold upon Him, then, in the measure in which His love has permeated our whole nature, will be our unwavering courage, and out of weakness we shall be made strong.

Of course the highest type of this undaunted boldness and unwavering firmness of conviction is not in John and his like. He presented strength in a lower form than did the Master from whom his strength came. The willow has a beauty as well as the oak. Firmness is not obstinacy; courage is not rudeness. It is possible to have the iron hand in the velvet glove, not of etiquette-observing politeness, but of a true considerateness and gentleness. They who are likest Him that was 'meek and lowly in heart,' are surest to possess the unflinching resolve which set His face like a flint, and enabled Him to go unhesitatingly and unrecalcitrant to the Cross itself.

Do not let us forget, either, that John's unwavering firmness wavered; that over the clear heaven of his convictions there did steal a cloud; that he from whom no violence could wrench his faith felt it slipping out of his grasp when his muscles were relaxed in the dungeon; and that he sent 'from the prison'--which was the excuse for the message--to ask the question, 'After all, art Thou He that should come?'

Nor let us forget that it was that very moment of tremulousness which Jesus Christ seized, in order to pour an unstinted flood of praise for the firmness of his convictions, on the wavering head of the Forerunner. So, if we feel that though the needle of our compass points true to the pole, yet when the compass-frame is shaken, the needle sometimes vibrates away from its true direction, do not let us be cast down, but believe that a merciful allowance is made for human weakness. This man was great; first, because he had such dauntless courage and firmness that, over his headless corpse in the dungeon at Machaerus, might have been spoken what the Regent Moray said over John Knox's coffin, 'Here lies one that never feared the face of man.'

II. Another element of true greatness that comes nobly out in the life with which I am dealing is its clear elevation above worldly good.

That was the second point that our Lord's eulogium signalled. 'What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?' But you would have gone to a palace, if you had wanted to see that, not to the reed-beds of Jordan. As we all know, in his life, in his dress, in his food, in the aims that he set before him, he rose high above all regard for the debasing and perishable sweetnesses that appeal to flesh, and are ended in time. He lived conspicuously for the Unseen. His asceticism belonged to his age, and was not the highest type of the virtue which it expressed. As I have said about his courage, so I say about his self-denial--Christ's is of a higher sort. As the might of gentleness is greater than the might of such strength as John's, so the asceticism of John is lower than the self-government of the Man that came eating and drinking.

But whilst that is true, I seek, dear brethren, to urge this old threadbare lesson, always needed, never needed more than amidst the senselessly luxurious habits of this generation, needed in few places more than in a great commercial centre like that in which we

live, that one indispensable element of true greatness and elevation of character is that, not the prophet and the preacher alone, but every one of us, should live high above these temptations of gross and perishable joys, should

'Scorn delights and live laborious days.'

No man has a right to be called 'great' if his aims are small. And the question is, not as modern idolatry of intellect, or, still worse, modern idolatry of success, often makes it out to be, Has he great capacities? or has he won great prizes? but has he greatly used himself and his life? If your aims are small you will never be great; and if your highest aims are but to get a good slice of this world's pudding--no matter what powers God may have given you to use--you are essentially a small man.

I remember a vigorous and contemptuous illustration of St. Bernard's, who likens a man that lives for these perishable delights which John spurned, to a spider spinning a web out of his own substance, and catching in it nothing but a wretched prey of poor little flies. Such a one has surely no right to be called a great man. Our aims rather than our capacity determine our character, and they who greatly aspire after the greatest things within the reach of men, which are faith, hope, charity, and who, for the sake of effecting these aspirations, put their heels upon the head of the serpent and suppress the animal in their nature, these are the men 'great in the sight of the Lord.'

III. Another element of true greatness, taught us by our type, is fiery enthusiasm for righteousness.

You may think that that has little to do with greatness. I believe it has everything to do with it, and that the difference between men is very largely to be found here, whether they flame up into the white heat of enthusiasm for the things that are right, or whether the only things that can kindle them into anything like earnestness and emotion are the poor, shabby things of personal advantage. I need not remind you how, all through John's career, there burned, unflickering and undying, that steadfast light; how he brought to the service of the plainest teaching of morality a fervour of passion and of zeal almost unexampled and magnificent. I need not remind you how Jesus Christ Himself laid His hand upon this characteristic, when He said of him that 'he was a light kindled and shining.' But I would lay upon all our hearts the plain, practical

lesson that, if we keep in that tepid region of lukewarmness which is the utmost approach to tropical heat that moral and religious questions are capable of raising in many of us, good-bye to all chance of being 'great in the sight of the Lord.' We hear a great deal about the 'blessings of moderation,' the 'dangers of fanaticism,' and the like. I venture to think that the last thing which the moral consciousness of England wants today is a refrigerator, and that what it needs a great deal more than that is, that all Christian people should be brought face to face with this plain truth--that their religion has, as an indispensable part of it, 'a Spirit of burning,' and that if they have not been baptized in fire, there is little reason to believe that they have been baptized with the Holy Ghost.

I long that you and myself may be aflame for goodness, may be enthusiastic over plain morality, and may show that we are so by our daily life, by our rebuking the opposite, if need be, even if it take us into Herod's chamber, and make Herodias our enemy for life.

IV. Lastly, observe the final element of greatness in this man--absolute humility of self-abnegation before Jesus Christ.

There is nothing that I know in biography anywhere more beautiful, more striking, than the contrast between the two halves of the character and demeanour of the Baptist; how, on the one side, he fronts all men undaunted and recognises no superior, and how neither threats nor flatteries nor anything else will tempt him to step one inch beyond the limitations of which he is aware, nor to abate one inch of the claims which he urges; and on the other hand how, like some tall cedar touched by the lightning's hand, he falls prone before Jesus Christ and says, 'He must increase, and I must decrease': 'A man can receive nothing except it be given him of God.' He is all boldness on one side; all submission and dependence on the other.

You remember how, in the face of many temptations, that attitude was maintained. The very message which he had to carry was full of temptations to a self-seeking man to assert himself. You remember the almost rough 'No!' with which, reiteratedly, he met the suggestions of the deputation from Jerusalem that sought to induce him to say that he was more than he knew himself to be, and how he stuck by that infinitely humble and beautiful saying, 'I am a voice'--that is all. You remember how the whole nation was in a kind of conspiracy to tempt him to assert himself, and was ready to break

into a flame if he had dropped a spark, for all men were musing in their heart whether he was the Christ or not,' and all the lawless and restless elements would have been only too glad to gather round him, if he had declared himself the Messiah. Remember how his own disciples came to him, and tried to play upon his jealousy and to induce him to assert himself: 'Master, He whom thou didst baptize'--and so didst give Him the first credentials that sent men on His course--'has outstripped thee, and all men are coming to Him.' And you remember the lovely answer that opened such depths of unexpected tenderness in the rough nature: 'He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom heareth the voice; and that is enough to fill my cup with joy to the very brim.' And what conceptions of Jesus Christ had John, that he thus bowed his lofty crest before Him, and softened his heart into submission almost abject? He knew Him to be the coming Judge, with the fan in His hand, who could baptize with fire, and he knew Him to be 'the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.' Therefore he fell before Him.

Brethren, we shall not be 'great in the sight of the Lord' unless we copy that example of utter self-abnegation before Jesus Christ. Thomas a Kempis says somewhere, 'He is truly great who is small in his own sight, and thinks nothing of the giddy heights of worldly honour.' You and I know far more of Jesus Christ than John the Baptist did. Do we bow ourselves before Him as he did? The Source from which he drew his greatness is open to us all. Let us begin with the recognition of the Lamb of God that takes away the world's sin, and with it ours. Let the thought of what He is, and what He has done for us, bow us in unfeigned submission. Let it shatter all dreams of our own importance or our own desert. The vision of the Lamb of God, and it only, will crush in our hearts the serpent's eggs of self-esteem and self-regard.

Then, let our closeness to Jesus Christ, and our experience of His power, kindle in us the fiery enthusiasm with which He baptizes all His true servants, and let it be because we know the sweetnesses that excel, take from us all liability to be tempted away by the vulgar and coarse delights of earth and of sense. Let us keep ourselves clear of the babble that is round about us, and be strong because we grasp Christ's hand.

I have been speaking about no characteristic which may not be attained by any man, woman, or child amongst us. 'The least in the kingdom of heaven' may be greater than John. It is a poor ambition

to seek to be _called_ 'great.' It is a noble desire to _be_ 'great in the sight of the Lord.' And if we will keep ourselves close to Jesus Christ that will be attained. It will matter very little what men think of us, if at last we have praise from the lips of Him who poured such praise on His servant. We may, if we will. And then it will not hurt us though our names on earth be dark and our memories perish from among men.

'Of so much fame in heaven expect the meed.'

THE MAGNIFICAT

'And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, 47. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. 48. For He hath regarded the low estate of His hand-maiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. 49. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name, 50. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation. 51. He hath shewed strength with His arm: He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. 52. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. 53. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away. 54. He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy; 55. As He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.'

--LUKE 1:46-55.

Birds sing at dawn and sunrise. It was fitting that the last strains of Old Testament psalmody should prelude the birth of Jesus. To disbelievers in the Incarnation the hymns of Mary and Zacharias are, of course, forgeries; but if it be true nothing can be more 'natural' than these. The very features in this song, which are appealed to as proof of its being the work of some unknown pious liar or dishonest enthusiast, really confirm its genuineness. Critics shake their heads over its many quotations and allusions to Hannah's song and to other poetical parts of the Old Testament, and declare that these are fatal to its being accepted as Mary's. Why? must the simple village maiden be a poetess because she is the mother of our Lord? What is more likely than that she should cast her emotions into forms so familiar to her, and especially that Hannah's hymn should colour hers? These old psalms provided the mould into which her glowing emotions almost instinctively would run, and the very absence of 'originality' in the song favours its genuineness.

Another point may be noticed as having a similar bearing; namely, the very general and almost vague outline of the consequences of the birth, which is regarded as being the consummation to Israel of the mercy promised to the fathers. Could such a hymn have been written when sad experience showed how the nation would reject their Messiah, and ruin themselves thereby? Surely the anticipations which glow in it bear witness to the time when they were cherished, as

prior to the sad tragedy which history unfolded. Little does Mary as yet know that 'a sword shall pierce through' her 'own soul also,' and that not only will 'all generations' call her 'blessed,' but that one of her names will be 'Our Lady of Sorrows.' For her and for us, the future is mercifully veiled. Only one eye saw the shadow of the Cross stretching black and grim athwart the earliest days of Jesus, and that eye was His own. How wonderful the calmness with which He pressed towards that 'mark' during all His earthly life!

The hymn is sometimes divided into four strophes or sections: first, the expression of devout emotion (vs. 46-48a); second, the great fact from which they arise (vs. 48b-50); third, the consequences of the fact (vs. 51-53); fourth, its aspect to Israel as fulfilment of promise. This division is, no doubt, in accordance with the course of thought, but is perhaps somewhat too artificial for our purposes; and we may rather simply note that in the earlier part the personal element is present, and that in the later it fades entirely, and the mighty deeds of God alone fill the meek singer's eye and lips. We may consider the lessons of these two halves.

I. The more personal part extends to the end of verse 50. It contains three turnings or strophes, the first two of which have two clauses each, and the third three. The first is verses 46 and 47, the purely personal expression of the glad emotions awakened by Elisabeth's presence and salutation, which came to Mary as confirmation of the angel's annunciation. Not when Gabriel spoke, but when a woman like herself called her 'mother of my Lord,' did she break into praise. There is a deep truth there. God's voice is made more sure to our weakness when it is echoed by human lips, and our inmost hopes attain substance when they are shared and spoken by another. We need not attribute to the maiden from Nazareth philosophical accuracy when she speaks of her 'soul' and 'spirit.' Her first words are a burst of rapturous and wondering praise, in which the full heart runs over. Silence is impossible, and speech a relief. They are not to be construed with the microscopic accuracy fit to be applied to a treatise on psychology. 'All that is within' her praises and is glad. She does not think so much of the stupendous fact as of her own meekly exultant heart, and of God, to whom its outgoings turn. There are moods in which the devout soul dwells on its own calm blessedness and on God, its source, more directly than on the gift which brings it. Note the twofold act--magnifying and rejoicing. We magnify God when we take into our vision some fragment more of the complete circle of His essential greatness, or when, by our means, our fellows are helped to do so.

The intended effect of all His dealings is that we should think more nobly--that is, more worthily--of Him. The fuller knowledge of His friendly greatness leads to joy in Him which makes the spirit bound as in a dance--for such is the meaning of the word 'rejoice'--and which yet is calm and deep. Note the double name of God--Lord and Saviour. Mary bows in lowly obedience, and looks up in as lowly, conscious need of deliverance, and beholding in God both His majesty and His grace, magnifies and exults at once.

Verse 48 is the second turn of thought, containing, like the former, two clauses. In it she gazes on her great gift, which, with maiden reserve, she does not throughout the whole hymn once directly name. Here the personal element comes out more strongly. But it is beautiful to note that the 'lowliness' is in the foreground, and precedes the assurance of the benedictions of all generations. The whole is like a murmur of wonder that such honour should come to her, so insignificant, and the 'behold' of the latter half verse is an exclamation of surprise. In unshaken meekness of steadfast obedience, she feels herself 'the handmaid of the Lord.' In undisturbed humility, she thinks of her 'low estate,' and wonders that God's eye should have fallen on her, the village damsel, poor and hidden. A pure heart is humbled by honour, and is not so dazzled by the vision of future fame as to lose sight of God as the source of all. Think of that simple young girl in her obscurity having flashed before her the certainty that her name would be repeated with blessing till the world's end, and then thus meekly laying her honours down at God's feet. What a lesson of how to receive all distinctions and exaltations!

Verses 49 and 50 end this part, and contain three clauses, in which the personal disappears, and only the thought of God's character as manifested in His wonderful act remains. It connects indeed with the preceding by the 'to me' of verse 49; but the main subject is the new revelation, which is not confined to Mary, of the threefold divine glory fused into one bright beam, in the Incarnation. Power, holiness, eternal mercy, are all there, and that in deeper and more wondrous fashion than Mary knew when she sang. The words are mostly quotations from the Old Testament, but with new application and meaning. But even Mary's anticipations fell far short of the reality of that power in weakness, that holiness mildly blended with tenderest pity and pardoning love; that mercy which for all generations was to stretch not only to 'them that fear Him,' but to rebels, whom it would make friends. She saw but dimly and in part. We see more plainly all the rays of divine perfection meeting in,

and streaming out to, the whole world, from her Son 'the effulgence of the Father's glory.'

II. The second part of the song is a lyric anticipation of the historical consequences of the appearance of the Messiah, cast into forms ready to the singer's hand, in the strains of Old Testament prophecy. The characteristics of Hebrew poetry, its parallelism, its antitheses, its exultant swing, are more conspicuous here than in the earlier half. The main thought of verses 51 to 53 is that the Messiah would bring about a revolution, in which the high would be cast down and the humble exalted. This idea is wrought out in a threefold antithesis, of which the first pair must have one member supplied from the previous verse. Those who 'fear Him' are opposed to 'the proud in the imagination of their hearts.' These are thought of as an army of antagonists to God and His anointed, and thus the word 'scattered' acquires great poetic force, and reminds us of many a psalm, such as the Second and One hundred and tenth, where Messiah is a warrior.

The next pair represent the antithesis as being that of social degree, and in it there may be traced a glance at 'Herod the King' and the depressed line of David, to which the singer belonged, while the meaning must not be confined to that. The third pair represent the same opposites under the guise of poverty and riches. Mary is not to be credited with purely spiritual views in these contrasts, nor to be discredited with purely material ones. She, no doubt, thought of her own oppressed nation as mainly meant by the hungry and lowly; but like all pious souls in Israel, she must have felt that the lowliness and hunger which Messiah was to ennoble and satisfy, meant a condition of spirit conscious of weakness and sin, and eagerly desiring a higher good and food than earth could give. So much she had learned from many a psalm and prophet. So much the Spirit which inspired psalmist and prophet spoke in her lowly and exultant heart now. But the future was only revealed to her in this wide, general outline. Details of manner and time were all still blank. The broad truth which she foretold remains one of the salient historical results of Christ's coming, and is the universal condition of partaking of His gifts. He has been, and is, the most revolutionary force in history; for without Him society is constituted on principles the reverse of the true, and as the world, apart from Jesus, is down-side up, the mission of His gospel is to turn it upside-down, and so bring the right side uppermost. The condition of receiving anything from Him is the humble recognition of emptiness and need. If princes on their thrones will come to Him

just in the same way as the beggar on the dunghill does, they will very probably be allowed to stay on them; and if the rich man will come to Him as poor and in need of all things, he will not be 'sent empty away.' But Christ is a discriminating Christ, and as the prophet said long before Mary, 'I ... will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick; and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment.'

The last turn in the song celebrates the faithfulness of God to His ancient promises, and His help by His Messiah to Israel. The designation of Israel as 'His servant' recalls the familiar name in Isaiah's later prophecies. Mary sees in the great wonder of her Son's birth the accomplishment of the hopes of ages, and an assurance of God's mercy as for ever the portion of the people. We cannot tell how far she had learned that Israel was to be counted, not by descent but disposition. But, in any case, her eyes could not have embraced the solemn facts of her Son's rejection by His and her people. No shadows are yet cast across the morning of which her song is the herald. She knew not the dark clouds of thunder and destruction that were to sweep over the sky. But the end has not yet come, and we have to believe still that the evening will fulfil the promise of the morning, and 'all Israel shall be saved,' and that the mercy which was promised from of old to Abraham and the fathers, shall be fulfilled at last and abide with their seed for ever.

ZACHARIAS'S HYMN

'And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, 68. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, 69. And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; 70. As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began; 71. That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; 72. To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, 73. The oath which He swore to our father Abraham, 74. That He would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, 75. In holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life. 76. And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways; 77. To give knowledge of salvation unto His people, by the remission of their sins, 78. Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, 79. To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. 80. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.'--LUKE i. 67-80.

Zacharias was dumb when he disbelieved. His lips were opened when he believed. He is the last of the Old Testament prophets, [Footnote: In the strictest sense, John the Baptist was a prophet of the Old dispensation, even though he came to usher in the New. (See Matt. xi. 9-11.) In the same sense, Zacharias was the last prophet of the Old dispensation, before the coming of his son to link the Old with the New.] and as standing nearest to the Messiah, his song takes up the echoes of all the past, and melts them into a new outpouring of exultant hope. The strain is more impassioned than Mary's, and throbs with triumph over 'our enemies,' but rises above the mere patriotic glow into a more spiritual region. The complete subordination of the personal element is very remarkable, as shown by the slight and almost parenthetical reference to John. The father is forgotten in the devout Israelite. We may take the song as divided into three portions: the first (vs. 68-75) celebrating the

coming of Messiah, with special reference to its effect in freeing Israel from its foes; the second (vs. 76, 77), the highly dramatic address to his unconscious 'child'; the third (vs. 78, 79) returns to the absorbing thought of the Messiah, but now touches on higher aspects of His coming as the Light to all who sit in darkness.

I. If we remember that four hundred dreary years, for the most part of which Israel had been groaning under a foreign yoke, had passed since the last of the prophets, and that during all that time devout eyes had looked wearily for the promised Messiah, we shall be able to form some faint conception of the surprise and rapture which filled Zacharias's spirit, and leaps in his hymn at the thought that now, at last, the hour had struck, and that the child would soon be born who was to fulfil the divine promises and satisfy fainting hopes. No wonder that its first words are a burst of blessing of 'the God of Israel.' The best expression of joy, when long-cherished desires are at last on the eve of accomplishment, is thanks to God. How short the time of waiting seems when it is past, and how needless the impatience which marred the waiting! Zacharias speaks of the fact as already realised. He must have known that the Incarnation was accomplished; for we can scarcely suppose that the emphatic tenses 'hath visited, hath redeemed, hath raised' are prophetic, and merely imply the certainty of a future event. He must have known, too, Mary's royal descent; for he speaks of 'the house of David.'

'A horn' of salvation is an emblem taken from animals, and implies strength. Here it recalls several prophecies, and as a designation of the Messiah, shadows forth His conquering might, all to be used for deliverance to His people. The vision before Zacharias is that of a victor king of Davidic race, long foretold by prophets, who will set Israel free from its foreign oppressors, whether Roman or Idumean, and in whom God Himself 'visits and redeems His people.' There are two kinds of divine visitations--one for mercy and one for judgment. What an unconscious witness it is of men's evil consciences that the use of the phrase has almost exclusively settled down upon the latter meaning! In verses 71-75, the idea of the Messianic salvation is expanded and raised. The word 'salvation' is best construed, as in the Revised Version, as in apposition with and explanatory of 'horn of salvation.' This salvation has issues, which may also be regarded as God's purposes in sending it. These are threefold: first, to show mercy to the dead fathers of the race. That is a striking idea, and pictures the departed as, in their solemn rest, sharing in the joy of Messiah's coming, and perhaps in

the blessings which He brings. We may not too closely press the phrase, but it is more than poetry or imagination. The next issue is God's remembrance of His promises, or in other words, His fulfilment of these. The last is that the nation, being set free, should serve God. The external deliverance was in the eyes of devout men like Zacharias precious as a means to an end. Political freedom was needful for God's service, and was valuable mainly as leading to that. The hymn rises far above the mere impatience of a foreign yoke. 'Freedom to worship God,' and God worshipped by a ransomed nation, are Zacharias's ideal of the Messianic times.

Note his use of the word for priestly 'service.' He, a priest, has not forgotten that by original constitution all Israel was a nation of priests; and he looks forward to the fulfilment at last of the ideal which so soon became impracticable, and possibly to the abrogation of his own order in the universal priesthood. He knew not what deep truths he sang. The end of Christ's coming, and of the deliverance which He works for us from the hand of our enemies, cannot be better stated than in these words. We are redeemed that we may be priests unto God. Our priestly service must be rendered in 'holiness and righteousness,' in consecration to God and discharge of all obligations; and it is to be no interrupted or occasional service, like Zacharias's, which occupied but two short weeks in the year, and might never again lead him within the sanctuary, but is to fill with reverent activity and thankful sacrifice all our days. However this hymn may have begun with the mere external conception of Messianic deliverance, it rises high above that here, and will still further soar beyond it. We may learn from this priest-prophet, who anticipated the wise men and brought his offerings to the unborn Christ, what Christian salvation is, and for what it is given us.

II. There is something very vivid and striking in the abrupt address to the infant, who lay, all unknowing, in his mother's arms. The contrast between him as he was then and the work which waited him, the paternal wonder and joy which yet can scarcely pause on the child, and hurries on to fancy him in the years to come, going herald-like before the face of the Lord, the profound prophetic insight into John's work, are all noteworthy. The Baptist did 'prepare the way' by teaching that the true 'salvation' was not to be found in mere deliverance from the Roman yoke, but in 'remission of sin.' He thus not only gave 'knowledge of salvation,' in the sense that he announced the fact that it would be given, but also in the sense that he clearly taught in what it consisted. John was no preacher of revolt, as the turbulent and impure patriots of the day

would have liked him to be, but of repentance. His work was to awake the consciousness of sin, and so to kindle desires for a salvation which was deliverance from sin, the only yoke which really enslaves. Zacharias the 'blameless' saw what the true bondage of the nation was, and what the work both of the Deliverer and of His herald must be. We need to be perpetually reminded of the truth that the only salvation and deliverance which can do us any good consist in getting rid, by pardon and by holiness, of the cords of our sins.

III. The thoughts of the Forerunner and his office melt into that of the Messianic blessings from which the singer cannot long turn away. In these closing words, we have the source, the essential nature, and the blessed results of the gift of Christ set forth in a noble figure, and freed from the national limitations of the earlier part of the hymn. All comes from the 'bowels of mercy of our God,' as Zacharias, in accordance with Old Testament metaphor, speaks, allocating the seat of the emotions which we attribute to the heart. Conventional notions of delicacy think the Hebrew idea coarse, but the one allocation is just as delicate as the other. We can get no deeper down or farther back into the secret springs of things than this--that the root cause of all, and most especially of the mission of Christ, is the pitying love of God's heart. If we hold fast by that, the pain of the riddle of the world is past, and the riddle itself more than half solved. Jesus Christ is the greatest gift of that love, in which all its tenderness and all its power are gathered up for our blessing.

The modern civilised world owes most of its activity to the quickening influence of Christianity. The dayspring visits us that it may shine on us, and it shines that it may guide us into 'the way of peace.' There can be no wider and more accurate description of the end of Christ's mission than this--that all His visitation and enlightenment are meant to lead us into the path where we shall find peace with God, and therefore with ourselves and with all mankind. The word 'peace,' in the Old Testament, is used to include the sum of all that men require for their conscious well-being. We are at rest only when all our relations with God and the outer world are right, and when our inner being is harmonised with itself, and supplied with appropriate objects. To know God for our friend, to have our being fixed on and satisfied in Him, and so to be reconciled to all circumstances, and a friend of all men--this is peace; and the path to such a blessed condition is shown us only by that Sun of Righteousness whom the loving heart of God has sent into the darkness and torpor of the benighted wanderers in the desert.

The national reference has faded from the song, and though it still speaks of 'us' and 'our,' we cannot doubt that Zacharias both saw more deeply into the salvation which Christ would bring than to limit it to breaking an earthly yoke, and deemed more worthily and widely of its sweep, than to confine it within narrower bounds than the whole extent of the dreary darkness which it came to banish from all the world.

THE DAYSPRING FROM ON HIGH

'The day-spring from on high hath visited us, 79. To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.'--LUKE i. 78, 79.

As the dawn is ushered in by the notes of birds, so the rising of the Sun of Righteousness was heralded by song, Mary and Zacharias brought their praises and welcome to the unborn Christ, the angels hovered with heavenly music over His cradle, and Simeon took the child in his arms and blessed it. The human members of this choir may be regarded as the last of the psalmists and prophets, and the first of Christian singers. The song of Zacharias, from which my text is taken, is steeped in Old Testament allusions, and redolent of the ancient spirit, but it transcends that. Its early part is purely national, and hails the coming of the Messiah chiefly as the deliverer of Israel from foreign oppressors, though even in it their deliverance is regarded mostly as the means to an end, and the end one very appropriate on the lips of a priestly prophet---viz. sacerdotal service by the whole nation 'in holiness and righteousness all their days.'

But in this latter portion, which is separated from the former by the pathetic, incidental, and slight reference to the singer's own child, the national limits are far surpassed. The song soars above them, and pierces to the very heart and kernel of Christ's work. 'The dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.' Nothing deeper, nothing wider, nothing truer about the mission and issue of Christ's coming could be spoken. And thus we have to look at the three things that lie in this text, as bearing upon our conceptions of Christ and His work--the darkness, the dawn, and the directing light.

I. The darkness.

Zacharias, as becomes the last of the prophets, and a man whose whole religious life was nourished upon the ancient Scriptures, speaks almost entirely in Old Testament phraseology in this song. And his description of 'them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death' is taken almost verbally from the great words from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, who speaks, in immediate connection with his prophecy of the coming of the Christ, of 'the people that walk in

darkness and them that dwell,' or sit, 'in the shadow of death, upon whom the light hath shined.'

The picture that rises before us is that of a group of travellers benighted, bewildered, huddled together in the dark, afraid to move for fear of pitfalls, precipices, wild beasts, and enemies; and so sighing for the day and compelled to be inactive till it comes. That is the picture of humanity apart from Jesus Christ, a darkness so intense, so tragic, that it is, as it were, the very shadow of the ultimate and essential darkness which is death, and in it men are sitting torpid, unable to find their way and afraid to move.

Now darkness, all the world over, is the emblem of three things--ignorance, impurity, sorrow. And all men who are rent away from Jesus Christ, or on whom His beams have not yet fallen, this text tells us, have that triple curse lying upon them.

Ignorance. Think of what, without Jesus Christ, the world has deemed of the unseen, and of the God, if there be a God, that may inhabit there. He has been to them a great Peradventure, a great Terror, a great Inscrutable, a stone-eyed Fate, a thin, nebulous Nothing, with no emotion, no attributes, no heart, no ear to hear, the nearest approach to nonentity, according to the despairing saying of a master of philosophy, that 'pure Being is equal to pure Nothing.' And if all men do not rise to such heights of melancholy abstraction as that, still how little there is of blessed certainty, how little clearness of conception of a Divine Person that turns to us with love and tenderness in His heart, apart from Christ and His teaching! If you take away from civilised men all the knowledge of God that they owe to Jesus Christ, what have you left? The ladder by which they climbed is kicked away by a great many people nowadays, but it is to Him that they owe the very conceptions in the name of which some of them turn round and deny Him.

Ignorance of God, ignorance of one's own self and of one's deepest duties, and ignorance of that solemn future, the fact of which is plain to most men, but the how of which is such a blank mystery but for Jesus Christ--these things are elements of the darkness that wraps the world. Go to heathendom if you want to see the problem worked out, as to what men know outside of the revelation which culminates in Jesus Christ. And take your own hearts, dear friends who stand aside from that sweet Lord and light of our lives, and ask yourselves, What do I know, with a certainty which is to me as valid, as--yea! more valid than that given by sense and outward

perceptions? What do I know of God that I do not owe to Jesus Christ? Nothing. You may guess much, you may hope a little, you may dread a great deal, you may question more than all, but you will know nothing.

Well, then, further, this solemn emblem stands for impurity. And we have only to consult our own hearts to feel how true it is about us all, that we dwell in a region all darkened, if not by the coarse transgressions which men consent to call sins, yet darkened more subtly and oftentimes more hopelessly by the obscuration of pure selfishness and living to myself and by myself. Wherever that comes, it is like the mists that steal up from some poisonous marsh, and shut out stars and sky, and drape the whole country in a melancholy veil. It is white but it is poisonous, it is white but it is darkness all the same. There are other kinds of sin than the sins that break the Ten Commandments; there are other kinds of sin than the sins that the world takes cognisance of. The worst poisons are the tasteless ones, and colourless gases are laden with fatal power. We may walk in a darkness that may be felt, though there be nothing in our lives that men call sin, and little there of which our consciences are as yet educated enough to be ashamed. Rent from God, man lives to himself, and so is sunk in darkness.

And what shall I say about the third of the doleful triad of which this pregnant emblem is the recognised symbol all the world over? Surely, though earth be full of blessing, and life of possibilities of joy, no man travels very far along the road without feeling that the burden of sorrow is a burden that we all have to carry. There are blessings in plenty, there is mirth more than enough. There is 'the laughter' which is 'the crackling of thorns' under a pot. There are plenty of distractions and amusements, 'blessings more plentiful than hope'; but yet the ground tone of every human life, when the first flush of inexperience and novelty has worn off, apart from God, is sadness, conscious of itself sometimes, and driven to all manner of foolish attempts at forgetfulness, unconscious of itself sometimes, and knowing not what is the disease of which it languishes. There it is, like some persistent minor in a great piece of music, wailing on through all the embroidery and lightness of the cheerfuller and loftier notes. 'Every heart knoweth its own bitterness,' and every heart has a bitterness of its own to know.

I do not understand how it is that men who have no religion in them can bear their own sorrows and see their neighbours' and not go mad.

Sometimes the world seems to me to be moving round its central sun with a doleful atmosphere of sighs wherever it goes, and all the mirth and stir and bustle are but like a thin crust of grass with flowers upon it, cast across the sulphurous depths of some volcano that may slumber for a while, but is there all the same.

Brother! you and I, away from Jesus Christ, have to face the certainties of ignorance, of sin, of sorrow--ignorance unenlightened, sin unconquered, sorrow uncomforted.

And then comes the other tragic, and yet most picturesque emblem in the representation here: 'They sit in darkness.' Yes! what can they do, poor creatures? They know not where to go. The light has left them, inactivity is a necessity. And so, with folded hands, they wish for the day, or try to forget the night by lighting some little torch of their own that only serves to make darkness visible, and dies all too soon, leaving them to lie down in sorrow.

But, you say, 'What nonsense! Inactivity! look at the fierce energy of life in our Western lands.' Well, grant it all, there may be plenty of material activity attendant upon inward stagnation and torpor. But, again, I would like to ask how much of the most godless, commercial, artistic, intellectual activity of so-called civilised and Christian countries is owing to the stimulus and ferment that Jesus Christ brought. If you want to see how true it is that men without Him sit in the darkness, go to heathen lands, and see the stagnation, the torpor, there.

Now, dear brethren, all this is true about us, in the measure in which we do not participate by faith and love, welcoming Him into our hearts in the illumination that Jesus Christ brings. And what I want to do is to lay upon the hearts and consciences of each of us here this thought, that the solemn, tragic picture of my text is the picture of me, separate from Christ, however I may try to conceal it from myself, and to mask it from other people by busying myself with inferior knowledges, by avoiding to listen to the answer that conscience gives to the question as to my moral character, and by befooling myself with noisy joys and tumultuous pleasures, in which there is no pleasure.

II. Now, note secondly, the dayspring, or dawn.

My text, in the part on which I have just been speaking, links itself with ancient Messianic prophecy, and this expression, 'the

dayspring from on high.' also links itself with other prophecies of the same sort. Almost the last word of prophecy before the four centuries of silence which Mary and Zacharias broke, was, 'Unto you that fear His name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His beams.' There can be little doubt, I think, that the allusion of my text is to these all but the last words of the prophet Malachi. For that final chapter of the Old Testament colours the song both of Mary and of Zacharias. And it is to be observed that the Greek translation of the Hebrew uses the same verb, of which the cognate noun is here employed, for the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. The picturesque old English word 'dayspring' means neither more nor less than sunrising. And it is here used practically as a name for Jesus Christ, who is Himself the Sun, represented as rising over a darkened earth, and yet, with a singular neglect of the propriety of the metaphor, as descending from on high, not to shine on us from the sky, but to 'visit us' on earth.

Jesus Christ Himself, over and over again, said by implication, and more than once by direct claim, 'I am the Light of the world.' And my text is the anticipation, perhaps from lips that did not fully understand the whole significance of the prophecy which they spoke, of these later declarations. I have said that the darkness is the emblem of three baleful things, of the converse of which light is the symbol. As the darkness speaks to us of ignorance, so Christ, as the Sun illumines us with the light of 'the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' For doubt we have blessed certainty, for a far-off God we have the knowledge of God close at hand. For an impassive will or a stony-eyed fate we have the knowledge (and not only the wistful yearning after the knowledge) of a loving heart, warm and throbbing. Our God is no unemotional abstraction, but a living Person who can love, who can pity, and we are speaking more than poetry when we say, God is compassion, and compassion is God. This we know because 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' And the solid certainty of a loving God, tender, pitying, mighty to help, quick to hear, ready to forgive, waiting to bless, is borne into our hearts, and comes there, sweet as the sunshine, when we turn ourselves to the light of Christ.

In like manner the darkness, born of our own sin, which wraps our hearts, and shuts out so much that is fair and sweet and strong, will pass away if we turn ourselves to Him. His light pouring into our souls will hurt the eye at first, but it will hurt to cure. The darkness of sin and alienation will pass, and the true light will

shine.

The darkness of sorrow--well! it will not cease, but He will 'smooth the raven down of darkness till it smiles,' and He will bring into our griefs such a spirit of quiet submission as that they shall change into a solemn scorn of ills, and be almost like gladnesses. Peace, which is better than exuberant delight, will come to quiet the sorrow of the soul that trusts in Jesus Christ. The day which is knowledge, purity, gladness, the cheerful day will be ours if we hold by Him. We 'are all the children of the light and of the day'; we 'are not of the night nor of darkness.'

Brother, it is possible to grope at noontide as in the dark, and in all the blaze of Christ's revelation still to be left in the Cimmerian folds of midnight gloom. You can shut your eyes to the sunshine; have you opened your hearts to its coming?

I cannot dwell (your time will not allow of it) upon the other points connected with this description of the day spring, except just to point out in passing the singular force and depth of the words--which I suppose are more forcible and deep than he who spoke them understood at the time that visitation was described. The dayspring is 'from on high.' This Sun has come down on to the earth. It has not risen on a far-off horizon, but it has come down and visited us, and walks among us. This Sun, our life-star, 'hath had elsewhere its setting, and cometh from afar.' For He that rises upon us as the Light of life, hath descended from the heavens, and was, before He appeared amongst men.

And His coming is a divine visitation. The word here 'hath _visited_ us' (or 'shall visit us,' as the Revised Version varies it), is chiefly employed in the Old Testament to describe the divine acts of self-revelation, and these, mostly redemptive acts. Zacharias employs it in that sense in the earlier portion of the song, where he says that 'God hath visited and redeemed His people.' And so from the use of this word we gather these two thoughts--God comes to us when Christ comes to us, and His coming is wondrous, blessed nearness, and nearness to each of us. 'What is man that Thou shouldst be mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou shouldst visit him?' said the old Psalmist. We say 'What is man that the Dayspring from on high should come down upon earth, and round His immortal beams, should, as it were, cast the veil and obscurity of a human form; and so walk amongst us, the embodied Light and the Incarnate God?' 'The dayspring from on high hath visited us.'

III. Lastly, note the directing by the light.

'To guide our feet into the way of peace.' This Sun stoops to the office of the star that moved before the wise men and hovered over His cradle, and becomes to each individual soul a guide and director. The picture of my text, I suppose, carries us on to the morning, when the benighted travellers catch the first gleams of the rising sun and resume their activity, and there is a cheerful stir through the encampment and the way is open before them once more, and they are ready to walk in it. The force of the metaphor, however, implies more than that, for it speaks to us of the wonder that this universal Light should become the special guide of each individual soul, and should not merely hang in the heavens, to cast the broad radiance of its beams over the whole surface of the earth, but should move before each man, a light unto his feet and a lamp to his path, in special manifestation to him of his duty and his life's pilgrimage.

There is only one way of peace, and that is to follow His beams and to be directed by His preceding us. Then we shall realise the most indispensable of all the conditions of peace--Christ brings you and me the reconciliation which puts us at peace with God, which is the foundation of all other tranquillity. And He will guide docile feet into the way of peace in yet another fashion--in that the following of His example, the cleaving to Him, the holding by His skirts or by His hand, and the treading in His footsteps, is the only way by which the heart can receive the solid satisfaction in which it rests, and the conscience can cease from accusing and stinging. The way of wisdom is a path of pleasantness and a way of peace. Only they who walk in Christ's footsteps have quiet hearts and are at amity with God, in concord with themselves, friends of mankind, and at peace with circumstances. There is no strife within, no strained relations or hostile alienation to God, no gnawing unrest of unsatisfied desires, no pricks of accusing conscience; for the man who puts his hand into Christ's hand, and says, 'Order Thou my footsteps by Thy word'; 'Where Thou goest I will go, and what Thou commandest I will do.'

Brother, put thy hand out from the darkness and clasp His, and 'the darkness shall be light about thee'; and He will fulfil His own promise when He said, 'I am the Light of the world. He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of life.'

SHEPHERDS AND ANGELS

'And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. 10. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 13. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. 15. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. 16. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. 17. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. 18. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. 20. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.'--Luke 2:8-20.

The central portion of this passage is, of course, the angels' message and song, the former of which proclaims the transcendent fact of the Incarnation, and the latter hymns its blessed results. But, subsidiary to these, the silent vision which preceded them and the visit to Bethlehem which followed are to be noted. Taken together, they cast varying gleams on the great fact of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Why should there be a miraculous announcement at all, and why should it be to these shepherds? It seems to have had no effect beyond a narrow circle and for a time. It was apparently utterly forgotten

when, thirty years after, the carpenter's Son began His ministry. Could such an event have passed from memory, and left no ripple on the surface? Does not the resultlessness cast suspicion on the truthfulness of the narrative? Not if we duly give weight to the few who knew of the wonder; to the length of time that elapsed, during which the shepherds and their auditors probably died; to their humble position, and to the short remembrance of extraordinary events which have no immediate consequences. Joseph and Mary were strangers in Bethlehem. Christ never visited it, so far as we know. The fading of the impression cannot be called strange, for it accords with natural tendencies; but the record of so great an event, which was entirely ineffectual as regards future acceptance of Christ's claims, is so unlike legend that it vouches for the truth of the narrative. An apparent stumbling-block is left, because the story is true.

Why then, the announcement at all, since it was of so little use? Because it was of some; but still more, because it was fitting that such angel voices should attend such an event, whether men gave heed to them or not; and because, recorded, their song has helped a world to understand the nature and meaning of that birth. The glory died off the hillside quickly, and the music of the song scarcely lingered longer in the ears of its first hearers; but its notes echo still in all lands, and every generation turns to them with wonder and hope.

The selection of two or three peasants as receivers of the message, the time at which it was given, and the place, are all significant. It was no unmeaning fact that the 'glory of the Lord' shone lambent round the shepherds, and held them and the angel standing beside them in its circle of light. No longer within the secret shrine, but out in the open field, the symbol of the Divine Presence glowed through the darkness; for that birth hallowed common life, and brought the glory of God into familiar intercourse with its secularities and smallnesses. The appearance to these humble men as they 'sat simply chatting in a rustic row' symbolised the destination of the Gospel for all ranks and classes.

The angel speaks by the side of the shepherds, not from above. His gentle encouragement 'Fear not!' not only soothes their present terror, but has a wider meaning. The dread of the Unseen, which lies coiled like a sleeping snake in all hearts, is utterly taken away by the Incarnation. All messages from that realm are thenceforward 'tidings of great joy,' and love and desire may pass into it, as all

men shall one day pass, and both enterings may be peaceful and confident. Nothing harmful can come out of the darkness, from which Jesus has come, into which He has passed, and which He fills.

The great announcement, the mightiest, most wonderful word that had ever passed angels' immortal lips, is characterised as 'great joy' to 'all the people,' in which designation two things are to be noted--the nature and the limitation of the message. In how many ways the Incarnation was to be the fountain of purest gladness was but little discerned, either by the heavenly messenger or the shepherds. The ages since have been partially learning it, but not till the 'glorified joy' of heaven swells redeemed hearts will all its sorrow-dispelling power be experimentally known. Base joys may be basely sought, but His creatures' gladness is dear to God, and if sought in God's way, is a worthy object of their efforts.

The world-wide sweep of the Incarnation does not appear here, but only its first destination for Israel. This is manifest in the phrase 'all the people,' in the mention of 'the city of David' and in the emphatic 'you,' in contradistinction both from the messenger, who announced what he did not share, and Gentiles, to whom the blessing was not to pass till Israel had determined its attitude to it.

The titles of the Infant tell something of the wonder of the birth, but do not unfold its overwhelming mystery. Magnificent as they are, they fall far short of 'The Word was made flesh.' They keep within the circle of Jewish expectation, and announce that the hopes of centuries are fulfilled. There is something very grand in the accumulation of titles, each greater than the preceding, and all culminating in that final 'Lord.' Handel has gloriously given the spirit of it in the crash of triumph with which that last word is pealed out in his oratorio. 'Saviour' means far more than the shepherds knew; for it declares the Child to be the deliverer from all evil, both of sin and sorrow, and the endower with all good, both of righteousness and blessedness. The 'Christ' claims that He is the fulfiller of prophecy, perfectly endowed by divine anointing for His office of prophet, priest, and king--the consummate flower of ancient revelation, greater than Moses the law-giver, than Solomon the king, than Jonah the prophet. 'The Lord' is scarcely to be taken as the ascription of divinity, but rather as a prophecy of authority and dominion, implying reverence, but not unveiling the deepest secret of the entrance of the divine Son into humanity. That remained unrevealed, for the time was not yet ripe.

There would be few children of a day old in a little place like Bethlehem, and none but one lying in a manger. The fact of the birth, which could be verified by sight, would confirm the message in its outward aspect, and thereby lead to belief in the angel's disclosure of its inward character. The 'sign' attested the veracity of the messenger, and therefore the truth of all his word--both of that part of it capable of verification by sight and that part apprehensible by faith.

No wonder that the sudden light and music of the multitude of the heavenly host' flashed and echoed round the group on the hillside. The true picture is not given when we think of that angel choir as floating in heaven. They stood in their serried ranks round the shepherds and their fellows on the solid earth, and 'the night was filled with music,' not from overhead, but from every side. Crowding forms became all at once visible within the encircling 'glory,' on every face wondering gladness and eager sympathy with men, from every lip praise. Angels can speak with the tongues of men when their theme is their Lord become man, and their auditors are men. They hymn the blessed results of that birth, the mystery of which they knew more completely than they were yet allowed to tell.

As was natural for them, their praise is first evoked by the result of the Incarnation in the highest heavens. It will bring 'glory to God' there; for by it new aspects of His nature are revealed to those clear-eyed and immortal spirits who for unnumbered ages have known His power, His holiness, His benignity to unfallen creatures, but now experience the wonder which more properly belongs to more limited intelligences, when they behold that depth of condescending Love stooping to be born. Even they think more loftily of God, and more of man's possibilities and worth, when they cluster round the manger, and see who lies there.

'On earth peace.' The song drops from the contemplation of the heavenly consequences to celebrate the results on earth, and gathers them all into one pregnant word, 'Peace.' What a scene of strife, discord, and unrest earth must seem to those calm spirits! And how vain and petty the struggles must look, like the bustle of an ant-hill! Christ's work is to bring peace into all human relations, those with God, with men, with circumstances, and to calm the discords of souls at war with themselves. Every one of these relations is marred by sin, and nothing less thorough than a power which removes it can rectify them. That birth was the coming into humanity of Him who brings peace

with God, with ourselves, with one another. Shame on Christendom that nineteen centuries have passed, and men yet think the cessation of war is only a 'pious imagination'! The ringing music of that angel chant has died away, but its promise abides.

The symmetry of the song is best preserved, as I humbly venture to think, by the old reading as in the Authorised Version. The other, represented by the Revised Version, seems to make the second clause drag somewhat, with two designations of the region of peace. The Incarnation brings God's 'good will' to dwell among men. In Christ, God is well pleased; and from Him incarnate, streams of divine complacent love pour out to freshen and fertilise the earth.

The disappearance of the heavenly choristers does not seem to have been so sudden as their appearance. They 'went away from them into heaven,' as if leisurely, and so that their ascending brightness was long visible as they rose, and attestation was thereby given to the reality of the vision. The sleeping village was close by, and as soon as the last gleam of the departing light had faded in the depths of heaven, the shepherds went 'with haste,' untimely as was the hour. They would not have much difficulty in finding the inn and the manger. Note that they do not tell their story till the sight has confirmed the angel message. Their silence was not from doubt; for they say, before they had seen the child, that 'this thing' is 'come to pass,' and are quite sure that the Lord has told it them. But they wait for the evidence which shall assure others of their truthfulness.

There are three attitudes of mind towards God's revelation set forth in living examples in the closing verses of the passage. Note the conduct of the shepherds, as a type of the natural impulse and imperative duty of all possessors of God's truth. Such a story as they had to tell would burn its way to utterance in the most reticent and shyest. But have Christians a less wonderful message to deliver, or a less needful one? If the spectators of the cradle could not be silent, how impossible it ought to be for the witnesses of the Cross to lock their lips!

The hearers of the story did what, alas! too many of us do with the Gospel. 'They wondered,' and stopped there. A feeble ripple of astonishment ruffled the surface of their souls for a moment; but like the streaks on the sea made by a catspaw of wind, it soon died out, and the depths were unaffected by it.

The antithesis to this barren wonder is the beautiful picture of the Virgin's demeanour. She 'kept all these sayings, and pondered them in her heart.' What deep thoughts the mother of the Lord had, were hers alone. But we have the same duty to the truth, and it will never disclose its inmost sweetness to us, nor take so sovereign a grip of our very selves as to mould our lives, unless we too treasure it in our hearts, and by patient brooding on it understand its hidden harmonies, and spread our souls out to receive its transforming power. A non-meditative religion is a shallow religion. But if we hide His word in our hearts, and often in secret draw out our treasure to count and weigh it, we shall be able to speak out of a full heart, and like these shepherds, to rejoice that we have seen even as it was spoken unto us.

WAS, IS, IS TO COME

'... The babe lying in a manger...'--LUKE 2:16.

'... While He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven...'--LUKE 24:51.

'This same Jesus... shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go...'--ACTS 1:11.

These three fragments, which I have ventured to isolate and bring together, are all found in one author's writings. Luke's biography of Jesus stretches from the cradle in Bethlehem to the Ascension from Olivet. He narrates the Ascension twice, because it has two aspects. In one it looks backward, and is necessary as the completion of what was begun in the birth. In one it looks forward, and makes necessary, as its completion, that coming which still lies in the future. These three stand up, like linked summits in a mountain. We can understand none of them unless we embrace them all. If the story of the birth is true, a life so begun cannot end in an undistinguished death like that of all men. And if the Ascension from Olivet is true, that cannot close the history of His relations to men. The creed which proclaims He was 'born of the Virgin Mary' must go on to say '... He ascended up into heaven'; and cannot pause till it adds '...From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.' So we have then three points to consider in this sermon.

I. Note first, the three great moments.

The thing that befell at Bethlehem, in the stable of the inn, was a commonplace and insignificant enough event looked at from the outside: the birth of a child to a young mother. It had its elements of pathos in its occurring at a distance from home, among the publicity and discomforts of an inn stable, and with some cloud of suspicion over the mother's fair fame. But the outside of a fact is the least part of it. A little film of sea-weed floats upon the surface, but there are fathoms of it below the water. Men said, 'A child is born.' Angels said, and bowed their faces in adoration, 'The Word has become flesh'. The eternal, self-communicating personality in the Godhead, passed voluntarily into the condition of humanity. Jesus was born, the Son of God came. Only when we hold fast by that great truth do we pierce to the centre of what was done in that poor stable, and possess the key to all the wonders of His

life and death.

From the manger we pass to the mountain. A life begun by such a birth cannot be ended, as I have said, by a mere ordinary death. The Alpha and the Omega of that alphabet must belong to the same fount of type. A divine conformity forbids that He who was born of the Virgin Mary should have His body laid to rest in an undistinguished grave. And so what Bethlehem began, Olivet carries on.

Note the circumstances of this second of these great moments. The place is significant. Almost within sight of the city, a stone's throw probably from the home where He had lodged, and where He had conquered death in the person of Lazurus; not far from the turn of the road where the tears had come into His eyes amidst the shouting of the rustic procession, as He had looked across the valley; just above Gethsemane, where He had agonised on that bare hillside to which He had often gone for communion with the Father in heaven. There, in some dimple of the hill, and unseen but by the little group that surrounded Him, He passed from their midst. The manner of the departure is yet more significant than the place. Here were no whirlwind, no chariots and horses of fire, no sudden rapture; but, as the narrative makes emphatic, a slow, leisurely, self-originated floating upwards. He was borne up from them, and no outward vehicle or help was needed; but by His own volition and power He rose towards the heavens. 'And a cloud received Him out of their sight'--the Shechinah cloud, the bright symbol of the Divine Presence which had shone round the shepherds on the pastures of Bethlehem, and enwrapped Him and the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. It came not to lift Him on its soft folds to the heavens, but in order that, first, He might be plainly seen till the moment that He ceased to be seen, and might not dwindle into a speck by reason of distance; and secondly, that it might teach the truth, that, as His body was received into the cloud, so He entered into the glory which He 'had with the Father before the world was.' Such was the second of these moments.

The third great moment corresponds to these, is required by them, and crowns them. The Ascension was not only the close of Christ's earthly life which would preserve congruity with its beginning, but it was also the clear manifestation that, as He came of His own will, so He departed by His own volition. 'I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go unto the Father.' Thus the earthly life is, as it were, islanded in a sea of glory, and that which stretches away beyond the last moment of visibility, is like that which stretched away beyond the first

moment of corporeity; the eternal union with the eternal Father. But such an entrance on and departure from earth, and such a career on earth, can only end in that coming again of which the angels spoke to the gazing eleven.

Mark the emphasis of their words. 'This same Jesus,' the same in His manhood, 'shall so come, in like manner, as ye have seen Him go.' How much the 'in like manner' may mean we can scarcely dogmatically affirm. But this, at least, is clear, that it cannot mean less than corporeally visible, locally surrounded by angel-guards, and perhaps, according to a mysterious prophecy, to the same spot from which He ascended. But, at all events, there are the three moments in the manifestation of the Son of God.

II. Look, in the second place, at the threefold phases of our Lord's activity which are thus suggested.

I need not dwell, in more than a sentence or two, on the first of these. Each of these three moments is the inauguration of a form of activity which lasts till the emergence of the next of the triad.

The birth at Bethlehem had, for its consequence and purpose, a threefold end: the revelation of God in humanity, the manifestation of perfect manhood to men, and the rendering of the great sacrifice for the sins of the world. These three--showing us God; showing ourselves as we are and as we may be; as we ought to be, and, blessed be His name, as we shall be, if we observe the conditions; and the making reconciliation for the sins of the whole world--these are the things for which the Babe lying in the manger was born and came under the limitations of humanity.

Turn to the second of the three, and what shall we say of it? That Ascension has for its great purpose the application to men of the results of the Incarnation. He was born that He might show us God and ourselves, and that He might die for us. He ascended up on high in order that the benefits of that Revelation and Atonement might be extended through, and appropriated by, the whole world.

One chief thought which is enforced by the narrative of the Ascension is the permanence, the eternity of the humanity of Jesus Christ. He ascended up where He was before, but He who ascended is not altogether the same as He who had been there before, for He has taken up with Him our nature to the centre of the universe and the throne of God, and there, 'bone of our bone, and flesh of our

flesh,' a true man in body, soul, and spirit, He lives and reigns. The cradle at Bethlehem assumes even greater solemnity when we think of it as the beginning of a humanity that is never laid aside. So we can look confidently to all that blaze of light where He sits, and feel that, howsoever the body of His humiliation may have been changed into the body of His glory, He still remains corporeally and spiritually a true Son of man. Thus the face that looks down from amidst the blaze, though it be 'as the sun shineth in his strength,' is the old face; and the breast which is girded with the golden girdle is the same breast on which the seer had leaned his happy head; and the hand that holds the sceptre is the hand that was pierced with the nails; and the Christ that is ascended up on high is the Christ that loved and pitied adulteresses and publicans, and took the little child in His gracious arms--'The same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

Christ's Ascension is as the broad seal of heaven attesting the completeness of His work on earth. It inaugurates His repose which is not the sign of His weariness, but of His having finished all which He was born to do. But that repose is not idleness. Rather it is full of activity.

On the Cross He shouted with a great voice ere He died, 'It is finished.' But centuries, perhaps millenniums, yet will have to elapse before the choirs of angels shall be able to chant, 'It is done: the kingdoms of the world are the kingdoms of God and of His Christ.' All the interval is filled by the working of that ascended Lord whose session at the right hand of God is not only symbolical of perfect repose and a completed sacrifice, but also of perfect activity in and with His servants.

He has gone--to rest, to reign, to work, to intercede, and to prepare a place for us. For if our Brother be indeed at the right hand of God, then our faltering feet may travel to the Throne, and our sinful selves may be at home there. The living Christ, working to-day, is that of which the Ascension from Olivet gives us the guarantee.

The third great moment will inaugurate yet another form of activity as necessary and certain as either of the two preceding. For if His cradle was what we believe it to have been, and if His sacrifice was what Scripture tells us it is, and if through all the ages He, crowned and regnant, is working for the diffusion of the powers of His Cross and the benefits of His Incarnation, there can be no end

to that course except the one which is expressed for us by the angels' message to the gazing disciples: He shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go. He will come to manifest Himself as the King of the world and its Lord and Redeemer. He will come to inaugurate the great act of Judgment, which His great act of Redemption necessarily draws after it, and Himself be the Arbiter of the fates of men, the determining factor in whose fates has been their relation to Him. No doubt many who never heard His name upon earth will, in that day be, by His clear eye and perfect judgment, discerned to have visited the sick and the imprisoned, and to have done many acts for His sake. And for us who know Him, and have heard His name, the way in which we stand affected in heart and will to Christ reveals and settles our whole character, shapes our whole being, and will determine our whole destiny. He comes, not only to manifest Himself so as that 'every eye shall see Him,' and to divide the sheep from the goats, but also in order that He may reign for ever and gather into the fellowship of His love and the community of His joys all who love and trust Him here. These are the triple phases of our Lord's activity suggested by the three great moments.

III. Lastly, notice the triple attitude which we should assume to Him and to them.

For the first, the cradle, with its consequence of the Cross, our response is clinging faith, grateful memory, earnest following, and close conformity. For the second, the Ascension, with its consequence of a Christ that lives and labours for us, and is with us, our attitude ought to be an intense realisation of the fact of His present working and of His present abode with us. The centre of Christian doctrine has, amongst average Christians, been far too exclusively fixed within the limits of the earthly life, and in the interests of a true and comprehensive grasp of all the blessedness that Christianity is capable of bringing to men, I would protest against that type of thought, earnest and true as it may be within its narrow limits, which is always pointing men to the past fact of a Cross, and slurs over and obscures the present fact of a living Christ who is with us, and in us. One difference between Him and all other benefactors and teachers and helpers is this, that, as ages go on, thicker and ever-thickening folds of misty oblivion wrap them, and their influence diminishes as new circumstances emerge, but this Christ's power laughs at the centuries, and is untinged by oblivion, and is never out of date. For all others we have to say--'having served his generation,' or a generation or two more, 'according to the will of God, he fell on sleep.' But Christ knows no corruption,

and is for ever more the Leader, and the Companion, and the Friend, of each new age.

Brethren! the Cross is incomplete without the throne. We are told to go back to the historical Christ. Yes, Amen, I say! But do not let that make us lose our grasp of the living Christ who is with us to-day. Whilst we rejoice over the 'Christ that died,' let us go on with Paul to say, 'Yea! rather, that is risen again, and is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.'

For that future, discredited as the thought of the second corporeal coming of the Lord Jesus in visible fashion and to a locality has been by the fancies and the vagaries of so-called Apocalyptic expositors, let us not forget that it is the hope of Christ's Church, and that 'they who love His appearing' is, by the Apostle, used as the description and definition of the Christian character. We have to look forwards as well as backwards and upwards, and to rejoice in the sure and certain confidence that the Christ who has come is the Christ who will come.

For us the past should be full of Him, and memory and faith should cling to His Incarnation and His Cross. The present should be full of Him, and our hearts should commune with Him amidst the toils of earth. The future should be full of Him, and our hopes should be based upon no vague anticipations of a perfectibility of humanity, nor upon any dim dreams of what may lie beyond the grave; but upon the concrete fact that Jesus Christ has risen, and that Jesus Christ is glorified. Does my faith grasp the Christ that was--who died for me? Does my heart cling to the Christ who is--who lives and reigns, and with whom my life is hid in God? Do my hopes crystallise round, and anchor upon, the Christ that is to come, and pierce the dimness of the future and the gloom of the grave, looking onwards to that day of days when He, who is our life, shall appear, and we shall appear also with Him in glory?

SIMEON'S SWAN-SONG

'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: 30. For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.'--LUKE 2:29-30.

That scene, when the old man took the Infant in his withered arms, is one of the most picturesque and striking in the Gospel narrative. Simeon's whole life appears, in its later years, to have been under the immediate direction of the Spirit of God. It is very remarkable to notice how, in the course of three consecutive verses, the operation of that divine Spirit upon him is noted. 'It was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.' 'And he came by the Spirit into the Temple.' I suppose that means that some inward monition, which he recognised to be of God, sent him there, in the expectation that at last he was to 'see the Lord's Christ.' He was there before the Child was brought by His parents, for we read 'He came by the Spirit into the Temple, and when the parents brought in the Child Jesus ... he took Him in his arms.' Think of the old man, waiting there in the Sanctuary, told by God that he was thus about to have the fulfilment of his life-long desire, and yet probably not knowing what kind of a shape the fulfilment would take. There is no reason to believe that he knew he was to see an infant; and he waits. And presently a peasant woman comes in with a child in her arms, and there arises in his soul the voice 'Anoint Him! for this is He!' And so, whether he expected such a vision or no, he takes the Child in his arms, and says, 'Lord! Now, now!--after all these years of waiting--lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.'

Now, it seems to me that there are two or three very interesting thoughts deducible from this incident, and from these words. I take three of them. Here we have the Old recognising and embracing the New; the slave recognising and submitting to his Owner; and the saint recognising and welcoming the approach of death.

I. The Old recognising and embracing the New.

It is striking to observe how the description of Simeon's character expresses the aim of the whole Old Testament Revelation. All that was meant by the preceding long series of manifestations through all these years was accomplished in this man. For hearken how he is described--'just and devout,' that is the perfection of moral

character, stated in the terms of the Old Testament; 'waiting for the Consolation of Israel,' that is the ideal attitude which the whole of the gradual manifestation of God's increasing purpose running through the ages was intended to make the attitude of every true Israelite--an expectant, eager look forwards, and in the present, the discharge of all duties to God and man. 'And the Holy Ghost was upon him'; that, too, in a measure, was the ultimate aim of the whole Revelation of Israel. So this man stands as a bright, consummate flower which had at last effloresced from the roots; and in his own person, an embodiment of the very results which God had patiently sought through millenniums of providential dealing and inspiration. Therefore in this man's arms was laid the Christ for whom he had so long been waiting.

And he exhibits, still further, what God intended to secure by the whole previous processes of Revelation, in that he recognises that they were transcended and done with, that all that they pointed to was accomplished when a devout Israelite took into his arms the Incarnate Messiah, that all the past had now answered its purpose, and like the scaffolding when the top stone of a building is brought forth with shouting, might be swept away and the world be none the poorer. And so he rejoices in the Christ that he receives, and sings the swan-song of the departing Israel, the Israel according to the Spirit. And that is what Judaism was meant to do, and how it was meant to end, in an euthanasia, in a passing into the nobler form of the Christian Church and the Christian citizenship.

I do not need to remind you how terribly unlike this ideal the reality was, but I may, though only in a sentence or two, point out that that relation of the New to the Old is one that recurs, though in less sharp and decisive forms, in every generation, and in our generation in a very special manner. It is well for the New when it consents to be taken in the arms of the Old, and it is ill for the Old when, instead of welcoming, it frowns upon the New, and instead of playing the part of Simeon, and embracing and blessing the Infant, plays the part of a Herod, and seeks to destroy the Child that seems to threaten its sovereignty. We old people who are conservative, if not by nature, by years, and you young people who are revolutionary and innovating by reason of your youth, may both find a lesson in that picture in the Temple, of Simeon with the Infant Christ in his arms.

II. Further, we have here the slave recognising and submitting to his Owner.

Now the word which is here employed for 'Lord' is one that very seldom occurs in the New Testament in reference to God; only some four or five times in all. And it is the harshest and hardest word that can be picked out. If you clip the Greek termination off it, it is the English word 'despot,' and it conveys all that that word conveys to us, not only a lord in the sense of a constitutional monarch, not only a lord in the polite sense of a superior in dignity, but a despot in the sense of being the absolute owner of a man who has no rights against the owner, and is a slave. For the word 'slave' is what logicians call the correlative of this word 'despot,' and as the latter asserts absolute ownership and authority, the former declares abject submission. So Simeon takes these two words to express his relation and feeling towards God. 'Thou art the Owner, the Despot, and I am Thy slave.' That relation of owner and slave, wicked as it is, when subsisting between two men--an atrocious crime, 'the sum of all villainies,' as the good old English emancipators used to call it--is the sum of all blessings when regarded as existing between man and God. For what does it imply? The right to command and the duty to obey, the sovereign will that is supreme over all, and the blessed attitude of yielding up one's will wholly, without reserve, without reluctance, to that infinitely mighty, and--blessed be God!--infinitely loving Will Absolute authority calls for abject submission.

And again, the despot has the unquestioned right of life and death over his slave, and if he chooses, can smite him down where he stands, and no man have a word to say. Thus, absolutely, we hang upon God, and because He has the power of life and death, every moment of our lives is a gift from His hands, and we should not subsist for an instant unless, by continual effluence from Him, and influx into us, of the life which flows from Him, the Fountain of life.

Again, the slave-owner has entire possession of all the slave's possessions, and can take them and do what he likes with them. And so, all that I call mine is His. It was His before it became mine; it remains His whilst it is mine, because I am His, and so what seems to belong to me belongs to Him, no less truly. What, then, do you do with your possessions? Use them for yourselves? Dispute His ownership? Forget His claims? Grudge that He should take them away sometimes, and grudge still more to yield them to Him in daily obedience, and when necessary, surrender them? Is such a temper what becomes the slave? What reason has he to grumble if the master comes

to him and says, 'This little bit of ground that I have given you to grow a few sugar-canes and melons on, I am going to take back again.' What reason have we to set up our puny wills against Him, if He exercises His authority over us and demands that we should regard ourselves not only as sons but also as slaves to whom the owner of it and us has given a talent to be used for Him?

Now, all that sounds very harsh, does it not? Let in one thought into it, and it all becomes very gracious. The Apostle Peter, who also once uses this word 'despot,' does so in a very remarkable connection. He speaks about men's 'denying the despot that bought them.' Ah, Peter! you were getting on very thin ice when you talked about denial. Perhaps it was just because he remembered his sin in the judgment hall that he used that word to express the very utmost degree of degeneration and departure from Jesus. But be that as it may, he bases the slave-owner's right on purchase. And Jesus Christ has bought us by His own precious blood; and so all that sounds harsh in the metaphor, worked out as I have been trying to do, changes its aspect when we think of the method by which He has acquired His rights and the purpose for which He exercises them. As the Psalmist said, 'Oh, Lord! truly I am Thy slave. Thou hast loosed my bonds.'

III. So, lastly, we have here the saint recognising and welcoming the approach of death.

Now, it is a very singular thing, but I suppose it is true, that somehow or other, most people read these words, 'Lord! now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace,' as being a petition; 'Lord! now _let_ Thy servant depart.' But they are not that at all. We have here not a petition or an aspiration, but a statement of the fact that Simeon recognises the appointed token that his days were drawing to an end, and it is the glad recognition of that fact. 'Lord! I see now that the time has come when I may put aside all this coil of weary waiting and burdened mortality, and go to rest.' Look how he regards approaching death. 'Thou lettest Thy servant depart' is but a feeble translation of the original, which is better given in the version that has become very familiar to us all by its use in a musical service, the *_Nunc Dimittis_*; 'Now Thou *_dost send away_*' It is the technical word for relieving a sentry from his post. It conveys the idea of the hour having come when the slave who has been on the watch through all the long, weary night, or toiling through all the hot, dusty day, may extinguish his lantern, or fling down his mattock, and go home to his little hut.

'Lord! Thou dost dismiss me now, and I take the dismissal as the end of the long watch, as the end of the long toil.'

But notice, still further, how Simeon not only recognises, but welcomes the approach of death. 'Thou lettest Thy servant depart in peace.' Yes, there speaks a calm voice tranquilly accepting the permission. He feels no agitation, no fluster of any kind, but quietly slips away from his post. And the reason for that peaceful welcome of the end is 'for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.' That sight is the reason, first of all, for his being sure that the curfew had rung for him, and that the day's work was done. But it is also the reason for the peacefulness of his departure. He went 'in peace,' because of what? Because the weary, blurred, old eyes had seen all that any man needs to see to be satisfied and blessed. Life could yield nothing more, though its length were doubled to this old man, than the sight of God's salvation.

Can it yield anything more to us, brethren? And may we not say, if we have seen that sight, what an unbelieving author said, with a touch of self-complacency not admirable, 'I have warmed both hands at the fire of life, and I am ready to depart.' We may go in peace, if our eyes have seen Him who satisfies our vision, whose bright presence will go with us into the darkness, and whom we shall see more perfectly when we have passed from the sentry-box to the home above, and have ceased to be slaves in the far-off plantation, and are taken to be sons in the Father's house. 'Thou lettest Thy servant depart in peace.'

THE BOY IN THE TEMPLE

'And He said unto them, How is it that ye sought Me!
wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?'
--LUKE 2:49.

A number of spurious gospels have come down to us, which are full of stories, most of them absurd and some of them worse, about the infancy of Jesus Christ. Their puerilities bring out more distinctly the simplicity, the nobleness, the worthiness of this one solitary incident of His early days, which has been preserved for us. How has it been preserved? If you will look over the narratives there will be very little difficulty, I think, in answering that question.

Observing the prominence that is given to the parents, and how the story enlarges upon what they thought and felt, we shall not have much doubt in accepting the hypothesis that it was none other than Mary from whom Luke received such intimate details. Notice, for instance, 'Joseph and His mother knew not of it.' 'They supposed Him to have been in the company.' 'And when they,' i.e. Joseph and Mary, 'saw Him, they were astonished'; and then that final touch, 'He was subject to them,' as if His mother would not have Luke or us think that this one act of independence meant that He had shaken off parental authority. And is it not a mother's voice that says, 'His mother kept all these things in her heart,' and pondered all the traits of boyhood? Now it seems to me that, in these words of the twelve-year-old boy, there are two or three points full of interest and of teaching for us. There is--

I. That consciousness of Sonship.

I am not going to plunge into a subject on which certainly a great deal has been very confidently affirmed, and about which the less is dogmatised by us, who must know next to nothing about it, the better; viz. the inter-connection of the human and the divine elements in the person of Jesus Christ. But the context leads us straight to this thought--that there was in Jesus distinct growth in wisdom as well as in stature, and in favour with God and man. And now, suppose the peasant boy brought up to Jerusalem, seeing it for the first time, and for the first time entering the sacred courts of the Temple. Remember, that to a Jewish boy, his reaching the age of twelve made an epoch, because he then became 'a son of the Law,' and took upon himself the religious responsibilities which had hitherto devolved upon his parents. If we will take that into account, and

remember that it was a true manhood which was growing up in the boy Jesus, then we shall not feel it to be irreverent if we venture to say, not that here and then, there began His consciousness of His Divine Sonship, but that that visit made an epoch and a stage in the development of that consciousness, just because it furthered the growth of His manhood.

Further, our Lord in these words, in the gentlest possible way, and yet most decisively, does what He did in all His intercourse with Mary, so far as it is recorded for us in Scripture--relegated her back within limits beyond which she tended to advance. For she said, 'Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing,' no doubt thus preserving what had been the usual form of speech in the household for all the previous years; and there is an emphasis that would fall upon her heart, as it fell upon none other, when He answered: 'Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?' We are not warranted in affirming that the Child meant all which the Man afterwards meant by the claim to be the Son of God; nor are we any more warranted in denying that He did. We know too little about the mysteries of His growth to venture on definite statements of either kind. Our sounding-lines are not long enough to touch bottom in this great word from the lips of a boy of twelve; but this is clear, that as He grew into self-consciousness, there came with it the growing consciousness of His Sonship to His Father in heaven.

Now, dear brethren, whilst all that is unique, and parts Him off from us, do not let us forget that that same sense of Sonship and Fatherhood must be the very deepest thing in us, if we are Christian people after Christ's pattern. We, too, can be sons through Him, and only through Him. I believe with all my heart in what we hear so much about now--'the universal Fatherhood of God.' But I believe that there is also a special relation of Fatherhood and Sonship, which is constituted only, according to Scripture teaching in my apprehension, through faith in Jesus Christ, and the reception of His life as a supernatural life into our souls. God is Father of all men--thank God for it! And that means, that He gives life to all men; that in a very deep and precious sense the life which He gives to every man is not only derived from, but is kindred with, His own; and it means that His love reaches to all men, and that His authority extends over them. But there is an inner sanctuary, there is a better life than the life of nature, and the Fatherhood into which Christ introduces us means, that through faith in Him, and the entrance into our spirits of the Spirit of adoption, we receive a life derived from, and kindred with, the life of the Giver, and that

we are bound to Him not only by the cords of love, but to obey the parental authority. Sonship is the deepest thought about the Christian life.

It was an entirely new thought when Jesus spoke to His disciples of their Father in heaven. It was a thrilling novelty when Paul bade servile worshippers realise that they were no longer slaves, but sons, and as such, heirs of God. It was the rapture of pointing to a new star flaming out, as it were, that swelled in John's exclamation: 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God!' For even though in the Old Testament there are a few occasional references to Israel's King or to Israel itself as being 'God's son,' as far as I remember, there is only one reference in all the Old Testament to parental love towards each of us on the part of God, and that is the great saying in the 103rd Psalm: 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.' For the most part the idea connected in the Old Testament with the Fatherhood of God is authority: 'If I be a Father, where is Mine honour?' says the last of the prophets. But when we pass into the New, on the very threshold, here we get the germ, in these words, of the blessed thought that, as His disciples, we, too, may claim sonship to God through Him, and penetrate beyond the awe of Divine Majesty into the love of our Father God. Brethren, notwithstanding all that was unique in the Sonship of Jesus Christ, He welcomes us to a place beside Himself, and if we are the children of God by faith in Him, then are we 'heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.'

Now the second thought that I would suggest from these words is--

II. The sweet 'must' of filial duty.

'How is it that ye sought Me?' That means: 'Did you not know where I should be sure to be? What need was there to go up and down Jerusalem looking for Me? You might have known there was only one place where you would find Me. Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?' Now, the last words of this question are in the Greek literally, as the margin of the Revised Version tells us, 'in the things of My Father'; and that idiomatic form of speech may either be taken to mean, as the Authorised Version does, 'about My Father's business,' or, with the Revised Version, 'in My Father's house.' The latter seems the rendering most relevant in this connection, where the folly of seeking is emphasised--the certainty of His place is more to the point than that of His occupation. But the locality carried the occupation with it, for why

must He be in the Father's house but to be about the Father's business, 'to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His Temple'?

Do people know where to find us? Is it unnecessary to go hunting for us? Is there a place where it is certain that we shall be? It was so with this child Jesus, and it should be so with all of us who profess to be His followers.

All through Christ's life there runs, and occasionally there comes into utterance, that sense of a divine necessity laid upon Him; and here is its beginning, the very first time that the word occurs on His lips, 'I must.' There is as divine and as real a necessity shaping our lives because it lies upon and moulds our wills, if we have the child's heart, and stand in the child's position. In Jesus Christ the 'must' was not an external one, but He 'must be about His Father's business,' because His whole inclination and will were submitted to the Father's authority. And that is what will make any life sweet, calm, noble. 'The love of Christ constraineth us.' There is a necessity which presses upon men like iron fetters; there is a necessity which wells up within a man as a fountain of life, and does not so much drive as sweetly incline the will, so that it is impossible for him to be other than a loving, obedient child.

Dear friend, have we felt the joyful grip of that necessity? Is it impossible for me not to be doing God's will? Do I feel myself laid hold of by a strong, loving hand that propels me, not unwillingly, along the path? Does inclination coincide with obligation? If it does, then no words can tell the freedom, the enlargement, the calmness, the deep blessedness of such a life. But when these pull in two different ways, as, alas! they often do, and I have to say, 'I must be about my Father's business, and I had rather be about my own if I durst,' which is the condition of a great many so-called Christian people--then the necessity is miserable; and slavery, not freedom, is the characteristic of such Christianity. And there is a great deal of such to-day.

And now one last word. On this sweet 'must,' and blessed compulsion to be about the Father's business, there follows:

III. The meek acceptance of the lowliest duties.

'He went down to Nazareth, and was subject to them.' That is all that is told us about eighteen years, by far the largest part of the

earthly life of Christ. Legend comes in, and for once not inappropriately, and tells us, what is probably quite true, that during these years, Jesus worked in the carpenter's shop, and as one story says, 'made yokes,' or as another tells, made light implements of husbandry for the peasants round Nazareth. Be that as it may, 'He was subject unto them,' and that was doing the Father's will, and being 'about the Father's business,' quite as much as when He was amongst the doctors, and learning by asking questions as well as by hearkening to their instructions. Everything depends on the motive. The commonest duty may be 'the Father's business,' when we are doing manfully the work of daily life. Only we do not turn common duty into the Father's business, unless we remember Him in the doing of it. But if we carry the hallowing and quickening influence of that great 'must' into all the pettinesses, and paltrinesses, and wearinesses, and sorrows of our daily trivial lives, then we shall find, as Jesus Christ found, that the carpenter's shop is as sacred as the courts of the Temple, and that to obey Mary was to do the will of the Father in heaven.

What a blessed transformation that would make of all lives! The psalmist long ago said: 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.' We may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives. We may be in one or other of the many mansions of the Father's house where-ever we go, and may be doing the will of the Father in heaven in all that we do. Then we shall be at rest; then we shall be strong; then we shall be pure; then we shall have deep in our hearts the joyous consciousness, undisturbed by rebellious wills, that now 'we are the sons of God,' and the still more joyous hope, undimmed by doubts or mists, that 'it doth not yet appear what we shall be'; but that wherever we go, it will be but passing from one room of the great home into another more glorious still. 'I must be about my Father's business'; let us make that the motto for earth, and He will say to us in His own good time 'Come home from the field, and sit down beside Me in My house,' and so we 'shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

JOHN THE PREACHER OF REPENTANCE

'Now, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, 2. Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. 3. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; 4. As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. 6. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; 6. And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. 7. Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come! 8. 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. 9. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 10. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? 11. He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. 12. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? 13. And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. 14. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.'--LUKE 3:1-14.

Why does Luke enumerate so carefully the civil and ecclesiastical authorities in verses 1 and 2? Not only to fix the date, but, in accordance with the world-wide aspect of his Gospel, to set his

narrative in relation with secular history; and, further, to focus into one vivid beam of light the various facts which witnessed to the sunken civil and darkened moral and religious condition of the Jews. What more needed to be said to prove how the ancient glory had faded, than that they were under the rule of such a delegate as Pilate, of such an emperor as Tiberius, and that the bad brood of Herod's descendants divided the sacred land between them, and that the very high-priesthood was illegally administered, so that such a pair as Annas and Caiaphas held it in some irregular fashion between them? It was clearly high time for John to come, and for the word of God to come to him.

The wilderness had nourished the stern, solitary spirit of the Baptist, and there the consciousness of his mission and his message 'came to him'--a phrase which at once declares his affinity with the old prophets. Out of the desert he burst on the nation, sudden as lightning, and cleaving like it. Luke says nothing as to his garb or food, but goes straight to the heart of his message, 'The baptism of repentance unto remission of sins,' in which expression the 'remission' depends neither on 'baptism' alone, nor on 'repentance' alone. The outward act was vain if unaccompanied by the state of mind and will; the state of mind was proved genuine by submitting to the act.

In verses 7 to 14 John's teaching as the preacher of repentance is summarised. Why did he meet the crowds that streamed out to him with such vehement rebuke? One would have expected him to welcome them, instead of calling them 'offspring of vipers,' and seeming to be unwilling that they should flee from the wrath to come. But Luke tells why. They wished to be baptized, but there is no word of their repentance. Rather, they were trusting to their descent as exempting them from the approaching storm, so that their baptism would not have been the baptism which John required, being devoid of repentance. Just because they thought themselves safe as being 'children of Abraham,' they deserved John's rough name, 'ye offspring of vipers.'

Rabbinical theology has much to say about 'the merits of the fathers.' John, like every prophet who had ever spoken to the nation of judgments impending, felt that the sharp edge of his words was turned by the obstinate belief that judgments were for the Gentile, and never would touch the Jew. Do we not see the same unbelief that God can ever visit England with national destruction in full force among ourselves? Not the virtues of past generations, but the

righteousness of the present one, is the guarantee of national exaltation.

John's crowds were eager to be baptized as an additional security, but were slow to repent. If heaven could be secured by submitting to a rite, 'multitudes' would come for it, but the crowd thins quickly when the administrator of the rite becomes the vehement preacher of repentance. That is so to-day as truly as it was so by the fords of Jordan. John demanded not only repentance, but its 'fruits,' for there is no virtue in a repentance which does not change the life, were such possible.

Repentance is more than sorrow for sin. Many a man has that, and yet rushes again into the old mire. To change the mind and will is not enough, unless the change is certified to be real by deeds corresponding. So John preached the true nature of repentance when he called for its fruits. And he preached the greatest motive for it which he knew, when he pressed home on sluggish consciences the close approach of a judgment for which everything was ready, the axe ground to a fine edge, and lying at the root of the trees. If it lay there, there was no time to lose; if it still lay, there was time to repent before it was swinging round the woodman's head. We have a higher motive for repentance in 'the goodness of God' leading to it. But there is danger that modern Christianity should think too little of 'the terror of the Lord,' and so should throw away one of the strongest means of persuading men. John's advice to the various classes of hearers illustrates the truth that the commonest field of duty and the homeliest acts may become sacred. Not high-flying, singular modes of life, abandoning the vulgar tasks, but the plainest prose of jog-trot duty will follow and attest real repentance. Every calling has its temptations--that is to say, every one has its opportunities of serving God by resisting the Devil.

JOHN'S WITNESS TO JESUS, AND GOD'S

'And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; 16. John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: 17. Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and will gather the wheat into His garner; but the chaff He will burn with fire unquenchable. 18. And many other things, in his exhortation, preached he unto the people. 19. But Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, 20. Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison. 21. Now, when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, 22. And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, like a dove, upon Him; and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased.'--LUKE iii. 15-22.

This passage falls into three parts: John's witness to the coming Messiah (vs. 15-17); John's undaunted rebuke of sin in high places, and its penalty (vs. 18-20); and God's witness to Jesus (vs. 21, 22).

I. Luke sharply parts off the Baptist's work as a preacher of repentance and plain morality from his work as the herald who preceded the king. The former is delineated in verses 7-14, and its effect was to set light to the always smouldering expectation of the Messiah. The people were ready to rally round him if he would say that he was the coming deliverer. It was a real temptation, but his unmoved humility, which lay side by side with his boldness, brushed it aside, and poured an effectual stream of cold water on the excitement. 'John answered' the popular questionings, of which he was fully aware, and his answer crushed them.

In less acute fashion, the same temptation comes to all who move the general conscience. Disciples always seek to hoist their teacher higher than is fitting. Adherence to him takes the place of

obedience to his message, and, if he is a true man, he has to damp down misdirected enthusiasm.

Mark John's clear apprehension of the limitations of his work. He baptized with water, the symbol and means of outward cleansing. He does not depreciate his position or the importance of his baptism, but his whole soul bows in reverence before the coming Messiah, whose great office was to transcend his, as the wide Mediterranean surpassed the little lake of Galilee. His outline of that work is grand, though incomplete. It is largely based upon Malachi's closing prophecy, and the connection witnesses to John's consciousness that he was the Elijah foretold there. He saw that the Messiah would surpass him in his special endowment. Strong as he was, that other was to be stronger. Probably he did not dream that that other was to wield the divine might, nor that His perfect strength was to be manifested in weakness, and to work its wonders by the might of gentle, self-sacrificing love. But, though he dimly saw, he perfectly adored. He felt himself unworthy (literally, insufficient) to be the slave who untied (or, according to Matthew, 'bore') his lord's sandals. How beautiful is the lowliness of that strong nature! He stood erect in the face of priests and tetrarchs, and furious women, and the headsman with his sword, but he lay prostrate before his King.

Strength and royal authority were not all that he had to proclaim of Messiah. 'He shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost and fire.' We observe that the construction here is different from that in verse 16 ('with water'), inasmuch as the preposition 'in' is inserted, which, though it is often used 'instrumentally,' is here, therefore, more probably to be taken as meaning simply 'in.' The two nouns are coupled under one preposition, which suggests that they are fused together in the speaker's mind as reality and symbol.

Fire is a frequently recurrent emblem of the Holy Spirit, both in the Old and New Testament. It is not the destructive, but the vitalising, glowing, transforming, energy of fire, which is expressed. The fervour of holy enthusiasm, the warmth of ardent love, the melting of hard hearts, the change of cold, damp material into its own ruddy likeness, are all set forth in this great symbol. John's water baptism was poor beside Messiah's immersion into that cleansing fire. Fire turns what it touches into kindred flame. The refiner's fire melts metal, and the scum carries away impurities. Water washes the surface, fire pierces to the centre.

But while that cleansing by the Spirit's fire was to be Messiah's primary office, man's freedom to accept or reject such blessing necessarily made His work selective, even while its destination was universal. So John saw that His coming would part men into two classes, according as they submitted to His baptism of fire or not. The homely image of the threshing-floor, on some exposed, windy height, carries a solemn truth. The Lord of the harvest has an instrument in His hand, which sets up a current of air, and the wheat falls in one heap, while the husks are blown farther, and lie at the edge of the floor. Mark the majestic emphasis on the Christ's ownership in the two phrases, '_His_ floor' and '_His_ garner.'

Notice, too, the fact which determines whether a man is chaff or wheat--namely, his yielding to or rejecting the fiery baptism which Christ offers. Ponder that awful emblem of an empty, rootless, fruitless, worthless life, which John caught up from Psalm I. Thankfully think of the care and safe keeping and calm repose shadowed in that picture of the wheat stored in the garner after the separating act. And let us lay on awed hearts the terrible doom of the chaff. There are two fires, to one or other of which we must be delivered. Either we shall gladly accept the purging fire of the Spirit which burns sin out of us, or we shall have to meet the punitive fire which burns up us and our sins together. To be cleansed by the one or to be consumed by the other is the choice before each of us.

II. Verses 18-20 show John as the preacher and martyr of righteousness. Luke tells his fate out of its proper place, in order to finish with him, and, as it were, clear the stage for Jesus. Similarly the Baptist's desert life is told by anticipation in chapter i. 80. That treatment of his story marks his subordination. His martyrdom is not narrated by Luke, though he knew of it (Luke ix. 7-9), and this brief summary is all that is said of his heroic vehemence of rebuke to sin in high places, and of his suffering for righteousness' sake. John's message had two sides to it, as every gospel of God's has. To the people he spoke good tidings and exhortations; to lordly sinners he peeled out stern rebukes.

It needs some courage to tell a prince to his face that he is foul with corruption, and, still more, to put a finger on his actual sins. But he is no prophet who does not lift up his voice like a trumpet, and speak to hardened consciences. King Demos is quite as impatient of close dealing with his immorality as Herod was. London and New York get as angry with the Christian men who fight against

their lust and drunkenness as ever he did, and would not be sorry if they could silence these persistent 'fanatics' as conveniently as he could. The need for courage like John's, and plain speech like his, is not past yet. The 'good tidings' has rebuke as part of its substance. The sword is two-edged.

III. The narrative now turns to Jesus, and does not even name John as having baptized Him. The peculiarities of Luke's account of the baptism are instructive. He omits the conversation between Jesus and John, and the fact of John's seeing the dove and hearing the voice. Like Mark, he makes the divine voice speak directly to Jesus, whereas Matthew represents it as spoken concerning Him. The baptism itself is disposed of in an incidental clause (having been baptized). The general result of these characteristics is that this account lays emphasis on the bearing of the divine witness as borne to Jesus Himself. It does not deny, but simply ignores, its aspect as a witness borne to John.

Another striking point is Luke's mention of Christ's prayer, which is thus represented as answered by the opened heavens, the descending dove, and the attesting voice. We owe most of our knowledge of Christ's prayers to this Evangelist, whose mission was to tell of the Son of man. Mysteries beyond our plummets are contained in this story; but however unique it is, it has this which may be reproduced, that prayer unveiled heaven, and brought down the dove to abide on the bowed head, and the divine attestation of sonship to fill the waiting heart.

We need not dwell on the beautiful significance of the emblem of the dove. It symbolised both the nature of that gracious, gentle Spirit, and the perpetuity and completeness of its abode on Jesus. Others receive portions of that celestial fullness, but itself, as if embodied in visible form, settled down on Him, and, with meekly folded wings, tarried there unscared. 'God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him.'

Our Evangelist does not venture into the deep waters, nor attempt to tell what was the relation between the Incarnate Word, as it dwelt in Jesus before that descent, and the Spirit which came upon Him. We shall be wise if we refrain from speculating on such points, and content ourselves with knowing that there has been one manhood capable of receiving and retaining uninterruptedly the whole Spirit of God; and that He will fill us with the Spirit which dwelt in Him, in measure and manner corresponding to our need and our faith.

The heavenly voice spoke to the heart of the man Jesus. What was His need of it, and what were its effects on Him, we do not presume to affirm. But probably it originated an increased certitude of the consciousness which dawned, in His answer to Mary, of His unique divine sonship. To us it declares that He stands in an altogether unexampled relation of kindred to the Father, and that His whole nature and acts are the objects of God's complacency. But He has nothing for Himself alone, and in Him we may become God's beloved sons, well pleasing to the Father.

14-THE TEMPTATION

4 And Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2. Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days He did eat nothing: and when they were ended, He afterward hungered. 3. And the devil said unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread, 4. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. 5. And the devil, taking Him up into an high mountain, showed unto Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6. And the devil said unto Him, All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. 7. If Thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be Thine. 8. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind Me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. 9. And he brought Him to Jerusalem and set Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down from hence: 10. For it is written, He shall give His angels charge over Thee, to keep Thee; 11. And in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. 12. And Jesus answering, said unto Him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord Thy God. 13. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from Him for a season.'

--LUKE iv. 1-13.

If we adopt the Revised Version's reading and rendering, the whole of the forty days in the desert were one long assault of Jesus by Satan, during which the consciousness of bodily needs was suspended by the intensity of spiritual conflict. Exhaustion followed this terrible tension, and the enemy chose that moment of physical weakness to bring up his strongest battalions. What a contrast these days made with the hour of the baptism! And yet both the opened heavens and the grim fight were needful parts of Christ's preparation. As true man, He could be truly tempted; as perfect man, suggestions of evil could not arise within, but must be presented from without. He must know our temptations if He is to help us in

them, and He must 'first bind the strong man' if He is afterwards 'to spoil his house.' It is useless to discuss whether the tempter appeared in visible form, or carried Jesus from place to place. The presence and voice were real, though probably if any eye had looked on, nothing would have been seen but the solitary Jesus, sitting still in the wilderness.

I. The first temptation is that of the Son of man tempted to distrust God. Long experience had taught the tempter that his most taking baits were those which appealed to the appetites and needs of the body, and so he tries these first. The run of men are drawn to sin by some form or other of these, and the hunger of Jesus laid Him open to their power--if not on the side of delights of sense, yet on the side of wants. The tempter quotes the divine voice at the baptism with almost a sneer, as if the hungry, fainting Man before him were a strange 'Son of God.' The suggestion sounds innocent enough; for there would have been no necessary harm in working a miracle to feed Himself. But its evil is betrayed by the words, 'If Thou art the Son of God,' and the answer of our Lord, which begins emphatically with 'man,' puts us on the right track to understand why He repelled the insidious proposal even while He was faint with hunger. To yield to it would have been to shake off for His own sake the human conditions which He had taken for our sakes, and to seek to cease to be Son of man in acting as Son of God. He takes no notice of the title given by Satan, but falls back on His brotherhood with man, and accepts the laws under which they live as His conditions.

The quotation from Deuteronomy, which Luke gives in a less complete form than Matthew, implies, even in that incomplete form, that bread is not the only means of keeping a man in life, but that God can feed Him, as He did Israel in its desert life, with manna; or, if manna fails, by the bare exercise of His divine will. Therefore Jesus will not use His power as Son of God, because to do so would at once take Him out of His fellowship with man, and would betray His distrust of God's power to feed Him there in the desert. How soon His confidence was vindicated Matthew tells us. As soon as the devil departed from Him, 'angels came and ministered unto Him.' The soft rush of their wings brought solace to His spirit, wearied with struggle, and once again 'man did eat angels' food.'

This first temptation teaches us much. It makes the manhood of our Lord pathetically true, as showing Him bearing the prosaic but terrible pinch of hunger, carried almost to its fatal point. It

teaches us how innocent and necessary wants may be the devil's levers to overturn our souls. It warns us against severing ourselves from our fellows by the use of distinctive powers for our own behoof. It sets forth humble reliance on God's sustaining will as best for us, even if we are in the desert, where, according to sense, we must starve; and it magnifies the Brother's love, who for our sakes waived the prerogatives of the Son of God, that He might be the brother of the poor and needy.

II. The second temptation is that of the Messiah, tempted to grasp His dominion by false means. The devil finds that he must try a subtler way. Foiled on the side of the physical nature, he begins to apprehend that he has to deal with One loftier than the mass of men; and so he brings out the glittering bait, which catches the more finely organised natures. Where sense fails, ambition may succeed. There is nothing said now about 'Son of God.' The relation of Jesus to God is not now the point of attack, but His hoped--for relation to the world. Did Satan actually transport the body of Jesus to some eminence? Probably not. It would not have made the vision of all the kingdoms any more natural if he had. The remarkable language 'showed ... all ... in a moment of time' describes a physical impossibility, and most likely is meant to indicate some sort of diabolic phantasmagoria, flashed before Christ's consciousness, while His eyes were fixed on the silent, sandy waste.

There is much in Scripture that seems to bear out the boast that the kingdoms are at Satan's disposal. But he is 'the father of lies' as well as the 'prince of this world,' and we may be very sure that his authority loses nothing in his telling. If we think how many thrones have been built on violence and sustained by crime, how seldom in the world's history the right has been uppermost, and how little of the fear of God goes to the organisation of society, even to-day, in so-called Christian countries, we shall be ready to feel that in this boast the devil told more truth than we like to believe. Note that he acknowledges that the power has been 'given,' and on the fact of the delegation of it rests the temptation to worship. He knew that Jesus looked forward to becoming the world's King, and he offers easy terms of winning the dignity. Very cunning he thought himself, but he had made one mistake. He did not know what kind of kingdom Jesus wished to establish. If it had been one of the bad old pattern, like Nebuchadnezzar's or Caesar's, his offer would have been tempting, but it had no bearing on One who meant to reign by love, and to win love by loving to the death.

Worshipping the devil could only help to set up a devil's kingdom. Jesus wanted nothing of the 'glory' which had been 'given' him. His answer, again taken from Deuteronomy, is His declaration that His kingdom is a kingdom of obedience, and that He will only reign as God's representative. It defines His own position and the genius of His dominion. It would come to the tempter's ears as the broken law, which makes his misery and turns all his 'glory' into ashes. This is our Lord's decisive choice, at the outset of His public work, of the path of suffering and death. He renounces all aid from such arts and methods as have built up the kingdoms of earth, and presents Himself as the antagonist of Satan and his dominion. Henceforth it is war to the knife.

For us the lessons are plain. We have to learn what sort of kingdom Jesus sets up. We have to beware, in our own little lives, of ever seeking to accomplish good things by questionable means, of trying to carry on Christ's work with the devil's weapons. When churches lower the standard of Christian morality, because keeping it up would alienate wealthy or powerful men, when they wink hard at sin which pays, when they enlist envy, jealousy, emulation of the baser sort in the service of religious movements, are they not worshipping Satan? And will not their gains be such as he can give, and not such as Christ's kingdom grows by? Let us learn, too, to adore and be thankful for the calm and fixed decisiveness with which Jesus chose from the beginning, and trod until the end, with bleeding but unreluctant feet, the path of suffering on His road to His throne.

III. The third temptation tempts the worshipping Son to tempt God. Luke arranges the temptations partly from a consideration of locality, the desert and the mountain being near each other, and partly in order to bring out a certain sequence in them. First comes the appeal to the physical nature, then that to the finer desires of the mind; and these having been repelled, and the resolve to worship God having been spoken by Jesus, Luke's third temptation is addressed to the devout soul, as it looks to the cunning but shallow eyes of the tempter. Matthew, on the other hand, in accordance with his point of view, puts the specially Messianic temptation last. The actual order is as undiscoverable as unimportant. In Luke's order there is substantially but one change of place--from the solitude of the wilderness to the Temple. As we have said, the change was probably not one of the Lord's body, but only of the scenes flashed before His mind's eye. 'The pinnacle of the Temple' may have been the summit that looked down into the deep valley where the enormous stones of the lofty wall still stand, and which must have been at a

dizzy height above the narrow glen on the one side and the Temple courts on the other. There is immense, suppressed rage and malignity in the recurrence of the sneer, 'If Thou art the Son of God' and in the use of Christ's own weapon of defence, the quotation of Scripture.

What was wrong in the act suggested? There is no reference to the effect on the beholders, as has often been supposed; and if we are correct in supposing that the whole temptation was transacted in the desert, there could be none. But plainly the point of it was the suggestion that Jesus should, of His own accord and needlessly, put Himself in danger, expecting God to deliver Him. It looked like devout confidence; it was really 'tempting God'. It looked like the very perfection of the trust with which, in the first round of this duel, Christ had conquered; it was really distrust, as putting God to proof whether He would keep His promises or no. It looked like the very perfection of that worship with which He had overcome in the second round of the fight; it was really self-will in the mask of devoutness. It tempted God, because it sought to draw Him to fulfil to a man on self-chosen paths His promises to those who walk in ways which He has appointed.

We trust God when we look to Him to deliver us in perils met in meek acceptance of His will. We tempt Him when we expect Him to save us from those encountered on roads that we have picked out for ourselves. Such presumption disguised as filial trust is the temptation besetting the higher regions of experience, to which the fumes of animal passions and the less gross but more dangerous airs from the desires of the mind do not ascend. Religious men who have conquered these have still this foe to meet. Spiritual pride, the belief that we may venture into dangers either to our natural or to our religious life, where no call of duty takes us, the thrusting ourselves, unbidden, into circumstances where nothing but a miracle can save us—these are the snares which Satan lays for souls that have broken his coarser nets. The three answers with which Jesus overcame are the mottoes by which we shall conquer. Trust God, by whose will we live. Worship God, in whose service we get all of this world that is good for us. Tempt not God, whose angels keep us in our ways, when they are His ways, and who reckons trust that is not submission to His ways to be tempting God, and not trusting Him.

'All the temptation' was ended. So these three made a complete whole, and the quiver of the enemy was for the time empty. He departed 'for a season,' or rather,

until an opportunity. He was foiled when he tried to tempt by addressing desires. His next assault will be at Gethsemane and Calvary, when dread and the shrinking from pain and death will be assailed as vainly.

15-PREACHING AT NAZARETH

'And He began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled In your ears.'--LUKE iv. 21.

This first appearance of our Lord, in His public work at Nazareth, the home of His childhood, was preceded, as we learn from John's Gospel, by a somewhat extended ministry in Jerusalem. In the course of it, He cast the money-changers out of the Temple, did many miracles, had His conversation with Nicodemus, and on His return towards Galilee met the woman of Samaria at the well. The report of these things, no doubt, had preceded Him, and kindled the Nazarenes' curiosity to see their old companion who had suddenly shot up into a person of importance, and had even made a sensation in the metropolis. A great man's neighbours are keen critics of, and slow believers in, his greatness. So it was natural and very prudent that Jesus should not begin His ministry in Nazareth.

We can easily imagine the scene that morning in the little village, nestling among the hills. How many memories would occupy Christ as He entered the synagogue, where He had so often sat a silent worshipper! How Mary's eyes would fill with tears if she was there, and how the companions of His boyhood, who used to play with Him, would watch Him; all curious, some sympathetic, some jealous, some contemptuous!

The synagogue service began with prayer and praise. Then followed two readings, one from the Law, one from the Prophets. When the latter point was reached, in accordance with usage, Jesus rose, thereby signifying His desire to be reader of the Prophetic portion. We can understand how there would be a movement of quickened attention as the roll was handed to Him and He turned its sheets. He 'found the place'; that looks as if He sought for it; that is to say, that it was not the appointed lesson for the day--if there was such--but that it was a passage selected by Himself.

I need not enter upon the divergences between Luke's quotation as given in our English version and the Hebrew. They are partly due to the fact that he is quoting from memory the Greek version of the LXX. He inserts, for instance, one clause which is not found in that place in Isaiah, but in another part of the same prophet. Having read standing, as was the usage, in token of reverence for the Scripture, Jesus resumed His seat, not as having finished, but, as

was the usage, taking the attitude of the teacher, which signified authority. And then, His very first sentence was the most unlimited assertion that the great words which He had been reading had reached their full accomplishment in Himself. They are very familiar to our ears. If we would understand their startling audacity we must listen to them with the ears of the Nazarenes, who had known Him ever since He was a child. 'This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.' Now, it seems to me that this first sermon of our Lord's to His old fellow-townsmen brings into striking prominence some characteristics of His whole teaching, to which I desire briefly to direct attention.

I. I note Christ's self-assertion.

To begin in Nazareth with such words as these in my text was startling enough, but it is in full accord with the whole tone of our Lord's teaching. If you will carefully search for the most essential characteristics and outstanding differentia of the words of Jesus Christ, even if you make all allowance that some make for the non-historical character of the Gospels, you have this left as the residuum, that the impression which He made upon the men that were nearest to Him, and that caught up most fully the spirit of His teaching, was that the great thing that differentiated it from all other was His unhesitating persistence in pushing into the very forefront, His testimony about Himself. I do not think that there is anything parallel to that anywhere else amongst the men whom the world recognises as being great religious geniuses or great moral teachers. What characterises as perfectly unique our Lord's teaching is not only the blessed things that He said about God or the deep truths that He said about men and their duty, or the sad things that He said about men and their destiny, or the radiant hopes that He unveiled as to men and their possibility, but what He said about Himself. His message was not so much 'Believe in God and do right,' as it was 'Believe in Me and follow Me.'

I need only point you to the Sermon on the Mount, which is popularly supposed to contain very little of Christ's reference to Himself, and to remind you how there, in that authoritative proclamation of the laws of the new kingdom, He calmly puts His own utterances as co-ordinate with--nay! as superior to--the utterances of the ancient law, and sweeps aside Moses--though recognising Moses' divine mission--with an 'I say unto you.' I need only remind you, further, how, at the end of that 'compendium of reasonable morality,' He lays down this principle--that these sayings of 'Mine' are a rock-foundation, on which whoever builds

shall never be put to confusion. This is but a specimen of the golden thread, if I may call it so, of self-assertion which runs through the whole of our Lord's teaching.

Now, I venture to say that this undeniable characteristic is only warranted on the supposition that He is the Son of God, and His work the salvation of the world. If He is so, if 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,' if the revelation of Himself which He makes is the Revelation of God, if His death is for the life of the world; and if, when we honour Him, we honour God; when we trust Him, we trust God; when we obey Him we obey God; then I can understand His persistent self-assertion. But otherwise does He not deliberately intercept emotions which are only rightly directed to God? Does He not claim prerogatives, such as forgiveness of sins, bestowal of life, answering of prayer, which are only possessed by the Divine Being?

I know that many who will not go with me in my intellectual formularising of the truth about Christ's nature do bow to Him with unfeigned reverence. But it seems to me, I humbly confess, that there is no logical basis for such reverence except the full-toned recognition that the mystery of His self-assertion is explained by the mystery of His nature, God manifest in the flesh. I, for my part, do not see how the moral perfectness of Jesus Christ is to be saved, in view of that unmistakable strand in His teaching, unless by such admission. Rather, I feel that the recognition of it brings us face to face with the tremendous alternative, and that the people who were moved to indignation by His self-assertion because they recognised not His divine origin, and said 'This man blasphemeth'; 'This deceiver said,' have more to say in defence of their conclusion than those who bow before Him with reverence, and declare Him to be the pattern of all human perfectness, and yet falter when they are asked to join in the great confession, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

II. Secondly, note here our Lord's sad conception of humanity.

There are, as it were, two strands running through the prophetic passage which He quotes, one in reference to Himself, one in reference to those whom He came to help. To the latter I now turn, to get our Lord's point of view when He looked upon the facts of human life.

No man will ever do much for the world whose ears have not been

opened to hear its sad music. An inadequate conception of its miseries is sure to lead to inadequate prescriptions for their remedy. We must bear upon our own hearts the burdens that we seek to lift off our brothers' shoulders. There is nothing about the Master's words concerning mankind more pathetic and more plain than the sad, stern, and yet pitying view which He always took concerning them and their condition.

In the passage on which Jesus based His claims, as given by Luke, one of the clauses is probably not in this place genuine, for 'the healing of the brokenhearted' should be struck out of the true text. There are then four symbols employed: the poor, the captives, the blind, the bruised. And these four are representations of the result of one fell cause, and that is--sin.

Sin impoverishes. Our true wealth is God. No man that possesses Him, by love, and trust, and conformity of will and effort to His discerned will, is poor, whatever else he has, whatever else he lacks. And no man who has lost this one durable treasure, the loving communion with, and possession of, God, in mind and heart and will and effort, but is a pauper whatever else he possesses. Wherever a man has sold himself to his own will, and has made himself and his own inclinations and misread good his centre and his aim, which is the definition of sin, there bankruptcy and poverty have come. Thieves sometimes beset travellers from the gold mines, as they are bringing down their dust or their nuggets to market, and empty the pockets of the gold, and fill them up with sand. That is what sin does for us; it takes away our true treasure, and befools us by giving us what seems to be solid till we come to open the bag; and then there is no power in it to buy anything for us. 'Why will ye spend your labour for that which satisfieth not?' The one poverty is the impoverishment that lays hold of every soul that wrenches itself, in self-will, apart from God. Sin makes poor.

Sin not only impoverishes, but imprisons 'the captives.' Ah! you have only to think of your own experience to find out what that means. Is there nothing in the set of your affections, in the mastery that your passion has over you, in the habits of your lives, which you know as well as God knows it, to be wrong and ruinous, and of which you have tried to get rid? I know the answer, and every one of us, if we will look into our own hearts, knows it: we are 'tied and bound by the chains of our sin.' You do not need to go to inebriate homes, where there are people that would cut their right hands off if they could get rid of the craving, and cannot, to find

instances of this bondage. We have only to be honest with ourselves, and to try to pull the boat against the stream instead of letting it drift with it, to know the force with which the current runs. A tiny thread like a spider's draws after it a bit of cotton a little thicker, and knotted to that there is a piece of pack-thread, and after that a two-stranded cord, and then a cable that might hold an ironclad at anchor. That is a parable of how we draw to ourselves, by imperceptible degrees, an ever-thickening set of manacles that bind our wills and make us the servants of sin. 'His slaves ye are whom ye obey.' Sin imprisons. That is, your sin--do not let us befool ourselves with abstractions--_your_ sin imprisons you.

Sin blinds. Wherever there comes over a soul the mist of self-will and self-regard, sight fails; and all the greatest things are blurred and blotted. The man that is immersed in his own evil is like one plunged in the ocean. The cold, salt waters are about him, and above him; and to him the glories of the sky, and the brightness of the sun, the tenderness of the colouring, are all blotted out. He who goes through life as some of us do, never seeing God, never seeing the loftiest beauty of goodness, never beholding with any clearness of vision the radiant possibilities of the future and its awful threatenings, may indeed see the things an inch from the point of his nose; but he is blind and cannot see afar off, and can only behold, and that darkly, the insignificances that are around him. Sin blinds.

And sin bruises. It takes all the health out of us, and makes us, from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head, masses of 'wounds and bruises and putrifying sores.'

The enchantress having worked all this havoc, then gives us a cup of illusion which, when we drink, we know not that there is anything the matter with us. We are like a lunatic in a cell, who thinks himself a prince in a palace, and though living on porridge and milk, fancies that he is partaking of all the dainties of a luxurious table. The deceitfulness of sin is not the least of its tragical consequences.

III. Lastly, we have here our Lord's conception of Himself and of His own work.

Your time will not allow of my dwelling upon this as I would fain have done, but let me point out one or two of the salient features of this initial programme of His. He claims to be the theme and the

fulfilment of prophecy. Now, whatever influences modern notions about the genesis of the Old Testament, and the characteristics of its prophetic utterances may have done, they have not touched, and they never will touch, this one central characteristic of all that old system, that embedded in it there was an onward-looking gaze, anticipatory of a higher fulfilment and a further development of all that it taught. To those of us to whom Christ's words are the end of all strife I need only point out that, here, He endorses the belief that prophetic utterances, however they may have had, and did have, a lower and immediate meaning, were only realised in the whole sweep and significance in Himself. So He presents Himself before His acquaintances in the little synagogue at Nazareth, and before the whole world to all time, as the centre-point and pivot on which the history of the world, so to speak, revolves; all that was before converging to Him, all that was after flowing down from Him. 'They that went before, and they that followed after, cried, Hosanna! blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord.'

He claims to possess the whole fullness of the divine Spirit: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me.' That is a reminiscence, no doubt, of the experience by the fords of the Jordan, at the Baptism. But it also opens up a wondrous consciousness, on His part, of a complete and uninterrupted possession of the divine life in all its fullness, which involves an entire separation from the miseries and needs of men. He claims to be the Messiah of the Old Covenant, with all the fullness of meaning, and loftiness of dignity which clustered round that word and that thought. He claims not only to proclaim, but to bestow, the blessings of which He speaks. For He not only comes to 'preach good tidings to the poor,' but 'to heal the broken-hearted,' and 'to set at liberty all them that are bound.' He is the Gospel which He utters. He not merely proclaims the favour of heaven, but He brings 'the acceptable year of the Lord.'

This, in barest outline--which is all that your time will admit--is the summary of what Jesus Christ, in that first sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth, asserted Himself to be.

He does not detail the means by which He is about to bring the golden year, the year of Jubilee, 'the acceptable year of the Lord.' But I venture to say that it is hard to find, in the life of Jesus Christ, that which fulfils Christ's own programme, as thus announced, unless you bring in His death on the Cross for the abolition of sin, His Resurrection for the abolition of death; His reign in glory for the bestowment on all sinful and bruised souls of

the Spirit of healing and of righteousness.

These Nazarenes listened. Their hearts and consciences attested the magnetic power of His personality, and the truth of His word. So do the hearts and consciences of most of us. They wondered at the 'words of grace'--whose matter was grace, whose manner was gracious--that proceeded from His mouth. So do most of us. But they let the incipient movement of their hearts be arrested by the cold, carping question, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' and all the enthusiasm chilled into indifference; 'indignation' followed, and some of those who had almost been drawn to Him, in an hour's time had their hands on His robe, to cast Him from the brow of the hill on which their village was built. Every man who comes to the point of feeling some emotions towards Christ as his Redeemer, as his King, is at a fork of the road. He may either take to the right, which will lead him to full communion and acceptance; or he may go to the left, which will carry him away out into the desert. The critical hour in the alchemist's laboratory was when the lead in his crucible began to melt. If a cold current got at it, it resumed its dead solidity, and no gold could be made.

Brother! do not let the world's cold currents get at your heart and freeze it again, if you feel that in any measure it is beginning to melt into penitence, and to flow with faith. The same voice that in the synagogue of Nazareth said, 'He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor' speaks to us to-day from heaven, saying, 'I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ... and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve that thou mayest see.'

16-A SABBATH IN CAPERNAUM

'And in the synagogue there was a man which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, 34. Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art; the Holy One of God. 35. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not. 36. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power He commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. 37. And the fame of Him went out into every place of the country round about. 38. And He arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house: and Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought Him for her. 39. And He stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them. 40. Now, when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them. 41. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ, the Son of God. And He, rebuking them, suffered them not to speak: for they knew that He was Christ. 42. And when it was day, He departed, and went into a desert place; and the people sought Him, and came unto Him, and stayed Him, that He should not depart from them. 43. And He said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. 44. And He preached in the synagogues of Galilee.'--LUKE iv.33-44.

There are seven references to Christ's preaching in the synagogues in this chapter, and only two in the rest of this Gospel. Probably our Lord somewhat changed His method, and Luke, as the Evangelist of the gospel for Gentile as well as Jew, emphasises the change, as foreshadowing and warranting the similar procedure in Paul's preaching. This lesson takes us down from the synagogue at Nazareth, among its hills, to that at Capernaum, on the lakeside, where Jesus was already known as a worker of miracles. The two Sabbaths are in sharp contrast. The issue of the one is a tumult of fury and hate;

that of the other, a crowd of suppliants and an eager desire to keep Him with them. The story is in four paragraphs, each showing a new phase of Christ's power and pity.

I. Verses 33-37 present Christ as the Lord of that dark world of evil. The hushed silence of the synagogue, listening to His gentle voice, was suddenly broken by shrieks of rage and fear, coming from a man who had been sitting quietly among the others. Possibly his condition had not been suspected until Christ's presence roused his dreadful tyrant. The man's voice is at the demon's service, and only Jesus recognises who speaks through the wretched victim. We take for granted the reality of demoniacal possession, as certified for all who believe Jesus, by His words and acts in reference to it, as well as forced on us, by the phenomena themselves, which are clearly distinguishable from disease, madness, or sin. The modern aversion to the supernatural is quite as much an unreasonable prejudice as any old woman's belief in witchcraft and Professor Huxley, making clumsy fun of the 'pigs at Gadara,' is holding opinions in the same sublime indifference to evidence of facts as the most superstitious object of his narrow-visioned scorn.

Napoleon called 'impossible' a 'beast of a word.' So it is in practical life,--and no less so when glibly used to discredit well-attested facts. We neither aspire to the omniscience which pronounces that there can be no possession by evil spirits, nor venture to brush aside the testimony of the Gospels and the words of Christ, in order to make out such a contention.

Note the rage and terror of the demon. The presence of purity is a sharp pain to impurity, and an evil spirit is stirred to its depths when in contact with Jesus. Monstrous growths that love the dark shrivel and die in sunshine. The same presence which is joy to some may be a very hell to others. We may approach even here that state of feeling which broke out in these shrieks of malignity, hatred, and dread. It is an awful thing when the only relief is to get away from Jesus, and when the clearest recognition of His holiness only makes us the more eager to disclaim any connection with Him. That is the hell of hells. In its completeness, it makes the anguish of the demon; in its rudiments, it is the misery of some men.

Observe too, the unclean spirit's knowledge, not only of the birthplace and name, but of the character and divine relationship of Jesus. That is one of the features of demoniacal possession which distinguish it from disease or insanity, and is quite incapable of

explanation on any other ground. It gives a glimpse into a dim region, and suggests that the counsels of Heaven, as effected on earth, are keenly watched and understood by eyes whose gleam is unsoftened by any touch of pity or submission. It is most natural, if there are such spirits, that they should know Jesus while men knew Him not, and that their hatred should keep pace with their knowledge, even while by the knowledge the hatred was seen to be vain.

Observe Christ's tone of authority and sternness. He had pity for men, who were capable of redemption, but His words and demeanour to the spirits are always severe. He accepts the most imperfect recognition from men, and often seems as if labouring to evoke it, but He silences the spirits' clear recognition. The confession which is 'unto salvation' comes from a heart that loves, not merely from a head that perceives; and Jesus accepts nothing else. He will not have His name soiled by such lips.

Note, still further, Christ's absolute control of the demon. His bare word is sovereign, and secures outward obedience, though from an unsubdued and disobedient will. He cannot make the foul creature love, but He can make him act. Surely Omnipotence speaks, if demons hear and obey. Their king had been conquered, and they knew their Master. The strong man had been bound, and this is the spoiling of his house. The question of the wondering worshippers in the synagogue goes to the root of the matter, when they ask what they must think of the whole message of One whose word gives law to the unclean spirits; for the command to them is a revelation to us, and we learn His Godhead by the power of His simple word, which is but the forth-putting of His will.

We cannot but notice the lurid light thrown by the existence of such spirits on the possibility of undying and responsible beings reaching, by continued alienation of heart and will from God, a stage in which they are beyond the capacity of improvement, and outside the sweep of Christ's pity.

II. Verses 38 and 39 show us Christ in the gentleness of His healing power, and the immediate service of gratitude to Him. The scene in the synagogue manifested 'authority and power,' and was prompted by abhorrence of the demon even more than by pity for his victim; but now the Lord's tenderness shines unmingled with sternness. Mark gives details of this cure, which, no doubt, came from Peter--such as his joint ownership of the house with his brother, the names of

the companions of Jesus, and the infinitely tender action of taking the sick woman by the hand and helping her to rise. But Luke, the physician, is more precise in his description of the case: 'holden by a great fever.' He traces the cure to the word of rebuke, which, no doubt, accompanied the clasp of the hand.

Here again Christ puts forth divine power in producing effects in the material sphere by His naked word. 'He spake and it was done.' That truly divine prerogative was put forth at the bidding of His own pity, and that pity which wielded Omnipotence was kindled by the beseechings of sorrowing hearts. Is not this miracle, which shines so lustrously by the side of that terrible scene with the demon, a picture in one case, and that the sickness of one poor and probably aged woman, of the great truth that heartens all our appeals to Him? He who moves the forces of Deity still from His throne lets us move His heart by our cry.

Luke is especially struck with one feature in the case--the immediate return of usual strength. The woman is lying, the one minute, pinned down and helpless with 'great fever,' and the next is bustling about her domestic duties. No wonder that a physician should think so abnormal a case worthy of note. When Christ heals, He heals thoroughly, and gives strength as well as healing. What could a woman, with no house of her own, and probably a poor dependant on her son-in-law, do for her healer? Not much. But she did what she could, and that without delay. The natural impulse of gratitude is to give its best, and the proper use of healing and new strength is to minister to Him. Such a guest made humble household cares worship; and all our poor powers or tasks, consecrated to His praise and become the offerings of grateful hearts, are lifted into greatness and dignity. He did not despise the modest fare hastily dressed for Him; and He still delights in our gifts, though the cattle on a thousand hills are His. 'I will sup with him,' says He, and therein promises to become, as it were, a guest at our humble tables.

III. Verses 40 and 41 show us the all-sufficiency of Christ's pity and power. The synagogue worship would be in the early morning, and the healing of the woman immediately after, and the meal she prepared the midday repast. The news had time to spread; and as soon as the sinking sun relaxed the Sabbatical restrictions, a motley crowd came flocking round the house, carrying all the sick that could be lifted, all eager to share in His healing. The same kind of thing may be seen yet round many a traveller's tent. It did not

argue real faith in Him, but it was genuine sense of need, and expectation of blessing from His hand; and the measure of faith was the measure of blessing. They got what they believed He could give. If their faith had been larger, the answers would have been greater.

But men are quite sure that they want to be well when they are ill, and bodily healing will be sought with far more earnestness and trouble than soul-healing. Crowds came to Jesus as Physician who never cared to come to Him as Redeemer. Offer men the smaller gifts, and they will run over one another in their scramble for them; but offer them the highest, and they will scarcely hold out a languid hand to take them.

But the point made prominent by Luke is the inexhaustible fullness of pity and power, which met and satisfied all the petitioners. The misery spoke to Christ's heart; and so as the level rays of the setting sun cast a lengthening shadow among the sad groups, He moved amidst them, and with gentle touch healed them all. To-day, as then, the fountain of His pity and healing power is full, after thousands have drawn from it, and no crowd of suppliants bars our way to His heart or His hands. He has 'enough for all, enough for each, enough for ever more.'

The reference to demoniacs adds nothing to the particulars in the earlier verses except the evidence it gives of the frequency of possession then.

IV. Verses 42-44 show us Jesus seeking seclusion, but willingly sacrificing it at men's call. He withdraws in early morning, not because His store of power was exhausted, or His pity had tired, but to renew His communion with the Father. He needed solitude and silence, and we need it still more. No work worth doing will ever be done for Him unless we are familiar with some quiet place, where we and God alone together can hold converse, and new strength be poured into our hearts. Our Lord is here our pattern, also, of willingly leaving the place of communion when duty calls and men implore. We must not stay on the Mount of Transfiguration when demoniac boys are writhing on the plain below, and heart-broken fathers wearying for our coming. A great, solemn 'must' ruled His life, as it should do ours, and the fulfilment of that for which He 'was sent' ever was His aim, rather than even the blessedness of solitary communion or repose of the silent hour of prayer.

17-INSTRUCTIONS FOR FISHERMEN

'Now when He had left speaking, He said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.'--LUKE v. 4.

The day's work begins early in the East. So the sun, as it rose above the hills on the other side of the lake, shone down upon a busy scene, fresh with the dew and energy of the morning, on the beach by the little village of Bethsaida. One group of fishermen was washing their nets, their boats being hauled up on the strand. A crowd of listeners was thus early gathered round the Teacher; but the fishermen, who were His disciples, seem to have gone on with their work, never minding Christ or the crowd. It is sometimes quite as religious to be washing nets as to be listening to Christ's teaching.

The incident which follows the words of my text, and which is called the first miraculous draught of fishes, is stamped by our Lord Himself with a symbolic purpose; for at the end of it He says: 'Fear not! from henceforth thou shalt catch men.' And that flings back a flood of light on the whole story; and not only warrants but obliges us to take it as being by Him intended for the instruction in their Christian work of these four whom He has chosen to be His workers. However many of our Lord's miracles may not come under this category of symbolism (and I, for my part, do not believe that there are any of them which do not), this one clearly does. We have His own commentary to compel us to interpret its features as meaning something beyond what appears on the surface. I take it, then, that we have here a first vivid code of instructions which our Lord gives to all His servants who do work for Him; and I wish to look at the various stages of this incident from that point of view.

If there are any of my hearers who think to themselves, 'Ah, well! he is not going to say anything that I have anything to do with,' so much the worse for you, if you are not a Christian; or, so much the worse for you if, being a Christian, you are not an active servant. Jesus Christ had four disciples who were fishermen, and out of them He made four fishers of men. The obligation is universal.

I. The Law of Service.

'Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.'

Now there is nothing more remarkable in the whole narrative than the matter-of-course fashion in which our Lord takes the disposal of these men, and orders them about. It is not explicable unless we fall back upon what Luke does not tell us, but John does, in his Gospel, that this was by no means the first time that He had come across Peter and Andrew his brother, or James and John his brother. We do not need to trouble ourselves with the chronological question how long before they had been drawn to Him at the fords of Jordan by the witness of John the Baptist, and by the witness of some of them to the others. The relationship had been then commenced which is presupposed by our Lord's authoritative tone here. It leads in the incident of my text to a closer discipleship, which did not admit of Simon and John hauling or cleaning their nets any more. They had been disciples before in a certain loose fashion, a fashion which permitted them to go home and look after their ordinary avocations. Hence-forward they were disciples in a much more stringent fashion. It was because they had already said 'Rabbi! Thou art the Son of God! Thou art the King of Israel,' that this strange imperative command, inexplicable, except by the supplement of the last of the four Gospels, came from Christ's lips and secured immediate obedience.

If we thus understand that His authority follows on our discipleship, and that the words of my text, first of all, insist upon and assert His right to command and absolutely dispose of the activities, resources, and persons of all His disciples, we have learned something that we only need to practise in order to make our lives noble with a strange nobility, and blessed and sweet with an unearthly sanctity and blessedness.

Further, the words of my text not only declare for us thus the absolute authority of Jesus Christ over all His disciples, but also reveal His sweet promise and gracious assurance that He cares to guide, to direct, to prescribe spheres, to determine methods, to lead those who docilely look to Him and wait upon Him, in paths in which their activity may most profitably be employed for Him and for His Church. If there is anything that is declared to us plainly in the Scriptures, with regard to the relationships between men and Jesus Christ, it is this, that a docile heart will always be a guided heart, partly by inward whispers, which only they disbelieve who limit God in His relation to men, beyond what they have a right to do; and partly by outward providences which only they disbelieve who limit God in His power over the external world, beyond what they have a right to do. He will guide, sometimes with His eye, to which

the loving eye flashes back response; sometimes with His whispered word, when the noises of earth and the pulsations of self-will are stilled; sometimes with His rod, which the less sensitive of His sons do often need; sometimes by successes in paths that we venture upon tentatively and timidly; and sometimes by failures in paths into which we rush confidently and presumptuously; but always, the waiting heart is a guided heart, and if we listen we shall hear 'This is the way, walk ye in it.' And sometimes it is God's will that we should make mistakes, for these too help us to learn His will.

But, further, and more particularly, I do not think that I am unduly reading too much meaning into this story, if I ask you to put emphasis upon one word, 'Launch out into the deep.' As long as you keep pottering along, a boat's length from the shore, you will only catch little fishes. The big ones, and the heavy takes are away out yonder. Go out there, if you want to get them. Which, being translated, is this--The same spirit of daring enterprise, which is a condition of success in secular matters, is no less potent a factor in the success of Christian men in their enterprises for Jesus Christ. As long as we keep Him down, within the limits of use and wont, and are horribly afraid of anything that our great-grandfathers did not use to do, there will be very few fish in the bottom of the boat.

Oh, brethren! if one thinks of the world into which it has been God's providence to put us, a world all seething with new aspirations and unrest--if we think of the condition of the great city in which we live, which is only a specimen of the cities of England, and of the tragical insufficiency of Christian enterprise and effort, as compared with the overwhelming masses of the community, surely, surely, there is nothing more wanted to make Christian people wake up from their old jog-trot habits, and cast themselves with new earnestness, new daring and enterprise, into forms of service which conscience and sober wisdom may approve. Of course, I do not forget that any such new methods must each approve themselves at the tribunal of the Christian consciousness. It is no part of my business here to descend into details and particulars, but I do want to lay on my own heart, and especially on the hearts of the members of the church of which I have the honour to be the pastor, and also upon all other Christian people whom my voice may reach, the solemn responsibility which the conditions of life in our generation lay upon Christian men and women, 'Launch out into the deep and let down your nets.' I believe, for my part, that if all the good, God-fearing, Christ-loving men and women in Manchester

were to hear this voice sounding in their ears, and to obey it, they would change the face of the city.

II. The Response.

Peter, characteristically, speaks out, and says exactly what a fisherman would be likely to say to a carpenter from Nazareth, that came down to teach him his business. The landsman would not know what the fisherman knew well enough, that it was useless to go fishing in the morning if you had not caught anything all night. There was very little chance of getting any better success when the sun's rays were glinting on the surface of the water.

'We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing.' Experience said, 'No! do not.' Christ said, 'Yes! do.' And so when Peter has made a clean breast of his objection, founded on experience, he goes on with the consent prompted by the devotion and consecration of love, 'nevertheless.' A great word that. 'We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at _Thy_ word we will let down the net. So here goes.' And away they went, breakfastless perhaps, with their nets half cleaned, and sleepy and tired with the night's work.

Here, then, we see obedience that springs delighted to obey, because it is impelled by love. That is the spirit which can be trusted to go out into the deep, which does not ask whether things are recognised and usual or not, but which, if once it is sure of the Lord's will, takes no counsel of anything else. How should it, seeing that there is nothing so delightful to a heart that truly loves as to know and do the will of its beloved? And that, dear brethren, is the spirit that all we Christian people need--a deeper, more vivid, more continual, soul-subduing, muscle-straining consciousness that Jesus Christ 'loved me and gave Himself for me.' Then His whisper will be like thunder, and the motto of our lives will be 'At Thy word, I will!'

Further, here is obedience that was not in the least degree depressed by the recognition of past failure. All night long they had been dropping the net overboard, and drawing it in, and with horny, wet hands seeking in its meshes, and finding nothing. Then overboard with it again, and more pulling at the heavy sweeps, till the dawn began to show, and all in vain. Now the weary task must be done all over again, though in all the past hours though they were the best, there has been only failure.

I think that our Christian courage and consecration would be immensely increased, if we could learn the lesson of my text; and feel that, however often in the past I may have broken down, the word of Christ's command, which thrills into my will, is also the word of Christ's promise which should stay my heart, and give me the assurance that past defeat shall be converted into future victory.

There is an obedience which did not grudge fresh toil before the effect of past toils had been quite got over. The nets, as I said, were only half cleaned. It was a pity to begin and dirty them again. The fishers had had a very hard night's toil. If they had been like some of us they would have said, 'Oh! I have been working hard all the night. I cannot possibly do any more this morning.' 'I am so very busy with my business all the week, that it is perfectly absurd to talk about my teaching in a Sunday-school.' That was not their spirit at all. No matter how they had to rub their eyes to get the sleep out of them, they just bundled the nets into the boat once more, pushed her down the strand, and shoved her out into the blue waters at Christ's bidding. And that is the sort of workmen that He wants, and that you and I should be.

Further, we have here an obedience that kept the Master's word sounding in its heart whilst it was at work. 'At Thy word will I let down the net.'

Ah! we very often begin working with a very pure motive, and as we go on, the motive gradually oozes away, and what was begun in the spirit is continued in the flesh; and what was begun with a true devotion to Jesus Christ is continued because we were doing it yesterday, and the day before that, and the day before that, and because it is the custom to do it. So we go on. The heart having all gone out of our service, the blessing is gone out of it too. But if we will keep our hearts near that Lord and listen to His voice calling us, wearied or not wearied, beaten before or not beaten before, and do as He bids us, launch out into the deep, we shall not toil in vain.

III. The result.

Christ's command ever includes His promise. Work done for Him is never resultless. True, His most faithful servants have often to say, if they look at their few sheaves with the eye of sense, 'I have spent my strength for nought.' True, the Apostolic experience is, at the

best, but too exactly repeated, 'Some believed, and some believed not.' Christ's Gospel always produces its twofold effect, being 'a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death.' If the great Sower, when He went forth to sow, expected but a fourth part of the seed to fall into good ground, His servants need look for no larger results. But still it remains true that honest, earnest work for Jesus, wisely planned and prayerfully carried out with self-oblivion and self-surrender, will not be unblest. If our labour is 'in the Lord,' it will not be 'in vain.' Just as pain is a danger signal, pointing to mischief at work on the body, so failure in achieving the results of Christian service is, for the most part, an indication of something wrong in method or spirit.

But, if we are toiling in loving obedience to Christ's voice, and seeking His direction as to sphere and manner of service, we may be quite sure of this, that whether we get, immediately or no, the outward and visible results which this incident promises to all who fulfil the conditions, we shall get the results which were symbolised in the second form of this miraculous draught of fishes. For, if you remember, there was another incident at the end of Christ's life, modelled upon this one, and equally significant, though in a different fashion. On that occasion, when the disciples had been toiling all the night, and saw, in the dim twilight of the morning, the questionable figure standing on the shore there, they were bidden to bring of the fish that they had caught, and when they came to land they saw a fire of coals, and fish laid thereon, and bread; and His voice said, 'Come, and eat!' Blessed are the workers that work for the Master, for living they shall not be left without His blessing, and dying, 'they rest from their labours'--by the side of that mysterious fire, and Christ-provided food--'and their works do follow them, in that they bring of the fish which they have caught.

18-FEAR AND FAITH

'When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.'
--LUKE v. 8.

'Now, when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him,... and did cast himself into the sea.'--JOHN xxi. 7.

These two instances of the miraculous draught of fishes on the Lake of Gennesareth are obviously intended to be taken in conjunction. Their similarities and their differences are equally striking and equally instructive. In the fragment of the incident which I have selected for our consideration now, we have the same man, in the same scene and circumstances, in the presence of the same Lord, acting under the influences of the same motive, and doing two exactly opposite things.

In the first case, the miracle at once struck him with the consciousness that he was now, in some way, he knew not how, in the immediate presence of the supernatural. That was immediately followed by a quick spasm and sense of sin, and that again by a recoil of terror, and that again by the cry, 'Go out of the boat; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.'

In the other instance, as soon as he saw (or rather, by the help of his friend's clearer sight, learned) that that dim and questionable figure on the morning beach there, was the Lord, the sight brought back his sin to his mind. But this time the consciousness of sin sent him splashing over the side, and through the shallow water, to struggle anyhow to get close to his Lord, not because he thought more complacently of himself or less loftily of his Master, but because he had learned that the best place for a sinful man was as close to Christ as ever he could get. And so, if we put these two incidents together, we get two or three thoughts that it is worth our while to dwell upon.

I. I ask you to notice, first, that instinctive and swift awaking of conscience.

This was not Peter's first acquaintance with Jesus Christ, nor his first enrolment in the ranks of disciples. John's Gospel tells the

very beginning, and how, long before this incident, he had recognised Jesus Christ to be the King of Israel. This was not his first experience of a miracle. There had been many wrought in Capernaum of which probably he was an observer; and he had been at the wedding of Cana of Galilee; and in many ways and at many times, no doubt had seen manifestations of our Lord's supernatural power. But here, in his own boat, with his own nets, about his own sort of work, the thing came home to him as it never had come home before. And although he had long ago recognised Jesus Christ as the Messiah, there is a new, tremulous accession of conviction in that 'O Lord!' It means more than 'Master,' as he had just called Jesus. It means more than he knew himself, no doubt, but it means at least a great, sudden illumination as to who and what Christ was. And so the consciousness of sin flashes upon him at once, as a consequence of that new vision of the divine, as manifested in Jesus Christ. The links of the process of thought are suppressed. We only see the two ends of it. He passed through a series of thoughts with lightning rapidity. The beginning was the recognition of Christ as in some sense the manifestation to him of the Divine Presence, and the end of it was the recognition of his own sinfulness. He had no new facts; but new meaning and vitality were given to the facts that had long been familiar to him. The first result of this was a new conviction of his own hollowness and evil; and then, side by side with that sense of demerit and sin, came this other trembling apprehension of personal consequences. And so, not thinking so much about the sin as about the punishment that he thought must necessarily come when the holy and the impure collided, he cried, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!'

Now I take it that you get there, in that one instance, packed into small and picturesque compass, just the outlines of what it is reasonable and right that there should always go on in a heart when it first catches a glimpse of the purity, and holiness, and nearness of God, and of the awful, solemn verity that we do, each of us for himself, stand in a living, personal relation to Him. That sudden conviction may come by a thousand causes. A sunset opening the gates to the infinite distance may do it. A chance word may do it. A phrase in a sermon may do it. Some personal sorrow or sickness may do it. Any accidental push may touch the spring, and then the door flies open, for we all of us carry, buried deep down in most of us, and not easily got at, that hidden conviction, only needing the letting in of air to flame up, that we have indeed to do with a living God; that we are sinful and He is pure, and that, that being the case, the discord between us, if we come to close quarters, must

end disastrously for us.

You remember the grand vision of Isaiah, how, when he saw the King sitting on His throne, 'high and lifted up, and His train filled the Temple,' the first thought was, not of rapture at the Apocalypse, not of adoration of the greatness, not of aspiration after the purity, not of any desire to join in the 'Holy! Holy! Holy!' of the burning spirits, but 'Woe is me, for I am undone; for mine eyes have seen the King; for I am a man of unclean lips.' Ah, brethren! whenever the commonplaces of our professed religious belief are turned into realities for us, and these things that we have all been familiar with from our childhood, flame before us as true and real, then there comes something analogous to the experience of that other Old Testament character--'I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eyes see Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.'

And then there comes, in like manner, and there ought to come, along with this new vision of a God in His purity, and the new sense of my own sinfulness, the apprehension of personal evil. For, although it be the lowest of its functions, it is a function of conscience, not only to say to me, 'It is wrong to do what is wrong,' but to say, too, 'If you do wrong, you will have to bear the consequences.' I believe that a part of the instinctive voice of conscience is the declaration, not only of a law, but of a Lawgiver, and that part of its message to me is not only that sin is a transgression of the law, but that 'the wages of sin is death.'

Now, let me ask you to ask yourselves whether it is not a strange and solemn and sad testimony to the reality and universality of the fact of sin that the sense of impurity and dread of its issues are the uniform results of any vivid, thrilling consciousness of nearness to God. And let me ask you to ask yourself one other question, and that is, whether it is a wise thing to live upon a surface that may be shattered at any moment; whether that is true peace which needs but a touch to melt away; whether you are wise with all this combustible material deep down in your conscience, in paying no regard to it but living and frolicking, and feasting and trafficking, and lusting and sinning on the surface, like those light-hearted, light-headed fools that build their houses on the slopes of volcanoes when the lava rush may come at any moment?

II. That brings me to note, secondly, the mistaken cry of fear.

Peter felt uneasy in the presence of that pure eye, and he also felt, and was mistaken in feeling, that somehow or other he would be safer if he was not so near the Master. Well, if it were true that Jesus Christ brought God near to him, and if it were true that the proximity of God was the revelation of his blackness and the premonition and prophecy of evil to himself, would getting Christ out of the boat help him much? The facts would remain the same. The departure of the physician does not tend to cure the disease; and thus the cry, 'Go away from me because I am sinful,' was all but ludicrous if it had not been so tragical in its misapprehension of the facts of the case and the cure for them.

Now the parallel to that, with you and me, is--what? How do we commit this same error? By trying to get rid of the thoughts which evoke these uncomfortable feelings of being impure and in peril. But does ceasing to remember the facts make any difference in the facts? Surely not. Just recall for a moment the many ways in which people manage to blind themselves to these plain, and to some of us unwelcome, truths. You may do it by availing yourselves of that strange power that we all have, of not attending to things that we do not like to think about. It is a strange thing that a man should be able to do that; it is a sad thing that any man should be fool enough to do it. But there are many among my hearers, I have no doubt whatever, who know that if they were to let their thoughts dwell on the facts of their own characters and relation to God they would be uncomfortable, and who, therefore, do their best to keep such thoughts at a safe distance. So, as soon as the sermon is over, some of you will begin to criticise me, or to discuss politics, or gossip, and so get rid of the impressions that the truth might produce. Or you fling yourselves into business. One of the reasons for the fierce energy which some men throw into their common avocations is their knowledge that if they have leisure, there may come into their chambers, and sit down beside them there, these unwelcome thoughts, that kill mirth. Some of you try to get rid of the Christ out of your boat by another way. You plunge into sensualism, and live in the low, vulgar atmosphere of fleshly delight and sensuous excitements in order to drown thought. And some of you do it by the even simpler process of merely giving no heed to such thoughts when kindled. The fire, unfed and unstirred, goes out. That is one way in which people come to have consciences, to use the dreadful words of the New Testament, 'seared as with a hot iron.' If you will only never listen to it, it will stop speaking after a while, and then you will have an exemption from all these thoughts. When Felix first heard about temperance and righteousness and

judgment to come he trembled, but paid no heed to his tremor, and said, 'Go away for this time, and when I am not busy at anything else, I will have thee back again.' He did have Paul back again many a time, and communed with him, but we never read that he trembled any more. The impression is not always reproduced, although the circumstances that produced it at first may be. The most impenetrable armour in which to clothe oneself against the sword of the Spirit is hammered out of former convictions that were never acted on. A soul cased in these is very hard to get at.

But consider the folly of seeking to get rid of truth, however unwelcome, under the delusion that it ceases to be true because we cease to look at it. Christ's leaving the boat would not have helped Peter. The facts remained, however he refused to look at them. If he could have changed them by getting rid of Him who reminded him of them, it might have been worth while to send Him away--but to dismiss the physician is a new way of curing the disease. Pain is an alarm bell for the physical nature to point to something wrong there, and this sense of evil, this shrinking from God regarded as the judge, is the alarm bell in the spiritual nature to warn of something wrong there. Do you think that you banish the danger for which the alarm bell is rung because you wrap a clout round the clapper so as to prevent it from sounding? and do you think that you make it less true that 'every transgression and disobedience shall receive its just recompense of reward' by bidding your conscience hold its peace when it tells you so, or by trying to drown its voice amidst the shouts of revelry, or the whirr of spindles, or the roar of traffic? By no means. The facts remain; and nothing except what deals with the facts is the cure which a wise man will adopt.

You remember the old story of the king of Babylon who sat feasting on the night when the city was captured. When the Finger came out and wrote upon the wall, 'Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin,' it did not stop the feast. They went on with their rioting, and whilst they were carousing, the enemy was creeping up the dried bed of the diverted river, 'and in that night was Belshazzar slain' amidst his wine-cups, and the flowers on his temples were dabbled with his blood. No more insane way of curing the consciousness of sin and the dread of judgment than that of stifling the voice that evokes it was ever dreamed of in an asylum.

III. Lastly, notice the right place for a sinful man.

On the second occasion to which our texts refer we have the Apostle

far more deeply conscious of his sin than he was on the first. He remembered his denial, and no doubt he remembered also the secret interview that Jesus Christ had with him on the day of the Resurrection, when, no doubt, He communicated to him His frank and full assurance of forgiveness, He knows far more of Christ's dignity and character and nature after the Resurrection than he had done on that day, long ago, by the banks of the lake. The deeper sense of his own sin, and the clearer and loftier view of who and what Jesus Christ was, send him struggling to his Master, and make him blessed only at His feet.

Ah yes, brother! the superficial knowledge of my evil may drive me away from Jesus Christ; the deepest conviction of it will send me right into His arms. A partial knowledge of the divine nature as revealed in Him as judge, and punitive and necessarily antagonistic to the blackness of my sin, in the lustrous whiteness of His purity, may drive me away from Him, but the deeper knowledge of God manifested in Jesus Christ, the long-suffering, the gentle, loving, pardoning, will send me to Him in all the depth of my self-abasement and in the confidence in His love as covering over my sin and accepting me. Where does the child go when it has transgressed against its mother's word? Into its mother's arms to hide its face upon her bosom near her heart. 'Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned'; and therefore to Thee, Thee only will I go. Only in nearness to Jesus Christ can we get the anodyne that quiets the conscience--the blessed assurance of forgiveness that lightens us of our burden and dread, and the power for holiness that will change our impurity into the likeness of His own purity. He, and He only, can forgive. He, and He only, brings the loving God into the midst of unloving men. He, and He only, hath offered the sacrifice in which all sin is done away. He, and He only, by the communication of His Spirit and life to me, will make me pure and deliver me from the burden of my sin.

And so the man who knows his own need and Christ's grace will not say, 'Depart from me for I am a sinful man,' but he will say, 'Leave me never, nor forsake me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord; but in Thee I have forgiveness and righteousness.'

Dear friends! that consciousness of demerit once evoked in a man's heart, however imperfectly, as I believe it is in some of your hearts now, must issue in one of two things. Either it will send you further into darkness to get away from the light, as the bats in a cave will flit to the deepest recesses of it in order to escape the

torch, or it will bring you nearer to Him, and at His feet you will find cleansing.

Oh, dear friends!--strangers many of you, but all friends--let me beseech you that, if the merciful Spirit of God is in any measure using my poor words to touch your consciences and hearts, you would not venture to seek escape from the convictions which are stirring in you by any other way than by betaking yourselves to the Cross. Let it not be, I pray you, that because you know yourselves to be in need of forgiveness, and to stand in peril of judgment, you say to God,' Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways.' But rather do you cast yourselves into Christ's arms and keep near Him; saying as this same Peter did, on another occasion, 'Lord! to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'

19-BLASPHEMER, OR--WHO?

'And it came to pass on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present to heal them. 18. And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before Him. 19. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the house-top, and let him down through the tiling, with his couch, into the midst before Jesus. 20. And when He saw their faith, He said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. 21. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone? 22. But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He, answering, said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? 23. Whether is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk! 24. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (He said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go unto thine house. 25. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. 26. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to-day.'--LUKE v. 17-26.

Luke describes the composition of the unfriendly observers in this crowd with more emphasis and minuteness than the other Evangelists do. They were Pharisees and doctors, and they were assembled from every part of Galilee, and even from Judea, and, what was most remarkable, from Jerusalem itself. Probably the conflict with the authorities in the capital recorded in John v. had taken place by this time, and if so, a deputation from the Sanhedrim would very naturally be despatched to Capernaum, and its members would as naturally summon the local lights to sit with them, and watch this revolutionary young teacher, who had no licence from them, and apparently not much reverence for them.

One can easily imagine that these heresy-hunters would be much too superior persons to mix with the crowd about the door of Peter's house, and would, as Luke says, be 'sitting by,' near enough to see and hear, but far enough to show that they had no share in the vulgar enthusiasm of these provincial peasants. They were too holy to mingle with the mob, so they kept together by themselves, and waited hopefully for some heresy or breach of their multitudinous precepts. They got more than they expected.

We may note the contrast between their cynical watchfulness and the glorious manifestations for which they had no eyes. 'The power of the Lord'--that is, of Christ--'was' (operative) 'in His healing,' or, according to another reading, 'to heal them.' But the critics took no heed of that. There is a temper of mind which is sharp-eyed as a lynx for faults, and blind as a bat to evidences of divine power in the Gospel or its adherents. Some noses are keen to smell stench, and dull to perceive fragrance. The race of such inquisitors is not extinct.

They contrast, too, with the earnestness of the four friends who brought the paralysed man. The former sat cool and critical, because they had no sense of need either for themselves or for others. The latter made all the effort they could to fight through the crowd, and then took to the roof by some outside stair, and hastily stripping off enough of the tiling, lowered their friend, bed and all, right down in front of the young Rabbi. The house would be low, and the roof slight, and Jesus was probably seated in an open inner court or verandah, At any rate, the description gives a piece of local colour, and presents no improbability.

Earnestness in striving to come oneself or to bring a dear one to Christ's feet seems a supremely absurd waste of energy to a cynical critic, who feels no need of anything that Christ can give. It looks rather different to the paralytic on his couch, and to the friends who long for his healing.

The first lesson from this incident is that our deepest need is forgiveness. No doubt, something in the paralytic's case determined Christ's method with him. Perhaps his sickness had been brought on by dissipation, and possibly conscience was lashing him with a whip of scorpions, so that, while his friends sought for his healing, he himself was more anxious for pardon. It is very unlikely that Jesus would have offered forgiveness unless He had known that it was yearned for. But whether that is so or not, we may fairly generalise

the order of givings in this miracle, and draw from it the lesson that what Jesus then gave first is His chief gift. In most of His other miracles He gave bodily healing first. First or second, it is always Christ's chief gift in the beginning of discipleship. His miracles of bodily healing are parables of that higher miracle. This incident brings out what is always the order of relative importance, whether it is that of chronological sequence or not.

And we all need to lay that truth to heart for ourselves. No tinkering with superficial discomforts, or culture of intellect and taste, or success in worldly pursuits, will avail to stanch the deep wound through which our life-blood is ebbing out. We need something that goes deeper than all these styptics. Only a power which can deal with our sense of sin, and soothe that into blessed assurance of pardon, is strong enough to grapple with our true root of misery. It is useless to give a man dying of cancer medicine for pimples. That is what all attempts to make man happy and restful while sin remains unforgiven, are doing.

Social reformers need this lesson. Many voices proclaim many gospels to-day. Culture, economical or social reconstruction, is trumpeted as the panacea. But it matters comparatively little how society is organised. If its individual members retain their former natures, the former evils will come back, whatever its organisation. The only thorough cure for social evils is individual regeneration. Christ deals with men singly, and remoulds society by renewing the individual. The most elaborate machinery may be used for filtering the black waters. What will be the good of that if the fountain of blackness is not sealed up, or rather purified, at its hidden source? Make the tree good, and its fruit will be good. To make the tree good, you must begin with dealing with sin.

The second lesson from this incident is that Christ's claim to forgive sins is either blasphemy or the manifest token of divinity. These Pharisees scented heresy at once. They were blind to the pathos of the story, and hard as millstones towards the poor sufferer's wistful looks. But they pounced at once gleefully on Christ's words. They were perfectly right in their premises that forgiveness was a divine prerogative which no man could share. For sin is the name of evil, when considered in its relation to God. He only can forgive it, for 'against Thee, Thee only,' as David confessed, is it committed. True, the same act may be full of harmful results to men, and may be a breach of human law, but in its character as sin it refers to God only. Forgiveness is the

outpouring of God's love on a sinner, uninterrupted by his sin. Only God can pour out that love.

But the cavillers were quite wrong in their conclusion. He did not 'blaspheme.' The fact that Jesus knew and answered their whispered or unspoken 'reasonings in their hearts' might have taught them that here was more than a rabbi, or even a prophet. But He goes on to reiterate His assertion that He has power to forgive sins.

Observe that He does not deny their premises. Nor does He, as He was bound in common honesty to do, set them right if they were wrong in supposing that He had claimed divine power. A wise religious teacher, who saw himself misunderstood as asserting that he could give what he only meant to assure a penitent that God would give, would have instantly said, 'Do not mistake me. I am only doing what every servant of God's should and can do, telling this poor brother that God is ready to forgive. God forbid that I should be supposed to do more than to declare his forgiveness!' Christ's answer is the strongest possible contrast to that. He knew what these Pharisees supposed Him to have meant by His authoritative words, and knowing it, He repeats them, and points to the miracle about to be done as their vindication.

Is there any possible way of escaping from the conclusion that Jesus solemnly and deliberately laid claim to exercise the divine prerogative of dispensing pardon? If He did, what shall we say of Him? Surely there is no third judgment of Him and His words possible; but either the Pharisees were right, and 'this man,' this pattern of all meekness and perfect example of humility, blasphemed, or else Peter was right when he said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

The third lesson is that the visible effects of Christ's power attest the reality of His claim to produce the invisible effects of peaceful assurance of forgiveness. It was equally easy to say, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee,' and to say, 'Take up thy bed and walk.' It was equally impossible for a mere man to forgive, and to give the paralytic muscular force to move. But the one saying could be tested, and its fulfilment verified by sight. The other could not; but if the visible impossibility was done, it was a witness that the invisible one could be.

The striking way in which our Lord weaves in His command to the palsied man to take up his bed with His words to the Pharisees is

preserved in all the Gospels, and gives vividness to the narrative, while it brings out the main purpose of the miracle. It was a demonstration in the visible sphere of Christ's power in the invisible. Both were divine acts, and that which could be verified by sight established the reality of that which could not.

The same principle may be widely extended. It includes all the outward effects of Christ's gospel in the world. There are abundance of these which are patent to fair-minded observers. If one wishes to know what these are, he has only to contrast heathen lands with those in which, however imperfectly, Jesus is recognised as King and Example. The lives of His disciples are full of faults, but they should, and in a measure, do, witness to the reality of His gifts of forgiveness and conquest of sin. He has done more to restore strength to humanity paralysed for good than all other would-be physicians put together have done; and since He has visibly effected such manifest changes on outward lives, it is no rash conclusion to draw that He can change the inward nature. If He has healed the palsy, that is a work surpassing human power, and it proves that He can forgive the sin which brought the paralysis, and tied the helpless sufferer to his couch of pain.

20-LAWS OF THE KINGDOM

'And He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God, 21. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. 22. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. 23. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. 24. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. 25. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. 26. Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets. 27. But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, 28. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. 29. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also. 30. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. 31. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.'--LUKE vi. 20-31.

Luke condenses and Matthew expands the Sermon on the Mount. The general outline is the same in both versions. The main body of both is a laying down the law for Christ's disciples. Luke, however, characteristically omits what is prominent in Matthew, the polemic against Pharisaic righteousness, and the contrast between the moral teaching of Christ and that of the law. These were appropriate in a Gospel which set forth Jesus as the crown of earlier revelation, while Luke is true to the broad humanities of his Gospel, in setting forth rather the universal aspect of Christian duty, and gathering it all into the one precept of love.

The fragment which forms the present passage falls into two parts--the description of the subjects of the kingdom and their blessedness, contrasted with the character of the rebels; and the summing up of

the law of the kingdom in the all-including commandment of love.

I. The subjects and blessedness of the kingdom, and the rebels. It is to be well kept in view that the discourse is addressed to 'His disciples.' That fact remembered would have saved some critics from talking nonsense about the discrepancy between Luke and Matthew, and supposing that the former meant merely literal poverty, hunger, and tears. No doubt he omits the decisive words which appear in Matthew, who appends 'in spirit' to 'poor,' and 'after righteousness' to 'hunger and thirst,' but there is no ground for supposing that Luke meant anything else than Matthew.

Notice that in our passage the sayings are directly addressed to the disciples, while in Matthew they are cast into the form of general propositions. In that shape, the additions were needed to prevent misunderstanding of Christ, as if He were talking like a vulgar demagogue, flattering the poor, and inveighing against the rich. Matthew's view of the force of the expressions is involved in Luke's making them an address _to the disciples.,_ 'Ye poor' at once declares that our Lord is not thinking of the whole class of literally needy, but of such of these as He saw willing to learn of Him. No doubt, the bulk of them were poor men as regards the world's goods, and knew the pinch of actual want, and had often had to weep. But their earthly poverty and misery had opened their hearts to receive Him, and that had transmuted the outward wants and sorrows into spiritual ones, as is evident from their being disciples; and these are the characteristics which He pronounces blessed. In this democratic and socialistic age, it is important to keep clearly in view the fact that Jesus was no flatterer of poor men as such, and did not think that circumstances had such power for good or evil, as that virtue and true blessedness were their prerogatives.

The foundation characteristic is poverty of spirit, the consciousness of one's own weakness, the opposite of the delusion that we are 'rich and increased with goods.' All true subjection to the kingdom begins with that accurate, because lowly, estimate of ourselves. Humility is life, lofty mindedness is death. The heights are barren, rivers and fertility are down in the valleys.

Luke makes hunger the second characteristic, and weeping the third, while Matthew inverts that order. Either arrangement suggests important thoughts. Desire after the true riches naturally follows on consciousness of poverty, while, on the other hand, sorrow for one's conscious lack of these may be regarded as preceding and

producing longing. In fact, the three traits of character are contemporaneous, and imply each other. Outward condition comes into view, only in so far as it tends to the production of these spiritual characteristics, and has, in fact, produced them, as it had done, in some measure, in the disciples. The antithetical characteristics of the adversaries of the kingdom are, in like manner, mainly spiritual; and their riches, fullness, and laughter refer to circumstances only in so far as actual wealth, abundance, and mirth tend to hide from men their inward destitution, starvation, and misery.

But what paradoxes to praise all that flesh abhors, and to declare that it is better to be poor than rich, better to feel gnawing desire than to be satisfied, better to weep than to laugh! How little the so-called Christian world believes it! How dead against most men's theory and practice Christ goes! These Beatitudes have a solemn warning for all, and if we really believed them, our lives would be revolutionised. The people who say, 'Give me the Sermon on the Mount: I don't care for your doctrines, but I can understand _it,' have not felt the grip of these Beatitudes.

Note that the blessings and woes are based on the future issues of the two states of mind. These are not wholly in the future life, for Jesus says, 'Yours _is_ the kingdom.' That kingdom is a state of obedience to God, complete in that future world, but begun here. True poverty secures entrance thither, since it leads to submission of will and trust. True hunger is sure of satisfaction, since it leads to waiting on God, who 'will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him.' Sorrow which is according to God, cannot but bring us near Him who 'will wipe away tears from off all faces.'

On the other hand, they who in condition are prosperous and satisfied with earth, and in disposition are devoid of suspicion of their own emptiness, and draw their joys and sorrows from this world alone, cannot but have a grim awaking waiting for them. Here they will often feel that earth's goods are no solid food, and that nameless yearnings and sadness break in on their mirth; and in the dim world beyond, they will start to find their hands empty and their souls starving.

The fourth of Luke's Beatitudes contrasts the treatment received from men by the subjects and the enemies of the kingdom. Better to be Christ's martyr than the world's favourite! Alas, how few Christians wear the armour of that great saying! They would not set

so much store by popularity, nor be so afraid of being on the unpopular side, if they did.

II. The second part of the passage contains the summary of the laws of the kingdom from the lips of the King. Its keynote is love. The precept follows strikingly on the predictions of excommunication and hatred. The only weapon to fight hate is love. 'The hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,' are not Christian dispositions, though Tennyson tells us that they are the poet's. So much the worse for him if they are! First, the commandment, so impossible to us unless our hearts are made Christlike by much dwelling with Christ, is laid down in the plainest terms. Enmity should only stimulate love, as a gash in some tree bearing precious balsam makes the fragrant treasure flow. Who of us has conformed to that law which in three words sums up perfection? How few of us have even honestly tried to conform to it!

But the command becomes more stringent as it advances. The sentiment is worth much, but it must bear fruit in act. So the practical manifestations of it follow. Deeds of kindness, words of blessing, and highest of all, and the best help to fulfilling the other two, prayer, are to be our meek answers to evil. Why should Christians always let their enemies settle the terms of intercourse? They are not to be mere reverberating surfaces, giving back echoes of angry voices. Let us take the initiative, and if men scowl, let us meet them with open hearts and smiles. 'A soft answer turneth away wrath.' 'It takes two to make a quarrel.' Frost and snow bind the earth in chains, but the silent sunshine conquers at last, and evil can be overcome with good.

Our Lord goes on to speak of another form of love--namely, patient endurance of wrong and unreasonableness. He puts that in terms so strong that many readers are fain to pare down their significance. Non-resistance is commanded in the most uncompromising fashion, and illustrated in the cases of assault, robbery, and pertinacious mendicancy. The world stands stiffly on its rights; the Christian is not to bristle up in defence of his, but rather to suffer wrong and loss. This is regarded by many as an impossible ideal. But it is to be observed that the principle involved is that love has no limits but itself. There may be resistance to wrong, and refusal of a request, if love prompts to these. If it is better for the other man that a Christian should not let him have his way or his wish, and if the Christian, in resisting or refusing, is honestly actuated by love, then he is fulfilling the precept when he says 'No' to some petition, or when he resists robbery. We must live near Jesus Christ

to know when such limitations of the precept come in, and to make sure of our motives.

The world and the Church would be revolutionised if even approximate obedience were rendered to this commandment. Let us not forget that it is a commandment, and cannot be put aside without disloyalty.

Christ then crystallises His whole teaching on the subject of our conduct to others into the immortal words which make our wishes for ourselves the standard of our duty to others, and so give every man an infallible guide. We are all disposed to claim more from others than we give to them. What a paradise earth would be if the two measuring-lines which we apply to their conduct and to our own were exactly of the same length!

21-THREE CONDENSED PARABLES

'And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceiveth not the beam that is in thine own eye? 42. Either, how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. 43. For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 44. For every tree is known by his own fruit: for of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble-bush gather they grapes. 45. A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil; for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh, 46. And why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? 47. Whosoever cometh to Me, and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: 48. He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock. 49. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that, without a foundation, built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.'--LUKE vi. 41-49.

Three extended metaphors, which may almost be called parables, close Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, and constitute this passage. These are the mote and the beam, the good and bad trees, the houses on the rock and on the sand. Matthew puts the first of these earlier in the sermon, and connects it with other precepts about judging others. But whichever order is the original, that adopted by Luke has a clear connection of thought underlying it which will come out as we proceed.

I. The striking and somewhat ludicrous image of the beam and the

mote is found in Rabbinical writings, and may have been familiar to Christ's hearers. But His use of it is deeper and more searching than the rabbis' was. He has just been speaking of blind guides and their blind followers. That 'parable,' as Luke calls it, naturally images another defect which may attach to the eye. A man may be partly blind because some foreign body has got in. If we might suppose a tacit reference to the Pharisees in the blind guides, their self-complacent censoriousness would be in view here; but the application of the saying is much wider than to them only.

Verse 41 teaches that the accurate measurement of the magnitude of our own failings should precede our detection of our brother's. Christ assumes the commonness of the opposite practice by asking 'why' it is so. And we have all to admit that the assumption is correct. The keenness of men's criticism of their neighbour's faults is in inverse proportion to their familiarity with their own. It is no unusual thing to hear some one, bedaubed with dirt from head to foot, declaiming with disgust about a speck or two on his neighbour's white robes.

Satan reproving sin is not an edifying sight, but Satan criticising sin is still less agreeable. If only 'he that is without sin among you' would fling stones, there would be fewer reputations pelted than there are. Most men know less about their own faults than about their brother's. They use two pairs of spectacles--one which diminishes, and is put on for looking at themselves; one which magnifies, and is worn for their neighbour's benefit. But when their respective good qualities are to be looked at, the other pair is used in each case. That is men's way, all the world over.

Christ's question asks the reason for this all but universal dishonesty of having two weights and measures for faults. He would have us ponder on the cause, that we may discover the remedy. He would have us reflect, that we may get a vivid conviction of the unreasonableness of the practice. There is nothing in the fact that a fault is mine which should make it small in my judgment; nor, on the other hand, in the accident that it is another's, which should make it seem large. A fault is a fault, whoever it belongs to, and we should judge ourselves and others by the same rule. Only we should be most severe in its application to ourselves, for we cannot tell how much our brother has had, to diminish the criminality of his sin, and we can tell, if we will be honest, how much we have had, to aggravate that of ours. So the conscience of a true Christian works as Paul's did when he said 'Of whom I am chief,' and

is more disposed to make its own motes into beams than to censure its brother's.

The reason, so far as there is a reason, can only lie in our diseased selfishness, which is the source of all sin. And the blindness to our 'beams' is partly produced by their very presence. All sin blinds conscience. A man with a beam in his eye would not be able to see much. One device of sin, practised in order to withdraw the doer's attention from his own deed, is to make him censorious of his fellows, and to compound for the sins he is inclined to by condemning other people's.

Verse 42 teaches that the conquest of our own discovered evils must precede efficient attempts to cure other people's. To pose as a curer of them while we are ignorant of our own faults is, consciously or unconsciously, hypocrisy, for it assumes a hatred of evil, which, if genuine, would have found first a field for its working in ourselves. An oculist with diseased eyes would not be likely to be a successful operator. 'Physician, heal thyself' would fit him well, and be certainly flung at him. A cleansed eye will see the brother's mote clearly, but only in order to help its extraction. It is a delicate bit of work to get it out, and needs a gentle hand.

Our discernment of others' faults must be compassionate, not to be followed by condemnation nor self-complacency but by loving efforts to help to a cure. And such will not be made unless we have learned our own sinfulness, and can go to the wrongdoer in brotherly humility, and win him to use the 'eye-salve' which our conduct shows has healed us.

II. The second compressed parable of the two trees springs from the former naturally, as stating the general law of which verse 42 gives one case, namely, that good deeds (such as casting out the mote) can only come from a good heart (made good by confession of its own evils and their ejection). It is often said that Christ's teaching is unlike that of His Apostles in that He places stress on works, and says little of faith. But how does He regard works? As fruits. That is to say, they are of value in His eyes only as being products and manifestations of character. He does not tell us in this parable how the character which will effloresce in blossoms and set in fruits of goodness is produced. That comes in the next parable. But here is sufficiently set forth the great central truth of Christian ethics that the inward disposition is the all-important thing, and

that deeds are determined as to their moral quality by the character from which they have proceeded.

Our actions are our self-revelations. The words are not to be pressed, as if they taught the entire goodness of one class of men, so that all their acts were products of their good character, nor the unmingled evil of another, so that no good of any kind or in any degree is in them or comes from them. They must be read as embodying a general truth which is not as yet fully exemplified in any character or conduct.

In verse 45 the same idea is presented under a different figure--that of a wealthy man who brings his possessions out of his store-house. The application of the figure is significantly varied so as to include the other great department of human activity. Speech is act. It, too, will be according to the cast of the inner life. Of course, feigned speech of all sorts is not in view. The lazy judgment of men thinks less of words than of deeds. Christ always attaches supreme importance to them. Intentional lying being excluded, speech is an even more complete self-revelation than act. When one thinks of the floods of foul or idle or malicious talk which half drown the world as being revelations of the sort of hearts from which they have gushed, one is appalled. What a black, seething fountain that must be which spurts up such inky waters!

III. The third parable, of the two houses, shows in part how hearts may be made 'good.' It is attached to the preceding by verse 46. Speech does not always come from 'the abundance of the heart.' Many call Him Lord who do not act accordingly. Deeds must confirm words. If the two diverge, the latter must be taken as the credible self-revelation. Now the first noticeable thing here is Christ's bold assumption that His words are a rock foundation for any life. He claims to give an absolute and all-sufficient rule of conduct, and to have the right to command every man.

And people read such words and then talk about their Christianity not being the belief of His divinity, but the practice of the Sermon on the Mount! His words are the foundation for every firm, lasting life. They are the basis of all true thought about God, ourselves, our duties, our future. 'That rock was Christ.' Every other foundation is as sand. Unless we build on Him, we build on changeable inclinations, short-lived desires, transitory aims, evanescent circumstances. Only the Christ who ever liveth, and is ever 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever,' is fit to be

the foundation of lives that are to be immortal.

Note the two houses built on the foundations. The metaphor suggests that each life is a whole with a definite character. Alas, how many of our lives are liker a heap of stones tilted at random out of a cart than a house with a plan. But there is a character stamped on every life, and however the man may have lived from hand to mouth without premeditation, the result has a character of its own, be it temple or pig-sty. Each life, too, is built up by slow labour, course by course. Our deeds become our dwelling-places. Like coral-insects, we live in what we build. Memory, habit, ever-springing consequences, shape by slow degrees our isolated actions into our abodes. What do we build?

One storm tries both houses. That may refer to the common trials of every life, but it is best taken as referring to the future judgment, when God 'will lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet'; and whatever cannot stand that test will be swept away. Who would run up a flimsy structure on some windy headland in northern seas? The lighthouses away out in ocean are firmly bonded into living rock. Unless our lives are thus built on and into Christ, they will collapse into a heap of ruin. 'Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.'

22-WORTHY-NOT WORTHY

'... They besought Him ... saying, That he was worthy for whom He should do this:... 6. I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof: 7. Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto Thee....'
--LUKE vii. 4. 6. 7.

A Roman centurion, who could induce the elders of a Jewish village to approach Jesus on his behalf, must have been a remarkable person. The garrison which held down a turbulent people was not usually likely to be much loved by them. But this man, about whom the incident with which our texts are connected is related, was obviously one of the people of whom that restless age had many, who had found out that his creed was outworn, and who had been drawn to Judaism by its lofty monotheism and its austere morality. He had gone so far as to build a synagogue, and thereby, no doubt, incurred the ridicule of his companions, and perhaps the suspicions of his superiors. What would the English authorities think of an Indian district officer that conformed to Buddhism or Brahminism, and built a temple? That is what the Roman officials would think of our centurion. And there were other beautiful traits in his character. He had a servant 'that was dear to him.' It was not only the nexus of master and servant and cash payments that bound these two together. And very beautiful is this story, when he himself speaks about this servant. He does not use the rough word which implies a bondservant, and which is employed throughout the whole of the rest of the narrative, but a much gentler one, and speaks of him as his 'boy.' So he had won the hearts of these elders so far as to make them swallow their dislike to Jesus, and deign to go to Him with a request which implied His powers at which at all other times they scoffed.

Now, we owe to Luke the details which show us that there was a double deputation to our Lord--the first which approached Him to ask His intervention, and the second which the centurion sent when he saw the little group coming towards his house, and a fresh gush of awe rose in his heart. The elders said, 'He is worthy'; he said, 'I am not worthy.' The verbal resemblance is, indeed, not so close in the original as in our versions, for the literal rendering of the words put into the centurion's mouth is 'not fit.' But still the evident antithesis is preserved: the one saying expresses the favourable view that partial outsiders took of the man, the other

gives the truer view that the man took of himself. And so, putting away the story altogether, we may set these two verdicts side by side, as suggesting wider lessons than those which arise from the narrative itself.

I. And, first, we have here the shallow plea of worthiness.

These elders did not think loftily of Jesus Christ. The conception that we have of Him goes a long way to settle whether it is possible or not for us to approach Him with the word 'worthy' on our lips. The higher we lift our thought of Christ, the lower becomes our thought of ourselves. These elders saw the centurion from the outside, and estimated him accordingly. There is no more frequent, there is no more unprofitable and impossible occupation, than that of trying to estimate other people's characters. Yet there are few things that we are so fond of doing. Half our conversation consists of it, and a very large part of what we call literature consists of it; and it is bound to be always wrong, whether it is eulogistic or condemnatory, because it only deals with the surface.

Here we have the shallow plea advanced by these elders in reference to the centurion which corresponds to the equally shallow plea that some of us are tempted to advance in reference to ourselves. The disposition to do so is in us all. Luther said that every man was born with a Pope in his belly. Every man is born with a Pharisee in himself, who thinks that religion is a matter of barter, that it is so much work, buying so much favour here, or heaven hereafter. Wherever you look, you see the working of that tendency. It is the very mainspring of heathenism, with all its penances and performances. It is enshrined in the heart of Roman Catholicism, with its dreams of a treasury of merits, and works of supererogation and the like. Ay! and it has passed over into a great deal of what calls itself Evangelical Protestantism, which thinks that, somehow or other, it is all for our good to come here, for instance on a Sunday, though we have no desire to come and no true worship in us when we have come, and to do a great many things that we would much rather not do, and to abstain from a great many things that we are strongly inclined to, and all with the notion that we have to bring some 'worthiness' in order to move Jesus Christ to deal graciously with us.

And then notice that the religion of barter, which thinks to earn God's favour by deeds, and is, alas! the only religion of multitudes, and subtly mingles with the thoughts of all, tends to

lay the main stress on the mere external arts of cult and ritual. 'He loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue'; not, 'He is gentle, good, Godlike.' 'He has built a synagogue.' That is the type of work which most people who fall into the notion that heaven is to be bought, offer as the price. I have no doubt that there are many people who have never caught a glimpse of any loftier conception than that, and who, when they think--which they do not often do--about religious subjects at all, are saying to themselves, 'I do as well as I can,' and who thus bring in some vague thought of the mercy of God as a kind of make-weight to help out what of their own they put in the scale. Ah, dear brethren! that is a wearying, an endless, a self-torturing, an imprisoning, an enervating thought, and the plea of 'worthiness' is utterly out of place and unsustainable before God.

II. Now let me turn to the deeper conviction which silences that plea.

'I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof, wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto Thee.' This man had a loftier conception of who and what Christ was than the elders had. To them He was only one of themselves, perhaps endowed with some kind of prophetic power, but still one of themselves. The centurion had pondered over the mystic power of the word of command, as he knew it by experience in the legion, or in the little troop of which he, though a man under the authority of his higher officers, was the commander; and he knew that even his limited power carried with it absolute authority and compelled obedience. And he had looked at Christ, and wondered, and thought, and had come at last to a dim apprehension of that great truth that, somehow or other, in this Man there did lie a power which, by the mere utterance of His will, could affect matter, could raise the dead, could still a storm, could banish disease, could quell devils. He did not formulate his belief, he could not have said exactly what it led to, or what it contained, but he felt that there was something divine about Him. And so, seeing, though it was but through mists, the sight of that great perfection, that divine humanity and human divinity, he bowed himself and said, 'Lord! I am not worthy.'

When you see Christ as He is, and give Him the honour due to His name, all notions of desert will vanish utterly.

Further, the centurion saw himself from the inside, and that makes all the difference. Ah, brethren! most of us know our own characters just as little as we know our own faces, and find it as difficult to

form a just estimate of what the hidden man of the heart looks like as we find it impossible to form a just estimate of what we look to other people as we walk down the street. But if we once turned the searchlight upon ourselves, I do not think that any of us would long be able to stand by that plea, 'I am worthy.' Have you ever been on a tour of discovery, like what they go through at the Houses of Parliament on the first day of each session, down into the cellars to see what stores of explosive material, and what villains to fire it, may be lurking there? If you have once seen yourself as you are, and take into account, not only actions but base tendencies, foul, evil thoughts, imagined sins of the flesh, meannesses and basenesses that never have come to the surface, but which you know are bits of you, I do not think that you will have much more to say about 'I am worthy.' The flashing waters of the sea may be all blazing in the sunshine, but if they were drained off, what a frightful sight the mud and the ooze at the bottom would be! Others look at the dancing, glittering surface, but you, if you are a wise man, will go down in the diving-bell sometimes, and for a while stop there at the bottom, and turn a bull's-eye straight upon all the slimy, crawling things that are there, and that would die if they came into the light.

'I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof.' But then, as I have said, most of us are strangers to ourselves. The very fact of a course of action which, in other people, we should describe with severe condemnation, being ours, bribes us to indulgence and lenient judgment. Familiarity, too, weakens our sense of the foulness of our own evils. If you have been in the Black Hole all night, you do not know how vitiated the atmosphere is. You have to come out into the fresh air to find out that. We look at the errors of others through a microscope; we look at our own through the wrong end of the telescope; and the one set, when we are in a cynical humour, seem bigger than they are; and the other set always seem smaller.

Now, that clear consciousness of my own sinfulness ought to underlie all my religious feelings and thoughts. I believe, for my part, that no man is in a position to apprehend Christianity rightly who has not made the acquaintance of his own bad self. And I trace a very large proportion of the shallow Christianity of this day as well as of the disproportion in which its various truths are set forth, and the rising of crops of erroneous conceptions just to this, that this generation has to a large extent lost--no, do not let me say this generation, _you and I_--have to a large extent lost, that wholesome consciousness of our own unworthiness and sin.

But on the other hand, let me remind you that the centurion's deeper conviction is not yet the deepest of all, and that whilst the Christianity which ignores sin is sure to be impotent, on the other hand the Christianity which sees very little but sin is bondage and misery, and is impotent too. And there are many of us whose type of religion is far gloomier than it should be, and whose motive of service is far more servile than it ought to be, just because we have not got beyond the centurion, and can only say, 'I am not worthy; I am a poor, miserable sinner.'

III. And so I come to the third point, which is not in my text, but which both my texts converge upon, and that is the deepest truth of all, that worthiness or unworthiness has nothing to do with Christ's love.

When these elders interceded with Jesus, He at once rose and went with them, and that not because of their intercession or of the certificate of character which they had given, but because His own loving heart impelled Him to go to any soul that sought His help. So we are led away from all anxious questionings as to whether we are worthy or no, and learn that, far above all thoughts either of undue self-complacency or of undue self-depreciation, lies the motive for Christ's gracious and healing approach in

'His ceaseless, unexhausted love,
Unmerited and free.'

This is the truth to which the consciousness of sinfulness and unworthiness points us all, for which that consciousness prepares us, in which that consciousness does not melt away, but rather is increased and ceases to be any longer a burden or a pain. Here, then, we come to the very bed-rock of everything, for

'Merit lives from man to man,
But not from man, O Lord, to Thee.'

Jesus Christ comes to us, not drawn by our deserts, but impelled by His own love, and that love pours itself out upon each of us. So we do not need painfully to amass a store of worthiness, nor to pile up our own works, by which we may climb to heaven. 'Say not, who shall ascend up into heaven,' to bring Christ down again, 'but the word is nigh thee, that if thou wilt believe with thine heart, thou shalt be saved.' Worthiness or unworthiness is to be swept clean out of the

field, and I am to be content to be a pauper, to owe everything to what I have done nothing to procure, and to cast myself on the sole, all-sufficient mercy of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

And then comes liberty, and then comes joy. If the gift is given from no consideration of men's deserts, then the only thing that men have to do is to exercise the faith that takes it. As the Apostle says in words that sound very hard and technical, but which, if you would only ponder them, are throbbing with vitality, 'It is of faith that it might be by grace.' Since He gives simply because He loves, the only requisites are the knowledge of our need, the will to receive, the trust that, in clasping the Giver, possesses the gift.

The consciousness of unworthiness will be deepened. The more we know ourselves to be sinful, the more we shall cleave to Christ, and the more we cleave to Christ, the more we shall know ourselves to be sinful. Peter caught a glimpse of what Jesus was when he sat in the boat, and he said, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' But Peter saw both himself and his Lord more clearly, that is more truly, when, subsequent to his black treachery, his brother Apostle said to him concerning the figure standing on the beach in the grey morning, 'It is the Lord,' and he flung himself over the side and floundered through the water to get to his Master's feet. For that is the place for the man who knows himself unworthy. The more we are conscious of our sin, the closer let us cling to our Lord's forgiving heart, and the more sure we are that we have that love which we have not earned, the more shall we feel how unworthy of it we are. As one of the prophets says, with profound meaning, 'Thou shalt be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy transgression, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done.' The child buries its face on its mother's breast, and feels its fault the more because the loving arms clasp it close.

And so, dear brethren, deepen your convictions, if you are deluded by that notion of merit; deepen your convictions, if you see your own evil so clearly that you see little else. Come into the light, come into the liberty, rise to that great thought, 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by His mercy He saved us.' Have done with the religion of barter, and come to the religion of undeserved grace. If you are going to stop on the commercial level, 'the wages of sin is death'; rise to the higher ground: 'the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

23-JESUS AT THE BIER

'And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. 14. And He came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. 15. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother.'--LUKE vii. 13-15.

We owe our knowledge of this incident to Luke only. He is the Evangelist who specially delights in recording the gracious relations of our Lord with women, and he is also the Evangelist who delights in telling us of unmasked miracles which Christ performed. Both of these characteristics unite in this story, and it may have been these, rather than the fact of its being a narrative of a resurrection, that found for it a place in this Gospel.

Be that as it may, it is obvious to remark that this miracle was not wrought with any intention of establishing Christ's claims thereby. Its motive was simply pity; its purpose was merely to comfort a desolate woman whose hope and love and defence were lying stretched on her boy's bier. Was that a sufficient reason for a miracle? People tell us that a test of a spurious miracle is that it is done without any adequate purpose to be served. Jesus Christ thought that to comfort one poor, sorrowful heart was reason enough for putting His hand out, and dragging the prey from the very jaws of death, so loftily did He think of human sorrow and of the comforting thereof.

Now I think we unduly limit the meaning of our Lord's miracles when we regard them as specially intended to authenticate His claims. They are not merely the evidences of revelation; they are themselves a large part of revelation. My purpose in this sermon is to look at this incident from that one point of view, and to try to set clearly before our minds what it shows us of the character and work of Jesus Christ. And there are three things on which I desire to touch briefly. We have Him here revealed to us as the compassionate Drier of all tears; the life-giving Antagonist of death; and as the Re-uniter of parted hearts.

Note, then, these three things.

I. First of all, look at that wonderful revelation that lies here of Jesus Christ as the compassionate Drier of all tears.

The poor woman, buried in her grief, with her eyes fixed on the bier, has no thought for the little crowd that came up the rocky road, as she and her friends are hurrying down it to the place of graves. She was a stranger to Christ, and Christ a stranger to her. The last thing that she would have thought of would have been eliciting any compassion from those who thus fortuitously met her on her sad errand. But Christ looks, and His eye sees far more deeply and far more tenderly into the sorrow of the desolate, childless widow than any human eyes looked. And as swift as was His perception of the sorrow, so swiftly does He throw Himself into sympathy with it. The true human emotion of unmingled pity wells up in His heart and moves Him to action.

And just because the manhood was perfect and sinless, therefore the sympathy of Christ was deeper than any human sympathy, howsoever tender it may be; for what unfits us to feel compassion is our absorption with ourselves. That makes our hearts hard and insensitive, and is the true, 'witches' mark'--to recur to the old fable--the spot where no external pressure can produce sensation. The ossified heart of the selfish man is closed against divine compassion. Since Jesus Christ forgot Himself in pitying men, and Himself 'took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses,' He must have been what none of us are--free from all taint of selfishness, and from all insensibility born of sin.

But there is another step to be taken. That pitying Christ, on the rocky road outside the little Galilean village, feeling all the pain and sorrow of the lonely mother--that is God! 'Lo! this is our God; and we have waited for Him.' Ay! waited through all the uncompassionating centuries, waited in the presence of the false gods, waited whilst men have been talking about an impassive Deity careless in the heavens, over whose serene blessedness no shadow can ever pass. This is our God. No impassive monster that no man can love or care for, but a God with a heart, a God that can pity, a God who, wonderful as it is, can and does enter, in the humanity of Jesus Christ, into a fellow-feeling of our infirmities.

If Jesus Christ in His pity was only a perfect and lovely example of unselfish sympathy such as man can exercise, what in the name of common-sense does it matter to me how much, or how tenderly, He pitied those past generations? The showers and the sunshine of this summer will do as much good to the springing corn in the fields to-day as the pity of a dead, human Christ will do for you and me. In our weaknesses, in our sorrows great and small, in our troubles and

annoyances, you and I need, dear brethren, a living Jesus to pity us, there in the heavens, just as He pitied that poor woman outside the gate of Nain. Blessed be God!, we have Him. The human Christ is the manifestation of the Divine, and as we listen to the Evangelist that says, 'When He saw her He had compassion upon her,' we bow our heads and feel that the old psalmist spoke a truth when He said, 'His compassions fail not,' and that the old prophet spoke a truth, the depth of which his experience did not enable him to fathom, when he said that 'in all their afflictions He was afflicted.'

Then, note that the pitying Christ dries the tears before He raises the dead. That is beautiful, I think. 'Weep not,' He says to the woman--a kind of a prophecy that He is going to take away the occasion for weeping; and so He calls lovingly upon her for some movement of hope and confidence towards Himself. With what an ineffable sweetness of cadence in His sympathetic voice these words would be spoken! How often, kindly and vainly, men say to one another, 'Weep not,' when they are utterly powerless to take away or in the smallest degree to diminish the occasion for weeping! And how often, unkindly, in mistaken endeavour to bring about resignation and submission, do well-meaning and erring good people say to mourners in the passion of their sorrow, 'Weep not!' Jesus Christ never dammed back tears when tears were wholesome, and would bring blessing. And Jesus Christ never said, 'Dry your tears,' without stretching out His own hand to do it.

How does He do it? First of all by the assurance of His sympathy. Ah! in that word there came a message to the lonely heart, as there comes a message, dear brethren, to any man or woman among us now who may be fighting with griefs and cares or sorrows, great or small--the assurance that Jesus Christ knows all about your pain and will help you to bear it if you will let Him. The sweet consciousness of Christ's sympathy is the true antidote to excessive grief.

And He dries the tears, not only by the assurance of His sympathy, but by encouraging expectation and hope. When He said, 'Weep not,' He was pledging Himself to do what was needed in order to stay the flow of weeping. And He would encourage us, in the midst of our cares and sorrows and loneliness, not indeed to suppress the natural emotion of sorrow, nor to try after a fantastic and unreal suppression of its wholesome signs, but to weep as though we wept not, because beyond the darkness and the dreariness we see the glimmering of the eternal day. He encourages expectation as the antagonist of sorrow, for the curse of sorrow is that it is ever

looking backwards, and the true attitude for all men who have an immortal Christ to trust, and an immortality for themselves to claim, is that not 'backward' should their 'glances be, but forward to their Father's home.' These are the thoughts that dry our tears, the assurance of the sympathy of Christ, and the joyous expectation of a great good to be ours, where beyond those voices there is peace.

Brother! it may be with all of us--for all of us carry some burden of sorrow or care--as it is with the hedgerows and wet ploughed fields to-day; on every spray hangs a raindrop, and in every raindrop gleams a reflected sun. And so all our tears and sorrows may flash into beauty, and sparkle into rainbowed light if the smile of His face falls upon us.

And then, still further, this pitying Christ is moved by His pity to bring unasked gifts. No petition, no expectation, not the least trace of faith or hope drew from Him this mighty miracle. It came welling up from His own heart. And therein it is of a piece with all His work. For the divine love of which Christ is the Bearer, the Agent, and the Channel for us men, 'tarries not for men, nor waiteth for the sons of men,' but before we ask, delights to bestow itself, and gives that which no man ever sought, even the miracles of the Incarnation and Crucifixion of Jesus Christ our Lord. If heaven had waited until men's prayers had forced its gates ere it sent forth its greatest gift, it had waited for ever, and all mankind had perished. God's love flows out of its own expansive and diffusive nature. Its necessity is to impart itself, and its nature and property is to give. A measureless desire to bestow itself, and in itself all good, is the definition of the love of God. And Christ comes 'to the unthankful and to the evil,' bringing a gift which none of us have asked, and giving as much of Himself as He can give, undesired, to every heart, that thereby we may be led to desire these better gifts which cannot be bestowed unless we seek them.

So here we have the compassion of the human Christ, which is the divine compassion, drying all tears and giving unasked blessings.

II. Note, secondly, the further revelation of our Lord here as being the life-giving Antagonist of Death.

There is something exceedingly picturesque, and if I might use the word, dramatic, in the meeting of these two processions outside the city gate, the little crowd of mourners hurrying, according to the

Eastern fashion, down the hill to the place of tombs, and the other little group toiling up the hill to the city. There Life and Death stand face to face. Jesus Christ puts out His hand, and lays it upon the bier, not to communicate anything, but simply to arrest its progress. Is it not a parable of His work in the world? His great work is to stop the triumphant march of Death--that grim power which broods like a thundercloud over humanity, and sucks up all brightness into its ghastly folds, and silences all song. He comes and says 'Stop!'; and it stands fixed upon the spot. He arrests the march of Death. Not indeed that He touches the mere physical fact. The physical fact is not what men mean by death. It is not what they cower before. What the world shrinks from is the physical fact plus its associations, its dim forebodings, its recoilings from the unknown regions into which the soul goes from out of 'the warm precincts of the cheerful day,' and plus the possibilities of retribution, the certainty of judgment. All these Christ sweeps away, so that we may say, 'He hath abolished Death,' even though we all have to pass through the mere externals of dying, for the dread of Death is gone for ever, if we trust Him.

And then note, still further, we have Christ here as the Life-giver. 'Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!'

Christ took various methods of imparting His miraculous power. These methods varied, as it would appear, according to the religious necessities of the subjects or beholders of the miracle. Sometimes He touched, sometimes He employed still more material vehicles, such as the clay with which He moistened the eyes of the blind man, and the spittle with which He touched the ears of the deaf. But all these various methods were but helps to feeble faith, and in the case of all the raisings from the dead it is the voice alone that is employed.

So, then, what is the meaning of that majestic 'I say unto thee, Arise'? He claims to work by His own power. Unless Jesus Christ wielded divine authority in a fashion in which no mere human representative and messenger of God ever has wielded it, for Him to stand by that bier and utter, 'I say unto thee, Arise!' was neither more nor less than blasphemy. And yet the word had force. He assumed to act by His own power, and the event showed that He assumed not too much. 'The Son quickeneth whom He will.'

Further, He acts by His bare word. So He did on many other occasions--rebuking the fever and it departs, speaking to the wind

and it ceases, calling to the dead and they come forth. And who is He, the bare utterance of whose will is supreme, and has power over material things? Let that centurion whose creed is given to us in the earlier portion of this chapter answer the question. 'I say to my servant, Go! and he goeth; Come! and he cometh; Do this! and he doeth it. Speak Thou, and all the embattled forces of the universe will obey Thine autocratic and sovereign behest,' they 'hearken to His commandments, and do the voice of His word.'

Then note, still further, that this voice of Christ's has power in the regions of the dead. Wherever that young man was, he heard; in whatsoever state or condition he was, his personality felt and obeyed the magnetic force of Christ's will. The fact that the Lord spake and the boy heard, disposes, if it be true, of much error, and clears away much darkness. Then the separation of body and soul is a separation and not a destruction. Then consciousness is not a function of the brain, as they tell us. Then man lives wholly after he is dead. Then it is possible for the spirit to come out of some dim region, where we know not, in what condition we know not. Only this we know--that, wherever it is, Christ's will has authority there; and there, too, is obedience to His commandment.

And so let me remind you that this Voice is not only revealing as to Christ's authority and power, and illuminative as to the condition of the disembodied dead, but it is also prophetic as to the future. It tells us that there is nothing impossible or unnatural in that great assurance. 'The hour is coming when they that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth.' There shall be for the dead a reunion with a body, which will bring men again into connection with an external universe, and be the precursor of a fuller judgment and an intenser retribution.

Brethren, that Voice that raised one poor bewildered boy to sit up on his bier, and begin to speak--broken exclamations possibly, and stammering words of astonishment--shall be flung, like a trumpet that scatters marvellous sounds, through the sepulchres of the nations and compel all to stand before the throne. You and I will hear it; let us be ready for it.

III. So, lastly, we have here the revelation of our Lord as the Reuniter of parted hearts.

That is a wonderfully beautiful touch, evidently coming from an eye-witness--'He delivered him to his mother.' That was what it had

all been done for. The mighty miracle was wrought that that poor weeping woman might be comforted.

May we not go a step further? May we not say, If Jesus Christ was so mindful of the needs of a sorrowful solitary soul here upon earth, will He be less mindful of the enduring needs of loving hearts yonder in the heavens? If He raised this boy from the dead that his mother's arms might twine round him again, and his mother's heart be comforted, will He not in that great Resurrection give back dear ones to empty, outstretched arms, and thereby quiet hungry hearts? It is impossible to suppose that, continuing ourselves, we should be deprived of our loves. These are too deeply engrained and enwrought into the very texture of our being for that to be possible. And it is as impossible that, in the great day and blessed world where all lost treasures are found, hearts that have been sad and solitary here for many a day shall not clasp again the souls of their souls--'and with God be the rest.'

So, though we know very little, surely we may take the comfort of such a thought as this, which should be very blessed and sweet to some of us, and with some assurance of hope may feel that the risen boy at the gate of Nain was not the last lost one whom Christ, with a smile, will deliver to the hearts that mourn for them, and there we 'shall clasp inseparable hands with joy and bliss in over-measure for ever.' 'And so shall we'--they and I, for that is what we means--' so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.'

24-JOHN'S DOUBTS AND CHRIST'S PRAISE

'And the disciples of John shewed him of all these things. 19. And John calling unto him two of his disciples, sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou He that should come? or look we for another? 20. When the men were come unto Him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto Thee, saying, Art Thou He that should come? or look we for another? 21. And in the same hour He cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind He gave sight. 22. Then Jesus, answering, said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. 23. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me. 24. And when the messengers of John were departed, He began to speak unto the people concerning John. What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? 25. But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts. 26. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. 27. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee. 28. 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.'--LUKE vii. 18-28.

We take three stages in this passage--the pathetic message from the prisoner, Christ's double answer to it, and His grand eulogium on John.

I. The message from the prisoner. Had mists of doubt crept over John's clear conviction that Jesus was the Messiah? Some have thought it incredible that the man who had seen the descending dove, and heard the voice proclaiming 'This is My beloved Son,' should ever have wavered. But surely our own experience of the effect of circumstances and moods on our firmest beliefs gives us parallels to

John's doubts. A prison would be especially depressing to the desert-loving Baptist; compelled inaction would fret his spirit; he would be tempted to think that, if Jesus were indeed the Bridegroom, he might have spared a thought for the friend of the Bridegroom languishing in Machaerus. Above all, the kind of works that Jesus was doing did not fill the role of the Messiah as he had conceived it. Where were the winnowing fan, the axe laid to the roots of the trees, the consuming fire? This gentle friend of publicans and sinners was not what he had expected the One mightier than himself to be.

Probably his disciples went farther in doubting than he did, but his message was the expression of his own hesitations, as is suggested by the answer being directed to him, not to the disciples. It may have also been meant to stir Jesus, if He were indeed Messiah, to 'take to Himself His great power.' But the most natural explanation of it is that John's faith was wavering. The tempest made the good ship stagger. But reeling faith stretched out a hand to Jesus, and sought to steady itself thereby. We shall not come to much harm if we carry our doubts as to Him to be cleared by Himself. John's gloomy prison thoughts may teach us how much our faith may be affected by externals and by changing tempers of mind, and how lenient, therefore, should be our judgments of many whose trust may falter when a strain comes. It may also teach us not to write bitter things against ourselves because of the ups and downs of our religious experience, but yet to seek to resist the impression that circumstances make on it, and to aim at keeping up an equable temperature, both in the summer of prosperity and the winter of sorrow.

II. The twofold answer. Its first part was a repetition of the same kind of miracles, the news of which had evoked John's message; and its second part was simply the command to report these, with one additional fact--that good tidings were preached to the poor. That seemed an unsatisfactory reply, but it meant just this--to send John back to think over these deeds of gracious pity and love as well as of power, and to ask himself whether they were not the fit signs of the Messiah. It is to be noted that the words which Christ bids the disciples speak to their master would recall the prophecies in Isaiah xxxv. 5 and lxi. 1, and so would set John to revise his ideas of what prophecy had painted Messiah as being. The deepest meaning of the answer is that love, pity, healing, are the true signs, not judicial, retributive, destructive energy. John wanted the lightning; Christ told him that the silent sunshine exerts energy, to which the

fiercest flash is weak. We need the lesson, for we are tempted to exalt force above love, if not in our thoughts of God, yet in looking at and dealing with men; and we are slow to apprehend the teaching of Bethlehem and Calvary, that the divinest thing in God, and the strongest power among men, is gentle, pitying, self-sacrificing love. Rebuke could not be softer than that which was sent to John in the form of a benediction. To take offence at Jesus, either because He is not what we expect Him to be, or for any other reason, is to shut oneself out from the sum of blessings which to accept Him brings with it.

III. Christ's eulogium on John. How lovingly it was timed! The people had heard John's message and its answer, and might expect some disparaging remarks about his vacillation. But Jesus chooses that very time to lavish unstinted praise on him. That is praise indeed. The remembrance of the Jordan banks, where John had baptized, shapes the first question. The streams of people would not have poured out there to look at the tall reeds swaying in the breeze, nor to listen to a man who was like them. He who would rouse and guide others must have a firm will, and not be moved by any blast that blows. Men will rally round one who has a mind of his own and bravely speaks it, and who has a will of his own, and will not be warped out of his path. The undaunted boldness of John, of whom, as of John Knox, it might be said that 'he never feared the face of man,' was part of the secret of his power. His imprisonment witnessed to it. He was no reed shaken by the wind, but like another prophet, was made 'an iron pillar, and brazen walls' to the whole house of Israel. But he had more than strength of character, he had noble disregard for worldly ease. Not silken robes, like courtiers', but a girdle of camels' hair, not delicate food, but locusts and wild honey, were his. And that was another part of his power, as it must be, in one shape or other, of all who rouse men's consciences, and wake up generations rotting away in self-indulgence. John's fiery words would have had no effect if they had not poured hot from a life that despised luxury and soft ease. If a man is once suspected of having his heart set on material good, his usefulness as a Christian teacher is weakened, if not destroyed. But even these are not all, for Jesus goes on to attest that John was a prophet, and something even more; namely, the forerunner of the Messiah. As, in a royal progress, the nearer the king's chariot the higher the rank, and they who ride just in front of him are the chiefest, so John's proximity in order of time to Jesus distinguished him above those who had heralded him long ages ago. It is always true that, the closer we are to Him, the more truly great we are. The highest dignity is to be His messenger. We must not lose sight of the

exalted place which Jesus by implication claims for Himself by such a thought, as well as by the quotation from Malachi, and by the alteration in it of the original 'My' and 'Me' to 'Thy' and 'Thee.' He does not mean that John was the greatest man that ever lived, as the world counts greatness, but that in the one respect of relation to Him, and consequent nearness to the kingdom, he surpassed all.

The scale employed to determine greatness in this saying is position in regard to the kingdom, and while John is highest of those who (historically) were without it, because (historically) he was nearest to it, the least in it is greater than the greatest without. The spiritual standing of John and the devout men before him is not in question; it is their position towards the manifestation of the kingdom in time that is in view. We rejoice to believe that John and many a saint from early days were subjects of the King, and have been 'saved into His everlasting kingdom.' But Jesus would have us think greatly of the privilege of living in the light of His coming, and of being permitted by faith to enter His kingdom. The lowliest believer knows more, and possesses a fuller life born of the Spirit, than the greatest born of woman, who has not received that new birth from above.

25-GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM

'He that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.'--LUKE vii. 28.

We were speaking in a preceding sermon about the elements of true greatness, as represented in the life and character of John the Baptist. As we remarked then, our Lord poured unstinted eulogium upon the head of John, in the audience of the people, at the very moment when he showed himself weakest. 'None born of women' was, in Christ's eyes, 'greater than John the Baptist.' The eulogium, authoritative as it was, was immediately followed by a depreciation as authoritative, from Christ's lips: 'The least in the kingdom is greater than he.' Greatness depends, not on character, but on position. The contrast that is drawn is between being in and being out of the kingdom; and this man, great as he was among them 'that are born of women,' stood but upon the threshold; therefore, and only therefore, and in that respect, was he 'less than the least' who was safely within it.

Now, there are two things in these great words of our Lord to notice by way of introduction. One is the calm assumption which He makes of authority to marshal men, to stand above the greatest of them, and to allocate their places, because He knows all about them; and the other is the equally calm and strange assumption of authority which He makes, in declaring that the least within the kingdom is greater than the greatest without. For the kingdom is embodied in Him, its King, and He claimed to have opened the door of entrance into it. 'The kingdom of God,' or of heaven--an old Jewish idea--means, whatever else it means, an order of things in which the will of God is supreme. Jesus Christ says, 'I have come to make that real reign of God, in the hearts of men, possible and actual.' So He presents Himself in these words as infinitely higher than the greatest within, or the greatest without the kingdom, and as being Himself the sovereign arbiter of men's claims to greatness. Greater than the greatest is He, the King; for if to be barely across the threshold stamps dignity upon a man, what shall we say of the conception of His own dignity which He formed who declared that He sat on the throne of that kingdom, and was its Monarch?

I. The first thought that I suggest is the greatness of the little ones in the kingdom.

As I have said, our Lord puts the whole emphasis of His classification on men's position. Inside all are great, greater than any that are outside. The least in the one order is greater than the greatest in the other. So, then, the question comes, How does a man step across that threshold? Our Lord evidently means the expression to be synonymous with His true disciples. We may avail ourselves, in considering how men come to be in the kingdom, of His own words. Once He said that unless we received it as little children, we should never be within it. There the blending of the two metaphors adds force and completeness to the thought. The kingdom is without us, and is offered to us; we must receive it as a gift, and it must come into us before we can be in it. The point of comparison between the recipients of the kingdom and little children does not lie in any sentimental illusions about the innocence of childhood, but in its dependence, in its absence of pretension, in its sense of clinging helplessness, in its instinctive trust. All these things in the child are natural, spontaneous, unreflecting, and therefore of no value. You and I have to think ourselves back to them, and to work ourselves back to them, and to fight ourselves back to them, and to strip off their opposites which gather round us in the course of our busy, effortful life. Then they become worth infinitely more than their instinctive analogues in the infant. The man's absence of pretension and consciousness of helplessness and dependent trust are beautiful and great, and through them the kingdom of God, with all its lights and glories, pours into his heart, and he himself steps into it, and becomes a true servant and subject of the King.

Then there is another word of the Master's, equally illuminative, as to how we pass into the kingdom, when He spoke to the somewhat patronising Pharisee that came to talk to Him by night, and condescended to give the young Rabbi a certificate of approval from the Sanhedrim, 'We know that Thou art a Teacher come from God.' Christ's answer was, in effect, 'Knowing will not serve your turn. There is something more than that wanted: "Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."' So, another condition of entering the kingdom--that is, of coming for myself into the attitude of lowly, glad submission to God's will--is the reception into our natures of a new life-principle, so that we are not only, like the men whom Christ compared with John, 'born of women,' but by a higher birth are made partakers of a higher life, and born of the Spirit of God. These are the conditions--on our side the reception with humility, helplessness, dependent trust like those of children, on God's side the imparting, in answer to that dependence and trust, of a higher principle of

life--these are the conditions on which we can pass out of the realm of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

This being so, then we have next to consider the greatness that belongs to the least of those who thus have crossed the threshold, and have come to exercise joyous submission to the will of God. The highest dignity of human nature, the loftiest nobility of which it is capable, is to submit to God's will. 'Man's chief end is to glorify God.' There is nothing that leads life to such sovereign power as when we lay all our will at His feet, and say, 'Break, bend, mould, fashion it as Thou wilt.' We are in a higher position when we are in God's hand. His tools and the pawns on His board, than we are when we are seeking to govern our lives at our pleasure. Dignity comes from submission, and they who keep God's commandments are the aristocracy of the world.

Then, further, there comes the thought that the greatness that belongs to the least of the little ones within the kingdom springs from their closer relation to the Saviour, whose work they more clearly know and more fully appropriate. It is often said that the Sunday-school child who can repeat the great text, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,' stands far above prophet, righteous man, and John himself. This is not exactly true, for knowledge of the truth is not what introduces into the kingdom; but it is true that the weakest, the humblest, the most ignorant amongst us, who grasps that truth of the God-sent Son whose death is the world's life, and who lives, therefore, nestling close to Jesus Christ, walks in a light far brighter than the twilight that shone upon the Baptist, or the yet dimmer rays that reached prophets and righteous men of old. It is not a question of character; it is a question of position. True greatness is regulated, by closeness to Jesus Christ, and by apprehension and appropriation of His work to myself. The dwarf on the shoulders of the giant sees further than the giant; and 'the least in the kingdom,' being nearer to Jesus Christ than the men of old could ever be, because possessing the fuller revelation of God in Him, is greater than the greatest without. They who possess, even in germ, that new life-principle which comes in the measure of a man's faith in Christ, thereby are lifted above saints and martyrs and prophets of old. The humblest Christian grasps a fuller Christ, and therein possesses a fuller spiritual life, than did the ancient heroes of the faith. Christ's classification here says nothing about individual character. It says nothing about the question as to the

possession of true religion or of spiritual life by the ancient saints, but it simply declares that because we have a completer revelation, we therefore, grasping that revelation, are in a more blessed position, 'God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.' The lowest in a higher order is higher than the highest in a lower order. As the geologist digs down through the strata, and, as he marks the introduction of new types, declares that the lowest specimen of the mammalia is higher than the highest preceding of the reptiles or of the birds, so Christ says, 'He that is lowest in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.'

Brethren! these thoughts should stimulate and should rebuke us that having so much we make so little use of it. We know God more fully, and have mightier motives to serve Him, and larger spiritual helps in serving Him than had any of the mighty men of old. We have a fuller revelation than Abraham had; have we a tithe of his faith? We have a mightier Captain of the Lord's host with us than stood before Joshua; have we any of his courage? We have a tenderer and fuller revelation of the Father than had psalmists of old; are our aspirations greater after God, whom we know so much better, than were theirs in the twilight of revelation? A savage with a shell and a knife of bone will make delicate carvings that put our workers, with their modern tools, to shame. A Hindoo, weaving in a shed, with bamboos for its walls and palm leaves for its roof, and a rude loom, the same as his ancestors used three thousand years ago, will turn out muslins that Lancashire machinery cannot rival. We are exalted in position, let us see to it that Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the saints, do not put us to shame, lest the greatest should become the guiltiest, and exaltation to heaven should lead to dejection to hell.

II. Notice the littleness of the great ones in the kingdom.

Our Lord here recognises the fact that there will be varieties of position, that there will be an outer and an inner court in the Temple, and an aristocracy in the kingdom. 'In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but of wood and of clay.' When a man passes into the territory, it still remains an open question how far into the blessed depths of the land he will penetrate. Or, to put away the figure, if as Christian people we have laid hold of Jesus Christ, and in Him have received the kingdom and the new life-power, there still remains the question, how much and how faithfully we shall utilise the gifts, and what place in the

earthly experience and manifestation of His kingdom we shall occupy. There are great and small within it.

So it comes to be a very important question for us all, how we may not merely be content, as so many of us are, with having scraped inside and just got both feet across the boundary line, but may become great in the kingdom. Let me answer that question in three sentences. The little ones in Christ's kingdom become great by the continual exercise of the same things which admitted them there at first. If greatness depends on position in reference to Jesus Christ, the closer we come to Him and the more we keep ourselves in loving touch and fellowship with Him, the greater in the kingdom we shall be. Again, the little ones in Christ's kingdom become great by self-forgetting service. 'He that will be great among you, let him be your minister.' Self-regard dwarfs a man, self-oblivion magnifies him. If ever you come across, even in the walks of daily life, traces in people of thinking much of themselves, and of living mainly for themselves, down go these men in your estimation at once. Whether you have a beam of the same sort in your own eye or not, you can see the mote in theirs, and you lower your appreciation of them immediately. It is the same in Christ's kingdom, only in an infinitely loftier fashion. There, to become small is to become great. Again, the little ones in Christ's kingdom become great, not only by cleaving close to the Source of all greatness, and deriving thence a higher dignity by the suppression and crucifixion of self-esteem and self-regard, but by continual obedience to their Lord's commandment. As He said on the Sermon on the Mount, 'Whoso shall do and teach one of the least of these commandments shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.' The higher we are, the more we are bound to punctilious obedience to the smallest injunction. The more we are obedient to the lightest of His commandments, the greater we become. Thus the least in the kingdom may become the greatest there, if only, cleaving close to Christ, he forgets himself, and lives for others, and does the Father's will.

III. Lastly, I travel for a moment beyond my text, and note the perfect greatness of all in the perfected kingdom.

The very notion of a kingdom of God established in reality, however imperfectly here on earth, demands that somewhere, and some time, and somehow, there should be an adequate, a universal and an eternal manifestation and establishment of it. If, here and now, dotted about over the world, there are men who, with much hindrance and many breaks in their obedience, are still the subjects of that

realm, and trying to do the will of God, unless we are reduced to utter bewilderment intellectually, there must be a region in which that will shall be perfectly done, shall be continually done, shall be universally done. The obedience that we render to Him, just because it is broken by so much rebellion, slackened by so much indifference, hindered by so many clogs, hampered by so many limitations, points, by its attainments and its imperfections alike, to a region where the clogs and limitations and interruptions shall have all vanished, and the will of the Lord shall be the life and the light thereof.

So there rises up before us the fair prospect of that heavenly kingdom, in which all that here is interrupted and thwarted tendency shall have become realised effect.

That state must necessarily be a state of continual advance. For if greatness consists in apprehension and appropriation of Christ and His work, there are no limits to the possible expansion and assimilation of a human heart to Him, and the wealth of His glory is absolutely boundless. An infinite Christ to be assimilated, and an indefinite capacity of assimilation in us, make the guarantee that eternity shall see the growing progress of the subjects of the kingdom, in resemblance to the King.

If there is this endless progress, which is the only notion of heaven that clothes with joy and peace the awful thought of unending existence, then there will be degrees there too, and the old distinction of 'least' and 'greatest' in the kingdom will subsist to the end. The army marches onwards, but they are not all abreast. They that are in front do not intercept any of the blessings or of the light that come to the rearmost files; and they that are behind are advancing and envy not those who lead the march.

Only let us remember, brother, that the distinction of least and great in the kingdom, in its imperfect forms on earth, is carried onwards into the kingdom in its perfect form into heaven. The highest point of our attainment here is the starting-point of our progress yonder. 'An entrance shall be ministered'; it may be 'ministered abundantly,' or we may be 'saved yet so as by fire.' Let us see to it that, being least in our own eyes, we belong to the greatest in the kingdom. And that we may, let us hold fast by the Source of all greatness, Christ Himself, and so we shall be launched on a career of growing greatness, through the ages of eternity. To be joined to Him is greatness, however small the world may think us.

To be separate from Him is to be small, though the hosannas of the world may misname us great.

26-THWARTING GOD'S PURPOSE

'The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of Him.'
--LUKE vii. 30.

Our Lord has just been pouring unstinted praise on the head of John the Baptist. The eulogium was tenderly timed, for it followed, and was occasioned by the expression, through messengers, of John's doubts of Christ's Messiahship. Lest these should shake the people's confidence in the Forerunner, and make them think of him as weak and shifting, Christ speaks of him in the glowing words which precede my text, and declares that he is no 'reed shaken with the wind.'

But what John was was of less moment to Christ's listeners than was what they had done with John's message. So our Lord swiftly passes from His eulogium upon John to the sharp thrust of the personal application to His hearers. In the context He describes the twofold treatment which that message had received; and so describes it as, in the description, to lay bare the inmost characteristics of the reception or rejection of the message. As to the former, He says that the mass of the common people, and the outcast publicans, 'justified God'; by which remarkable expression seems to be meant that their reception of John's message and baptism acknowledged God's righteousness in accusing them of sin and demanding from them penitence.

On the other hand, the official class, the cultivated people, the orthodox respectable people--that is to say, the dead formalists--'rejected the counsel of God against themselves.'

Now the word 'rejected' would be more adequately rendered '_frustrated,_' thwarted, made void, or some such expression, as indeed it is employed in other places of Scripture, where it is translated 'disannulled,' 'made void,' and the like. And if we take that meaning, there emerge from this great word of the Master's two thoughts, that to disbelieve God's word is to thwart God's purpose, and that to thwart His purpose is to harm ourselves.

I. And I remark, first, that the sole purpose which God has in view in speaking to us men is our blessing.

I suppose I need not point out to you that 'counsel' here does not

mean advice, but intention. In regard to the matter immediately in hand, God's purpose or counsel in sending the Forerunner was, first of all, to produce in the minds of the people a true consciousness of their own sinfulness and need of cleansing; and so to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, who should bring the inward gift which they needed, and so secure their salvation. The intention was, first, to bring to repentance, but that was a preparation for bringing to them full forgiveness and cleansing. And so we may fairly widen the thought into the far greater and nobler one which applies especially to the message of God in Jesus Christ, and say that the only design which God has in view, in the gospel of His Son, is the highest blessing--that is, the salvation--of every man to whom it is spoken.

Now, by the gospel, which, as I say, has thus one single design in the divine mind, I mean, what I think the New Testament means, the whole body of truths which underlie and flow from the fact of Christ's Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, which in brief are these--man's sin, man's helplessness, the Incarnation of the Son of God, the Death of Christ as the sacrifice for the world's sin; Faith, as the one hand by which we grasp the blessing, and the gift of a Divine Spirit which follows upon our faith, and bestows upon us sonship and likeness to God, purity of life and character, and heaven at last. That, as I take it, is in the barest outline what is meant by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And now I want to press upon you, dear friends, that that great and sublime body of truths made known to us, as I believe, from God Himself, has one sole object in view and none beside--viz. that every man who hears it may partake of the salvation and the hope which it brings. It has a twofold effect, alas! but the twofold effect does not imply a twofold purpose. There have been schemes of so-called Christian theology which have darkened the divine character in this respect, and have obscured the great thought that God has one end in view, and one only, when He speaks to us in all good faith, desiring nothing else but only that we shall be gathered into His heart, and made partakers of His love. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth.

If so, the question comes very sharp and direct to each of us, Is that gospel fulfilling its purpose in me? There are many subordinate good things flowing from the Christian revelation, such as blessings for social outward life, which are as flowers that spring up in its

path; but unless it has effected its one purpose in regard to you and me, it has failed altogether. God meant His word to save your soul. Has it done so? It is a question that any man can answer if he--will be honest with himself.

Further, this single purpose of the divine speech embraces in its intention each of the hearers of that message. I want to gather the wide-flowing generality, 'God so loved the world that He sent His Son that whosoever believeth,' into this sharp point, 'God so loved me, that He sent His Son that I, believing, might have life eternal.' We shall never understand the universality of Christianity until we have appreciated the personality and the individuality of its message to each of us. God does not lose thee in the crowd, do not thou lose thyself in it, nor fail to apprehend that thou art personally meant by His broadest declarations. It is thy salvation that Christ had in view when He became man and died on the Cross; and it is thy salvation that He had in view when He said to His servants, 'Go into all the world'--there is universality--'and preach the Gospel to every creature'--there is individuality.

Then, further, God is verily seeking to accomplish this purpose even now, by my lips, in so far as I am true to my Master and my message. The outward appearance of what we are about now is that I am trying, lamely enough, to speak to you. You may judge this service by rules of rhetoric, or anything else you like. But you have not got to the bottom of things unless you feel, as I am praying that every one of you may feel, that even with all my imperfections on my head--and I know them better than you can tell me them--I, like all true men who are repeating God's message as they have caught it, neither more nor less, and have sunk themselves in it, may venture to say, as the Apostle said: 'Now, then, we are ambassadors for God, as though God did beseech by us, we pray in Christ's stead.' John's voice was a revelation of God's purpose, and the voice of every true preacher of Jesus Christ is no less so.

II. Secondly, this single divine purpose, or 'counsel,' may be thwarted.

'They frustrated the counsel of God.' Of all the mysteries of this inexplicable world, the deepest, the mother-mystery of all, is, that given an infinite will and a creature, the creature can thwart the infinite. I said that was the mystery of mysteries: 'Our wills are ours we know not how,'--No! indeed we don't!--'Our wills are ours to

make them Thine.' But that purpose necessarily requires the possibility of the alternative that our wills are ours, and we refuse 'to make them Thine.' The possibility is mysterious; the reality of the fact is tragic and bewildering. We need no proof except our own consciousness; and if that were silenced we should have the same fact abundantly verified in the condition of the world around us, which sadly shows that not yet is God's 'will' done 'on earth as it is in heaven,' but that men can and do lift themselves up against God and set themselves in antagonism to His most gracious purposes. And whosoever refuses to accept God's message in Christ and God's salvation revealed in that message is thus setting himself in battle array against the infinite, and so far as in him lies (that is to say, in regard to his own personal condition and character) is thwarting God's most holy will.

Now, brethren, I said that there was only one thought in the divine heart when He sent His Son, and that was to save you and me and all of us. But that thought cannot but be frustrated, and made of none effect, as far as the individual is concerned, by unbelief. For there is no way by which any human being can become participant of the spiritual blessings which are included in that great word 'salvation,' except by simple trust in Jesus Christ. I cannot too often and earnestly insist upon this plain truth, which, plain as it is, is often obscured, and by many people is never apprehended at all, that when the Apostle says 'It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth,' he is laying down no limitation of the universality or of the adequacy of that power, but is only setting forth the plain condition, inherent in the very nature of things and in the nature of the blessings bestowed, that if a man does not trust God he cannot get them, and God cannot give him them, though His heart yearns to give him them He cannot do it. How can any man get any good out of a medicine if he locks his teeth and won't take it? How can any truth that I refuse to believe produce any effect upon me? How is it possible for the blessings of forgiveness and cleansing to be bestowed upon men who neither know their need of forgiveness nor desire to be washed from their sins? How can there be the flowing of the Divine Spirit into a heart which is tightly barred against His entrance? In a word, how a man can be saved with the salvation that the Gospel offers, except on condition of his simple trust in Christ the Giver, I, for my part, fail to see. And so I remind you that the thwarting of God's counsel is the awful prerogative of unbelief.

Then, note that, in accordance with the context, you do not need to

put yourselves to much effort in order to bring to nought God's gracious intention about you. 'They thwarted the counsel of God, being not baptized of Him.' They did not do anything. They simply did nothing, and that was enough. There is no need for violent antagonism to the counsel. Fold your hands in your lap, and the gift will not come into them. Clench them tightly, and put them behind your back, and it cannot come. A negation is enough to ruin a man. You do not need to do anything to slay yourselves. In the ocean, when the lifebelt is within reach, simply forbear to put out your hand to it, and down you will go, like a stone, to the very bottom. 'They rejected the counsel,' 'being not'--and that was all.

Further, the people who are in most danger of frustrating God's gracious purpose are not blackguards, not men and women steeped to the eyebrows in the stagnant pool of sensuous sin, but clean, respectable church-and-chapel-going, sermon-hearing, doctrine-criticising Pharisees. The man or woman who is led away by the passions that are lodged in his or her members is not so hopeless as the man into whose spiritual nature there has come the demon of self-complacent righteousness, or who, as is the case with many a man and woman sitting in these pews now, has listened to, or at all events, has heard, men preaching, as I am trying to preach, ever since childhood, and has never done anything in consequence. These are the hopeless people. The Pharisees--and there are hosts of their great-great-grandchildren in all our congregations--'the Pharisees ... frustrated the counsel of God.'

III. Lastly, this thwarting brings self-inflicted harm.

A little skiff of a boat comes athwart the bows of a six thousand ton steamer, with triple-expansion engines, that can make twenty knots an hour. What will become of the skiff, do you think? You can thwart God's purpose about yourself, but the great purpose goes on and on. And 'Who hath hardened himself against Him and prospered?' You can thwart the purpose, but it is kicking against the pricks.

Consider what you lose when you will have nothing to do with that divine counsel of salvation. Consider not only what you lose, but what you bring upon yourself; how you bind your sin upon your hearts; how you put out your hands, and draw disease and death nearer to yourselves; how you cannot turn away from, or be indifferent to, the gracious, sweet, pleading voice that speaks to you from the Cross and the Throne, without doing damage--in many more ways than I have time to enlarge upon now--to your own

character and inward nature. And consider how there lie behind dark and solemn results about which it does not become me to speak, but which it still less becomes me--believing as I do--to suppress. 'After death the judgment'; and what will become of the thwarters of the divine counsel then?

These wounds, many, deep, deadly as they are, are self-inflicted. There do follow, on God's message and unbelief of it, awful consequences; but these are not His intention. They are the results of our misuse of His gracious word. 'Oh, Israel!' wailed the prophet, 'thou hast destroyed _thyself_' Man's happiness or woe is his own making, and his own making only. There is no creature in heaven or earth or hell that is chargeable with your loss but yourself. We are our own betrayers, our own murderers, our own accusers, our own avengers, and--I was going to say, and it is true --our own hell.

Dear friends! this message comes to you once more now, that Jesus Christ has died for your sins, and that if you will trust Him as your Saviour, and obey Him as your Sovereign, you will be saved with an everlasting salvation. Even through my lips God speaks to you. What are you going to do with His message? Are you going to receive it, and 'justify' Him, or are you going to reject it, and thwart Him? You thwart Him if you treat my words now as a mere sermon to be criticised and forgotten; you thwart Him if you do anything with His message except take it to your heart and rest wholly upon it. Unless you do you are suicides; and neither God, nor man, nor devil is responsible for your destruction. He can say to you, as His servant said: 'Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean.' Jesus Christ is calling to every one of us, 'Turn ye! turn ye! Why will ye die? As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.'

27-A GLUTTONOUS MAN AND A WINEBIBBER

'The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!'--LUKE vii. 34.

Jesus Christ very seldom took any notice of the mists of calumny that drifted round Him. 'When He was reviled He reviled not again.' If ever He did allude to them it was for the sake of the people who were harming themselves by uttering them. So here, without the slightest trace of irritation, He quotes a malignant charge which was evidently in the popular mouth, and of which we should never have known if He had not repeated it; not with anger, but simply in order that He might point to the capricious inconsistency of finding fault with John and Himself on precisely opposite grounds. The former did not suit because he came neither eating nor drinking. Well, if His asceticism did not please, surely the geniality of a Christ who comes doing both will be hailed. But He is rejected like the other. What is the cause of this dislike that can look two different ways at once? Not the traits that it alleges, but something far deeper, a dislike to the heavenly wisdom of which John and Jesus were messengers. The children of wisdom would see that there was right in both courses; the children of folly would condemn them both. If the message is unwelcome, nothing that the messenger can say or do will be right.

The same kind of thing is common to-day. Never mind consistency, find fault with Christianity on all its sides, and with all its preachers, though you have to contradict yourself in doing so. Object to this man that he is too learned and doctrinal; to that one that he is too illiterate, and gives no food for thought; to this one that he is always thundering condemnation; to that one that he is always running over with love; to this one that he is perpetually harping upon duties; to that other one that he is up in the clouds, and forgets the tasks of daily life; to this one that he is sensational; to that one that he is dull; and so on, and so on. The generation that liked neither piping nor mourning has its representatives still.

But my business now is not with the inconsistency of the objectors to John and Jesus, but simply with this caricature which He quotes from them of some of His characteristics. It is a distorted refraction of the beam of light that comes from His face, through

the muddy, thick medium of their prejudice. And if we can, I was going to say, pull it straight again, we shall see something of His glories. I take the two clauses of my text separately because they are closely connected with our design, and cover different ground.

I. I ask you to note, first, the enemies' attestation to Christ's genial participation in the joys and necessities of common life.

'The Son of man came eating and drinking.' There is nothing that calumny, if it be malignant enough, cannot twist into an accusation; and out of glorious and significant facts, full of lessons and containing strong buttresses of the central truth of the Gospel, these people made this charge, 'a winebibber and gluttonous.' The facts were facts; the inferences were slanders.

Notice how precious, how demonstrative of the very central truth of Christianity, is that plain fact, 'The Son of man came eating and drinking.' Then that pillar of all our hope, the Incarnation of the word of God, stands irrefragable. Sitting at tables, hungering in the wilderness, faint by the well, begging a draught of water from a woman, and saying on His Cross 'I thirst!'--He is the Incarnation of Deity, the manifestation of God in the flesh. Awe and mystery and reverence and hope and trust clasp that fact, in which prejudice and dislike could only find occasion for a calumny.

By eating and drinking He declared that 'forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise took part in the same.' If it is true that every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God,' then it is true that no miracle in His life, nor any of the supernatural glories which we are accustomed to regard as evidences of His majesty, are more blessed, or more important as revelations of His nature, than the fact that 'the Son of man came eating and drinking.'

But, still further, mark how the truth which gave colour to the slander attests that Jesus Christ presents to the world the highest type of manhood. The ideal for life is not the suppression, but the consecration, of material satisfactions and pleasures of appetite. And they are likeliest to the Master who, like the Master, come eating and drinking, and yet ever hold all appetites and desires rigidly under control, and subordinate them all to loftier purposes. John the Baptist could be an ascetic; the Pattern Man must not be.

The highest type of religion, as it is shown to us in His perfect

life, includes the acceptance of all pure material blessings. Asceticism is second best; the religion that can take and keep secondary all outward and transitory sources of enjoyment, and can hallow common life, is loftier than all pale hermits and emaciated types of sanctity, who preserve their purity only by avoiding things which it were nobler to enjoy and to subdue.

There is nothing more striking about the Old Testament than the fact that its heroes and saints were kindly with their kind, and took part in common life, accepting, enjoying its blessings. They were warriors, statesmen, shepherds, vinedressers; 'they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; they married and were given in marriage,' and all the while they were the saints of God. That was a nobler type of religion than the one that came after it, into which Jesus Christ was born. When devotion cools it crusts; and the crust is superstition and formalism and punctilious attention to the proprieties of worship and casuistry, instead of joyful obedience to a law, and abstinence from, instead of sanctification of, earthly delights and supplies.

So, protesting against all that, and showing the more excellent way, and hallowing the way because He trod it, 'the Son of man came eating and drinking.' Hence-forward every table may be a communion table, and every meal may be a sacrament, eaten in obedience to His dying injunction: 'This do in remembrance of Me.' If we can feel that Christ sits with us at the feast, the feast will be pure and good. If it is of such a sort as that we dare not fancy Him keeping us company there, it is no place for us. Wherever Jesus Christ went the consecration of His presence lingers still; whatever Jesus Christ did His servants may do, if in the same spirit and in the same manner.

He hallowed infancy when He lay an infant in His mother's arms; He hallowed childhood when, as a boy, He was obedient to His parents; He hallowed youth during all those years of quiet seclusion and unnoticed service in Nazareth; He hallowed every part of human life and experience by bearing it. Love is consecrated because He loved; tears are sacred because He wept; life is worship, or may be made so, because He passed through it; and death itself is ennobled and sanctified because He has died.

Only let us remember that, if we are to exercise this blessed hallowing of common things, of which He has set us the example, we must use them as He did; that is, in such sort as that our communion with

God shall not be broken thereby, and that nothing in them shall darken the vision and clip the wings of the aspiring and heavenward-gazing spirit. Brethren! the tendency of this day--and one rejoices, in many respects, that it is so--is to revolt against the extreme of narrowness in the past that prescribed and proscribed a great many arbitrary and unnecessary abstinences and practices as the sign of a Christian profession. But whilst I would yield to no man in my joyful application of the principle that underlies that great fact that 'He came eating and drinking,' I do wish at this point to put in a caveat which perhaps may not be so welcome to some of you as the line of thought that I have been pursuing. It is this: it is an error to quote Christ's example as a cover for luxury and excess, and grasping at material enjoyments which are not innocent in themselves, or are mixed up with much that is not innocent. There is many a table spread by so-called Christian people where Jesus Christ will not sit. Many a man darkens his spirit, enfeebles his best part, blinds himself to the things beyond, by reason of his taking the liberty, as he says, which Christianity, broadly and generously interpreted, gives, of participating in all outward delights. I have said that asceticism is not the highest, but it is sometimes necessary. It is better to enjoy and to subdue than to abstain and to suppress, but abstinence and suppression are often essential to faithfulness and noble living. If I find that my enjoyment of innocent things harms me, or is tending to stimulate cravings beyond my control; or if I find that abstinence from innocent things increases my power to help a brother, and to fight against a desolating sin; or if things good and innocent in themselves, and in some respects desirable and admirable, like the theatre, for instance, are irretrievably intertwined with evil things, then Christ's example is no plea for our sharing in such. It is better for us to cut off the offending hand, and so, though maimed, to enter into life, than to keep two hands and go into the darkness of death. Jesus Christ 'came eating and drinking,' and therefore the highest and the best thing is that Christian people should innocently, and with due control, and always keeping themselves in touch with God, enjoy all outward blessings, only subject to this law, 'whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all to the glory of God,' and remembering this warning, 'He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.'

II. Now, secondly, notice the enemies' witness that Christ is the Friend of outcasts.

As I said about the other charge, so I say of this, the facts were facts, the inferences were errors. The slanderers saw, as nobody

could help seeing, that there was a strange kind of mutual attraction between Jesus and publicans and sinners; that harlots as well as little children seemed to be drawn to Him; and that He obviously delighted in the company of those at whose presence, partly from pride, partly from national enmity, partly from heartless self-righteousness, Pharisaism gathered its dainty skirts around itself in abhorrence, lest a speck should fall upon their purity. That being the fact, low natures, who always misunderstand lofty ones, because they can only believe in motives as low as their own, said of Jesus, 'Ah! you can tell what sort of a man He is by the company He keeps. He is the friend of publicans because He is a bad Jew; the friend of sinners because He likes their wicked ways.'

There was a mysterious sense of sympathy which drew Jesus Christ to these poor people and drew them to Him. It would have been a long while before any penitent woman would have come in and wept over the feet of Gamaliel and his like. It would have been a long while before any sinful men would have found their way, with tears and yet with trust, to these self-righteous hypocrites. But perfect purity somehow draws the impure, though assumed sanctity always repels them. And it is a sign, not that a man is bad, but that he is good in a Christlike fashion, if the outcasts that durst not come near your respectable people find themselves drawn to Him. Oh! if there were more of us liker Jesus Christ in our purity, there would be more of us who would deserve the calumny which is praise--'the friend of sinners.'

It was an attestation of His love, as I need not remind you. I suppose there is nothing more striking in the whole wonderful and unique picture of Jesus Christ drawn in the Gospels than the way in which two things, which we so often fancy to be contradictory, blend in the most beautiful harmony in Him--viz. infinite tenderness and absolute condemnation of transgression. To me the fact that these two characteristics are displayed in perfect harmony in the life of Jesus Christ as written in these Gospels, is no small argument for believing the historical veracity of the picture there drawn. For I do not know a harder thing for a dramatist, or a romancer, or a legend-monger to effect than to combine, in one picture--without making the combination monstrous--these two things, perfect purity and perfect love for the impure.

But, dear brethren, remember, that if we are to believe Jesus Christ's own words, that strange love of His, which embraced in its pure clasp the outcasts, was not only the love of a perfect Man, but

it was the love of God Himself. 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' When we see Jesus Christ looking across the valley to the city, with tears in His sad and gentle eyes; and when we see harlots and sinners coming near Him with new hope, and a strange consciousness of a fascination which He wields; and when we see Him opening His heart to all the impure, just as He laid His clean hand on the leper's ulcers, let us rejoice to believe that the Friend of publicans and sinners is God manifest in the flesh.

Then, still further, this wondrous, seeking love of His for all the outcasts is the sign to us of His boundless hopefulness concerning the most degraded.

The world talks of races too low to be elevated, of men too hardened to be softened. Jesus Christ walks through the hospitals of this world, and nowhere sees incurables. His hope is boundless, because, first of all, He sees the dormant possibilities that slumber in the most degraded; and because, still more, He knows that He bears in Himself a power that will cleanse the foulest and raise the most fallen. There are some metals that resist all attempts to volatilise them by the highest temperature producible in our furnaces. Carry them up into the sun and they will all pass into vapour. No man or woman who ever lived, or will live, is so absolutely besotted, and held by the chains of his or her sins, as that Jesus cannot set them free. His hope for outcasts is boundless, because He knows that every sin can be cleansed by His precious blood. Therefore, Christianity should know nothing of desperate cases. There should be no incurables in our estimate of the world, but our hope should be as boundless as the Master's, who drew to Himself the publicans and sinners, and made them saints.

I need not remind you how this is the unique glory of Christ and of Christianity. Men have been asking the question whether Christianity is played out or not. What has been the motive power of all the great movements for the elevation of mankind that have occurred for the last nineteen centuries? What was it that struck the fetters of the slaves? What is it that sends men out amongst savage tribes? Has there ever been found a race of men so degraded that the message of Christ's love could not find its way into their hearts? Did not Darwin subscribe to the Patagonian Mission--a mission which takes in hand perhaps the lowest types of humanity in the world--and did he not do it because his own eyes had taught him that in this strange superstition that we call the Gospel there is a power that, somehow or other, nothing else can wield? Brethren! if the Church begins to

lose its care for, and its power of drawing, outcasts and sinners, it has begun to lose its hold on Christ. The sooner such a Church dies the better, and there will be few mourners at its funeral.

The Friend of publicans and sinners has set the example to all of us His followers. God be thanked that there are signs to-day that Christian people are more and more waking up to the consciousness of their obligations in regard to the outcasts in their own and other lands. Let them go to them, as Jesus Christ did, with no false flatteries, but with plain rebukes of sin, and yet with manifest outgoing of the heart, and they will find that the same thing which drew these poor creatures to the Master will draw others to the feeblest, faintest reflection of Him in His servants.

And, last of all, dear friends, let each think that Jesus Christ is my Friend, and your Friend, because He is the Friend of sinners, and we are sinners. If He did not love sinners there would be nobody for Him to love. The universality of sin, however various in its degrees and manifestations, makes more wonderful the universal sweep of His friendship.

How do I know that He is my Friend? 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,' and when we were yet enemies He was our Friend, and died for us. How shall we requite that love? 'Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you to do.' All over the Eastern world to this day the name by which the Patriarch Abraham is known is the 'Friend' or the 'Companion.' Well for us, for time and for eternity, if, knowing that Jesus is our Friend, we yield ourselves, in faith and love, to become His friends!

28-THE TWO DEBTORS

'There was a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. 42. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell Me therefore, which of them will love him most? 43. Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most.'--LUKE vii.41-43.

We all know the lovely story in which this parable is embedded. A woman of notoriously bad character had somehow come in contact with Jesus Christ, and had by Him been aroused from her sensuality and degradation, and calmed by the assurance of forgiveness. So, when she heard that He was in her own town, what could she do but hasten to the Pharisee's house, and brave the cruel, scornful eyes of the eminently respectable people that would meet her there? She carries with her part of the spoils and instruments of her sinful adornment, to devote it to His service; but before she can open the cruse, her heart opens, and the hot tears flow on His feet, inflicting an indignity where she had meant an honour. She has nothing at hand to repair the fault, she will not venture to take her poor garment, which might have done it, but with a touch, she loosens her long hair, and with the ingenuity and self-abasement of love, uses that for a towel. Then, gathering confidence from her reception, and carried further than she had meant, she ventures to lay her sinful lips on His feet, as if asking pardon for the tears that would come--the only lips, except those of the traitor, that are recorded as having touched the Master. And only then does she dare to pour upon Him her only wealth.

What says the Pharisee? Has he a heart at all? He is scandalised at such a scene at his respectable table; and no wonder, for he could not have known that a change had passed upon the woman, and her evil repute was obviously notorious. He does not wonder at her having found her way into his house, for the meal was half public. But he began to doubt whether a Man who tolerates such familiarities from such a person could be a prophet; or if He were, whether He could be a good man. 'He would have known her if He had been a prophet,' thinks he. The thought is only a questionably true one. 'If He had known her, He would have thrust her back with His foot,' he thinks; and that thought is obviously false. But Simon's righteousness was of the sort that gathers up its own robes about it, and shoves back the poor sinner into the filth. 'She is a sinner,' says he. No, Simon! she was a sinner, but she is a penitent, and is

on the road to be a saint, and having been washed, she is a great deal cleaner than thou art, who art only white-washed.

Our Lord's parable is the answer to the Pharisee's thought, and in it Jesus shows Simon that He knows him and the woman a great deal better than he did. There are three things to which briefly I ask your attention--the common debt, in varying amounts; the common insolvency; and the love, like the debt, varying in amount. Now, note these things in order.

I. There is, first of all, the common debt.

I do not propose to dwell at all upon that familiar metaphor, familiar to us all from its use in the Lord's Prayer, by which sin and the guilt of sin are shadowed forth for us in an imperfect fashion by the conception of debt. For duty neglected is a debt to God, which can only be discharged by a penalty. And all sin, and its consequent guilt and exposure to punishment, may be regarded under the image of indebtedness.

But the point that I want you to notice is that these two in our parable, though they are meant to be portraits of Simon and the woman, are also representatives of the two classes to one or other of which we all belong. They are both debtors, though one owes but a tenth of what the other does. That is to say, our Lord here draws a broad distinction between people who are outwardly respectable, decent, cleanly living, and people who have fallen into the habit, and are living a life, of gross and open transgression. There has been a great deal of very pernicious loose representation of the attitude of Christianity in reference to this matter, common in evangelical pulpits. And I want you to observe that our Lord draws a broad line and says, 'Yes! you, Simon, are a great deal better than that woman was. She was coarse, unclean, her innocence gone, her purity stained. She had been wallowing in filth, and you, with your respectability, your rigid morality, your punctilious observance of the ordinary human duties, you were far better than she was, and had far less to answer for than she had.' Fifty is only a tenth of five hundred, and there is a broad distinction, which nothing ought to be allowed to obliterate, between people who, without religion, are trying to do right, to keep themselves in the paths of morality and righteousness, to discharge their duty to their fellows, controlling their passions and their flesh, and others who put the reins upon the necks of the horses and let them carry them where they will, and live in an eminent manner for the world and the flesh and the devil.

And there is nothing in evangelical Christianity which in the smallest degree obliterates that distinction, but rather it emphasises it, and gives a man full credit for any difference that there is in his life and conduct and character between himself and the man of gross transgression.

But then it says, on the other side, the difference which does exist, and is not to be minimised, is, after all, a difference of degree. They are both debtors. They stand in the same relation to the creditor, though the amount of the indebtedness is extremely different. We are all sinful men, and we stand in the same relation to God, though one of us may be much darker and blacker than the other.

And then, remember, that when you begin to talk about the guilt of actions in God's sight, you have to go far below the mere surface. If we could see the infinite complexity of motives--aggravations on the one side and palliations on the other--which go to the doing of a single deed, we should not be so quick to pronounce that the publican and the harlot are worse than the Pharisee. It is quite possible that an action which passes muster in regard to the morality of the world may, if regard be had (which God only can exercise) to the motive for which it is done, be as bad as, if not worse than, the lust and the animalism, drunkenness and debauchery, crime and murder, which the vulgar scales of the world consider to be the heavier. If you once begin to try to measure guilt, you will have to pass under the surface appearance, and will find that many a white and dazzling act has a very rotten inside, and that many a very corrupt and foul one does not come from so corrupt a source as at first sight might seem to be its origin. Let us be very modest in our estimate of the varying guilt of actions, and remember that, deep down below all diversities, there lies a fundamental identity, in which there is no difference, that all of us respectable people that never broke a law of the nation, and scarcely ever a law of propriety, in our lives, and the outcasts, if there are any here now, the drunkards, the sensualists, all of us stand in this respect in the same class. We are all debtors, for we have 'all sinned and come short of the glory of God,' A viper an inch long and the thickness of whipcord has a sting and poison in it, and is a viper. And if the question is whether a man has got small-pox or not, one pustule is as good evidence as if he was spotted all over. So, remember, he who owes five hundred and he who owes the tenth part of it, which is fifty, are both debtors.

II. Now notice the common insolvency.

'They had nothing to pay.' Well, if there is no money, 'no effects' in the bank, no cash in the till, nothing to distrain upon, it does not matter very much what the amount of the debt is, seeing that there is nothing to meet it, and whether it is fifty or five hundred the man is equally unable to pay. And that is precisely our position.

I admit, of course, that men without any recognition of God's pardoning mercy, or any of the joyful impulse that comes from the sense of Christ's redemption, or any of the help that is given by the indwelling of the Spirit who sanctifies may do a great deal in the way of mending their characters and making themselves purer and nobler. But that is not the point which my text contemplates, because it deals with a past. And the fact that lies under the metaphor of my text is this, that none of us can in any degree diminish our sin, considered as a debt to God. What can you and I do to lighten our souls of the burden of guilt? What we have written we have written. Tears will not wash it out, and amendment will not alter the past, which stands frowning and irrevocable. If there be a God at all, then our consciences, which speak to us of demerit, proclaim guilt in its two elements--the sense of having done wrong, and the foreboding of punishment therefor. Guilt cannot be dealt with by the guilty one: it must be Some One else who deals with it. He, and only He against whom we have sinned, can touch the great burden that we have piled upon us.

Brother! we have nothing to pay. We may mend our ways; but that does not touch the past. We may hate the evil; that will help to keep us from doing it in the future, but it does not affect our responsibility for what is done. We cannot touch it; there it stands irrevocable, with this solemn sentence written over the black pile, 'Every transgression and disobedience shall receive its just recompense of reward.' We have nothing to pay.

But my text suggests, further, that a condition precedent to forgiveness is the recognition by us of our penniless insolvency. Though it is not distinctly stated, it is clearly and necessarily implied in the narrative, that the two debtors are to be supposed as having come and held out a couple of pairs of empty hands, and sued in *_forma pauperis_*. You must recognise your insolvency if you expect to be forgiven. God does not accept dividends, so much in the pound, and let you off the rest on consideration thereof. If you are

going to pay, you have to pay all; if He is going to forgive, you have to let Him forgive all. It must be one thing or the other, and you and I have to elect which of the two we shall stand by, and which of the two shall be applied to us.

Oh, dear friends! may we all come and say,

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling.

III. And so, lastly, notice the love, which varies with the forgiveness.

'Tell Me which of them will love him most.' Simon does not penetrate Christ's design, and there is a dash of supercilious contempt for the story and the question, as it seems to me, in the languid, half-courteous answer:--'I suppose, if it were worth my while to think about such a thing, that he to whom he forgave the most.' He did not know what a battery was going to be unmasked. Jesus says, 'Thou hast rightly judged.'

The man that is most forgiven is the man that will love most. Well, that answer is true if all other things about the two debtors are equal. If they are the same sort of men, with the same openness to sentiments of gratitude and generosity, the man who is let off the smaller debt will generally be less obliged than the man who is let off the larger. But it is, alas! not always the case that we can measure benefits conferred by gratitude shown. Another element comes in--namely, the consciousness of the benefit received--which measures the gratitude far more accurately than the actual benefit bestowed. And so we must take both these things, the actual amount of forgiveness, so to speak, which is conferred, and the depth of the sense of the forgiveness received, in order to get the measure of the love which answers it. So that this principle breaks up into two thoughts, of which I have only just a word or two to say.

First, it is very often true that the greatest sinners make the greatest saints. There have been plenty of instances all down the history of the world, and there are plenty of instances, thank God, cropping up every day still in which some poor, wretched outcast, away out in the darkness, living on the husks that the swine do eat, and liking to be in the pigstye, is brought back into the Father's house, and turns out a far more loving son and a far better servant than the man that had never wandered away from it. 'The publicans and the harlots' do often yet 'go into the Kingdom of God before'

the respectable people.

And there are plenty of people in Manchester that you would not touch with a pair of tongs who, if they could be got hold of, would make far more earnest and devoted Christians than you are. The very strength of passion and feeling which has swept them wrong, rightly directed, would make grand saints of them, just as the very same conditions of climate which, at tropics, bring tornadoes and cyclones and dreadful thunder-storms, do also bring abundant fertility. The river which devastates a nation, dammed up within banks, may fertilise half a continent. And if a man is brought out of the darkness, and looks back upon the years that are wasted, that may help him to a more intense consecration. And if he remembers the filth out of which Jesus Christ picked him, it will bind him to that Lord with a bond deep and sacred.

So let no outcast man or woman listening to me now despair. You can come back from the furthest darkness, and whatever ugly things you have in your memories and your consciences, you may make them stepping-stones on which to climb to the very throne of God. Let no respectable people despise the outcasts; there may be the making in them of far better Christians than we are.

But, on the other hand, let no man think lightly of sin. Though it can be forgiven and swept away, and the gross sinner may become the great saint, there will be scars and bitter memories and habits surging up again after we thought they were dead; and the old ague and fever that we caught in the pestilential land will hang by us when we have migrated into a more wholesome climate. It is never good for a man to have sinned, even though, through his sin, God may have taken occasion to bring him near to Himself.

But the second form of this principle is always true--namely, that those who are most conscious of forgiveness will be most fruitful of love. The depth and fervour of our individual Christianity depends more largely on the clearness of our consciousness of our own personal guilt and the firmness of our grasp of forgiveness than upon anything else.

Why is it that such multitudes of you professing Christians are such icebergs in your Christianity? Mainly for this reason--that you have never found out, in anything like an adequate measure, how great a sinner you are, and how sure and sweet and sufficient Christ's pardoning mercy is. And so you are like Simon--you will ask Jesus to

dinner, but you will not give Him any water for His feet or ointment for His head. You will do the conventional and necessary pieces of politeness, but not one act of impulse from the heart ever comes from you. You discharge 'the duties of religion.' What a phrase! You discharge the duties of religion. Ah! My brother, if you had been down into the horrible pit and the miry clay, and had seen a hand and a face looking down, and an arm outstretched to lift you; and if you had ever known what the rapture was after that subterraneous experience of having your feet set upon a rock and your goings established, you would come to Him and you would say, 'Take me all, O Lord! for I am all redeemed by Thee.' 'To whom little is forgiven the same loveth little.' Does not that explain the imperfect Christianity of thousands of us?

Fifty pence and five hundred pence are both small sums. Our Lord had nothing to do here with the absolute amount of debt, but only with the comparative amount of the two debts. But when He wanted to tell the people what the absolute amount of the debt was, he did it in that other story of the Unfaithful Servant. He owed his lord, not fifty pence (fifty eightpences or thereabouts), not five hundred pence, but 'ten thousand talents,' which comes to near two and a half millions of English money. And that is the picture of our indebtedness to God. 'We have nothing to pay.' Here is the payment--that Cross, that dying Christ. Turn your faith there, my brother, and then you will get ample forgiveness, and that will kindle love, and that will overflow in service. For the aperture in the heart at which forgiveness enters in is precisely of the same width as the one at which love goes out. Christ has loved us all, and perfectly. Let us love Him back again, who has died that we might live, and borne our sins in His own body.

29-LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.'--LUKE vii. 47.

This story contains three figures, three persons, who may stand for us as types or representatives of the divine love and of all its operation in the world, of the way in which it is received or rejected, and of the causes and consequences of its reception or rejection. There is the unloving, cleanly, respectable, self-complacent Pharisee, with all his contempt for 'this woman.' There is the woman, with gross sin and mighty penitence, the great burst of love that is flowing out of her heart sweeping away before it, as it were, all the guilt of her transgressions. And, high over all, brooding over all, loving each, knowing each, pitying each, willing to save and be the Friend and Brother of each, is the embodied and manifested divine Love, the knowledge of whom is love in our hearts, and is 'life eternal.' So that now I have simply to ask you to look with me, for a little while, at these three persons as representing for us the divine love that comes forth amongst sinners, and the twofold form in which that love is received. There is, first, Christ the love of God appearing amongst men, the foundation of all our love to Him. Then there is the woman, the penitent sinner, lovingly recognising the divine love. And then, last, there is the Pharisee, the self-righteous man, ignorant of himself, and empty of all love to God. These are the three figures to which I ask your attention now.

I. We have Christ here standing as a manifestation of the divine love coming forth amongst sinners. His person and His words, the part He plays in this narrative, and the parable that He speaks in the course of it, have to be noticed under this head.

First, then, you have this idea--that He, as bringing to us the love of God, shows it to us, as not at all dependent upon our merits or deserts: 'He frankly forgave them both' are the deep words in which He would point us to the source and the ground of all the love of God. Brethren, have you ever thought what a wonderful and blessed truth there lies in the old words of one of the Jewish prophets, 'I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for Mine holy Name's sake'? The foundation of all God's love to us sinful men, that saying tells us, lies not in us, nor in anything about us, not in anything external to God Himself. He, and He alone, is the cause and reason, the motive and the end, of His own love to our world.

And unless we have grasped that magnificent thought as the foundation of all our acceptance in Him, I think we have not yet learnt half of the fullness which, even in this world, may belong to our conceptions of the love of God--a love that has no motive but Himself; a love that is not evoked even (if I may so say) by regard to His creatures' wants; a love, therefore, which is eternal, being in that divine heart before there were creatures upon whom it could rest; a love that is its own guarantee, its own cause--safe and firm, therefore, with all the firmness and serenity of the divine nature--incapable of being affected by our transgression, deeper than all our sins, more ancient than our very existence, the very essence and being of God Himself. 'He frankly forgave them both.' If you seek the source of divine love, you must go high up into the mountains of God, and learn that it, as all other of His (shall I say) emotions, and feelings, and resolutions, and purposes, owns no reason but Himself, no motive but Himself; lies wrapped in the secret of His nature, who is all-sufficient for His own blessedness, and all whose work and being is caused by, and satisfied, and terminates in His own fullness. 'God is love': therefore beneath all considerations of what we may want--deeper and more blessed than all thoughts of a compassion that springs from the feeling of human distress and the sight of man's misery--lies this thought of an affection which does not need the presence of sorrow to evoke it, which does not want the touch of our finger to flow out, but by its very nature is everlasting, by its very nature is infinite, by its very nature must be pouring out the flood of its own joyous fullness for ever and ever!

Then, again, Christ standing here for us as the representative and revelation of this divine love which He manifests to us, tells us, too, that whilst it is not caused by us, but comes from the nature of God, it is not turned away by our sins. 'This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him,' says the unloving and self-righteous heart, 'for she is a sinner.' Ah! there is nothing more beautiful than the difference between the thought about sinful creatures which is natural to a holy being, and the thought about sinful creatures which is natural to a self-righteous being. The one is all contempt; the other, all pity. He knew what she was, and therefore He let her come close to Him with the touch of her polluted hand, and pour out the gains of her lawless life and the adornments of her former corruption upon His most blessed and most holy head. His knowledge of her as a sinner, what did it do to His love for her? It made that love gentle and tender, as knowing that she could not bear the

revelation of the blaze of His purity. It smoothed His face and softened His tones, and breathed through all His knowledge and notice of her timid and yet confident approach. 'Daughter, I know all about it--all thy wanderings and thy vile transgressions: I know them all, and My love is mightier than all these. They may be as the great sea, but my love is like the everlasting mountains, whose roots go down beneath the ocean, and My love is like the everlasting heaven, whose brightness covers it all over.' God's love is Christ's love; Christ's love is God's love. And this is the lesson that we gather--that that infinite and divine loving-kindness does not turn away from thee, my brother and my friend, because thou art a sinner, but remains hovering about thee, with wooing invitations and with gentle touches, if it may draw thee to repentance, and open a fountain of answering affection in thy seared and dry heart. The love of God is deeper than all our sins. 'For His great love wherewith He loved us, when we were dead in sins, He quickened us.'

Sin is but the cloud behind which the everlasting sun lies in all its power and warmth, unaffected by the cloud; and the light will yet strike, the light of His love will yet pierce through, with its merciful shafts bringing healing in their beams, and dispersing all the pitchy darkness of man's transgression. And as the mists gather themselves up and roll away, dissipated by the heat of that sun in the upper sky, and reveal the fair earth below--so the love of Christ shines in, molting the mist and dissipating the fog, thinning it off in its thickest places, and at last piercing its way right through it, down to the heart of the man that has been lying beneath the oppression of this thick darkness, and who thought that the fog was the sky, and that there was no sun there above. God be thanked! the everlasting love of God that comes from the depth of His own being, and is there because of Himself, will never be quenched because of man's sin.

And so, in the next place, Christ teaches us here that this divine love, when it comes forth among sinners, necessarily manifests itself first in the form of forgiveness. There was nothing to be done with the debtors until the debt was wiped out; there was no possibility of other gifts of the highest sort being granted to them, until the great score was cancelled and done away with. When the love of God comes down into a sinful world, it must come first and foremost as pardoning mercy. There are no other terms upon which there can be a union betwixt the loving-kindness of God, and the emptiness and sinfulness of my heart, except only this--that first of all there shall be the clearing away from my soul of the sins

which I have gathered there, and then there will be space for all other divine gifts to work and to manifest themselves. Only do not fancy that when we speak about forgiveness, we simply mean that a man's position in regard to the penalties of sin is altered. That is not all the depth of the scriptural notion of forgiveness. It includes far more than the removal of outward penalties. The heart of it all is, that the love of God rests upon the sinner, unturned away even by his sins, passing over his sins, and removing his sins for the sake of Christ. My friend, if you are talking in general terms about a great divine loving-kindness that wraps you round--if you have a great deal to say, apart from the Gospel, about the love of God as being your hope and confidence--I want you to reflect on this, that the first word which the love of God speaks to sinful men is pardon; and unless that is your notion of God's love, unless you look to that as the first thing of all, let me tell you, you may have before you a very fair picture of a very beautiful, tender, good-natured benevolence, but you have not nearly reached the height of the vigour and yet the tenderness of the Scripture notion of the love of God. It is not a love which says, 'Well, put sin on one side, and give the man the blessings all the same,' not a love which has nothing to say about that great fact of transgression, not a love which gives it the go-by, and leaves it standing: but a love which passes into the heart through the portal of pardon, a love which grapples with the fact of sin first, and has nothing to say to a man until it has said that message to him.

And but one word more on this part of my subject--here we see the love of God thus coming from Himself; not turned away by man's sins; being the cause of forgiveness; expressing itself in pardon; and last of all, demanding service. 'Simon, thou gavest Me no water, thou gavest Me no kiss, My head thou didst not anoint: I expected all these things from thee--I desired them all from thee: My love came that they might spring in thy heart; thou hast not given them; My love is wounded, as it were disappointed, and it turns away from thee!' Yes, after all that we have said about the freeness and fullness, the unmerited, and uncaused, and unmotivated nature of that divine affection--after all that we have said about its being the source of every blessing to man, asking nothing from him, but giving everything to him; it still remains true, that God's love, when it comes to men, comes that it may evoke an answering echo in the human heart, and 'though it might be much bold to enjoin, yet for love's sake rather beseeches' us to give unto Him who has given all unto us. There, then, stands forth in the narrative, Christ as a revelation of the divine love amongst sinners.

II. Now, in the second place, let us look for a moment at 'this woman' as the representative of a class of character--the penitent lovingly recognising the divine love.

The words which I have read as my text contain a statement as to the woman's character: 'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.' Allow me just one word of explanation, in the shape of exposition, on these words. Great blunders have been built upon them. I dare say you have seen epitaphs--(I have)--written often on gravestones with this misplaced idea on them--'Very sinful; but there was a great deal of love in the person; and for the sake of the love, God passed by the sin!' Now, when Christ says 'She loved much,' He does not mean to say that her love was the cause of her forgiveness--not at all. He means to say that her love was the proof of her forgiveness, and that it was so because her love was a consequence of her forgiveness. As, for instance, we might say, 'The woman is in great distress, for she weeps'; but we do not mean thereby that the weeping is the reason of the distress, but the means of our knowing the sorrow. It is the proof because it is the consequence. Or (to put it into the simplest shape) the love does not go before the forgiveness, but the forgiveness goes before the love; and because the love comes after the forgiveness, it is the sign of the forgiveness. That this is the true interpretation, you will see if you look back for a moment at the narrative which precedes, where He says, 'He frankly forgave them both: tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?' Pardon is the pre-requisite of love, and love is a consequence of the sense of forgiveness.

This, then, is the first thing to observe: all true love to God is preceded in the heart by these two things--a sense of sin, and an assurance of pardon. Brethren, there is no love possible--real, deep, genuine, worthy of being called love of God--which does not start with the belief of my own transgression, and with the thankful reception of forgiveness in Christ. You do nothing to get pardon for yourselves; but unless you have the pardon you have no love to God. I know that sounds a very hard thing--I know that many will say it is very narrow and very bigoted, and will ask, 'Do you mean to tell me that the man whose bosom glows with gratitude because of earthly blessings, has no love--that all that natural religion which is in people, apart from this sense of forgiveness in Christ, do you mean to tell me that this is not all genuine?' Yes, most assuredly; and I believe the Bible and man's conscience say the same thing. I do not

for one moment deny that there may be in the hearts of those who are in the grossest ignorance of themselves as transgressors, certain emotions of instinctive gratitude and natural religiousness, directed to some higher power dimly thought of as the author of their blessings and the source of much gladness: but has that kind of thing got any living power in it? I demur to its right to be called love to God at all, for this reason--because it seems to me that the object that is loved is not God, but a fragment of God. He who but says, 'I owe to Him breath and all things; in Him I live and move, and have my being,' has left out one-half at least of the Scriptural conception of God. Your God, my friend, is not the God of the Bible, unless He stands before you clothed in infinite loving-kindness indeed; but clothed also in strict and rigid justice. Is your God perfect and entire? If you say that you love Him, and if you do so, is it as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Have you meditated on the depths of the requirements of His law? Have you stood silent and stricken at the thought of the blaze of His righteousness? Have you passed through all the thick darkness and the clouds with which He surrounds His throne, and forced your way at last into the inner light where He dwells? Or is it a vague divinity that you worship and love? Which? Ah, if a man study his Bible, and try to find out for himself, from its veracious records, who and what manner of God the living God is, there will be no love in his heart to that Being except only when he has flung himself at His feet, and said, 'Father of eternal purity, and God of all holiness and righteousness, forgive Thy child, a sinful broken man--forgive Thy child, for the sake of Thy Son!' That, and that alone, is the road by which we come to possess the love of God, as a practical power, filling and sanctifying our souls; and such is the God to whom alone our love ought to be rendered; and I tell you (or rather the Bible tells you, and the Gospel and the Cross of Christ tell you), there is no love without pardon, no fellowship and sonship without the sense of sin and the acknowledgment of foul transgression!

So much, then, for what precedes the love of Christ in the heart; now a word as to what follows. 'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.' The sense of sin precedes forgiveness: forgiveness precedes love; love precedes all acceptable and faithful service. If you want to do, love. If you want to know, love. This poor woman knew Christ a vast deal better than that Pharisee there. He said, 'This man is not a prophet; He does not understand the woman.' Ay, but the woman knew herself better than the Pharisee knew himself, knew herself better than the Pharisee knew her, knew Christ, above all, a vast deal better than he did.

Love is the gate of all knowledge.

This poor woman brings her box of ointment, a relic perhaps of past evil life, and once meant for her own adornment, and pours it on His head, lavishes offices of service which to the unloving heart seem bold in the giver and cumbersome to the receiver. It is little she can do, but she does it. Her full heart demands expression, and is relieved by utterance in deeds. The deeds are spontaneous, welling out at the bidding of an inward impulse, not drawn out by the force of an external command. It matters not what practical purpose they serve. The motive of them makes their glory. Love prompts them, love justifies them, and His love interprets them, and His love accepts them. The love which flows from the sense of forgiveness is the source of all obedience as well as the means of all knowledge.

Brethren, we differ from each other in all respects but one, 'We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God'; we all need the love of Christ; it is offered to us all; but, believe me, the sole handle by which you can lay hold of it, is the feeling of your own sinfulness and need of pardon. I preach to you a love that you do not need to buy, a mercy that you do not need to bribe, a grace that is all independent of your character, and condition, and merits, which issues from God for ever, and is lying at your doors if you will take it. You are a sinful man; Christ died for you. He comes to give you His forgiving mercy. Take it, be at rest. So shalt thou love and know and do, and so shall He love and guide thee!

III. Now one word, and then I have done. A third character stands here--the unloving and self-righteous man, all ignorant of the love of Christ.

He is the antithesis of the woman and her character. You remember the traditional peculiarities and characteristics of the class to which he belonged. He is a fair specimen of the whole of them. Respectable in life, rigid in morality, unquestionable in orthodoxy; no sound of suspicion having ever come near his belief in all the traditions of the elders; intelligent and learned, high up among the ranks of Israel! What was it that made this man's morality a piece of dead nothingness? What was it that made his orthodoxy just so many dry words, from out of which all the life had gone? What was it? This one thing: there was no love in it. As I said, Love is the foundation of all obedience; without it, morality degenerates into mere casuistry. Love is the foundation of all knowledge; without it, religion degenerates into a chattering about Moses, and doctrines,

and theories; a thing that will neither kill nor make alive, that never gave life to a single soul or blessing to a single heart, and never put strength into any hand for the conflict and strife of daily life. There is no more contemptible and impotent thing on the face of the earth than morality divorced from love, and religious thoughts divorced from a heart full of the love of God. Quick corruption or long decay, and in either case death and putrefaction, are the end of these. You and I need that lesson, my friends. It is of no use for us to condemn Pharisees that have been dead and in their graves for nineteen hundred years. The same thing besets us all; we all of us try to get away from the centre, and dwell contented on the surface. We are satisfied to take the flowers and stick them into our little gardens, without any roots to them, when of course they all die out! People may try to cultivate virtue without religion, and to acquire correct notions of moral and spiritual truth; and partially and temporarily they may succeed, but the one will be a yoke of bondage, and the other a barren theory. I repeat, love is the basis of all knowledge and of all right-doing. If you have got that firm foundation laid in the soul, then the knowledge and the practice will be builded in God's own good time; and if not, the higher you build the temple, and the more aspiring are its cloud-pointing pinnacles, the more certain will be its toppling some day, and the more awful will be the ruin when it comes. The Pharisee was contented with himself, and so there was no sense of sin in him, therefore there was no penitent recognition of Christ as forgiving and loving him, therefore there was no love to Christ. Because there was no love, there was neither light nor heat in his soul, his knowledge was barren notions, and his painful doings were soul-destructive self-righteousness.

And so it all comes round to the one blessed message: My friend, God hath loved us with an everlasting love. He has provided an eternal redemption and pardon for us. If you would know Christ at all, you must go to Him as a sinful man, or you are shut out from Him altogether. If you will go to Him as a sinful being, fling yourself down there, not try to make yourself better, but say, 'I am full of unrighteousness and transgression; let Thy love fall upon me and heal me'; you will get the answer, and in your heart there shall begin to live and grow up a root of love to Him, which shall at last effloresce into all knowledge and unto all purity of obedience; for he that hath had much forgiveness, loveth much; and 'he that loveth knoweth God,' and 'dwelleth in God, and God in Him'!

30-GO INTO PEACE

'And He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace.'--LUKE vii. 50.

We find that our Lord twice, and twice only, employs this form of sending away those who had received benefits from His hand. On both occasions the words were addressed to women: once to this woman, who was a sinner, and who was gibbeted by the contempt of the Pharisee in whose house the Lord was; and once to that poor sufferer who stretched out a wasted hand to lay upon the hem of His garment, in the hope of getting healing--filching it away unknown to the Giver. In both cases there is great tenderness; in the latter case even more so than in the present, for there He addressed the tremulous invalid as 'daughter'; and in both cases there is a very remarkable connection hinted at between faith and peace; 'Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace.'

Now, there are three things that strike me about these words; the first of them is this--

I. The dismissal of the woman.

One might have expected that our Lord would have flung the shield of His companionship, for a little while, at any rate, over this penitent, and so have saved her from the scoffs and sneers of her neighbours, who knew that she was a sinner. One might have supposed that the depth of her gratitude, as expressed by her costly offering and by her tears, would have spoken to His heart, and that He would have let her stop beside Him for a little while; but no! Jesus said to her in effect; 'You have got what you wished; go away, and take care of it.' Such a dismissal is in accordance with the way in which He usually acted. For very seldom indeed, after He had gathered the first nucleus of four disciples, do we find that He summoned any individual to His side. Generally He broke the connection between Himself and the recipients of His benefits at as early a moment as possible, and dismissed them. And that was not only because He did not wish to be surrounded and hampered by a crowd of slightly attached disciples, but for two other reasons; one, the good of the people themselves, and the other, that, scattered all over northern Palestine, they might in their several circles become centres of light and evangelists for the King. He dispersed them that He might fling the seed broadcast over the land.

Jesus Christ says to us, if we have been saved by our faith, 'Go!' And He intends two things thereby. First, to teach us that it is good for us to stand by ourselves, to feel responsibility for the ordering of our lives, not to have a visible Presence at our sides to fall back upon, but to grow by solitude. There is no better way of growing reliant, of becoming independent of circumstances, and in the depths of our own hearts being calm, than by being deprived of visible stay and support, and thus drawing closer and closer to our unseen Companion, and leaning harder and heavier upon Him. 'It is expedient for you that I go away.' For solitude and self-reliance, which is bottomed upon self-distrust and reliance upon Him, are the things that make men and women strong. So, if ever He carries us into the desert, if ever He leaves us forsaken and alone, as we think, if ever He seems--and sometimes He does with some people, and it is only seeming--to withdraw Himself from us, it is all for the one purpose, that we may grow to be mature men and women, not always children, depending upon go-carts of any kind, and nurses' hands and leading-strings. Go, and alone with Christ realise by faith that you are not alone. Christian men and women, have you learned that lesson--to be able to do without anybody and anything because your whole hearts are filled, and your courage is braced up and strengthened by the thought that the absent Christ is the present Christ?

There is another reason, as I take it, for which this separation of the new disciple from Jesus was so apparently mercilessly and perpetually enforced. At the very moment when one would have thought it would have done this woman good to be with the Lord for a little while longer, she is sent out into the harshly judging world. Yes, that is always the way by which Christian men and women that have received the blessing of salvation through faith can retain it, and serve Him--by going out among men and doing their work there. The woman went home. I dare say it was a home, if what they said about her was true, that sorely needed the leavening which she now would bring. She had been a centre of evil. She was to go away back to the very place where she had been such, and to be a centre of good. She was to contradict her past by her present which would explain itself when she said she had been with Jesus. For the very same reason for which to one man that besought to be with Him, He said, 'No, no! go away home and tell your friends what great things God has done for you,' He said to this woman, and He says to you and me, 'Go, and witness for Me.' Communion with Him is blessed, and it is meant to issue in service for Him. 'Let us make here three tabernacles,' said

the Apostle; and there was scarcely need for the parenthetical comment, 'not knowing what he said.' But there was a demoniac boy down there with the rest of the disciples, and they had been trying in vain to free him from the incubus that possessed him, and as long as that melancholy case was appealing to the sympathy and help of the transfigured Christ, it was no time to stop on the Mount. Although Moses and Elias were there, and the voice from God was there, and the Shechinah cloud was there, all were to be left, to go down and do the work of helping a poor, struggling child. So Jesus Christ says to us, 'Go, and remember that work is the end of emotion, and that to do the Master's will in the world is the surest way to realise His presence.'

II. Now, the second point I would suggest is--

The region into which Christ admitted this woman. It is remarkable that in the present case, and in that other to which I have already referred, the phraseology employed is not the ordinary one of that familiar Old Testament leave-taking salutation, which was the 'goodbye' of the Hebrews, 'Go in peace.' But we read occasionally in the Old Testament a slight but eloquent variation. It is not 'Go in peace,' as our Authorised Version has it, but 'Go into peace,' and that is a great deal more than the other. 'Go in peace' refers to the momentary emotion; 'Go into peace' seems, as it were, to open the door of a great palace, to let down the barrier on the borders of a land, and to send the person away upon a journey through all the extent of that blessed country. Jesus Christ takes up this as He does a great many very ordinary conventional forms, and puts a meaning into it. Eli had said to Hannah, 'Go into peace.' Nathan had said to David, 'Go into peace.' But Eli and Nathan could only wish that it might be so; their wish had no power to realise itself. Christ takes the water of the conventional salutation and turns it into the wine of a real gift. When He says, 'Go into peace,' He puts the person into the peace which He wishes them, and His word is like a living creature, and fulfils itself.

So He says to each of us: 'If you have been saved by faith, I open the door of this great palace. I admit you across the boundaries of this great country. I give you all possible forms of peace for yours.' Peace with God--that is the foundation of all--then peace with ourselves, so that our inmost nature need no longer be torn in pieces by contending emotions, 'I dare not' waiting upon 'I would,' and 'I ought' and 'I will' being in continual and internecine conflict; but heart and will, and calmed conscience, and satisfied

desires, and pure affections, and lofty emotions being all drawn together into one great wave by the attraction of His love, as the moon draws the heaped waters of the ocean round the world. So our souls at rest in God may be at peace within themselves, and that is the only way by which the discords of the heart can be tuned to one key, into harmony and concord; and the only way by which wars and tumults within the soul turn into tranquil energy, and into peace which is not stagnation, but rather a mightier force than was ever developed when the soul was cleft by discordant desires.

In like manner, the man who is at peace with God, and consequently with himself, is in relations of harmony with all things and with all events. 'All things are yours if ye are Christ's.' 'The stars in their courses fought against Sisera,' because Sisera was fighting against God; and all creatures, and all events, are at enmity with the man who is in antagonism and enmity to Him who is Lord of them all. But if we have peace with God, and peace with ourselves, then, as Job says, 'Thou shalt make a league with the beasts of the field, and the stones of the field shall be at peace with thee.' 'Thy faith hath saved thee; go into peace.'

Remember that this commandment, which is likewise a promise and a bestowal, bids us progress in the peace into which Christ admits us. We should be growingly unperturbed and calm, and 'there is no joy but calm,' when all is said and done. We should be more and more tranquil and at rest; and every day there should come, as it were, a deeper and more substantial layer of tranquillity enveloping our hearts, a thicker armour against perturbation and calamity and tumult.

III. And now there is one last point here that I would suggest, namely:

The condition on which we shall abide in the Land of Peace.

Our Lord said to both these women: 'Thy faith hath saved thee.' To the other one it was even more needful to say it than to this poor penitent prostitute, because that other one had the notion that, somehow or other, she could steal away the blessing of healing by contact of her finger with the robe of Jesus. Therefore He was careful to lift her above that sensuous error, and to show her what it was in her that had drawn healing 'virtue' from Him. In substance He says to her: 'Thy faith, not thy forefinger, has joined thee to Me; My love, not My garment, has healed thee.'

There have been, and still are, many copyists of the woman's mistake who have ascribed too much healing and saving power to externals--sacraments, rites, and ceremonies. If their faith is real and their longing earnest, they get their blessing, but they need to be educated to understand more clearly what is the human condition of receiving Christ's saving power, and that robe and finger have little to do with it.

The sequence of these two sayings, the one pointing out the channel of all spiritual blessing, the other, the bestowment of the great blessing of perfect peace, suggests that the peace is conditional on the faith, and opens up to us this solemn truth, that if we would enjoy continuous peace, we must exercise continuous faith. The two things will cover precisely the same ground, and where the one stops the other will stop. Yesterday's faith does not secure to-day's peace. As long as I hold up the shield of faith, it will quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, but if I were holding it up yesterday, and have dropped it to-day, then there is nothing between me and them, and I shall be wounded and burned before long. No past religious experience avails for present needs. If you would have 'your peace' to be 'as the waves of the sea,' your trust in Christ must be continuous and strong. The moment you cease trusting, that moment you cease being peaceful. Keep behind the breakwater, and you will ride smoothly, whatever the storm. Venture out beyond it, and you will be exposed to the dash of the waves and the howling of the tempest. Your own past tells you where the means of blessing are. It was your faith that saved you, and it is as you go on believing that you 'Go into peace'.