

EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ST. LUKE

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VOLUME I-B: ST. LUKE _Chaps. VIII-XII

THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN (Luke viii 2,3)

ONE SEED AND DIVERSE SOILS (Luke viii. 4-15)

SEED AMONG THORNS (Luke viii. 14)

A MIRACLE WITHIN A MIRACLE (Luke viii. 43-48)

CHRIST TO JAIRUS (Luke viii. 50)

BREAD FROM HEAVEN (Luke ix. 10-17)

'THE LORD THAT HEALETH THEE' (Luke ix. 11)

CHRIST'S CROSS AND OURS (Luke ix. 18-27)

PRAYER AND TRANSFIGURATION (Luke ix. 29)

'IN THE HOLY MOUNT' (Luke ix. 30, 31)

CHRIST HASTENING TO THE CROSS (Luke ix. 51)

CHRIST'S MESSENGERS: THEIR EQUIPMENT AND WORK (Luke x. 1-11; 17-20)

NEIGHBOURS FAR OFF (Luke x. 25-37)

HOW TO PRAY (Luke xi. 1-13)

THE PRAYING CHRIST (Luke xi. 1)

THE RICH FOOL (Luke xii. 13-23)

ANXIOUS ABOUT EARTH, OR EARNEST ABOUT THE KINGDOM (Luke xii. 22-31)

STILLNESS IN STORM (Luke xii. 29)

THE EQUIPMENT OF THE SERVANTS (Luke xii. 35-36)

THE SERVANT-LORD (Luke xii. 37)

SERVANTS AND STEWARDS HERE AND HEREAFTER (Luke xii. 37, 43, 44)

FIRE ON EARTH (Luke xii. 49)

31A-THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN

'And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, 3. And Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto Him of their substance.'

--LUKE viii. 2,3.

The Evangelist Luke has preserved for us several incidents in our Lord's life in which women play a prominent part. It would not, I think, be difficult to bring that fact into connection with the main characteristics of his Gospel, but at all events it is worth observing that we owe to him those details, and the fact that the service of these grateful women was permanent during the whole of our Lord's wandering life after His leaving Galilee. An incidental reference to the fact is found in Matthew's account of the Crucifixion, but had it not been for Luke we should not have known the names of two or three of them, nor should we have known how constantly they adhered to Him. As to the women of the little group, we know very little about them. Mary of Magdala has had a very hard fate. The Scripture record of her is very sweet and beautiful. Delivered by Christ from that mysterious demoniacal possession, she cleaves to Him, like a true woman, with all her heart. She is one of the little group whose strong love, casting out all fear, nerved them to stand by the Cross when all the men except the gentle Apostle of love, as he is called, were cowering in corners, afraid of their lives, and she was one of the same group who would fain have prolonged their ministry beyond His death, and who brought the sweet spices with them in order to anoint Him, and it was she who came to the risen Lord with the rapturous exclamation, 'Rabboni, my Master.' By strange misunderstanding of the Gospel story, she has been identified with the woman who was a sinner in the previous chapter in this book, and her fair fame has been blackened and her very name taken as a designation of the class to which there is no reason whatever to believe she belonged. Demoniacal possession was neither physical infirmity nor moral evil, however much it may have simulated sometimes the one or the other.

Then as to Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, old Church tradition tells us that she was the consort of the nobleman whose son Christ healed at Capernaum. It does not seem very likely that Herod's steward would have been living in Capernaum, and the

narrative before us rather seems to show that she herself was the recipient of healing from His hands. However that may be, Herod's court was not exactly the place to look for Christian disciples, was it? But you know they of Caesar's household surrounded with their love the Apostle whom Nero murdered, and it is by no means an uncommon experience that the servants' hall knows and loves the Christ that the lord in the saloon does not care about.

And then as for Susanna, is it not a sweet fate to be known to all the world for ever more by one line only, which tells of her service to her Master?

So I will try to take out of these little incidents in our text some plain lessons about this matter of Christian service and ministry to Christ, with which it seems to be so full. It will apply to missionary work and all other sorts of work, and perhaps will take us down to the bottom of it all, and show us the foundation on which it should all rest.

Let me ask you for a moment to look with me first of all at the centre figure, as being an illustration of--what shall I say? may I venture to use a rough word and say the pauper Christ?--as the great Pattern and Motive for us, of the love that becomes poor. We very often cover the life of our Lord with so much imaginative reverence that we sometimes lose the hard angles of the facts of it. Now, I want you to realise it, and you may put it into as modern English as you like, for it will help the vividness of the conception, which is a simple, prosaic fact, that Jesus Christ was, in the broadest meaning of the word, a pauper; not indeed with the sodden poverty that you can see in our slums, but still in a very real sense of the word. He had not a thing that He could call His own, and when He came to the end of His life there was nothing for His executioners to gamble for except His one possession, the seamless robe. He is hungry, and there is a fig-tree by the roadside, and He comes, expecting to get His breakfast off that. He is tired, and He borrows a fishing-boat to lie down and sleep in. He is thirsty, and He asks a woman of questionable character to give Him a draught of water. He wants to preach a sermon about the bounds of ecclesiastical and civil society, and He says, 'Bring Me a penny.' He has to be indebted to others for the beast of burden on which He made His modest entry into Jerusalem, for the winding sheet that wrapped Him, for the spices that would embalm Him, for the grave in which He lay. He was a pauper in a deeper sense of the word than His Apostle when he said, 'Having nothing, and yet possessing all things, as poor,

and yet making many rich.' For let us remember that the great mystery of the Gospel system--the blending together in one act and in one Person all the extremes of lowliness and of the loftiness which go deep down into the very profundities of the Gospel, is all here dramatised, as it were, and drawn into a picturesque form on the very surface; and the same blending together of poverty and absolute love, which in its loftiest form is the union in one Person of Godhead and of manhood, is here for us in this fact, that all the dark cloud of poverty, if I may so say, is shot through with strange gleams of light like sunshine caught and tangled in some cold, wet fog, so that whenever you get some definite and strange mark of Christ's poverty, you get lying beside it some definite and strange mark of His absoluteness and His worth. For instance, take the illustration I have already referred to--He borrows a fishing-boat and lies down, weary, to sleep on the wooden pillow at the end of it; aye, but He rises and He says, 'Peace, be still,' and the waves fall. He borrows the upper room, and with a stranger's wine and another man's bread He founds the covenant and the sacrament of His new kingdom. He borrows a grave; aye, but He comes out of it, the Lord both of the dead and of the living. And so we have to say, 'Consider the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich.'

The noblest life that was ever lived upon earth-I hope you and I think it is a great deal more than that, but we all think it is that at any rate--the noblest life that was ever lived upon earth was the life of a poor man. Remember that pure desires, holy aspirations, noble purposes, and a life peopled with all the refinement and charities that belong to the spirit, and that is ever conscious of the closest presence of God and of the innate union with Him, is possible under such conditions, and so remember that the pauper Christ is, at the least, the perfect Man.

But then what I more immediately intended was to ask you to take that central figure with this external fact of His poverty, of the depth of His true inanition, the emptying of Himself for our sakes, as being the great motive, and Oh! thank God that with all humility, we may venture to say, the great Pattern to which you and I have to conform. There is the reason why we say, 'I love to speak His name,' there is the true measure of the devotion of the consecration and the self-surrender which He requires. Christ gave all for us even to the uttermost circumference of external possession, and standing in the midst of those for whose sakes He became poor, He turns to them

with a modest appeal when He says, 'Minister unto Me, for I have made Myself to need your ministrations for the sake of your redemption.' So much, then, for the first point which I would desire to urge upon you from this incident before us.

Now, in the next place, and pursuing substantially the same course of thought, let me suggest to you to look at the love--the love here that stoops to be served.

It is a familiar observation and a perfectly true one that we have no record of our Lord's ever having used miraculous power for the supply of His own wants, and the reason for that, I suppose, is to be found not only in that principle of economy and parsimony of miraculous energy, so that the supernatural in His life was ever pared down to the narrowest possible limits, and inosculated immediately with the natural, but it is also to be found in this--let me put it into very plain words--that Christ liked to be helped and served by the people that He loved, and that Christ knew that they liked it as well as He. It delighted Him, and He was quite sure that it delighted them. You fathers and mothers know what it is when one of your little children comes, and seeing you engaged about some occupation says, 'Let me help you.' The little hand perhaps does not contribute much to the furtherance of your occupation. It may be rather an encumbrance than otherwise, but is not there a gladness in saying 'Yes, here, take this and do this little thing for me'? And do not we all know how maimed and imperfect that love is which only gives, and how maimed and imperfect that love is which only receives, so that there must be an assumption of both attitudes in all true commerce of affection, and that same beautiful flashing backwards and forwards from the two poles which makes the sweetness of our earthly love find its highest example there in the heavens. There are the two mirrors facing each other, and they reverberate rays from one polished surface to another, and so Christ loves and gives, and Christ loves and takes, and His servants love and give, and His servants love and take. Sometimes we are accustomed to speak of it as the highest sign of our Lord's true, deep conviction that He has given so much to us. It seems to me we may well pause and hesitate whether the mightiness and the wonderfulness of His love to us are shown more in that He gives everything to us, or in that He takes so much from us. It is much to say, 'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister'; I do not know but that it is more to say that the Son of man let this record be written: 'Certain women also which ministered to Him of their substance.' At all events there it stands and for us. What although we have to come and say, 'All that I bring is Thine'; what then?

Does a father like less to get a gift from his boy because he gave him the shilling to buy it? And is there anything that diminishes the true sweetness of our giving to Christ, and as we may believe the true sweetness to Him of receiving it from us, because we have to herald all our offerings, all our love, aspirations, desires, trust, conformity, practical service, substantial help, with the

old acknowledgment, 'All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.'

Now, dear friends, all these principles which I have thus imperfectly touched upon as to the necessity of the blending of the two sides in all true commerce of love, the giving and bestowing the expression of the one affection in both hearts, all bears very directly upon the more special work of Christian men in spreading the name of Christ among those who do not know it. You get the same economy of power there that I was speaking about. The supernatural is finished when the divine life is cast into the world. 'I am come to fling fire upon the earth,' said He, 'and oh, that it were already kindled!' _There_ is the supernatural; after that you have to deal with the thing according to the ordinary laws of human history and the ordinary conditions of man's society. God trusts the spread of His word to His people; there will not be one moment's duration of the barely, nakedly supernatural beyond the absolute necessity. Christ comes; after that you and I have to see to it, and then you say, 'Collections, collections, collections, it is always collections. This society and that society and the other society, there is no end of the appeals that are made. Charity sermons--men using the highest motives of the Gospel for no purpose but to get a shilling or two out of people's pockets. I am tired of it.' Very well; all I have to say is, first of all, 'Ye have not resisted unto blood'; some people have had to pay a great deal more for their Gospel than you have. And another thing, a man that had lost a great deal more for his Master than ever you or I will have to do, said, 'Unto me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given, that I should preach amongst the heathen the unsearchable riches of Christ.' Ah! a generous, chivalrous spirit, a spirit touched to fine issues by the fine touch of the Lord's love, will feel that it is no burden; or if it be a burden, it is only a burden as a golden crown heavy with jewels may be a burden on brows that are ennobled by its pressure. This grace is given, and He has crowned us with the honour that we may serve Him and do something for Him.

Dear brethren! of all the gracious words that our Master has spoken to us, I know not that there is one more gracious than when He said, 'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature'; and of all the tender legacies that He has left His Church, though there be included amongst these His own peace and His own Spirit, I know not that there is any more tender or a greater sign of His love towards us and His confidence in us than when departing to the far country to receive a kingdom and to return, He gave authority to His servants, and to every man his work.'

And so, in the next place, let me ask you to look for a moment at the complement to this love that stoops to serve and delights to serve--the ministry or service of our love. Let me point to two things.

It seems to me that the simple narrative we have before us goes very deep into the heart of this matter. It gives us two things--the foundation of the service and the sphere of the service.

First there is the foundation--'Certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities.' Ah, there you come to it! The consciousness of redemption is the one master touch that evokes the gratitude which aches to breathe itself in service. There is no service except it be the expression of love. That is the one great Christian principle; and the other is that there is no love that does not rest on the consciousness of redemption; and from these two--that all service and obedience are the utterance and eloquence of love, and that all love has its root in the sense of redemption--you may elaborate all the distinct characteristics and peculiarities of Christian ethics, whereby duty becomes gladness. 'I will,' and 'I ought' overlap and cover each other like two of Euclid's triangles; and whatsoever He commands that I spring to do; and so though the burden be heavy, considered in regard to its requirements, and though the yoke do often press, considered *_per se_*, yet because the cords that fasten the yoke to our neck are the cords of love, I can say, 'My burden is light.' One of the old psalms puts it thus; 'O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; Thou hast loosed my bonds; and because Thou hast loosed, therefore O hear me; speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.'

So much then for the foundation--now for the sphere. 'Ah,' you say, 'there is no parallel there, at any rate. These women served Him with personal ministrations of their substance.' Well, I think there is a parallel notwithstanding. If I had time I should like to dwell

upon the side thoughts connected with that sphere of service, and remind you how very prosaic were their common domestic duties, looking after the comfort of Christ and the travel-stained Twelve who were with Him--let us put it into plain English--cooking their dinners for them, and how that became a religious act. Take the lesson out of it, you women in your households, and you men in your counting-houses and behind your counters, and you students at your dictionaries and lexicons. The commonest things done for the Master flash up into worship, or as good old George Herbert puts it--

'A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine;
Who sweeps a room, as for Thy cause,
Makes that and th' action fine.'

But then beyond that, is there any personal ministration to do? If any of you have ever been in St. Mark's Convent at Florence, I dare say you will remember that in the Guest Chamber the saintly genius of Fra Angelico has painted, as an appropriate frontispiece, the two pilgrims on the road to Emmaus, praying the unknown man to come in and partake of their hospitality; and he has draped them in the habit of his order, and he has put Christ as the Representative of all the poor and wearied and wayworn travellers that might enter in there and receive hospitality, which is but the lesson, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'

And there is another thing, dear friends. Do we not minister to Him best when we do the thing that is nearest His heart and help Him most in the purpose of His life and in His death? What would you think of a would-be helper of some great reformer who said: 'I will give you all sorts of material support; but I have not a grain of sympathy with the cause to which you have devoted your life. I think it is madness and nonsense: I will feed you and house you and make you comfortable, but I do not care one rush for the object for which you are to be housed and fed and made comfortable.' Jesus Christ let these poor women help Him that He might live to bear the Cross; He lets you and me help Him for that for which on the Cross He died; 'This honour have all the saints'; The foundation of our service is the consciousness of redemption; its sphere is ministering to Him in that which is nearest His heart.

And then, brethren, there is another thing that does not so immediately belong to the incident before us, but which suggests

itself to me in connection with it. We have tried to show the motive and the pattern, the foundation and the sphere, of the service: let me add a last thought--the remembrance and the record of it.

How strange that is, that just as a beam of light coming into a room would enable us to see all the motes dancing up and down that lay in its path, so the beam from Christ's life shoots athwart the society of His age, and all those little insignificant people come for a moment into the full lustre of the light. Years before and years afterward they lived, and we do not know anything about them; but for an instant they crossed the illuminated track and there they blazed. How strange Pharisees, officials, and bookmen of all sorts would have felt if anybody had said to them: 'Do you see that handful of travel-stained Galileans there, those poor women you have just passed by the way? Well, do you know that these three women's names will never perish as long as the world lasts?' So we may learn the eternity of work done for Him. Ah, a great deal of it may be forgotten and unrecorded! How many deeds of faithful love and noble devotion are all compressed into those words, 'which ministered unto Him'! It is the old story of how life shrinks, and shrinks, and shrinks in the record. How many acres of green forest ferns in the long ago time went to make up a seam of coal as thick as a sixpence? But still there is the record, compressed indeed, but existent.

And how many names may drop out and not be associated with the work which they did? Do you not think that these anonymous 'many others which ministered' were just as dear to Jesus Christ as Mary and Joanna and Susannah? A great many people helped Him whose deeds are related in the Gospel, but whose names are not recorded. But what does it matter about that? With many 'others of my fellow-labourers also,' says St. Paul; 'whose names'--well, I have forgotten them; but that is of little consequence; they 'are in the Lamb's book of life.' And so the work is eternal, and will last on in our blessed consciousness and in His remembrance who will never forget any of it, and we shall self-enfold the large results, even if the rays of dying fame may fade.

And there is one other thought on this matter of the eternity of the work on which I would just touch for an instant.

How strange it must be to these women now! If, as I suppose, you and I believe, they are living with Christ, they will look up to Him and think, 'Ah! we remember when we used to find your food and prepare for your household comforts, and there Thou art on the throne! How

strange and how great our earthly service seems to us now!' So it will be to us all when we get up yonder. We shall have to say, 'Lord, when saw I Thee?' He will put a meaning into our work and a majesty into it that we know nothing about at present. So, brethren, account the name of His slaves your highest honour, and the task that love gives you your greatest joy. When we have in our poor love poorly ministered unto Him who in His great love greatly died for us, then, at the last, the wonderful word will be fulfilled: 'Verily I say unto you, He shall gird Himself and make them to sit down to meat and will come forth and serve them.'

31-ONE SEED AND DIVERSE SOILS

'And when much people were gathered together, and were come to Him out of every city, He spake by a parable: 5. A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. 6. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. 7. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. 8. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when He had said these things, He cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. 9. And His disciples asked Him, saying, What might this parable be? 10. And He said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. 11. Now the parable is this; The seed is the word of God. 12. Those by the way-side are they that hear: then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. 13. They on the rock are they which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. 14. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. 15. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.'

--LUKE viii. 4-16.

Luke is particular in dating this parable as spoken at a time when crowds resorted to Jesus, and the cities of Galilee seemed emptied out to hear Him. No illusions as to the depth or worth of this excitement beset Him. Sadly He looked on the eager multitudes, because He looked through them, and saw how few of them were bringing 'an honest and good heart' for the soil of His word. Just because He saw the shallowness of the momentary enthusiasm, He spoke this pregnant parable from a heavy heart, and as He tells us in His explanation of it to the disciples (ver. 10), uses the parabolic garb as a means of hiding the truth from the unsusceptible, and of

bringing it home to those who were prepared to receive it. Every parable has that double purpose of obscuring and revealing. The obscuring is punitive, but the punishment is meant to be remedial. God never cheats men by a revelation that does not reveal, and the very hiding is meant to stimulate to a search which cannot be vain.

The broad outstanding fact of the parable is tragic. Three failures and one success! It may be somewhat lightened by observing that the proportion which each 'some' bears to the whole seed-basketful is not told; but with all alleviation, it is sad enough. What a lesson for all eager reformers and apostles of any truth, who imagine that they have but to open their mouths and the world will listen! What a warning for any who are carried off their feet by their apparent 'popularity'! What a solemn appeal to all hearers of God's message!

I. Commentators have pointed out that all four kinds of soil might have been found close together by the lake, and that there may have been a sower at work within sight. But the occasion of the parable lay deeper than the accident of local surroundings. A path through a cornfield is a prosaic enough thing, but one who habitually holds converse with the unseen, and ever sees it shining through the seen, beholds all things 'apparelled in celestial light,' and finds deep truths in commonplace objects. The sower would not intentionally throw seed on the path, but some would find its resting-place there. It would lie bare on the surface of the hard ground, and would not be there long enough to have a chance of germinating, but as soon as the sower's back was turned to go up the next furrow, down would come the flock of thievish birds that fluttered behind him, and bear away the grains. The soil might be good enough, but it was so hard that the seed did not get in, but only lay on it. The path was of the same soil as the rest of the field, only it had been trodden down by the feet of passengers, perhaps for many years.

A heart across which all manner of other thoughts have right of way will remain unaffected by the voice of Jesus, if He spoke His sweetest, divinest tones, still more when He speaks but through some feeble man. The listener hears the words, but they never get farther than the drum of his ear. They lie on the surface of his soul, which is beaten hard, and is non-receptive. How many there are who have been listening to the preaching of the Gospel, which is in a true sense the sowing of the seed, all their lives, and have never really been in contact with it! Tramp, tramp, go the feet across the path, heavy drays of business, light carriages of pleasure, a never-ending stream of traffic and noise like that which pours day and night

through the streets of a great city, and the result is complete insensibility to Christ's voice.

If one could uncover the hearts of a congregation, how many of them would be seen to be occupied with business or pleasures, or some favourite pursuit, even while they sit decorously in their pews! How many of them hear the preacher's voice without one answering thought or emotion! How many could not for their lives tell what his last sentence was! No marvel, then, that, as soon as its last sound has ceased, down pounce a whole covey of light-winged fancies and occupations, and carry off the poor fragments of what had been so imperfectly heard. One wonders what percentage of remembrances of a sermon is driven out of the hearers' heads in the first five minutes of their walk home, by the purely secular conversation into which they plunge so eagerly.

II. The next class of hearers is represented by seed which has had somewhat better fate, inasmuch as it has sunk some way in, and begun to sprout. The field, like many a one in hilly country, had places where the hard pan of underlying rock had only a thin skin of earth over it. Its very thinness helped quick germination, for the rock was near enough to the surface to get heated by the sun. So, with undesirable rapidity, growth began, and shoots appeared above ground before there was root enough made below to nourish them. There was only one possible end for such premature growth--namely, withering in the heat. No moisture was to be drawn from the shelf of rock, and the sun was beating fiercely down, so the feeble green stem drooped and was wilted.

It is the type of emotional hearers, who are superficially touched by the Gospel, and too easily receive it, without understanding what is involved. They take it for theirs 'with joy,' but are strangers to the deep exercises of penitence and sorrow which should precede the joy. 'Lightly come, lightly go,' is true in Christian life as elsewhere. Converts swiftly made are quickly lost. True, the most thorough and permanent change may be a matter of a moment; but, if so, into that moment emotions will be compressed like a great river forced through a mountain gorge, which will do the work of years.

Such surface converts fringe all religious revivals. The crowd listening to our Lord was largely made up of them. These were they who, when a ground of offence arose, 'went back, and walked no more with Him.' They have had their successors in all subsequent times of religious movement. Light things are caught up by the wind of a

passing train, but they soon drop to the ground again. Emotion is good, if there are roots to it. But 'these have no root.' The Gospel has not really touched the depths of their natures, their wills, their reason, and so they shrivel up when they have to face the toil and self-sacrifice inherent in a Christian life.

III. The third parcel of seed advanced still farther. It rooted and grew. But the soil had other occupants. It was full of seeds of weeds and thorns (not thorn _bushes_). So the two crops ran a race, and as ill weeds grow apace, the worse beat, and stifled the green blades of the springing corn, which, hemmed in and shut out from light and air, came to nothing.

The man represented has not made clean work of his religion. He has received the good seed, but has forgotten that something has to be grubbed up and cast out, as well as something to be taken in, if he would grow the fair fruits of Christian character. He probably has cut down the thorns, but has left their roots or seeds where they were. He has fruit of a sort, but it is scanty, crude, and green. Why? Because he has not turned the world out of his heart. He is trying to unite incompatibles, one of which is sure to kill the other. His 'thorns' are threefold, as Luke carefully distinguishes them into 'cares and riches and pleasures,' but they are one in essence, for they are all 'of this life.' If he is poor, he is absorbed in cares; if rich, he is yet more absorbed in wealth, and his desires go after worldly pleasures, which he has not been taught, by experience of the supreme pleasure of communion with God, to despise.

Mark that this man does not 'fall away.' He keeps up his Christian name to the end. Probably he is a very influential member of the church, universally respected for his wealth and liberality, but his religion has been suffocated by the other growth. He has fruit, but it is not to 'perfection.' If Jesus Christ came to Manchester, one wonders how many such Christians He would discover in the chief seats in the synagogues.

IV. The last class avoids the defects of the three preceding. The soil is soft, deep, and clean. The seed sinks, roots, germinates, has light and air, and brings forth ripened grain. The 'honest and good heart' in which it lodges has been well characterised as one 'whose aim is noble, and who is generously devoted to his aim' (Bruce, *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ*, p. 33). Such a soul Christ recognises as possible, prior to the entrance into it of the

word. There are dispositions which prepare for the reception of the truth. But not only the previous disposition, but the subsequent attitude to the word spoken, is emphasised by our Lord. 'They having heard the word, hold it fast.' Docilely received, it is steadily retained, or held with a firm grip, whoever and whatever may seek to pluck it from mind or heart.

Further, not only tenacity of grasp, but patient perseverance of effort after the fruit of Christian character, is needed. There must be perseverance in the face of obstacles within and without, if there is to be fruitfulness. The emblem of growth does not suffice to describe the process of Christian progress. The blade becomes the ear, and the ear the full corn, without effort. But the Christian disciple has to fight and resist, and doggedly to keep on in a course from which many things would withdraw him. The nobler the result, the sorer the process. Corn grows; character is built up as the result, first of worthily receiving the good seed, and then of patient labour and much self-suppression.

These different types of character are capable of being changed. The path may be broken up, the rock blasted and removed, the thorns stubbed up. We make ourselves fit or unfit to receive the seed and bear fruit. Christ would not have spoken the parable if He had not hoped thereby to make some of His hearers who belonged to the three defective classes into members of the fourth. No natural, unalterable incapacity bars any from welcoming the word, housing it in his heart, and bringing forth fruit with patience.

32-SEED AMONG THORNS

'And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.'--Luke viii. 14.

No sensible sower would cast his seed among growing thorn-bushes, and we must necessarily understand that the description in this verse is not meant to give us the picture of a field in which these were actually growing, but rather of one in which they had been grubbed up, and so preparation been made for the sowing of the seed. They had been grubbed up, but they had not been grubbed out. The roots were there, although the branches and the stems had been cut down, or if the roots were not there, abundant seeds were lying buried, and when the good seed was sown it went into ground full of them--and that was the blunder out of which all the mischief came.

I. These three different instances of failure in this parable represent to us, first, the seed carried off at the very beginning, before it has sunk into the ground and before it has had time to germinate. It lies on the surface and it goes at once. But suppose it is safely piloted past that first danger, then comes another peril. It gets a little deeper into the ground, but there is a shelf of rock an inch or two below the skin of soil, and the poor little rootlets cannot get through that, and so when the hot Syrian sun shines down upon the field, there is an unnatural heat, and a swift vegetation. There is growth, but the same sun that at first stimulated the unnaturally rapid growth, gets a little hotter or continues to pour down during the fervid summer and dries up the premature vegetation which it had called into feeble life. That second seed went further on the road towards fruit.

But suppose a seed is piloted past that second risk, there comes this third one. This seed gets deeper still, and does take root, and does grow, and does bear fruit. That is to say, this is a picture of a real Christian, in whom the seed of the kingdom, which is the word of God, has taken root, and to whom there has been the communication of the divine life that is in the seed; and yet that, too, comes to grief, and our parable tells us how--by three things, the thorns, the growth of the thorns, and the choking of the word.

Luke puts the interpretation of the thorns even more vividly than the other Evangelists, because he represents them as being three

different forms of one thing, 'cares and riches and pleasures,' which all come into the one class, 'of this life.' Or, in other words, the present world, with all its various appeals to our animal and sensual nature, with all its possible delights for part of our being, a real and important part of it; and with all the troubles and anxieties which it is cowardly for us to shirk, and impossible for us to escape--this world is ever present to each of us, and if there is anything in us to which it appeals, then certainly the thorns will come up. The cares and the wealth and the pleasures are three classes of one thing. Perhaps the first chiefly besets struggling people; the second mainly threatens well-to-do people; the third, perhaps, is most formidable to leisurely and idle people. But all three appeal to us all, for in every one of us there are the necessary anxieties of life, and every one of us knows that there is real and substantial good to a part of our being, in the possession of a share of this world's wealth, without which no man can live, and all of us carry natures to which the delights of sense do legitimately and necessarily appeal.

So the soil for the growth of the thorns is always in us all. But what then? Are these things so powerful in our hearts as that they become hindrances to our Christian life? That is the question. The cares and the occupation of mind with, and desire for, the wealth and the pleasures are of God's appointment. He did not make them thorns, but you and I make them thorns; and the question for us is, has our Christianity driven out the undue regard to this life, regarded in these three aspects--undue in measure or in any other respect, by which they are converted into hindrances that mar our Christian life? Dear brethren, it is not enough to say, 'I have received the word into my heart.' There is another question besides that--Has the word received into your heart cast out the thorns? Or are they and the seed growing there side by side? The picture of my text is that of a man who, in a real fashion, has accepted the Gospel, but who has accepted it so superficially as that it has not exercised upon him the effect that it ought to produce, of expelling from him the tendencies which may become hindrances to his Christian life. If we have known nothing of 'the expulsive power of a new affection,' and if we thought it was enough to cut down the thickest and tallest thorn-bushes, and to leave all the seeds and the roots of them in our hearts, no wonder if, as we get along in life, they grow up and choke the word. 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon'; that is just putting into a sentence the lesson of my text.

II. Further, note the growth of the thorns. Luke employs a very

significant phrase. He says, 'When they have heard they _go forth_, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life.' That is to say, the path of daily life upon which we all have to walk, the common duties which necessarily draw us to themselves, will certainly stimulate the growth of the thorns if these are not rooted out. Life is full of appeals to our desires after earthly good or pleasure, to our greed after earthly gain, to our dread of earthly sorrow, of pain, of loss, and of poverty. As surely as we are living, and have to go out into the world day by day, so surely will the thorns grow if they are left in us. And so we come back to the old lesson that because we are set in this world, with all its temptations that appeal so strongly to many needs and desires of our nature, we must make thorough work of our religion if it is to be of any good to us at all, and we are not to go on the Christian pilgrimage with one foot upon the higher level and the other upon the lower, like a man walking with one foot on the kerbstone and the other on the roadway. Let us be one thing or the other, out and out, thorough and consistent. If we have the seed in our hearts, remember that _we_ are responsible for its growth.

Let us make certain that we have cast out the thorns. There is an old German proverb, the vulgarity of which may be excused for its point. 'You must not sit near the fire if your head is made of butter.' We should not try to walk through this wicked world without making very certain that we have stubbed the thorns out of our hearts. Oh, dear friends! here is the secret to the miserable inconsistencies of the great bulk of professing Christians. They have got the seed in, but they have not got the thorns out.

III. Lastly, mark the choking of the growth. Of course it is rapid, according to the old saying, 'Ill weeds grow apace.' 'They are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life and bring no fruit to perfection.' The weeds grow faster than the seed. 'Possession is nine-tenths of the law,' and they have got possession of the soil, and their roots go far and strike deep, and so they come up, with their great, strong, coarse, quick-growing stems and leaves, and surround the green, infant, slender shoot, and keep the air and light out from it, and exhaust all the goodness of the soil, which has not nutriment in it enough for the modest seed and for the self-asserting thorn. And so the thorn beats in the race, and grows inches whilst the other grows hairbreadths. Is not that a true statement of our experience? If Christian men and women permit as much of their interest and affection and effort and occupation of

mind to go out towards the world and worldly things, as, alas! most of us do, no wonder if the tiny, yellow, rather than green, blade is choked and gets covered with parasitical disease, and perhaps dies at last. You cannot grow two crops on one field. Some of us have tried; it will never do. It must be one thing or another, and we must make up our minds whether we are going to cultivate corn or thorn. May God help us to make the right choice of the crop we desire to bear!

Our text tells us that this man, represented by the seed among thorns, was a Christian, did, and does, bear fruit, but, as Luke says, 'brings no fruit to perfection.' The first seed never grew at all; the second got the length of putting forth a blade; this one has got as far as the ear, but not so far as 'the full corn in the ear.' It has fruited, but the fruit is green and scanty, not ripened, as it ought to be, since it grows under such a sky and was taken out of such a seed-basket as our seed has come from. It brings forth no fruit _to perfection_';--is not that a picture of so many Christian people? One cannot say that they are not Christians. One cannot say that there are no signs of a divine life in them. One cannot say but that they do a good many things that are right and pure, and obviously the result of a Divine Spirit working upon them; but all that they do just falls short of the crowning grace and beauty. There is always something about it that strikes one as being incomplete. They are Christian men and Christian women bringing forth many of the fruits of the Christian life, but the climax somehow or other is always absent. The pyramid goes up many stages, but there is never the gilded summit flashing in the light--'No fruit to perfection.'

Dear brethren, let us take our poor, imperfect services, and lay them down at the Master's feet, and ask Him to help us to make clean work of these hearts of ours, and to turn out of them all our worldly hankerings after the seen and temporal. Then we shall bear fruit that He will gather into His garner. The cares and the pleasures and the wealth that terminate in, and are occupied with, this poor fleeting present are small and insignificant. Let us try to yield ourselves up wholly to the higher influences of that Divine Spirit, and in true consecration receive the engrafted word. And then He will give to us to drink of that river of His pleasures, drinking of which we shall not thirst, nor need to come to any of earth's fountains to draw. If the Saviour comes in in His power, He will cast out the uncleanness that dwells in us and make us fruitful as He would have us to be.

33-A MIRACLE WITHIN A MIRACLE

'And a woman, having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, 44. Came behind Him, and touched the border of His garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanch'd. 45. And Jesus said, Who touched Me? When all denied, Peter, and they that were with Him, said, Master, the multitude throng Thee and press Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched Me? 46. And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched Me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of Me. 47. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and, falling down before Him, she declared unto Him before all the people for what cause she had touched Him, and how she was healed immediately. 48. And He said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.'--LUKE viii. 43-48.

The story of Jairus's daughter is, as it were, cut in two by that of the poor invalid woman. What an impression of calm consciousness of power and of leisurely dignity is made by Christ's having time to pause, even on His way to a dying sufferer, in order to heal, as if parenthetically, this other afflicted one! How Jairus must have chafed at the delay! He had left his child 'at the point of death' and here was the Healer loitering, as it must have seemed to a father's agony of impatience.

But Jesus, with His infinite calm and as infinite power, can afford to let the one wait and even die, while He tends the other. The child shall receive no harm, and her sister in sorrow has as great a claim on Him as she. He has leisure of heart to feel for each, and power for both. We do not rob one another of His gifts. Attending to one, He does not neglect another.

This miracle illustrates the genuineness and power of feeble and erroneous faith, and Christ's merciful way of strengthening and upholding it. The woman, a poor, shrinking creature, has been made more timid by long illness, disappointed hopes of cure, and by poverty. She does not venture to stop Jesus, as He goes with an important official of the synagogue to heal his daughter, but creeps up in the crowd behind Him, puts out a wasted, trembling hand to touch the tasselled fringe of His robe--and she is whole.

She would fain have glided away with a stolen cure, but Jesus forced her to stand out before the throng, and with all their eyes on her, to conquer diffidence and womanly reticence, and tell all the truth. Strange contrast, this, to His usual avoidance of notoriety and regard for shrinking weakness! But it was true kindness, for it was the discipline by which her imperfect faith was cleared and confirmed.

It is easy to point out the imperfections in this woman's faith. It was very ignorant. She was sure that this Rabbi would heal her, but she expected it to be done by the material contact of her finger with His robe. She had no idea that Christ's will, much less His love, had anything to do with His cures. She thinks that she may carry away the blessing, and He be none the wiser. It is easy to say, What blank ignorance of Christ's way of working! what grossly superstitious notions! Yes, and with them all what a hunger of intense desire to be whole, and what absolute confidence that a finger-tip on His robe was enough!

Her faith was very imperfect, but the main fact is that she had it. Let us be thankful for a living proof of the genuineness of ignorant and even of superstitious faith. There are many now who fall with less excuse into a like error with this woman's, by attaching undue importance to externals, and thinking more of the hem of the garment and its touch by a finger than of the heart of the wearer and the grasp of faith. But while we avoid such errors, let us not forget that many a poor worshipper clasping a crucifix may be clinging to the Saviour, and that Christ does accept faith which is tied to outward forms, as He did this woman's.

There was no real connection between the touch of her finger and her healing, but she thought that there was, and Christ stoops to her childish thought, and lets her make the path for His gift. 'According to thy faith be it unto thee': His mercy, like water, takes the shape of the containing vessel.

The last part of the miracle, when the cured woman is made the bold confessor, is all shaped so as to correct and confirm her imperfect faith. We note this purpose in every part of it. She had thought of the healing energy as independent of His knowledge and will. Therefore she is taught that He was aware of the mute appeal, and of the going out of power in answer to it. The question, 'Who touched me?' has been regarded as a proof that Jesus was ignorant of the

person; but if we keep the woman's character and the nature of her disease in view, we can suppose it asked, not to obtain information, but to lead to acknowledgment, and that without ascribing to Him in asking it any feigning of ignorance.

The contrast between the pressure of the crowd and the touch of faith has often been insisted on, and carries a great lesson. The unmannerly crowd hustled each other, trod on His skirts, and elbowed their way to gape at Him, and He took no heed. But His heart detected the touch, unlike all the rest, and went out with healing power towards her who touched. We may be sure that, though a universe waits before Him, and the close-ranked hosts of heaven stand round His throne, we can reach our hands through them all, and get the gifts we need.

She had shrunk from publicity, most naturally. But if she had stolen away, she would have lost the joy of confession and greater blessings than the cure. So He mercifully obliges her to stand forth. In a moment she is changed from a timid invalid to a confessor. A secret faith is like a plant growing in the dark, the stem of which is blanched and weak, and its few blossoms pale and never matured. 'With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.'

Christ's last word to her is tender. He calls her 'Daughter'--the only woman whom He addressed by such a name. He teaches her that her faith, not her finger, had been the medium through which His healing power had reached her. He confirms by His authoritative word the furtive blessing: '_Be_ whole of thy plague.' And she goes, having found more than she sought, and felt a loving heart where she had only seen a magic-working robe.

34-CHRIST TO JAIRUS

'When Jesus heard it, He answered, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole.'
--LUKE viii. 60.

The calm leisureliness of conscious power shines out very brilliantly from this story of the raising of Jairus's daughter. The father had come to Jesus, in an agony of impatience, and besought Him to heal his child, who lay 'at the point of death.' Not a moment was to be lost. Our Lord sets out with him, but on the road pauses to attend to another sufferer, the woman who laid her wasted finger on the hem of Christ's robe. How Jairus must have chafed at the delay, and thought every moment an eternity; and perhaps said hard things in his heart about Christ's apparent indifference! Delay seemed to be fatal, for before Christ had finished speaking to the woman, the messenger comes with a word which appears to me to have in it a touch of bitterness and of blame. 'Trouble not the Master' sounds as if the speaker hinted that the Master was thinking it a trouble, and had not put Himself much about to meet the necessity. But one's gain shall not be another's loss, and Christ does not let any applicant to Him suffer whilst He attends to any other. Each has an equal claim on His heart. So He turns to the father with the words that I have read for my text.

They are the first of three sayings of our Lord round which this whole narrative is remarkably grouped. I have read the first, but I mean to speak about all three. There is a word of encouragement which sustains a feeble faith: there is a word of revelation which smooths the grimness of death; 'She is not dead but sleepeth'; and there is a word of power which goes into the darkness, and brings back the child; 'Maiden, arise!' Now, I think if we take these three, we get the significance of this whole incident.

I. First, then, the word of cheer which sustains a staggering faith.

'When Jesus heard this, He said unto him, Fear not, believe only, and she shall be made whole.' How preposterous this rekindling of hope must have seemed to Jairus when the storm had blown out the last flickering spark! How irrelevant, if it were not cruel, the 'Fear not!' must have sounded when the last possible blow had fallen. And yet, because of the word in the middle, embedded between the obligation to hope and the prohibition to fear, neither the one

nor the other is preposterous, 'Only believe.' That is in the centre; and on the one side, 'Fear not!'--a command ridiculous without it; and on the other side, 'Hope!' an injunction impossible apart from faith.

Jesus Christ is saying the very same things to us. His fundamental commandment is 'Only believe,' and there effloresce from it the two things, courage that never trembles, and hope that never despairs. 'Only believe'--usually He made the outflow of His miraculous power contingent upon the faith, either of the sufferer himself or of some others. There was no necessity for the connection. We have instances in His life of miracles wrought without faith, without asking, simply at the bidding of His own irrepressible pity. But the rule in regard to His miracles is that faith was the condition that drew out the miraculous energy. The connection between our faith and our experience of His supernatural, sustaining, cleansing, gladdening, enlightening power is closer than that. For without our trust in Him, He can do no mighty works upon us, and there must be confidence, on our part, before there is in our experience the reception into our lives of His highest blessings; just because they are greater and deeper, and belong to a more inward sphere than these outward and inferior miracles of bodily healing. Therefore the connection between our faith and His gifts to us is inevitable, and constant, and the commandment 'Only believe,' assumes a more imperative stringency, in regard to our spiritual experience, than it ever did in regard to those who felt the power of His miracle-working hand. So it stands for us, as the one central appeal and exhortation which Christ, by His life, by the record of His love, by His Cross and Passion, by His dealings and pleadings with us through His Spirit, and His providence to-day, is making to us all. 'Only believe'--the one act that vitally knits the soul to Christ, and makes it capable of receiving unto itself the fullness of His loftiest blessings.

But we must note the two clauses which stand on either side of this central commandment. They deal with two issues of faith. One forbids fear, the other gives fuel for the fire of hope. On the one hand, the exhortation, 'Fear not,' which is the most futile that can be spoken if the speaker does not touch the cause of the fear, comes from His lips with a gracious power. Faith is the one counterpoise of fear. There is none other for the deepest dreads that lie cold and paralysing, though often dormant, in every human spirit; and that ought to lie there. If a man has not faith in God, in Christ, he ought to have fear. For there rise before him, solitary, helpless, inextricably caught into the meshes of this

mysterious and awful system of things--a whole host of possible, or probable, or certain calamities, and what is he to do? stand there in the open, with the pelting of the pitiless storm coming down upon him? The man is an idiot if he is not afraid. And what is to calm those rational fears, the fear of wrath, of life, of death, of what lies beyond death? You cannot whistle them away. You cannot ignore them always. You cannot grapple with them in your own strength. 'Only believe,' says the Comforter and the Courage-bringer. The attitude of trust banishes dread, and nothing else will effectually and reasonably do it. 'I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear.' Him who can slay and who judges. You have, and you cannot break, a connection with God. He ought to be one of two things--your ghastliest dread or your absolute trust. 'Only believe then,' 'fear not.' Believe not, _then_ be afraid; for you have reason to be.

Men say, 'Oh! keep your courage up'; and they contribute no means to keep it up: Christ says 'Fear not; only believe,' and gives to faith the courage which He enjoins. Like a child that never dreams of any mischief being able to reach it when the mother's breast is beneath its head, and the mother's arms are round its little body, each of us may rest on Christ's breast, and feel His arm round about us. Then we may smile at all that men call evils; and whether they are possible, or probable, or certain, we can look at them all and say, 'Ah! I have circumvented you.' 'All things work together for good to them that' trust Christ. 'Fear not; only believe.'

But on the other hand, from that simple faith will spring up also hope that cannot despair. 'She shall be made whole.' Irreversible disasters have no place in Christian experience. There are no irrevocable losses to him who trusts. There are no wounds that cannot be stanchd, when we go to Him who has the balm and the bandage. Although it is true that dead faces do not smile again upon us until we get beyond earth's darkness, it is also true that bonds broken may be knit in a finer fashion, if faith instead of sense weaves them together; and that in the great future we shall find that the true healing of those that went before was not by deliverance from, but by passing through, the death that emancipates from the long disease of earthly life.

Brethren! if we trust Christ we may 'hope perfectly.' If we do not trust Him our firmest hopes are as spiders' webs that are swept away by a besom; and our deepest desires remain unfulfilled. 'Only believe,' then, on the one side, 'Fear not,' and on the other side 'Hope ever.'

II. We have here a word of revelation which softens the grimness of death.

Our Lord reaches the house of affliction, and finds it a house of hubbub and noise. The hired mourners, with their shrill shrieks, were there already, bewailing the child. The tumult jarred upon His calmness, and He says 'Weep not; she is not dead but sleepeth.' One wonders how some people have read those words as if they declared that the apparent physical death was only a swoon or a faint, or some kind of coma, and that so there was no miracle at all in the case. 'They laughed Him to scorn; knowing that she was dead.' You can measure the hollowness of their grief by its change into scornful laughter when a promise of consolation began to open before them. And you can measure their worth as witnesses to the child's resurrection by their absolute certainty of her death.

But notice that our Lord never forbids weeping unless He takes away its cause. 'Weep not,' is another of the futile forms of words with which men try to encourage and comfort one another. There is nothing more cruel than to forbid tears to the sad heart. Jesus Christ never did that except when He was able to bring that which took away occasion for weeping. He lets grief have its way. He means us to run rivers of waters down our cheeks when He sends us sorrows. We shall

never get the blessing of these till we have felt the bitterness of them. We shall never profit by them if we stoically choke back the manifestations of our grief, and think that it is submissive to be dumb. Let sorrow have way. Tears purge the heart from which their streams come. But Jesus Christ says to us all, 'Weep not,' because He comes to us all with that which, if I may so say, puts a rainbow into the tear-drops, and makes it possible that the great paradox should be fulfilled in our hearts, 'As sorrowful yet always rejoicing.' Weep not; or if you weep, let the tears have thankfulness as well as grief in them. It is a difficult commandment, but it is possible when His lips tell us not to weep, and we have obeyed the central exhortation, 'Only believe.'

Note, further, in this second of our Lord's words, how He smooths away the grimness of death. I do not claim for Him anything like a monopoly of that most obvious and natural symbolism which regards death as a sleep. It must have occurred to all who ever looked upon a corpse. But I do claim that when He used the metaphor, and by His use of it modified the whole conception of death in the thoughts of

His disciples, He put altogether different ideas into it from that which it contained on the lips of others. He meant to suggest the idea of repose--

'Sleep, full of rest from head to foot.'

The calm immobility of the body so lately racked with pain, or restless in feverish tossings, is but a symbol of the deeper stillness of truer repose which remaineth for the people of God and laps the blessed spirits who 'sleep in Jesus.' He meant to suggest the idea of separation from this material world. He did not mean to suggest the idea of unconsciousness. A man is not unconscious when he is asleep, as dreams testify. He meant, above all, if sleep, then waking.

So the grim fact is smoothed down, not by blinking any of its aspects, but by looking deeper into them. They who, only believing, have lived a life of courage and of hope, and have fronted sorrows, and felt the benediction of tears, pass into the great darkness, and know that they there are rocked to sleep on a loving breast, and, sleeping in Jesus, shall wake with the earliest morning light.

This is a revelation for all His servants. And how deeply these words, and others like them which He spake at the grave of Lazarus and at other times, were dented into the consciousness of the Christian Church, is manifested by the fact, not only that they are recurrently used by Apostles in their Epistles, but that all through the New Testament you scarcely ever find the physical fact of dissolution designated by the name 'death,' but all sorts of gracious paraphrases, which bring out the attractive and blessed aspects of the thing, are substituted. It is a 'sleep'; it is a 'putting off the tabernacle'; it is a 'departure'; it is a pulling up of the tent-pegs, and a change of place. We do not need the ugly word, and we do not need to dread the thing that men call by it. The Christian idea of death is not the separation of self from its house, of the soul from the body, but the separation of self from God, who is the life.

III. So, lastly, the life-giving word of power.

'Maiden, arise!' All the circumstances of the miracle are marked by the most lovely consideration, on Christ's part, of the timidity of the little girl of twelve years of age. It is because of that that He seeks to raise her in privacy, whereas the son of the widow of

Nain and Lazarus were raised amidst a crowd. It is because of that that He selects as His companions in the room only the three chief Apostles as witnesses, and the father and mother of the child. It is because of that that He puts forth His hand and grasps hers, in order that the child's eyes when they open should see only the loving faces of parents, and the not less loving face of the Master; and that her hand, when it began to move again, should clasp, first, His own tender hand. It is for the same reason that the remarkable appendix to the miracle is given--'He commanded that they should give her food.' Surely that is an inimitable note of truth. No legend-manufacturer would have dared to drop down to such a homely word as that, after such a word as 'Maiden, arise!' An economy of miraculous power is shown here, such as was shown when, after Lazarus came forth, other hands had to untie the grave-clothes which tripped him as he stumbled along. Christ will do by miracle what is needful and not one hairs-breadth more. In His calm majesty He bethinks Himself of the hungry child, and entrusts to others the task of giving her food. That homely touch is, to me, indicative of the simple veracity of the historian.

But the life-giving word itself; what can we say about it? Only this one thing: here Jesus Christ exercises a manifest divine prerogative. It was no more the syllables that He spoke than it was the touch of His hand that raised the child. What was it? The forth-putting of His will, which went away straight into the darkness; and if the disembodied spirit was in a locality, went straight there; and somehow or other, laid hold of the spirit, and somehow or other, reinstated it in its home. Christ's will, like the king's writ, runs through all the universe. 'He spake, and it was done';--whose prerogative is that? God's; and God manifest in the flesh exercised it. The words of the Incarnate Word have power over physical things.

Here, too, are the prelude and first-fruits of our resurrection. Not that there are not wide differences between the raising of this child, and that future resurrection to which Christian hope looks forward, but that in this one little incident, little, compared with the majestic scale of the latter, there come out these two things--the demonstration that conscious life runs on, irrespective of the accident of its being united with or separated from a bodily organisation; and the other, that Jesus Christ has power over men's spirits, and can fit them at His will to bodies appropriate to their condition. Time is no element in the case. What befalls the particles of the human frame is no element in the case. 'Thou sowest not the body that shall be.' But if that Lord had the power which He showed in that one

chamber, with that one child, then, as a little window may show us great matters, so we see through this single incident the time when 'they that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth.'

Brethren! there is a higher lesson still; He that gives and gives again, physical life, does so as a symbol of the highest gift which He can bestow upon us all. If we 'only believe,' then, 'you hath He quickened which were dead in trespasses and sins ... and for His great love wherewith He loved us.... He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together, in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.'

35-BREAD FROM HEAVEN

'And the apostles, when they were returned, told Him all that they had done. And He took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city, called Bethsaida. 11. And the people, when they knew it, followed Him; and He received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing. 12. And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto Him, Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals; for we are here in a desert place. 13. But He said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we should go and buy meat for all this people. 14. (For they were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, Make them sit down by fifties in a company. 15. And they did so, and made them all sit down. 16. Then He took the five loaves, and the two fishes; and, looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude. 17. And they did eat, and were all filled: and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets.'--LUKE ix. 10-17.

The Apostles needed rest after their trial trip as evangelists. John the Baptist's death had just been told to Christ. The Passover was at hand, and many pilgrims were on the march. Prudence and care for His followers as well as Himself suggested a brief retirement, and our Lord sought it at the Eastern Bethsaida, a couple of miles up the Jordan from its point of entrance to the lake. Matthew and Mark tell us that He went by boat, which Luke does not seem to have known. Mark adds that the curious crowd, which followed on foot, reached the place of landing before Him, and so effectually destroyed all hope of retirement. It was a short walk round the north-western part of the head of the lake, and the boat would be in sight all the way, so that there was no escape for its passengers.

Luke records the self-oblivious cordiality of Christ's reception of the intrusive crowd. Without a sigh or sign of impatience, He 'welcomed them'--a difficult thing to do, and one which few of us could have achieved. The motives of most of them can have been

nothing higher than what leads vulgar people of all ranks and countries to buzz about distinguished men, utterly regardless of delicacy or considerateness. They want to see the notoriety, no matter what it costs him. But Jesus received them patiently, because, as Mark touchingly tells, He was 'moved with pity,' and saw in their rude crowding round Him the token of their lack of guides and teachers. They seemed to Him, not merely a mob of intrusive sight-seers, but like a huddled mass of unshepherded sheep.

Christ's heart felt more lovingly than ours because His eye saw deeper, and His eye saw deeper because His heart felt more lovingly. If we would live nearer Him, we should see, as He did, enough in every man to draw our pity and help, even though he may jostle and interfere with us.

The short journey to Bethsaida would be in the early morning, and a long day of toil followed instead of the hoped-for quiet. Note that singular expression, 'Them that had need of healing He healed.' Why not simply 'them that were sick'? Probably to bring out the thought that misery made unflinching appeal to Him, and that for Him to see need was to supply it. His swift compassion, His all-sufficient power to heal, and the conditions of receiving His healing, are all wrapped up in the words. Coming to the miracle itself, we may throw the narrative into three parts--the preliminaries, the miracle, and the abundant overplus.

I. Our Lord leads up to the miracle by forcing home on the minds of the disciples the extent of the need and the utter inadequacy of their resources to meet it, and by calling on them and the crowd for an act of obedience which must have seemed to many of them ludicrous. John shows us that He had begun to prepare them, at the moment of meeting the multitude, by His question to Philip. That had been simmering in the disciples' minds all day, while they leisurely watched Him toiling in word and work, and now they come with their solution of the difficulty. Their suggestion was a very sensible one in the circumstances, and they are not to be blamed for not anticipating a miracle as the way out. However many miracles they saw, they never seem to have expected another. That has been thought to be unnatural, but surely it is true to nature. They moved in a confusing mixture of the miraculous and the natural which baffled calculation as to which element would rule at any given moment. Their faith was feeble, and Christ rebuked them for their slowness to learn the lesson of this very miracle and its twin feeding of the four thousand. They were our true brothers in their failure to grasp

the full meaning of the past, and to trust His power.

The strange suggestion that the disciples should feed the crowd must have appeared to them absurd, but it was meant to bring out the

clear recognition of the smallness of their supply. Therein lie great lessons. Commands are given and apparent duties laid on us, in order that we may find out how impotent we are to do them. It can never be our duty to do what we cannot do, but it is often our duty to attempt tasks to which we are conspicuously inadequate, in the confidence that He who gives them has laid them on us to drive us to Himself, and there to find sufficiency. The best preparation of His servants for their work in the world is the discovery that their own stores are small. Those who have learned that it is their task to feed the multitude, and who have said 'We have no more than such and such scanty resources,' are prepared to be the distributors of His all-sufficient supply.

What a strange scene that must have been as the hundred groups of fifty each arranged themselves on the green grass, in the setting sunlight, waiting for a meal of which there were no signs! It took a good deal of faith to seat the crowd, and some faith for the crowd to sit. How expectant they would be! How they would wonder what was to be done next! How some of them would laugh, and some sneer, and all watch the event! We, too, have to put ourselves in the attitude to receive gifts of which sense sees no sign; and if, in obedience to Christ's word, we sit down expecting Him to find the food, we shall not be disappointed, though the table be spread in the wilderness, and neither storehouse nor kitchen be in sight.

II. The miracle itself has some singular features. Like that of the draught of fishes, it was not called forth by the cry of suffering, nor was the need which it met one beyond the reach of ordinary means. It was certainly one of the miracles most plainly meant to strike the popular mind, and the enthusiasm excited by it, according to John's account, was foreseen by Christ. Why did He evoke enthusiasm which He did not mean to gratify? For the very purpose of bringing the carnal expectations of the crowd to a head, that they might be the more conclusively disappointed. The miracle and its sequel sifted and sent away many 'disciples,' and were meant to do so.

All the accounts tell of Christ's 'blessing.' Matthew and Mark do not say what He blessed, and perhaps the best supplement is 'God,'

but Luke says that He blessed the food. What He blesses is blessed; for His words are deeds, and communicate the blessing which they speak. The point at which the miraculous multiplication of the food came in is left undetermined, but perhaps the difference in the tenses of the verbs hints at it. 'Blessed' and 'brake' are in the tense which describes a single act; 'gave' is in that which describes a continuous repeated action. The pieces grew under His touch, and the disciples always found His hands full when they came back with their own empty. But wherever the miraculous element appeared, creative power was exercised by Jesus; and none the less was it creative, because there was the 'substratum' of the loaves and fishes. Too much stress has been laid on their being used, and some commentators have spoken as if without them the miracle could not have been wrought. But surely the distinction between pure creation and multiplication of a thing already existing vanishes when a loaf is 'multiplied' so as to feed a thousand men.

The symbolical aspect of the miracle is set forth in the great discourse which follows it in John's Gospel. Jesus is the 'Bread of God which came down from heaven.' That Bread is broken for us. Not in His Incarnation alone, but in His Death, is He the food of the world; and we have not only to 'eat His flesh,' but to 'drink His blood,' if we would live. Nor can we lose sight of the symbol of His servants' task. They are the distributors of the heaven-sent bread. If they will but take their poor stores to Jesus, with the acknowledgment of their insufficiency, He will turn them into inexhaustible supplies, and they will find that 'there is that scattereth, and yet increaseth.' What Christ blesses is always enough.

III. The abundance left over is significant. Twelve baskets, such as poor travellers carried their belongings in, were filled; that is to say, each Apostle who had helped to feed the hungry had a basketful to bring off for future wants. The 'broken pieces' were not crumbs that littered the grass, but the portions that came from Christ's hands.

His provision is more than enough for a hungry world, and they who share it out among their fellows have their own possession of it increased. There is no surer way to receive the full sweetness and blessing of the Gospel than to carry it to some hungry soul. These full baskets teach us, too, that In Christ's gift of Himself as the Bread of Life there is ever more than at any given moment we can appropriate. The Christian's spiritual experiences have ever an

element of infinity in them; and we feel that if we were able to take in more, there would be more for us to take. Other food cloy and does not satisfy, and leaves us starving. Christ satisfies and does not cloy, and we have always remaining, yet to be enjoyed, the boundless stores which neither eternity will age nor a universe feeding on them consume. The Christian's capacity of partaking of Christ grows with what it feeds on, and he alone is safe in believing that 'To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.'

36-THE LORD THAT HEALETH THEE'

'He healed them that had need of healing.'--Luke ix. 11.

Jesus was seeking a little quiet and rest for Himself and His followers. For that purpose He took one of the fishermen's boats to cross to the other side of the sea. But the crowd, inconsiderate and selfish, like all crowds, saw the course of the boat, and hurried, as they could easily do, on foot round the head of the lake, to be ready for Him wherever He might land. So when He touched the shore, there they all were, open-mouthed and mostly moved by mere curiosity, and the prospect of a brief breathing-space vanished.

But not a word of rebuke or disappointment came from His lips, and no shade of annoyance crossed His spirit. Perhaps with a sigh, but yet cheerfully, He braced Himself to work where He had hoped for leisure. It was a little thing, but it was the same in kind, though infinitely smaller in magnitude, as that which led Him to lay aside 'the glory that He had with the Father before the world was,' and come to toil and die amongst men.

But what I especially would note are Luke's remarkable words here. Why does he use that periphrasis, 'Them that had need of healing,' instead of contenting himself with straightforwardly saying, 'Them that were sick,' as do the other Evangelists? Well, I suppose he wished to hint to us the Lord's discernment of men's necessities, the swift compassion which moved to supply a need as soon as it was observed, and the inexhaustible power by which, whatsoever the varieties of infirmity, He was able to cure and to bring strength. 'He healed them that had need of healing,' because His love could not look upon a necessity without being moved to supply it, and because that love wielded the resources of an infinite power.

Now, all our Lord's miracles are parables, illustrating upon a lower platform spiritual facts; and that is especially true about the miracles of healing. So I wish to deal with the words before us as having a direct application to ourselves, and to draw from them two or three very old, threadbare, neglected lessons, which I pray God may lead some of us to recognise anew our need of healing, and Christ's infinite power to bestow it. There are three things that I want to say, and I name them here that you may know where I am going. First, we all need healing; second, Christ can heal us all; third, we are not all healed.

I. We all need healing.

The people in that crowd were not all diseased. Some of them He taught; some of them He cured; but that crowd where healthy men mingled with cripples is no type of the condition of humanity. Rather we are to find it in that Pool of Bethesda, with its five porches, wherein lay a multitude of impotent folk, tortured with varieties of sickness, and none of them sound. Blessed be God! we are in Bethesda, which means 'house of mercy,' and the fountain that can heal is perpetually springing up beside us all. There is a disease, dear brethren, which affects and infects all mankind, and it is of that that I wish to speak to you two or three plain, earnest words now. Sin is universal.

What does the Bible mean by sin? Everything that goes against, or neglects God's law. And if you will recognise in all the acts of every life the reference, which really is there, to God and His will, you will not need anything more to establish the fact that 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.' Whatever other differences there are between men, there is this fundamental similarity. Neglect--which is a breach--of the law of God pertains to all mankind. Everything that we do ought to have reference to Him. Does everything that we do have such reference? If not, there is a quality of evil in it. For the very definition of sin is living to myself and neglecting Him. He is the centre, and if I might use a violent figure, every planet that wrenches itself away from gravitation towards, and revolution round, that centre, and prefers to whirl on its own axis, has broken the law of the celestial spheres, and brought discord into the heavenly harmony. All men stand condemned in this respect.

Now, there is no need to exaggerate. I am not saying that all men are on the same level. I know that there are great differences in the nobleness, purity, and goodness of lives, and Christianity has never been more unfairly represented than when good men have called, as they have done with St. Augustine, the virtues of godless men, 'splendid vices.' But though the differences are not unimportant, the similarity is far more important. The pure, clean-living man, and the loving, gentle woman, though they stand high above the sensuality of the profligate, the criminal, stand in this respect on the same footing that they, too, have to put their hands on their mouths, and their mouths in the dust, and cry 'Unclean!' I do not want to exaggerate, and sure I am that if men will be honest with

themselves there is a voice that responds to the indictment when I say sadly, in the solemn language of Scripture, 'we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' For there is no difference. If you do not believe in a God, you can laugh at the old wife's notion of 'sin.' If you do believe in a God, you are shut up to believe this other thing, 'Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.'

And, brethren, if this universal fact is indeed a fact, it is the gravest element in human nature. It matters very little, in comparison, whether you and I are wise or foolish, educated or illiterate, rich or poor, happy or miserable. All the superficial distinctions which separate men from one another, and are all right in their own places, dwindle away into nothing before this solemn truth that in every frame there is a plague spot, and that the leprosy has smitten us all.

But, brethren, do not let us lose ourselves in generalities. All means each, and each means me. We all know how hard it is to bring general truths to bear, with all their weight, upon ourselves. That is an old commonplace: 'All men think all men mortal but themselves'; and we are quite comfortable when this indictment is kept in the general terms of universality--'All have sinned.' Suppose I sharpen the point a little. God grant that the point may get to some indurated conscience here. Suppose, instead of reading 'All have sinned,' I beseech each one of my hearers to strike out the general word, and put in the individual one, and to say '_I_' have sinned.' You have to do with this indictment just as you have to do with the promises and offers of the Gospel--wherever there is a 'whosoever' put your pen through it, and write your own name over it. The blank cheque is given to us in regard to these promises and offers, and we have to fill in our own names. The charge is handed to us, in regard to this indictment, and if we are wise we shall write our own names there, too.

Dear brethren, I leave this on your consciences, and I will venture to ask that, if not here, at any rate when you get quietly home to-night, and lie down on your beds, you would put to yourselves the question, 'Is it I?' And sure I am that, if you do, you will see a finger pointing out of the darkness, and hear a voice sterner than that of Nathan, saying 'Thou art the man.'

II. Christ can heal us all.

I was going to use an inappropriate word, and say, the superb ease

with which He grappled with, and overcame, all types of disease is a revelation on a lower level of the inexhaustible and all-sufficient fullness of His healing power. He can cope with all sin-the world's sin, and the individual's. And, as I believe, He alone can do it.

Just look at the problem that lies before any one who attempts to stanch these wounds of humanity. What is needed in order to deliver men from the sickness of sin? Well! that evil thing, like the fabled dog that sits at the gate of the infernal regions, is three-headed. And you have to do something with each of these heads if you are to deliver men from that power.

There is first the awful power that evil once done has over us of repeating itself on and on. There is nothing more dreadful to a reflective mind than the damning influence of habit. The man that has done some wrong thing once is a *_rara avis_* indeed. If once, then twice; if twice, then onward and onward through all the numbers. And the intervals between will grow less, and what were isolated points will coalesce into a line; and impulses wax as motives wane, and the less delight a man has in his habitual form of evil the more is its dominion over him, and he does it at last not because the doing of it is any delight, but because the *_not_* doing of it is a misery. If you are to get rid of sin, and to eject the disease from a man, you have to deal with that awful degradation of character, and the tremendous chains of custom. That is one of the heads of the monster.

But, as I said, sin has reference to God, and there is another of the heads, for with sin comes guilt. The relation to God is perverted, and the man that has transgressed stands before Him as guilty, with all the dolefulness that that solemn word means; and that is another of the heads.

The third is this--the consequences that follow in the nature of penalty. 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' So long as there is a universal rule by God, in which all things are concatenated by cause and effect, it is impossible but that 'Evil shall slay the wicked.' And that is the third head. These three, habit, guilt, and penalty, have all to be dealt with if you are going to make a thorough job of the surgery.

And here, brethren, I want not to argue but to preach. Jesus Christ died on the Cross for you, and your sin was in His heart and mind when He died, and His atoning sacrifice cancels the guilt, and

suspends all that is dreadful in the penalty of the sin. Nothing else--nothing else will do that. Who can deal with guilt but the offended Ruler and Judge? Who can trammel up consequences but the Lord of the Universe? The blood of Jesus Christ is the sole and sufficient oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

That disposes of two of the monster's heads. What about the third? Who will take the venom out of my nature? What will express the black drop from my heart? How shall the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? How can the man that has become habituated to evil 'learn to do well'? Superficially there may be much reformation. God forbid that I should forget that, or seem to minimise it. But for the thorough ejection from your nature of the corruption that you have yourselves brought into it, I believe--and that is why I am here, for I should have nothing to say if I did not believe it--I believe that there is only one remedy, and that is that into the sinful heart there should come, rejoicing and flashing, and bearing on its broad bosom before it all the rubbish and filth of that dunghill, the great stream of the new life that is given by Jesus Christ. He was crucified for our offences, and He lives to bestow upon us the fullness of His own holiness. So the monster's heads are smitten off. Our disease and the tendency to it, and the weakness consequent upon it, are all cast out from us, and He reveals Himself as 'the Lord who healeth thee.'

Now, dear brethren, you may say 'That is all very fine talking.' Yes! but it is something a great deal more than fine talking. For nineteen centuries have established the fact that it is so; and with all their imperfections there have been millions, and there are millions to-day, who are ready to say, 'Behold! it is not a delusion; it is not rhetoric, I have trusted in Him and He has made me whole.'

Now, if these things that I have been saying do fairly represent the gravity of the problem which has to be dealt with in order to heal the sicknesses of the world, then there is no need to dwell upon the thought of how absolutely confined to Jesus Christ is the power of thus dealing. God forbid that I should not give full weight to all other methods for partial reformation and bettering of humanity. I would wish them all God-speed. But, brethren, there is nothing else that will deal either with my sin in its relation to God, or in its relation to my character, or in its relation to my future, except the message of the Gospel. There are plenty of other things, very

helpful and good in their places, but I do want to say, in one word, that there is nothing else that goes deep enough.

Education? Yes! it will do a great deal, but it will do nothing in regard to sin. It will alter the type of the disease, because the cultured man's transgressions will be very different from those of the illiterate boor. But wise or foolish, professor, student, thinker, or savage with narrow forehead and all but dead brain, are alike in this, that they are sinners in God's sight. I would that I could get through the fence that some of you have reared round you, on the ground of your superior enlightenment and education and refinement, and make you feel that there is something deeper than all that, and that you may be a very clever, and a very well educated, a very highly cultured, an extremely thoughtful and philosophical sinner, but you are a sinner all the same.

And again, we hear a great deal at present, and I do not desire that we should hear less, about social and economic and political changes, which some eager enthusiasts suppose will bring the millennium. Well, if the land were nationalised, and all 'the means of production and distribution' were nationalised, and everybody got his share, and we were all brought to the communistic condition, what then? That would not make men better, in the deepest sense of the word. The fact is, these people are beginning at the wrong end. You cannot better humanity merely by altering its environment for the better. Christianity reverses the process. It begins with the inmost man, and it works outwards to the circumference, and that is the thorough way. Why! suppose you took a company of people out of the slums, for instance, and put them into a model lodging-house, how long will it continue a model? They will take their dirty habits with them, and pull down the woodwork for firing, and in a very short time make the place where they are as like as possible to the hovel whence they came. You must change the men, and then you can change their circumstances, or rather they will change them for themselves. Now, all this is not to be taken as casting cold water on any such efforts to improve matters, but only as a protest against its being supposed that these alone are sufficient to rectify the ills and cure the sorrows of humanity. 'Ye have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly.' The patient is dying of cancer, and you are treating him for a skin disease. It is Jesus Christ alone who can cure the sins, and therein the sorrows, of humanity.

III. Lastly, we are not all healed.

That is only too plain. All the sick in the crowd round Christ were sent away well, but the gifts He bestowed so broadcast had no relation to their spiritual natures, and gifts that have relation to our spiritual nature cannot be thus given in entire disregard of our actions in the matter.

Christ cannot heal you unless you take His healing power. He did on earth sometimes, though not often, cure physical disease without the requirement of faith on the part of the healed person or his friends, but He cannot (He would if He could) do so in regard to the disease of sin. There, unless a man goes to Him, and trusts Him, and submits his spirit to the operation of Christ's pardoning and hallowing grace, there cannot be any remedy applied, nor any cure effected. That is no limitation of the universal power of the Gospel. It is only saying that if you do not take the medicine you cannot expect that it will do you any good, and surely that is plain common-sense. There are plenty of people who fancy that Christ's healing and saving power will, somehow or other, reach every man, apart from the man's act. It is all a delusion, brethren. If it could it would. But if salvation could be thus given, independent of the man, it would come down to a mere mechanical thing, and would not be worth the having. So I say, first, if you will not take the medicine you cannot get the cure.

I say, second, if you do not feel that you are ill you will not take the medicine. A man crippled with lameness, or tortured with fever, or groping in the daylight and blind, or deaf to all the sounds of this sweet world, could not but know that he was a subject for the healing. But the awful thing about our disease is that the worse you are the less you know it; and that when conscience ought to be speaking loudest it is quieted altogether, and leaves a man often perfectly at peace, so that after he has done evil things he wipes his mouth and says, 'I have done no harm.'

So, dear brethren, let me plead with you not to put away these poor words that I have been saying to you, and not to be contented until you have recognised what is true, that you--_you_, stand a sinful man before God.

There is surely no madness comparable to the madness of the man that prefers to keep his sin and die, rather than go to Christ and live. We all neglect to take up many good things that we might have if we would, but no other neglect is a thousandth part so insane as that

of the man who clings to his evil and spurns the Lord. Will you look into your own hearts? Will you recognise that awful solemn law of God which ought to regulate all our doings, and, alas! has been so often neglected, and so often transgressed by each of us? Oh! if once you saw yourselves as you are, you would turn to Him and say, 'Heal me'; and you would be healed, and He would lay His hand upon you. If only you will go, sick and broken, to Him, and trust in His great sacrifice, and open your hearts to the influx of His healing power, He will give you 'perfect soundness'; and your song will be, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul.... Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth thy diseases.'

May it be so with each of us!

37-CHRIST'S CROSS AND OURS

'And it came to pass, as He was alone praying, His disciples were with Him; and He asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am I 19. They answering, said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again. 20. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering, said, The Christ of God. 21. And He straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing; 22. Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day. 23. And He said to them all, If any man will come after Me. let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. 24. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it. 25. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? 26. For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me, and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels. 27. But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.'--Luke ix. 18-27.

This passage falls into three distinct but closely connected parts: the disciples' confession of Christ by Peters mouth, the revelation to them of Christ's sufferings as necessarily involved in His Messiahship, and His extension to them of the law of suffering as necessarily involved in discipleship. Luke dwells much more lightly than Matthew on the first of these stages, omitting the eulogium and benediction on Simon Bar-Jona, and the great words about the rock on which the Church is built, but he retains the essentials, and emphasises the connection of the three parts by his very brevity in regard to the first.

I. Luke has special interest in recording Christ's prayers, and though he does not tell us where the great confession was made, he tells what Jesus did before it was made. We may well suppose that His solitary thoughts had been busied with the sufferings on which He was soon to enter, and that His resolve to impart the knowledge

of these to His followers was felt by Him to be a sharp trial of their loyalty. The moment was a fateful one. How should fateful moments be prepared for but by communion with the Father? No doubt the feebleness of the disciples was remembered in His petitions.

Jesus' double question was intended, first, to make the disciples feel the gulf which separated them from the rest of the nation, and so to make them hold the faster by their unshared faith, and be ready to suffer for it, if needful, as probably it would be. It braces true men to know that they are but a little company in the midst of multitudes who laugh at their belief. That Jesus should have seen that it was safe to accentuate the disciples' isolation indicates the reality which He discerned in their faith, imperfect as it was.

'Whom say ye that I am?' Jesus brings them to articulate utterance of the thought that had been slowly gathering distinctness in their minds. We see our beliefs more clearly, and hold them more firmly, when we put them into definite words. The question acted like a chemical element dropped into a solution, which precipitates its solid matter. Nebulous opinions are gathered up into spheres of light by the process of speaking them. That question is all-important for us. Our conceptions of Christ's nature and office determine our relation to Him and our whole cast of life. True, we may say that He is Lord, and not be His disciples, but we are not His disciples as He would have us unless His Messiahship stands out clear and axiomatic in our thoughts of Him. The conviction must pass into feeling, and thence into life, but it must underlie all real discipleship. Doctrine is not Christianity, but it is the foundation of Christianity. The Apostolic confession here is the 'irreducible minimum' of the Christian creed.

It does not contain more than Nathanael had said at the beginning, but here it is spoken, not as Peter's private belief, but he is the mouthpiece of all. 'Whether it were I or they, so we' believe. This confession summed up the previous development of the disciples, and so marked the end of one stage and the beginning of another. Christ would have them, as it were, take stock of their convictions, as preliminary to opening a new chapter of teaching.

II. That new chapter follows at once. The belief in Him as Messiah is the first story of the building, and the second is next piled on it. The new lesson was a hard one for men whose hopes were coloured by Jewish dreams of a kingdom. They had to see all these vulgar

visions melting away, and to face a stern, sad reality. The very fact that He was the Messiah necessarily drew after it the fact of suffering. Whence did the 'must' arise? From the divine purpose, from the necessities of the case, and the aim of His mission. These had shaped prophetic utterances, and hence there was yet another form of the 'must,' namely, the necessity for the Messiah's fulfilling these predictions.

No doubt our Lord led His saddened listeners to many a prophetic saying which current expositions had smoothed over, but which had for many years set before Him His destiny. What a scene that would be--the victim calmly pointing to the tragic words which flashed ominous new meanings to the silent hearers, stricken with awe and grief as the terrible truth entered their minds! What had become of their dreams? Gone, and in their place shame and death. They had fancied a throne; the vision melted into a cross.

We note the minute particularity of Jesus' delineation, and the absolute certainty in His plain declaration of the fact and time of the Resurrection. It is not wonderful that that declaration should have produced little effect. The disciples were too much absorbed and confounded by the dismal thought of His death to have ears for the assurance of His Resurrection. Comfort coming at the end of the announcement of calamities so great finds no entrance into, nor room in, the heart. We all let a black foreground hide from us a brighter distance.

III. The Master's feet mark the disciples' path. If suffering was involved in Messiahship, it is no less involved in discipleship. The cross which is our hope is also our pattern. In a very real sense we have to be partakers of the sufferings of Christ, and no faith in these as substitutionary is vital unless it leads to being conformed to His death. The solemn verses at the close of this lesson draw out the law of Christian self-denial as being inseparable from true discipleship.

Verse 23 lays down the condition of following Jesus as being the daily bearing, by each, of his own cross. Mark that self-denial is not prescribed for its own sake, but simply as the means of 'following.' False asceticism insists on it, as if it were an end; Christ treats it as a means. Mark, too, that it is 'self' which is to be denied--not this or that part of our nature, but the central 'self.' The will is the man, and it is to be brought into captivity to Jesus, so that the true Christian says, 'I live; yet

not I, but Christ liveth in me.' That is much deeper, harder, wholesomer teaching than separate austerities or forsakings of this or that.

Verse 24 grounds this great requirement on the broad principle that to make self the main object of life is the sure way to ruin oneself, and that to slay self is the road to true life. Note that it is he who '_would_ save' his life that loses it, because the desire is itself fatal, whether carried out or not; while it is he who _does_ 'lose' his life for Christ that preserves it, because even if the extreme evil has been suffered, the possession of our true lives is not imperilled thereby. No doubt the words refer primarily to literal death, and threaten the cowards who sacrifice their convictions for the sake of keeping a whole skin with the failure of their efforts, while they promise the martyr dying in the arena or at the stake a crown of life. But they go far beyond that. They carry the great truth that to hug self and to make its preservation our first aim is ruinous, and the corresponding one, that to slay self for Christ's sake is to receive a better self. Self-preservation is suicide; self-immolation is not only self-preservation, but self-glorification with glory caught from Jesus. Give yourselves to Him, and He gives you back to yourselves, ennobled and transfigured.

Verse 25 urges obedience to the precept, by an appeal to reasonable self-regard and common-sense. The abnegation enjoined does not require that we should be indifferent to our own well-being. It is right to consider what will 'profit,' and to act accordingly. The commercial view of life, if rightly taken, with regard to all a man's nature through all the duration of it, will coincide accurately with the most exalted. It 'pays' to follow Christ. Christian morality has not the hypersensitive fear of appealing to self-interest which superfine moralists profess nowadays. And the question in verse 25 admits of only one answer, for what good is the whole world to a dead man? If our accounts are rightly kept, a world gained shows poorly on the one side, against the entry on the other of a soul lost.

Verse 26 tells in what that losing oneself consists, and enforces the original exhortation by the declaration of a future appearance of the Son of man. He of whom Christ is then ashamed loses his own soul. To live without His smile is to die, to be disowned by Him is to be a wreck. To be ashamed of Jesus is equivalent to that base self-preservation which has been denounced as fatal. If a man

disavows all connection with Him, He will disavow all connection with the disavower. A man separated from Jesus is dead while he lives, and hereafter will live a living death, and possess neither the world for which he sacrificed his own soul nor the soul for which he sacrificed it.

We cannot but note the authoritative tone of our Lord in these verses. He claims the obedience and discipleship of all men. He demands that all shall yield themselves unreservedly to Him, and that, even if actual surrender of life is involved, it shall be gladly given. He puts our relation to Him as determining our whole present and future. He assumes to be our Judge, whose smile is life, whose averted face darkens the destiny of a man. Whom say ye that He who dared to speak thus conceived Himself to be? Whom say ye that He is?

Verse 27 recalls us from the contemplation of that far-off appearance to something nearer. Remembering the previous announcement of our Lord's sufferings, these words seem intended to cheer the disciples with the hope that the kingdom would still be revealed within the lifetime of some then present. Remembering the immediately preceding words, this saying seems to assure the disciples that the blessed recompense of the life of self-crucifying discipleship is not to be postponed to that future, but may be enjoyed on earth. Remembering Christ's word, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,' we doubt whether there is any reference here to the destruction of Jerusalem, as is commonly understood. Are not the words rather a declaration that they who are Christ's true disciples shall even here enter into the possession of their true selves, and find the Messianic hopes more than fulfilled? The future indicated will then be no more remote than the completion of His work by His death and Resurrection, or, at the farthest, the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, by which the fuller life of renewed natures was bestowed on those who were following Jesus in daily self-surrender.

38-PRAYER AND TRANSFIGURATION

'And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered.'--LUKE ix. 29.

This Evangelist is especially careful to record the instances of our Lord's prayers. That is in accordance with the emphasis which he places on Christ's manhood. In this narrative of the Transfiguration it is to Luke that we owe our knowledge of the connection between our Lord's prayer and the radiance of His face. It may be a question how far such transfiguration was the constant accompaniment of our Lord's devotion. It is to be remembered that this is the only time at which others were present while He prayed, and perhaps it may be that whensoever, on the mountain top or in the solitude of the wilderness, He entered into closer communion with His heavenly Father, that radiance shone from His face, though no eye beheld and no tongue has recorded the glory.

But that is a mere supposition. However that may be, it would seem that the light on Christ's face was not merely a reflection caught from above, but it was also a rising up from within of what always abode there, though it did not always shine through the veil of flesh. And in so far it presents no parallel with anything in our experience, nor any lesson for us. But to regard our Lord's Transfiguration as only the result of the indwelling divinity manifested is to construe only one half of the fact that we have to deal with, and the other half does afford for us a precious lesson. 'As He prayed the fashion of His countenance was altered'; and as we pray, and in the measure in which we truly and habitually do hold communion, shall we, too, partake of His Transfiguration.

The old story of the light that flashed upon the face of the Lawgiver, caught by reflection from the light of God in which He walked, is a partial parallel to Christ's Transfiguration, and both the one and the other incident, amongst their other lessons, do also point to some mysterious and occult relation between the indwelling soul and the envious veil of flesh which, under certain circumstances, might become radiant with the manifestation of that indwelling power.

I. The one great lesson which I seek now to enforce from this incident is, that communion with God transfigures.

Prayer is more than petitions. It is not necessarily cast into words at all. In its widest, which is its truest sense, it is the attitude and exercise of devout contemplation of God and intercourse in heart, mind, and will with Him, a communion which unites aspiration and attainment, longing and fruition, asking and receiving, seeking and finding, a communion which often finds itself beggared for words, and sometimes even seems to transcend thought. How different is such an hour of rapt communion with the living God from the miserable notions which so many professing Christians have of prayer, as if it were but spoken requests, more or less fervent and sincere, for things that they want! The noblest communion of a soul with God can never be free from the consciousness of need and dependence. Petition must ever be an element in it, but supplication is only a corner of prayer. Such conscious converse with God is the very atmosphere in which the Christian soul should always live, and if it be an experience altogether strange to us we had better ask ourselves whether we yet know the realities of the Christian life, or have any claim to the name. 'Truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ,' and if we have no share in that fellowship we do not belong to the class of whom it is the mark and possession.

Of course, such communion is not to be attained or maintained without effort. Sense wars against it. Tasks which are duties interrupt the enjoyment of it in its more conscious forms. The hard-working man may well say, 'How can I, with my business cares calling--for my undivided attention all day long, keep up such communion?' The toiling mother may well say, 'How can I, in my little house, with my children round me, and never a quiet minute to myself, get such?' True, it is hard, and the highest and sweetest forms of communion cannot be reached by us while so engaged, and therefore we all need seasons of solitude and repose, in which, being left alone, we may see the Great Vision, and, the clank of the engines being silenced, we may hear the Great Voice saying, 'Come up hither.' Such seasons the busiest have on one day in every week, and such seasons we shall contrive to secure for ourselves daily, if we really want to be intimate with our heavenly Friend.

And for the rest it is not impossible to have real communion with God in the midst of anxious cares and absorbing duties; it is possible to be like the nightingales, that sing loudest in the trees by the dusty roadsides, possible to be in the very midst of anxiety and worldly work, and yet to keep our hearts in heaven and in touch with God. We do not need many words for communion, but we do need to

make efforts to keep ourselves near Him in desire and aspiration, and we need jealous and constant watchfulness over our motives for work, and our temper and aim in it, that neither the work nor our way of doing it may draw us away. There will be breaches in the continuity of our conscious communion, but there need not be any in the reality of our touch with God. For He can be with us, 'like some sweet, beguiling melody, so sweet we know not we are listening to it.' There may be a real contact of the spirit with Him, though it would be hard at the moment to put it into words.

'As He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered.' Such communion changes and glorifies a man. The very secret of the Gospel way of making men better is--transfiguration by the vision of God. Yes! to be much with God is the true way to mend our characters, and to make them like His. I do not under-value the need of effort in order to correct faults and acquire virtues. We do not receive sanctification as we receive justification, by simple faith. For the latter the condition is 'Only believe,' for the former it is 'Work out your own salvation.' No man is cured of his evil tendencies without a great deal of hard work conscientiously directed to curbing them.

But all the hard work, and all the honest purpose in the world, will not do it without this other thing, the close communion with God, and incomparably the surest way to change what in us is wrong, and to raise what in us is low, and to illumine what in us is dark, is to live in habitual beholding of Him who is righteousness without flaw, and holiness supreme, and light without any darkness at all. That will cure faults. That will pull the poison fangs out of passions. That will do for the evil in us what the snake-charmers do by subtle touches, turn the serpent into a rigid rod that does not move nor sting. That will lift us up high above the trifles of life, and dwarf all here that imposes upon us with the lie that it is great, and precious, and permanent; and that will bring us into loving contact with the living 'Beauty of holiness,' which will change us into its own fair likeness.

We see illustrations of this transforming power of loving communion in daily life. People that love each other, and live beside each other, and are often thinking about one another, get to drop into each other's ways of looking at things; and even sometimes you will catch strange imitations and echoes of the face and voice, in two persons thus knit together. And if you and I are bound to God by a love which lasts, even when it does not speak, and which is with us

even when our hands are busy with other things, then be sure of this, we shall get like Him whom we love. We shall be like Him even here, for even here we shall see Him. Partial assimilation is the condition of vision; and the vision is the condition of growing assimilation. The eye would not see the sun unless there were a little sun imaged on the retina. And a man that sees God gets like the God he sees; 'for we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a glass (or, rather, mirroring as a glass does) the glory of God, are changed into the same image.' The image on the mirror is only on the surface; but if my heart is mirroring God He sinks in, and abides there, and changes me from glory to glory. So it is when we keep near Christ, who is manifest in the flesh, that we get liker Him day by day, and the fashion of our countenances will be altered.

Now there is a test for our Christianity. Does my religion alter me? If it does not, what right or reason have I to believe that it is genuine at all? Is there a process of purifying going on in my inward nature? Am I getting any more like Jesus Christ than I was ten years ago? I say I live with Him and by Him. If I do I shall become like Him. Do not work at the hopeless task of purifying yourselves without His help, but go and stay in the sun if you want to get warm. Lo as the bleachers do, spread the foul cloth on the green grass, below the blazing sunshine, and that will take all the dirt out. Believing and loving, and holding fast by Jesus Christ in true communion, we, too, become like Him we love.

II. Another thought is suggested by these words--namely, that this transfiguring will become very visible in the life if it be really in our inmost selves.

Even in the most literal sense of the words it will be so. Did you never see anybody whose face was changed by holier and nobler purposes coming into their lives? I have seen more than one or two whose features became as the face of an angel as they grew more and more unselfish, and more and more full of that which, in the most literal sense of the words, was in them the beauty of holiness. The devil writes his mark upon people's faces. The world and the flesh do so. Go into the streets and look at the people that you meet. Care, envy, grasping griping avarice, discontent, unrest, blotches of animalism, and many other prints of black fingers are plain enough on many a face. And on the other hand, if a man or a woman get into their hearts the refining influences of God's grace and love by living near the Master, very soon the beauty of expression which is born of consecration and unselfishness, the irradiation of

lofty emotions, the tenderness caught from Him, will not be lacking, and some eyes that look upon them will recognise the family likeness.

But that may be said to be mere fancy. Perhaps it is, or perhaps there is truth in it deeper and more far-reaching than we know. Perhaps the life fashions the body, and the 'body of our glory' may be moulded in immortal loveliness by the perfect Christ-derived life within it. But be that as it may, the main point to be observed here is rather this. If we have the real, transforming influence of communion with Jesus Christ in our hearts, it will certainly rise to the surface, and show itself in our lives. As oil poured into water will come to the top, so that inward transforming will not continue hidden within, 'The king's daughter is all-glorious within, but also 'her clothing is of wrought gold.' The inward life, beautiful because knit to Him, will have corresponding with it and flowing from it an outward life of manifest holy beauty.

'His name shall be in their foreheads,' stamped there, where everybody can see it. Is that where you and I carry Christ's name? It is well that it should be in our hearts, it is hypocrisy that it should be in our foreheads unless it is in our hearts first. But if it be in the latter it will surely be in the former.

Now, dear friends, there is a simple and sure touchstone for us all. Do not talk about communion with Christ being the life of your religion, unless the people that have to do with you, your brothers and sisters, or fathers and mothers, your wives and children, your servants or your masters, would endorse it and say 'Yes! I take knowledge of him, he has been with Jesus.' Do you think that it is easier for anybody to believe in, and to love God, 'whom he hath not seen' because of you, 'his brother whom he hath seen'? The Christ in the heart will be the Christ in the face and in the life.

Alas! why is it that so little of this radiance caught from heaven shines from us? There is but one answer. It is because our communion with God in Christ is so infrequent, hurried, and superficial. We should be like those luminous boxes which we sometimes see, shining in the dark with light absorbed from the day; but, like them, we need to be exposed to the light and to lie in it if we are to be light. 'Now are ye light in the Lord,' and only as we abide in Him by continuous communion shall we resemble Him or reflect Him.

III. The perfection of communion will be the perfection of visible

transformation.

Possibly the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ had an element of prophecy in it, and pointed onwards to the order of things when His glorified humanity should be enthroned on the throne of the universe, and have left the limitations of flesh with the folded grave-clothes in the empty sepulchre. As the two majestic forms of the Lawgiver and the Prophet shared His glory on Hermon, and held converse with Him there, so we may see in that mysterious group wrapped in the bright cloud the hint of a hope which was destined to grow to clearness and certainty. Christ's glorified bodily humanity is the type to which all His followers will be conformed. Gazing on Him they shall be like Him, and will grow liker as they gaze. Through eternal ages the double process will go on, and they shall become ever more assimilated, and therefore capable of truer, completer vision, and ever seeing Him more fully as He is, and therefore progressively changed into more perfect resemblance. Nor will that blessed change into advancing glory be shut up in their hearts nor lack beholders. For in that realm of truth and reality all that is within will be visible, our life will no longer fall beneath our aspirations, nor practice be at variance with the longings and convictions of our best selves. Then the Christlike spirit will possess a body which is its glad and perfect servant, and through which its beauty will shine undimmed. 'When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall we also be manifested with Him in glory.'

39-'IN THE HOLY MOUNT'

'And, behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias: 31. Who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.'--LUKE ix. 30, 31.

The mysterious incident which is commonly called the Transfiguration contained three distinct portions, each having its own special significance and lesson. The first was that supernatural change in the face and garments of our Lord from which the whole incident derives its name. The second was the appearance by His side of these two mighty dead participating in the strange lustre in which He walked, and communing with Him of His death. And the last was the descent of the bright cloud, visible as bright even amidst the blazing sunshine on the lone hillside, and the mysterious attesting Voice that spoke from out of its depths.

I leave untouched altogether the first and the last of these three portions, and desire briefly to fix our attention on this central one. Now it is to be observed that whilst all the three Synoptic Evangelists tell us of the Transfiguration, of the appearance of Moses and Elias, and of the Cloud and the Voice, only Luke knows, or at least records, and therefore alone probably knows, what it was that they spoke of. Peter and James and John, the only human witnesses, were lying dazed and drunken with sleep, whilst Christ's countenance was changed; and during all the earlier portion at all events of His converse with Moses and Elias. And it was only when these were about to depart that the mortals awoke from their slumber. So they probably neither heard the voices nor knew their theme, and it was reserved for this Evangelist to tell us the precious truth that the thing about which Lawgiver, Prophet, and the Greater than both spake in that mysterious communion was none other than the Cross.

I think, then, that if we look at this incident from the point of view which our Evangelist enables us to take, we shall get large and important lessons as to the significance of the death of Jesus Christ, in many aspects, and in reference to very many different persons. I see at least four of these. This incident teaches us what Christ's death was to Himself; what it was in reference to previous revelation; what it was in reference to past generations; and what it may be in reference to His servants' death. And upon these four

points I desire briefly to touch now.

I. First, then, I see here teaching as to what the death of the Lord Jesus Christ was in reference to Himself.

What was it that brought these men--the one who had passed in a whirlwind to heaven, and the other who had been led by a mysterious death to slumber in an unknown grave--what was it that brought these men to stand there upon the side of the slopes of Hermon? It was not to teach Christ of the impending Cross. For, not to touch upon other points, eight days before this mysterious interview He had foretold it in the minutest details to His disciples. It was not for the sake of Peter and James and John, lying coiled in slumber there, that they broke the bands of death, and came back from 'that bourne from which no traveller returns,' but it was for Christ, or for themselves, or perhaps for both, that they stood there.

You remember that in Gethsemane 'there appeared an angel from heaven strengthening Him.' And one of the old devout painters has marvellously embraced the deepest meaning of that vision when he has painted for us the strengthening angel displaying in the heavens the Cross on which He must die, as if the holding of it up before Him as the divine will gave the strength that He needed. And I think in some analogous way we are to regard the mission and message to Jesus of these two men in our text. We know that clear before Him, all His life long, there stood the certainty of the Cross. We know that He came, not merely to teach, to minister, to bless, to guide, but that He came to give His life a ransom for many. But we know, too, that from about this point of time in His life the Cross stood more distinctly, if that may be, before Him; or at all events, that it pressed more upon His vision and upon His spirit. And doubtless after that time when He spoke to the disciples so plainly and clearly of what was coming upon Him, His human nature needed the retirement of the mountain-side and prayer which preceded and occasioned this mysterious incident. Christ shrank from His Cross with sinless, natural, human shrinking of the flesh. That never altered His purpose nor shook His will, but He needed, and He got, strength from the Father, ministered once by an angel from heaven, and ministered, as I suppose, another time by two men who looked at death from the other side, and 'who spoke to Him of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.'

And now it is to be noticed that the words which our Evangelist employs are remarkable, and one of them, at least, is all but

unique. The expression translated in my text 'decease' is the same Greek word which, untranslated, names the second book of the Old Testament--_Exodus_. And it literally means neither more nor less than a departure or 'going out.' It is only employed in this one passage and in another one to which I shall have occasion to refer presently, which is evidently based and moulded upon this one, to signify _death_. And the employment of it, perhaps upon these undying tongues of the sainted dead--or, at all events, in reference to the subject of their colloquy--seems to us to suggest that part of what they had to say to the Master and what they had to hear from Him was that His death was His departure in an altogether unique, solitary, and blessed sense. 'I came forth from the Father, and I am come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.' Not dragged by any necessity, but of His own sovereign will, He passes from earth to the state where He was before. And as He stands there on the mountain with His radiant face and His white robes, this thought as to His death brings to Him comfort and strength, even whilst He thinks of the suffering of the Cross.

But, still further, the other word which is here employed helps us to understand what our Lord's death was to Him; 'He should _accomplish_' it as a thing to be fulfilled. And that involves two ideas, the one that Christ in His death was consciously submitting to a gladly accepted divine _must_, and was accomplishing the purpose of Love which dwelt in the heavens and sent Him, as well as His own purpose of love which would redeem and save. The necessity of the death of Christ if sin is to be put away, if we are ever to have a hope of immortality, the necessity of the death of Christ if the mercy of God is to pour out upon a sinful and rebellious world, the necessity of the death of Christ, if the deep purposes of the divine heart are ever to be realised, and the yearning compassion of the Saviour's soul is ever to reach its purpose--all lie in that great word that 'His decease' was by Him to be 'accomplished.' This is the fulfilling of the heart of God, this is the fulfilling of the compassion of the Christ. It is the accomplishment of the divine purpose from eternity.

Still further, the word, as I think, suggests another kind of fulfilment. He was to 'accomplish' His death. That is to say, every drop of that bitter cup, drop by drop, bitterness by bitterness, pang by pang, desolation by desolation, He was to drink; and He drank it. Every step of that road sown with ploughshares and live coals He was to tread, with bleeding, blistered, slow, unshrinking feet. And He trod it. He _accomplished_ it; hurrying over none

of the sorrow, perfunctorily doing none of the tasks. And after the weary moments had ticked themselves away, and the six hours of agony, when the minutes were as drops of blood falling slowly to the ground, were passed, He inverted the cup, and it was empty, and He said 'It is finished'; and He gave up the ghost, having accomplished His decease in Jerusalem.'

II. Further, note in this incident what that death is in regard to previous revelation.

I need not remind you, I suppose, that we have here the two great representative figures of the past history of Israel--the Lawgiver, who, according to the Old Testament, was not only the medium of declaring the divine will, but the medium of establishing Sacrifice as well as Law, and the Prophet, who, though no written words of his have been preserved, and nothing of a predictive and Messianic character seems to have dropped from His lips, yet stood as the representative and head of the great prophetic order to which so much of the earlier revelation was entrusted. And now here they two stand with Christ on the mountain; and the theme about which they spake with Him there is the theme of which the former revelation had spoken in type and shadow, in stammering words, 'at sundry times and in divers manners,' to the former generations--viz. the coming of the great Sacrifice and the offering of the great Propitiation. All the past of Israel pointed onwards to the Cross, and in that Cross its highest word was transcended, its faintest emblems were explained and expressed, its unsolved problems which it had raised in order that they might be felt to be unsolved, were all answered, and that which had been set forth but in shadow and symbol was given to the world in reality for evermore. In Moses Law and Sacrifice, and in Elijah the prophetic function, met by the side of Christ, 'and spake of His decease.'

Now, dear friends, let me say one word here before I pass on. There is a great deal being said nowadays about the position of the Old Testament, the origin of its ritual, and other critical, and, to some extent, historical, questions. I have no doubt that we have much to learn upon these subjects; but what I would now insist upon is this, that all these subjects, about which people are getting so excited, and some of them so angry, stand, and may be dealt with, altogether apart from this central thought, that the purpose and meaning, the end and object of the whole preliminary and progressive revelation of God from the beginning, are to lead straight up to Jesus Christ and to His Cross. And if we understand that, and feel that 'the testimony

of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy,' and that law and sacrifice, commandments and altar, Sinai and Zion, the fiery words that were spoken in the wilderness, and the perpetual burnt-offering that went up in the Temple, had one mission--viz. to 'prepare the way of the Lord'--we have grasped the essential truth as to the Old Revelation; and if we do not understand that, we may be as scholarly and erudite and original as we please, but we miss the one truth which is worth grasping. The relation between the Old revelation and the New is this, that Christ was pointed to by it all, and that in Himself He sums up and surpasses and antiquates, because He fulfils, all the past.

Therefore Moses and Elijah came to witness as well as to encourage. Their presence proclaimed that Christ was the meaning of all the past, and the crown of the divine revelation. And they faded away, and Jesus was found alone standing there, as He stands for ever before all generations and all lands, the sole, the perfect, the eternal Revealer of the heart and will of God. 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.'

III. Again, we have here set before us the death of Christ in its relation to past generations.

I need not dwell upon anything that was mysterious or anomalous in the last moments upon earth of either Moses or Elijah. I do not suppose that there is any reference to the undoubted peculiarities which existed in the case of both. But they came from that dim region where the dead were waiting for the coming of the Saviour, and by some means, we know not how, were clothed with something that was like an immortal body, and capable of entering into this material universe. There they stood, witnesses that Christ's death was of interest to all those sleeping generations in the past. We know not anything, or scarcely anything, of the condition of the sainted dead who died before Christ came. But this is clear, that these two came from the land where silent expectancy had ruled, and came perhaps to carry back to their brethren the tidings that the hour was ready to strike, and that soon amongst them there would stand the Eternal Life.

But, be that as it may, does not that group on the mountain-side teach us this, that the Cross of Jesus Christ had a backward as well as a forward power, and that for all the generations who had died, 'not having received the promises, but having seen them and saluted them from afar,' the influence of that Sacrifice had opened the

gates of the Kingdom where they were gathered in hope, even as it opens for us, and all subsequent generations, the gates of the paradise of God?

I know not whether there be truth in the ancient idea that when the Master died He passed into that _Hades_ where were assembled the disembodied spirits of the righteous dead, and led captivity captive, taking them with Him into a loftier Paradise. But this I am sure of, that Christ's Cross has always been the means and channel whereby forgiveness and hope and heaven have been given to men, and that the old dream of the devout painter which he has breathed upon the walls of the convent in Florence is true in spirit whatever it may be in letter, that the Christ who died went down into the dark regions, burst the bars and broke the gates of iron, and crushed the demon porter beneath the shattered portal, and that out of the dark rock-hewn caverns there came streaming the crowds of the sainted dead, with Adam at their head, and many another who had seen His day afar off and been glad, stretching out eager hands to grasp the life-giving hand of the Redeemer that had come to them too.

Moses and Elias were the 'first-fruits of them that slept,' and there were others, when the bodies of the saints rose from the grave and appeared in the Holy City unto many. And their presence, and the presence of these two there, typified for us the great fact that the Cross of Christ is the redemption of pre-Christian as well as of Christian ages; and that He is the Lord both of the dead and of the living.

IV. And so, lastly, this incident may suggest also what that death of Jesus Christ may be in reference to the deaths of His servants.

I do not find that thought in the words of our text, but in the reference to them which is made in the second epistle attributed to Peter, who was present at the Transfiguration. There is a very remarkable passage in that Epistle, in the context of which there are distinct verbal allusions to the narrative of the Transfiguration, and in it the writer employs the same word to describe his own death which is employed here. It is the only other instance in Scripture of its use in that sense. And so I draw this simple lesson; that mighty death which was accomplished upon Calvary, which is the crown and summit of all Revelation, beyond which God has nothing that He can say or do to make men sure of His heart and recipients of forgiveness, which was the channel of pardon for all past ages, and the hope of the sainted dead--that death may turn for us our departure

into its own likeness. For us, too, all the grimness, all the darkness, all the terror, may pass away, and it may become simply a change of place, and a going home to God. If we believe that Jesus died, we believe that He has thereby smoothed and softened and lessened our death into a sleep in Him.

Nor need we forget the special meaning of the word. If we have set our hopes upon Christ, and, as sinful men and women, have cast the burden of our sins, and the weight of our salvation, on His strong arm, then life will be blessed, and death, when it comes, will be a true Exodus, the going out of the slaves from the land of bondage, and passing through the divided sea, not into a weary wilderness, but into the light of the love and the blessedness of the land where our Brother is King, and where we shall share His reign.

I have been speaking to you of what Christ's death is in many regions of the universe, in many eras of time. My brother, what is Christ's death to you? Can you say, 'The life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me?'

40-CHRIST HASTENING TO THE CROSS

'And it came to pass, when the time was come that He should be received up, He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.'--LUKE ix. 51.

There are some difficulties, with which I need not trouble you here, as to bringing the section of this Gospel to which these words are the introduction, into its proper chronological place in relation to the narratives; but, putting these on one side for the present, there seems no doubt that the Evangelist's intention here is to represent the beginning of our Lord's last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem--a journey which was protracted and devious, and the narrative of which in this Gospel, as you will perceive, occupies a very large portion of its whole contents.

The picture that is given in my text is that of a clear knowledge of what waited Him, of a steadfast resolve to accomplish the purpose of the divine love, and that resolve not without such a shrinking of some part of His nature that He had 'to set His face to go to Jerusalem.'

The words come into parallelism very strikingly with a great prophecy of the Messiah in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, where we read, 'The Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded'--or, as the words have been rendered, 'shall not suffer myself to be overcome by mockery'--'therefore have I set my face like a flint.' In the words both of the Prophet and of the Evangelist there is the same idea of a resolved will, as the result of a conscious effort directed to prevent circumstances which tended to draw Him back, from producing their effect. The graphic narrative of the Evangelist Mark adds one more striking point to that picture of high resolve. He tells us, speaking of what appears to be the final epoch in this long journey to the Cross, 'They were in the way, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus went before them; and they were amazed: and as they followed, they were afraid.' What a picture that is, Christ striding along the steep mountain path far in advance--impelled by that same longing which sighs so wonderfully in His words, 'How am I straitened till it be accomplished,'--with solemn determination in the gentle face, and His feet making haste to run in the way of the Father's commandments! And lagging behind, the little group, awed into almost stupor, and shrinking in uncomprehending terror from that light of unconquerable resolve and

more than mortal heroism that blazed in His eyes!

If we fix, then, on this picture, and as we are warranted in doing, regard it as giving us a glimpse of the very heart of Christ, I think it may well suggest to us considerations that may tend to make more real to us that sacrifice that He made, more deep to us that love by which He was impelled, and may perhaps tend to make our love more true and our resolve more fixed. 'He set His face to go to Jerusalem.'

I. First, then, we may take, I think, from these words, the thought of the perfect clearness with which all through Christ's life He foresaw the inevitable and purposed end.

Here, indeed, the Evangelist leaps over the suffering of the Cross, and thinks only of the time when He shall be lifted up upon the throne; but in that calm and certain prevision which, in His manhood, the Divine Son of God did exercise concerning His own earthly life, between Him and the glory there ever stood the black shadow thrown by Calvary. When He spoke of being 'lifted up,' He ever meant by that pregnant and comprehensive word, at once man's elevation of Him on the accursed tree, and the Father's elevation of Him upon the throne at His right hand! The future was, if I may so say, in His eye so foreshortened that the two things ran into one, and the ambiguous expression did truly connote the one undivided act of prescient consciousness in which He at once recognised the Cross and the throne. And so, when the time was come that He should be received up, He 'steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.'

Now, there is another thing to be noticed. That vision of the certain end which here fills His mind and impels His conduct, was by no means new with Him. Modern unbelieving commentators and critics upon the Gospels have tried their best to represent Christ's life as, at a certain point in it, being modified by His recognition of the fact that His mission was a failure, and that there was nothing left for Him but martyrdom! I believe that that is as untrue to the facts of the Gospel story upon any interpretation of them, as it is repulsive to the instincts of devout hearts; and without troubling you with thoughts about it I need only refer to two words of His. When was it that He said, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up'? When was it that He said, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up'? The one saying was uttered at the very beginning of His public work, and the other in His conversation with Nicodemus. On the

testimony of these two sayings, if there were none else, I think there is no option but to believe that from the first there stood clear before Him the necessity and the certainty of the Cross, and that it was no discovery made at a certain point of His course.

And then, remember that we are not to think of Him as, like many an earthly hero and martyr, regarding a violent and bloody death as being the very probable result of faithful boldness, but to believe that He, looking on from the beginning to that end, regarded it always as being laid upon Him by a certain divine necessity, into which necessity He entered with the full submission and acquiescence of His own will, and from the beginning knew that Calvary was the work for which He had come, and that His love would fail of its expression, and the divine purpose would fail of its realisation, and His whole mission would fail of all its meaning, unless He died for men. The martyr looks to the scaffold and says, 'It stands in my way, and I must either be untrue to conscience or I must go there, and so I will go.' Christ said, 'The Cross is in My path, and on it and from it I shall exercise the influence, to exercise which I have come into the world, and there I shall _do_ the thing which I came forth from the Father to do.' He thought of His death not as the end of His work, but as the centre-point of it; not as the termination of His activity, but as its climax, to which all the rest was subordinated, and without which all the rest was nought. He does not die, and so seal a faithful life by an heroic death,--but dies, so bearing and bearing away man's sin. He regarded from the beginning 'the glory that should follow,' and the suffering through which He had to wade to reach it, in one and the same act of prescience, and said, 'Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of Me.'

And I think, dear friends, if we carried with us more distinctly than we do that one simple thought, that in all the human joys, in all the apparently self-forgetting tenderness, of that Lord who had a heart for every sorrow and an ear for every complaint, and a hand open as day and full of melting charity for every need--that in every moment of that life, in the boyhood, in the dawning manhood, in the maturity of His growing human powers--there was always present one black shadow, towards which He ever went straight with the consent of His will and with the clearest eye, we should understand something more of how His life as well as His death was a sacrifice for us sinful men!

We honour and love men who crush down their own sorrows in order to

help their fellows. We wonder with almost reverence when we see some martyr, in sight of the faggots, pause to do a kindness to some weeping heart in the crowd, or to speak a cheering word. We admire the leisure and calm of spirit which he displays. But all these pale, and the very comparison may become an insult, before that heart which ever discerned Calvary, and never let the sight hinder one deed of kindness, nor silence one gracious word, nor check one throb of sympathy.

II. Still further, the words before us lead to a second consideration, which I have just suggested in my last sentence--Our Lord's perfect willingness for the sacrifice which He saw before Him.

We have here brought into the narrowest compass, and most clearly set forth, the great standing puzzle of all thought, which can only be solved by action. On the one side there is the distinctest knowledge of a divine purpose that will be executed; on the other side there is the distinctest consciousness that at each step towards the execution of it He is constrained by no foreign and imposed necessity, but is going to the Cross by His own will. 'The Son of Man must be lifted up.' 'It became Him to make the Captain of salvation perfect through sufferings.' 'It behoved Him to be made in all points like His brethren.' The Eternal Will of the Father, the purpose purposed before the foundation of the world, the solemn prophecies from the beginning of time, constituted the necessity, and involved the certainty, of His death on the Cross. But are we, therefore, to think that Jesus Christ was led along the path that ended there, by a force which overbore and paralysed His human will? Was not His life, and especially His death, obedience? Was there not, therefore, in Him, as in us all, the human will that could cheerfully submit; and must there not, then, have been, at each step towards the certain end, a fresh act of submission and acceptance of the will of the Father that had sent Him?

'Clear knowledge of the end as divinely appointed and certain'; yes, one might say, and if so, there could have been no voluntariness in treading the path that leads to it. 'Voluntariness in treading the path that leads to it, and if so, there could have been no divine ordination of the end.' Not so! When human thought comes, if I may so say, full butt against a stark, staring contradiction like that, it is no proof that either of the propositions is false. It is only like the sign-boards that the iceman puts upon the thin ice,

'dangerous!' a warning that that is not a place for us to tread. We have to keep a firm hold of what is certified to us, on either side, by its appropriate evidence, and leave the reconciliation, if it can ever be given to finite beings, to a higher wisdom, and, perchance, to another world!

But that is a digression from my more immediate purpose, which is simply to bring before our minds, as clearly as I can, that perfect, continuous, ever-repeated willingness, expressing itself in a chain of constant acts that touch one upon the other, which Christ manifested to embrace the Cross, and to accomplish what was at once the purpose of the Father's will and the purpose of His own.

And it may be worth while, just for a moment, to touch lightly upon some of the many points which bring out so clearly in these Gospel narratives the wholly and purely voluntary character of Christ's death.

Take, for instance, the very journey which I am speaking of now. Christ went up to Jerusalem, says my text. What did He go there for? He went, as you will see, if you look at the previous circumstance,--He went in order, if I might use such a word, to precipitate the collision, and to make His Crucifixion certain. He was under the ban of the Sanhedrim; but perfectly safe as long as He had stopped up among the hills of Galilee. He was as unsafe when He went up to Jerusalem as John Huss when he went to the Council of Constance with the Emperor's safe-conduct in his belt; or as a condemned heretic would have been in the old days, if he had gone and stood in that little dingy square outside the palace of the Inquisition at Rome, and there, below the obelisk, preached his heresies! Christ had been condemned in the council of the nation; but there were plenty of hiding-places among the Galilean hills, and the frontier was close at hand, and it needed a long arm to reach from Jerusalem all the way across Samaria to the far north. Knowing that, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and, if I might use the expression, went straight into the lion's mouth. Why? Because He chose to die.

And, then, take another circumstance. If you will look carefully at the Scripture narrative, you will find that from about this point in His life onwards there comes a distinct change in one very important respect. Before this He shunned publicity; after this He courted it. Before this, when He spoke in veiled words of His sufferings, He said to His disciples, 'Tell no man till the Son of man be risen from the dead.' Hereafter though there are frequent prophecies of

His sufferings, there is no repetition of that prohibition. He goes up to Jerusalem, and His triumphal entry adds fuel to the fire. His language at the last moment appeals to the publicity of His final visit to that city--'Was I not daily with you in the Temple and ye laid no hands upon Me?' Everything that He could do He does to draw attention to Himself--everything, that is to say, within the limits of the divine decorum, which was ever observed in His life, of whom it was written long, long ago, 'He shall not strive, nor cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets.' There is, then, a most unmistakable change to be felt by any who will carefully read the narratives in their bearing upon this one point--a resolve to draw the eyes of the enemy upon Himself.

And to the same purpose, did you ever notice how calmly, with full self-consciousness, distinctly understanding what He is doing, distinctly knowing to what it will lead, He makes His words ever heavier and heavier, and more and more sharply pointed with denunciations, as the last loving wrestle between Himself and the scribes and Pharisees draws near to its bloody close? Instead of softening He hardens His tones--if I dare use the word, where all is the result of love--at any rate He keeps no terms; but as the danger increases His words become plainer and sterner, and approach as near as ever _His_ words could do to bitterness and rebuke. It was then, whilst passionate hate was raging round Him, and eager eyes were gleaming revenge, that He poured out His sevenfold woes upon the 'hypocrites,' the 'blind guides,' the 'fools,' the 'whited sepulchres,' the 'serpents,' the 'generation of vipers,' whom He sees filling up the measure of their fathers in shedding His righteous blood.

And again, the question recurs--Why? And again, besides other reasons, which I have not time to touch upon here, the answer, as it seems to me, must unmistakably be, Because He willed to die, and He willed to die because He loved us.

The same lesson is taught, too, by that remarkable incident preserved for us by the Gospel of John, of the strange power which accompanied His avowal of Himself to the rude soldiers who had come to seize Him, and which struck them to the ground in terror and impotence. One flash comes forth to tell of the sleeping lightning that He will not use, and then having revealed the might that could have delivered Him from their puny arms, He returns to His attitude of self-surrender for our sakes, with those wonderful words which tell how He gave up Himself that we might be free, 'If ye seek Me,

let these go their way.' The scene is a parable of the whole work of Jesus; it reveals His power to have shaken off every hand laid upon Him, His voluntary submission to His else impotent murderers, and the love which moved Him to the surrender.

Other illustrations of the same sort I must leave untouched at present, and only remind you of the remarkable peculiarity of the language in which all the Evangelists describe the supreme moment when Christ passed from His sufferings. 'When He had cried with a loud voice, He yielded up the ghost,'--He sent away the spirit--'He breathed out' (His spirit), 'He gave up the ghost.' In simple truth, He 'committed His spirit' into the Father's hand. And I believe that it is an accurate and fair comment to say, that that is no mere euphemism for death, but carries with it the thought that He was active in that moment; that the nails and the spear and the Cross did not kill Christ, but that Christ willed to die! And though it is true on the one side, as far as men's hatred and purpose are concerned. 'Whom with wicked hands ye have crucified and slain'; on the other side, as far as the deepest verity of the fact is concerned, it is still more true, 'I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.'

But at all events, whatever you may think of such an exposition as that, the great principle which my text illustrates for us at an earlier stage is, at least, irrefragably established--that our dear Lord, when He died, died, because He willed to do so. He was man and therefore He could die; but He was not man in such fashion as that He must die. In His bodily frame was the possibility, not the necessity, of death. And that being so, the very fact of His death is the most signal proof that He is Lord of death as well as of life. He dies not because He must, He dies not because of faintness and pain and wounds. These and they who inflicted them had no power at all over Him. He chooses to die; and He wills it because He wills to fulfil the eternal purpose of divine love, which is His purpose, and to bring life to the world. His hour of weakness was His hour of strength. They lifted Him on a cross, and it became a throne. In the moment when death seemed to conquer Him, He was really using it that He might abolish it. When He gave tip the ghost, He showed Himself Lord of death as marvellously and as gloriously as when He burst its bands and rose from the grave; for this grisly shadow, too, was His servant, and He says to him, 'Come, and he cometh; do this, and he doeth it.' 'Thou didst overcome the sharpness of death' when Thou didst willingly bow Thy head to it, and didst die not because Thou must, but because

Thou wouldest.

III. Still further, let me remind you how, in the language of this verse, there is also taught us that there was in Christ a natural human shrinking from the Cross.

The steadfast and resolved will held its own, overcoming the natural human reluctance. 'He set His face.' People are afraid to talk--and the instinct, the reverent instinct, is right, however we may differ from the application of it--people are afraid to talk, as if there was any shrinking in Christ from the Cross. I believe there was. Was the agony in Gethsemane a reality or a shadow, when He said, 'O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass?' What did that prayer mean, if there was not something in His nature that recoiled from the agony and mysterious horror of these awful hours? Let us take heed lest in our reverence we destroy the very notion on which our hope rests--that of Christ as suffering. For that one word involves all that I say--Did Christ suffer or did He not? If He suffered, then human nature shrank from it. The two ideas are correlative, you cannot part them--suffering and reluctance, a perfectly innocent, natural, inevitable, human instinct, inseparable from corporeity, that makes men recoil from pain. 'He endured the Cross,' says the Book--if there was not reluctance what was there to 'endure'? 'Despising the shame'--if there was not something from which He shrank, what was there to 'despise'? 'He set His face'--if there was not something in Him that hung back, what need was there for the hardening of the countenance? If Christ has suffered, then His flesh and blood quivered beforehand with the pangs and shrank from these, and He would have been spared the cup. Such instinctive recoil is not evil, it is not rebellion, it is not unwillingness to submit to the Father's will. His whole being clave to that, and never swerved from it for one moment. But still, because the path was darkened by mysterious blackness, and led to a Cross, therefore He, even He, who did always the things that pleased the Father, and ever delighted to do His will, needed to 'set His face' to go up to the mountain of sacrifice.

And now, if you will take along with that the other thought that I suggested at the beginning of these remarks, and remember that this shrinking must have been as continuous as the vision, and that this overcoming of it must have been as persistent and permanent as the resolve, I think we get a point of view from which to regard that life of Christ's--full of pathos, full of tender appeals to our hearts and to our thankfulness.

All along that consecrated road He walked, and each step represented a separate act of will, and each separate act of will represented a triumph over the reluctance of flesh and blood. As we may say, every time that He planted His foot on the flinty path the blood flowed. Every step was a pain like that of a man enduring the ordeal and walking on burning iron or sharp steel.

The old taunt of His enemies, as they stood beneath His Cross, might have been yielded to--'If Thou be the Son of God, come down and we will believe.' I ask why did not He? I know that, to those who think less loftily of Christ than we who believe Him to be the Son of God, the words sound absurd--but I for one believe that the only thing that kept Him there, the only answer to that question is--Because He loved me with an everlasting love, and died to redeem me. Because of that love, He came to earth; because of that love, He tabernacled among us; because of that love, He gazed all His life long on the Cross of shame; because of that love, He trod unfaltering, with eager haste and solemn resolve, the rough and painful road; because of that love, He listened not to the voice that at the beginning tempted Him to win the world for Himself by an easier path; because of that love, He listened not--though He could have done so--to the voices that at the end taunted Him with their proffered allegiance if He would come down from the Cross; because of that love, He gave up His spirit. And through all the weariness and contumely and pain, that love held His will fixed to its purpose, and bore Him over every hindrance that barred His path. Many waters quench it not. _That_ love is stronger than death; mightier than all opposing powers; deep and great beyond all thought or thankfulness. It silences all praise. It beggars all recompense. To believe it is life. To feel it is heaven.

But one more remark I would make on this whole subject. We are far too much accustomed to think of our Saviour as presenting only the gentle graces of human nature. He presents those that belong to the strong side of our nature just as much. In Him are all power, manly energy, resolved consecration; everything which men call heroism is there. 'He steadfastly set His face.' And everything which men call tenderest love, most dewy pity, most marvellous and transcendent patience, is all there too. The type of manhood and the type of womanhood are both and equally in Jesus Christ; and He is _the_ Man, whole, entire, perfect, with all power breathed forth in all gentleness, with all gentleness made steadfast and mighty by His strength. 'And he said unto me, Behold the lion of the tribe of

Judah. And I beheld, and lo, a lamb!--the blended symbols of kingly might, and lowly meekness, power in love, and love in power. The supremest act of resolved consecration and heroic self-immolation that ever was done upon earth--an act which we degrade by paralleling it with any other--was done at the bidding of love that pitied us. As we look up at that Cross we know not whether is more wonderfully set forth the pitying love of Christ's most tender heart, or the majestic energy of Christ's resolved will. The blended rays pour out, dear brethren, and reach to each of us. Do not look to that great sacrifice with idle wonder. Bend upon it no eye of mere curiosity. Beware of theorising merely about what it reveals and what it does. Turn not away from it carelessly as a twice-told tale. But look, believing that all that divine and human love pours out its treasure upon you, that all that firmness of resolved consecration and willing surrender to the death of the Cross was for you. Look, believing that you had then, and have now, a place in His heart, and in His sacrifice. Look, remembering that it was because He would save you, that Himself He could not save,

And as, from afar, we look on that great sight, let His love melt our hearts to an answering fervour, and His fixed will give us, too, strength to delight in obedience, to set our faces like a flint. Let the power of His sacrifice, and the influence of His example which that sacrifice commends to our loving copy, and the grace of His Spirit whom He, since that sacrifice, pours upon men, so mould us that we, too, like Him, may 'quit us like men, be strong,' and all our strength and 'all our deeds' be wielded and 'done in charity.'

41-CHRIST'S MESSENGERS: THEIR EQUIPMENT AND WORK

'After these things, the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before His face into every city and place whither He Himself would come. 2. Therefore said He unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest. 3. Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. 4. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes; and salute no man by the way. 5. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. 6. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. 7. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. 8. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: 9. And heal the sick that are therein; and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. 10. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, 11. Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.... 17. And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name. 18. And He said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. 19. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you. 20. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.'

--LUKE x. 1-11: 17-20.

The mission of the Seventy is clearly distinguished from and contrasted with that of the Twelve by the word 'others' in verse 1, which points back to Luke ix.1. The Twelve were prohibited from going beyond Jews; the Seventy were under no such restriction, and were probably sent to the half-Gentile districts on the east of

Jordan. The number of twelve had reference to the number of the tribes; that of seventy may have referred to the number of the elders, but it has also been suggested that its reference is to the supposed number of the nations. The appointment of the Twelve was to a permanent office; that of the Seventy to a transitory mission. Much of the charge given to either is given to both, as is most natural, since they had the same message, and both were sent to prepare for Christ's personal ministry. But though the Seventy were sent out but for a short time, permanent principles for the guidance, not only of Christian workers, but of all Christian lives, are embodied in the charge which they received.

We note, first, that all personal service should be preceded by intense realisation of the immense field, and of the inadequacy, of Christian effort, which vision will culminate in prayer for more toilers to be 'sent forth.' The word implies a certain measure of compulsion, for an overmastering impulse is always needed to overcome human reluctance and laziness. No man has ever done large service for God who has not felt that, like the prophet, he was laid hold of by the Spirit, and borne away, whether he would or no. 'I must speak,' is felt by every true messenger of God. The prayer was answered by the sending of the pray-ers, as it often is. Note how Jesus implies that He is Lord of the harvest, in that His sending them is the answer to the petition. Note, too, the authority which He claims to exercise supreme sovereignty over the lives of men. He has the right to fling them into deadly peril for no other purpose than to proclaim His name. Lambs, ringed round by wolves with white, gleaming teeth, have little chance of life. Jesus gives His servants full warning of dangers, and on the very warning builds an exhortation to quiet confidence; for, if the sentence ends with 'lambs in the midst of wolves,' it begins with 'I send you forth,' and that is enough, for He will defend them when He seeth the wolf coming. Not only so, but He will also provide for all their needs, so they want no baggage nor money, nor even a staff. A traveller without any of these would be in poor case, but they are not to carry such things, because they carry Jesus. He who sends them forth goes with them whom He sends. Now, this precept, in its literal form, was expressly abolished afterwards (Luke xxii. 36), but the spirit of it is permanent. If Christ sends us, we may trust Him to take care of us as long as we are on His errands.

Energetic pursuit of their work, unimpeded by distractions of social intercourse, is meant by the prohibition of saluting by the way. That does not mean churlish isolation, but any one who has ever seen

two Easterns 'saluting' knows what a long-drawn-out affair it is. How far along the road one might have travelled while all that empty ceremony was being got through! The time for salutations is when the journey is over. They mean something then. The great effect of the presence of Christ's servants should be to impart the peace which they themselves possess. We should put reality into conventional courtesies. All Christians are to be peacemakers in the deepest sense, and especially in regard to men's relations with God. The whole scope of our work may be summed up as being to proclaim and bring peace with God, with ourselves, with all others, and with circumstances. The universality of our message is implied in the fact that the salutation is to be given in every house entered, and without any inquiry whether a 'son of peace' is there. The reflex blessedness of Christian effort is taught in the promise that the peace, vainly wished for those who would not receive it, is not wasted like spilt water, but comes back like a dove, to the hand of its sender. If we do no other person good, we bless ourselves by all work for others.

The injunctions as to conduct in the house or city that receives the messengers carry two principles of wide application. First, they demand clear disinterestedness and superiority to vulgar appetites. Christ's servants are not to be fastidious as to their board and lodging. They are not to make demands for more refined diet than their hosts are accustomed to have, and they are not to shift their quarters, though it were from a hovel to a palace. The suspicion that a Christian worker is fond of good living and sensuous delights robs his work of power. But the injunction teaches also that there is no generosity in those who hear the message giving, and no obligation laid on those who deliver it by their receiving, enough to live and work on. The less we obviously look for, the more shall we probably receive. A high-minded man need not scruple to take the 'hire'; a high-minded giver will not suppose that he has hired the receiver to be his servant.

The double substance of the work is next briefly stated. The order in which its two parts stands is remarkable, for the healing of the sick is put first, and the proclamation of the nearness of the kingdom second. Possibly the reason is that the power to heal was a new gift. Its very priority in mention may imply that it was but a means to an end, a part of the equipment for the true and proper work of preaching the coming of the kingdom and its King. At all events, let us learn that Jesus wills the continual combination of regard to the bodily wants and sicknesses, and regard to the

spiritual needs of men.

The solemn instructions as to what was to be done in the case of rejection breathe a spirit the reverse of sanguine. Jesus had no illusions as to the acceptance of the message, and He will send no man out to work hiding from him the difficulties and opposition probably to be encountered. Much wisdom lies in deciding when a field of labour or a method of work should be abandoned as hopeless--for the present and for the individual worker, at all events. To do it too soon is cowardice; to delay it too long is not admirable perseverance, but blindness to plain providences. To shake off the dust is equivalent to severing all connection. The messenger will not bring away the least thing belonging to the city. But whatever men's unbelief, it does not affect the fact, but it does affect their relation to the fact. The gracious message was at first that 'the kingdom of God is come nigh _unto you_', but the last shape of it leaves out 'unto you': for rejection of the word cuts off from beneficial share in the word, and the kingdom, when it comes, has no blessing for the unbelieving soul.

The return of the Seventy soon followed their being sent forth. They came back with a childish, surprised joy, and almost seem to have thought that Jesus would be as much astonished and excited as they were with the proof of the power of His name. They had found that they could not only heal the sick, but cast out demons. Jesus' answer is meant to quiet down their excitement by teaching them that He had known what they were doing whilst they were doing it. When did He behold Satan fall from heaven? The context seems to require that it should be at the time when the Seventy were casting out demons. The contest between the personal Source of evil and Jesus was fought out by the principals, not by their subordinates, and it is already victoriously decided in Christ's sight. Therefore, as the sequel of His victory, He enlarges His gifts to His servants, couching the charter in the words of a psalm (Ps. xci.). Nothing can harm the servant without the leave of the Master, and if any evil befall him in his work, the evil in the evil, the poison on the arrow-head, will be wiped off and taken away. But great as are the gifts to the faithful servant, they are less to be rejoiced in than his personal inclusion among the citizens of heaven. Gifts and powers are good, and may legitimately be rejoiced in; but to possess eternal life, and to belong to the mother-city of us all, the New Jerusalem, is better than all gifts and all powers.

42-NEIGHBOURS FAR OFF

'And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted Him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? 26. He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? 27. And he, answering, said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. 28. And He said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. 29. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? 30. And Jesus, answering, said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. 33. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, 34. And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. 36. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves! 37. And he said. He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.'

--LUKE x. 25-37.

The lawyer's first question was intended to 'tempt' Jesus, which here seems to mean, rather, 'to test'; that is, to ascertain His orthodoxy or His ability. Christ walks calmly through the snare, as if not seeing it. His answer is unimpeachably orthodox, and withal just hints in the slightest way that the question was needless, since one so learned in the law knew well enough what were the conditions of inheriting life. The lawyer knows the letter too well to be at a loss what to answer. But it is remarkable that he gives the same combination of two passages which Jesus gives in His last

duel with the Pharisees (Matt. xxii; Mark xii.). Did Jesus adopt this lawyer's summary? Or is Luke's narrative condensed, omitting stages by which Jesus led the man to so wise an answer?

Our Lord's rejoinder has a marked tone of authority, which puts the lawyer in his right place. His answer is commended, as by one whose estimate has weight; and his practice is implicitly condemned, as by one who knows, and has a right to judge. 'This do' is a sharp sword-thrust. It also unites the two 'loves' as essentially one, by saying 'This'-not 'these'--'do.' The lawyer feels the prick, and it is his defective practice, not his question, which he seeks to 'justify.' He did not think that his love to God needed any justification. He had fully done his duty there, but about the other half he was less sure. So he tried to ride off, lawyer-like, on a question of the meaning of words. 'Who is my neighbour?' is the question answered by the lovely story of the kindly Samaritan.

I. The main purpose, then, is to show how far off men may be, and yet be neighbours. The lawyer's question, 'Who is my neighbour?' is turned round the other way in Christ's form of it at the close. It is better to ask 'Whose neighbour am I?' than 'Who is my neighbour?' The lawyer meant by the word 'a person whom I am bound to love.' He wanted to know how far an obligation extended which he had no mind to recognise an inch farther than he was obliged. Probably he had in his thought the Rabbinical limitations which made it as much duty to 'hate thine enemy' as to 'love thy neighbour.' Probably, too, he accepted the national limitations, which refused to see any neighbours outside the Jewish people.

'Neighbourhood,' in his judgment, implied 'nearness,' and he wished to know how far off the boundaries of the region included in the command lay. There are a great many of us like him, who think that the obligation is a matter of geography, and that love, like force, is inversely as the square of the distance. A good deal of the so-called virtue of 'patriotism' is of this spurious sort. But Christ's way of putting the question sweeps all such limitations aside. 'Who became neighbour to' the wounded man? 'He who showed mercy on him,' said the lawyer, unwilling to name the Samaritan, and by his very reluctance giving the point to his answer which Christ wished to bring out. We are not to love because we are neighbours in any geographical sense, but we become neighbours to the man farthest from us when we love and help him. The relation has nothing to do with proximity. If we prove ourselves neighbours to any man by exercising love to him, then the relation intended by the word is as wide as humanity. We recognise

that A. is our neighbour when a throb of pity shoots through our heart, and thereby we become neighbours to him.

The story is not, properly speaking, a parable, or imaginary narrative of something in the physical world intended to be translated into something in the spiritual region, but it is an illustration (by an imaginary narrative) of the actual virtue in question. Every detail is beautifully adapted to bring out the lesson that the obligation of neighbourly affection has nothing to do with nearness either of race or religion, but is as wide as humanity. The wounded man was probably a Jew, but it is significant that his nationality is not mentioned. He is 'a certain man,' that is all. The Samaritan did not ask where he was born before he helped him. So Christ teaches us that sorrow and need and sympathy and help are of no nationality.

That lesson is still more strongly taught by making the helper a Samaritan. Perhaps, if Jesus had been speaking in America, he would have made him a negro; or, if in France, a German; or, if in England, a 'foreigner.' It was a daring stroke to bring the despised name of 'Samaritan' into the story, and one sees what a hard morsel to swallow the lawyer found it, by his unwillingness to name him after all.

The nations have not yet learned the deep, simple truth of this parable. It absolutely forbids all limitations of mercy and help. It makes every man the neighbour of every man. It carries in germ the great truth of the brotherhood of the race. 'Humanity' is a purely Christian word, and a conception that was never dreamed of before Christ had showed us the unity of mankind. We slowly approximate to the realisation of the teaching of this story, which is oftener admired than imitated, and perhaps oftenest on the lips of people who obey it least.

II. Another aspect of the parable is its lesson as to the true manifestations of neighbourliness. The minutely detailed account of the Samaritan's care for the half-dead man is not only graphic, but carries large lessons. Compassionate sentiments are very well. They must come first. The help that is given as a matter of duty, without the outgoing of heart, will be worth little, and soon cease to flow; but the emotion that does not drive the wheels of action, and set to work to stanch the sorrows which cause it to run so easily, is worth still less. It hardens the heart, as all feeling unexpressed in action does. If the priest and Levite had gone up to the man, and

said, 'Ah, poor fellow, poor fellow! how sorry we are for you! somebody ought to come and help you,' and so had trudged on their way, they would have been worse than they are painted as being.

The various acts are enumerated as showing the genius of true love. We notice the swift, cool-headed deftness of the man, his having at hand the appliances needed, the business-like way in which he goes about his kindness, his readiness to expend his wine and oil, his willingness to do the surgeon's work, his cheerful giving up of his 'own beast,' while he plodded along on foot, steadying the wounded man on his ass; his care for him at the inn; his generosity, and withal his prudence, in not leaving a great sum in the host's hands, but just enough to tide over a day or two, and his wise hint that he would audit the accounts when he came back. This man's quick compassion was blended with plenty of shrewdness, and was as practical as the hardest, least compassionate man could have been. There is need for organisation, 'faculty,' and the like, in the work of loving our neighbour. A thousand pities that sometimes Christian charity and Christian common-sense dissolve partnership. The Samaritan was a man of business, and he did his compassion in a business-like fashion, as we should try to do.

III. Another lesson inwrought into the parable is the divorce between religion and neighbourliness, as shown in the conduct of the priest and Levite. Jericho was one of the priestly cities, so that there would be frequent travellers on ecclesiastical errands. The priest was 'going down' (that is from Jerusalem), so he could not plead a 'pressing public engagement' at the Temple. The verbal repetition of the description of the conduct of both him and the Levite serves to suggest its commonness. They two did exactly the same thing, and so would twenty or two hundred ordinary passers by. They saw the man lying in a pool of blood, and they made a wide circuit, and, even in the face of such a sight, went on their way. Probably they said to themselves, 'Robbers again; the sooner we get past this dangerous bit, the better.' We see that they were heartless, but they did not see it. We do the same thing ourselves, and do not see that we do; for who of us has not known of many miseries which we could have done something to stanch, and have left untouched because our hearts were unaffected? The world would be a changed place if every Christian attended to the sorrows that are plain before him.

Let professing Christians especially lay to heart the solemn lesson that there does lie in their very religion the possibility of their

being culpably unconcerned about some of the world's wounds, and that, if their love to God does not find a field for its manifestation in active love to man, worship in the Temple will be mockery. Philanthropy is, in our days, often substituted for religion. The service of man has been put forward as the only real service of God. But philanthropic unbelievers and unphilanthropic believers are equally monstrosities. What God hath joined let not man put asunder. That simple 'and,' which couples the two great commandments, expresses their indissoluble connection. Well for us if in our practice they are blended in one!

It is not spiritualising this narrative when we say that Jesus is Himself the great pattern of the swift compassion and effectual helpfulness which it sets forth. Many unwise attempts have been made to tack on spiritual meanings to the story. These are as irreverent as destructive of its beauty and significance. But to say that Christ is the perfect example of that love to every man which the narrative portrays, has nothing in common with these fancies. It is only when we have found in Him the pity and the healing which we need, that we shall go forth into the world with love as wide as His.

43-HOW TO PRAY

'And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught His disciples. 2. And He said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. 3. Give us day by day our daily bread. 4. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. 5. And He said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; 6. For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? 7. And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. 8. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. 9. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. 10. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. 11. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? 12. Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 13. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him!--LUKE xi. 1-13.

Christ's praying fired the disciples with desire to pray like Him. There must have been something of absorption and blessedness in His communion with the Father which struck them with awe and longing, and which they would fain repeat. Do our prayers move any to taste the devotion and joy which breathe through them? But low conceptions mingled with high desires in their request. They think that if He will give them a form, that will be enough; and they wish to be as well off as John's disciples, whose relation to their master seems to them parallel with theirs to Jesus.

Our Lord's answer meets and transcends their wish. He does give them a model prayer, and He adds encouragements to pray which inculcate confidence and persistence. The passage, then, falls into two parts--the pattern prayer (vs. 2-4), and the spirit of prayer as enforced by some encouragements (vs. 5-13). The material is so rich that we can but gather the surface wealth. Deep mines must lie unexplored here.

I. The pattern of prayer. We call it the Lord's Prayer, but it is so only in the sense that He gives it. It is our prayer for our use. His own prayers remain unrecorded, except those in the upper room and at Gethsemane. This is the type to which His servants' prayers are to be conformed. 'After this manner pray ye,' whether in these words or not. And the repetition of the words is often far enough away from catching their spirit. To suppose that our Lord simply met the disciples' wish by giving them a form misconceives the genius of His work. He gave something much better; namely, a pattern, the spirit of which we are to diffuse through all our petitions,

Two salient features of the prayer bring out the two great characteristics of all true Christian prayer. First, we note the invocation. It is addressed to the Father. Our prayers are, then, after the pattern only when they are the free, unembarrassed, confident, and utterly frank whispers of a child to its father. Confidence and love should wing the darts which are to reach heaven. That name, thoroughly realised, banishes fear and self-will, and inspires submission and aspiration. To cry, 'Abba, Father,' is the essence of all prayer. Nothing more is needed.

The broad lesson drawn from the order of requests is the second point to be noticed. If we have the child's spirit, we shall put the Father's honour first, and absolutely subordinate our own interests to it. So the first half of the prayer, like the first half of the Decalogue, deals with God's name and its glory. Alas! it is hard even for His child to keep this order. Natural self-regard must be cast out by love, if we are thus to pray. How few of us have reached that height, not in mere words, but in unspoken desires!

The order of the several petitions in the first half of the prayer is significant. God's name (that is, His revealed character) being hallowed (that is, recognised as what it is), separate from all limitation and creatural imperfection, and yet near in love as a Father is, the coming of His kingdom will follow; for where He is known and honoured for what He is He will reign, and men, if they

rightly knew Him, would fall before Him and serve Him. The hallowing of His name is the only foundation for His kingdom among us, and all knowledge of Him which does not lead to submission to His rule is false or incomplete.

The outward, visible establishment of God's kingdom in human society follows individual acquaintance with His name. The doing of God's will is the sign of His kingdom having come. The ocean is blue, like the sky which it mirrors. Earth will be like heaven.

The second half of the prayer returns to personal interests; but God's child has many brethren, and so His prayer is, not for 'me' and 'my,' but for 'us' and 'ours.' Our first need, if we start from the surface and go inwards, is for the maintenance of bodily life. So the petition for bread has precedence, not as being most, but least, important. We are to recognise God's hand in blessing our daily toil. We are to limit our desires to necessities, and to leave the future in His hands. Is this 'the manner' after which Christians pray for perishable good? Where would anxious care or eager rushing after wealth be, if it were?

A deeper need, the chief in regard to the inner man, is deliverance from sin, in its two aspects of guilt and power. So the next petition is for pardon. Sin incurs debt. Forgiveness is the remission of penalty, but the penalty is not merely external punishment. The true penalty is separation from God, and His forgiveness is His loving on, undisturbed by sin. If we truly call God Father, the image of His mercifulness will be formed in us; and unless we are forgiving, we shall certainly lose the consciousness of being forgiven, and bind our sins on our backs in all their weight. God's children need always to pray 'after this manner, 'for sin is not entirely conquered.

Pardon is meant to lead on to holiness. Hence the next clause in effect prays for sanctification. Knowing our own weakness, we may well ask not to be placed in circumstances where the inducements to sin would be strong, even while we know that we may grow thereby, if we resist. The shortened form of the prayer in Luke, according to the Revised Version, omits 'deliver us from evil'; but that clause is necessary to complete the idea. Whether we read 'evil' or 'the evil one,' the clause refers to us as tempted, and, as it were, in the grip of an enemy too strong for us. God alone can extricate us from the mouth of the lion. He will, if we ask Him. The only evil is to sin away our consciousness of sonship and to cling to the sin

which separates us from God.

II. A type of prayer is not all that we need. The spirit in which we pray is still more important. So Jesus goes on to enjoin two things chiefly; namely, persistence and filial confidence. He presents to us a parable with its application (vs. 5-10), and the germ of a parable with its (vs. 11-13). Observe that these two parts deal with encouragements to confidence drawn, first, from our own experience in asking, and, second, with encouragements drawn from our own experience in giving. In the former we learn from the man who will not take 'no,' and so at last gets 'yes'; in the latter, from the Father who will certainly give His child what he asks.

In the parable two points are to be specially noted--the persistent suppliant pleads not for himself so much as for the hungry traveller, and the man addressed gives without any kindness, from the mere wish to be left at peace. As to both points, an a fortiori argument is implied. If a man can so persevere when pleading for another, how much more should we do so when asking for ourselves! And if persistence has such power with selfish men, how much more shall it avail with Him who slumbers not nor sleeps, and to whom we can never come at an inopportune moment, and who will give us because we are His friends, and He ours! The very ugliness of character ascribed to the owner of the loaves, selfish in his enjoyment of his bed, in his refusal to turn out on an errand of neighbourliness, and in his final giving, thus serves as a foil to the character of Him to whom our prayers are addressed.

The application of the parable lies in verses 9 and 10. The efforts enjoined are in an ascending scale, and 'ask' and 'knock' allude to the parable. To 'seek' is more than to ask, for it includes active exertion; and for want of seeking by conduct appropriate to our prayers, we often ask in vain. If we pray for temporal blessings, and then fold our hands, and sit with our mouths open for them to drop into, we shall not get them. If we ask for higher goods, and rise from our knees to live worldly lives, we shall get them as little. Knocking is more than either, for it implies a continuous hammering on the door, like Peter's when he stood in the morning twilight at Mary's gate. Asking and seeking must be continuous if they are to be rewarded.

Verse 10 grounds the promise of verse 9 on experience. It is he who asks that gets. In men's giving it is not universally true that petitions are answered, nor that gifts are not given unasked. Nor is

it true about God's lower gifts, which are often bestowed on the unthankful, and not seldom refused to His children. But it is universally true in regard to His highest gifts, which are never withheld from the earnest asker who adds to his prayers fitting conduct, and prays always without fainting, and which are not and cannot be given unless desire for them opens the heart for their reception, and faith in God assures him who prays that he cannot ask in vain.

The germ of a parable with its application (vs. 11-13) draws encouragement from our own experience in giving. It guards against misconceptions of God which might arise from the former parable, and comes back to the first word of the Lord's Prayer as itself the guarantee of every true desire of His child being heard and met. Bread, eggs, and fish are staple articles of food. In each case something similar in appearance, but useless or hurtful, is contrasted with the thing asked by the child. The round loaves of the East are not unlike rounded, wave-washed stones, water-serpents are fishlike, and the oval body of a quiescent scorpion is similar to an egg. Fathers do not play tricks with their hungry children. Though we are all sinful, parental love survives, and makes a father wise enough to know what will nourish and what would poison his child.

Alas! that is only partially true, for many a parent has not a father's heart, and is neither impelled by love to give good things to, nor to withhold evil ones from, his child. But it is true with sufficient frequency to warrant the great *a fortiori* argument which Jesus bases on it. Our heavenly Father's love, the archetype of all parental affection, is tainted by no evil and darkened by no ignorance. He loves perfectly and wisely, therefore He cannot but give what His child needs.

But the child often mistakes, and thinks that stones are bread, serpents fish, and scorpions eggs. So God often has to deny the letter of our petitions, in order not to give us poison. Luke's version of the closing promise, in which 'the Holy Spirit' stands instead of Matthew's 'good things,' sets the whole matter in the true light; for that Spirit brings with Him all real good, and, while many of our desires have, for our own sakes, to be denied, we shall never hold up empty hands and have to let them fall still empty, if we desire that great encyclopediacal gift which our loving Father waits to bestow. It cannot be given without our petition, it will never be withheld from our petition.

44-THE PRAYING CHRIST

'... As He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray.'--LUKE xi. 1.

It is noteworthy that we owe our knowledge of the prayers of Jesus principally to the Evangelist Luke. There is, indeed, one solemn hour of supplication under the quivering shadows of the olive-trees in Gethsemane which is recorded by Matthew and Mark as well; and though the fourth Gospel passes over that agony of prayer, it gives us, in accordance with its ruling purpose, the great chapter that records His priestly intercession. But in addition to these instances the first Gospel furnishes but one, and the second but two, references to the subject. All the others are found in Luke.

I need not stay to point out how this fact tallies with the many other characteristics of the third Gospel, which mark it as eminently the story of the Son of Man. The record which traces our Lord's descent to Adam rather than to Abraham; which tells the story of His birth, and gives us all we know of the 'child Jesus'; which records His growth in wisdom and stature, and has preserved a multitude of minute points bearing on His true manhood, as well as on the tenderness of His sympathy and the universality of His work, most naturally emphasises that most precious indication of His humanity--His habitual prayerfulness. The Gospel of the King, which is the first Gospel, or of the Servant, which is the second, or of the Son of God, which is the fourth, had less occasion to dwell on this. Royalty, practical Obedience, Divinity, are their respective themes. Manhood is Luke's, and he is ever pointing us to the kneeling Christ.

Consider, then, for a moment, how precious the prayers of Jesus are, as bringing Him very near to us in His true manhood. There are deep and mysterious truths involved with which we do not meddle now. But there are also plain and surface truths which are very helpful and blessed. We thank God for the story of His weariness when He sat on the well, and of His slumber when, worn out with a hard day's work, He slept on the hard wooden pillow in the stern of the fishing-boat among the nets and the litter. It brings Him near to us when we read that He thirsted, and nearer still when the immortal words fall on our wondering ears, 'Jesus wept.' But even more precious than these indications of His true participation in physical needs and human emotion, is the great evidence of His prayers, that He too lived a

life of dependence, of communion, and of submission; that in our religious life, as in all our life, He is our pattern and forerunner. As the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it, He shows that He is not ashamed to call us brethren by this, that He too avows that He lives by faith; and by His life--and surely pre-eminently by His prayers--declares, I will put my trust in Him.' We cannot think of Christ too often or too absolutely as the object of faith; and as the hearer of our cries; but we may, and some of us do, think of Him too seldom as the pattern of faith, and as the example for our devotion. We should feel Him a great deal nearer us; and the fact of His manhood would not only be grasped more clearly by orthodox believers, but would be felt in more of its true tenderness, if we gave more prominence in our thoughts to that picture of the praying Christ.

Another point that may be suggested is, that the highest, holiest life needs specific acts and times of prayer. A certain fantastical and overstrained spirituality is not rare, which professes to have got beyond the need of such beggarly elements. Some tinge of this colours the habits of many people who are scarcely conscious of its presence, and makes them somewhat careless as to forms and times of public or of that of private worship. I do not think that I am wrong in saying that there is a growing laxity in that matter among people who are really trying to live Christian lives. We may well take the lesson which Christ's prayers teach us, for we all need it, that no life is so high, so holy, so full of habitual communion with God, that it can afford to do without the hour of prayer, the secret place, the uttered word. If we are to 'pray without ceasing,' by the constant attitude of communion and the constant conversion of work into worship, we must certainly have, and we shall undoubtedly desire, special moments when the daily sacrifice of doing good passes into the sacrifice of our lips. The devotion which is to be diffused through our lives must be first concentrated and evolved in our prayers. These are the gathering-grounds which feed the river. The life that was all one long prayer needed the mountain-top and the nightly converse with God. He who could say, 'The Father hath not left Me alone, for I do always the things that please Him,' felt that He must also have the special communion of spoken prayer. What Christ needed we cannot afford to neglect.

Thus Christ's own prayers do, in a very real sense, 'teach us to pray.' But it strikes me that, if we will take the instances in which we find Him praying, and try to classify them in a rough way, we may gain some hints worth laying to heart. Let me attempt this

briefly now.

First, then, the praying Christ teaches us to pray as a rest after service.

The Evangelist Mark gives us, in his brief, vivid way, a wonderful picture in his first chapter of Christ's first Sabbath-day of ministry in Capernaum. It was crowded with work. The narrative goes hurrying on through the busy hours, marking the press of rapidly succeeding calls by its constant reiteration--'straightway,' 'immediately,' 'forthwith,' 'anon,' 'immediately.' He teaches in the synagogue; without breath or pause He heals a man with an unclean spirit; then at once passes to Simon's house, and as soon as He enters has to listen to the story of how the wife's mother lay sick of a fever. They might have let Him rest for a moment, but they are too eager, and He is too pitying, for delay. As soon as He hears, He helps. As soon as He bids it, the fever departs. As soon as she is healed, the woman is serving them. There can have been but a short snatch of such rest as such a house could afford. Then when the shadows of the western hills began to fall upon the blue waters of the lake, and the sunset ended the restrictions of the Sabbath, He is besieged by a crowd full of sorrow and sickness, and all about the door they lie, waiting for its opening. He could not keep it shut any more than His heart or His hand, and so all through the short twilight, and deep into the night, He toils amongst the dim, prostrate forms. What a day it had been of hard toil, as well as of exhausting sympathy! And what was His refreshment? An hour or two of slumber; and then, 'in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed' (Mark i. 35).

In the same way we find Him seeking the same repose after another period of much exertion and strain on body and mind. He had withdrawn Himself and His disciples from the bustle which Mark describes so graphically. 'There were many coming and going, and they had no leisure, so much as to eat.' So, seeking quiet, He takes them across the lake into the solitudes on the other side. But the crowds from all the villages near its head catch sight of the boat in crossing, and hurry round; and there they all are at the landing-place, eager and exacting as ever. He throws aside the purpose of rest, and all day long, wearied as He was, 'taught them many things.' The closing day brings no respite. He thinks of their hunger, before His own fatigue, and will not send them away fasting. So He ends that day of labour by the miracle of feeding the five thousand. The crowds gone to

their homes, He can at last think of Himself; and what is His rest? He loses not a moment in 'constraining' His disciples to go away to the other side, as if in haste to remove the last hindrance to something that He had been longing to get to. 'And when He had sent them away, He departed into a mountain to pray' (Mark vi. 46; Matt. xiv. 23).

That was Christ's refreshment after His toil. So He blended contemplation and service, the life of inward communion and the life of practical obedience. How much more do we need to interpose the soothing and invigorating influences of quiet communion between the acts of external work, since our work may harm us, as His never did Him. It may disturb and dissipate our communion with God; it may weaken the very motive from which it should arise; it may withdraw our gaze from God and fix it upon ourselves. It may puff us up with the conceit of our own powers; it may fret us with the annoyances of resistance; it may depress us with the consciousness of failure; and in a hundred other ways may waste and wear away our personal religion. The more we work the more we need to pray. In this day of activity there is great danger, not of doing too much, but of praying too little for so much work. These two--work and prayer, action and contemplation--are twin-sisters. Each pines without the other. We are ever tempted to cultivate one or the other disproportionately. Let us imitate Him who sought the mountain-top as His refreshment after toil, but never left duties undone or sufferers unrelieved in pain. Let us imitate Him who turned from the joys of contemplation to the joys of service without a murmur, when His disciples broke in on His solitude with, 'all men seek Thee,' but never suffered the outward work to blunt His desire for, nor to encroach on the hour of, still communion with His Father. Lord, teach us to work; Lord, teach us to pray.

The praying Christ teaches us to pray as a preparation for important steps.

Whilst more than one Gospel tells us of the calling of the Apostolic Twelve, the Gospel of the manhood alone narrates (Luke vi. 12) that on the eve of that great epoch in the development of Christ's kingdom, 'He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.' Then, 'when it was day,' He calls to Him His disciples, and chooses the Twelve.

A similar instance occurs, at a later period, before another great epoch in His course. The great confession made by Peter, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,' was drawn forth by our Lord

to serve as basis for His bestowment on the Apostles of large spiritual powers, and for the teaching, with much increased detail and clearness, of His approaching sufferings. In both aspects it distinctly marks a new stage. Concerning it, too, we read, and again in Luke alone (ix. 18), that it was preceded by solitary prayer.

Thus He teaches us where and how we may get the clear insight into circumstances and men that may guide us aright. Bring your plans, your purposes to God's throne. Test them by praying about them. Do nothing large or new--nothing small or old either, for that matter--till you have asked there, in the silence of the secret place, 'Lord, what wouldest Thou have me to do?' There is nothing bitterer to parents than when children begin to take their own way without consulting them. Do you take counsel of your Father, and have no secrets from Him. It will save you from many a blunder and many a heartache; it will make your judgment clear, and your step assured, even in new and difficult ways, if you will learn from the praying Christ to pray before you plan, and take counsel of God before you act.

Again, the praying Christ teaches us to pray as the condition of receiving the Spirit and the brightness of God.

There were two occasions in the life of Christ when visible signs showed His full possession of the Divine Spirit, and the lustre of His glorious nature. There are large and perplexing questions connected with both, on which I have no need to enter. At His baptism the Spirit of God descended visibly and abode on Jesus. At His transfiguration His face shone as the light, and His garments were radiant as sunlit snow. Now on both these occasions our Gospel, and our Gospel alone, tells us that it was whilst Christ was in the act of prayer that the sign was given: 'Jesus being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended' (iii. 21, 22). 'As He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening' (ix. 29).

Whatever difficulty may surround the first of these narratives especially, one thing is clear, that in both of them there was a true communication from the Father to the man Jesus. And another thing is, I think, clear too, that our Evangelist meant to lay stress on the preceding act as the human condition of such communication. So if we would have the heavens opened over our heads, and the dove of God descending to fold its white wings, and brood over the chaos of our hearts till order and light come there, we must do what the Son of Man did--pray. And if we would have the

fashion of our countenances altered, the wrinkles of care wiped out, the traces of tears dried up, the blotches of unclean living healed, and all the brands of worldliness and evil exchanged for the name of God written on our foreheads, and the reflected glory irradiating our faces, we must do as Christ did--pray. So, and only so, will God's Spirit fill our hearts, God's brightness flash in our faces, and the vesture of heaven clothe our nakedness.

Again, the praying Christ teaches us to pray as the preparation for sorrow. Here all the three Evangelists tell us the same sweet and solemn story. It is not for us to penetrate further than they carry us into the sanctities of Gethsemane. Jesus, though hungering for companionship in that awful hour, would take no man with Him there; and He still says, 'Tarry ye here, while I go and pray yonder.' But as we stand afar off, we catch the voice of pleading rising through the stillness of the night, and the solemn words tell us of a Son's confidence, of a man's shrinking, of a Saviour's submission. The very spirit of all prayer is in these broken words. That was truly 'The Lord's Prayer' which He poured out beneath the olives in the moonlight. It was heard when strength came from heaven, which He used in 'praying more earnestly.' It was heard when, the agony past and all the conflict ended in victory, He came forth, with that strange calm and dignity, to give Himself first to His captors and then to His executioners, the ransom for the many.

As we look upon that agony and these tearful prayers, let us not only look with thankfulness, but let that kneeling Saviour teach us that in prayer alone can we be forearmed against our lesser sorrows; that strength to bear flows into the heart that is opened in supplication; and that a sorrow which we are made able to endure is more truly conquered than a sorrow which we avoid. We have all a cross to carry and a wreath of thorns to wear. If we want to be fit for our Calvary--may we use that solemn name?--we must go to our Gethsemane first.

So the Christ who prayed on earth teaches us to pray; and the Christ who intercedes in heaven helps us to pray, and presents our poor cries, acceptable through His sacrifice, and fragrant with the incense from His own golden censer.

'O Thou by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way;
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod;
Lord! teach us how to pray.'

45-THE RICH FOOL

'And one of the company said unto Him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. 14. And He said unto him, Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you? 15. And He said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. 16. And He spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: 17. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits! 18. And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. 19. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. 20. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided! 21. So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. 22. And He said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. 23. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment'--LUKE xii. 13-23.

What a gulf between the thoughts of Jesus and those of this unmannerly interrupter! Our Lord had been speaking solemnly as to confessing Him before men, the divine help to be given, and the blessed reward to follow, and this hearer had all the while been thinking only of the share in his father's inheritance, out of which he considered that his brother had cheated him. Such indifference must have struck a chill into Christ's heart, and how keenly he felt it is traceable in the curt and stern brushing aside of the man's request. The very form of addressing him puts him at a distance. 'Man' is about as frigid as can be. Our Lord knew the discouragement of seeing that His words never came near some of His hearers, and had no power to turn their thoughts even for a minute from low objects. 'What do I care about being confessed before the angels, or about the Holy Spirit to teach me? What I want is my share of the paternal acres. A rabbi who will help me to these is the rabbi for me.' John Bunyan's 'man with the muck-rake' had his

eyes so glued to the ground and the muck that he did not see the crown hanging above him. How many of us find the sermon time a good opportunity for thinking about investments and business!

Christ's answer is intentionally abrupt and short. It deals with part only of the man's error, the rest of which, being an error to which we are all exposed, and which was the root of the part special to him, is dealt with in the parable that follows. Because the man was covetous, he could see in Jesus nothing more than a rabbi who might influence his brother. Our sense of want largely shapes our conception of Christ. Many to-day see in Him mainly a social (and economical) reformer, because our notion of what we and the world need most is something to set social conditions right, and so to secure earthly well-being. They who take Jesus to be first and foremost 'a judge or a divider' fail to see His deepest work or their own deepest need. He will be all that they wish Him to be, if they will take Him for something else first. He will 'bid' men 'divide the inheritance' with their brethren after men have gone to Him for salvation.

But covetousness, or the greedy clutching at more and more of earthly good, has its roots in us all, and unless there is the most assiduous weeding, it will overrun our whole nature. So Jesus puts great emphasis into the command, 'Take heed, and keep yourselves,' which implies that without much 'heed' and diligent inspection of ourselves (for the original word is 'see'), there will be no guarding against the subtle entrance and swift growth of the vice. We may be enslaved by it, and never suspect that we are. Further, the correct reading is 'from all covetousness,' for it has many shapes, besides the grossest one of greed for money. The reason for the exhortation is somewhat obscure in construction, but plain in its general meaning, and sufficiently represented by the Authorised and Revised Versions. The Revised Version margin gives the literal translation, 'Not in a man's abundance consisteth his life, from the things which he possesseth,' on which we may note that the second clause is obviously to be completed from the first, and that the difference between the two seems to lie mainly in the difference of prepositions, 'from' or 'out of' in the second clause standing instead of 'in' in the first, while there may be also a distinction between 'abundance' and 'possessions' the former being a superfluous amount of the latter. The whole will then mean that life does not consist in possessions, however abundant, nor does it come out of anything that simply belongs to us in outward fashion. Not what we possess, but what we are, is the important

matter.

But what does 'life' mean? The parable shows that we cannot leave out the notion of physical life. No possessions keep a man alive. Death knocks at palaces and poor men's hovels. Millionaires and paupers are huddled together in his net. But we must not leave out the higher meaning of life, for it is eminently true that the real life of a man has little relation to what he possesses. Neither nobleness nor peace nor satisfaction, nor anything in which man lives a nobler life than a dog, has much dependence on property of any sort. Wealth often chokes the channels by which true life would flow into us. 'We live by admiration, hope, and love,' and these may be ours abundantly, whatever our portion of earth's riches. Covetousness is folly, because it grasps at worldly good, under the false belief that thereby it will secure the true good of life, but when it has made its pile, it finds that it is no nearer peace of heart, rest, nobleness, or joy than before, and has probably lost much of both in the process of making it. The mad race after wealth, which is the sin of this luxurious, greedy, commercial age, is the consequence of a lie--that life does consist in the abundance of possessions. It consists in knowing 'Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.' Is there any saying of Jesus Christ's more revolutionary, or less believed by His professed followers, than this?

The story of the rich fool is not a parable in the narrower meaning of that word--that is, a description of some event or thing in the natural sphere, transferred by analogy to the spiritual--but an imaginary narrative exemplifying in a concrete instance the characteristics of the class of covetous men. The first point noted is that accumulated wealth breeds anxiety rather than satisfaction. The man is embarrassed by his abundance. The trouble of knowing how to keep it is as great as the labour of acquiring it, and the enjoyment of it is still in the future. Many a rich man is more worried about his securities than he was in making his money. There are so many 'bags with holes' that he is at his wits' end for investments, and the first thing he looks at in his morning's paper is the share list, the sight of which often spoils his breakfast.

The next point is the selfish and arrogant sense of possession, as betrayed by the repetition of 'my'--my fruits, my barns, my corn, and my goods. He has no thought of God, nor of his own stewardship. He recognises no claim on his wealth. If he had looked a little beyond himself, he would have seen many places where he could have

bestowed his fruits. Were there no poor at his gates? He had better have poured some riches into the laps of these than have built a new barn. Corn laid up would breed weevils; dispersed, it would bring blessings.

Again, this type of covetous men is a fool because he reckons on 'many years.' The goods may last, but will he? He can make sure that they will suffice for a long time, but he cannot make sure of the long time. Again, he blunders tragically in his estimate of the power of worldly goods to satisfy. 'Eat, drink,' might be said to his body, but to say it to his soul, and to fancy that these pleasures of sense would put it at ease, is the fatal error which gnaws like a worm at the root of every worldly life. The word here rendered 'take thine ease' is cognate with Christ's in His great promise, 'Ye shall find rest unto your souls.' Not in abundance of worldly goods, but in union with Him, is that rest to be found which the covetous man vainly promises himself in filled barns and luxurious idleness.

There is a grim contrast between what the rich man said and what God said. The man's words were empty breath; God's are powers, and what He says is a deed. The divine decree comes crashing into the abortive human plans like a thunder-clap into a wood full of singing birds, and they are all stricken silent. So little does life consist in possessions that all the abundance cannot keep the breath in a man for one moment. His life is 'required of him,' not only in the sense that he has to give it up, but also inasmuch as he has to answer for it. In that requirement the selfishly used wealth will be 'a swift witness against' him, and instead of ministering to life or ease, will 'eat his flesh as fire.' Molten gold dropping on flesh burns badly. Wealth, trusted in and selfishly clutched, without recognition of God the giver or of others' claims to share it, will burn still worse.

The 'parable' is declared to be of universal application. Examples of it are found wherever there are men who selfishly lay up treasures for their own delectation, and 'are not rich toward God.' That expression is best understood in this connection to mean, not rich in spiritual wealth, but in worldly goods used with reference to God, or for His glory and service. So understood, the two phrases, laying up treasure for oneself and being rich towards God, are in full antithesis.

46-ANXIOUS ABOUT EARTH, OR EARNEST ABOUT THE KINGDOM

'And He said unto His disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. 23. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. 24. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? 25. And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? 26. If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? 27. Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 28. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to-day in the field, and to-morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith! 29. And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. 30. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. 31. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall he added unto you.'

--LUKE xii. 22-31.

The parable of the rich fool was spoken to the multitude, but our Lord now addresses the disciples. 'Therefore' connects the following with the foregoing teachings. The warnings against anxiety are another application of the prohibition of laying up treasure for self. Torturing care is the poor man's form of worldliness, as luxurious self-indulgence is the rich man's. There are two kinds of gout, as doctors tell us--one from high living, and one from poverty of blood. This passage falls into two parts--the prohibition against anxious care (vs. 22-31), and the exhortation to set the affections on the true treasure (vs. 31-34).

I. The first part gives the condemnation of anxiety about earthly necessities. The precept is first stated generally, and then followed by a series of reasons enforcing it. As to the precept, we may remark that the disciples were mostly poor men, who might think that they were in no danger of the folly branded in the parable. They had no barns bursting with plenty, and their concern was how to

find food and clothing, not what to do with superfluities. Christ would have them see that the same temper may be in them, though it takes a different shape. Dives and Lazarus may be precisely alike.

The temper condemned here is 'self-consuming care,' the opposite of trust. Its misery is forcibly expressed by the original meaning of the Greek word, which implies being torn in pieces, and thus paints the distraction and self-inflicted harrassment which are the lot of the anxious mind. Prudent foresight and strenuous work are equally outside this prohibition. Anxiety is so little akin to foresight that it disables from exercising it, and both hinders from seeing what to do to provide daily bread, and from doing it.

The disciples' danger of being thus anxious may be measured by the number and variety of reasons against it given by Jesus. The first of these is that such anxiety does not go deep enough, and forgets how we come to have lives to be fed and bodies to be clothed. We have received the greater, life and body, without our anxiety. The rich fool could keep his goods, but not his 'soul' or 'life.' How superficial, then, after all, our anxieties are, when God may end life at any moment! Further, since the greater is given, the less which it needs will also be given. The thought of God as 'a faithful creator' is implied. We must trust Him for the 'more'; we may trust Him for the less.

The second reason bids us look with attention at examples of unanxious lives abundantly fed. Perhaps Elijah's feathered providers, or the words of the Psalmist (Ps. cxlvii. 9), were in Christ's mind. The raven was one of the 'unclean' birds, and of ill omen, from Noah's days, and yet had its meat in due season, though that meat was corpses. Notice the allusions to the preceding parable in 'sow not, neither reap,' and in 'neither have storehouse nor barn.' In these particulars the birds are inferior to us, and, so to speak, the harder to care for. If they who neither work nor store still get their living, shall not we, who can do both? Our superior value is in part expressed by the capacity to sow and reap; and these are more wholesome occupations for a man than worrying.

How lovingly Jesus looked on all creatures, and how clearly He saw everywhere God's hand at work! As Luther said, 'God spends every year in feeding sparrows more than the revenues of the King of France.'

The third reason is the impotence of anxiety (ver. 25). It is

difficult to decide between the two possible renderings here. That of 'a cubit' to the 'stature' corresponds best with the growth of the lilies, while 'age' preserves an allusion to the rich fool, and avoids treating the addition of a foot and a half to an ordinary man's height as a small thing. But age is not measured by cubits, and it is best to keep to 'stature.'

At first sight, the argument of verse 23 seems to be now inverted, and what was 'more' to be now 'least.' But the supposed addition, if possible, would be of the smallest importance as regards ensuring food or clothing, and measured by the divine power required to effect it, is less than the continual providing which God does. That smaller work of His, no anxiety will enable us to do. How much less can we effect the complicated and wide-reaching arrangements needed to feed and clothe ourselves! Anxiety is impotent. It only works on our own minds, racking them in vain, but has no effect on the material world, not even on our own bodies, still less on the universe.

The fourth reason bids us look with attention at examples of unanxious existence clothed with beauty. Christ here teaches the highest use of nature, and the noblest way of looking at it. The scientific botanist considers how the lilies grow, and can tell all about cells and chlorophyll and the like. The poet is in raptures with their beauty. Both teach us much, but the religious way of looking at nature includes and transcends both the others. Nature is a parable. It is a visible manifestation of God, and His ways there shadow His ways with us, and are lessons in trust.

The glorious colours of the lily come from no dyer's vats, nor the marvellous texture of their petals from any loom. They are inferior to us in that they do not toil or spin, and in their short blossoming time. Man's 'days are as grass; as a flower of the field so he flourisheth'; but his date is longer, and therefore he has a larger claim on God. 'God clothes the grass of the field' is a truth quite independent of scientific truths or hypotheses about how He does it. If the colours of flowers depend on the visits of insects, God established the dependence, and is the real cause of the resulting loveliness.

The most modern theories of the evolutionist do not in the least diminish the force of Christ's appeal to creation's witness to a loving Care in the heavens. But that appeal teaches us that we miss the best and plainest lesson of nature, unless we see God present

and working in it all, and are thereby heartened to trust quietly in His care for us, who are better than the ravens because we have to sow and reap, or than the lilies because we must toil and spin.

Verse 29 adds to the reference to clothing a repeated prohibition as to the other half of our anxieties, and thus rounds off the whole with the same double warning as in verse 22. But it gives a striking metaphor in the new command against 'being of doubtful mind.' The word so rendered means to be lifted on high, and thence to be tossed from height to depth, as a ship in a storm. So it paints the wretchedness of anxiety as ever shuttlecocked about between hopes and fears, sometimes up on the crest of a vain dream of good, sometimes down in the trough of an imaginary evil. We are sure to be thus the sport of our own fancies, unless we have our minds fixed on God in quiet trust, and therefore stable and restful.

Verse 30 gives yet another reason against not only anxiety, but against that eager desire after outward things which is the parent of anxiety. If we 'seek after' them, we shall not be able to avoid being anxious and of doubtful mind. Such seeking, says Christ, is pure heathenism. The nations of the world who know not God make these their chief good, and securing them the aim of their lives. If we do the like, we drop to their level. What is the difference between a heathen and a Christian, if the Christian has the same objects and treasures as the heathen? That is a question which a good many so-called Christians at present would find it hard to answer.

But the crowning reason of all is kept for the last. Much of what precedes might be spoken by a man who had but the coldest belief in Providence. But the great and blessed faith in our Father, God, scatters all anxious care. How should we be anxious if we know that we have a Father in heaven, and that He knows our needs? He recognises our claims on Him. He made the needs, and will send the supply. That is a wide truth, stretching far beyond the mere earthly wants of food and raiment. My wants, so far as God has made me to feel them, are prophecies of God's gifts. He has made them as doors by which He will come in and bless me. How, then, can anxious care fret the heart which feels the Father's presence, and knows that its emptiness is the occasion for the gift of a divine fullness? Trust is the only reasonable temper for a child of such a father. Anxious care is a denial of His love or knowledge or power.

II. Verses 31-34 point out the true direction of effort and

affection, and the true way of using outward good so as to secure the higher riches. It is useless to tell men not to set their longings or efforts on worldly things unless you tell them of something better. Life must have some aim, and the mind must turn to something as supremely good. The only way to drive out heathenish seeking after perishable good is to fill the heart with the love and longing for eternal and spiritual good. The ejected demon comes back with a troop at his heels unless his house be filled. To seek 'the kingdom,' to count it our highest good to have our wills and whole being bowed in submission to the loving will of God, to labour after entire conformity to it, to postpone all earthly delights to that, and to count them all but loss if we may win it--this is the true way to conquer worldly anxieties, and is the only course of life which will not at last earn the stern judgment, 'Thou fool.'

That direction of all our desires and energies to the attainment of the kingdom which is the state of being ruled by the will of God, is to be accompanied with joyous, brave confidence. How should they fear whose desires and efforts run parallel with the 'Father's good pleasure'? They are seeking as their chief good what He desires, as His chief delight, to give them. Then they may be sure that, if He gives that, He will not withhold less gifts than may be needed. He will not 'spoil the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar,' nor allow His children, whom He has made heirs of a kingdom, to starve on their road to their crown. If they can trust Him to give them the kingdom, they may surely trust Him for bread and clothes.

Mark, too, the tenderness of that 'little flock.' They might fear when they contrasted their numbers with the crowds of worldly men; but, being a flock, they have a shepherd, and that is enough to quiet anxiety.

Seeking and courage are to be crowned by surrender of outward good and the use of earthly wealth in such manner as that it will secure an unfailing treasure in heaven. The manner of obeying this command varies with circumstances. For some the literal fulfilment is best; and there are more Christian men to-day whose souls would be delivered from the snares if they would part with their possessions than we are willing to believe.

Sometimes the surrender is rather to be effected by the conscientious consecration and prayerful use of wealth. That is for each man to settle for himself. But what is not variable is the obligation to set the kingdom high above all else, and to use all outward wealth, as

Christ's servants, not for luxury and self-gratification, but as in His sight and for His glory. Let us not be afraid of believing what Jesus and His Apostles plainly teach, that wealth so spent here is treasured in heaven, and that a Christian's place in the future life depends upon this among other conditions--how he used his money here.

47-STILLNESS IN STORM

'... Neither be ye of doubtful mind.'--LUKE xii. 29.

I think that these words convey no very definite idea to most readers. The thing forbidden is not very sharply defined by the expression which our translators have employed, but the original term is very picturesque and precise.

The word originally means 'to be elevated, to be raised as a meteor,' and comes by degrees to mean to be raised in one special way--namely, as a boat is tossed by a tough sea. So there is a picture in this prohibition which the fishermen and folk dwelling by the Sea of Galilee with its sudden squalls would understand: 'Be not pitched about'; now on the crest, now in the trough of the wave.

The meaning, then, is substantially identical with that of the previous words, 'Take no thought for your life,' with this difference, that the figures by which the thing prohibited is expressed are different, and that the latter saying is wider than the former.

The former prohibits 'taking thought,' by which our Lord of course means not reasonable foresight, but anxious foreboding. And the word which He uses, meaning at bottom as it does, 'to be distracted or rent asunder,' conveys a striking picture of the wretched state to which such anxiety brings a man. Nothing tears us to pieces like foreboding care. Then our text forbids the same anxiety, as well as other fluctuations of feeling that come from setting our hopes and hearts on aught which can change; and its figurative representation of the misery that follows on fastening ourselves to the perishable, is that of the poor little skiff, at one moment high on the crest of the billow, at the next down in the trough of the sea.

So both images point to the unrest of worldliness, and while the unrest of care is uppermost in the one, the other includes more than simply care, and warns us that all occupation with simply creaturely things, all eager seeking after 'what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink' or after more refined forms of earthly good, brings with it the penalty and misery of 'for ever tossing on the tossing wave.' Whosoever launches out on to that sea is sure to be buffeted about. Whoso sets his heart on the uncertainty of anything below the changeless God will without doubt be driven from hope to fear, from joy to sorrow, and his soul will be agitated as his idols change,

and his heart will be desolate when his idols perish.

Our Lord, we say, forbids our being thus tossed about. He seems to believe that it is in our own power to settle whether we shall be or no. That sounds strange; one can fancy the answer: 'What is the use of telling a man not to be buffeted about by storm? Why, he cannot help it. If the sea is running high the little boat cannot lie quiet as if in smooth water. Do not talk to me about not being moved, unless you can say to the tumbling sea of life, "Peace, be still!" and make it

"quite forget to rave,
While birds of peace sit brooding on the charmed wave."

The objection is sound after a fashion. Change there must be, and fluctuation of feeling. But there is such a thing as 'peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation.' You may remember the attempt that was made some years ago to build a steamer in which the central saloon was to hang perfectly still while the outer hull of the ship pitched and rolled with the moving sea. It was a failure, but the theory was sound and looked practicable. At any rate, it is a parable of what may be in our lives. If I might venture, without seeming irreverence, to modernise and so to illustrate this command of our Lord's, I would say, that He here bids us do for our life's voyage across a stormy sea, exactly what the 'Bessemer' ship was an attempt to do in its region--so to poise and control the oscillations of the central soul that however the outward life may be buffeted about, there may be moveless rest within. He knows full well that we must have rough weather, but He would have us counteract the motion of the sea, and keep our hearts in stillness. 'In the world ye shall have tribulation,' but in Him ye may have peace.

He does not wish us to be blind to the facts of life, but to take all the facts into our vision. A partial view of the so-called facts certainly will lead to tumultuous alternations of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow. But if you will take them all into account, you can be quiet and at rest. For here is a fact as real as the troubles and changes of life: 'Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.' Ah! the recognition of that will keep our inmost hearts full of sweet peace, whatever may befall the outward life. Only take all the facts of your condition, and accept Christ's word for that greatest and surest of all--the loving Father's knowledge of your needs, and it will not be hard to obey Christ's

command, and keep yourself still, because fixed on Him.

But now consider the teachings here as to the true source of the agitation which our Lord forbids. The precept itself affords no light on that subject, but the context shows us the true origin of the evil.

The first point to observe is how remarkably our Lord identifies this anxiety and restlessness which He forbids with what at first sight seems its exact opposite, namely a calmness and peace which he also condemns as wholly bad. The whole series of warnings of which our text is part begins with the story of the rich man whose ground brought forth plentifully. His fault was not that he was tossed about with care and a doubtful mind, but the very opposite. His sin was in saying, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.'

Notice, then, that our Lord begins by pointing out the great madness and the great sin of being thus at rest, and trusting in earthly possessions: and then with a 'Therefore, I say unto you,' He turns to the opposite pole of worldly feeling, and shows us how, although opposite, it is yet related. The warning, 'Take no thought for your life' follows as an inference from the picture of the folly of the man that lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.

That is to say, the two faults are kindred and in some sense the same. The rich fool stretching himself out to rest on the pile of his possessions, and the poor fool tossing about on the billows of unquiet thought, are at bottom under the influence of the same folly, though their circumstances are opposite, and their moods seem to be so too.

The one man is just the other turned inside out. When he is rich and has got plenty of outward goods, he has no anxiety, because he thinks that they are supreme and all-sufficient. When he is poor and has not got enough of them, he has no rest, because he thinks that they are supreme and all-sufficient. Anxious care and satisfied possession are at bottom the very same thing. The man who says, 'My mountain stands strong,' because he has got a quantity of money or the like; and the man who says, 'Oh, dear me, what is going to become of me?' because he thinks he has not got enough, only need to exchange circumstances and they will exchange cries.

The same figure is concave or convex according to the side from

which you look at it. From one it swells out into rounded fullness; from the other it gapes as in empty hungriness. So the rich fool of the preceding parable and the anxious, troubled man of my text are the same man looked at from opposite sides or set in opposite circumstances. The root of both the rest of the one and of the anxiety of the other is the over-estimate of outward good.

Then, still further, notice how our Lord here brands this forbidden fluctuation of feeling as being at bottom pure heathenism. Most significant double reasons for our text follow it, introduced by a double 'for.' The first reason is, 'For all these things do the nations of the world seek after'; the second is, 'For your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.' The former points the lesson of the contradiction between such trouble of mind and the position of disciples. For pure heathens it is all natural; for men who do not know that they have a Father in heaven, there is nothing strange or anomalous in care and anxiety, nor in the race after riches. But for you, it is in diametrical contradiction to all your professions, in flagrant inconsistency with all your belief, in flat denial of that mighty truth that you have a Father who cares for you, and that His love is enough. Every time you yield to such cares or thoughts you are going down to the level of pure heathenism. That is a sharp saying. Our Lord's steady hand wields the keen dissecting-knife here, and lays bare with unsparing cuts the ugly growth. We give the thing condemned a great many honourable names, such as 'laying up for a rainy day,' or 'taking care for the future of my children,' or 'providing things honest in the sight of all men,' and a host of others, with which we gloss and gild over unchristian worldly-mindedness.

There are actions and feelings which are rightly described by such phrases, that are perfectly right, and against them Jesus Christ never said a word.

But much of what we deceive ourselves by calling reasonable foresight is rooted distrust of God, and much practical heathenism creeps into our lives under the guise of 'proper prudence.' The ordinary maxims of the world christen many things by names of virtues and yet they remain vices notwithstanding.

I do not know that there is any region in which Christian men have more to be on their guard, lest they be betrayed into deadening inconsistencies, than this of the true limits of care for material

wealth, and of provision for the future outward life.

Those of us, especially, who are engaged in business, and who live in our great commercial cities, have hard work to keep from dropping down to the heathen level which is adopted on all sides. It is not easy for such a man to resist the practical belief that money is the one thing needful, and he the happy man who has made a fortune. The false estimate of worldly good is in the air about us, and we have to be on our guard, or else, before we know where we are, we shall have breathed the stupefying poison and feel its narcotic influence slackening the pulses and dimming the eye of our spirits. We need special watchfulness and prayer, or we shall not escape this subtle danger, which is truly for many of us 'the pestilence that walketh in darkness.'

So be not tossed about by these secularities, for the root of them all is heathenish distrust of your Father in heaven.

Then, finally, we have the cure for all agitation. Christ here puts in our own hands, in that thought, 'Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things,' the one weapon with which we can conquer. There is the true anchorage for tempest-tossed spirits, the land-locked haven where they can ride, whatever winds blow and waves break outside the bar.

I remarked that our Lord here seemed to give an injunction which the facts of life would prevent our obeying, and so it would be, had He not pointed us to that firm truth, which, if we believe it, will keep us unmoved. There is no more profitless expenditure of breath than the ordinary moralist's exhortations to, or warnings against, states of feeling and modes of mind. Our emotions are very partially under our direct control. Life cannot be calm by willing to be so. But what we can do is to think of a truth which will sway our moods. If you can substitute some other thought for the one which breeds the emotion you condemn, it will fall silent of itself, just as the spindles will stop if you shut off steam, or the mill-wheel if you turn the stream in another direction. So Christ gives us a great thought to cherish, knowing that if we let it have fair play in our minds, we shall be at rest: 'Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.' Surely that is enough for calmness. Why should, or how can we be, troubled if we believe that?

'He knows.' What a wonderful confidence in His heart and resources is silently implied in that word! If He knows that you need, you may be quite sure that you will not want. 'He knows'; and His fatherly

heart is our guarantee that to know and to supply our need, are one and the same thing with Him; and His deep treasure of exhaustless good is our guarantee that our need can never go beyond His fullness, nor He ever, like us, see a sorrow He cannot comfort, a want that He cannot meet.

Enough that He knows; 'the rest goes without saying.' The whole burden of solicitude is shifted off our shoulders, if once we get into the light of that great truth. A man is made restful in the midst of all the changes and storms of life, not by trying to work himself into tranquillity, not by mere dint of coercing his feelings through sheer force of will, not by ignoring any facts, but simply by letting this truth stand before his mind. It scatters cares, as the silent moon has power, by her mild white light, to clear away a whole skyful of piled blacknesses.

One other word of practical advice, as to how to carry out this injunction, is suggested by the context, which goes on, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God.'

A boat will roll most when, from lack of a strong hand at the helm, she has got broadside to the run of the sea. There she lies rocking about just as the blow of the wave may fall, and drifting wherever the wind may take her. There are two directions in which she will be comparatively steady; one, when her head is kept as near the wind as may be, and the other when she runs before it. Either will be quieter than washing about anyhow. May we make a parable out of that? If you want to have as little pitching and tossing as possible on your voyage, keep a good strong hand on the tiller. Do not let the boat lie in the trough of the sea, but drive her right against the wind, or as near it as she will sail. That is to say, have a definite aim to which you steer, and keep a straight course for that. So Christ says to us here. Be not filled with agitations, but seek the Kingdom. The definite pursuit of the higher good will deaden the lower anxieties. The active energies called out in the daily efforts to bring my whole being under the dominion of the sovereign will of God, will deliver me from a crowd of tumultuous desires and forebodings. I shall have neither leisure nor inclination to be anxious about outward things, when I am engaged and absorbed in seeking the kingdom. So 'bear up and steer right onward,' and it will be smooth sailing.

Sometimes, too, we shall have to try the other tack, and run before the storm, which again will give us the minimum of

commotion. That, being translated, is, 'Let the winds and the waves sometimes have their way.' Yield to them in the sweetness of submission and the strength of resignation. Even when all the stormy winds strive on the surface sea, recognise them as God's messengers 'fulfilling His word.' Submission is not rudderless yielding to the gale, that tosses us on high and sinks us again, as the waves list. This frees us from their power, even while they roll mountains high.

Then keep firm trust in your Father's knowledge; strenuously seek the kingdom. In quietness accept the changeful methods of his unchanging providence. Thus shall your hearts be kept in peace amidst the storm of life, with the happy thought, '_So_ He bringeth them unto their desired haven.'

48-THE EQUIPMENT OF THE SERVANTS

'Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; 36. And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord.'--Luke xii. 35, 36.

These words ought to stir us like the sound of a trumpet. But, by long familiarity, they drop upon dull ears, and scarcely produce any effect. The picture that they suggest, as an emblem of the Christian state, is a striking one. It is midnight, a great house is without its master, the lord of the palace is absent, but expected back, the servants are busy in preparation, each man with his robe tucked about his middle, in order that it may not interfere with his work, his lamp in his hand that he may see to go about his business and his eye ever turned to the entrance to catch the first sign of the coming of his master. Is that like your Christian life? If we are His servants that is what we ought to be, having three things--girded loins, lighted lamps, waiting hearts. These are sharp tests, solemn commandments, but great privileges, for blessedness as well as strength, and calm peace whatever happens, belong to those who obey these injunctions and have these things.

I. The girded loins.

Every child knows the long Eastern dress; and that the first sign that a man is in earnest about any work would be that he should gather his skirts around him and brace himself together.

The Christian service demands concentration. It needs the fixing of all a man's powers upon the one thing, the gathering together of all the strength of one's nature, and binding it with cords until its softest and loosest particles are knit together, and become strong. Why! you can take a handful of cotton-down, and if you will squeeze it tight enough, it will be as hard and as heavy as a bullet and will go as far, and have as much penetrating power and force of impact. The reason why some men hit and make no dint is because they are not gathered together and braced up by a vigorous concentration.

The difference between men that succeed and men that fail in ordinary pursuits is by no means so much intellectual as moral; and there is nothing which more certainly commands any kind of success than giving yourselves with your whole concentrated power to the task in hand. If we succeed in anything we must focus all our power

on it. Only by so doing, as a burning-glass does the sun's rays, shall we set anything on fire.

And can a vigorous Christian life be grown upon other conditions than those which a vigorous life of an ordinary sort demands? Why should it be easier to be a prosperous Christian than to be a prosperous tradesman? Why should there not be the very same law in operation in the realm of the higher riches and possessions that rules in the realm of the lower? 'Gird up the loins _of your mind_', says the Apostle, echoing the Master's word here. The first condition of true service is that you shall do it with concentrated power.

There is another requirement, or perhaps rather another side of the same, expressed in the figure. One reason why a man tucked up his robe around his waist, when he had anything to do that needed all his might, was that it might not catch upon the things that protruded, and so keep him back. Concentration, and what I may call detachment, go together. In order that there shall be the one, there must be the other. They require each other, and are, in effect, but the two sides of the same thing contemplated in regard to hindrances without, or contemplated in regard to the relation of the several parts of a man's nature to each other.

Observe that Luke immediately precedes the text with:--'Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Let your loins be girded about.' That is to say, do not let your affections go straggling anywhere and everywhere, but gather them together, and that you may gather them together tear away the robe from the briars and thorns which catch you as you pass, and gird the long flowing skirts close to yourselves in order that they may not be caught by these hindrances. There is no Christian life worth living except upon condition of wrenching oneself away from dependence upon idolatry of, or longing for, perishable things. The lesson of my text is the same as the solemn lesson which the beloved Apostle sharpened his gentle lips to pronounce when he said, 'If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' 'Gird up your loins,' detach heart, desire, effort from perishable things, and lift them above the fleeting treasures and hollow delusive sparkles of earth's preciousness, and set them on the realities and eternities at God's right hand. 'For where the treasure is, there will the heart be also,' and only that

heart can never be stabbed by disappointment, nor bled to death by losses, whose treasure is as sure as God and eternal as Himself. 'Let your loins be girded about.'

And then there is another thing suggested, which is the consequence of these two. The girding up of the loins is not only the symbol of concentration and detachment, but of that for which the concentration and the detachment are needful--viz. alert readiness for service. The servant who stands before his lord with his belt buckled tight indicates thereby that he is ready to run whenever and wherever he is bid. Our girded loins are not merely in order to give strength to our frame, but in order that, having strength given to our frame, we may be ready for all work. That which is needful for any faithful discharge of any servant's duty is most of all needful for the discharge of the highest duty and the noblest service to the Master who has the right to command all our service.

There are three emblems in Scripture to all of which this metaphor applies. The soldier, before he flings himself into the fight, takes in another hole in his leather belt in order that there may be strength given to his spine, and he may feel himself all gathered together for the deadly struggle, and the Christian soldier has to do the same thing. 'Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.'

The traveller, before he starts upon his long road, girds himself, and gathers his robes round him; and we have to 'run with perseverance the race set before us'; and shall never do it if our garments, however delicately embroidered, are flapping about our feet and getting in our way when we try to run.

The servant has to be succinct, girded together for his work, even as the Master, when He took upon Him the form of a servant, 'took a towel and girded Himself.' His servants have to follow His example, to put aside the needless vesture and brace themselves with the symbol of service. So as soldiers, pilgrims, servants, the condition of doing our work is, girding up the loins.

II. Further, there are to be the burning lamps.

If we follow the analogy of Scripture symbolism, significance belongs to that emblem, making it quite worthy to stand by the side of the former one. You remember Christ's first exhortation in the Sermon on the Mount immediately following the Beatitudes: 'Ye are

the salt of the earth, ye are the light of the world. Men do not light a candle, and put it under a bushel. _Let your light so shine before men_, that they may see your good deeds.' If we apply that key to decipher the hieroglyphics, the burning lamps which the girded servants are to bear in the darkness are the whole sum of the visible acts of Christian people, from which there may flash the radiance of purity and kindness, 'So shines a good deed in a naughty world.' The lamp which the Christian servant is to bear is a character illuminated from above (for it is a kindled lamp, and the light is derived), and streaming out a brilliance into the encircling murky midnight which speaks of hospitable welcome and of good cheer in the lighted hall within.

Now, what is the connection between that exhibition of a lustrous and pure Christian character and the former exhortation? Why this, if you do not gird your loins your lamp will go out. Without the concentrated effort and the continually repeated detachment and the daily renewed 'Lord! here am I, send me,' of the alert and ready servant, there will be no shining of the life, no beauty of the character, but dimness will steal over the exhibition of Christian graces. Just as, often, in the wintry nights, a star becomes suddenly obscured, and we know not why, but some thin vaporous cloud has come between us and it, invisible in itself but enough to blur its brightness, so obscuration will befall the Christian character unless there be continual concentration and detachment. Do you want your lights to blaze? You trim them--though it is a strange mixture of metaphor--you trim them when you gird your loins.

III. Lastly, the waiting hearts.

An attitude of expectancy does not depend upon theories about the chronology of prophecy. It is Christ's will that, till He comes, we know 'neither the day nor the hour.' We may, as I suppose most of us do, believe that we shall die before He comes. Be it so. That need not affect the attitude of expectance, for it comes to substantially the same thing whether Christ comes to us or we go to Him. And the certain uncertainty of the end of our individual connection with this fleeting world stands in the same relation to our hopes as the coming of the Master does, and should have an analogous effect on our lives. Whatever may be our expectation as to the literal coming of the Lord, that future should be very solid, very real, very near us in our thoughts, a habitual subject of contemplation, and ever operative upon our hearts and conduct.

Ah! if we never, or seldom, and then sorrowfully, look forward to the future, and contemplate our meeting with our Master, I do not think there is much chance of our having either our loins girt, or our lamps burning.

One great motive for concentration, detachment, and alertness of service, as well as for exhibiting the bright graces of the Christian character, is to be found in the contemplation of the two comings of the Lord. We should be ever looking back to the Cross, forward to the Throne, and upwards to the Christ, the same on them both. If we have our gathering together with Him ever in view, then we shall be willing to yield all for Him, to withdraw ourselves from everything besides for the excellency of His knowledge; and whatsoever He commands, joyfully and cheerfully to do.

The reason why such an immense and miserable proportion of professing Christians are all unbraced and loose-girt, and their lamps giving such smoky and foul-smelling and coarse radiance, is because they look little back to the Cross, and less forward to the Great White Throne. But these two solemn and sister sights are far more real than the vulgar and intrusive illusions of what we call the present. That is a shadow, they are the realities; that is but a transitory scenic display, like the flashing of the Aurora Borealis for a night in the wintry sky, these are the fixed, unsetting stars that guide our course. Therefore let us turn away from the lying present, with its smallnesses and its falsities, and look backwards to Him that died, forward to Him that is coming. And, as we nourish our faith on the twofold fact, a history and a hope, that Christ has come, and that Christ shall come, we shall find that all devotion will be quickened, and all earnestness stirred to zeal, and the dim light will flame into radiance and glory.

He comes in one of two characters which lie side by side here, as they do in fact. To the waiting servants He comes as the Master who shall gird Himself and go forth and serve them; to those who wait not, He comes as a thief, not only in the suddenness nor the unwelcomeness of His coming, but as robbing them of what they would fain keep, and dragging from them much that they ought never to have had. And it depends upon ourselves whether, we waiting and watching and serving and witnessing for Him, He shall come to us as our Joy, or as our Terror and our Judge.

49-THE SERVANT-LORD

Verily I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth, and serve them.--LUKE xii. 37.

No one would have dared to say that except Jesus Christ. For surely, manifold and wonderful as are the glimpses that we get in the New Testament of the relation of perfect souls in heaven to Him, none of them pierces deeper, rises higher, and speaks more boundless blessing, than such words as these. Well might Christ think it necessary to preface them with the solemn affirmation which always, upon His lips, points, as it were, an emphatic finger to, or underlines that which He is about to proclaim. 'Verily I say unto you,' if we had not His own word for it, we might hesitate to believe. And while we have His own word for it, and do not hesitate to believe, it is not for us to fathom or exhaust, but lovingly and reverently and humbly, because we know it but partially, to try to plumb the unfathomable depth of such words. 'He shall gird Himself, and cause them to sit down to meat; and come forth and serve them.'

I. Then we have, first of all, the wonderful revelation of the Servant-Lord.

For the name of dignity is employed over and over again in the immediate context, and so makes more wonderful the assumption here of the promise of service.

And the words are not only remarkable because they couple so closely together the two antagonistic ideas, as we fancy them, of rule and service, authority and subordination, but because they dwell with such singular particularity of detail upon all the stages of the menial office which the Monarch takes upon Himself. First, the girding, assuming the servant's attire; then the leading of the guests, wondering and silent, to the couches where they can recline; then the coming to them as they thus repose at the table, and the waiting upon their wants and supplying all their need. It reminds us of the wonderful scene, in John's Gospel, where we have coupled together in the same intimate and interdependent fashion the two thoughts of dignity and of service--'Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hand, and that He came from God and went to God,' made this use of His consciousness and of His unlimited and universal dominion, that 'He laid aside His garments,

and took a towel, and girded Himself, and washed the disciples' feet'; thus teaching what our text teaches in still another form, that the highest authority means the lowliest service, that the purpose of power is blessing, that the very sign and mark of dignity is to stoop, and that the crown of the Universe is worn by Him who is the Servant of all.

But beyond that general idea which applies to the whole of the divine dealings and especially to the earthly life of Him who came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, the text sets forth special manifestations of Christ's ministering love and power, which are reserved for heaven, and are a contrast with earth. The Lord who is the Servant girds Himself. That corresponds with the commandment that went before, 'Let your loins be girded,' and to some extent covers the same ground and suggests the same idea. With all reverence, and following humbly in the thoughts that Christ has given us by the words, one may venture to say that He gathers all His powers together in strenuous work for the blessing of His glorified servants, and that not only does the metaphor express for us His taking upon Himself the lowly office, but also the employment of all that He is and has there in the heavens for the blessing of the blessed ones that sit at His table.

Here upon earth, when He assumed the form of a Servant in His entrance into humanity, it was accompanied with the emptying Himself of His glory. In the symbolical incident in John's Gospel, to which I have already referred, He laid aside His garments before He wrapped around Him the badge of service. But in that wondrous service by the glorified Lord there is no need for divesting ere He serves, but the divine glories that irradiate His humanity, and by which He, our Brother, is the King of kings and the Lord of the Universe, are all used by Him for this great, blessed purpose of gladdening and filling up the needs of the perfected spirits that wait, expectant of their food, upon Him. His girding Himself for service expresses not only the lowliness of His majesty and the beneficence of His power, but His use of all which He has and is for the blessing of those whom He keeps and blesses.

I need not remind you, I suppose, how in this same wonderful picture of the Servant-Lord there is taught the perpetual--if we may so say, the increased--lowliness of the crowned Christ. When He was here on earth, He was meek and holy; exalted in the heavens, He is, were it possible, meeker and more lowly still, because He stoops from a loftier elevation. The same loving, gentle, gracious heart, holding

all its treasures for its brethren, is the heart that now is girded with the golden girdle of sovereignty, and which once was girt with the coarse towel of the slave. Christ is for ever the Servant, because He is for ever the Lord of them that trust in Him. Let us learn that service is dominion; that 'he that is chiefest among us' is thereby bound to be 'the servant' and the helper 'of all.'

II. Notice, the servants who are served and serve.

There are two or three very plain ideas, suggested by the great words of my text, in regard to the condition of those whom the Lord thus ministers to, and waits upon. I need not expand them, because they are familiar to us all, but let me just touch them. 'He shall make them to sit down to meat.' The word, as many of you know, really implies a more restful attitude--'He shall make them recline at meat.' What a contrast to the picture of toil and effort, which has just been drawn, in the command, 'Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning, and ye yourselves as men that wait for their Lord!' Here, there must be the bracing up of every power, and the careful tending of the light amid the darkness and the gusts that threaten to blow it out, and every ear is to be listening and every eye strained, for the coming of the Lord, that there may be no unpreparedness or delay in flinging open the gates. But then the tension is taken off and the loins ungirded, for there is no need for painful effort, and the lamps that burn dimly and require tending in the mephitic air are laid aside, and 'they need no candle, for the Lord is the light thereof'; and there is no more intense listening for the first foot-fall of One who is coming, for He has come, and expectation is turned into fellowship and fruition. The strained muscles can relax, and instead of effort and weariness, there is repose upon the restful couches prepared by Him. Threadbare and old as the hills as the thought is, it comes to us toilers with ever new refreshment, like a whiff of fresh air or the gleam of the far-off daylight at the top of the shaft to the miner, cramped at his work in the dark. What a witness the preciousness of that representation of future blessedness as rest to us all bears to the pressure of toil and the aching, weary hearts which we all carry! The robes may flow loose then, for there is neither pollution to be feared from the golden pavement, nor detention from briars or thorns, nor work that is so hard as to be toil or so unwelcome as to be pain. There is rest from labour, care, change, and fear of loss, from travel and travail, from tired limbs and hearts more tired still, from struggle and sin, from all which makes the unrest of life.

Further, this great promise assures us of the supply of all wants that are only permitted to last long enough to make a capacity for receiving the eternal and all-satisfying food which Christ gives the restful servants. Though 'they hunger no more,' they shall always have appetite. Though they 'thirst no more,' they shall ever desire deeper draughts of the fountain of life. Desire is one thing, longing is another. Longing is pain, desire is blessedness; and that we shall want and know ourselves to want, with a want which lives but for a moment ere the supply pours in upon it and drowns it, is one of the blessednesses to which we dare to look forward. Here we live, tortured by wishes, longings, needs, a whole menagerie of hungry mouths yelping within us for their food. There we wait upon the Lord, and He gives a portion in due season.

The picture in the text brings with it all festal ideas of light, society, gladness, and the like, on which I need not dwell. But let me just remind you of one contrast. The ministry of Christ, when He was a servant here upon earth, was symbolised by His washing His disciples' feet, an act which was part of the preparation of the guests for a feast. The ministry of Christ in heaven consists, not in washing, for 'he that is washed is clean every whit' there, and for ever more--but in ministering to His guests that abundant feast for which the service and the lustration of earth were but the preparation. The servant Christ serves us here by washing us from our sins in His own blood, both in the one initial act of forgiveness and by the continual application of that blood to the stains contracted in the miry ways of life. The Lord and Servant serves His servants in the heavens by leading them, cleansed to His table, and filling up every soul with love and with Himself.

But all that, remember, is only half the story. Our Lord here is not giving us a complete view of the retributions of the heavens, He is only telling us one aspect of them. Repose, society, gladness, satisfaction, these things are all true. But heaven is not lying upon couches and eating of a feast. There is another use of this metaphor in this same Gospel, which, at first sight, strikes one as being contradictory to this. Our Lord said: 'Which of you, having a servant ploughing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, go and sit down to meat, and will not rather say unto him, make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink.' These two representations are not contradictory. Put the two halves together like the two pictures in

a stereoscope and, as you look, they will go together into one solid image, of which the one part is the resting at the table of the feast, and the other part is that entrance into heaven is not cessation, but variation, of service. It was dirty, cold, muddy work out there in the field ploughing, and when the man comes back with his soiled, wet raiment and his weary limbs a change of occupation is rest. It is better for him to be set to 'make ready wherewith I may eat and drink,' than to be told to sit down and do nothing.

So the servants are served, and the servants serve. And these two representations are not contradictory, but they fill up the conception of perfect blessedness. For remember, if we may venture to say so, that the very same reason which makes Christ the Lord serve His servants makes the servants serve Christ the Lord. For love, which underlies their relationship, has for its very life-breath doing kindnesses and good to its objects, and we know not whether it is more blessed to the loving heart to minister to, or to be ministered to by, the heart which it loves. So the Servant-Lord and the servants, serving and served, are swayed in both by the same motive and rejoice in the interchange of offices and tokens of love.

III. Mark the earthly service which leads to the heavenly rest.

I have already spoken about Christ's earthly service, and reminded you that there is needed, first of all, that we should partake in His purifying work through His blood and His Spirit that dwells in us, ere we can share in His highest ministrations to His servants in the heavens. But there is also service of ours here on earth, which must precede our receiving our share in the wonderful things promised here. And the nature of that service is clearly stated in the preceding words, 'Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find'--doing what? Trying to make themselves better? Seeking after conformity to His commandments? No! 'Whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching.' It is character rather than conduct, and conduct only as an index of character--disposition rather than deeds--that makes it possible for Christ to be hereafter our Servant-Lord. And the character is more definitely described in the former words. Loins girded, lights burning, and a waiting which is born of love. The concentration and detachment from earth, which are expressed by the girded loins, the purity and holiness of character and life, which are symbolised by the burning lights, and the expectation which desires, and does not shrink from, His coming in His Kingdom to be the Judge of all the earth--these things, being built upon the acceptance of Christ's ministry of washing, fit us

for participation in Christ's ministry of the feast, and make it possible that even we shall be of those to whom the Lord, in that day, will come with gladness and with gifts. 'Blessed are the servants whom the Lord shall find so watching.'

50-SERVANTS AND STEWARDS HERE AND HEREAFTER

'Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching: Verily I shall say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.

Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when He cometh, shall find so doing. 44. Of a truth I say unto you, that He will make him ruler over all that he hath.
--LUKE xii. 37, 43, and 44.

You will, of course, observe that these two passages are strictly parallel in form. Our Lord evidently intends them to run side by side, and to be taken together. The divergences are as significant and instructive as the similarities, and the force of these will be best brought out by just recalling, in a sentence or two, the occasion for the utterance of the second of the two passages which I have taken for my text. When our Lord had finished His previous address and exhortations, Peter characteristically pushed his oar in with the question, 'Do these commandments refer to us, the Apostles, or to all,' the whole body of disciples? Our Lord admits the distinction, recognises in His answer that the 'us,' the Twelve, were nearer Christ than the general mass of His followers, and answers Peter's question by reiterating what He has been saying in a slightly different form. He had spoken before about servants. Now He speaks about 'stewards,' because the Apostles did stand in that relation to the other disciples, as being slaves indeed, like the rest of the household, but slaves in a certain position of authority, by the Master's appointment, and charged with providing the nourishment which, of course, means the religious instruction, of their fellow-servants.

So, notice that the first benediction is upon the 'servants,' the second is upon the servants who are 'stewards.' The first exhortation requires that when the Master comes He shall find the servants watching; the second demands that when He comes He shall find the stewards doing their work. The first promise of reward gives the assurance that the watching servants shall be welcomed into the house, and be waited on by the Master himself; the second gives the assurance that the faithful steward shall be promoted to higher work. We are all servants, and we are all, if we are Christian men, stewards of the manifold grace of God.

So, then, out of these two passages thus brought together, as our Lord intended that they should be, we gather two things: the twofold aspect of life on earth--watchfulness and work; and the twofold hope of life in heaven--rest and rule. 'Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching.' 'Blessed is that steward whom his Lord, when He cometh, shall find'--not merely watching, but--'so doing.'

I. The twofold attitude here enjoined.

The first idea in watchfulness is keeping awake; and the second is looking out for something that is coming. Both these conceptions are intertwined in both our Lord's use of the metaphor of the watching servant, and in the echoes of it which we find abundantly in the Apostolic letters. The first thing is to keep ourselves awake all through the soporific night, when everything tempts to slumber. Even the wise virgins, with trimmed lamps and girt loins, do in some degree succumb to the drowsy influences around them, and like the foolish ones, slumber, though the slumbers of the two classes be unlike. Christian people live in the midst of an order of things which tempts them to close the eyes of their hearts and minds to all the real and unseen glories above and around them, and that might be within them, and to live for the comparatively contemptible and trivial things of this present. Just as when a man sleeps, he loses his consciousness of solid external realities, and passes into a fantastic world of his own imaginations, which have no correspondence in external facts, and will vanish like

'The baseless fabric of a dream,
If but a cock shall crow,'

so the men who are conscious only of this present life and of the things that are seen, though they pride themselves on being wide awake, are, in the deepest of their being, fast asleep, and are dealing with illusions which will pass and leave nought behind, as really as are men who lie dreaming upon couches, and fancy themselves hard at work. Keep awake; that is the first thing; which, being translated into plain English, points just to this, that unless we make a dead lift of continuous effort to keep firm grasp of God and Christ, and of all the unseen magnificences that are included in these two names, as surely as we live we shall lose our hold upon them, and fall into the drugged and diseased sleep in which so many men around us are plunged. It sometimes seems to one

as if the sky above us were raining down narcotics upon us, so profoundly are the bulk of men unconscious of realities, and befooled by the illusions of a dream.

Keep yourselves awake first, and then let the waking, wide-opened eye, be looking forward. It is the very *_differentia_*, so to speak, the characteristic mark and distinction of the Christian notion of life, that it shifts the centre of gravity from the present into the future, and makes that which is to come of far more importance than that which is, or which has been. No man is living up to the height of his Christian responsibilities or privileges unless there stands out before him, as the very goal and aim of his whole life, what can never be realised until he has passed within the veil, and is at rest in the 'secret place of the Most High.' To live for the future is, in one aspect, the very definition of a Christian.

But the text reminds us of the specific form which that future anticipation is to take. It is not for us, as it is for men in the world, to fix our hopes for the future on abstract laws of the progress of humanity, or the evolution of the species, or the gradual betterment of the world, and the like. All these may be true: I say nothing about them. But what we have to fill our future with is that 'that same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go.' It is much to be lamented that curious chronological speculations have so often discredited that great central hope of the Church, which is properly altogether independent of them; and that, because people have got befogged in interpreting such symbols as beasts, and horses, and trumpets, and seals, and the like, the Christian Church as a whole should so feebly be holding by that great truth, without which, as it seems to me, the truth which many of us are tempted to make the exclusive one, loses half its significance. No man can rightly understand the whole contents of the blessed proclamation, 'Christ has come,' unless he ends the sentence with 'and Christ will come.' Blessed is 'that servant whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching.'

Of course I need not remind you that much for which that second coming of the Lord is precious, and an object of hope to the world and the Church, is realised by the individual in the article of death. Whether Christ comes to the world or I go to Christ, the important thing is that there result union and communion, the reign of righteousness and peace, the felicities of the heavenly state. And so, dear brethren, just because of the uncertainty that drapes

the future, and which we are often tempted to make a reason for dismissing the anticipation of it from our minds, we ought the more earnestly to give heed that we keep that end ever before us, and whether it is reached by His coming to us, or our going to Him, anticipate, by the power of realising faith grasping the firm words of Revelation, the unimaginable, and--until it is experienced--the incommunicable blessedness revealed in these great, simple words, 'So shall we ever be with the Lord.'

But, then, look at the second of the aspects of Christian duty which is presented here, that watchfulness is to lead on to diligent work.

The temptation for any one who is much occupied with the hope of some great change and betterment in the near future is to be restless and unable to settle down to his work, and to yield to distaste of the humdrum duties of every day. If some man that kept a little chandler's shop in a back street was expecting to be made a king to-morrow, he would not be likely to look after his poor trade with great diligence. So we find in the Apostle Paul's second letter--that to the Thessalonians--that he had to encounter, as well as he could, the tendency of hope to make men restless, and to insist upon the thought--which is the same lesson as is taught us by the second of our texts--that if a man hoped, then he had with quietness to work and eat his own bread, and not be shaken in mind.

'Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when He cometh, shall find so doing.' It may seem humble work to serve out hunches of bread and pots of black broth to the family of slaves, when the steward is expecting the coming of the master of the house, and his every nerve is tingling with anticipation. But it is steady work, and it is blessed work. It is better that a man should be found doing the homeliest duty as the outcome of his great expectations of the coming of his Master, than that he should be fidgeting and restless and looking only at that thought till it unfits him for his common tasks. Who was it who, sitting playing a game of chess, and being addressed by some scandalised disciple with the question, 'What would you do if Jesus Christ came, and you were playing your game?' answered, 'I would finish it'? The best way for a steward to be ready for the Master, and to show that he is watching, is that he should be 'found so doing' the humble task of his stewardship. The two women that were squatting on either side of the millstone, and helping each other to whirl the handle round in that night were in the right place, and the one that was taken had no cause to regret that she was not more religiously employed. The watchful servant

should be a working servant.

II. And now I have spent too much time on this first part of my discourse; so I must condense the second. Here are two aspects of the heavenly state, rest and rule.

'Verily I say unto you, He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.' I do not know that there is a more wonderful promise, with more light lying in its darkness, in all Scripture than that. Jesus Christ continues in the heavens to be found in 'the form of a servant.' As here He girded Himself with the towel of humiliation in the upper room, so there He girds Himself with the robes of His imperial majesty, and uses all His powers for the nourishment and blessedness of His servants. His everlasting motto is, 'I am among you as one that serveth.' On earth His service was to wash His disciples' feet; in heaven the pure foot contracts no stain, and needs no basin: but in heaven He still serves, and serves by spreading a table, and, as a King might do at some ceremonial feasts, waiting on the astonished guests.

I say nothing about all the wonderful ideas that gather round that familiar but never-to-be-worn-into-commonplace emblem of the feast. Repose, in contrast with the girded loins and the weary waiting of the midnight watch; nourishment, and the satisfaction of all desires; joy, society--all these things, and who knows how much more, that we shall have to get there to understand, lie in that metaphor, 'Blessed is that servant' who is served by the Master, and nourished by His presence?

But modern popular presentations of the future life have far too predominantly dwelt upon that side of it. It is a wonderful confession of 'the weariness, the fever, and the fret,' the hunger and loneliness of earthly experience, that the thought of heaven as the opposite of all these things should have almost swallowed up the other thought with which our Lord associates it here. He would not have us think only of repose. He unites with that representation, so fascinating to us weary and heavy-laden, the other of administrative authority. He will set him 'over all that he hath.'

The steward gets promotion. 'On twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel'--these are to be the seats, and that is to be the occupation of the Twelve. 'Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things.' The relation between earthly faithfulness and heavenly service is the same in

essence as that between the various stages of our work here. The reward for work here is more work; a wider field, greater capacities. And what depths of authority, of new dignity, of royal supremacy, lie in those solemn and mysterious words, I know not--'He will set him over all that he hath.' My union with Christ is to be so close as that all His is mine and I am master of it. But at all events this we can say, that faithfulness here leads to larger service yonder; and that none of the aptitudes and capacities which have been developed in us here on earth will want a sphere when we pass yonder.

So let watchfulness lead to faithfulness, and watchful faithfulness and faithful watchfulness will lead to repose which is activity, and rule which is rest.

51-FIRE ON EARTH

'I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled!'--LUKE xii. 49.

We have here one of the rare glimpses which our Lord gives us into His inmost heart, His thought of His mission, and His feelings about it. If familiarity had not weakened the impression, and dulled the edge, of these words, how startling they would seem to us! 'I am come'--then, He was, before He came, and He came by His own voluntary act. A Jewish peasant says that He is going to set the world on fire--and He did it. But the triumphant certitude and consciousness of a large world-wide mission is all shadowed in the next clause. I need not trouble you with questions as to the precise translation of the words that follow. There may be differences of opinion about that, but I content myself with simply suggesting that a fair representation of the meaning would be, 'How I wish that it was already kindled!' There is a longing to fulfil the purpose of His coming and a sense that something has to be done first, and what that something is, our Lord goes on to say in the next verse. This desirable end can only be reached through a preliminary painful ordeal, 'but I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished.' If I might use such an incongruous figure, the fire that is to flash and flame through the world emerges from the dark waters of that baptism. Our Lord goes on still further to dwell upon the consequence of His mission and of His sufferings. And that, too, shadows the first triumphant thought of the fire that He was to send on earth. For, the baptism being accomplished, and the fire therefore being set at liberty to flame through the world, what follows? Glad reception? Yes, and angry rejection. Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, nay! but rather division.' The fire, the baptism, and the sword; these three may sum up our Lord's vision of the purpose, means, and mingled result of His mission. But it is only with regard to the first of these that I wish to speak now.

I. The fire which Christ longed to cast upon the earth.

Now, opinions differ as to what is meant by this fire. Some would have it to mean the glow of love kindled in believing hearts, and others explain it by other human emotions or by the transformation effected in the world by Christ's coming. But while these things are the results of the fire kindled on earth, that fire itself means not

these effects, but the cause of them. It is _brought_ before it kindles a flame on earth.

He does not kindle it simply in humanity, but He launches it into the midst of humanity. It is something from above that He flings down upon the earth. So it is not merely a quickened intelligence, a higher moral life, or any other of the spiritual and religious transformations which are effected in the world by the mission of Christ that is primarily to be kept in view here, but it is the Heaven-sent cause of these transformations and that flame. If we catch the celestial fire, we shall flash and blaze, but the fire which we catch is not originated on earth. In a word it is God's Divine Spirit which Christ came to communicate to the world.

I need not remind you, I suppose, how such an interpretation of the words before us is in entire correspondence with the symbolism both of the Old and New Testament. I do not dwell upon the former at all, and with regard to the latter I need only remind you of the great words by which the Forerunner of the Lord set forth His mighty work, in contrast with the superficial cleansing which John himself had to proclaim. 'I indeed baptize you with water, but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.' I need only point to the Pentecost, and the symbol there, of which the central point was the cloven tongues, which symbolised not only the speech which follows from all deep conviction, but the descent from above of the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of burning, on each bowed and willing head. With these analogies to guide us, I think we shall not go far wrong if we see in the words of my text our Lord's great symbolical promise that the issue of His mission shall be to bring into the heart of the world, so to speak, and to lodge in the midst of humanity which is one great whole, a new divine influence that shall flame and burn through the world.

So, then, my text opens out into thoughts of the many-sided applications of this symbol. What hopes for the world and ourselves are suggested by that fire? Let us stick to the symbol closely, and we shall then best understand the many-sided blessings that flash and coruscate in the gift of the Spirit.

It is the gift of life. No doubt, here and there in Scripture, fire stands for a symbol of destroying power. But that is a less frequent use than that in which it stands as a symbol of life. In a very real sense life is warmth and death is cold. Is not respiration a kind of combustion? Do not physiologists tell us that? Is not the centre of

the system and the father of all physical life that great blazing sun which radiates heat? And is not this promise, 'I will send fire on the earth,' the assurance that into the midst of our death there shall come the quick energy of a living Spirit which shall give us to possess some shadow of the immortal Being from which itself flows?

But, beyond that, there is another great promise here, of a quickening energy. I use the word 'quickenings,' not in the sense of life-giving, but in the sense of stimulating. We talk about 'the flame of genius,' the 'fervour of conviction,' about 'fiery zeal,' about 'burning earnestness,' and the like; and, conversely, we speak of 'cold caution,' and 'chill indifference,' and so on. Fire means love, zeal, swift energy. This, then, is another side of this great promise, that into the torpor of our sluggish lives He is waiting to infuse a swift Spirit that shall make us glow and flame with earnestness, burn with love, aspire with desire, cleave to Him with the fervour of conviction, and be, in some measure, like those mighty spirits that stand before the Throne, the seraphim that burn with adoration and glow with rapture. A fire that shall destroy all our sluggishness, and change it into swift energy of glad obedience, may be kindled in our spirits by the Holy Spirit whom Christ gives.

Still farther, the promise of my text sets forth, not only life-giving and stimulating energy, but purifying power. Fire cleanses, as many an ancient ritual recognised. For instance, the thought that underlay even that savage 'passing the children through the fire to Moloch' was, that thus passed, humanity was cleansed from its stains. And that is true. Every man must be cleansed, if he is cleansed at all, by the touch of fire. If you take a piece of foul clay, and push it into a furnace, as it warms it whitens, and you can see the stains melting off it as the fire exercises its beneficent and purifying mastery. So the promise to us is of a great Spirit that will come, and by communicating His warmth will dissipate our foulness, and the sins that are enwrought into the substance of our natures will exhale from the heated surface, and disappear. The ore is flung into the blast furnace, and the scum rises to the surface, and may be ladled off, and the pure stream, cleansed because it is heated, flows out without scoriae or ash. All that was 'fuel for the fire' is burned; and what remains is more truly itself and more precious. And so, brother, you and I have, for our hope of cleansing, that we shall be passed through the fire, and dwell in the everlasting burnings of a Divine Spirit and a changeless love.

The last thought suggested by the metaphor is that it promises not only life-giving, stimulating, purifying, but also transforming and assimilating energy. For every lump of coal in your scuttles may be a parable; black and heavy, it is cast into the fire, and there it is turned into the likeness of the flame which it catches and itself begins to glow, and redden, and crackle, and break into a blaze. That is like what you and I may experience if we will. The incense rises in smoke to the heavens when it is heated: and our souls aspire and ascend, an odour of a sweet smell, acceptable to God, when the fire of that Divine Spirit has loosed them from the bonds that bind them to earth, and changed them into His own likeness, We all are 'changed from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord.'

So I think if you take these plain teachings of this symbol you learn something of the operations of that Divine Spirit to which our Lord pointed in the great words of my text.

II. And now I have a second thought to suggest--viz., what Christ had to do before His longing could be satisfied.

He longed, but the longing wish was not able to bring that on which it was fixed. He had come to send this divine fire upon the earth; but there was something that stood in the way; and something needed to be done as a preliminary before the ultimate purpose of His coming could be accomplished. What that was, as I have already tried to point out, the subsequent verse tells us. I do not need, nor would it be congruous with my present purpose, to comment upon it at any length. We all know what He meant by the 'baptism,' that He had to be baptized with, and what were the dark waters into which He had to pass, and beneath which His sacred head had to be plunged. We all know that by the 'baptism' He meant His passion and His Cross. I do not dwell, either, upon the words of pathetic human shrinking with which His vision of the Cross is here accompanied, but I simply wish to signalise one thing, that in the estimation of Jesus Christ Himself it was not in His power to kindle this holy fire in humanity until He had died for men's sins. That must come first; the Cross must precede Pentecost. There can be no Divine Spirit in His full and loftiest powers poured out upon humanity until the Sacrifice has been offered on the Cross for the sins of the world. We cannot read all the deep reasons in the divine nature, and in human receptivity, which make that sequence absolutely necessary, and that preliminary indispensable. But this, at least, we know, that the Divine Spirit whom Christ gives uses as His instrument and sword the completed

revelation which Christ completed in His Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension, and that, until His weapon was fashioned, He could not come.

That thought is distinctly laid down in many places in Scripture, to which I need not refer in more than a word. For instance, the Apostle John tells us that, when our Lord spoke in a cognate figure about the rivers of water which should flow from them who believed on Him, He spake of that Holy Spirit who 'was not given because that Jesus was not yet glorified.' We remember the words in the upper chamber, 'If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart I will send Him unto you.' But enough for us that He recognised the necessity, and that here His baptism of suffering comes into view, not so much for what it was itself, the sacrifice for the world's sin, as for that to which it was the necessary preliminary and introduction, the bestowment on humanity of the gift of the Divine Spirit. The old Greek legend of the Titan that stole fire from heaven tells us that he brought it to earth in a reed. Our Christ brings the heavenly fire in the fragile, hollow reed of His humanity, and the reed has to be broken in order that the fire may blaze out. 'How I wish that it were kindled! but I have a baptism to be baptized with.'

III. Lastly, what the world has to do to receive the fire.

Take these triumphant words of our Lord about what He was to do after His Cross, and contrast with them the world as it is to-day, ay! and the Church as it is to-day. What has become of the fire? Has it died down into grey ashes, choked with the cold results of its own former flaming power? Was Jesus Christ deceiving Himself? was He cherishing an illusion as to the significance and permanence of the results of His work in the world? No! There is a difference between B.C. and A.D. which can only be accounted for by the fulfilment of the promise in my text, that He did bring fire and set the world aflame. But the condition on which that fire will burn either through communities, society, humanity, or in an individual life, is trust in Him that gives it, and cleaving to Him, and the appropriate discipline. 'This spake He of the Holy Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive.'

And they that do not believe upon Him--what of them? The fire is of no advantage to them. Some of you do as people in Swiss villages do where there is a conflagration--you cover over your houses with incombustible felts or other materials, and deluge them

with water, in the hope that no spark may light on you. There is no way by which the fire can do its work on us except our opening our hearts for the Firebringer. When He comes He brings the vital spark with Him, and He plants it on the hearth of our hearts. Trust in Him, believe far more intensely than the most of Christian people of this day do in the reality of the gift of supernatural divine life from Jesus Christ. I do believe that hosts of professing Christians have no firm grip of this truth, and, alas! very little verification of it in their lives. Your heavenly Father gives the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. 'Covet earnestly the best gifts'; and take care that you do not put the fire out--'quench not the Holy Spirit,' as you will do if you 'fulfil the lusts of the flesh.' I remember once being down in the engine-room of an ocean-going steamer. There were the furnaces, large enough to drive an engine of five or six thousand horsepower. A few yards off there were the refrigerators, with ice hanging round the spigots that were put in to test the temperature. Ah! that is like many a Christian community, and many an individual Christian. Here is the fire; there is the frost. Brethren, let us seek to be baptized with fire, lest we should be cast into it, and be consumed by it.

END OF VOL. I.