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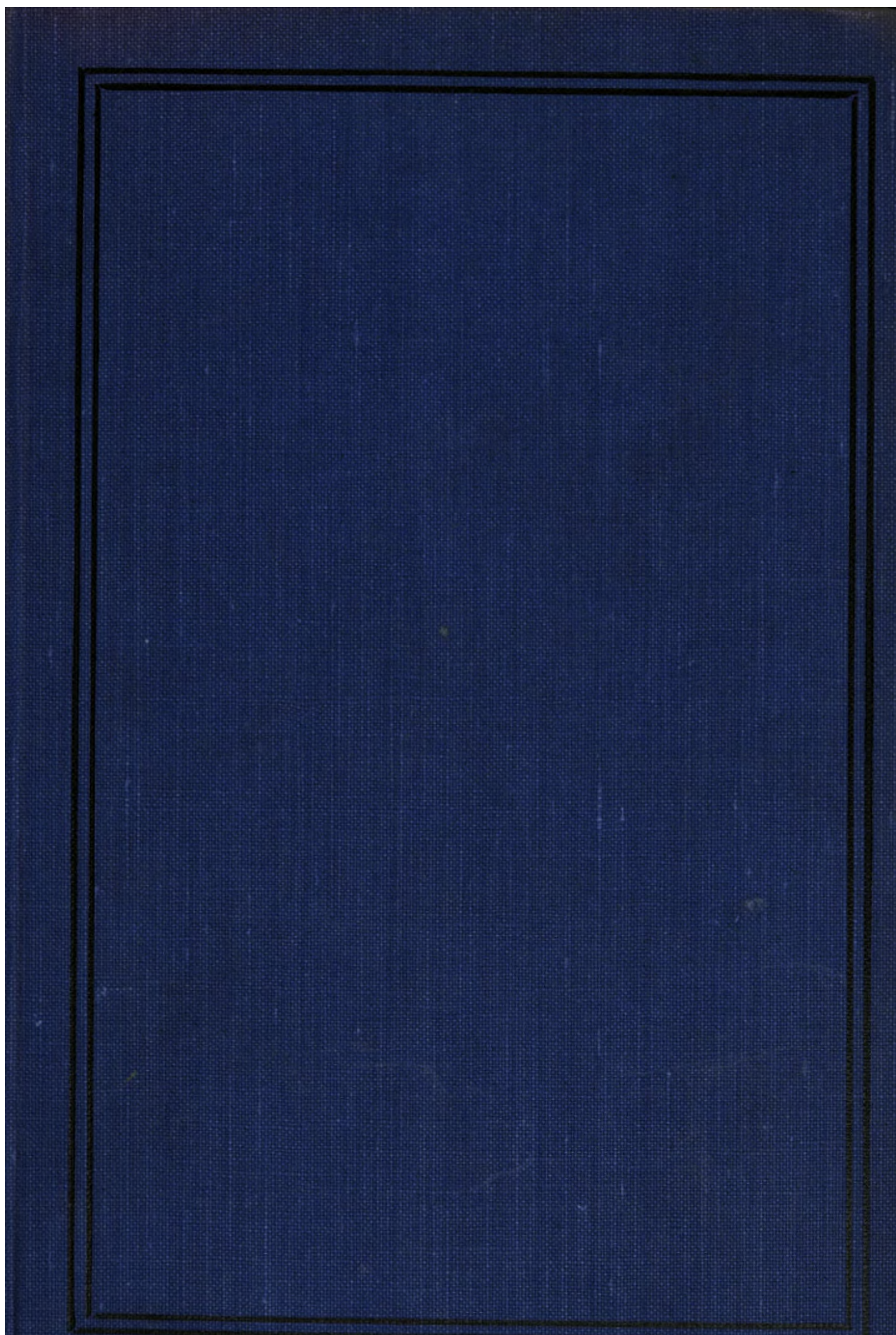
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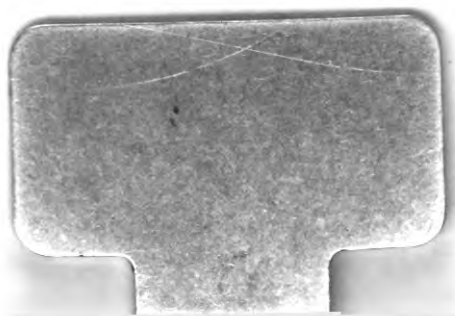
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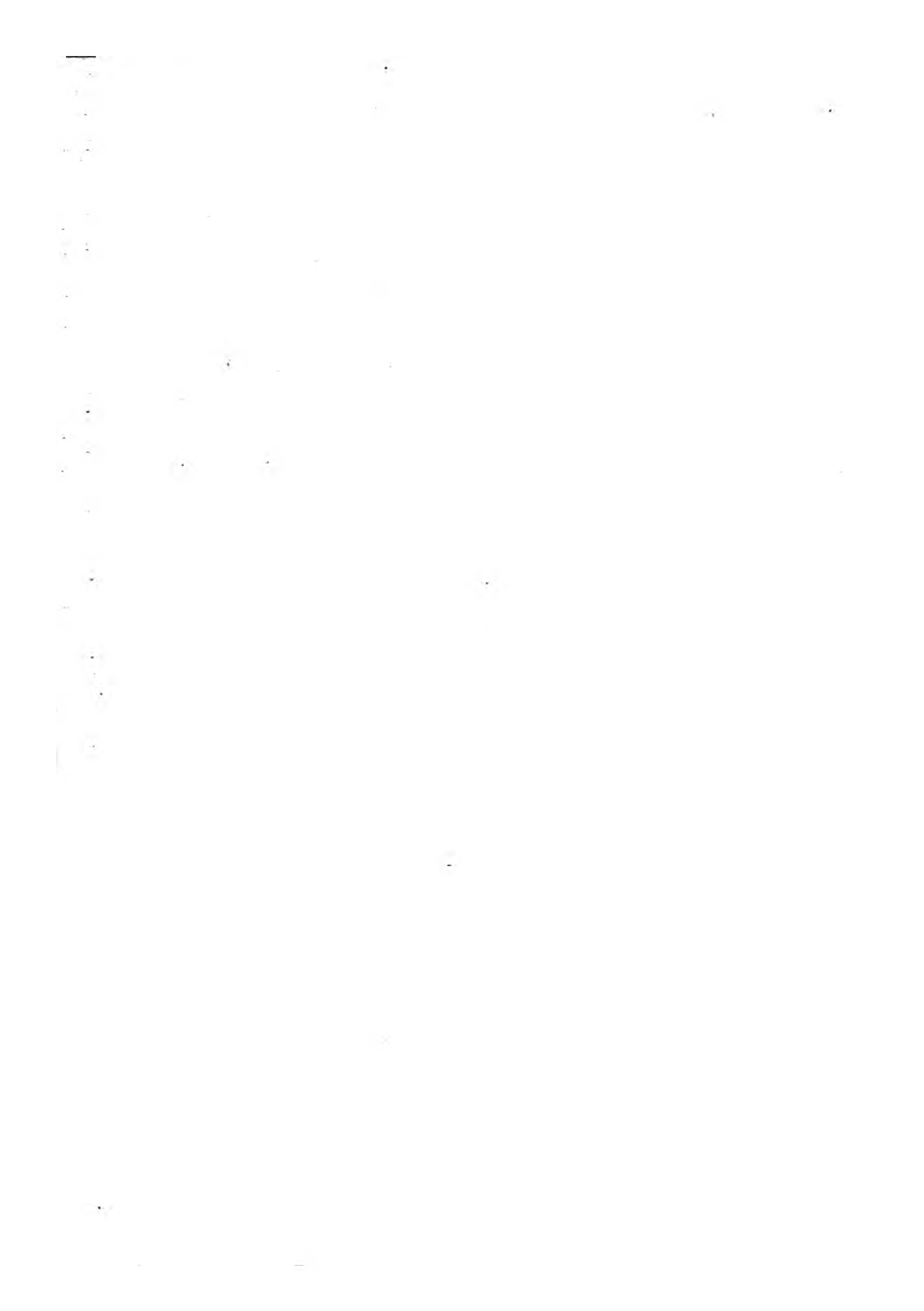




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Dr. J. STUART HOLDEN

SOME OLD TESTAMENT PARABLES

BEING BIBLE READINGS GIVEN
AT PORTSTEWART
AND ADDRESSES ON
New Testament Principles

BY

Dr. J. STUART HOLDEN

Late of St. Paul's, Portman Square, London.

Author of

"A Voice for God," "The Holy Gospels Opened," etc.



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Dedication

This small book of Addresses, some of which were given at the Portstewart Convention in 1934, is dedicated to the writer's old and valued friend,

MR. STEPHENS RICHARDSON

the Chairman of the Convention, also to many other friends in Ireland whom he loved, and amongst whom he had spent many happy days of service in the past.

Foreword

I COUNT it a great privilege to be asked to write this brief Foreword, in memory of my old friend, JOHN STUART HOLDEN.

We little thought as we heard his Bible Readings and sat under his ministry at Portstewart Convention in 1934, that we were hearing for the last time, that voice of melody and charm. The first four addresses given in this book were his last public utterances in connection with his long years of service in Conventions for the Deepening of Spiritual Life, for two months later he suddenly became ill in his home in Scotland and passed away in his sleep.

I had known him for over thirty-six years, for here in Ulster in his undergraduate days he identified himself in Mission work with other young men of kindred spirit, and gathered around him abiding friends.

We watched with interest the circle of his influence ever widening, till his spiritual ministry, by speech and pen, blessed souls to the uttermost parts of the earth.

His greatest joy at that last Portstewart Convention was the meeting of a number of men and women, who personally thanked him for his ministry, and told him that they had been converted over thirty years previously during his different missions held in Bangor, Belfast, Londonderry, Newcastle, Portrush, etc.

I have been asked to state that these four Bible Readings given at Portstewart and the other addresses were not prepared for printing by Dr. Holden, but

are taken from his notes, so that any literary defects must be overlooked. But this book reveals the man, his culture, his beautiful English, and his choice of the right word.

His ministry was not, however, in word only, but in power and in loyalty to the central and saving truths of the Gospel "once delivered."

His passionate love for Christ, and his knowledge of the Bible were wonderful. In the first address on the Parable of the Ewe Lamb, we read his burning, scorching words, "Sin without excuse, that narcotic power that paralyses and leads to the road of delusion and ends in death."

In the story of "the Vineyard" he challenges us to examine the quality of our life—"It is faith which we affirm but not what we really are?"

The picture of "the Potter" reveals God's infinite patience towards the clay "till the love and power of the Divine Potter makes a vessel unto honour and meet for the Master's use."

In the parable of "the Bramble King" we have Romans 6 and 8 illustrated. Convention teaching is here set forth under the figure of the trees. The Bramble life claims dominion over man's soul, instead of the True Vine, in whom alone we can enjoy the fulness of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus.

It was a kindly thought of Dr. Holden towards the Portstewart Convention to wish this book to be dedicated to its Chairman.

I trust that these inspiring messages may be borne on the wings of prayer and bless many an Ulster and Empire home.

R. H. STEPHENS RICHARDSON.

DRUMLYN,
MOYALLON, PORTADOWN,
Co. DOWN.

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OLD TESTAMENT PARABLES

CHAPTER I

The Ewe Lamb

"Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" (Rom. 2. 1).

THE interpretation of Nathan's parable of the rich man and the poor man's ewe lamb is to be found in Romans 2. 1: "Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things." It is a parable of life—of sin without excuse. "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings" is an old word of predictive wisdom which gives an insight into the circumstances under which this parable came to be uttered by the man who uttered it.

Not much is known of Nathan the prophet, but evidently he was diligent in his business. He took it with the seriousness proper to it. He lived under the burden of the Word of God. He had long before this put himself under the discipline of its demands, and had not flinched from it. He had grown in moral

stature (as men always do) by his fidelities. He watched his opportunities. He proved himself trustworthy by his manner of discharging duties too many and too small in themselves to be recorded, except upon the living tablet of his own character: the record that is always unavoidable, and always of deadly accuracy. He had become courageous, robust, resolute, and independent of spirit, by facing up to opposition. His call to the prophetic office was confirmed to him by his experience of God's protection of His servants, and His provision for them. He was bold before men because in the secret place he had bowed before God.

There is a school of the prophets. Its foundation is the oldest in the world. Its courses are life-courses: they are not academic, but practical: its products are not prophecies, but prophets. And diligence is one of the conditions of membership. Nathan was a member of the school of the prophets. No man begins by having the cool fearlessness essential to a messenger of unwelcome tidings to a powerful king. He acquires it in the school of the prophets, and on the field of duty. And it was because Nathan was qualified by his diligence as a prophet to carry out the high ideals and aims of the office, that he was sent to stand before this king.

Servants of the Truth

It is not an easy thing to be a prophet. Prophets have always been unpopular, espec-

ially with priests, whose arrogant pretensions, and with kings whose high-handed autocracies, they challenge. Prophets are servants of the truth, and by the same token are unwelcome to those who have reasons of their own for evading encounters with the truth. They are not, primarily, predictors, but proclaimers. Their first concern is not with things to come, but with things that are here. To them the present stands related both to the past and to the future, and is the supreme importance. Prophets speak to men with the authority of those to whom God has first spoken. They are the articulate moral conscience of society. Upon their fearless fidelity more hangs than upon any other feature, or any other force in the life of any people. No wonder the wish was once fervently expressed, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets." They might—and should be: and it is because they are not that all kinds of evil growths flourish unchecked and uncontested in the world. Lonely, misunderstood, derided people—these prophets of the true order are never weaklings: they were baptised into holy courage and self-effacing boldness, and utter carelessness of personal consequence! Contemptuously unafraid when the issue is the fear of God, or the favour of men! Diligent as those who realise that time and strength are not their own, that they are trusted, put in trust with the Word of the Lord: that they are His agents. Nathan was such an one.

All this is the background of the man who stands before the king, and speaks this parable. To him kingly sin was just sin. That sin is no less hideous when its setting is a palace than when its setting is a slum. The head of gold does not dazzle nor blind him to the feet of clay! A king's frown cannot silence his voice, nor tone down his pungent speech to harmless, toothless platitudes. He has nothing to lose—such a man never has—but he has everything to gain by being simply faithful to his Master and to his mission.

A Sordid Story

In Chapter 11 of the Second Book of Samuel we have the circumstances which led up to the prophet's denunciation. It is all a sorry story of how far off the course a good man may go when he drops the pilot, and lets passion assume the bridge. There is not one redeeming feature in David's liason with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. From the moment of his temptation (for which he alone was responsible) to the planning and carrying out of the murder of Uriah, it is a story of sordid intrigue by devilish cunning, hot-blooded lust and cold-blooded depravity. This is no grand passion (as of which poets have sung) sweeping every defence before it by the sheer intensity of its flaming tide, which, if not excusable, has at least, a barbaric beauty of its own, an elemental greatness which shames and scorns secrecy and subterfuge. It is a furtive,

ugly, unclean thing, deceitful and hateful and unrelieved by a single tender or noble feature. Had it been just an episode in which David and Bathsheba themselves were alone concerned, it might have been left at that. They knew what they were doing: they were not deceiving one another: and under the tender influences of the Spirit of God might each have said to the God Whose they were, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." And He would have had mercy upon them.

"For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind.
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind."

It would have been between them and Him, a shared and closely-guarded secret, such as every man who worships Him has hidden deep amongst his sacred memories of forgiven mistakes and lapses.

But it was far other with David. He stopped at nothing in gratifying his own selfishness, and then in trying to deceive the man he had wronged in the cruellest fashion. The cynical libertine in him determined to continue the indulgence he had begun, at all costs. Nothing, nothing at all should stand in his way. To clothe his conduct with conventional respectability he stooped to simply unbelievable depths. He actually murdered his victim! And it seemed as though, with that, the incident is closed. His conscience apparently did not disturb him. Calculated sensuality had put

it to sleep—as it always does. Until Nathan confronts him, and tells him this story—the most pitiful and appealing of all the Old Testament parables. Its aim is to awaken his slumbering conscience. And it does.

Sin Without Excuse

Look at its exquisitely-drawn picture of a rich man and his poor neighbour. In contrast to his well-filled folds the poor man has just one lamb, a pet lamb, upon which he lavished affection, as upon a child. It was the joy of the home. The rich man is hospitable (in a land where hospitality is counted a virtue), but he is unutterably selfish. He is quite ready to entertain a traveller—at some one else's expense! To save his own flocks for the market he ruthlessly lays hands upon the poor man's solitary ewe lamb, and the poor man cannot resist his powerful neighbour—probably his landlord. He is possibly a good-natured man at heart, but he is over canny! He loves himself first, last, and always. He wants a reputation for kindness to strangers, but he does not want to pay for it. So the poor man's single treasure, his pet lamb, is killed and dressed for the feast. And he thinks he is making the best of both worlds—of the world of the spirit where friendliness, generosity, disinterested hospitality, and the like, are sterling realities; and of the other world where flocks and herds and business smartness, and the ability to get what one wants in

the lowest markets are the things that count. He is ready to do evil to another, without any compunction, and actually does it that good may come of it to himself. And he gets away with it!

Little wonder that as he listens to the parable—not knowing it to be a parable—David's sense of justice is outraged, and he demands punishment and reparation for such an indefensible wrong perpetrated with such shameless effrontery. In an abstract proposition of right and wrong he has not lost his perceptions. He is righteously indignant. Such conduct is not to be tolerated. The sordid meanness of that rich man is beyond condonation. There can be only one answer to the question the parable raises, and he frames it in no measured terms. And then the forked lightning smites him. "*Thou art the man!*" He is judged out of his own mouth, and we cannot withhold from him a measure of pity. The exquisite pain of it all! Humbled to the dust: his self-complacency shattered: his delusion at an end. Truth grabs with rough hands at the ends of naked nerves. Punishment itself, however severe, can only be as an anodyne to that mental suffering. And punished his sin will be—its punishment was born with it. But—and here is the point of the parable, his sin is inexcusable because he judges others in the light of his knowledge, while never applying that knowledge to his own actions. It is the sin of not being, and not doing, though

knowing! Truth acknowledged, but unapplied! Sin covered! Others judged! That is the record of the man who is without excuse.

Determined Selfishness

How far is that record ours? For this is a parable of life in every age, and very certainly in this our day. Its point is not in its warning against sexual vice, nor lying, nor treachery—nor even against murder. As a matter of fact they carry their own warning on their faces. It is rather that of all forms of sin against the law of God, and the rights of men; this is the inexcusable sin, to judge others while failing to judge ourselves: to condemn in others what we allow in ourselves: to believe truth which we do not apply to ourselves.

Whatever its form may be, sin, at its root, is just wilful, determined selfishness. And selfishness is strong enough (in David, or any other man) to swamp spiritual perceptions, and to degrade a man's beliefs below the moral level of the blackest unbelief. It literally stupifies the soul. Its narcotic power paralyses the nerve of detection, and renders a man quite amazingly callous about himself. He becomes infatuated with himself, and imprisoned within himself, and pathetically deluded about himself, pathetically, because the road of delusion leads on to the city of death. Is that what is wrong with some of us? Is this what makes us such a sorry spectacle to men and angels as professing witnesses to the Lord Christ?

Is this what governs the sinister influences our personality and our names carry to those who know us as Christians? It is one of the most inconceivable things in life, one of its really awesome mysteries that we are so constituted as to be able to recognise divine truth, to be aware of its significance and its absoluteness, and at the same time to give not the slightest heed to it. To hold it, in New Testament language, "in unrighteousness." To pay it lip service while withholding from it life-homage. To bow to its sovereignty mentally, and to bow it out of our lives morally. In nothing so much as in this sinister ability to dissociate practice from belief is the devastating power of self-centredness displayed. There is something in the "letter" of truth, Jesus says, that has a deadening effect—that is, in truth unapplied to life as its director and arbiter. It literally "killeth." Under its toxic influence sensibility dies, and fundamental sincerity and humility and common decency perish. Truth that is not attended to is like manna that is uneaten. It breeds deadly disease. You may look upon truth with complacent admiration until you are blinded by it, or rather by your indifference to it—as when men on the high Alps are smitten by snow blindness.

Condemnation of Others

And when it comes to judging another, as David so readily did; to being censorious of

others, we are in no better case than he was. In every community there are unholy experts at this unholy business, with all too-ready tongues advertising what they regard as unbecoming actions—and worse—on the part of others. And in every case they are themselves of all people, the least morally justified, the least morally competent for the rôle they assume. When you turn the light upon another's conduct, with glib tongue, don't you know you are only calling attention to your own pathetic failure to turn it upon yourself? Your condemnation of others is re-active and reflective. The artist paints his own portrait every time he paints the portrait of another. His picture, whoever may be its subject, discloses what manner of man he himself is. So you, when you pass your garrulous, infallible judgments on others are declaring yourself. When you disparage what others do as not being good enough, or condemn it as being incorrigibly bad, you are simply publishing your own pitiful deficiencies and shortcomings. Did you never read that "by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned"? Have you never stopped to listen to the reverberating echo of your facile criticisms, your voluble denunciations, your ready censures, your empty disapprovals—"Thou art the man"? Do you never pray, "Judge *me*, O Lord"? Can you stand otherwise than with a crushed heart before the word that interprets the parable:

"Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself: for thou that judgest doest the same things"?

Upon David the influence of the parable was seen in the miracle of a broken and contrite heart. The hallmark of a good man is not that he is always right, but that he is always willing to be put right when he does wrong. And he was a good man of this sort. At once upon his shamed confession "I have sinned against the Lord" Nathan gave to him this priceless word of forgiveness and assurance, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." Like Tennyson's unhorsed knight, who said,

"Betwixt the stirrup and the ground
Mercy I sought, and mercy found."

His inexcusable sin was blotted out in the instant of his confession. And for the rest he walked softly all his days, offering the acceptable "sacrifices of a broken spirit."

Is that to be the influence of the word of the Lord upon you? For you are in this picture. You know you are. And you are in the covenant of mercy too. There is immediate and complete cleansing in the blood of Jesus Christ from the meanest of your sins, and from all sin! And a new beginning at His Cross, the beginning of a chastened, humbled, self-committed life: "a life in every thought renewed, and filled with Love Divine;" a life brought into liberating "captivity to the obedience of Christ;" a life

whose inspired loyalty shall obliterate the shame of its forgiven lapses, and glorify the Name it once defamed; a life indwelt by the restraining and constraining Spirit of Christ Jesus. And the accepted time is NOW!

CHAPTER II

The Vineyard

"Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Me?" (Jer. 2. 21).

STRANGELY enough this parable was spoken at a time of national prosperity and widespread affluence. Things were going really well in Judah. Trade was good. Harvests were plentiful. The fighting-strength of the nation appeared to guarantee its security against envious enemies. True, there were war-clouds on the horizon, but they caused no anxiety to a nation quite definitely "on top of things," a nation that being quite confident in its prosperity said (as nations and individuals too, are apt to say!) it would never be moved! For it seemed as though it were so entirely and unmistakably and irrevocably God's favourite as to be independent even of His authority. He, surely, was on their side. It never occurred to them to wonder if they were on His side. Their opulence attested His approval of them—that, at least, might be taken for granted. That is what was taken for granted! It is hard enough for a prophet to secure a hearing when a people is in trouble and depressed and woe-

stricken. But to proclaim that all is not as it should be; to declare impending upheaval, and an on-coming invasion, and a nation-wide devastation—the rigours and suffering of which should be nothing less than the judgment of God upon unseen evils corroding that people's life; to warn them of a "destruction that wasteth at noonday"—when the sun of prosperity is shining and warming men to slumbrous moral indolence, and worse—is to invite unpopularity: "Kill-joy," "Disturber of the peace," "Wet blanket," "Death's head," "Pessimist!"—these are only some of the names sure to be hurled at him, with the equivalent of brick-bats to follow.

A Fiery Experience

Yet, this is just what Isaiah did. He had seen things too clearly in the light of Him Whose glory filled the Temple, and had himself come through a fiery experience too undeniable and too searching to allow him to be silent when terrible disaster was about to overtake the land. And it surely was. For things were not what they seemed. They seldom are. Nothing can be so misleading as appearances. Surface judgments are invariably untrustworthy. The superficial measurement is never the true, the complete measurement. Beneath Judah's busy towns and smiling fields, beneath her vaunted wealth and booming successes, there was a process of moral defection and religious declension and actual defilement going on at

which God could not wink, being the God He is. God, Whose love has ever been, and ever is, a great and an awe-inspiring jealousy, was not getting the glory; was, indeed, hardly getting the gleanings of this people's exalted well-being. Idolatry, and its excesses and self-indulgences flourished. Ruthless social injustice multiplied the revenues and possessions of the rich at the expense of the exploited poor, who were inarticulate under duress. Unwonted luxury at one end of the scale, and needless poverty at the other virtually denied God. Such a state of things always does, now as then. And He will not always be mocked!

So Isaiah speaks this parable—really two parables in one; the first of tender care without response; and the other inexorable judgment without appeal or appeasement. Let us look at the parable.

A vineyard has been planted in a most favourable position. It is fenced, protected, and cultivated with the most expert and solicitous care. Nothing that concerns it is left to chance. Everything possible is done to assist its fertility, to ensure the development of its latent possibilities. Soil and shower and sun combine with the vine-dresser's skill to enrich the vines. The time for grape-gleaning comes, and there are promising clusters upon the branches. But instead of fulfilling reasonable expectation, they are sour, bitter, inedible, even poisonous—just like the wild fruit of wild vines. For the vines have not responded

to the vine-dressers' attention. Their nature has proved stubborn and intractable. It has defied and overcome every refining influence. The care bestowed upon the vineyard has been in vain—not by reason of its insufficiency or impotence, but on account of the vine's reception, or, rather, rejection of it. So hopeless is the condition of the vineyard that nothing more can be tried with any hope of happier result. Everything has been done that can be done. Now it must just revert to the wild weed-ridden condition from which it might have been redeemed. But it would not; it must be left to itself, and to its natural enemies—to become a worthless tangle, irreclaimable, a memory of tragic failure. That is the parable.

A Picture of Life

Now while all the features are, without any straining after effect, identifiable with Israel, its reach by no means is limited, for it is a picture of life, of all life, of any life, of yours and mine. The care of God, expressed in a thousand providences, and, above all, in one great Sacrifice, and its living effluences of the Life-giving Spirit, which give meaning to them all, is the core of our individual history. The contrast between what He expects, and what He finds in us, and is it not amazing and humiliating what He does find? is our secret condemnation. Oh, that it might this day become our saving concern, for there is a point at which an ominous hiatus in the parable is

replaced in the Gospel of Christ our Saviour by a glorious promise!

It is frequently asserted, and there is every justification for the assertion, that a man's eyes must be turned away from himself, and off to Jesus Christ if he is ever to know the reality of the Great Salvation. But such a statement needs to be qualified and guarded. Ever and comfortingly true it is that the ground of our salvation is not in ourselves, but in Christ. The righteousness by which we stand before God is not our own, but His. In us there dwells no good thing. In Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead. "If any man glory, let him glory in the Lord."

"Vile and full of sin I am
Thou art full of truth and grace."

On this account our eyes must be "ever toward the Lord." We have no standing-ground but upon His merit. "Looking unto Jesus" must ever be our attitude if our confidence is not to be tragically, and disastrously misplaced. He only is our hope and our salvation.

The Quality of Life

And just because this is so we must be sincere with ourselves about ourselves. We must lay to heart the purpose of our salvation, and honestly examine ourselves as to how far it is being carried out in our lives. We must from time to time have an honest stock-taking. We must prove ourselves, at any rate, to our

enlightened conscience, as to whether we are really in the Faith, or not; whether we are bringing forth fruit unto holiness, or not; whether we are evidencing the New Life by "newness of life," or whether we are not. There is, surely, the searching, testing message of the Parable; not, what is the object of our faith, but what is the quality of our life. Faith is not what we affirm, but what we are.

There are those whose single idea in religion is self-security. Whether intentionally or not (usually not, I am sure) they appropriate and wrest Scripture texts from their qualifying contexts to prove to themselves that whatever happens they are "safe" for all eternity. A tremendous and perilous assertion for any man to make when it is unbacked by convincing moral evidence, seeing we have to do with a moral God. By hearing it so often from the only kind of preacher they will listen to, who preaches what they like, and not what they need to hear—how vicious the circle!—they believe that God cannot cast off those who assent to certain truths about Him. They regard what they call their "faith" as a talisman, a passport, a cover-all, an indemnity! And that, in defiance of Jesus, and the de-salted salt, and the unclad wedding-guest, and the withered branch, and the light that is darkness, and the candlestick removed from its place, and the record of those whom God "gave up" on account of their determined waywardness; and an apostle's fear of becoming a

castaway. Faith is not what a man holds, but what holds him. Should we not seriously take ourselves in hand, and tear from our minds every veil of self-deception, and face up to the contradictions of our trusted belief in the characteristic qualities of our living? Surely the tremendousness of the issues involved forbids anything less thorough. We may, indeed, with every confidence and certainty take the Vine-dresser, and all His care, for granted. But what of the vines and their grape clusters?

Disappointing Fruit

Here in the parable the indictment is not of mere fruitlessness, such as for which later on Christ consigned a fig tree to the only end it had become fit for. There is nothing merely negative in this disappointing vineyard. Here there is fruit, plenty of it, but it is fruit that any vine-dresser is richer without, it is fruit that he is ashamed of, the kind of fruit that is an utter disappointment of his hopes. Translated into the terms of human life (which is, of course, what the prophet does all along), it is the fruit of untamed, unresponsive, callous, wilfully-determined human nature, of human nature stubbornly resistant of any of the overtures (it would say the "interferences") of Divine grace. There is quite evidently no lack of vitality. On the contrary! But it is vitality bent upon being unchecked in any of its carnal impulses. The grapes it brings forth are the

wild grapes of self—self that will not be controlled, nor directed, nor disciplined, nor purged of its waywardness, nor limited, nor thwarted; self that will not have its “good times” interfered with, nor their evil consequences corrected; self that perverts the rich provisions of the love of God into actual lasciviousness; self that is ever defiant and contemptuous of the pruning-knife’s tender woundings; self that is obstinately resolved to suffer no restriction of its liberties, to respond to no curtailing influences, except by inexorable opposition; self whose pagan praises have been sung by one of its devotees for the rest to join in:

“Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank what ever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

“In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud:
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

“Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade:
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

“It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll:
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.”

That is how the pagan poet of determined self-sufficiency puts it. Listen to how the Bible puts it. The works of the flesh are impurity, uncleanness, idolatry, quarrels, dissension,

envy, jealousy, temper, rivalry, revelry and the like (Gal. 5. 19-21). Are these the growths the Vine-dresser finds upon us? Or, does He find the fruits of the Spirit, Love, joy, peace, good-temper, kindness, generosity, fidelity, gentleness, self-control? What is the spiritual master of your life? Self, or the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus? And what is its product? Grapes or wild grapes? Wild grapes on a Heaven-tended vine. What an anomaly! What a contradiction! What a denial of Him Whose Name it bears! What a picture of opposites!

A Pernicious Influence.

And more, for this must also be pointed out, that not only are such wild grapes bearing vines useless to the vine-dresser, and the negation of all His hopes and intentions, and the frustration of all His efforts, but they are socially pernicious as well. For degenerate plants—weeds—spread amazingly. Their harmless appearance not infrequently masks their infective character. Wholesome growths are hindered and maimed by their unarrested influence. The very soil is poisoned by their subtle issues. They communicate their degeneracy. An entire vineyard can be ruined by one poisonous vine. Little wonder that this parable ends on the note of judgment. It could really end in no other way. Is that what is wrong in your home, in your business-house, in your school? Is the cause of the spiritual condition

there attributable, in any measure, to you? Are you contributing to it by the kind of fruit your avowed faith is producing? A little boy was one day taken to Westminster Abbey by his father, and he was particularly attracted by the stained glass windows and the beautiful colours that they reflected on the floor of the Abbey; and his father pointed out to him that figures of the saints were represented in those beautiful windows. Some time after he was asked the question at school as to who was a saint, and he replied, "They are people through whom the light shines."

Let us listen once again to the good Lord of us all, "What more could have been done (to ensure your proper fruitfulness) that I have not done?" Is there not an implied, "Tell Me, and I will do it for you" here? I said there is a point at which an ominous hiatus in the parable is replaced in the Gospel of Christ our Saviour by a glorious promise. And here it is! Every gardener knows all about the miracle of cross-grafting, in which a weaker tree grafted to a stronger, which for the purpose must be gashed and bruised, is made to partake, and actually to reproduce its qualities. So that the stronger lives in the weaker, and the weaker by the stronger. Is this not the meaning of the Gospel of the Living, the True Vine? (John 15). That His wounds are our invitations to the life that is "saved by His life." That we may be joined to Another, and bring forth fruit unto God,

here, and now, and for always. Does this not recall us to our high calling, the choosing and commissioning of us to go and bring forth fruit unto holiness, and reminding us of that vital union with the True Vine which alone makes this possible? It is not our life for Him so much as His life in us. What say you to the Well-Beloved Who hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill? A vineyard called by your name! When visiting Denmark a few years ago I went one day into the wonderful Cathedral in Copenhagen, and came to the celebrated statue of our Lord by Bertel Thorwaldsen. It was very beautiful, and I looked up at it in admiration. And the Dean said to me: "You have not seen it yet at its best. You must kneel down if you would see its real beauty." Shall we not learn that lesson?

CHAPTER III

The Potter

"The vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" (Jer. 18. 4).

NONE of the parables of the Old Testament has a more direct and personal, and withal, a more general appeal to us than Jeremiah's parable of his visit to the potter's house in lower Jerusalem—probably the potter attached to the king's house. While its original significance concerned Israel in its then state, for all the Old Testament prophets were first of all messengers to their own times, its meaning was by no means limited to its first application. Israel, as a nation, has passed away, whatever the future may, and assuredly does hold for the dispersed in the matter of their national life. But this parable is a lens through which God is to be seen, the unchanging God of persons as well as of people, in Whose hands are all our ways, and with Whom we all have to do. It *was* all about God and Israel. It *is* all about God and ourselves.

It is not infrequently quoted (its conclusion and summation in particular) as though the one thing it sets forth in vivid illustration is

the incontestable sovereignty of God, and the helplessness of men to avert His will, and to change His arbitrary decrees. But that is a reading of the parable, be it said, which involves a conception of God entirely out of accord with the teaching and revelation of Jesus Christ, a conception of God which, indeed, is quite impossible to maintain, if it be true that, as He said, those who have seen Him have actually seen God, that the God to Whom we all sustain final relationship is like Jesus Christ. In the light He sheds on the parable, and with the crown He puts upon its central promise it is, rather, seen to be, indeed, what I have termed it, a parable of renewal without recrimination. Its outstanding message is of the Love-directed power which mends spoiled lives, and does not upbraid them, nor lay upon them an irremovable burden of blame, nor deal with them after their sins, nor qualify the gifts by any contingent conditions, nor put any man outside the range and reach of His mercy. For which let us be humbly grateful, knowing ourselves to be the kind of men we are, and having each the private history which is ours.

The Marred Vessel

Let us look at the parable. The prophet is in a dilemma. The nation has broken away from God's protective law. It has turned defiantly to its own ways. Its moral state is just a ruin. The external, material evils that

have come upon it, that have invaded and destroyed its prosperities, are as nothing in comparison of its spiritual apostasy. Unfitted, as it has become, to be the instrument of carrying out God's purpose toward other nations—for who would give heed to a God reflected in a people like Israel?—and unable to check its own momentum and reserve its direction, its case looks hopeless, and Jeremiah is disheartened and voiceless. As he sees it the situation is so bad that only a worse can come out of it. The nation can have no future except one of successive disasters and ultimate extinction. The man who has consistently declared God's care over it, and His intentions for it, is crushed. All he sees is that Israel has forsaken God, and that God has failed to hold Israel. So, at any rate, it seems to him.

Under the Divine direction (for Jeremiah was a man who lived close enough to God, and in a fellowship constant enough to recognise His Voice when it arose through his instincts to become an imperative constraint) he went to the potter's shop in lower Jerusalem, and watched the potter at his work, and there he saw what scattered his gloom, and restored his confidence, and gave him a message for the nation, which, had they but hearkened to it, would have changed the entire course of the people's history, and probably of the history of the whole world. He saw the whirling wheel, and the directing hand creating in clay the potter's thoughts. Vessel after vessel was

swiftly fashioned and laid aside to be sun-baked, and then distributed for use. The inanimate material seemed to live under the potter's power to shape it from dull amorphousness into forms of beauty and usefulness. And, as any observant layman watching a skilled craftsman at work must always be, he was doubtless amazed at the skill which gave individual value to each shapeless mass of plastic stuff put upon the wheel. Then, as he gazed fascinated, something unusual happened! A handful of clay had evidently contained some hidden admixture, some bit of hardness, or, it might be, of over-softness, a tiny pocket of sand or of moisture—and the potter, for the moment, is beaten by it. He stops the rotating wheel by ceasing to operate the single treadle that controlled it, crumbles up the misformed vessel with his fingers, remedies the defect in the material by adding some dry dust, or a little water, as the case might be, kneads it into plasticity, restarts the wheel and, lo, under his hand it grows into another vessel. He has made it again! And the prophet has learnt what he was sent there to learn!

This is a parable in deeds, not in words, for no conversation is recorded between the potter and his strange taciturn visitor who stood and watched, and went away without purchasing anything or without even speaking. For Jeremiah had been too intent upon seeing and inwardly listening, to talk. Through the noise of the swiftly-revolving wheel he heard

the voice of God. He saw the symbolic meaning of it all, where another would have noticed nothing specially significant. To him, as to every God-ordained prophet, there were sermons in stones, and every common bush was ablaze with God. "Can I not do with you, O House of Israel, as this potter?" is what he heard, and he went on his way "with heart elate, and feet with courage shod," to carry the challenge to the nation.

Creating Personality

And if with a nation, then surely with a man. Of course it all stands for God's creation of human personality on the wheels of time, and by the skilful pressure of His hand exerted in circumstance, and influence, and communicated intention. For this is what life under the direction and discipline of His Holy Spirit means. This is the interpretation of its experiences and urgent providences. When any man calls God "Father," as taught by, and encouraged so to do, by Jesus Christ, he begins to be made; there is a new creation set agoing; he is built up; he is God's workmanship; and, as with Jeremiah's potter, whose vessels were made for the king's use, his personality is created with a view to his life-service. All of which is important that we keep in mind. For the kind and value of every man's life-work is altogether conditioned by what kind of a person he is, what kind he becomes in the hand of the Heavenly Potter.

And that is self-determined. In quality, if not in size and shape, we may be what we will.

There are many points of deep interest in the parable, because of what they severally suggest in respect of our personal Christian life, because of their sun-clear analogy to our inevitable experience. But one point stands out as important and meaningful above the rest. It is that lives which, though they are in God's hands, have failed to fulfil the first promise of their faith, lives which have not maintained that attitude of yieldedness to His purpose and discipline with which they began, lives which to-day are like **marred** vessels, useless for the purpose of their creation and redemption—it is that those lives may be re-made, if they will.

God's Design

I say, if they will. For in the life which the parable illustrates, the clay is not inanimate and irresponsible. It is living clay; its flaws and defects are of its own will. Folly, rebelliousness, pride, stubborn self-appreciation, resistance, covetousness, determined self-acquisitiveness (with its train of furtive untruthfulness and ethical waywardness and undependableness) these are the things that contend with the Potter's will, and hold up His skilful intention. It is because of such things as these, wilfully, recklessly persisted in, in defiance both of enlightened understanding and professed faith, that so many nominally Christian

lives are damaged and deranged, and are pathetically futile and third-rate and unimpressive for good, and arouse derision in some, and despair in others who observe them—the self-same contending emotions that must have been aroused in the eager watcher at the potter's wheel when the defective clay seemed either to check the potter's dextrous expertness, or to discredit his choice. They are saved—but! They are in God's hands—but!

Is that what your personality suggests? Is your spiritual usefulness, your irreparably-flawed character, reflecting upon God's competence? upon the ability of the One Who has begun a good work in you to perfect it? upon the actual sufficiency of His grace to carry out His design this side of Heaven? Let us be honest with ourselves! Let us face up to things which the wheel of time has already shown to those who watch us, as Jeremiah watched that bit of recalcitrant clay, even though we have schooled ourselves not to look at them. Do not, on any account, take the comforting, reassuring suggestions of this parable to yourself. They do not belong to you, if you are of those—and, alas, their name is legion within the Church—who, believing themselves to be entirely redeemed for the next world are content to be but fractionally saved in this. But if you mourn and deplore your conscious shortcomings and failure and marred life and service-uselessness, if you long to be the best that you can be for His sake Whose

Name you bear, if you are willing to be remade, to lose what little comeliness you have, under the hand of the Potter who reduces the malformed, flawed vessel to shapelessness, takes from it what little resemblance to the pattern-form it has, breaks it, as the beginning of remaking it, then every fine thing the parable points to is for you, and is for you now.

God's Patience

And one thing above all the rest to be observed gratefully is that there is no hint of impatient temper on the part of the potter towards the clay which has failed him. No upbraiding, no recrimination, no suspicion of anger with the inanimate stuff, always the most impotent, futile, and self-reproaching form of petulance. He does not blame the clay for breaking down on the wheel under his hand; he does not fling it away. He is naturally embarrassed and thwarted—but He is not wrathful. He knows what clay is, especially clay from the pit from which came the supply. There is nothing punitive nor recriminating in his action in the crumbling of it. Of course not. He is not daunted, and he is certainly not beaten because his first intention has miscarried—and from such a cause. He sees that he must impart to that lump of clay the fitness for his purpose it so evidently lacks. And so he does; and the breaking of it is part of the process.

And then he fashions it again until it satisfies him. For there is still promise in it. Its flaw is not its fate. There is something to be reckoned with that is stronger than its peculiar nature. It is the purpose and the power of the potter into whose possession it has come, with all its untrustworthiness. Is it too much to say that he has set his heart upon making something of it? And so long as the clay is in his hand he can do it, and does it. That is true in Nature. Beautiful flowers now cover many of the fields of France and Flanders, and there are but the rarest traces of that diabolical thing called war that for a time defied God, and defiled His fair creation. The pearl in the oyster-shell, beautiful in its shimmering opalescence, precious rich, fit for a queen's crown, is just the covering up of a flaw, the mending of a rent, the overcoming of a disaster to the delicate lining of the shell, just the transformation of a tragedy. Nature adds for our clearer understanding her parable to that of the potter's patience and skill, who makes a vessel strong and beautiful and serviceable—perhaps more so than it ever would have been had it not first been marred in his hand. And the prophet goes away with a new, creative thought of God possessing him, the Sovereign Lord, Who, because He is Sovereign is not fettered even by His own decrees, Who can change His first purpose for a marred life, and make it into another vessel, when it has declined and frustrated His first design,

"another vessel" with its own beauty and usefulness, and its own place in the Royal household. God's dealings with men are always moral. He treats them as their moral attitude toward Him permits Him to do.

Messengers of Love

Yes, the clay is not inanimate and passive; it is instinct with the power of miracle. It is as living and active and purposeful as you are. For it is you yourself. And you can be remade, however old and stubborn and deep-seated the flaw that has been your undoing, and is not your settled despair. If there are extenuations that can be pleaded for the moral quality of the clay, be assured that the Potter makes them. You have no kinder Judge than He is. Marred vessels! Look into the Marred Face! Read there your forgiveness of the sin (call it by its right name) that is spoiling your life, and maiming your personality, and cancelling the validity and influence of your Christian profession. Read there, too, in the marred Face your deliverance from its perpetuation, and your recovery from its consequences, and your new beginning. Read there in the Marred Face, the Face without a frown, the love and power of the Potter, the Master of wheel and clay alike, His patience and willingness to make you "a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use." One day Paganini, the great violinist, went into an auction room, and tenderly took

up a violin, and held it up to his ear ; and some one in the crowd recognised this middle-aged man dressed in a velvet coat. And then slowly there came from that instrument, that seemed so worthless, soft, exquisite notes, and men raised their hats as they stood there in awed reverence and listened. Paganini held men spellbound under the influence of the music that he drew forth from that despised instrument. Its worth was unknown until the hand of the master drew forth praise. That is the intention and purpose of the Divine love, despite our failures, and our unworthy attitudes and actions which have hitherto marred us in the making. He summons us to yield ourselves afresh to Him to be re-made for His service in the world.

Your desire is His invitation. Do not stifle it. You have not lost your place in His heart, and there is still a place in His service that only you can fill. Have you long lain among the broken pots, cast-off, and useless, and fit for nothing, but one day to be carted off to the potter's field, the burial-place of strangers from the covenant of promise. Well, "you shall be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers of gold." The beauty of the Potter's mind, and the skilfulness of His hands shall be expressed in you, and, filled with the water of life you shall be for thirsty lips and lives the bringer of His gifts, and the messenger of His love. If you will only cease to contend with, and begin to consent

unto His will. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out. For of Him, and through Him, and unto Him, are all things. To Whom be the glory for ever."

CHAPTER IV

The King Tree

"And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble" (Judg. 9. 15).

THE first significance of the parable of the Trees, and their election of a King Tree, gives the necessary clue to its interpretation, and to its far-reaching, and deep-searching applications to life in every age—just as surely to life in this day as in the days of the Judges who ruled Israel. This parable speaks in a quite searching way of the actual quality of life apart from, and often under the sovereignty of Him Whose right it is to reign over His people.

Briefly its historic setting is this. Gideon, one of the most famous of the nation's soldier-judges, after a wonderfully faithful beginning, in which his God-honouring fidelity had brought its rich reward to the people who hailed and followed him as their God-sent leader, had strangely declined in his loyalty. Actually he encouraged idol-worship, and himself fell under its carnal fascinations, until the land was riddled through and through, like a moth-fretted garment with idolatrous practices and

moral degradation. To such depths and perversions of influence may any man descend who fails to hold the beginnings of his confidence steadfast to the end. Upon his death, the restraint of his powerful personality being removed, anarchy and civil strife broke out, and the worst passions of men had free reign for their rival contentions. One of his sons, Abimelech by name, a child of unhallowed parentage, a thoroughly unscrupulous upstart, at once seized his opportunity, murdered all his brothers, except one, Jotham, who hid himself and escaped his violence, and arrogantly claimed the crown, which his father, Gideon, had refused; for to have accepted it at the request of the people would have been an open and determined break with God. But no such qualms of conscience deterred his natural son, Abimelech. God was not in all his thoughts, nor in any of them. Treachery, fratricide, underhanded wire-pulling, all the dark arts of unprincipled ambition, with which, alas, we are not unfamiliar to-day, despite centuries of civilisation, and two thousand years of Christianity, were employed by him in furtherance of his headstrong determination. And he succeeded, for he gathered around him a company of "vain and light persons," paying them with money come by under false pretences, capitalizing their moral emptiness, and using them to secure for himself the fickle proclamation of the men of Shechem as their king. And there, on a sacred site, where in the days

of Joshua the nation had made a solemn covenant to serve the Lord, and Him only, Abimelech was made king, with a view to the establishment of Baal-worship throughout the land. The only one of his brothers to escape his bloodthirsty, murderous outrage was Jotham. He, on the occasion of a great gathering of the people who had been beguiled to this disastrous action, appearing, as it were from nowhere, on Mount Gerizim, addresses the parable to them.

A Despicable Character

It is a summons to a misguided multitude to retrace its steps. They have, by yielding to the blandishments and threats of Abimelech, and his "vain and light persons," cut themselves off from the safe defences, and sure resources of the God to Whom they owe allegiance. So he challenges them, and the challenge is all the more impressive because it is uttered by one who is not a prophet, in the accepted sense of the term: "Hearken unto me, that God may hearken unto you!" The parable both satirises the Shechemites for their choice "they have chosen in haste, and will repent at leisure," and lashes Abimelech for what he is. And, be it said, that no more contemptible character stains the records of Israel. The Bible chronicles not a single good thing of him. Not an exploit of his does it record except the shameful slaughter of his unarmed brothers. It sets him forth as just an

upstart with an over-weening sense of his own importance, a despicable character who under the guise of wanting to serve his country is determined that his country shall serve him! The Bible does not employ irony and sarcasm to any great extent, but when it does it bites like acid. When it covers a man with ignominy it just buries him.

This is a parable in the form of a fable, which could not fail to secure the attention, and then to prod the imagination of all who heard it. Under an unusual inspiration, for so it would seem, Jotham tells of the trees meeting together to anoint them a king. In turn they asked the olive, the fig tree, and the vine to reign over them. But all three, whose claims to such distinction were obvious, refused to leave their proper functions of rich fruitfulness in order to assume it. Then, at last, the trees came to the prickly, scrubby bramble. And the bramble immediately consented—but upon terms. The other trees must put their trust under its shadow. What trenchant satire! Ludicrous, is it not?—the shadow of a bramble! It claims all! Nothing less will suffice. This, the most unworthy, unsuitable, inadequate groundling, with thorny arrogance is ready, eagerly ready to be a king, on one condition—that it really is king! The only commendable thing about the bramble is its frankness, and its plain threat that if anything is withheld of the honour due to its kingship it will kindle a devouring fire against those concerned.

That is the parable. Its meaning, then and now, is plain and heart-probing. From first to last it is a warning, both to the foolish trees, and to the shameless, head-strong, swaggering bramble. It holds them both up to scorn, to kindle in them, if may be, the fire of self-judgment. It warns these Shechemites of the character of Abimelech: that he is nothing more than a mean and worthless and flesh-tearing thorn-bush, whose end is to be burned, that he will do them no good if they yield to his bluster, that he will involve them in his own destruction. And it warns him, that even the trees of the garden, the olive, the fig, the vine have more sense than he has, for they will not let the pride that goes before a fall tempt them to play Providence to themselves, which is what he is doing! And that will be his ruin, the only end that an immodest upstart fits himself for. The triumph of the adventurer is one of the trials of the upright. The success of a man like Abimelech is almost an argument for the indifference, even the cynicism of God, Who does not interfere to prevent it in the name of Righteousness. Or it would be if He had not said, "Wait." Divine justice may tarry, but it never sleeps. Written in letters of flame across the scroll of time are the words, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." There we may leave Abimelech, the bramble-king, and concern ourselves with the parable as a fragment of the eternal Word of God that liveth for ever. Let us lift it now from its

local and temporary meaning to its present and personal significance.

Advertising Folly

Its friendly warning, Heaven-directed, against the abject folly—and worse—of those who profess their confidence in the providence and care of God (as we who call Him “Father” do, taught thereto by Jesus Christ) seeking great things for themselves, exalting themselves, making their personal advancement the one thing in life, scheming and plotting, blustering and sneaking, trampling on others, and bloating themselves with vain ambition, and creating their own false and poisonous inspirations by their subtle self-appreciation—all to secure some advantage for themselves.

Is that warning superfluous amongst us? Is it not because the brambles are so numerous, and so pathetically unconscious that they are “spotted” as brambles by those whom they want to impress; because there are so many climbers, pushers, vulgarians, even in Christian circles, in whose hearts there is no real reverence for God or man—but only for themselves—that there is so much dispeace and lovelessness and so little real fellowship amongst Christian groups? Unscrupulous intention, jealousy, greed of gain, lust for prominence, forwardness, the levity of empty self-conceit—these are the things that dishonour the Holy Name by which we are called. And how common they are! There is a shaft of ironic wit in the attention

the parable calls to the silly vanity of the bramble. What a fool it unwittingly shows itself to be, in avidly seizing the kingship of the trees, for which office it has not the slightest fitness. But that shaft is truly aimed, for it is invariably in proportion to personal unfitness for the heights that they are desired, and sought, and manœuvred for by those who are determined to capture them. What fools we Christians make of ourselves when we turn from the simple ways of Jesus Christ to the devious ways of selfishness! And how inevitably we advertise our folly!

Marks of a Law Nature

For the designing of any personal profit, the love of money, the determination to forge ahead, and to rise in the scale of importance and advantage irrespective of any consideration, the vanity which can imagine itself as being worth more acclaim than has hitherto been accorded, the impropriety of mind which will not recognise its own place, and its rewards as being the gifts of Divine grace (and far more than it merits)—all these are the marks of a low nature, the characteristics of the bramble. For it is only brambles that must spread themselves. The one who aims at personal greatness only advertises his personal littleness! Self-seeking is of all personal activities the most despicable, and the most unchristian. Could we “but see ourselves as others see us,” the gift of which Rabbie Burns sang, what a surprise

we would get! - And what a shock—the sheer ridiculousness of a bramble strutting about as a king! How tragic the delusions of selfish ambition, which clothes itself in deceptive garments, and calls itself all kinds of self-flattering names, but cannot hide its nature nor its aims from the discerning. For shabby motives, and the seamy places in a man's secret life simply will not remain covered, however religious his talk. It is true that stealthy insinuation, unctuous murmuring against others to call attention to their own superiority, the well-known tricks of the hood-winker bent on his own promotion to some self-glory, hiding the hiss of the serpent beneath the cooing of the dove, may sometimes deceive the very elect. "And verily I say unto you, they have their reward." But who would wish to stand with them when the bill for it all has to be paid; when the bramble-destroying flames are lighted?

It is this, the complete imbecility, the fatuous lack of elementary intelligence, not to speak of the absence of anything like fitting modesty, that the parable's contrast between the bramble and the nobler trees is intended to drive home. Their refusal to entertain the suggestion of kingship was based upon their contentment with their service—life of fruitfulness. They had too much proper pride in their own work, which was to minister to the well-being of the world—to be envious of any pre-eminence that would interfere with this. Their business, like

ours, was to bear fruit, and a great business it is. It blesses mankind and it glorifies God. That being their business they will stay where they are, and get on with it. For they are themselves already under a king. They were planted at His will. They live under the kindly rule of nature, responding to the discipline, and the gifts of sun, and rain, and wind, and dew, and snow, and winter's cold, and spring's geniality, by individual fruit-bearing. The world itself would be the poorer by their renunciation of their high calling for one that might seem high, but would actually disgrace the deserter who embraced it, because it necessitated his desertion.

Bearing Love's Fruit

To which company do you belong? To the noble, self-denying order of the olive tree, the fig tree, the vine? Or to the ignoble, Christ-denying order of the strutting bramble? Are you pursuing Christ's glory, or your own? Snatching at the perilous honours of earth, for your own sake, or seeking first His Kingdom for His sake? Are you in the train of Abimelech, or of Jesus? Bearing love's fruit, or spreading self's poison? Content with Christ's will, or intent on securing your own? A blessing or a blight in your little world-plot?

And here life is more wonderful than the Parable that hints, and more than hints at its proper conduct. For all such searching questions as to its quality, which we cannot evade,

are answered by another question as to its voluntary loyalty, its determined submission and subjection. Under which enthronement, which authority, do you live by your deliberate choice? That of the bramble? Or that of the true King of all the trees, whose they are, the only King Who can nourish you to fulfil the intention that lies behind your creation and redemption? Is Christ regnant, or is self? Is the base shrub infecting your activities at their sources with the pernicious self-virus, bringing you into ever-intensifying bondage to yourself, to a love and admiration of yourself, thereby killing the very soul in you? Or is the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, the sap of the Tree of Life which is in the midst of the paradise of God, fertilising and fructifying and freeing your life unto the service of holiness, and the holiness of service? The story is told that Mendelssohn one day went into a village Church and sat listening for a time to the organist as he sat playing at his instrument. After a time he went up to him, and asked him whether he would allow him to play his organ. "I never allow anyone to play my organ," he said; but as the stranger persisted in his request, at last the organist very reluctantly gave way. Quietly the stranger took his place at the instrument, and as his hands moved gently over the keys there burst forth from that little organ such strains of music as never before had filled the village church. The organist sat spell-bound as he listened, and when on asking the

stranger who he was and hearing that his name was Mendelssohn, the organist said, "How could I have kept my organ from the great master-player?" It is all important to face up to this. Do we not so often hold back and prevent God from making the best use of our lives? He wants to shed abroad in our hearts the love of the Lord Jesus, that it may fill us, and flow through us into other lives, and that we may live to the glory of His praise.

We have travelled far, and yet not so very far from Jotham and Mount Gerizim, and his challenge—to the Lord Christ and His claim. Hearken: O ye trees of the Lord's planting, ye that are planted in the house of the Lord, and flourish in the courts of our God, ye whose roots go down to the river, ye who are under the care of the Father Husbandman, and who would fain bring forth fruit that shall remain—there is one true King for you. He is a Plant of renown, though "a root out of a dry ground." A Bush that blazes, and is not consumed. The very Tree of Life in the midst of the paradise of God. Admit no bramble-rivalry to Him in your life. His leaves are for the healing of your hurts. Lay them upon your wounds. Dwell under His shadow with great delight, and let His fruit be sweet to your taste. Do not vitiate your taste for it. Your present and your future are bound up with Him. Strew His way with your branches. Make Him King, and indwelling you He will make you conqueror. Weave for Him a Conqueror's garland with

your blossoms. Let all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord their King. For He cometh to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness and the people with His truth. God be with us then, as He is with us now.

CHAPTER V

Christ's Limitless Gospel

"He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him" (Heb. 7. 25).

"Jesus . . . having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end (unto the uttermost)" (John 13. 1).

"Ye shall be witnesses unto Me . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1. 8).

"For the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thess. 2. 16).

MORE and more as we come to the New Testament, and as we strive to apprehend something of Christ's great purpose of redemption, are we not "lost in wonder, love, and praise," at the magnitude of the grace of God? This is a day when men are concerned with the needs of the earth; and whatever may be said in demerit of the good of to-day there is this to be said, that men are a good deal less self-centred than they ever were. They are beginning to regard themselves as but units in a great system, and there is abroad to-day, as perhaps there never has been in the history of the world, a spirit of brotherhood. I do not mean that it is Christian, but I do mean this, that while it is part of the progress of the world, while it is part of the resolute march

of civilisation, it is also an absorption of the Spirit of Christ. These movements toward federation and brotherhood cannot all be regarded as antichristian. There are a great many outside the churches to-day who do not name the Name of Christ, and yet who are very near akin to the Spirit of Christ. Legislation to-day is moving along the line of helping the poor, and bettering the condition of things in the world, as, perhaps, it never did. This spirit of imperialism, which regards the ends of the earth as being next-door neighbours, is an absorption of the Spirit of Christ; and if the Gospel of Christ is to have any appeal to this age, it must fit in with this conception. Men to-day are not going to accept a small Gospel. Nothing less than a world-wide Gospel, a Gospel which is universal in its scope and embrace, is going to answer the clamant cry of the spirit of the age.

A Gospel for Individuals

As you study the New Testament you see how wonderfully this present age has been anticipated. The Gospel is indeed imperial and universal and world-wide. It may be narrow at its entrance, but it widens out into life eternal. It may be small in its concerns, that is, concerning itself, as it does, with the small needs of people; but it is great in its conception, it is large in its desires and schemes, and promises, and it is eternal in its workings. And the Gospel is personal in its application,

for it is directed to the personal blessing of individual lives in its wonderful magnitude and scope. Hence there is nothing so fitted to the spirit of to-day as the Gospel of Christ. It seems almost as though the Gospel had been written yesterday, so entirely does it meet the needs of men and women of our time and generation.

"He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." Christ's power to save is not limited by man's present consciousness of his need. This is the most emphatic word that the Holy Ghost said concerning Christ's power. It is as though, having searched all human speech, He could lay emphasis on no more powerful words than these, that Christ is able to save "unto the uttermost." It is a fundamental law in the science of dynamics that all force is measurable at a certain point, that is, at the point of its application. Apply that to the spiritual. There is a point at which the power of Christ can be measured by the humblest and weakest and most unlearned of us, not by words, not by units, but at the point of its application to our own personal lives.

"He is able to save unto the uttermost." There is a supposition here that men need to be saved. There is an inference here that sin is so great that it takes God to deal with it. There is an assumption here that transgression is of such magnitude that nothing but the power of God can make any impress upon it. Now

how do we use that word "save" in our common speech? There is a man drowning; he is engulfed in a torrent which has swept him off his feet, and is carrying him down to death and destruction. A strong swimmer, at the risk of his life, plunges in and saves him. Blessed be God, that is just what Jesus does for men who have been swept off their feet by the storms and streams of evil and sin. Again, there is a man lying sick. Disease has got hold of him; the span of life is running out, and strength is ebbing away. And the physician comes in, and by the exercise of his God-given skill, and by summoning to his assistance all his powers of patience and diagnosis, he saves the man. Blessed be God, that is just what Jesus does. He finds men in the grip of hell-disease; he finds men in the grasp of a wasting fever. And He, the great Physician, touches men, and the fever ceases; He expels their disease, and infuses into them His own calm, cooling life, and makes them sound and strong. Christ is able to save men from danger which is imminent, and from disease which is destructive. Further, there is a man being attacked by an enemy; he is grasped by one who bears him malice and malignity. And another man comes by, and puts the enemy to flight, and saves the man from injury. Jesus finds us in the strong power of the evil one; we are in bondage; and He comes and saves us.

"He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
And sets the prisoner free."

The Gulf Bridged

There is a man there who is wasting his powers; he was made for something better than the life he is living. God meant him to be an artist, and he has become a drunkard. God meant him to be a man of keen thought and intellect, and he has become a gambler. God meant him to be a man of fine sensibility, and of useful service in the world, but passion has fascinated him, and has him in its grasp. And one who knows him and loves him seeks to create in him a desire for the better, and the nobler, and the higher things of life, and he saves that man. That is just what Jesus does. He sees us wasting our powers; living for the world, and for self; using our powers which should be for the glory of God, for things which are trifling, and empty, and worthless. Christ saves us by putting into our hearts new desires; by converting disloyalties into loyalties; by turning antagonisms into Christian affection. "He is able to save to the uttermost." What a wonderful scope! Think of your own insincerity. Think of those things which come to your mind in the wakeful hours of the night. Then think of your ideals of holiness and fruitful service in the world. And betwixt the two there is a gulf fixed, but it is bridged by these blessed, blessed words, He is able to save from the uttermost unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. The fact is, when you turn your back upon the Gospel, you turn your back upon the biggest thing in God's

universe. Not even the record of the Creation in Genesis is greater and stronger than this. Not greater is that Divine power shown in the creation of the world than is the power of Christ in a human life.

A Purpose of Recovery

It may be that you have had some experience of the saving power of Christ, but, somehow, the consciousness of that experience has all gone before the bright light of the world's glamour and glitter. Somehow that salvation which you believed you had grasped, and had begun to enter upon, seems to have slipped from you; and to-day you are in doubt as to your faith, and as to God's love. Let me remind you of the unending limitlessness of the love of God in Christ. "Having loved His own which were in the world He loved them unto the uttermost." What is the love of Christ but a great purpose of recovery. It is the practical expression of the great plan of God to bring back wandering prodigals to their home, and lost sheep to the fold, and poor erring ones to the light. Who does not know the bitterness of failure, and the darkness of disappointment? Who does not know the heart-sickening experience of waking up to find that our resolves have been unstable, that our professions have proved to be insincere, and that our vows which were made with tears have been broken with smiles? Who does not know the utter self-disgust of the life which wakes up to find that

despite all its promises it has proved unreliable and fickle? Who does not know the sickness that comes from the consciousness of having embarrassed God by our disloyalty! We know what is meant when some one says with scorn, "I thought you were a Christian!" and we suddenly realise that we have disgraced the Lord of Glory. It is just at such a moment that a word such as this needs to be taken to lean upon, and to bind close to the heart. "Having loved His own which were in the world He loved them unto the uttermost." What does it mean? It means that despite all these things, God's love goes on planning and re-arranging our circumstances with a view to making us His children. It means that the love of Christ does not break down, however great may be the strain that we put upon it. It means a recalling into the fellowship we have discarded. It means an invitation to return to the Heart we have grieved. It means, in fact, that the light in the home-window is still shining for the one who wanders o'er trackless moor and fen.

Service for God

But service to the uttermost is as vitally a part of Christ's Gospel as salvation to the uttermost. "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me unto the uttermost parts of the earth," He said. Limitless service! Missionary work is not an addendum to our belief in Christ. It is not something added to the Gospel which we en-

shrine in our creed, and call it our belief. It is an integral part of the Evangel of Christ. "Go ye" is as much a part of Christ's Gospel as "Come unto Me." You are not even a Christian until you have honestly faced your responsibility in regard to the carrying of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. What is your part in that great task? There are, of course, many to whom personal service in the Mission Field is impossible. But who would not covet such a high honour? God has called us to co-operate with Him in making the Gospel known to our generation. But if He has so ordered your life that it is impossible for you to go at His command, make a covenant with Him to make everything in your present life here subservient to that great end, the making of Christ known to other lives. There are great marvels in the world to-day. There is the marvel of the disobedient Church which hugs to itself Christian privileges and neglects Christian obligations. There is the marvel of what has been accomplished. There is not a country in the world which has not some witness for Jesus. Away in the land of the rising sun there are those who are proclaiming the Sun of Righteousness. In the crowded fields and lanes of China, there are those who are telling of Him Who has redeemed the whole world by His blood. Away through the realms of the Arctic and the Antarctic there are those who, amid privations, are planting the banner of the Cross of Jesus Christ, and seek no fame as mere

explorers. In the jungle of Africa, in the zenanas of India, away amid the barbarism of South America where the foot of man has never trod for commercial gain, there are found men and women who have learned that Christ saves "unto the uttermost," and loves "unto the uttermost," and they are seeking to serve Him "unto the uttermost." We talk of the marvels of science and invention. There is no marvel like the marvel of foreign missionary enterprise. Think of the world-wide facilities for the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. It is as though long closed doors have swung back on their hinges to the Word of God. It is as though countries long centred in their own self-satisfaction, have opened themselves up to the incoming of the light of God. Nowhere, and at no time, has there been such a wonderful opportunity for the Church of Christ. Oh, the tragedy! God has opened His world. God has opened His heart. God has called His people. And they merely sit down before Him, and do nothing—His people who have been "saved unto the uttermost," and are "loved unto the uttermost." Those of you who are precluded from personal service, what are you doing with regard to this command of Christ's in the realm of your possessions and in the realm of your prayers?

Nemesis of Disobedience

The man who will not accept Christ's offer of salvation, the man who will not receive Christ's promise of love, the man who will

not fulfil his responsibility towards those in "the uttermost parts of the earth" is the man upon whom the wrath of God rests. "The wrath of God is come upon them unto the uttermost." Upon whom? Upon those "who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and they pleased not God, forbidding to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved." It is not that the wrath of God is vindictive; it is but the nemesis of disobedience. On one occasion when I was preaching in America a man came to me at the close of a service, and told me a story like this. He said, "When I was a graduate God spoke to me about becoming a missionary. My prospects in life were bright, my father was rich, and I had a good start. I balanced the whole thing up, and during my last year in College I had almost registered my decision to follow Jesus Christ, and to serve Him unto the uttermost. But the world got a hold of me, and to-day the light is out of my life. I am a rich man, but I am a ruined man." Yes, a man may become prosperous, and yet, at the same time, his soul may be unresponsive to the light and love of God. A lady once came to speak to me; I had never seen her before, and I have never seen her since. She told me that God had called her daughter to serve Him in the regions beyond, but she withheld her. She said, "She would have gone, but I would not let her. She was dear to me, and I wanted her for myself. Six months later I buried her." The wrath of God, indeed, came

upon that mother "unto the uttermost." Do not turn your back upon this great salvation. Do not choose any easier pathway than the pathway of devotion and obedience to Jesus Christ. In these days of opportunity come to Him Who is able to save "unto the uttermost," and to love "unto the uttermost" and Who calls you to serve Him "unto the uttermost."

CHAPTER VI

Living the Risen Life

"Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14. 19).

IF the message of the Resurrection can be expressed in one statement it is surely to be found in these words in which our Lord sought to comfort and to inspire His disciples ere He left them by way of the Cross and the grave. "Because I live, ye shall live also." Not "Because I *have* lived." Christ is not merely pointing to that episode in His own eternal existence, His thirty-three years sojourning among men; for He is ageless and timeless, without beginning and without end. "Because *I live*, ye shall live also." The great truth of the Resurrection is not merely a truth to be believed, but an experience to be shared. It is not something which we believe about the Lord Jesus; it is not just a tremendous miracle upon which we fasten our faith; no, it is an experience which we are to share with Him—life eternal, life victorious, life over which death and all its power has no domination. "Like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." As we seek to explore the content of these wonderful words may we

discover something of their greatness, and may the great truth that they proclaim become more and more a reality in our lives, so that we may each one be living witnesses of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ's Risen Life

"Because I live, ye shall live also." These words correct the false conception as to what eternal life really means, a conception which is false because it is inadequate and restricted. It does not mean merely an eternal survival of existence. Christ meant something immeasurably more than that. Surely He meant something which is present as well as prospective. "He that hath the Son of God hath the life," the life which does not wait until that incident which men call death takes place before it has its beginnings. This promise, as Christ proclaimed it, is surely a present living experience. The Risen Christ, Conqueror over death and the grave, reveals to men a new type of life, which the sacred Scriptures call "Newness of life." He says in effect, "You whose powers are deteriorated because of sin, you whose minds are darkened because of weakness and iniquity—you shall live also by the same mighty power as that by which I was raised from the dead."

Such glimpses as we have during the forty days after the Resurrection, of Christ's risen life reveal to us that He was the same, and yet essentially different. He maintained all His

earthly affinities, and yet His risen life was marked by startling independencies. He was independent of time, and space, and place, and locked doors. Yet He took of the fish and the honeycomb, and ate a meal with His disciples. He maintained the old relationships. Those to whom He spoke were still His brethren. He called them individually by their names—Mary, Thomas, Peter. And yet while He maintained those relationships He maintained also startling aloofnesses. "Touch Me not," He said to Mary, "for I am not yet ascended unto My Father." He maintained all the old intimacies, and yet something had grown up betwixt Him and His people. In these glimpses we have in the Gospels of the Risen Christ we realise that His life was in an entirely new sense characterised by the utter pre-dominance of the spiritual; as though He touched earth and human life from a new and higher plane.

Conquest Downward

Let us consider what eternal life, which comes to men only by union with Jesus Christ, really means. It is characterised, first of all, by what I might call Christ's conquest downward. "Behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of death and of hell." This brings the Resurrection message close home to every one of us. For, after all, if we strip life of all its unrealities, death is the great fear by which every man is holden and bound.

Death touches every one of us, sooner or later, directly or indirectly, in ourselves, or through our affections. It is something which concerns us all. There is not one of us who has not lost some loved one by death; and though they have gone from us, our affection for them still lives; indeed, it is intensified by their absence. And one day each one of us, alone and unsupported, will have to go out into that great unknown and unexplored region called death. There is something about the very word that chills us to our hearts. When a man goes out to die he goes out to fight a battle in which he has no possible help from experience. Often it is my painful lot to visit men and women as they draw near to the end of life, and as I leave the sick room I always think of a lonely soul going out to fight a lonely battle. To every man, as death comes, there comes the voice, saying, "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." It is the mystery of death, the strange, sphinx-like mystery, that brings such fear to our hearts: and its terrifying uncertainties, too, its humiliating weaknesses, its cruel separateness, cutting men off from all that has made life lovely to them. We may try to shut the thought of death out of our minds by getting absorbed with other things; we may have our lives so full of trivial concerns as to have no thought for the great realities of life. But, after all, that is very much like a boy going through a dark lane, and whistling to keep his courage up—and much of the activity and pleasure of life

is just that, and nothing else; for behind, and not very far away, is the lurking shadow of death. I suppose most of us are familiar with, perhaps, the most pathetic instance of all this which we find in Robert Louis Stevenson, the apostle of breezy optimism. He wrote these words: "Be vital; enjoy life; make the most of it; never think of death." Then you remember his own brave struggle in that island under the Southern Cross, how, when the seed of disease was deeply sown, he fought and struggled to live brightly and courageously, and, at the end, had to confess his failure, for he wrote again, "With the best will in the world no man can always be twenty-five; the shadow of the prison-house is creeping over my life."

Blinking at Death

That is the best example that our modern life has ever afforded us of a man who sought to blink at, and to hide from his eyes the great fact of death. In contrast to that, think of the words of the blessed Lord Jesus, "Because I live, ye shall live also." And He uttered those words—when? Just before He died; to use R. L. Stevenson's words, just when the shadow of "the prison house" was beginning to darken His days. But Christ refused to acknowledge death in its boastful, vaunting character by which it declares itself to men. He refused to acknowledge death as an extinction. Christ refused to acknowledge death as an interruption; to Him it was merely an introduction

into a fuller and greater life of fellowship with the Father. To Christ, death was not a prison, but a passage-way. To Him it was not an end, but an entrance. And that is all attested by His Resurrection. It is this truth of the Resurrection, "Behold, I am alive for evermore," that makes this word of His a vital part of the Gospel in every age, for in every age this fear of death grips and holds men. There is a deep sense here in which Christ is reassuring sinful hearts, for, after all, what gives death its greatest terror is the Judgment that lies on the other side; that which men are going to meet when they have passed through the gloomy portals is what they fear. Christ says, "You need not fear the Day of Judgment. You need not fear that great day of revelation. I live, your Saviour, your Surety, your Friend, and because I live, you shall live also."

Direction Godward

And there is not only Christ's conquest deathward, but there is the direction of His risen life Godward. "In that He liveth He liveth unto God." To Christ nothing matters but one thing, and that is the will of God, and this is the life in which He unites His people with Himself. If this characteristic is lacking in our lives it is because we are lacking in vital union with Christ. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." The force of Christ's life within us can, somehow, transform all our disloyalties

into loyalties, change all our selfishness into generosity, and deliver us from those things to which we so readily lend allegiance by inspiring us with a new passion. This word declares that Christ can re-set and re-centre all the activities of a man's life if that life is but united to Him. In other words, God's will becomes no longer a mere dormant admission, but a dominant, inspiring passion. All his aims become subordinated to God's will, and sanctified by His Spirit. That is what it means to be a Christian. The man who lives "unto God" brings God into the very centre of his life. Do you say that that is impossible? Do you say, with all the knowledge that you have of your own circumstances and environment, that this ideal is beautiful, but entirely impracticable? If Christ meant what He said that "because I live, ye shall live also," He surely meant that what we think is a difficulty and a hindrance, may be made, with the power of His own endowment, to serve the highest interests of the soul.

I wonder if you have heard the parable of the dragon-fly? Mr. Frank Butler tells it most graphically. Sitting by the edge of a pool one summer evening he noticed the dragon flies flitting hither and thither upon the surface of the water; and with his observant eye he noticed that they only dipped their bodies into the water, but never their wings. He tells how he saw one poor dragon-fly unable to rise; it had immersed its wings in the water, and with

wet wings was unable to fly. That is a parable of life. Men whose wings are wet with worldliness and sin and selfishness cannot rise into fellowship with God. Every contact with the world is as the contact of the body of the dragon fly with the water. Beware, lest your soaring powers should become impaired. Beware lest the spirit of the world should invade the holy place. Beware lest your aptitudes for fellowship with the Most High should deteriorate and become destroyed by your voluntary contact with things doubtful, and sinful, and earthward. Such is the direction Godward. An upward aim, seeking not to be rich, or great, or popular, or strong, as men measure strength, but "living unto God."

Influence Earthward

Again, there is the direction of Christ's influence earthward. The risen life of Christ is characterised by a boundless energy. "He ever liveth to make intercession." It is as though He carries on a work of which we have a glimpse when He sojourned among men, and taught, and blessed, and died. His energies of redemption are unchecked by His sacrifice once offered for sin. Our Great High Priest presents His sacrifice continually, and makes intercession for the transgressors. Christ has boundless faith in the possibilities of stained and marred men and women; he despairs of none; He makes intercession for those who do not intercede for themselves, and whose characters

are utterly alien to goodness and purity and truth. "Because I live, ye shall live also." In effect He says, "You shall carry on My redeeming work, and the scope of your energies shall be world wide. His message of salvation is for "every creature." It is His will that all should be saved.

Lest you should imagine that the truth of the resurrection is remote, and unreal, and unrelated to our personal lives, let me say as clearly as I can, that no man has begun to share the risen life of the risen Christ who is not devoting himself soul and body, time and talent, to the perpetuation of Christ's own work in the world, and to the proclamation of Christ's own Gospel, the Gospel of His sacrifice, and love, and power. "Because I live," He says, "ye shall live also" to do this self-same work; to be a friend of publicans and sinners, to "bind up the broken-hearted, and to preach deliverance to the captives." Let us examine ourselves as to whether our lives are characterised by these three things: Life with its conquest deathward; Life with its direction Godward; and Life with its influence earthward. May it never be said of any one of us by the Saviour, "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." Rather may this word ring in our hearts, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

CHAPTER VII

The Pentecostal Anointing

"Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts" (Gal. 4. 6).

THERE are great days which the Church of Christ commemorates from time to time.

We commemorate His birth at Christmas; we commemorate His death and His rising again at Easter; we commemorate His ascension into the heavens at Witsun. These are all remembrances of completed events, events which will never transpire again; they are once and for all complete manifestations of the purpose and power of God. But the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit upon what has come to be known as the Day of Pentecost is not a completed event. It was the day on which the promise of Jesus began to be fulfilled, but it was, in no sense, completely fulfilled. The Day of Pentecost is a coronation of all the other great days which the Church of Christ commemorates; it is the topstone of the arch of grace, the fulfilment of the promise of God to His people from the foundation of the world. It is not a mere accident that the Acts of the Apostles comes before all the precepts of the Epistles, and the record of the successful

evangelisation of the Church. It was not the bookbinder who so ordered it, but Divine providence. The fulness of the Spirit of God descending upon that weak, but loyal-hearted band of disciples, conditioned all that they afterwards did, all to which they attained, and the vision which subsequently and ultimately they saw, and by which their lives were governed. The great event of the Day of Pentecost is not only history, but prophecy. Strip the Day of Pentecost of the merely local and temporary features, and it is but the prophetic experience of every individual believer, and of every true Church. Otherwise the ethics of the New Testament are unattainable. "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son, because ye are His sons," and because, apart from His enabling and indwelling Spirit, the life of sonship is utterly impossible. Pentecost is not only an event to be believed, but an experience to be shared. It is not only a truth to be proclaimed, but a type with which every life must be impressed

The Exaltation of Christ

Let us consider some of the details of that first great coming of the Holy Spirit, for such a study contains a message both to the individual and to the Church.

First, the Day of Pentecost stands for the heavenly attestation of the exaltation of Christ. In the Gospel narrative we read those words from His own lips, that the Holy Ghost was

not yet given because He Himself was not yet glorified. We read in the prophetic record that "He ascended up on high and led captivity captive," and not until then did "He receive gifts for men" which He shed abroad among His people "that the Lord God might dwell among them." So precedent to the Day of Pentecost was the exaltation of Christ. And when that wonderful event transpired, it was Heaven's attestation that the Conqueror had led captivity captive, that He had trampled on His foes, and had returned in triumph from the fight. What is true with regard to Heaven is true also of the human heart. When Christ was enthroned in the heavens, the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the earth; and when Christ is enthroned in the human heart, the Holy Ghost in all His fulness, is poured out upon that life. What is true of the individual, is true also of the Church. The enthronement of Jesus in the Church conditions the full endowment of the Holy Spirit's power. Christ's pre-eminence alone ensures the personal experience of Pentecostal anointing. The Lordship of Christ, professed not only by lip, but confessed in life, is the necessary, securing condition of the experience of life more abundant. Notice that it was only to the minority in the city of Jerusalem where Christ had lived and died that His presence was exhibited, and to whom this attestation of His victory came. The Holy Spirit always works through minorities, never through majorities. There is

no instance of any church possessing a majority of Spirit-filled members. There is no history of any movement being carried on in the power of the Holy Spirit through a majority. It is always through the minority, the "poor of this world, but rich in faith, whom God hath made heirs of the promise." An American writer has said, "It does not take much of a man to be a Christian, but it takes all there is of him, and all the time." When the Holy Spirit gets a minority of men who will yield to Him undivided allegiance and loyalty and love, then that band, no matter how small it be, becomes as invincible as that little band of early disciples, to whom this word first became a living truth, and is an attestation and proof that the Christ Who died and rose again is exalted to the throne as our representative Head.

The Divine Equipment

Secondly, for the disciples Pentecost inaugurated a new era of power: it stood for their equipment. While it is impossible to analyse into its prismatic colours the spectrum of that wonderful light which fell upon them and illumined their lives, yet we may see some of those great characteristic graces which made their lives afterwards so conspicuous and courageous: for faint-hearted men became as bold as lions, and their eyes which were red with weeping for their Lord, Who had been taken from them, became filled with a joy which

the world could not interfere with, a joy which became their strength and lifted them, as wings lift a bird, into the blue of Heaven, because of their sense of victory. They were made conscious of an open heaven, of free access to God, and a knowledge of the power of prayer which they had never, hitherto, known. We do not know what to pray for, nor how to pray, save as the Holy Spirit takes us by the hand and leads us into the great sanctuary of God, and teaches us how to speak with Him, and to hearken to His voice. It is not when we are on the field of battle; it is not when we are busy with all the engagements and absorptions of life that we are most prone to realise our weakness. It is when we shut to the door, and kneel to pray, that we realise our weakness. For it is when a man endeavours to maintain intercourse with God that there comes in upon him re-assertions of old discarded tyrannies; there comes in upon Him a new sense of the Divine ideal, and a new consciousness of his own shortcomings and failures. We never need so much a helper, a Guide, a Comforter, and a Strengtheners, as when we open the door of the sanctuary and enter in, there to commune with God. So the blessed Spirit when He descended invested the Truth which the disciples had received from Jesus with a new and convincing power. They began to realise that not only had Christ proclaimed the Truth, but that He was and is the Truth.

The sacred symbols of the Holy Spirit's

coming are not without significance. There was heard the sound of a rushing, mighty wind; and there were seen tongues of flame parted asunder. What is wind, that most mysterious of natural forces which man cannot command? We may avail ourselves of its strength, but we cannot order its cessation, or its commencement. The wind, which blows health into jaded, wearied, weakened bodies; or blasts and blights that which cannot stand against its strength. Wind, which winnows the chaff from the wheat, and sterilises the field and the forest, as does the sunlight and the air. It is not without significance that the Holy Ghost came as a wind, bringing health to His people from the hills of God, and blighting and blasting every tree that the Heavenly Father had not planted in His garden: winnowing the chaff from the wheat, sifting their lives, the worthy from the unworthy. It is not without significance that He came, too, in the symbol of fire; fire, which consumes the dross and refines the gold; fire, which stands for a glowing enthusiasm which cannot be quenched; the tongue of fire, which stands for impassioned speech and utterance. So here we have the equipment of the disciples of the exalted Christ.

An Opportunity of Witness

Now as to the effect upon the world. Oh, it is a wondrous story! We read that when the multitude heard it they came together and marvelled. They were confounded and

arrested. They hearkened to the Word, as men must hearken when the Word is preached with a tongue of fire. They were pricked to the heart, and at least three thousand of them that day bowed before the God of Heaven, under the power of Him, Who, but a few days previously they had crucified. Pentecost created for the disciples their opportunity of witness, and endued them with strength to seize that opportunity. It was the coming of the Holy Ghost which brought the people together, and enabled the disciples to seize the occasion for the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. The coming of the Holy Ghost upon those untutored, illiterate men, caused the world to rub its eyes, and to say, "What is this?" Would to God that the world to-day had far more occasion to ask the same question, for is it not true to say that when the Church is witnessing, the world will be wondering; when the Church is consecrated, the world will be convicted—and not till then; when the Church is sanctified, the world will be seeking Christ; when the Church is in dead earnest, the world will be eager to know the reality of the things which she affirms. The quest of the Upper Room always leads to the conquest of the open-air. It has been so throughout all the ages of spiritual history. And what is true of the Church is true also of the individual. If we are filled with this same Blessed Spirit, then that very Divine infilling will create for us opportunities of service, and will give us the power to seize

them and improve them. The tongue of fire! This is the true symbol of the Church. It was a great strategic stroke on the part of the devil when he persuaded the Church that its true symbol was the Cross. But, after all, the Cross led on to the Resurrection. The true symbol of the Church is an open tomb, with the stone rolled away, and a tongue of fire imparted to each willing member. When the Church of Christ, and its individual members alike, possess the tongue of fire which Christ, the exalted Lord, waits to bestow, then the multitudes around will wonder, and then we shall hear men say, "What is this?" "What must we do?" and then shall we rejoice before Him with the joy of harvest. But without the tongue of fire, we who preach will only tickle the ears of the people, when we should be thrusting the sword right into their hearts. We shall be declaring the plausibleness of our faith when we should be demonstrating its power to save souls. We shall be expounding doctrine when we should be exhibiting dynamic. We may arouse admiration, but our true mission is to inspire awe, to cause the world to catch its breath, and to say, "What is this?" Then shall men hear in their own tongue, as on the Day of Pentecost, of the wonderful works of God, and the most wonderful of all, of the Coming of His Son to die for sinners. They shall hear of Him Who "takes the beggar out of the pit, and sets him with the princes of His people." "Because ye are His sons, God

hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts" for this very purpose, to attest to the exaltation of Christ, to equip us for our work, and witness, and ministry, and sacrifice too, and to arrest and arouse the sleeping world.

The Conditions of Sonship

If these things be so, then a word as to the personal consideration of this word. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the unalienable possession of all believers, and yet it is not an unconditioned possession. This gift is yours by right if you are a child of God, but not yours in experience save as you fulfil the conditions of sonship. Let me put to you the question that they put who came seeking the Infant Redeemer at His birth: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" I say to you, "Where is He?" Is He, on the threshold of your heart and life or is He on the throne? Is He exalted in your life, or is He only recognised? For upon the answer to that query depends your practical possession of this His Gift, and which is yours by the purchase of His own blood. The promise of the Holy Spirit is as much yours as the love and faithfulness of the Lord Jesus can make it. Yet how many Christians there are who live in entire ignorance of His sanctifying and strengthening ministries, their lives a complete denial of the fact that the Gift of His Spirit has ever been poured forth.

Some of you travel from time to time to other countries, and you take with you a letter of

credit, and it is signed by your banker, and is current in every country whither you go. Yet it is useless unless you present it at the bank, and avail yourself of its provision. Here is your heavenly letter of credit: "Because ye are His sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts." Ask yourself, "Why am I not powerful? Why have I not the joy and the courage of God's people? God will not keep you in doubt for long if you are honest of heart. He is the unchanged and unchanging Lord, and He sends no man into the warfare at his own charges. May we know Him, that the exalted Christ may get added glory through our redeemed lives.

CHAPTER VIII

God's Sovereign Gift

"Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means" (2 Thess. 3. 16).

THIS word "peace" is one of the greatest of the Gospel words. It sounds the depths of the deepest human instinct. It soothes the fever of the most irritated human experience. It shines into the gloom of the darkest human perplexity with regard to the uncertainty of the future. Peace! And peace always! And Peace always by all means! Perhaps there is no word which so entirely expresses both the character and the mission of our Lord, in Whose name Paul writes, as does this word "Peace." For has He not been called "the Prince of Peace"? Is it not so that those who knew Him best thus described the whole force of His mission? "He is our peace!" "He hath made peace!" "My peace I give unto you!"

The Promise of the Gospel

We are, of course, conscious of the fact that the word "peace" has a varying use and meaning in the Evangel. It stands, for instance, as an expression of the attitude of reconciliation.

"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." It stands also for that deepest of all human experiences possible to believers in Christ: "The peace of God which passeth all understanding," which transcends in its power and influence, the peace which knowledge can bring about any subject, or about any age. I do not want to speak of this word, however, in either of these great senses in which it appears constantly in the Evangel, but rather I would deal with it in its largest and fullest meaning, for the world is full of people who need peace in its widest interpretation, who too often fail to find that for which their hearts are yearning because of a misdirected search for it. Too often men fancy that peace is to be found in material or intellectual absorptions. Sometimes they fancy that peace is to be secured by avoiding serious and irksome duty. Sometimes they seek for it in the ignoble and perilous pleasures of life, which serve either as a counter-irritant to pain, or as a narcotic to conscience. Sometimes they hope it will be found in the pure delights of human and domestic affection. Oh, how many give themselves to these things, vainly seeking for the fulfilment of that which is of the great promise of the Gospel of Christ—Peace, and peace always, and peace always by all means. The tragedy of life to-day is that men are squandering all their moral resources in seeking after that which is near at hand, did they but know it. The world is full of disappointed,

disillusioned, and disheartened men and women who are seeking for peace in the wrong direction. The greatest thing about life is the utter insufficiency of any lower satisfaction than that of God Himself to meet the instinctive need of our souls. That which invests life with its most solemn awe is the fact that nothing less than God Himself satisfies this clamant instinct. The ultimate proof of the Gospel that we preach, by which we stand, and in which we live, is the effectiveness of its ministry to unrested souls, who have found in the world sorrow and dispeace and unending dissatisfaction. I pray that through this word God may speak to any who are, perchance, unrested and disheartened with regard to life, and are almost in that state in which the inevitable is accepted, and the experience of the past re-regarded as the best possible experience for them. May God Himself introduce into their lives this new joy, His peace which passes all understanding in its re-creative power, and unending and unfailing inspiration.

I would have you notice the superlative extravagance of these words. I defy you to match it anywhere, either within or without the pages of the Book. Not only peace, but peace always; and not only peace always, but peace always by all means, or, as it is in the Revised Version, "peace in all ways and directions" This seemingly extravagant language of the Apostle Paul in writing thus to these Thessalonian Christians is justified only by that from

which it springs—the deep, hidden certitudes of his own life. For he is only saying to them in effect, “May the God of peace do for you what He has done for me. May He repeat in your lives what He has brought into my life, transforming, and changing, and lifting me into the glorious realms of a satisfied service.”

A Persecuted Church

A very brief survey of the state of the Thessalonian Church, as you get it indirectly in those Letters, will give you some indication of the general meaning of this benediction. For, perhaps, more than any other Church this was one which had suffered persecution, and persecution in which many of its individual members had lost friends and loved ones. Their hearts had been rent and torn in the sorrow of bereavement. And because of those who had invaded their Church with their false teaching in regard to the future, perhaps there was no Church that was so perplexed as to what the future held as this Church; and there is no epistle in which the future is more wonderfully and clearly revealed and unveiled than in this one. Think, therefore, of the state of that Church—persecuted, perplexed, pain-ridden—all conditions which are inimical to peace, and yet to such the apostle has the audacity of faith to say, “The Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means.” Surely that benediction must have fallen upon their

hearts as something that was entirely contradictory to their experience: as being, in its fullest aspects, in entire variance with the facts of life as they knew them. As this word falls upon our ears do we not feel our own littleness, and does it not awe us by its immensity? The waters we have to sail in are in the latitudes of storm; and peace seems to be always an idle dream. The country of our pilgrimage is full of perils, and peace is always an impossibility. Above all, the dispositions we have to carry about with us are so unstable, and so volatile, that peace seems always more or less of a mockery.

But let us get beyond the seeming irony of a benediction like this, spoken to a people who had to live amid the stern practicalities of life, to that deep, hidden certitude out of which it arose, namely, the apostle's own experience of life, a life, as you know, tempest-tossed, in conflict at every point with destructive forces, and experiencing that lonesomeness of a life in which those upon whom he depended had forsaken him. Paul says that in just that experience of life Christ had imparted His own peace, and it had made life for him one glad song. He seeks to lift those to whom he writes from the peril of looking at God, and interpreting God, through the distorted lens of their own lives, instead of looking at life through the great, clarifying lens of God's purpose and grace.

Harmony with God

"The Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means." What is peace? It is as difficult to analyse peace as it is to analyse a sunbeam, or a tear. Scientists may analyse a sunbeam, and tell us what the rays of light are composed of, but that does not explain a sunbeam. A chemist may tell you that a tear consists of a little sodium, and a few other salts, but that is no description of a tear. I may tell you something about peace, but I cannot describe it. Perhaps we may best understand it by thinking of what peace is not. Peace is not a mere emotional sense of inward satisfaction with things as they are. Still less is peace a fatalistic acceptance of inevitable circumstances. Peace is not a mere unambitious contentment with life. Still less is peace any escape from its pressure and burdens. Peace is harmony with the will and purpose and government of God. Peace is that harmony with God which qualifies men for serious duty, for ceaseless conflict, for fruitful service, and for bright witness in the world. Peace is an appeasing of conscience. Peace is a satisfaction of the deep instincts and needs of the soul. Peace is an assurance of the future. These are some of the constituents which go to make up the by-product of peace. And to mention these things is only to make clear to the thoughtful-minded man that such peace can only come from the Lord of Peace Himself. No one but God can create such a state of

peace in a man's life. It can only come from the Lord of peace, Who Himself has conquered in every possible field of human difficulty and dispeace, and Whose gift of peace is the outcome of His own victorious submission to the will of the Father. Remember His legacy to His people, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Me ye shall have peace. Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world, and in offering to you My gift of peace I am offering to you the fruits of My own victory." That is the import of Christ's word. Oh, how few of us know its truth in all its depth, unfathomable as the sea, a peace which cannot be interfered with by any outward circumstance. His peace which is as a river deepening as it flows towards the ocean. Peace, which is a prophetic experience of that land of peace where He Who bears the marks of His Passion, holds the reigns of power.

A Lasting Experience

And not only peace does He give to His people, but "peace always." It is not just the transient experience of an hour, when His people meet together for worship, when their thoughts are uplifted by prayer, and by hymn, and by the atmosphere of fellowship. It is a lasting peace covering every possible contingency which now may be veiled in the uncertainty of the future. "Always"—one of the biggest words in our common speech: it is a word to which nothing needs to be added, and

nothing, in fact, can be added. "Peace always"—when the many duties of life tend to crowd out all thoughts of God and of Heaven: when days of trouble overtake us; when calamity robs us of joy; when the chill breath of doubt dries up the living springs of our hope; when the darkness of despair settles upon our hearts: when unmerited blame and unappreciated service tend to embitter the spirit; when life is bereft of human love; when death itself is drawing near; when the valley of the shadow is opening; and when we are fighting for our very breath. "Peace always"; peace of heart amid endless agitation. Always we may have the peace of God when we can never hope to have the praise and support of men. If these words are true, and if the apostle is no false witness of Christ, then there is nothing in life which can touch, or interfere with this sovereign gift of peace. There is only one thing that can disturb this peace of God within, and that is resistance to the will of God.

But there is still more. It is "peace always by all means"; and here we have the full cumulative force of this benediction. Peace is not a mere passivity, but an active co-operative fellowship with the God of all grace and power. It is peace by all means. Let me point out the meaning of this final phrase, "by all means," by suggesting to those to whom this peace of God is utterly unknown the way by which it may become living and powerful in their lives.

First, if peace is impossible to one here because of some hidden thing in the disturbing past, there is only one way by which this peace may be realised by you, and that is by bringing the past out into the light, and in the light which streams from the Cross of Calvary you will find that the blood of Christ cleanses away all the sins of the past. At that Cross there is to be found peace for the vilest, peace for the one whose heart is a very turmoil and gale of sin. Peace will come into the life as the past is honestly brought out into the light of God. Bring the past and lay it at His feet, and there is only one thing He can say consistent with His own nature and promise, "Go in peace, and sin no more."

Making Christ the Centre

Secondly, if peace is not a reality in the life because of the insistence of some present foe, because of the constant resurrection of some old temptation which is overmastering you, then the only way of peace for such a one is to face it, to fight it out, to end the controversy once and for all. To some souls peace can never come save as the outcome of victory. If you will take that dark, hidden passion, and face it, and fight it with all the strength of your manhood, reinforced by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, you will experience that peace of God which passeth all understanding. And if fear about the future is causing dispeace, face it, and fight it out, and the chances are ten

thousand to one, that when you do face it, you will find that the lions are chained, and cannot get beyond the length of their chains. And if peace is disturbed in any life because of untoward circumstances, because of the heavy pressure of life, then the way of peace for you is to be quiet, and to take your proper bearings. Look at life in all its aspects, and then say to your soul some such words as these: "I am here by the direct appointment of God. Underneath are the everlasting arms. Above me is the banner of love. And as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so is the Lord round about His people. Behind me is the Cross, which separates me from my defilement and disqualifications. And ahead of me are the lights of Home."

Lastly, to those whose dispeace of heart is the wearisomeness of self-complacency, and self-centredness, the only way by which you will ever realise the height of this wondrous evangel of peace is to get out into the field of service. Do something for some one else. Do something to secure the salvation of another soul. Go and suffer with those who suffer. Get underneath the burdens of those who are being crushed in life. Go out into the world with the tender light of Christ shining in your eyes, and the influence of His Spirit streaming through all your surrendered personality. Tell those who are perishing, of Jesus the mighty to save. Then you will know a peace which is constant and unending. In short, make Christ and His

service the sum and centre of your life. In the old days before Copernicus, all books on astronomy dealt with great earthquakes, cataclysms, upheavals, and calamities; the earth was at that time regarded as the centre of things. But when in the good purpose of God the light of truth came to man that the sun was the centre of the great solar system, and that everything in the universe is held in its relationship to the sun, then there was no more talk of earthquakes, and cataclysms, and avalanches. And if you will make Christ the centre of your life, and forsake the old earth-centre of self and its wearisome dominations, then I pledge the sacred name of my Lord and Master that He, the Lord of peace, will bring into your life "peace always," and "peace always by all means."

CHAPTER IX

The Reward of Trust

"Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord" (James 5. 11).

"The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42. 10).

WHAT was the "end of the Lord" to this man whose patience is here set forth as an inspiration and an example to us? Surely this, "That the Lord gave him twice as much as he had before." The Book of Job has always made a strong appeal to men, and especially to those who are members of the common fellowship of suffering, of trial, of perplexity, and of testing. This is a Book which meets us at the deepest levels and at the most secret intimacies of life. Indeed, there are times when it seems to be the only Book in the whole Divine library that speaks to our hearts. For, above all others, it illustrates, and, at the same time, interprets those experiences which bind the whole world of men together in a common fellowship of pain and suffering and perplexity, all of which stand forth so conspicuously in the history of Job's experience.

Perplexing Experiences

Let us recall the outstanding features of that experience. Job was a God-fearing man, living at ease and in prosperity. Suddenly without warning, and, apparently, without reason, as far as he himself is able to discern, there came to him a sudden loss of fortune. He awakened in the morning a rich man; he slept at night a bankrupt; everything had gone. And, as though that were not enough—in one day he lost his family, sons and daughters. And remember what that meant to a man who was a Jew. It meant the obliteration of every true hope that inspired every family, that along that line should come one day the Messiah in the flesh. Then, as though all that were not enough, he lost his health, and he lost it in such a painful fashion that he was unable to enjoy any of the ordinary amenities of life. And as though all these things were insufficient—he had a wife who did not understand one iota of his experience; and, further, he was cursed with meddlesome friends. Such was the history of Job. He suffered in the dark, and was perplexed beyond measure. But he never lost his hold upon God; he never lost his patience with God. We are apt to think of the patience of Job as merely directed towards those with whom he came into contact. It was more than that. Its direction was mainly Godward. Job stands before us always as a man who had patience with the slowness of God's methods,

because he was so convinced of their certain issue.

Ultimately there came to Job a restoration to prosperity. "The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before." That did not mean that he had two camels where before he had one. It did not mean that he had two pounds where before he possessed but one. It may include that, but that is, after all, the most negligible of the meanings of this word. What it really meant was this, that Job became a bigger man than he had been before: that he had a deepened sense of God; that he came to know himself twice as well as he had known himself hitherto. The gifts of God are not confined to material things, which are, as a matter of fact, the most minor and negligible of His gifts. This story of Job's experience is illustrative because of the light it casts upon God's desires for men, His ways with men, and His work in men. It illustrates His purpose in permitting these tests of faith and endurance; it illustrates His ideals of good, and the way He takes by which alone these ideals can be realised. There are many whose present experiences are only met by some such interpreting word as this: "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord—the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before."

Ultimate Issues

Now the Bible, open it where you will—at history, or prophecy, or exhortation—is a

study, firstly, in initial relationship, men and God, and men with each other. It is also a study in progressive processes, the way in which God realises His own ideals in and for men; and, further, it is a study in ultimate issues, both of relationship and processes. So that it is always possible to find here a key to our current experiences, something which sheds a light upon our pathway, something which opens a door through which we may emerge out of our doubt, if doubt it be, out of our fear, if fear enwraps us, into the light of unbroken fellowship with God in Christ. It is always a part of God's greatness that His ways with men need to be interpreted by faith and patience; we cannot fathom the ways of God in an hour. It is always part of God's greatness, and it is always part of the greatness of the human soul that God's dealings with men require time for their elucidation. We do not reach the goal which Job here reached until we, like Job, are patient. It is not without meaning that James couples these two things—the patience of Job, and the end of the Lord. For the one can never be realised apart from the other. One of the dangers of the Christian life to-day, a danger which has been common to every age, is that of impetuosity and impatience. Many of us are like those tourists who “do” a city in a day, and a country in a week; and who imagine that in so doing they have exhausted all the possibilities of that city and that country. You see them hurrying



round the picture galleries at express speed, and taking but a passing glance at the wonderful monuments of wealth and national history; and, then, they think they have seen a great city! And men deal with the great judgments of God, with the great truths of His Word, with the revelations of His grace and power, as do these somewhat amusing tourists. They will never know "the end of the Lord" in that way.

God's Ideal for Men

"The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before." These words contradict any mere surface judgment of life's great experiences. Take, for example, the verdict of Job's friends with regard to his affliction. They almost rubbed salt into his bleeding wounds as they accused him of his sin. They said, "Your suffering is the result of your wrong-doing. You have professed to be a good man, but at heart you have been a hypocrite, or you would never have been so visited by God." We know that suffering, especially physical suffering, is sometimes the result of sin. But this was not so in the case of Job. When a man sees another suffering some dreadful trial of faith and endurance, he never makes a greater mistake than to point to such an one, and to say, "That suffering of yours is the consequence of sin." It may be, even as it was with Job, not sin but righteousness being perfected! There is a surface judgment which is current to-day, as it was in the days of Job, that what men call

happiness is the great ideal of life. But nowhere do we find in the teaching of the Word of God, and it is conspicuously absent in the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ our Master, that happiness is God's ideal for men; goodness, if you will; and there is a world of difference between goodness, in its large, spacious meanings, and mere happiness. Goodness strikes its roots into the past, and stretches out its hands into eternity. Happiness is a matter only of a moment, of an hour. Hence it is because of this, that present and ultimate goodness is the Divine objective, that burdens become heavier and not lighter, that perplexity becomes greater, that darkness often becomes deeper, that loneliness becomes more terrifying, and that sympathetic understanding becomes rarer. The common experience of many a man who has set out to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, who has enthroned the Lord in his heart as Saviour and Sovereign, is that God is seeking his good, and not merely arranging happiness for him.

A Dangerous Doctrine

There are, for instance, those divinely-ordained subtractions which are sanctifying in their influence, and the character-product of these things is the justification of the whole. We sometimes speak of the end justifying the means. There is no more dangerous doctrine that can be applied to human affairs, and no higher doctrine than can be applied to Divine

affairs. It is the end which justifies the means which God takes in making men holy, and pure, and strong, and true, and in giving them twice as much as they had before. For at the end of the day when we come to balance up the accounts of life, it will be found, if we know anything of the ways of God with the human soul, that tears have cleansed from sin-dust the eyes of the one that shed them; that sorrow has quickened the intuition and sympathy, as nothing else could have done; that clouds have emptied themselves in fructifying rain; that the setting sun has only set in order to reveal the glory of the starlight skies; that the desert has become the place of the burning bush, and the smitten rock, and the pillar of cloud. That to those in lonely exile, as to the one of old who was exiled to the Isle of Patmos, has been revealed the glorified Lord in greater strength, and power, and clearness, and beauty than ever before. It will be found in that day that the Lord has given such a once twice as much as he had before; for these things are the real enrichments of life. We hear people say when a man dies, "What was he worth?" The answer may be that he was worth a quarter of a million pounds, when, in reality, he was not worth a farthing. Many a man is reputed to be worth a million, who, if he gets into Heaven at all, is but a poor bankrupt and a pauper. Possessions, if they are to be of any real value, must be as immortal as the possessor himself. They must be possessions which

you do not have to drop when life is suddenly interrupted by a funeral, and the passing through the valley into the Beyond. We are worth just that, and nothing more, which we can take with us into eternity, and into the brilliant white of the Throne of Judgment. The only thing that we are worth is the immortal, eternal character which has been the product of God's dealings with us. When you visit a foreign land the first thing you have to do as a preliminary to your journey is to exchange your money into the currency of the country to which you are going. How much of what you call your worth have you exchanged into the currency of Heaven? How much is there of immortal, eternal, unchangeable value in your life? For those are the real enrichments.

The Perils of Prosperity

Secondly, there is to be seen in these words concerning Job the love of God expressing itself in painstaking solicitude and care over a human soul. Every experience, however untoward it seems, tends towards the creation, not towards the crushing of a man's hopes and ideals. Everything in God's order is directed towards the establishing of a man's faith, the enrichment of his resources, and the enlargement of his influence. And while God is thus working in the human heart, He is allowing Himself to be misunderstood as He works. Love never reaches a higher pinnacle of greatness and disinterestedness and perfection than

just here—that the love of God is willing to be misunderstood by the very one whom it seeks to bless and to enrich. Job trusted Him; he was perfectly content to be deaf to all the advice, and all the irony, and all the obloquy and scorn of those who bade him curse God and die. And as he waited, strangely enough life advanced by its very contradictions, and was enlarged by its restrictions, and fertilised by its losses. “The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.”

I might mention here the difficulty we all experience of accepting only partially understood providences; and most of the dark things of life are only partially understood at the time of their happening. If we cannot understand these things by looking forward we may perhaps understand them by looking backward. This is not scientific. The child says to the scientist, “Why does that stone fall to the ground?” And the scientist replies, “Because there is a law of gravitation, and the earth pulls everything down towards itself. “And the child says, “Why? What causes the earth to have a downward pull?” And that simplest of questions confounds the mightiest of scientists. It is a mystery, and is part of a greater mystery. The greatest mystery of all is the love of God, and we have all ample and abundant proof of the love of God in our lives. All the time God was preparing Job for the perils of prosperity. He had twice as much as he had before because he had become twice as great. How do we know

it? Listen to Job's testimony, not at the beginning of things, but at the end: "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." When a man gets to that place God can trust him with prosperity. God can trust him as a faithful steward with the mammon of unrighteousness. As a matter of fact, God is infinitely just; we get what we are fit to get, and nothing more, and nothing less.

Lastly, there is in this word an intimation of those things which God is preparing for them that love Him. This word is descriptive of Heaven, towards which we are pressing on. Whatever else is in Heaven of a certainty this is there. Every unfinished service, every incomplete consecration, will find there a new opportunity. Every gift of God which I have only partially appreciated, will be renewed to me. Every capacity which I have felt day by day to be inadequate to the realisation of my ideals will be expanded. Every light of love, of friendship, of service, of gladness which has been lighted in my life only, as it seems to be extinguished, will be re-lighted. What a wonderful hope towards which we may press! What a wonderful hope to sustain us when all things seem to be working against us!

CHAPTER X

The Glory of the Second Place

"For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one" (Matt. 25. 14, 15).

THIS parable told by our Lord is full of suggestive teaching to those who would fain be members and citizens of the heavenly Kingdom. It brings before us the true nature of the Kingdom, and reminds us, not only of its departing Lord, but also of its returning Lord. We are reminded that to the citizens of the Kingdom the King commits His interests. There is to be found also the certain criterion of judgment upon their conduct; and the reward of success and faithfulness.

Inequality of Gifts

One thing, however, stands out, and it is the inequality of the gifts—to one man five talents are given; to another, two; and to another, one. There were doubtless more than three servants involved in this distribution. It is easy to picture the man with the five talents, with the fulness of entrustment which lifted him above the level of the ordinary man,

so trading with them that he was able to lay ten talents at the feet of his lord when he returned. But it is less easy to understand the inspiration of the man with the two talents. I do not think that in our consideration of this parable we have always done him justice. We might describe him as the man of the second place, the average man. He does not possess the fulness of the five talents, nor the poverty of the one. He has not got the stimulus of conscious power, nor the handicap of penury which cannot be remedied. The temptation which faces such a man is to adopt the attitude that it is not worth while struggling, that it is not worth while bending oneself to the difficult tasks of life. "I am just a second-place man," he might say, "and I can never gain a place in the front ranks of life. My gifts are never going to lift me into any conspicuous position, nor secure for me any measure of recognition." The five talent man flashes out like a meteor; the two talent man is ignored altogether. But such a one, with his magnificent record—a record as magnificent as the record of the man more richly endowed, for his success was relatively equal to that of the more highly-gifted servant—affords us an inspiring example for our common lives. Most of us have come to realise by this time that the second place is about as high a place as we shall ever reach in life. We are not men and women of any conspicuous distinction in any realm of life. With regard to character—we are not

very good, nor yet very bad ; our virtues are not shining ones, but our vices are not unwholesome. With regard to circumstances—we are not very rich, and, on the other hand, we are not very poor. With regard to capacity—we are not very clever, but we are not entirely devoid of common-sense and ability. We are just men and women of the two talents. We are just, morally and spiritually, middle-class people, by Divine appointment ; and we shall remain so to the end of the chapter. The hardest thing in life is to recognise that fact, and not to beat against our limitations, as a poor, wild bird beats against the bars of his cage. The true art of life is to accept our limitations as of Divine appointment, and to seek to be utterly faithful to the God Who has so blessed and circumstanced us. We have counted up our talents over and over again, but we can never make the total to amount to more than two, and we have come reluctantly, it may be, to realise that the place of prominence is not for us. Just for us the ordinary work of hewing wood and drawing water day by day until the evening. After all, there are available only a few front places in life, and they are mostly all taken, and the rest of us have got to be content with the second place, and to magnify, and to make sure our calling and election there. This is the true secret of all that is strong and eternal in Christian experience.

A Subtle Suggestion

Now there is the peril—and we all know something about it—of resentment taking hold of a man at being passed over for the first place. There is the peril of falling into the baneful habit of self-sympathy because he imagines that, somehow, there has been a providential injustice with regard to the arrangements of his life. If we do not overcome that subtle suggestion which affects so many when they realise just what their place of life is to be, it is apt to lead us to an ungenerous judgment with regard to those who occupy the first rank: and it is apt to lead to carelessness of effort with regard to our own duty and responsibility, and a defiance of our own moral obligations. It is apt to lead to an unworthy blaming of God, on our part, which is not only a contradiction of our Christian profession, but a certain and utter deterioration of the real fibre of our lives. I think, perhaps, that is one of the advantages of living in a great city like London where, perhaps, most of the five-talent people gather for their service. It puts a man in his right place. There are preachers who have come to this great city thinking to set the Thames on fire, and then discovering that the Thames is not at all particularly inflammable. Many a man who regarded himself as possessed of five talents in his own village has come to London to find that he has really only two, and, sometimes, not even two! One of the benefits of living in a great community is that a man very

soon finds out what is his true place, and to accept it as the ordinance and providence of God, and to seek, as did this anonymous hero in Christ's parable, to be utterly and entirely faithful to God just there. In so doing, he will serve his own generation, and when the end comes will fall asleep, to awake in the joyful presence of his Lord, which is the portion laid up for all who have been faithful. There are preachers who often make the mistake of thinking that they are bigger men than they actually are, and that their hearers are a good deal more richly endowed than is, in reality, the case. But we can most surely get at the heart of things by recognising at once that, for the most part, we are men and women with two talents. Let me suggest one or two lessons which may be learned from this average man.

A Divine Entrustment

The first lesson that we learn for the help and encouragement and guidance of our lives from this message is that two talents are a divine entrustment, and the second place a divinely-given honour. The second place in the service of Christ is a greater honour than the first place in the service of the world. There is a sense in which the Psalmist scales the highest heights of Christian philosophy when he says, "I would rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of ungodliness." The fact that the Master has assigned this place in life to me must put an end for ever to all petu-

lance and all dissatisfaction which rob life of its vital force. You remember the Apostle Paul says, "It pleased the Lord"; and that thought governed everything in his life; it put an end to all questioning. Self-depreciation is dishonouring to God. There is really a stimulus here in realising that we have only two talents. It should help us to see that having only two talents, we have no time to lose, and that we must work hard at Christian living and Christian service. The fact of our limitations should be an incentive to moral and spiritual industry and persistence. It works out something like this: We have only two talents, therefore we must pray, for we have only the power of God to support us. We have only two talents, therefore we must make the most of the illuminations and inspiration of His Word. The two-talent people should become the most diligent and most highly-rewarded of Bible students. We have only two talents, therefore we must redeem the time, and buy up the opportunities, and squander nothing of our capital. In such a spirit, second-place people can do first-class work, and two talents can gain "other two talents": The man with the two talents can gain and acquire that which shall be for the eternal glory of God.

The Call to Faithfulness

The second lesson we learn is that the number of talents in no wise affects the matter of faithfulness. It is no easier to be faithful with

five talents than it is to be faithful with two talents. We look round about us in life, and especially in the Church of Christ, and we discover that the real work is done by two-talented people. For the few people there are in the world possessing the five talents, as far as I have opportunity to judge, seem to be singularly unlike the man in the parable. The temptation which confronts the man with the five talents is to imagine that because he has genius he need not, therefore, go in for the grind of hard work. Sometimes he is quite glad to exert the conscious glamour of his own personality in order to cover up an ungenerous spirit towards others. The five talented man has flashes of genius, but he is not always dependable and steadfast. And, after all, it is faithfulness that counts in the long run. It is not brilliancy, not genius, not popular acclaim, but utter and absolute devotion to duty, faithfulness without applause, and without recognition that counts. It might be helpful to remember in this connection that the consideration of God's greatness lifts a man from the baneful effects of comparing himself with others. After all there is not very much difference between five talents and two talents. The five talents which the first man laid at the feet of his lord did not mean much to him in comparison with the two talents. The thought of God's greatness is a great encouragement to us as we seek to do His will with this smaller endowment.

Further, we learn from this story that faithfulness brings to each man the same degree of moral enlargement. The man with the larger, and the man with the smaller endowment, are rewarded because of their faithfulness in exactly the same degree. We need to look beyond those things which are inclined to chafe and to fret our lives, and to consecrate ourselves with undivided soul to Him Whom we seek to serve.

The second place also affords opportunities for showing devotion to the Master. We realise that some paths are barred to us by God's ordering: that life has to be lived largely without the things that other lives seem to have in abundance: that our service is not going to secure for us a great deal of recognition from others. A real, humble acceptance of these things demands a moral heroism of which love alone is the inspiration. This is, after all, the true secret of faithfulness. Faithfulness is not merely a thing we read about in books. Faithfulness is not something that we can acquire by listening to sermons about it. Faithfulness is the expression of loyal affection. If we love God then we shall need no other stimulus. The glory of the second place is just this: that it affords us a magnificent opportunity for showing our love to God. The greatness of this man is to be seen not merely in the two talents that he gained, but in the character-product of his struggle, in his victory over those things which would have dragged him down had he yielded to them. The eternal character-product

is that which one day is going to fit him for eternal service in the presence of God.

The Crowning Day

Lastly, we are helped, not only by a consideration of this anonymous man's faithfulness, but by the example of those who have gone before in this same pathway. There is no more interesting study in the whole Bible than that of the man of the second place. Let me remind you of some of them. Aaron always took the second place, while Moses took the first. His position could not always have been of the happiest, but his faithfulness secured for him the Divine approval. Think of John the Baptist. The second place must have been hard for him, because at one time he occupied the first. But when Jesus came then he recognised his true position. He realised that in the presence of the Son of God he was a man only of two talents. "He must increase, but I must decrease," he said. Yet of him Jesus said, "This man of the second place is the greatest of men born of women." Think of Barnabas and Silas, men who accompanied Paul, the five talent man, on his journeys. They received little applause, little appreciation, yet had they not been faithful to their commission, it is doubtful if Paul would ever have accomplished his mission in life. Above and beyond all these whom I have mentioned, I think of the Lord Himself. In Him "there is no beauty that we should desire Him." The glamour and pomp

of Rome were all around Him, but there was no glamour and pomp about Him. Our blessed Master, to the end of His life, had to drink the same bitter cup which you and I have to drink: and when He was put forward for the suffrages of the people, He had to take the second place—Barrabas got the first. There is that young man who wants to be a missionary, and who finds that his capacities do not warrant his going forth to the mission field; he has to stay where he is, and do the will of God here. There is that one who wanted to be a leader, but he finds himself maimed as to his aspirations. Our Lord Himself drank of the bitterness of this cup that He might for ever be the Companion, the lifter-up of the head of the man with the two talents who has, perforce, to take the second place in life.

We are reminded in this parable of the crowning day. The light of that day falling upon the hour of time, and upon the mists of the present, settles our hearts as we seek to improve our two talents. "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." That is the first place—at His side—for the man who has been content with the second place in His service down here. Let us learn how to live, for "the chief end of man" is not to be great, nor to be rich, nor to be popular, but to be faithful, to "glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever."

CHAPTER XI

The Sin of Neutrality

"In the day that thou stoodest on the other side . . . even thou wast as one of them" (Obad. II).

LET us recall the circumstances in which this prophecy was called forth. Judah and Jerusalem were in dire peril and in mortal conflict. Strangers and foreigners had invaded the land, and the fall of the holy city was imminent. The Edomites, whose peculiar relationship with Israel forms a very large part of the minor Prophecies of the Old Testament, instead of coming to the help of the weak and those whom they were morally bound and obliged to assist, simply "stood on the other side," just content to do nothing but look on. This verse, which is the very heart and kernel of this much-neglected and little-understood prophecy of Obadiah, expresses the consequence of such an attitude in the lives of those who refused to help the people of God; they were numbered as their foes: they were regarded actually as one of the aggressors because they "stood on the other side," when all that was best in them was calling them to action and to sacrifice.

In this word we have an insight into the requirements of God, and the requirements of men alike. Edom was condemned for not recognising the claim of God, she was condemned for her attitude of passive unconcern, and she is visited for the sin of unfulfilled obligation. The permanent value of this message goes out far beyond its original significance. The meaning of this word could not have been misunderstood by the men to whom it was addressed; and its permanent value is as great to-day as it was then, for it is a condemnation which admits of no possible refutation of that same attitude, and the unveiling of its consequence.

These words, "In the day that thou stoodest on the other side" is descriptive of a large body of professing Christians at the present time. They are just looking on at all the great movements that are going on in the world, and in the Church of Christ, and at all the interests clashing against interests which go to make up our common life as the servants of God. There are many whose attitude cannot be described as antagonistic—they are not concerned enough to be antagonistic; their attitude is not one of direct opposition, they are not sufficiently interested to oppose. They are simply looking on, sometimes critically, sometimes carelessly and thoughtlessly, and showing no concern whatsoever, they are just standing aloof. We know the history which the prophecy records of the consequence, swift and certain, visited

upon Edom for not coming "to the help of the Lord against the mighty," and if these words may enter our hearts, and purge them from selfishness, and arouse them out of their dull unconcern, this message will not have been in vain.

Mere Lookers-On

"In the day that thou stoodest on the other side." Looking out upon the life of the Church of Christ, it seems to me that those who comprise its membership might be divided into two divisions. There are the strenuous, and there are the spectators. There are the labourers, and there are the mere lookers-on. There are the courageous, and there are the coldly critical. There are those who are "standing on the other side" when all round about them there is a great struggle going on between the cause of God and the forces of evil.

Oh, there is a call for the co-operation of all those who name the Name of Christ as Saviour and Lord. In our own land we see that struggle going on, and we see it also when we lift up our eyes and look beyond the horizon away out into the heathen darkness of the heathen world, where the cause of God is being upheld by an almost anonymous handful of His servants. How many Christians there are who are simply "standing on the other side"! They know such things are going on, but the fact does not touch them, and the noise and clash of battle does not thrill them. Their

ears have long since become deaf to all the calls which God is making to them by the very condition of things in the world of which they are daily made conscious. They are "standing on the other side." Meanwhile, God is marching on. "The Son of God goes forth to war, a kingly crown to gain," and men and women of all races and classes are "following in His train." And the great indifferent crowds are watching the procession go by unmoved and uncaring. The pathos of life to those who have eyes to see, to those whose vision has been, in some degree, anointed with the Divine eye salve, is in the superior unconcern for those things which are really vital, and which characterises so large a number in the Church of Christ. Oh, that we may be quickened and aroused to see this cardinal sin of unconcern and indifference!

The Armchair Critic

If we read this prophecy rightly as part of the revelation of God to men, we realise that there is no condemnation more severe than just this, that when God calls a man, when the state of the world calls him, he "stands on the other side." It has become the vogue with many to-day just to look on at things. It is the vogue amongst young men not to play games, but to look on while others play them. It is the vogue of some not to give themselves to the service of their fellows, but to look on and criticise the few who do. There are men who

are content to sit, or to stand on the other side, to let things pass them by, to let their own lives deteriorate, and to let their own powers waste. There is the man—I call him the arm-chair critic—who sits and passes judgment upon policies directed toward the amelioration of the lot of the poor and outcast and distressed, but never himself lifts a finger, nor spends a penny to help the said poor. He stands as a model of insincerity. There is the professed believer in Christ, a paper member, let us call him, for his name is on the Church roll: but his attitude towards all that is vital in the work of the Church is just that of “standing on the other side.” He is infinitely more interested in the rise and fall of markets than he is in the progress of the Gospel in human hearts. He is infinitely more concerned in the passing news contained in his morning paper than he is in the progress of the Kingdom of God in the Mission Field. He has no antipathies, but he also has no sympathies. He is just what Christ, the ascended Lord, said of the Laodiceans, “lukewarm,” showing scorn for anything like enthusiasm, and identifying himself as the modern successor of the priest and the Levite who passed by on “the other side,” and to whose eternal condemnation it is that the “other side” held them, while on “this side” there was a bruised, and bleeding, and broken life claiming and calling for beneficent assistance. Such ones sometimes justify themselves by pious declarations about faith, they

say that they believe in faith, and not in works. But such a declaration is either a total misconception of the nature of faith, or it is wilful insincerity. Sometimes when the call to engage in the service of Christ comes to them, they excuse themselves by saying, "I am only one, and what is one against so many? After all, my non-participation in the conflict can make little, if any, difference." To say that and to act like that, is to fling away one of life's richest values, which is this, that individuality counts in the eternal scale of things. Beware of "standing on the other side." Beware of adopting such an attitude when the issues are so vital, and when the call of Christ is so unmistakeable.

Avoidance of Obligation

There is also this truth to be remembered that neutrality carries its own condemnation, that lukewarmness is nauseous to God, not to speak of His people; that unconcern is the eternally inexcusable sin; that avoidance of obligation is just a declaration of cowardice; and that when considerations of convenience are allowed to stifle conscience, and to silence the call of conviction, Heaven has once again been defeated on the battlefield of a man's life, and hell has once again been victorious. Beware of "standing on the other side."

No man, of course, has the right to say of another that he is "standing on the other side." In one of Ian Maclaren's illuminating and soul-

moving sketches he tells of the hidden life of a Liverpool merchant (and he drew his model from life). This man passed among his fellows as a sour and unkindly and self-absorbed man, and without anything of the milk of human kindness about his life. But after his death it was discovered that he it was who had given the thousands for the establishment of a Home for Consumptives; that he it was who had taken pains to find out needy cases; that he it was who had sent to College the son of the doctor who had given his life for the poor of the slums. Oh, it never does to judge any man. But there must be a ruthless and honest judgment of our own lives, if we would avoid being judged with the world, and judged of the Lord at the Last Day. Think with me, further, of the peril which lurks round about our path, and which is in the very air we breathe—the peril of the “other side” attitude towards the things of life, and of God.

An Atrophy of Power

The first great peril is that it puts us hopelessly out of touch with the realities of life until self-concern becomes an utter obsession. There are those who are entirely concerned about their own health and about their own well-being, and their own ease, and their own escape from the common suffering under which mankind must ever live, until they begin to regard themselves as privileged individuals in the centre of the world. That is

the peril of "the other side" attitude. That is the peril that lurks round about the path of the man who is content to do nothing more than "look on" and observe and talk, and never to do. It puts us hopelessly out of touch with realities, until we are known amongst our fellows as men who are always thinking of themselves, and, if they can get an audience big enough, talking about themselves also. And the worst of it is that such an attitude grows upon us until we get to that state where literally, while we are "standing on the other side" we cannot see what is across the road. Until quite literally our eyes become blinded and darkened, and vision vanishes, and we are not even aware of those things which are going on which are calling for sacrifice and love. There is nothing truer than this, that "the wages of sin is death." The sin of "standing on the other side" brings a positive atrophy of power into life, until a man does not see and does not feel—and he fails to realise that the power of life has disappeared.

Further, this "other side" attitude not only puts us hopelessly out of touch with realities, but it also results in an unceasing drift from God and His fellowship. If God is unceasing in activity in the presence of human need and sin, and in all that concerns the good of men, we cannot be in sympathy with Him if we are not also unceasing in activity too. Union with God in Jesus Christ is an utter impossibility to

the man who is content to "stand upon the other side." For indifference is a direct negative to the wooing, winsome invitations of God in Christ to "Come unto Me," to "Abide in Me," to "Follow Me;" and to stand "on the other side" is to say to Christ in answer to His invitations, "I will not! I entirely disagree with the emphasis that you put upon things, and I would rather go my own way." If this is true of any life—and who does not know something of this peril?—it means that you are getting further and further from Him Who is marching on in the greatness of His strength and love. If this be so, then how great is the need for that ruthless self-examination, to which I have already made reference! How great is our need that we should come again to Him Whose gifts are never withdrawn, and that we may commence, or that we may re-commence where we left off, to live a practical, prayerful, and consistent life.

It is well to remember that the man who "stands on the other side" is the eternally-anonymous man. The men who are mere spectators in life are eternally anonymous. It is the worker, it is the one who does the will of God who abides for ever. There is an eternal obscurity to the man who is content to live his life as a mere spectator.

Christ's Response to Men

Let us remind ourselves of the contrast to all this as we have it in the Gospel of Christ,

God did not "stand on the other side" when He saw that man had sinned and had fallen. Had God "stood on the other side" when all the awful agony of the world called Him, there had been no Gospel to preach to-day. This is the Gospel of God that He did not "stand on the other side" when a poor, bruised humanity called for His love. He so loved that He gave. It is true also of the Son Whom He gave. This is the evangel, eternal, and glorious, that Christ never "stood on the other side." "In all their afflictions He was afflicted." "Tempted in all points like as are men, yet without yielding unto sin." And the Christ Who did not "stand on the other side," blessed be His Name, is the Christ Who never does stand there, but is always at hand, "closer than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet," to poor, distressed, tempted, and sin-harassed men. He is always at hand to help, to bind, to heal, to aid, to inspire, and to guide. The crowning tragedy of life is that men are content to look on at Jesus Christ, despite the Voice which is ever crying, "Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by?" The saddest history of the last great scene of His life when there betwixt Heaven and earth He hung suspended for man's redemption, is that of the men of whom it is recorded, that "they sat and watched Him there." Oh, that we may be saved from that attitude by being drawn once again to Christ Who is Himself the unending and undying contradiction of this attitude. He is the

Christ of sympathy, of comradeship, of eternal sacrifice, and love, of Whom no man can ever say in the light of his own experience that He "stood on the other side" when he needed Him.

So may it be when the Great Day comes, and when the earth and the heavens are rolled up like a scroll, and we stand before Him Who now stands pleading with us to-day, God grant that it may never be said of any one of us, "he stood on the other side," and thereby sealed his destiny on "the other side" of the great gulf.



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