SHORT PAPERS

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A WORD TO SLAVES

(By One of Them.)

"How much I could do for Christ if only I could get an easier post."

"How much I could do for Him if it were not for the never-ending cares of the house and the children. My work is never done."

"If only my circumstances were different, how much more possible it would be for me to do the will of God."

So we may often have thought, if we have any desire to do His will, and any sense of how little we do it. *And if the will of God for us were that* we should carry out some great thing, some heroic enterprise, some task whose successful accomplishment would reflect credit on us and be a joy to us to contemplate, our lamentations would be just.

But that is exactly where we are apt to make a mistake; it is for *God* to choose in what way we shall serve and glorify Him; *our* blessing is in obedience (the example was given us by our Lord) in whatever circumstances He may have set us. To some it may be given to glorify Him in conspicuous service, perhaps ending in imprisonment or death. (Thus our Lord, of Peter: "This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God." John xxi. 19.) Others may be called to continued but undistinguished ministry in the

gospel or the church, with no very striking manifestations either of success or failure. But for most of us the opportunities for any ostensible service are very restricted, for in the providence of God our outward circumstances are to a large extent those of *slaves*: that is to say, whether men or women, in high estate or low, our earthly life is one of daily labour—the trivial round, the common task—of a kind which leaves us only a very limited freedom.

Are we then to fret under our daily burden, thinking that unless we can somehow get rid of it we cannot serve God? That would be to mistake His will. "Art thou called being a servant (literally *bondman* or slave)? *Care not for it.*" (1 Cor. vii, 20-24.) It is *nothing* to God in what circumstances we are, if we are there under His hand; it is in fact, irrelevant to the doing of His will. What matters is that, whether slave or freeman, I should recognise my true calling, and "keep the commandments of God"; and if I cannot do that as a slave, freedom from toil will never enable me to do it. Observe that what is written is not "Art thou a bondman?" but "Art thou *called* being a bondman?" The fundamental assumption is that we consider our earthly circumstances with reference to that which must govern our whole lives, namely, the call of God. "For this I say, brethren, that the time is short." (v. 29.)

If we are simple and obedient in our souls before God (the "bondmen of Christ"—see v. 22) we shall know how to avail ourselves of such opportunities of service as He may open to us, as well as to receive with thankfulness any greater measure of freedom that may offer itself. "If thou mayest be made free, use it rather."

But the reason why so little importance is attached to the fact of our outward slavery is that God would have us to be by all means truly (*i.e., inwardly*) free—free from the bondage of sin, of self, of man; above all, free in our spirits before Him. *"Care not for it."* In view of the fearful conditions under which many of the slaves in the first century passed their lives, these words must have come with startling force; but they convey a call to freedom which we equally need in the more tolerable conditions of to-day. "He that is called in the Lord being a bondman is the Lord's freeman (literally *freedman*): likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's bondman." "Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the bondmen of men." "I would have you without carefulness . . . that ye may attend on the Lord without distraction." Have we, in our souls, embraced this freedom? Have we breathed its pure air, with the sun shining down upon us from above (the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in His wings)? It is open to us now—without leaving our daily toil in the office, the factory, or the home.

The little maid in the house of Naaman had some sense of this true freedom. Taken captive out of the land of Israel, she might naturally have lived in a state of continual resentment against her heathen masters. But she was free in her spirit, and therefore ready to serve the gracious will of God. It was not in preaching that her service was rendered; it was in the spontaneous expression of a heartfelt wish, almost a prayer, wrung from her by pity for her master: "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy" (2 Kings v. 1-3). If we are free in our spirits we need not lament our condition of comparative slavery: it is no necessary bar

to our serving God; it may even be the occasion of such service.

The apostle places this freedom very beautifully before the slaves in the church at Colosse. After exhorting them to "obey in all things your masters according to the flesh," he sets forth principles of conduct which, equally in our condition to-day, are essential to real freedom: "not with eye-service, as men-pleasers: but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: *for ye serve the Lord Christ*" (Col. iii. 22-24). If this mind is in us as we take up each day's task, it will so enter into the warp and woof of our work that not only will all we do be well done to the utmost of our ability, but the doing of it will be contributory to the higher ends which God has in view in calling us to His Kingdom and glory.

"And stay'd by joy divine,
As hireling fills his day,
Through scenes of strife and
desert life
We tread in peace our way.

"That way is upward still,
Where life and glory are;
Our rest's above; in perfect love
The glory we shall share."

There is much around us—and not a little within us—to hinder us from enjoying this freedom of spirit. May our prayer be that, in whatever state we are, we may learn how therein to abide "*with God*"; that in our days of toil we may know how to be both "*the slaves of Christ*" and "*the Lord's freedmen.*"

WHOSE GLORY?

WHOSE glory? This is a question which we might well put to ourselves at the beginning of each day, indeed at every step we take. What are we out for? *Whose glory?* Are we bent on extracting from each occasion of our lives some profit, some credit, some *kudos* for ourselves, or is it our fervent desire that the result should be, in whatever way may please Him, to glorify God? Our actions, our words, our prayers will shew whether we have faced this question, and how each has answered it for himself.

The question searches us, but if we submit to its challenge it will clear our vision; it will simplify our course; it will free our hearts from care.

"If thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light"—luminous, transparent, unwavering—and so conveying a clear meaning, light, and guidance to those around.

And if the interest of God is our motive, why need we worry? *He* will care for ours.

Whose glory have we in view in bringing up our children? We "want them to do well," and no doubt there is that which is right and proper in choice of calling and in reasonable development of the faculties which God has given. But unless we resolutely keep these natural purposes subordinate to higher ends—the glory of God and our children's true welfare—the result will be, not blessing, but

leanness of soul. "But," you say, "their studies are important, how can they find time" to attend to the things of the Lord? God knows. We must settle it *with Him;* if we do not, we shall go astray. Doubtless we can say much in defence of our line of action; we easily make excuses for ourselves (less easily for others); but God knows our hearts. Our children, too, will be quick to perceive whether our minds are set on earthly advancement or on the interests of God. May God help us!

We sleep that we may live and work; we work that we may satisfy our needs and enjoy our rest; but what does it all lead to? What is our proper aim in life? Is it anything less than the glory of God? Is not that the ultimate measure of a man's life, of its product, its fruit? This test was perfectly fulfilled in our Lord; "I have glorified thee on the earth" (John xvii. 4); but the same motive should be ours, "that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. iv. 11).

Do we fear ill-success? But what *is* ill-success? Is not the "ill-success" most to be feared just this, that we might dishonour God? And, in the long run, is there any true measure of success except the glory of God?

The question tests us in service. Even if we start with right desires we easily slip into motives of self—whence come strife and vainglory. If we see the glory of the Lord it will be easy to say, "He must increase, but I must decrease," and we can leave our credit in His hands. (John iii. 30; Matt. xi. 11.) We can wait for the day when each shall have his praise from God. (1 Cor. iv. 5.)

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory. . . . Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who . . . took upon him the

form of a servant . . . and became obedient unto death." And the determining motive of His course of self-humiliation will receive its final answer and its full satisfaction, for all things will be placed under Him *"to the glory of God the Father"* (Phil. ii.).

We may partly escape the common snare of selfishly pleasing ourselves and yet fall an easy prey to the temptation of gaining some credit for ourselves by pleasing others. "Let every one of us please his neighbour"—yes, but with what motive? —*"for his good to edification"* (Rom. xv. 2). There is no danger of our doing too much of *that.* But pleasing men is a great source of weakness, which we should avoid if we had before us God's glory rather than our own. Servants are to serve "not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God" (Col. iii. 22). On the one hand the apostle could say, "I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, *that they may be saved"* (1 Cor. x. 33); but, when it was a question of the truth of God, "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. i. 10).

"Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others" (1 Thess. ii. 6).

Whose glory? The question is apt for the occasions of everyday life; but it is no less so in considering the larger relations in which our souls are set before God. It has pleased God in His wisdom so to order His whole scheme of blessing that it shall reflect glory, not on us, but on Him. It is *His* work, not ours. "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and

through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." (Rom. xi. 34-36.)

The acknowledgment of divine grace is the burden of the song of the redeemed, now and hereafter. "*Thou* art worthy . . . for *Thou* . . . hast redeemed to God, by Thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. v. 9, New Trans.). "Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. ii. 9). "Where is boasting then? *It is excluded*" (Rom. iii. 27). *Non nobis, Domine!*

Principles which we would fain understand and (if God give us grace) in some measure put into practice, are seen in their perfection and in their full intensity in Christ. Reverently and with chastened spirits we are allowed to contemplate Him and listen to His prayer when the hour of His suffering has drawn near: "Now is my soul troubled ; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. *Father, glorify Thy name*" (John xii. 27, 28). There He rests. "Even Christ pleased not Himself." Well might the One whose mind was thus revealed teach His disciples to pray before all things, "Father, thy Name be hallowed."

"O mind divine, so must it be
That glory all belongs to God;
O love divine that did decree
We should be part, through Jesus' blood.

O keep us, love divine, near Thee,
That we our nothingness may know,
And ever to Thy glory be
Walking in faith while here below."

OUR MIND AND SPEECH

CHRISTIANS who in their daily life are called upon to rub shoulders with the world must often feel the danger of insensibly adopting its outlook and modes of thought, to the loss of that which is distinctively Christian.

In the world around us numbers of men would hardly pretend to be in any living sense of the word Christians; that is, not disciples of Christ, professing obedience to Him or recognising His interests; and unless we cherish our calling we very easily adopt the world's standards and the world's values. In so doing we yield up our birthright; we forget that we belong to a holy nation.

Our valuation of other things, things in general and things in particular, will largely depend on how we think of ourselves in relation to our calling. If we think of ourselves just as ordinary men, " men of the world, which have their portion in this life " (Psa. xvii. 14), we shall naturally adopt the world's thoughts, and there is an end of it, so far as concerns anything for Christ in our lives. God only will know whether we are really His: we shall hardly know ourselves.

It may be answered that we should not think of ourselves at all. But this would be going too far. It is most true, and of great practical importance, that we should be free of ourselves, free from any

pharisaical spirit, free from any unhealthy self-consciousness; that we should have God before us and not ourselves; but it is also true that if God has called us to be His sons, if we are, as in the opening words of some of the epistles, "saints by calling," we have no right to ignore this calling. It would be no true humility in the sons of a king to be unmindful of their royal birth.

The first question, therefore, is whether we frankly take account of ourselves—and by ourselves I mean all believers—as "saints," the called of God. Of course the world will not think of us in this way; but if a Christian is true to his calling he will be such that the world's categories will not cover him; there will be something about him that the world does not understand; it will indeed *mis*understand him, for it will put him into one of its own categories, which at best can only cover what is "natural" in him, not what is spiritual. If we accept the world's categories, if we find them suffice for us, we shall prove thereby that we have descended to the level of the world's thoughts and lost the enjoyment of our birthright.

We are indeed too ready to accept these categories; like Peter when asked by the collectors of tribute money for the temple service, "Doth not your master pay tribute?" Anxious to remove a possible stigma and to shew that his Master would do what *they* thought proper, he answered at once with an unintelligent "Yes." But when he came into the house Jesus invited him to view the question from a higher standpoint, that of the freedom of "the sons." True, the collectors of the tribute would not have understood this; but the point was that Peter should understand it. (Matt. xvii. 24-27.)

Scripture records—though no one can refer to it without some searching of heart—an occasion on

which even Paul seems to have yielded something in this respect, when he relieved his position for the time being by calling out, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee." (Acts xxiii. 6.) He accepted for a moment the categories of the religious world, classifying himself as a Pharisee as against the Sadducees, though no such classification could really "explain" him or justly define his position as "a servant of Jesus Christ . . . separated unto the gospel of God." (Rom. i. 1.) Fewness of words becomes us in speaking of such an incident in the life of the great apostle; but it is worth pondering.

"Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Num. xxiii. 9); that was a prophecy of no "private" or "particular" interpretation (2 Peter i. 20), but many sided and of wide application. It is not merely a question of outward separation; but in establishing a "people" on earth God has given it something to maintain, something to represent, a testimony to render, which falls outside the natural thoughts of men, because it is essentially greater and higher, because it is spiritual, and of God.

To hold this position in our own souls is a duty, not to ourselves, but to God who has called us. But it needs some vigour of faith and nearness to God. It was when Israel lacked these things that they longed for a king; they wanted to be like other people, to be "reckoned among the nations." They failed to appreciate the quality of uniqueness in God's elect.

The Corinthians were largely walking as ordinary men, thinking of things, judging of things, in a merely human and not a spiritual way; that is, apart from the Spirit of God; and the lack of spiritual understanding was accompanied, as it always will be, by a moral standard unworthy of a

Christian. "Whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and *walk as men?*" It looks as if Paul had foreseen the danger, for in first going to preach to them he had "determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified"; the cross is the starting-point of all wholesome lessons and of all right judgments. (1 Cor. ii and iii.)

He goes on to warn them against worldly judgments: "Now we have received, *not the spirit of the world,* but the spirit* which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, *not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth,* but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

How it jars upon us when we hear spiritual things —the things of God and of Christ, of the glad tidings and the church—spoken of, assessed, on a merely "natural" footing. Nehemiah tells us of some of the people who spoke "half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language"—the language, the mode of thought and speech of the true Jews, of the Israel of God. (Neh. xiii. 24.) Ashdod was a city of the Philistines, those people who were outwardly in the land, but were not of it: they had not been led by Moses through the wilderness nor followed the ark over Jordan. The speech of Ashdod is widely used in Christendom to-day.

These "natural" judgments are never far away from us, and in spiritual things they are always wrong, because they leave out of account the most

* The Spirit of God (with a capital "S") produces a corresponding spirit (small "s") in the believer.

essential elements, the mind and will of God. Our Lord Himself was judged by men in this way; witness the unbelieving advice given to Him by His brethren to go up to the feast. "If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world." (John vii. 4.) They could not take in the possibility of His being moved by an entirely different set of motives from those which governed their own actions. Along such a line of worldly unbelief we shall find no light nor understanding.

It is not that spiritual things are not, in a high sense of the word, natural; they are in accordance with their own nature; they are not artificial, they are living; but they are beyond the order and range of men's natural thoughts as uninstructed by the Spirit of God. The question is not one of intellect, but of moral estimation, standards of value, modes of thought, and motive.

Not only motive, but also the attributing of motive to others. The Corinthians, unspiritual themselves, could not understand the motives which weighed with Paul in deciding at what time it would be wise to visit them again; they lightly judged him to be moved by considerations merely human, worldly, opportunist. "When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness . . . that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay? . . . But as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." (2 Cor. i and ii.) If we are unspiritual ourselves we shall be unable to discern a spiritual motive in others. "But he that is spiritual judgeth [discerneth] all things."

This way of regarding other things and other persons was closely connected with the failure of the Corinthians rightly to regard themselves and other saints of God; thus illustrating the principle

already noticed. Therefore Paul, while he upbraids them for their unworthy moral conduct and their unspiritual modes of thought, does not hesitate to remind them with equal energy of their high calling. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple are ye." A consciousness of this truth would give us the right view-point in our estimation of other things. Without it we shall shew a certain lack of spiritual refinement, a bluntness of sensibility. Our speech will betray it.

We belong to a great metropolis; Jerusalem above is our mother. By contrast with the law the great feature of this city is that it is *free;* let us cherish our freedom. (Gal. iv. 26.) But when it is seen coming down out of heaven from God, a city of pure gold, one of its glories is its "wall great and high"; not to cut off intercourse—for the gates of the city shall never be shut—but something which defines and encloses it and marks its strength and character; something which is built on "foundations," moral foundations, "garnished with all manner of precious stones," features of rare and varied beauty; nothing that defiles, nothing "common," can enter in. (Rev. xxi.) "Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces." (Psa xlviii. 13.) "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." (Psa. lxxxvii. 3.)

But the saints are, or will be, that city; and we want to cherish, and grow into, its glorious features now, while we wait for its manifestation. We want to be "vessels unto honour, *sanctified* [that is, not common, but set apart specifically for divine purposes] and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." (2 Tim. ii. 21.)

It is a hign calling. We are not merely *left* in the world, we are *sent* into it, in some sense to represent God. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." (John xx. 21.) And if we justly think of ourselves in relation to this calling it will greatly affect our spiritual valuations, our moral estimates, both of things in the church and things in the world. Our standard of value will be "the shekel of the sanctuary"; and neither the mind nor the speech of Ashdod will be ours.

GOOD MANNERS

"Love doth not behave itself unseemly."
(1 Cor. xiii. 5.)

It appears to be sometimes assumed that Christianity takes little account of good manners. It would be truer to say that a large part of the Bible is directly addressed to the subject. But then manners, as taught in the scriptures, are no mere matter of a polite exterior, a smooth surface, such as might be acceptable and sufficient in the polished society of the world; they are the faithful expression, for good or ill, of the character within.

The New Testament, and indeed most of the Old, assumes that its readers are already familiar with the ten commandments and other moral precepts, but by dealing with the manners of those who assent to these things it searches and illuminates the springs of conduct in a way that no mere precepts could. If Christ teaches that men should pray, or give alms, the precept itself is compressed into small space; it was not new; but much longer passages are devoted to the manner of our doing these things. "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them. . . . *When thou doest thine alms*, do not sound a trumpet before thee. . . . *When thou prayest*, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret. . . . *When ye fast*, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance." (Matt. vi.)

All these are instructions in manners; not only, be it noted, manners before men, but before God. Manners as thus taught are not so much the performance of specific commandments as the spontaneous expression of a true humility of heart and an unfeigned desire to please God.

Luke vii. gives us a clear example. We have read of the courtesies of the East in receiving a guest: water for the feet; perhaps, if the welcome be cordial, a kiss; perhaps also the anointing with oil. Simon the Pharisee had been at least careless in these things; he had left the Lord without them. Note the contrast in one whose good manners sprang from a contrite heart. "Simon, seest thou this woman? . . . she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. . . . Since the time I came in [she] hath not ceased to kiss my feet. . . . This woman hath anointed my feet with ointment." She spoke not a word throughout the incident; but she loved much, and "love doth not behave itself unseemly."

We are exhorted to follow love, but the exhortation is brought home to us by reference to the fruits which spring from it. "Love [charity] suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil." (1 Cor. xiii.) Every one of these things merits our patient attention. They were written to the Corinthians, whose manners in many respects called forth the apostle's sharp rebuke. The Corinthians were in danger of being deceived by influences under which they were now living. "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners." (1 Cor. xv. 33.) But in order to deal with their manners the apostle has to begin deep down, with nothing

less than the cross of Christ in its destructive power, "that no flesh should glory in his presence . . . according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." (1 Cor. i.)

Good manners are not a specious veneer hiding a cheap wood; they are the pleasing outward surface (bright in the reflection of divine grace) of a sound material, of an honest and good heart, of truth in the inward parts. No doubt good manners may be simulated, and indeed, even if only on the surface, something of the sort is necessary to the existence of civilised society, apart altogether from Christianity in its inward power. But if it is only this, the veneer on occasion chips off, exposing the base material beneath.

The manners of an ill-behaved child are not a plant without roots, and a wise training will aim at correcting the selfishness, boastfulness, envy, or greed which manifest themselves in such unpleasing forms. It is thus with God's training of His children. He must maintain us in self-judgment, and rid us of self-complacency (a fruitful source of ill-manners); and to this end we have to be chastened for our profit. Good manners are not a question of rich or poor; indeed, the scriptures attribute particularly bad manners to the rich. But they do depend on a good education, on discipline in the school of God. Gentle manners are the natural expression of a soul made gentle by divine teaching.

The end of good manners is to please; primarily, to please God. "Ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God." "Walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." "Walk as children of light . . . proving what is acceptable unto the Lord." (1 Thess. iv. 1; Col. i. 10; Eph. v. 8, 10.)

The Pharisee who went up to the temple to pray thus addressed God: "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are . . . I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." (Luke xviii. 11, 12.) Was it not true? The Lord does not say it was not; but He says it was not approved of God. For it may be utterly unseemly to say things to God about ourselves, even though it might be difficult for any one to contradict them. The Pharisee had never let the light into his soul, had never known repentance, consequently his heart was blind and his manners before God to the last degree unsuitable.

Contrast Mary of Bethany, who took "a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment." (John xii. 3.) It is not recorded that she spoke, but her action was wonderfully in tune with the feelings of Christ on the eve of His suffering; how much so He only discerned. Suppose she had drawn His attention to the odour that filled the house! It would have spoilt the whole beauty of her act. Such a reference to herself in the moment of her adoration of Christ was unthinkable, because her heart was filled with Him, and not with her own offering. We may learn much from this. Be assured our manners will find us out, and not least in our public prayer and praise. A delicate perception will prevent us from saying even what is true at the wrong time; "for Christianity is delicate in its propriety, and never falsifies its principles." (J. N. D.)

Morality may be taught by laws; good manners are the fruit of grace. The aim of morality is a limited one, altogether too limited for Christianity, for the grace of God is unlimited alike in what it

brings to us and what it produces in us. We may aim at avoiding certain sins or faults, but our manners will reveal how far short we have fallen of divine teaching; our speech will betray us; so will even our silence. Morality refers to a man's overt acts as they can be judged by men, but manners express the man himself. Thus in effect it is only as we "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," that our manners will be really pleasing to God, and that we can be "followers [imitators] of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." (Eph. iv. 24; v. 1, 2.)

PRAYER:

IN PRIVATE AND BEFORE OTHERS

"Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me." (John xi. 41.)

How short, in general, are the public prayers recorded in scripture, or, to speak more accurately, the prayers spoken aloud in the presence of others; and, on the other hand, what constant reference we have there to habitual and long-continued "private" prayer.

The Lord's prayer at the grave of Lazarus (really it was a thanksgiving) was in few words, but it was the expression, as the words themselves shew, of a mind always with God in secret: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always; but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." What quietness, what rest, breathe out in that utterance, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me." The expression of a constant mind, it was at the same time the outcome of an ever fresh experience, ever afresh confirming the knowledge, "I knew that thou hearest me always." It was said aloud for the sake of "the people which stand by," but such a prayer spoken in the hearing of others—brief, and carrying conviction—was the fruit of what had already passed in secret between Himself and God.

Similarly, after being refused by the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, the secret exercises through which the Lord passed are not recorded for us (though prophetically the Psalms may tell us something of them); it is only recorded that "Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." (Matt. xi.) He *answered* and said, "I thank thee, O Father." How blest we should be if we also could give such an answer—an answer of submission and a joyful spirit, an answer of praise and thanksgiving—in the face of every untoward circumstance.

By the side of the Lord's prayers anything on our part must seem poor, yet it is the simple truth —and the Gospel of John shews it no less than the others—that the life and character exhibited in the Lord as man are to be reproduced in us, according to our measure, if we live of Him. In particular—and this is what is before us at the moment—very strong statements are made about prayer in John's gospel and first epistle. "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." (John xiv. 14.)

Such sayings may offer some difficulty at first sight, and even if we come to understand them a little we shall always feel, and especially in reading the writings of John, that there is in the scripture that which is still beyond our understanding. But at least such words of the Lord shew what is offered to us if we put ourselves in His hands. And the Christian should be able to speak in some degree from experience of "the confidence that we

have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." (1 John v. 14.)

If, however, we are to learn His will, we must be prepared to listen more than to speak. "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." "He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned."* (Isa. l. 4.) If we have listened much after this fashion, our speaking, especially speaking in prayer before others, will be of a chastened sort; not wordy. "When thou goest to the house of God . . . be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools." (Eccles. v. 1.) This does not mean that we are to refrain from speaking; but if fresh experiences, the matured result of no small measure of secret prayer with God, preceded and coloured our "public" utterances, might not the latter perhaps be briefer, thus leaving more room for other voices? And might not the result be less suggestive of fatigue to the hearers, with more certainty of spiritual interest, more encouragement, more thanksgiving in the hearts of all ?

The privilege of prayer in the assembly is a humbling one, as we must often have felt deeply; humbling, but not without its blessing, though bought at some cost. Admittedly it is a subject which raises questions and calls for reflection. We have always to remember that in its primary character prayer is that which passes in secret with God. "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." But when it is a question of appearing before others, "anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou

* Or "instructed," or "those that are taught."

appear not unto men to fast"; that we be not as the hypocrites. (Matt. vi.)

These principles are not to be lost sight of on the occasions—few compared with the perpetual occasion for secret prayer—on which we may pray aloud before others. This primary character of prayer remains, even though whatever is done in the hearing of others should have regard to their presence, and should be for edification not, surely, in the case of prayer, by anything directly addressed to the hearers, but by the indirect, though not less effectual, influence of a true heart speaking in truth to God. If we keep this true character of prayer in mind, we shall not be found saying in our meetings for prayer things that ought rather to be poured out to God in our secret chamber, with the door shut and no on-looker even to say Amen. And certainly we shall not be heard saying things to God about the shortcomings of others—in the guise of general confessions not first taken home to ourselves— which we ought rather to say to them direct, if at all.

If we think of ourselves as individuals, we start each time in a sense from zero—not exalted, but altitude zero! Saul of Tarsus "fell to the earth"; and although he "arose . . . and was strengthened," and "increased the more in strength" (Acts ix.); though as he went on he could speak of paradise, and of heavenly places, he retained the personal sense of being "less than the least of all saints." The altar of earth is compulsory. (Exo. xx. 24.)

But prayer in the assembly has rather a different character. True, there are occasions when a whole company may have to confess its failure, to humble itself in contrition; and habitually any company of believers will be before God in the sense of weak-

ness. But the one who gives expression to such exercises in the assembly has to be very careful, lest he be found confessing the faults of others rather than his own. That would be too easy; "the heart is deceitful." (Jer. xvii. 9.) The normal order is that secret and searching individual exercises with God lead to prayer in the assembly of a kind which is not far removed from thanksgiving and praise.*

Here again the Lord Himself is our example, not only in the gospels, but in the Spirit of Christ as expressed in the Psalms. "I cry in the daytime . . . and in the night season, and am not silent." That is in secret. But afterwards, "In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee." (Psa. xxii.) Notice how many psalms which begin with individual prayer close with the mind turned towards God's interest in Israel centred in Zion. So Paul in 2 Corinthians shews how the deepest individual sufferings and distresses—"without were fightings, within were fears," so that he "despaired even of life"—were fruitful in consolation and sympathy and thanksgiving among the many, so that this epistle often exhibits the character of a psalm. "So then death worketh in us, but life in you." Thus the assembly gets the fruit of individual exercises; but it gets little benefit if these exercises are thrown upon it at an immature stage at which they should not have passed beyond the secret chamber.

Thus we are brought back to the word, "Pray without ceasing"—above all in quietness. When we were children we used to ask how this was possible, seeing that we had so many other things

* Note how, in 1 Corinthians xiv., prayer (in the assembly) in verse 15 is referred to in verses 16 and 17 as giving of thanks; not, of course, that supplication would be excluded.

to do. Now that we are no longer children perhaps we realise that we should do well to take the injunction rather more literally than we do.* Without much prayer in secret any prayer spoken before others must lack character; indeed it will hardly ring true. The more prayer in private, the more refreshing and strengthening to the hearers will be any spoken prayer, and the more, it will be found, will such prayer be marked by a measure of rest, confidence and praise.

* To shew the other side, we may notice that our Lord had times when He specifically gave Himself to prayer: thus it is recorded that "as he was praying in a certain place, *when he ceased,* one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray." (Luke xi. 1.) Definite seasons of prayer—morning, noon, evening, or whenever it may be—are by no means to be omitted from our days.

SOME THOUGHTS ON FASTING

"This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." (Matt. xvii. 21.)

PRAYER we perhaps think we know something about, though truly, if we ask ourselves how much we really speak to God in the secret of our souls, we may be surprised to find how little it amounts to. But our present purpose is to consider what is meant by fasting.

In its original and most rudimentary meaning, to fast is simply to abstain from food. Specially it means to abstain from food or other satisfaction of our lawful needs, not because food is not to be had, but on account of some occasion of mourning, it may be of repentance, or self-judgment, or heart-searching before God.

Thus Ezra: "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us. . . . So we fasted and besought our God." (Chap. viii. 21.)

And Daniel: "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sack-cloth, and ashes: and I prayed . . . and made my confession, and said . . . We have sinned." (Chap. ix. 3.)

Fasting is not always associated with specific confession of sin, but it is safe to say that it is always associated with self-judgment and (its positive counterpart) *concentration of spiritual purpose.* It was in the church at Antioch, "as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted," that "the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." (Acts xiii. 2, 3.)

Such special occasions of fasting are still called for; yet the New Testament addresses itself to the tenor of our lives as a whole more than to specific moments in it, and it is this general tenor which is in view in the Lord's words relating to the conditions after His departure. "Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast." (Matt. ix. 15.) These days have come. The Bridegroom is gone; we await His return, when He will lead the whole creation in joy; meanwhile "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." (Matt. v. 4.) It is obvious from the Lord's words that in this wider sense fasting is not a question of limitation of food merely.

It is noteworthy that, while the New Testament contains numerous exhortations to prayer (many will at once occur to the reader), there are no direct instructions to fast. A direct exhortation to prayer is little likely to make us "legal" about it, but perhaps the same is hardly true as to fasting. At all events, if we begin to instruct another to fast in respect of this or that need of the body or mind (some need, perhaps, which we do not ourselves feel), we are likely to become conventional and legal in the

matter, requiring from others rather than giving ourselves; and such a state of mind is very damaging to the interests of grace and truth.

"Christ has set us free in freedom" (Gal. v. 1, New Trans.), and it is in this freedom that we can rightly entertain the idea of fasting.

It should be observed that to fast means to abstain, not from things that are sinful or wrong, but from things that are, in the ordinary sense, legitimate. Many will ask, Why should we ever abstain from that which is legitimate? The answer is to be found in the conditions of our life down here—conditions of weakness such that, without this deliberate self-restraint and self-discipline, we are not able to see divine things clearly; at least we lack the strength to serve God effectually. Quite apart from specific occasions of self-judgment, such as those already referred to, without fasting it is not possible, in our present earthly conditions, to concentrate on the things of the Spirit; and if we do not so concentrate, as God may give us grace, we shall be useless as Christians here. A young man may ask, Why should I not do this, why should I not do that? There may or may not be a good reason why you should not do this or that particular thing; but one thing is certain, unless you know, of your own motion, how to fast, you will have no power as a Christian. "This kind [of power against evil] goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." You may say, Why does it not? Well, it just *does not*, that is all; it is a matter that can be verified by observation and experience. A man who does not fast, is a man from whom no spiritual power goes forth.

And yet the man who thus fasts is not marked by a sad countenance, nor by lamentations or complaints. Our fasting should be for God; before men

we must anoint our heads and wash our faces, that we "appear not unto men to fast." (Matt. vi. 16-18.)

Fasting is a natural accompaniment of, a necessary aid to, concentration of spiritual purpose, and the question of fasting therefore only arises when such concentration is our aim, that is, when we desire of set purpose to seek the Lord, to cleave to Him, to follow and to serve Him. This question—what is our object in life in relation to the Lord?—must precede any intelligent handling of the question whether it is wise and seemly to enjoy, or to refrain from, the several things on this varied earth that offer themselves for our interest and use.

Many people ask whether it is *wrong* to do this or that, before they have settled seriously between themselves and God what is their central and commanding object in life; that is, before they have yielded themselves to God in the freedom of surrender; as the slaves of Christ, and the Lord's freedmen. (1 Cor. vii. 22, New Trans.) They argue about the parts before they have faced the whole.

The things that earth offers for our use and enjoyment may be right enough in themselves, but the serious question is whether, unless I resolutely limit myself in respect of them, they will not dilute my spiritual energy and weaken my interest and joy in the things of the Lord to such an extent as to deprive my life of its properly distinctive character of witness to Him. This danger of *dilution*, or watering down, merits the attention of any one who has believed in Christ, and to whom this present life is making attractive offers. The young believer little knows how strong is the world, and how weak he is in himself to resist it; how easily, washed by its advancing tides, his distinctively Christian colour may become fainter and fainter.

We do not want to be legal: we may rightly remember that God gives us richly all things to enjoy (1 Tim. vi. 17); but we may also remember that we are *sent* into the world (John xvii. 18); we are, in a sense soldiers, not mere civilians, and " no man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." (2 Tim. ii. 4.) We do not want to be among those who " bow down on their knees to drink "—and take no part in the battle. (Judges vii. 5-7.)

"HE MAKETH HIS SUN TO RISE"

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you. . . .

"That ye may be the sons of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. . . .

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

(Matthew v. 44-48.)

THE Gospel calls in no uncertain tones for a humble and a contrite spirit, yet at the same time it offers us nobility, and that in an almost inconceivable degree.

The chapter which begins with "Blessed are the poor in spirit" closes with an amazing exhortation to be like God, and to be like Him in respect of that which we should have thought particularly beyond our reach, viz.: the lordly power of unrestricted giving.

To the material earth the sun is the great source of light and warmth, of life and well-being. More and more we are learning the influence of its rays on health and happiness in ways hitherto unsuspected. In the passage before us our Lord couples the sun with the rain (itself not unconnected with the sun's activities) and takes the two together as a standing illustration of the impartial liberality of God. And then He invites His disciples to be like that!

The prospect of being wealthy enough, royal enough, to afford such liberality must appeal to every generous mind, and certainly the proposal to place men in this position was worthy of the One by whom it was brought to us, and through whom alone it can be realized.

We expect others to give to us, to do good to us; we are content to be beggars before the world, like the impotent man at the Gate Beautiful, asking alms of those who passed by. We do not realize that happiness is to be found in the opposite direction, in being wealthy, and able to give to others, to forgive others, to be a blessing to others.

Of course only a nobleman could do this. But then the Gospel comes proposing to make us noblemen; nay, more, to make us very sons of the King.

The word of God to Abraham was, "I will bless thee, . . . and thou shalt be a blessing." Obedient to the call of God, he left his country and his father's house; but if he was a stranger and a pilgrim, he showed again and again that he was wonderfully well off. With noble generosity, and a heart free from care, he could leave to Lot the choice of the best fields; and, later, he could arm his household to rescue him from the captivity into which his coveted prosperity had led him. To the King of Sodom's offer, "Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself," he could afford to reply that the source of his wealth was God: "I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet . . . lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich." (Genesis xiv. 21-23.)

Truly Abraham was a nobleman.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts xx. 35.) It is true that many men do not seem to think so; and we must admit that, whether in a material or a spiritual sense, we cannot give except in so far as we have received. "Freely ye have received, freely give." Here, indeed, is the crux of the matter, for the beginning of all blessedness is to receive *from God*, and this beginning only begins when we come before God confessedly empty-handed.

> "Nothing in my hand I bring."
>
> "Just as I am, without one plea,
> But that Thy blood was shed for me."

"God be merciful to me the sinner . . . I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for . . . he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke xviii. 13, 14.)

But if, in repentance and faith, we have thus come to God, we receive from Him; heaven's stores, through Christ, are opened to us; the grace of God is ours, and Christ, who has died for us and is risen again, becomes to us the source of life, our bread from heaven; linked with Him by His Spirit we find in His death our great lesson-book, in His pathway on earth our example, in His present position of power and glory the encouragement of our hearts and the assurance of what shall be. "I am the Living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore." (Rev. i. 18.)

Persons are more than things, and our wealth lies in personal relations; in the love of God (do we really take in the stupendous truth that *God loves us?*) and in the unfailing grace of Christ, Who has loved us even unto death, and Who "saves them

to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Heb. vii. 25.) The resources thus made ours we may on our side draw out hourly by prayer, the prayer of faith.

It will not bear thinking of for a moment that God, who is love, and whose are all things, could have intended us to be poverty-stricken in the things that make life worth living. To give is the delight of God; He so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son; He "giveth us richly all things to enjoy." "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give *the Holy Spirit* (the supreme gift) to them that ask Him?" (Luke xi. 13.) "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. viii. 32.)

And, in turn, God "loveth a cheerful giver," one (in measure) like Himself. Peter had known what it was to be brought low, but in the power of Christ he could give superbly: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.*" (Acts iii. 6.) Paul, too, in that same power was "poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." (2 Cor. vi. 10.)

However poor we may be in this world's goods we may be rich enough to give liberally. The best gifts are spiritual gifts; but material gifts are fitting symbols, and, be they but two mites, will not pass unseen by the divinely discerning eye. "Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but

she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had." (Luke xxi. 3, 4.) Have we cast anything like that into the offerings of God?

> " What can I give Him,
> Poor as I am?
> If I were a shepherd
> I would bring a lamb.
> If I were a wise man
> I would do my part—
> Yet what I can I give Him,
> Give my heart."

If it is a question of yielding to others in our daily life, we are to do it, not because we are too poor to resist, but because we are rich enough to be able to afford it. Only in the sense of being well-off —of a grateful receiving from God—can the royal law be carried out, the royal priesthood exercised, " that ye should show forth the excellencies of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light." (1 Peter ii. 9.) This is the royal character of the kingdom of heaven, even in its present conditions of tribulation and patience. It belongs to the " poor in spirit "; theirs is the kingdom of heaven. As the Lord says to the persecuted Smyrna, " I know thy poverty (but thou art rich)." (Rev. ii. 9.)

The new things that medical men are telling us about the wonderful curative effect of the sun's rays bring vividly home the untold loss that we must suffer by spreading between ourselves and the sun a pall of smoke above our towns and cities, thanks to the activity of our chimneys. The sun's rays are there, they have come millions of miles to reach us, but by our own habits we shut them out at our very doors.

So the grace of God has been brought near to us in Christ. The Sun of Righteousness, with healing

in His wings, is now shining in the heavens; but the barriers on our side, the pall of smoke from our own hearts, our insensibility, our unbelief, may prevent us from letting in His rays. Yet the sun shines still; not only to the penitent "younger son" is the love of God told out, but to the elder also, as yet hard, callous and self-righteous, the gracious appeal is repeated: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." (Luke xv. 31.)

Again let it be said, it is the urgent desire of God to bless us, and to make us a blessing. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow *rivers of living water.* (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)" (John vii. 37-39.) But now Jesus is glorified, having "tasted death for everything" (Heb. ii. 9); the Spirit has been given, to bear witness to Christ and to link our souls with Him, in order that we might freely receive and freely give, even rivers of living water.

Have we received this wealth? And are we using it? Now is the time. In heaven there will be no poor; to be rich, and a giver, will no longer be a distinction; the opportunity of being light ("light in the Lord") amid surrounding darkness will be past. It is in this present time, surrounded as we are by spiritual poverty, that the offer of wealth, of grace, the grace of God, comes to us with its full force and power. Our life here is but a moment, but it is a unique moment, in which, if our hearts are open to the light from heaven, we may learn wonderful things; how to be abased and

how to abound; "both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil. iv. 12); how to receive and how to give.

SERVING GOD

I.

"For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." (1 Tim. iv. 10.)

EVERYONE who is genuinely, from the heart, a believer in God, must also have some sense of the obligation to serve God; to be His servant.

The apostle Paul sums up the outward conditions of his life as a servant of God in two words: we "labour"; we "suffer reproach"; and these two things, in whatever different ways or varying degrees, mark the life of every servant of God.

A man of the world, seeing only the outside, might ask whether such a life was worth living. Everyone must give—everyone does in fact give, by the manner of his life—his own answer to this question. Paul's answer at all events was clear and confident, and every true servant of God will follow him in this confidence: "We trust [or, translated more exactly, we *hope*] in the living God," Saviour, Preserver of men. No one can find, in heaven or on earth, any firmer basis of hope than that. With such a hope his soul was securely anchored. It was no question of the formal assertion of a creed merely; his hope was in the living God, and he knew that his life of labour and reproach was one of abounding blessedness. He could wish nothing

better for others than that they also should be in it; alone and a prisoner, he could say to king Agrippa, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." (Acts xxvi. 29.) The superior good fortune (as men would speak) of Agrippa, surrounded by pomp and splendour, aroused no envy in Paul's breast; despite his chain he could take up the language of the Psalm, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." (Psa. xvi.)

So would we live and be minded, every one of us who is a disciple of Christ, rejoicing in the God who is both our shield and our exceeding great reward. With this confidence may we be ready to go forth and labour at His command.

For some task in the service of God is assuredly waiting for every one of us; some opportunity provided for us and for no one else. He "gave . . . to every man his work" (Mark xiii. 34); let us ask Him what He has given to us; for surely He has not forgotten us!

Unhappily we often want to choose our own service, to decide for ourselves what work we will do; and then perhaps someone else comes along and (so we think) takes it out of our hands or somehow hinders us, and we become discontented; almost taking up the attitude that if we cannot serve in the way we want we will not serve at all. But it is no use trying to be a servant of the Lord on that line. He "gave . . . to every man his work"; that does not mean that every man looked round and chose what he thought he would like to do. It may be perfectly legitimate to feel drawn to some particular line of service—we are to covet earnestly the best gifts—but the right spirit is not "I want to do this

particular thing which I have chosen," but "Here am I; send me." (Isa. vi.) *Send* me—that means that I am a man set under authority, no longer my own master, but under the command of Another. If we have, or think we have, any natural ability, knowledge or aptitude that might be supposed to fit us for any particular kind of service, it is essential that it first be laid—and left—before the Lord upon the altar, to be received back from Him only if and as He will. (Rom. xii. 1.) We are His bondmen; it is right and wholesome that we should recognise this, and glory in it.

If we are ready at each moment to serve—and to sacrifice—in whatever way the Lord may indicate, whether in activity or it may be only in waiting on Him, others certainly may throw hindrances in the way of His work, but no power on earth can hinder us from doing whatever in the circumstances may be His will for us—except ourselves! To submit to His will must be more pleasing to Him than any other thing that we might call by the name of service; and who can possibly hinder us from doing that? If we are willing to be under the Lord's command it is impossible to admit that in any circumstances He will allow any man to close to us the avenues of His service; though he may well use the hindrances thrown in our way by men or by circumstances to divert us from one road—perhaps one that to us seemed natural and obvious—to the one along which in the end He will send us.

It was not for nothing that Paul, in speaking of himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, commonly added the words "by the will of God," or, in this epistle (1 Tim. i. 1), "by the commandment of God our Saviour." For beyond question all acceptable service of God must spring from obedience of heart to God—the obedience of faith—though we well

know that in practice it seems natural to us *not* to start from that point. Yet this root-principle of service, obvious enough on a moment's reflection, shines out with perfect clearness in the pathway of Christ our Example. "Lo, I come"—it does not say "to do something for," but "to do thy will, O God." With that motive at the beginning and throughout, He could say in the course of His service, "I do always those things that please him," and at the end, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John viii. 29; xvii. 4.) He lived "about thirty years" (Luke iii. 23) pleasing God, "my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," before He was sent forth on His public service. And it is to the obedience of Jesus Christ (that is, to obey as He obeyed) that we are sanctified. (1 Peter i. 2.)

If we do the will of God from the heart we can always be sure that our labour will not be in vain. Time will be on our side; eternity will be on our side, for "he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John ii. 17); nothing of that "doing" will fall to the ground, or be lost; its fruit will remain; it will be raised up at the last day. It is like the love that never faileth, it belongs to the eternal order, it brings in the element of permanence; it will abide when external forms of service—prophecies and tongues and knowledge—shall cease or vanish away. (1 Cor. xiii.)

Sometimes we may labour patiently, and in the wise ordering of God it is given to others to do the reaping. If so, how glad we should be! But the converse is certainly true: other men have laboured and we are entered into their labours. We stand on the shoulders of others; generations of men who have served God in hard conditions, and have ploughed the earth in patience and sown the seed of

which we, with something less of suffering, are now reaping the harvest. Mindful of their harder lot and more laborious toil we may well take up with alacrity, and with due humility, the lighter tasks that we find to our hand; looking on to the day when they that sow and they that reap shall rejoice together. (John iv. 34-38.)

"The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few." (Luke x. 2.) The path of service, in obscurity or otherwise, lies open before us, if we have grace first to give our own selves to the Lord. (2 Cor. viii. 5.) Then shall we serve indeed, labouring in hope but with rest in our souls, not cramped by opposition or chilled by reproach, but still bearing the message of a Saviour God.

And the time for such service is short, and the opportunity swiftly passing.

II.

"His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads." (Rev. xxii. 3, 4.)

To the reader of the preceding pages the thought may well have suggested itself that we are servants of God in different senses of the word, or rather in different aspects of the fundamental principle. In our further consideration of the subject it will be helpful to distinguish three of these—but with the caution that it would be a mistake to try and make our distinctions in such matters too rigid.

(1) First of all, we are to serve God at all times in all that we do, just as we are to do all things—whatsoever we do, whether we eat or drink—for His glory. (1 Cor. x. 31.)

(2) Secondly, we want to take our part in His work, to serve in His cause, in the interests of His name. That is what the word service generally means on the lips of Christians.

(3) Thirdly, we want to serve Him at His altar, in His courts, offering to Him the sacrifice of praise continually. (Heb. xiii. 15.)

Let us look briefly at these three aspects.

(1) The Thessalonians who had believed the gospel—which had come to them "not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost"—had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thess. i.); and the same is true of every believer, though the idols from which we have turned may be different from theirs. In this sense our whole life is to be lived in the service of God; we are no longer to be the servants of sin—whether of our own will or the will of men—we are to yield* ourselves to God ("as free . . . but as servants of God," 1 Peter ii. 16). We are to "learn to maintain good works"—that which is good in every relation of life—"for necessary uses," that we be not unfruitful. (Titus iii. 14.) Slaves, in obeying their masters with singleness of heart, were to do it "as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." (Eph. vi. 6.)

As we have opportunity we are to "do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. iv. 10); and we are to do this as serving God.

(2) But it is open to us, indeed it is incumbent upon us, to serve God (and do we not long so to serve Him?) in a more special sense, to engage our-

* Literally "to have yielded," *i.e.*, having become, once for all, bondmen to God. (Rom. vi. 13, 22.)

selves in His specific interests, to be soldiers in His cause. This is different from the sense in which we serve God in the ordinary occupations of our every-day life; in that sense we are, so to speak, ordinary civilians among the people of God; but we are soldiers, too, and a soldier is a special sort of person, with a special allegiance; "no man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." (2 Tim. ii. 4.)

To take a different figure, in Israel of old there was a multitude of duties connected (under the priests) with the tabernacle, that is, with the direct service of God, for which the Levites were appointed; and every believer should be eager to be not only, so to speak, in all his life a true Israelite, one of the people of God, but also a special servant, a Levite; that is, in some way to help to carry "the things of God." (1 Cor. ix. 13, 14; Phil. ii. 21.) It is to these occupations, very varied in their scope and character, that the word service is most commonly applied among Christian people, and it is to such service that the previous part (I.) of this paper has been more especially directed.

It may be remarked here that in using a type, such as this of Levitical service, taken from the economy of Israel, we must bear in mind the difference in the dispensation. For our present purpose the outstanding feature in this difference is the central character of the gospel*—the glad tidings to men—in Christianity, that is, in the New Testament; this, with the concomitant truth of the

* The gospel is often spoken of to-day as if it covered only the rudimentary aspects of Christianity, but the word as used in Scripture carries us much further than that. Compare the scope of the term in the epistle to the Philippians, where it occurs almost more frequently than in any equal number of pages elsewhere in the Bible.

church, or assembly, could not be made known until Christ came; and naturally the commandments of our Lord directed the minds of His disciples into correspondingly new activities. These activities, however, in the gospel or the church, are concerned with the holy things of God, with the "true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man," and we shall not be wrong in speaking of them as covered broadly by the typical term Levitical, if we keep in mind that the truths of the New Testament are not all confined within the types of the Old. To give examples might involve the risk of limiting what in its variety is almost unlimited, but some illustrations from the Scripture may perhaps help to fix the idea.

In Luke viii. we read that Jesus "went throughout every city and village, *preaching and showing the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God:* and the twelve were with Him, and certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene . . . and many others, *which ministered unto him of their substance.*" The Lord Himself was here the great Levite; and it is characteristic of His ways with His servants that He associates them, both men and women, with Him in *His* service.

Paul writes of Timothy: "Ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel." And he calls Epaphroditus not only "my brother," but also my "*companion in labour,* and *fellow-soldier,* but your *messenger,* and he that *ministered* to my wants." (Phil. ii. 22, 25.)

Again, to the Corinthians Paul writes: "I beseech you, brethren (ye know the house of Stephanas . . . that *they have addicted themselves*

to the ministry of the saints,) that ye submit yourselves unto such and to *every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth.*" (1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16.) Here we have a whole household engaged in the "ministry," and the blessing extended to everyone who is prepared for the sacrifice required for so helping and so labouring, with the remarkable exhortation to the saints generally to submit themselves to such. This passage is worth considering in connection with the question sometimes asked, "In what way can I serve?" Well, how did the members of the household of Stephanas serve (for the word translated "minister" is simply the ordinary word for "serve")? Apparently by attending, according to their several capacities and opportunities, to everything that might be for the welfare of their brethren, spiritually or otherwise. Not a bad starting point! But we need simplicity of heart and faith in God. Without faith it is impossible to please Him. Service of such kinds, in furthering the Lord's interests in the church or the gospel in the widest sense, is referred to generally at the end of 1 Corinthians xv., the long chapter about the resurrection of Christ and its consequences for us: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor. xv. 58.) Observe that it does not say "always abounding in *your service,*" but "in the work of the Lord"; It is in His work, not ours, that we are engaged; and our "labour . . . in the Lord" is not in vain. If at times the work seems difficult or discouraging, we are to be steadfast, and prepared to endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. (2 Tim. ii. 3.)

And here let us pause for a moment to remind ourselves that for this service we need to be trained. Mark is *par excellence* the gospel of service, and it

is there that it is recorded that Jesus "ordained twelve, that they should be *with Him* and that He might send them forth to preach." It was from Him they went forth, and to Him they returned: "the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught." (Mark iii. 14; vi. 7, 30.) To be in His company and learn from Him, besides being an end in itself, is an essential preliminary to any task on which He may send us. If He is our Lord and Master we do not want to rush off, like untrained and impatient children, without first being attentive to His commands: and we are always to return to Him.

(3) But there is a yet higher sense in which the saints of God are occupied in His service, and this third sense may be illustrated by referring to the Greek word λατρευω (*latreuo*—serve), which is commonly used to denote the direct service of God.* Other and more frequently occurring Greek words are used for the service either of God or of men, but this word is not used in the Bible for the service of men. It is associated with the worship of God and (using the types) with the service of the tabernacle or the temple, and particularly with that higher service which may fitly be described as *priestly*. Such service of God is carried out in communion with Him; it may be purely and directly as in worship, thanksgiving or prayer, or it may be associated, as we shall see below, with beneficent activity towards men; but in the latter case it is viewed as carried out in immediate nearness to God.

One of the simplest references to this character of service is in the Lord's words at the temptation,

* In the Scripture quotations that follow in this paper the word *serve* is marked thus † where it represents *latreuo* in the Greek.

asserting the first duty and highest blessedness of man: "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."† (Luke iv. 8.) The meaning of service in such a context must needs be a high one.

What is said of Anna in Luke ii. 36-38 further elucidates this meaning. We read that she "departed not from the temple, but served† God with fastings and prayers night and day." This is a deeper and higher thing than the (ostensibly more active) service which we have called Levitical. The references to "fastings," "prayers," "the temple," illustrate the character and trend of this highest service; God Himself is its object. Just as in the passage quoted in the preceding paragraph such service is associated with *worship*, so here it is connected with *prayer* and the *temple*, and again with the temple in Revelation vii. 15; they "serve† him day and night in his temple."

Such being Anna's unceasing employment, it is not surprising that, coming in at the moment when Simeon was blessing the Child Jesus and His mother and Joseph, her mind was in tune with the occasion and she "gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem"—spiritual ministrations to men following, as we shall see again, from habitual communion with God.

> "Where all in Thee supremely blest,
> Thy praise their service is."

Scripture is full of examples of this order of service. We have a very clear one, though the

† See footnote on page 56.

special word which has been alluded to is not used in the record, in Mary of Bethany, who brought an alabaster box of ointment, very precious, and poured it on the head of Jesus. There were those then, as there are many now, who would write down as waste such expenditure of time and substance in the service of God alone; as if the resulting benefit to man were the measure of value of any service. "There were some that had indignation among themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good; but me ye have not always." (Mark xiv. 3-9.)

If we are taken up to be a people for God, our service is not to stop short of this highest character of devotion. The command of God to Pharaoh was, "Let my people go, that they may serve† me" (Exo. viii. 1); it would be Israel's highest blessedness thus to serve God. "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation." (Exo. xix. 6; see also Acts vii. 7.) And if there be possibly cases where a Christian's circumstances may seem for the time being to debar him from any active form of "Levitical" service, there can be no question at all that all the saints of God are properly priests. Moreover, while priesthood in its fulness contemplates the highest maturity of the servant, yet the principle of it is within the reach of the youngest believer, for it is of vital moment that everyone should be marked by prayer and thanksgiving.

† See footnote on page 56.

And now having arrived in our thought at this the highest of the three broad categories* of service mentioned (pp. 51-52), let us notice that activities which we might think of in the first instance as falling within the first or second categories (pp. 52-56) ought to be viewed, and undertaken, in this priestly way—with our souls very near to God—if they are to be carried out in a manner acceptable to God (and this, let us remind ourselves in passing, is the test of true "success"). Thus, referring to the first category—the sense in which our whole lives are to be lived in the service of God—the apostle Paul, in writing to the Romans, in chapter vi. speaks simply and generally of yielding ourselves to God for the service of righteousness; but in chapter xii. 1-3, after the outburst of worship with which chapter xi. closes, he brings forward this practical exhortation in a developed and deepened form, with a more intimate appeal and an added refinement of thought: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye *present* your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."† The word for "service" here is the same priestly word, just as the word "present" brings before the mind the act of placing our bodies on the altar once for all for the service of God; a sacrifice, but a living one. This done, we shall be ready for the Levitical and other services which the rest of chapter xii. brings before us.

An interesting practical example of this priestly mind in connection with more ordinary services will be found in the narrative of Paul's voyage in

* "Bless the Lord, O house of Israel: Bless the Lord, O house of Aaron: Bless the Lord, O house of Levi." (Psa. cxxxv. 19, 20.)

† See footnote on page 56.

Acts xxvii. Brought into contact with soldiers and sailors, among whom he was a prisoner, he is able to take a practical interest in their welfare in circumstances of much distress; yet however considerate and helpful his action towards his fellow-travellers, he is, first and always, serving God in his spirit, so that he can speak naturally to them, and in a way that must have carried conviction, of "the God whose I am and whom I serve."† And when he encourages them to take food for their bodily needs it is deemed worthy of record that "he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all"—again a priestly action, not by any means to be omitted.

These are illustrations of the priestly character which should not be absent from services of a simple kind. Equally those services which we should naturally regard as in the second category (pp. 52-56), which has been called Levitical, should be carried out with the same spiritual mind which serves God continually in prayer and thanksgiving. Among all services which seem naturally to fall into this category—that is, what we usually think of as service—the preaching of the gospel is the most obvious, yet it is in just this connection that the apostle introduces the thought of priesthood and sacrifice: "God is my witness, whom I serve† with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers." (Rom. i. 9.) And in chapter xv. he speaks of carrying on his work among the Gentiles as a sacrificial service, "ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost." (Rom. xv. 16.)

† See footnote on page 56.

If the service of the gospel is taken up with this mind it will not lack that character of spiritual refinement, as of the fine flour of the meat offering, which properly belongs to it.

Thus these three categories of service run into one another; we may distinguish them to help our thought, but our distinctions must not be too rigid, or they will hinder our further understanding. To classify the truth of God is like trying to classify the stars of heaven; it may not be impossible, but at least there is more in it than meets the eye, and our first attempts will be subject to revision. Thus our endeavour to understand the meaning of the service of God by viewing it broadly under three categories has brought us to see that all service should properly be governed by what we are in the highest category, that is, as priests, worshipping God and offering to God. This is no arbitrary conclusion, no accident; the principle may be seen in type in Israel, where in the service of God both Levites and people were directed by the priests. Only in Christianity all are properly priests, besides being also Levites and common people.

It comes to this then, that if we are to "serve† God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. xii. 28) we must learn what it is to be priests to God, And we find our place in spirit in that priesthood, if, having "tasted that the Lord is gracious"—which is the first great step in blessing—we come to Him as the One disallowed of men, but chosen of God; this is the second great step. "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively [*i.e.*, living] stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by

Jesus Christ." If we have found our place in that holy priesthood toward God we are then to be, in relation to men, "a *royal* priesthood, that we may show forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light." (1 Peter ii.)

We find the same order of thought as to sacrifice and service in Hebrews xiii. First, and generally, "We have an altar"; that is, we Christians; actually the contrast there is with the Jews who still served the tabernacle; "we have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve† the tabernacle." In other words, there are established in Christianity the true basis and conditions of worship and fellowship. Secondly, these conditions are dependent on our coming to the One who is disallowed of men: "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." Hence, thirdly, the exercise of our holy priesthood: "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." And forthly, such worship of God is to be accompanied by beneficent activity towards men, in the exercise of a royal priesthood: "To do good and to communicate forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." (Heb. xiii. 10-16.)

If these are the things that mark us we shall be enabled to anticipate the holy city, when "his servants [bondmen] shall serve† him, and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads"—His name, the expression of what He is, His character, impressed upon them and shining out from them. (Rev. xxii. 4.)

† See footnote on page 56.

III.

"The Lord give thee understanding in all things." (2 Tim. ii. 7.)

If we want to see still further how these principles work out in practice, we may notice how the three categories of service alluded to are all comprehended in the reference to the widows in 1 Timothy v. Some people might be disposed to think that widows were not a class whose opportunities of service would be of the widest or most varied. However that may be, we may learn something from the illustration; and the reader will be able to find for himself in the Scriptures innumerable examples of services appropriate to men, or women, or both.

After the remark that "she that is a widow indeed . . . continueth in supplications and prayers night and day" (a truly priestly activity), the apostle commends those who "have brought up children . . . have lodged strangers . . . have washed the saints' feet . . . have relieved the afflicted . . . have diligently followed every good work"—surely a liberal variety of service!

"Have brought up children": this is a work which falls to the lot of thousands in the ordinary course of nature; but what a service to God and men if done in the fear of God! What patient labour and unremitting care are demanded, what difficulties to be overcome and questions to be solved, major problems many, and minor troubles every day, calling for firmness and kindness, wisdom and grace; but offering too, for those engaged in this great service, "a road to bring us daily nearer God."

"Have lodged strangers": this may also be regarded as a duty of ordinary life, but in its context

here the reference, as in other passages in the Epistles and the Acts, is primarily to the provision of hospitality for those brethren whose occupation, whether in the Lord's service or perhaps in their ordinary calling, led them to travel from place to place. For a sister or a brother to receive such "strangers," in heathen cities where congenial accommodation might not be easy to find, was a service often of a "Levitical" character, and in any case of no mean order. (Compare Heb. xiii. 2; 3 John 5-8.)

"Have washed the saints' feet": here we are back to a service of the highest class, peculiarly priestly, only possible to be done in close communion with God; for the reference is surely to no material act, but to that rare service of spiritual contact and help which can only proceed from one who is living near to God that "washing of the feet" which with a humility which avoids any occasion of offence and a delicacy which hardly pretends to offer help, yet succeeds in bringing refreshment, purification, and comfort to the soul of another. The kindest act that any saint can do for any other is thus practically to bring the grace of Christ afresh to bear upon him. We are reminded of the Lord's words, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. . . . He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." (John xiii. 1-17.)

"Have relieved the afflicted": a service which, according to circumstances, might come into any or all of the three categories mentioned on pp. 51-56; and the need for it is always with us.

"Have diligently followed every good work." It is unfortunate that in the common speech of Christians the expression "good works" should so

often be used in a technical sense, narrowing it down to what are called, with a restriction of meaning not justified, "Christian works," "works of charity," etc. The result is that we rather miss the meaning of such a scripture as "Let your light so shine before men, that they may *see your good works*, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt. v. 16.) The meaning is not, of course, that men may take notice of any specific Christian "works of service" in us—that would be likely to glorify *us*—but that all our actions should be such as to represent truly before men the character of God, whose holy name is called upon us. The idea of good works in the Scripture is comprehensive, as well as pure: "The God of peace . . . make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Heb. xiii. 20, 21.)

The careful reader of Scripture will not have fallen into the mistake of reading the passage before us (1 Tim. v. 6-10) as just a statement of services specially appropriate to widows; it is speaking largely of the commendable things which they may *have done*, i.e., in the past, perhaps before they were widows.

Reflecting on the examples of service given in the passage, we may note certain general features. The deeds mentioned, invaluable as they are, are not generally such as to bring the servant himself (or herself) into any special prominence. Nor are they altogether those that would occur to an enthusiastic Christian who, starting out (like Peter, see Luke xxii. 33) ready to do something of note, looks either to himself or to the organisations of men for direction. Yet they seem to be natural enough to anyone who, not putting the idea of his

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own achievement or his own service in the middle of the picture, desires simply and wholeheartedly, in humility and sacrifice of self, to please his Lord and do that which is right and show love, especially in activities which lie near home (where charity begins), without any thought of the approval of the world—even the religious world—or of pursuing some interest of which men can take cognisance. Such services might not, any more than those of the household of Stephanas (see p. 54), readily lend themselves to a descriptive article in the newspapers.

Many other passages in both the Old and the New Testament, while throwing light on the ways in which the "bondman of God" may unaffectedly serve Him, indicate clearly that the idea of service as set before us in the Scriptures, starting as it does from a definite acknowledgment of the will of God —"the will of God in Christ Jesus"—is by no means that which is current in the world. It is well, therefore, at the outset to be candid with ourselves as to the influences under which we are moving in anything we may desire to undertake in the service of God. Are we consciously with God in it? Is it God we are out to serve, or only men? "Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant [bondman] of Christ." (Gal. i. 10.) The answer will make all the difference to the *mind* with which we serve; for God wants fit vessels, "meet for the Master's use"; only thus can we be "prepared unto every good work." (2 Tim. ii. 21.) It will affect the whole character of our activity; and of course it will greatly affect the ends we have in view in it.

If we are to serve God we must, in our thoughts and aims, put Him first throughout. If we put man first (and nothing is easier) we shall move in

our souls, insensibly but none the less surely, downhill, away from God, even though what we do we may call by the name of service.

"If any man serve me, let him follow me." (John xii. 26.) Often the question is whether we are minded to go on our own way—or it may be someone else's way—in what we may suppose to be doing good, or whether we really hold ourselves as the disciples of Christ, following Him, learning from Him. We need to have our minds progressively informed by the Scriptures, that we be not as those who missed their way, having a "zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." (Rom. x. 2.) The Lord has Himself shown us the way; He "went about doing good," but as One "anointed . . . with the Holy Ghost and with power . . . for God was with him." (Acts x. 38.) He was the obedient and the dependent One; He pleased God; He served God. To serve thus as sent by Him is a very different thing from joining in what is called "social and religious work"; such work in fact, as we can see plainly from what is around, commonly looks to the King as its head rather than to Christ; it seeks to be honoured by the patronage of the great among men. But the point is not whether we are doing something that men will recognise as service, but whether in faith we are obeying and pleasing the Lord. Without faith it is impossible to please Him. This is a motive beyond the world's ken, yet it is the point of paramount importance, and the point at which real sacrifice of self is tested. And while we may be able to help each other with suggestions and with opportunities for giving practical expression to our desire to serve, each of us must look to the Lord Himself for direction. "*The Lord* give thee understanding in all things." (2 Tim. ii. 7.)

To serve God by His will is the only worthy purpose of a man's life, the only aim which can sanctify it and make it eternally fruitful, the only central and commanding interest which can leave behind it no regrets. And there is every encouragement to us to enlist while young in this unique, this supreme service, to let nothing stand in its way, and never to turn back. Whether we be young or old we may well respond with decision of heart to the exhortation that we "no longer should live the rest of [our] time in the flesh to the lusts of men" (a very comprehensive set of rival motives), "but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles." (1 Peter iv. 2, 3.) It may indeed; and now it is high time to awake out of sleep. (Rom. xiii. 11.) If we "sleep" while we are young we shall lose much precious time, and sooner or later we shall lament the loss. May God help us to find true blessedness by serving Him with all our heart.

"LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY"

I.

"Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (1 Thess. v. 17, 18.)

PRAYER is the breathing out of the soul's desire to God. Our prayers are often feeble because our most cherished desires are selfish or earthly, and we dare not express them in the presence of God; while those which we feel free to tell out to Him, sincere enough though they may be, are often by comparison less strongly felt. To be taught to pray is to have our desires (not merely our words) trained and fashioned—and strengthened, too—after the mind of God. We shall then ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us.

"Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks." (1 Thess. v. 17, 18.) Not only be in the spirit of prayer, but let confiding prayer be the habit of our souls. Nothing is more calculated to give us sobriety of mind, and to free us from that subtle self-satisfaction which easily finds a congenial soil even in select religious circles. "Behold, he prayeth": this was the mark of one who had fallen to the ground before the brightness of the Lord, and who thereafter took a sober estimate both of himself and others. (Acts ix. 11.)

The way of prayer is also the way of rest. If by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, we

make known our requests to Him, the peace of God shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. We get the sense of having laid our desires before Him; we leave them with Him. We are content, and "careful for nothing." (Phil. iv. 6, 7.)

We should not for that reason forget the requests we have made: on the contrary, we should watch thereunto with thanksgiving. Do we always remember what we have prayed for? We shall not easily forget, if our prayers have been the expression of our inmost desires. "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Our Lord did not forget the requests He had laid before the Father; He could not think of Peter without recalling what He had asked for him. (Luke xxii. 32.) His prayers were the expression of His inmost heart; His prayers and His life were one.

Daniel is a striking example of a man of prayer and of its effects. "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." (Dan. vi. 10.) If we keep our windows *closed*, and attempt to pray in the stuffy atmosphere of our own selfish (or, it may be, family or business) interests, our hearts are contracted, our prayers feeble and poverty-stricken. And *towards what* do we open our windows? Are we "too busy" with our earthly concerns to care for the interests of God? Daniel, if any one, might have pleaded such an excuse, for his were the heavy cares which fall to the lot of the first minister of a great empire; but his windows were open, not towards the palace of Darius, nor towards the offices of state in which he reviewed the accounts of the princes (that "the king should

have no damage"), but "toward Jerusalem"—the city around which centred the promises of God.

It is beautiful to see, unhindered by the burden of earthly responsibilities, such freedom, such leisure of soul to think of the interests of God, to "attend on the Lord without distraction." (1 Cor. vii. 35.) His heart was central, metropolitan (*God's* metropolis); and we may well believe that his prayers were free from any selfish or party or provincial littleness. This is not to say that he did not pray also for the immediate needs of himself and others; far from it. But the petition to "give us this day our daily bread" is preceded, first by the prayer, "Father, Thy Name be hallowed"—surely the purest desire that human lips could utter—and secondly, by regard for God's interest, "Thy kingdom come." (Luke xi. 2.) After such prayers every other request, for great things or small, will fall into its natural and proper place.

"As he did aforetime." Daniel did not suddenly begin to pray when trouble came; the emergency reveals him to be already a man of prayer, of dependence on God, and strong enough, therefore, to remain wholly unmoved by the evil uprising of "all the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains," who had consulted together to destroy him. "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." (Psa. cvii. 7.) He is unmoved; with the knowledge of what was impending, he does not close his windows and concentrate on his own immediate danger. His windows remain open "toward Jerusalem," God's interests remain paramount with him and in the centre of his thoughts: nor does he forget to give thanks "as he did aforetime." This habitual dependence, this largeness of soul for the interests of God, with

the resulting moral strength—these are things earnestly to be desired in the present days of stress and trial. "When I am weak, then am I strong."

II.

"Is any among you afflicted let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms." (James v. 13.)

THE man who feels his own weakness will pray, will seek the face of God. The man who prays will prove to be, when trial comes, the strong man.

This lesson, of which we found a striking illustration in Daniel, is further illustrated, though in different circumstances, in Paul and Silas on the occasion of their entrance into Macedonia. (Acts xvi.) Heralds of the glad tidings, they did not presume to announce it except in dependence on the Spirit of Jesus whom they preached. It is clear from every line of the narrative that they prayed, not only "without ceasing," but—in the language of the type—with their "windows open toward Jerusalem" (Dan. vi. 10); not now toward the earthly city, but toward that "Jerusalem above" which, now that Jesus was exalted at the right hand of God, had become the centre of the divine interest, the metropolis of freedom and of the sons of God. (Gal. iv. 26.) They were filled with the service of God; they desired only His will, which was sure blessing; by the side of that their own personal fortunes were of small account to them, they could safely be left in the hands of God, and doubtless filled but a secondary place in their prayers.

With hearts thus at rest they waited at Philippi, ready to avail themselves of each indication of divine guidance. In keeping with this attitude of

mind, their first recorded act was a very simple one. They went outside the city on the sabbath day to the riverside, to a place where prayer was wont to be made, and they sat down and spoke to the women whom they found there. Here the word bore fruit; the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, and her house became their home as long as they remained at Philippi.

Is it an accident that the next event is also introduced by an allusion to prayer? It was as they "were going to prayer" that a certain female slave, possessed of a spirit of divination, met them and offered a flattering testimony to the divine authority of their mission. The prospect of immediate public recognition and respect was presented to them without the exercise of patient labour and suffering, but also, in effect, without bringing men into the reality of repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ—in fact, without the work of God. The temptation was similar in its essential character to that which the devil was allowed to present to our Lord: "All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matt. iv. 9), and it was met in the same spirit of obedience. Paul was not flattered, he was "grieved" at the dishonourable association, and in due time—not in impulsive haste, but, as we may infer, in patient waiting on the wisdom of God—he cast out the evil spirit.

Having thus resisted temptation, Paul and Silas appear to have found the outburst of violence a simpler matter. It is not recorded that they were "grieved" by the public humiliation of the stripes, as they had been by the public acclamation of the spirit of divination, nor were they disheartened by the imprisonment that followed. Did they suppose, as some of us might, that because He had allowed

them to fall into such evil case (as men judge), God had evidently not heard their prayer? No such dull thought chilled their faith; they were as happy as Daniel in the lions' den! The affliction awoke them to song; it brought out the music of their souls. At midnight, with their feet fast in the stocks, these sons of the day "prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." And they were not terrified when the earthquake shook the foundations of the prison, nor, on the other hand, did they see in it a means of easy and miraculous escape. Not at all; their hearts remained open "toward Jerusalem," Jerusalem above. In that moment of excitement they were watchful and ready as ever for the service of God. Their ear had been wakened morning by morning to hear as one that is taught, and consequently they knew how to speak a word in season to the weary or the stricken soul. (Isa. l. 4.) "Believe on the Lord Jesus"—they spoke what was in their hearts—"and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

But let us make no mistake about it, there would have been no songs in the prison that night, and no scenes of joy afterwards in the jailor's house, unless Paul and Silas had been living long before in prayerful dependence on God and regard for His interest. We are to come boldly to the throne of grace, *habitually*, in order that we may obtain mercy, and find grace for seasonable help, *whenever the need arises.* (Heb. iv. 16.) No doubt if we cry to God in trouble He will be merciful to us, but if we are not already looking to Him the trouble will find us unprepared; it will throw us off our balance, unseat us, cast us down. We shall suddenly realise the poverty and unfruitfulness of our souls; we shall be filled with our own trouble, with nothing to spare for the interest of God; and no songs will gladden our night.

"Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms." (James v. 13.) Paul and Silas were, indeed, both "afflicted" (in outward circumstances) and "merry" (in heart); they prayed and they sang. If we are walking with God, every circumstance of life will be the occasion for a suited utterance of our hearts to Him; in adversity we shall be conscious of not being alone, and in prosperity we shall not be inflated, we shall sing psalms; not necessarily those of others' composing, in rhyme or rhythm, but those—precious to God—which are the spontaneous expression of our own experience of Him. And perhaps our trials will become the occasion of our deepest rejoicing; it may even be given to us to "glory in tribulation," so that our prayers and our songs will rise together.

It is true that the experiences of Paul and Silas arose out of the special mission which had been entrusted to them. But the lesson is of general application—the patient waiting upon God, the spirit of dependence disclosed at every point, the freedom from their own personal interests, the wisdom to perceive and overcome insidious temptation, the strength to suffer, the songs in the night, the sweet incense to God, the blessing and salvation of men.

Certainly the apostle was speaking what he well knew when, at a later date, he wrote to the saints who were the fruit of his work in that same city, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. . . . Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Phil. iv. 4-7.)

III.

"Ask what I shall give thee." (1 Kings iii. 5.)

CHILDREN sometimes ask each other what they would choose if they were offered what they most desired. It is a question which we must ask ourselves in all seriousness if we are to pray from the heart.

The question was put to Solomon when he ascended the throne. "In Gideon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee." (1 Kings iii. 5.) The king's answer furnishes a notable example of a true prayer.

Faced with a question so comprehensive and so searching, his first thought is not to present an immediate request, but to review the situation broadly and rehearse before God the mercy and kindness already experienced. "Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before Thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with Thee; and Thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that Thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day." Such a review of God's ways with us will furnish an occasion for thanksgiving, enlarge our outlook, set us in right relation to God and to all else, give us a sense of proportion, and so guide our prayers.

There follows what may be called an appreciation of the actual moment—the greatness of the opportunity, and the sense of insufficiency in the face of it. "And now, O Lord my God, Thou hast made Thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in." In the sight of his subjects

Solomon may have been "every inch a king"; in the presence of God and in his own eyes he was but a little child, wholly unequal in himself to the great charge entrusted to him. "With the lowly is wisdom." (Prov. xi. 2.) He seems not to have been elated by his accession to the throne, any more than Daniel was depressed by being cast into the lions' den, or Paul and Silas by being shut up in prison. The man of prayer is not thrown off his balance by the sudden advent of either prosperity or adversity.

This humility and quietness of spirit before God open the way for an unselfish concern for His interests. "And Thy servant is in the midst of Thy people which Thou hast chosen, a great people that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude." Only after this chastened review of the position, and in the sight of this wide prospect—the vineyard of God, in which he was called upon to serve—does Solomon at length offer his brief petition. "Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this Thy so great a people?

We say, and truly, that Solomon asked for wisdom. But the manner of his asking, the spirit and purpose which governed him, are all-important. It was not his ambition to be a crowned philosopher; he did not covet the fame even of being a wise man. His mind was not directed to himself at all, but to the interest of God, the people of God upon earth; his desire was simply to be of service there, and his petition was framed accordingly.

We call it Solomon's choice. But is not every sincere prayer in some sense an expression of choice, revealing on what our minds are really set?

"And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. . . . Behold, I have done according to thy words." Such a prayer could not fail to receive an abundant answer.

"And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour." A profound principle, carrying with it both an encouragement and a warning. "The liberal soul shall be made fat." (Prov. xi. 25.) If our desires are granted (and perhaps if they are not) we receive also something that we have not asked. When Daniel and his companions begged that they might be permitted not to eat the king's meat, their motive was simply obedience to God, not their own personal welfare; but the result found them "fairer and fatter" than all the rest. (Dan. i.) The converse, too, is terribly true. If our set purpose is selfish or earthward we may achieve it, but we shall achieve something else as well. "He gave them their request; *but sent leanness into their soul.*" (Psa. cvi. 15.)

If, however, our minds are free for God and His interests, He will surely care for ours, adding to us, not necessarily, indeed, in the more spacious dispensation to which we belong, earthly riches and earthly honour, but something of truer and more abiding blessing for ourselves—durable riches—though to get anything for ourselves has not been the primary object of our prayers.

Another prayer, in a later age, may be compared with Solomon's—the quiet, confident prayer of the persecuted church. (Acts iv. 23-31.) Their leaders, Peter and John, had been before the authorities to answer for a work of power and mercy done in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and they had been dismissed with threats of severe punishment

if they ventured further to speak to any man in that Name. "And having been let go, they came to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them."* Were they narrow-minded in preferring that company—the company where the Name was owned—to any other on earth? Listen to their prayer:

"And they, having heard it, lifted up their voice with one accord to God, and said, Lord, Thou art the God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them." They seem to have found relief from the puny threatenings of men in the contemplation of the greatness of God. A sense of that greatness is indeed a first necessity of prayer. We are reminded of the words of our Lord, when rejected by the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, "*I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth,* because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight." (Matt. xi. 25, 26.) The sense of the greatness of God is fitly accompanied by a thankful submission to His will.

As in Solomon's case, any petition the church at Jerusalem may offer is preceded by a review of God's ways in connection with Christ, which have brought His people to the moment at which they stand. The raging of the nations against Him and His Christ had only brought to pass "whatever Thy hand and Thy counsel had determined."

"And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings." In the face of those threats, which shall the church pray for? For protection, for security, for the

* Quotations from Acts iv. are here taken from J.N.D.'s "New Translation."

removal of the peril? These might have been legitimate requests, but something else was uppermost in their thoughts; their horizon had been widened, their hearts made free by the knowledge of God and His ways in Christ. Thus their desires were in tune with His will, and their prayer was right in the centre of His interest among men. "And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings, and give to Thy bondmen with all boldness to speak Thy word, in that Thou stretchest out Thy hand to heal, and that signs and wonders take place through the Name of Thy holy servant Jesus." It is the very spirit of the Lord's teaching, "Father, Thy Name be hallowed," translated into terms suited to the circumstances of the moment. What singleness of heart, what freedom from pre-occupation with their own personal danger, what leisure of soul for the interests of the Name! Truly, as we have seen with Daniel, they prayed "with their windows open toward Jerusalem" (Jerusalem above, which is free). The answer to threats was the prayer for healing; they knew "what manner of spirit they were of" (Luke ix. 55); and they desired signs and wonders for the shining forth of God.

"And when they had prayed, the place in which they were assembled shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God with boldness." They had asked, and received, and their joy was full.

And again we find the liberal principle, "I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked." Their prayer was for the glory of God and the healing of men—indissolubly linked together. They were not occupied with themselves; they shew no trace of that corporate self-complacency (more subtle, because a degree less ignoble than the individual sort) which among many Christians has

marked an unconscious decline. Nothing was further from their thoughts than their own glory; yet this threatened and buffeted company shines with a grace derived from Christ Himself. "The heart and soul of the multitude of those that had believed were one, and not one said that anything of what he possessed was his own, but all things were common to them; and with great power did the apostles give witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all." Different though they might be from one another, both in natural character and in degree of spiritual apprehension, they were wonderfully freed from those selfish and personal motives which commonly rule in the societies of men. They were set here in the place of Christ; persecuted, yet in the spirit of dependence upon God and of healing towards men; the body of Christ, expressing His character. If the complete fulfilment of the great prayer of Christ waits for a coming day, some foretaste of it was granted to those early believers. "The glory which Thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one." (John xvii. 22.)

IV.

"Ask, and it shall be given you . . . for every one that asketh receiveth." (Matt. vii. 7, 8.)

"DOES God answer our prayers?" The question is present in some shape or form in many puzzled minds, and some consideration of it may be helpful.

Let us observe at the outset, that God invites us to ask of Him—constantly, on every occasion, under all conditions. "Ask, and it shall be given you." "In every thing . . . let your requests be made known unto God." "Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks."

Then will God give us whatever we may ask for? Consider the question. Could any father who loved his child give him everything he might ask for? "No infant's changing pleasure is like my wandering mind." Is God going to answer every changing desire of a wandering mind? Nay, He cannot, if He loves me, give me even an object strongly desired unless it be for good, and of that He alone can be the judge. Where were the blessing if my requests were such that to receive them brought leanness into my soul? (Psa. cvi. 15.)

Our Lord spoke very simply and very encouragingly: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: *for every one that asketh receiveth;* and and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give *good things* to them that ask Him?" (Matt. vii. 7-1.) The Lord gives us the assurance of receiving abundantly in answer to our prayers. True, He does not here promise that we shall receive exactly the things we ask for; but, a more blessed thing really, He assures us of the loving and wise liberality of the God with whom we have to do.

"In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." (Phil. iv. 6.) And your requests shall all be granted? Not that; but the promise is greater! "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Could anything be better among the

"good things" that He gives "to them that ask Him"?

The question whether God answers prayer, as asked by unbelieving men, really implies a misunderstanding of its nature. The unbeliever thinks of prayer as of a kind of magic by which he is to get some boon unobtainable by natural means. The Pharisee regards it (perhaps unconsciously, for he does not know that he is a Pharisee) as a religious exercise that brings credit to himself. Neither has any thought of prayer as the natural and daily expression of a known relationship with God. But a man who believes in God, and fears God, and walks before God, *must* pray to Him; for such a man to live is to pray; prayer is the breathing out of his soul to God. If we do not know this true nature of prayer we shall not understand anything about its answer.

God in His goodness may see fit to grant us the very things we ask for, but the love which answers our prayers is perhaps better illustrated by a case of an apparently right request that was, nevertheless, not granted. "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." (2 Cor. xii. 7-10.) The Lord loved His servant Paul (how dearly!), loved him too well to allow him to

be spoilt even by the greatness of the revelations vouchsafed to him; so He sent him—by no means an object of natural desire—apparently some trying physical disability. But Paul writes as one who had discerned the love and the purpose which lay behind the Lord's action; twice he repeats the reason for the trying infliction, "*lest I should be exalted above measure.*" Three times he had besought the Lord for its removal.

And how was the prayer answered? The infirmity was *not* removed, but the apostle received from the Lord a communication of the utmost sweetness, encouragement and instruction. "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." The very infirmity from which he had prayed to be released became an occasion of thanksgiving and rejoicing, and he had gained a fresh and deeper experience of the Lord's grace.

The same principle of the divine grace and liberality in answering prayer holds good, even in our daily life. Should I pray for the removal of strain, or pressure, or trial? It may be proper to do so; but should I not rather seek that they may continue until God has used them to fulfil His blessed will? Should not my prayer each morning be: O God, that Thy gracious purpose in discipline of my soul this day may be fulfilled in me? Let all be used for Thy will, and for Thy glory!

"For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." It would appear that in praying for an obvious boon, the removal of an infirmity (even if moved thereto by the interest of the Lord's service), Paul set a certain limit to his requests. He prayed thrice, and waited on the Lord's will. There was no such limit in his prayers for the church of God. "For this cause we also,

since the day we heard it, *do not cease* to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Col. i. 9, 10.) In asking something for ourselves we do well to inquire of the Lord what may be His mind for us and His way with us; but we may pray unceasingly for the peace of Jerusalem. (Psa. cxxii. 6.)

This distinction calls to mind a series of passages in which our Lord made to His disciples some promises of a more direct and definite character. In connection with the "greater works" which it would be given to them to do in His Name after He had departed, "*Whatsoever* ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask *any thing* in My Name, I will do it." (John xiv. 13, 14.) In connection with bearing fruit for the Father's glory, "*If ye abide in Me,* and My words abide in you, ye shall ask *what ye will,* and it shall be done unto you." "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that *whatsoever* ye shall ask of the Father in My Name He may give it you." (John xv. 7, 16.) "And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, *Whatsoever* ye shall ask the Father in My Name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My Name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." (John xvi. 23, 24.)

These passages are taken from our Lord's last discourse to His disciples on the night of His betrayal. He was describing to them how, after His de-

parture, they would be put in the same place in relation to Himself, in the power of the Spirit, which He Himself had occupied on earth in relation to the Father—the place of nearness to God, of rejection by the world, of identification with the Father and the Son in interest and affection. It is in this connection that these frequent references to "asking" arise, and the whole discourse is fitly closed by the great prayer of Christ Himself in chapter xvii. Placed in such a position it is not contemplated that the disciples can have anything to ask that would not be for the glory of God and the advancement of His work. The requests of one who was abiding in Christ would be, in no merely verbal or formal sense, but with great fulness of meaning, "in His Name"; they would be expressive of the mind of Christ, learnt in the soul of one in whom His words were abiding; and they could not fail to command the resources of divine grace and power.

"Every one that asketh receiveth . . . and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." It has been said that God sometimes grants the petitions of young believers in a direct and obvious way for the encouragement of their faith. However this may be, experience brings with it a deeper conviction that God always hears, and, in His own time and His own perfect way, always answers prayer. Sometimes He may, in His inscrutable wisdom, make long trial of our faith, but it will surely be found in the end that no true prayer has ever been offered in vain. We have to recognise, however, that prayer is essentially a moral thing, not to be dissociated from our state of soul with God. The first answer to prayer may be the purifying of the heart, in His eyes perhaps our most immediate need. We are, too, in the presence of deep things; and we know only in part.

V.

"And when He rose up from prayer." (Luke xxii. 24-62.)

THERE are ahead of us tests, trials, temptations, perhaps even crises. At what moment they will come, what shape they will take, is hidden from us; God only knows. They will meet us, it may be in our daily business or domestic life, it may be in our individual spiritual experience, it may be in our associations with our brethren. Will these tests catch us unawares? Will they find us sleeping, or watching? Shall we fail under them, or shall we glorify God?

Perhaps (God forbid!) we shall be so fast asleep that we shall pass through them and succumb to them without ever perceiving their true character. Or perhaps we shall wake up and begin to "pray for guidance." But unless they find us already awake and praying, we shall be weak to face them.

In the scenes which immediately preceded the crucifixion of our Lord, the contrast between His patient continuance in prayer and the absence of it on the part of the disciples is brought prominently before our notice.

At the hour of His supreme trial He was not unmindful of the tests which, as He foresaw, would at the same time try their faith, and He repeatedly warned them to be ready.

There had been a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest—a very natural matter on which to differ, and not out-of-date even in the twentieth century, but precisely the most impossible subject of dispute if our minds have been truly in prayer before God. The Lord does not chide them; He meets them with perfect

patience, shewing them *Himself*: "I am among you as he that serveth." He even, as if encouraging them to be not weary in well-doing, speaks to them as "they which have continued with Me in My temptations." Then He lingers over Peter with tender concern: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Peter's self-confidence, "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death," is met by a more explicit prediction: "I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest Me."

Once again, as the crisis approached, He warned them: "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." But they were unequal to the strain; He found them sleeping for sorrow. "Why sleep ye? *rise* and *pray*, lest ye enter into temptation." Too late, when the foe was upon them, they woke up, only to act without understanding.

Have not we also often woken up too late to be strong, or wise, or patient in the face of trial? When the Lord was awake and praying, the disciples had slept. If they had been watching with Him then, they would have learnt something of His mind. Now, while He is strong in dependence on God, waiting in meekness and patience, they are out of touch with Him, and their misguided energy displays itself in a futile blow. Peter draws his sword and cuts off the servant's ear, an act of unchastened valour which the Lord must immediately answer with rebuke and with healing.

It is very beautiful to see how again and again the Lord exhibits in His own Person the things

which He teaches to others. He *does*, He *is*, what He teaches. So in this supreme moment He watches, He prays, He seeks strength from God. "And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done." There are deep things in Gethsemane for our hearts to ponder, but none is more arresting than this perfection of prayer, this holy dependence upon God. Realising all the bitterness of that cup, He could not but lay His sorrow wholly before God; but all His human feelings—human, we may reverently say, sensitive and strong, but perfect as such—were subjected to the single purpose, "Not My will, but Thine, be done." It is not a place where many words become us.

"And when He rose up from prayer." He has passed through conflict; He rises up in strength. He has gone through the coming trial already in His soul with God; now He is at rest, and ready to face calmly the treachery of Judas, the murderous enmity of the chief priests and elders, the moral weakness of Pilate, the gross and brutal exhibitions of the Jewish crowd and the Roman soldiery, as well as sufferings which went far deeper than all these and in which no other could ever share.

But, it may be asked, He had prayed that, if it were possible, the cup might pass from Him; can we say, then, that His prayer was heard? Most certainly, yes. Our uncouth tongues can little speak of what passed in Gethsemane, but as we meditate on it we are compelled to the conviction that we have here, not only a perfect prayer, but also a perfect answer. The immediate answer was the strength and meekness with which our Lord passed with unfaltering steps through a trial that will for

ever stand alone. The ultimate answer who can tell? "Thy will be done" will be fulfilled in a world of blessing, all founded on that perfect sacrifice.

The contrast is great if we turn suddenly back from the prayer of our Lord to the failure of Peter and the other disciples. Yet in the scripture records the references to the Lord, to His disciples, to His enemies, are alternated as if to bring out the contrasts in the strongest possible light. And so the narrative turns aside for a moment to tell of Peter's denial in the palace court—Peter, who had so confidently affirmed that "though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended," who was so rashly prepared to smite with the sword and cut off an opponent's ear, but so little prepared by prayer and supplication for the real battle of the soul that he went down before the taunt of a maidservant.

"And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter." If we fall, what then? God grant that we may hear the cock crow; that we may *wake up*. For He will look upon us, with eyes of love that will search our heart and conscience. *He will bring us to the place we should never have left*, the place, not of self-confidence but of self-judgment. "Peter went out, and wept bitterly." And He will challenge our hearts, tenderly, graciously, strongly, as if there was something we could give Him which He greatly prized. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest Thou Me more than these?" (this to the one who had said, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I"). "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" The Lord will even grieve us by His loving importunity; but He will bring us on to our knees before Him. "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." What a contrast between this

humbled spirit and the self-confidence in which Peter had vowed, "I will lay down my life for Thy sake." In which spirit lay the greater strength is shewn, not only by the history of Peter in the early chapters of the Acts, but also by the evangelist's comment on the Lord's prediction for him, "This spake he, signifying by what death *he should glorify God.*" After he had learnt by bitter lessons the sources of weakness and of strength, he was to "strengthen his brethren," and in due time the true aim of every human life was to be fulfilled in him; he was to glorify God. (John xxii. 15-19.)

"Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." (Isa. xl. 30, 31.)

The natural powers of manhood will be of no avail in the tests of the Christian life; the young men shall utterly fall, even though inspired by the enthusiasm of a Peter. To wait on God is the only way of strength. Not that to gain strength is the central purpose of our prayers; it is not. Our part is—while making known all our requests to God by prayer and supplication and thanksgiving—to seek above all that His will may be done, and that He may be glorified. But in seeking this we shall mount up with wings as eagles; we shall breathe a freer and purer air; we shall gain a view of things which could never be seen from the level of earth, and without which we could never see our way clear when we come to run or to walk.

But true prayer will not make us merely contemplative and visionary; it is essentially practical, and if we are with God, He will set before us an

object—His purpose in Christ, and His consequent interest upon earth—for which we can *run and not be weary.*

And then, perhaps most difficult of all, He will teach us to *walk*—day by day, in all weathers, through evil report and good report—to walk and not faint.

"ANOTHER SHALL GIRD THEE"

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." (John xxi. 18.)

WE think, especially when we are young, that the thing to be desired is to be free and strong and do what we like; to dispose of the things and the persons around us as we will; cutting a noble figure in our own eyes, and, we would fain imagine, in the eyes of our fellows. We do not like to feel small, to be at the mercy of others, to be cribbed and confined by circumstances.

Yet it may be, when we come to look back on our history in a purer light than that in which we see it now, that the moments of real value, perhaps the only ones worth recording, will be precisely those in which we were made to feel small, in which we suffered rather than acted, or, if we acted at all, took in simple trust in God a course little calculated to gain us the good opinion of those around us.

The event selected by the Holy Spirit for notice in the New Testament out of the whole of Jacob's history (and the history of every believer is surely

being watched for such gracious notice, and a book of remembrance kept) is not the successful issue of any of his carefully laid schemes; it is at the close of his life, when, a chastened and disciplined soul looking back on the way that God had led him, he "worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." (Heb. xi. 21.) And all the triumphs of Joseph in Egypt are passed over in silence in the sacred retrospect, and the moment chosen for approving comment is again his last, when everything passed from his mind except the promise of God to bring His people up to Canaan, and he "gave commandment concerning his bones."

Peter was a man of ardent affection, ambitious to do great things for Christ. And his desire was granted, but not until his *mind* was changed; and then the great things given to him were not of his own choosing. It is not even said in so many words that they would be done in the service of Christ; but in the event it was given to him to glorify God in the moment of his utter helplessness: "When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me." The primary service to God is to yield ourselves wholly to His will.

In truth it is good to be free and strong and rich, to love life and see good days. But things are not always what they seem. He that loveth his life shall lose it. It may take us years to learn that what we thought was freedom was really Egyptian bondage, while the bondservant of Christ was the only free man; that the fine energy and glittering success which looked like life were really Dead Sea fruit; and that those strange people were right who,

after suffering affliction and disappointment, and going through it with God, have told us that they would not for anything have missed the experience and the blessing.

We should have had few psalms of David if, instead of being filled with trouble and bitterness from first to last—a fugitive from Saul in his youth, and from Absalom in his old age—his life had been one of placid success, such as we often regard as the one thing needful! It is by experience of suffering, reducing us to a sense of reality and of our nothingness before God, that life yields its increase for His pleasure, the harps are tuned to song, and the golden vials are filled with odours, "which are the prayers of saints." (Rev. v. 8.)

Pressure makes us small, makes us feel small, but in moral things (and, in the long run, are any other things real?) the processes and results are often very strange, very wonderful; and in effect we find that pressure, in dispersing our self-glorifying bubbles, greatly enlarges our knowledge of God. "In pressure, thou hast enlarged me." (Psa. iv., New Trans.) The inward blessing is greater than any given by visible prosperity: "Thou hast put joy in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their new wine was in abundance."

We are more likely to find God if our desires are crossed—and we submit ourselves in full sincerity of heart to the will of God in it—than if we succeed in giving effect to them. It is "in distresses" that "God is . . . a help . . . *very readily found.*" (Psa. xlvi. 1, New Trans.) How shall we ever find God, or learn to trust Him, if, by getting our own way, we find every reason to trust ourselves, or our circumstances, or even our service?