

# *Spiritual Light and Life.*

BY

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Our little systems have their day;  
They have their day and cease to be:  
They are but broken lights of Thee,  
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.

We have but faith: we cannot know;  
For knowledge is of things we see;  
And yet we trust it comes from Thee,  
A beam in darkness: let it grow.

Let knowledge grow from more to more,  
But more of reverence in us dwell;  
That mind and soul, according well,  
May make one music as before,

But vaster.

TENNYSON : *In Memoriam—Prologue.*

## The Religion of Feeling and the Religion of Being.

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"Every one therefore who heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, . . . . . and great was the fall thereof."  
—*St. Matthew* vii. 24-27.

"IT is well said," wrote Thomas Carlyle, in his Lectures on Heroes, "that a man's religion is the chief fact with regard to him. By religion I do not mean here the Church creed which he professes, the articles of faith which he will sign, and, in words or otherwise, assert. . . . But the thing a man does practically believe, the thing a man does practically lay to heart, and know for certain, concerning his vital relations to this mysterious Universe, and his duty and destiny there, that is in all things the primary thing for him, and creatively determines the rest. That is his religion."<sup>1</sup> These are true and plain words; and in these days, when there are still a great number of good and well-meaning people who think that the chief and most important matter in religion is the correctness of a man's creed, and the precision with which he can state what he believes, they cannot too constantly be borne in mind. For they lay stress upon a point that is frequently apt to be overlooked, and that is, that no form of faith is worth much which is not

Lectures on Heroes: the Hero as Divinity.

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practically believed, and carried out diligently, earnestly, patiently, in the character and conduct of the life of every day. This it behoves us continually to remember in our dealings with one another, for we really have no other means of deciding upon the truth and value of a man's convictions in any matter except as we see them embodied in his words and his acts. As for us, that is the only test that we have. We are bound to look upon the outward appearance, for it is impossible for us to look upon the heart. God can do that, but we cannot. Judged by a human standard, such as from the nature of the case we are obliged to adopt, a man will be approved or censured, praised or condemned, not according to what he says he believes, but according to what we see him to be. If a man professes to be a Liberal in politics, and, in time of election, gives his vote for a Conservative candidate, we know pretty well what to think of his professions. In the same way, if a man says that to be spiritual and generous, forgiving and Christ-like, is the royal road to true happiness in this life and everlasting joy in the life to come, and all the time is worldly-minded and selfish and unloving, we are sure that he is not sincere in his acceptance of the beautiful sentiments in which he professes to believe. "By their fruits ye shall know them," said Jesus.<sup>2</sup> And this is the only way in which we, at all events, are able to judge.

At the same time, we must never forget that,

<sup>2</sup> Matthew vii. 16.

although the chief part of religion consists in practice, a man's religion must have some ground of belief, some ground of conviction, on which to rest. If conduct be the house that every one of us is engaged in building all through life, it must have one or two well-defined, fundamental principles of action on which it is based as its foundation. Sincerity is indeed vastly more important in matters of life and religion than an orthodox creed which a man may write down in black and white; but yet a man must have a creed of some kind or other, in living out which he is constantly called upon to be sincere. No one acts without an end or principle of action. We give money to beggars because the sight of wretchedness touches our sympathies and loosens our purse-strings; or we refuse money to beggars because we have no money to spare, or because we think that indiscriminate charity does no good. An action without an end in view, without some underlying principle to which we can refer it, is quite inconceivable. And as it is with any one action, so is it with a collection, a series, a lifetime of actions—that is to say, with conduct. This is the case with the highest kind of action, with action that springs from religious motives; and this is the case with the noblest kind of conduct, with conduct that comes out of or converges to religion. It is perfectly true that religion is more of a life than a creed. It is more. It is *very much* more. But still there must be a creed of some sort, which may be simple or which may be complex. There must be some fundamental principle, which may



be elementary or which may be compounded of several others. Otherwise religion and the religious life has no basis, no roots, no foothold; nay, more, there can scarcely be any religion at all. For it will be a vaporous, shifting, emotional thing, leaving no more perceptible trace in the heart and the character than the electric current leaves in the wire through which it shoots, or than the wind leaves on the petals of the summer flower as it skims lightly by.

Now, it is quite evident from the records that we have of the teaching of Jesus Christ that he taught in perfect accord with these facts. If we take the Sermon on the Mount, which the words of our text draw to a solemn and impressive conclusion, as forming Christ's code of religion and morality, we find most clearly that, while on the one hand the larger part of it refers to and gives directions for conduct, yet on the other hand it contains certain broad comprehensive principles, which form a kind of simple creed for Christ's disciples, and from obedience to which conduct is to take its rise. Now, these principles, as far as we can be guided in an attempt to sum them up by the general tenor of the whole discourse, may all be included and embraced under this great truth, that God is the Father of mankind. A rapid glance through the Sermon on the Mount, as it is called, is quite enough to show that Jesus kept on speaking of God in this way, as indeed he could not fail to do. For he knew the Father, and testified of Him. That which he had heard in the ear he proclaimed aloud

upon the housetops. That which he knew about the Divine nature, from dwelling in the secret places of the Divine love, he declared to men, to bring them back, renewed and penitent, to Him from whom they had wandered away, some with the aimless strayings of a silly sheep, some with the wilful rebellion of the prodigal son. And if, still further, we attempted to sum into one Christ's directions for conduct, as contained in this discourse, we might include and embrace them all under this precept: that men be spiritual, that they live the higher life, that they develop the higher nature. We have only to look at Christ's re-delivery of the law of Moses to be convinced of this truth. Acts were in future to be looked at not in themselves, but in their motives; and if, as is frequently the case, we cannot look at them in this way in one another, it was always to be remembered that this is the way in which they are judged by God. The laws relating to revenge, and murder, and oaths, and adultery; the great questions of prayer, and alms-giving, and the amassing of wealth, and the provision for temporal needs, were all of them lifted into an ethereal sphere, and were shone upon and breathed into by Jesus' revelation of the Father. In this way the Saviour's doctrine of God becomes the foundation of all true and holy and Christ-like conduct; principle leads on to practice; a spiritual creed is given for the living out of a spiritual life. All is very simple. God is a Spirit; therefore do you be spiritual. God is your Father; therefore do you love, obey, honour,

glorify Him, and live evermore as in His sight. That is the sum and substance of the words of Jesus as we have them in the Sermon on the Mount. It is to these thoughts, arising out of a review of that discourse, that Jesus gives an impressive and picturesque form in the parable that draws the discourse to a fitting conclusion. We have just seen what we may regard as a brief yet comprehensive summary of the teachings by which the parable is preceded. There is a short simple creed: God is your spiritual Father. There is a short simple code of practice: do you be His spiritual children. Then, after having unfolded, enforced, and applied in many ways and with a variety of illustration these leading ideas, he drove home all he had been saying by this picture of the two builders. We cannot fail to see with what beautiful effect he gives prominence to the relation between belief and practice, faith and life. The one is a foundation; the other is a house built on the foundation. And the parable is a lesson to men, teaching them to build securely, and warning them against the easy yet dangerous plan of building insecurely.

Like a great many more of his parables, this was no doubt suggested to him by local scenery. The mountain from which the Saviour addressed his hearers was probably one of the rocky terraces overlooking the Lake of Galilee, in the neighbourhood of Capernaum. On the shelving lands which surround the lake, travellers have found numerous broad ledges on which houses might conveniently be built. On many



of these ledges rock is covered with only a thin layer of earth or sand. The soil, which is of the nature of an alluvial deposit, left by the streams which rush down the torrent-beds during the winter and early spring, is made into a ready-prepared level surface by the action of the water. A stranger coming to build there would be attracted by such a spot, for it is much easier to build there than to work the foundations of the house into the hard and rugged rock. It is true that the rock lies hidden underneath the sand; but still the builder might hope that the alluvial soil would be secure enough to hold his house. The mountain streams are dry. There is no torrent, thundering as it leaps down from above, to threaten either the building or its slender foundation. The skies are fair. The sun is bright. The nights are calm. The storms of winter seem passed away for ever. The house will do very well, at least for the present. But when the wet and windy season returns, and the rains descend, and the floods come, and the blasts beat upon the poorly-founded building, then the fair fabric, on which time and money have been expended, gives way, and falls into a heap of ruins. The winter torrents sweep down in their fury, the fierce-breathing storms rage, and the house is no more. And all this loss, all this desolation, arises from the man's neglecting to dig through the deposit of earth into the solid rock, and to make a foundation for his dwelling against which the trial-time of tempest would come in vain. A builder like this may well

be called foolish. He may well pass into a by-word of reproach. In the same way, a man who, taking trouble and expending time and strength, digs through the shifting, uncertain sand into the rock, and founds his house truly and well, may indeed be called wise, for his firm and moveless dwelling is the best monument of his wisdom. Christ says that the man who hears his words and does them is like the wise builder who built firmly; and that the man who hears his words and does them not is like the foolish builder who built insecurely. For the house of an outwardly religious life which each builds, in the one case stands, and in the other case falls with a great and utter ruin.

Now, it is important to notice that, up to a certain point, these two men are in precisely the same situation; for there is the same foundation for both of them if they only choose to build upon it. They both might have built upon the rock if they had liked to do so; only one of them did not. He chose the ready-prepared level surface of the sand, thinking that that would be enough to hold his house; while the other digs through the sand into the rock, knowing that that only would guarantee the security that he desired. Applying the parable, we find that both the characters whom Christ contrasts hear his words. His doctrine of God, his teachings about the Divine Fatherhood, his precepts for the living out a spiritual life, come equally to both. He is not responsible for the issue in either of the two cases. He has laid the rock-foundation, and

he says: "There it is; build upon it. Dig through "the sand that overlays it, through the shifting, "uncertain feelings, the passing emotions, which my "words cannot fail to excite, down into the solid rock "of my doctrine of God as your Father and of yourself "as His child." If a man neglects to do this, it is not Christ's fault, any more than it is the fault of a schoolmaster if a boy whom he has taught to write by and bye employs his knowledge of writing in forging a cheque.

In another respect also, the two men of the parable, and the characters whom they respectively represent, have something in common. For not only is there the same foundation for both if they will only choose to build on it, but they do, in fact, both of them build their house. Now it is clear that the house in each case symbolizes the general fabric of an outwardly religious life. For we must bear in mind that in this picture Christ is not speaking, as St. Paul speaks in a certain place, of the quality of the house that a man builds, whether of wood, hay, stubble, or of gold, silver, precious stones.<sup>8</sup> But he is speaking of the quality of the foundation, of the stability or instability of that on which a man erects the structure of his religious profession. He is speaking of the question as to whether the profession is based on shifting, uncertain feelings, or on solid truth; on what is mere emotion, unsteady as the sand, or on what is real apprehension of truth inwrought into our very being, firm as the rock.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 12, 13.

That is the great matter at issue here. And, in fact, just as the two houses may have been alike in every point except that of the character of the foundation on which each respectively rested, so there may be nothing to choose outwardly between two lives equally religious, equally moral, of which one is based on feeling and the other on solid truth inwrought into character. Until the trial arrives, until the rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds beat upon both the buildings, it may be and often is quite impossible to detect anything in which one is better than the other. The seed that fell upon the rocky soil where it had not much earth was quite as fair to look upon while it was growing as the seed that fell into good ground. It was not till the scorching sun arose, revealing its want of root as it withered away, that the difference became manifest; for the same sun that ripened the one caused the other to perish. Probably all of us in the range of our acquaintance can find men of whose religious life we were as confident as of anyone's, very likely more confident than of our own, until the time of trial fell upon them, and revealed the insecurity of the foundation on which their professions were based. They were all we could wish; for the time being, they answered all our expectations. The house was fair and seemly, and one in which a man might be proud to dwell. But the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew. Sickness, losses, bereavements, temptations, trial in one form or another,

swept down upon them, and they fell, and great was their fall. What makes the difference between such and those whose house, in time of trial, stands secure? Anything in the house? No, nothing. It is in the quality of the foundation that the secret of collapse or of firmness is contained; the storms of winter make the quality of the foundation apparent.

But let us look at this question of the foundation a little closer. The sand symbolizes shifting, perishable emotion; the rock symbolizes the teachings of Christ about God and man into which character is inwrought. In other words, the foolish builder represents the man whose religion is a religion of feeling; and the wise builder represents the man whose religion is a religion of being. The former is the man who is content to base his religious life in religious impressions; the latter is the man who strives to base his religious life in religious truth, who transmutes and develops his feeling into being, his impressions into character. The former stops short at the layer of sand that overstrewns the rock; the latter digs down through the sand into the rock itself. Now if we look carefully at the question of the religious life, as far as its outward manifestations are concerned, we shall find that in most cases, if not in all, it either had its origin, or received a very strong impulse, at a time when the emotions generally were deeply stirred. Many a man has been solemnly affected by the death of his nearest and dearest, by some great tribulation,

by some intense and thrilling joy, by some religious revival whose wave of feeling has swept over him. By one or other of these agencies the latent religious emotions of his nature were awakened; his spiritual imagination was quickened; his loftiest and best feelings were aroused. If we ask him the time when he first began to think about religious matters, he will probably point back to some occasion of the kind suggested, and say that then and under those circumstances his religious emotions were awakened or were greatly stimulated. But, beyond all other agencies, there is nothing so well fitted to produce these results as listening with heart and soul to the teachings of Jesus. To hear him say that the great mysterious Power that is both behind and before the forces of the Universe—that is the life of all life, the inspiration of every thought of goodness, and beauty, and love—is a personal Spirit, a loving, tender, watchful Father, not less of the peasant than of the prince—oh! such a truth as that sends a thrill of emotion through the soul that hearkens to it with all its attention, and tries to grasp, with ever so small an apprehension, its depth and fulness. When, moreover, we hear Jesus telling us that he has come to declare the love of this great Father, to win His erring children back to Him, to make Him worthily known, to be himself the revelation of God, the religious emotions are stirred still more deeply, the religious aspirations are awakened still more. Such cannot fail to have been the case with those who listened candidly to Jesus as he taught

amongst them. Such cannot fail to be the case with those who listen candidly to him as he teaches still by his Spirit and by his Word. And the times of intense feeling arising from other causes, to which reference was made a few sentences back, do but prepare the way for and work together with these more truly religious feelings.

It is in feeling, then, that religion frequently, if not always, takes its rise. But what then? Is feeling of itself enough as a basis for the religious life? Is its lasting-power sufficiently great, its nature sufficiently enduring, to withstand the trials, the testing-times, common to us all? To these questions we must answer, no. Feeling of itself is not enough. It is a poor thing at the best. It is shifting and transient, here to-day and gone to-morrow. It may be intense or it may be weak; but in either case it sooner or later passes away, just as the blasts of the winter storm disappear equally with the soft breathings of the summer breeze. Feeling is valuable only as it is embodied in being. It is permanent only as its effects remain in character. To hear Christ's words, to thrill with emotion as we hear them, to long to be like him, to desire to come near to God, to hear the Father's whisperings of love in the silences of the soul, to wish to be spiritual—all this is as nothing unless we pass through it down to the reality of being, the reality of feeling embodied in the life. We must dig through it, as through a layer of sand, down to the solid rock of a being based upon and inwrought with the eternal truth.

How, then, may we get at this sure foundation on which the house of an outward religious profession may rest secure, freeing us from all fear that, when the time of trial comes, our professions may collapse, and become a by-word and a laughing-stock? Christ gives us the answer to our question. He likens unto the wise man that built his house upon the rock everyone who hears his words, and does them. Feeling is transmuted into being through the agency of doing. Doing is, as it were, the string around which the solvent, shifting feeling may crystallize into being, which is firm and real and cannot pass away. This is what St. John meant in his Epistle when he wrote, "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."<sup>4</sup> This is what Christ meant when he said, "He that keepeth my commandments, he it is that loveth me."<sup>5</sup> Love is an emotion, and becomes real, permanent, only in the effects of obedience. And successive acts of obedience to Christ's will form the Christ-like character. Therefore it is that, by doing the words of Christ, the feelings aroused when we hear them take on a lasting form. It is by doing that we get through the shifting sandy layer of feeling down into the firm foundation of a character, a nature, a being, a life, inwrought into truth, against which the trial-tempests beat in vain. The outward religious professions that are based upon it cannot be overthrown, for their foundation is secure, laid deep in the very core and centre of our being.

<sup>4</sup> 1 John ii. 17.<sup>5</sup> John xiv. 21.



Do in order that you may be. That is the great law of the development of Christian character, and its wisdom, as manifest in the teachings of Jesus Christ, is enforced also by the voice of the ages. It is a law that we constantly meet with in every department of life. We meet with it in the discipline and training of children. The ready, unquestioning obedience of a child to its parents has been formed—how? By moulding the little will through the agency of successive acts in which obedience has been required; and the doing of the successive acts of obedience has produced the obedient character. We meet with it in every school. The boys and girls are made to learn their lessons day by day, why? That their minds may be cultivated, their habits of thinking formed; that they may become fitted for the duties and avocations of life. They are taught to do in order that they may be. We meet with it in the making of boys into skilled artisans, into good tradesmen, into clever professional men. The years of apprenticeship, the years of study, are gone through day by day, each day bringing with it its own work, in order that when the lads, grown into young men, start life on their own account, they may be prepared to follow well their respective callings. We meet with it in the making and administration of the laws of a country. Those in authority hope, that by accustoming the people whom they govern to obedience to the laws, loyalty may be fostered, lawlessness may be removed. And when men break the laws they are put in prison;

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where they have no chance of breaking them again for the time being, in order that by compulsory obedience loyal and lawful habits may be restored. Everywhere there is the principle, "Do in order that 'you may be.'" Action is the product of feeling, and character is the product of successive actions. When the outward profession arises from the inward character, when a holy life springs from a holy nature, then the man has built his house upon the solid rock, and has dug through the shifting layer of sand. Such an one will stand in the time of storm: floods will come, rains will descend, winds will beat against him in vain; while, on the other hand, the man whose religious professions are the outcome of passing emotion, of empty excitement, in the time of storm will fall with a great ruin.

Let us take care that we do not mistake feeling for being, emotion for character. Feeling is only a perishing and changeful foundation of sand; but character, consistent Christian character based on truth, is a house that cannot be moved. Such a structure, so founded, far from perishing in the tempest, will be only more firmly grounded by every blast. And when the storms of life have spent their fiercest, and the last great testing-time of death itself sweeps down upon us, shall we fall? No, we shall not. But after it is overpast, the night will vanish; the day will break; the shadows will flee away. Upon the house that we have toiled patiently to found and to build there shall arise the sweet splendours of the morning without clouds, even the morning of eternity.

## Spiritual Life.

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“Thou wilt show me the path of life.”—*Psalm* xvi. 11.

BEYOND the fact that this sacred poem was written by David, and called by him or by others “a golden psalm,” we know nothing more of the circumstances of its authorship, amid which, if we did know them, it would lie like a jewel in its setting. Yet it is easy to see from the language of the poem itself that it was called forth from the Psalmist’s grateful soul by some signal display of the Divine goodness toward him. Deliverance from trouble, such as David was often impelled by fervent thankfulness to celebrate in song, would seem to have been granted to him; and from his responsive heart there arises the confession that he has no good above his God.<sup>1</sup> He did not allow the Divine favours to hide from his eyes the hand that bestowed them. He felt that the mercies which he enjoyed were but voices telling him that the Lord was near, and that every new mercy as it came to him should be to him a witness and an evidence of the immovability of the soul that sets God always before itself as its ground of faith and goal of desire. And the deliverance he had experienced in the little circle of his present life

<sup>1</sup> “Thou art my Lord: I have no good above thee:”  
Revised rendering of verse 2.

was a prophecy that in the mysterious future God would still be with him. His soul could scarcely be abandoned to the darkness of Hades. Rather would God's goodness to him here be a ground of hope to him, all vague as his thoughts of immortality were, of continued goodness in the hereafter. His preserved and prolonged life in this sphere of time would tell of life yet to come in the vast circumscribing sphere of eternity. "Thou wilt shew me the path "of life."

What was the nature of the display of the Divine goodness granted to him it is, of course, impossible for us to determine. We had better not trust ourselves to the steed of our imagination, for it may carry us into dangerous places; and imagination, as George Eliot says of prophecy, is a very difficult horse to ride. We can only say that the Psalmist may have recovered from some visitation of sickness; or may have escaped some peril threatened by his foes during the time that Saul was trying to destroy him; or that the deliverance celebrated may even have been the overthrow of the revolt in his kingdom headed by his loved son Absalom. What was the occasion of the Psalm we know not. All we can be certain of is that the dreaded danger passed over; that instead of fear, there arose hope; that instead of impending death, there came a grateful preservation of life. The Psalmist felt round about him the strengthening sense of that protecting power and presence of his God which filled his heart with a confidence of stability, intensified his expectation of life

and made his cup to overflow as with fulness of the wine of joy.

But we pass from what is temporal and local in the words of our text to what is universal and eternal as humanity itself. Just as every true prophecy, no matter by whom spoken, finds perpetual and ever-recurring fulfilments as the wheels of time go round, so every true religious sentiment, every deep spiritual intuition, no matter who first feels and expresses it, awakens an echo from the hearts of men in every nation and in every age. It is, indeed, in this fact that we find one of the chief reasons for the perennial value of the Bible. Just as the æsthetic sentiments of mankind, our best feelings of the beautiful in art and music, and nature and poetry, were given to the Greeks to preserve and develop, so the religious sentiments of mankind, our feelings of the Divine and the spiritual, our intuitions of righteousness, our insight into the great questions of right and wrong, seem to have been the special care and heritage of the Jewish race; so that on every page of their sacred writings, which form our Old Testament, there is written, in large and legible letters, the great truth, "Righteousness tendeth to life." And just as, because our feelings of beauty are eternal, the poetry and oratory of the Greeks will never utter their sweet voices unheard, nor their sculpture and architecture appeal to unappreciative eyes; so, because our intuitions of righteousness, our yearnings for the Divine, our desires for the spiritual life, are eternal, the Bible will never die, and its perennial fount of inspiration will never stagnate and dry up. There the soul thirsting

for righteousness may always drink a refreshing draught. There the heart in its search for God may always find finger-posts pointing out the way.

This is the case with our text. "Thou wilt show me 'the path of life.'" The cry of hope sounding in these words was indeed only the outburst of one grateful soul after having experienced some signal mark of the Divine goodness. David was indeed wholly unaware of the depth and breadth of his expression of confidence. But because the words are the words of a true human heart, because we can hear in them the throb of a true human life, they become to us the language in which the sentiments and hopes of a whole humanity find their form. We hear humanity's cry of faith and of desire to the God who made it, whose spirit lives in it, who is alike its author and its goal. And not only from the heart of a Jewish king, who lived and reigned over his little empire centuries ago, but from the universal heart of mankind do we hear going up to its God the wistful longing, which contains the prophecy of its own fulfilment, "Thou, Thou wilt shew me the path of life."

Tennyson's beautiful words are not less true than beautiful :—<sup>2</sup>

"Thou wilt not leave us in the dust :  
Thou madest man, he knows not why ;  
He thinks he was not made to die ;  
And Thou hast made him : Thou art just."

To attempt to prove the universal desire for life in everything that lives would be both a needless and an unprofitable undertaking. We are our own proofs

<sup>2</sup> "In Memoriam" Prologue.

of the fact, and all creation accords with the evidence. That every living thing tries to prolong its life, and by that means gives evidence of its desire for life, is one of the first facts, as it is one of the most certain facts, alike of our consciousness and of our observation. This fact is as true of the humblest as it is of the highest forms of life, of the most lowly organized as of the most highly organized of creatures. In a drop of water taken from a stagnant pool, in a portion of the mud that collects after rain in the gutters of our houses, the microscope reveals to us organisms so lowly that they seem to be only on the border line of life, between the merest beginnings of existence and no existence at all. Yet life is doubtless as dear to them as it is to man himself. Certainly they make efforts no less ardent to maintain it in their humble way than are the efforts of men to maintain their life in their complex way. Even among men and women themselves, we find that those who live amid such wretched conditions that life seems not only not worth living, but scarcely even to be worth calling life, nevertheless make the most frantic struggles for its maintenance even on the poorest possible pittance. So true are the words which the poet puts into the mouth of Satan in the book of Job, "Skin for skin, "yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life."<sup>3</sup> Only when trouble has so preyed upon the mind, only when the struggle has been so fierce and fiery and vain, as to shake the foundations of reason's sway, does the suicide allow his natural love of life to yield

<sup>3</sup> Job ii. 4.

to the hope of repose he has in death. But the great fact remains. We know that wherever we find a living thing—a man, a beast, a bird, a fish, an insect, a tree, a plant, an organism so lowly that we can scarcely tell whether it is a plant or an animal—we know that there we shall find a thing which desires life, and seeks, by all the means it has, for the maintenance of its own life. Indeed, so universal, so eternal is this desire for life that that scientific theory which has probably done more to mould the thought of our century than any other influence to which the century has been subjected, proceeds upon what its founder has called “the struggle for existence.” Thus we see, in the Psalmist’s cry to God, “Thou wilt show me the path of life,” he is but putting into words the most fundamental desire of created things and of man in especial.

But if, having noticed the universal desire for life, we now go on to put the question, “What is Life?” we begin to enter, in the course of our meditations, a region which lies in impenetrable darkness; for that is a question which no one can answer, and which most men in our day are wise enough not to attempt to answer. We cannot any more say what life is than we can say what gravitation is, or what electricity is, or what mind is. The nature of these things probably will ever remain an inscrutable mystery. All that we can say of them is that they are varying manifestations of an Infinite and Eternal Energy which is behind all things and in all things, from which all things proceed and by which all things are sustained. And at that point many people nowadays are disposed to leave the



matter, saying we can know no more. But we, as disciples of Jesus Christ, believe in the God of whom he has told us. We believe that He is that Infinite and Eternal Energy who upholds all things, as an Apostle says, "by the word of His power."<sup>4</sup> But even this confidence of ours does not unfold to us what is life, any more than it unfolds to us what is electricity. It only assures us that God, the God of Jesus, whom he has taught us to call our Father, is the source of life, and that to know Him as revealed in Jesus Christ, whom He has sent, is the truest life.<sup>5</sup> But the nature of life still remains, as it ever must remain, a dark, impenetrable mystery. We see it, we feel it, we are conscious of it; but that is all. What life is, we do not know.

But must we leave the matter there? As regards the intrinsic nature of life we must leave it there, content to wait for further knowledge, if indeed further knowledge will ever come. But as regards such knowledge of life as we can attain to, we may know life as we know every other means by which the Infinite and Eternal Energy displays itself; that is to say, we may know it by what we see of it, by its modes of showing itself, by its manifestations. We do not know what electricity is, in its nature. But we know it by its manifestations, in the brilliancy of lightning, in the telegraph that flashes a message under thousands of miles of rolling waters, in the electric light that illuminates our streets, our museums and our railway stations. Nor do we know what gravitation is, but we know it by its manifestations

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews i. 3.<sup>5</sup> John xvii. 3.

every time we see anything fall to the ground ; we see it on its most tremendous scale in its government of the movements of the solar system and of the entire universe. Nor do we know what mind is, but we know it by its manifestations, when we listen to music, or look at a picture, or read a poem, or are conscious of anything else that is the work of mind. Just in the same way, therefore, though we do not know what life is in its nature, we know life through its manifestations. The question then arises, in what do its manifestations agree—what have they in common ?

Now, let us take two or three very simple facts ; and, finding out what features they possess in common with one another, let us see if this generalization helps us in understanding how life shows itself. If we were to go into a greenhouse in the wintry time of year, we should no doubt find there some beautiful plants in bloom which cannot live in a lower temperature than is kept up in the greenhouse. Take the camellia, with its waxy white or red flowers, as an example. The camellia cannot bear frost, as every gardener knows. Now, if we were to take such a plant from the warm greenhouse and expose it to two or three nights' frost, what would be the consequence ? It would die. The camellia cannot live in the cold ; frost is fatal to it. This is one fact, one illustration ; now let us take another. Doubtless, we have all at some time or another taken a chill. We know the result—a cold. What has been going on in our bodies ? Just this, as any doctor will admit : we have been parting with the

heat of our bodies more freely than enabled us securely to withstand the sudden inroad of cooler air upon them. That is a second fact, a second illustration. Now take a third, from an experience happily not so familiar as that of catching cold. A heavy grief suddenly comes upon a man. A loved relative, a dear friend, has almost without warning been stricken down by death in the midst of life; or he has had an unexpected notice to leave a situation which he held for a long time, and where to make a living for himself and those dependent on him seems an insoluble problem; or a medical man whom he has consulted has told him that he is suffering from a disease whose effects may temporarily be stayed, but which must ultimately carry him off; or in a broken bank or a sudden collapse in stocks his hardly-earned and carefully-saved money has disappeared for ever. For the time being he was overpowered with grief at one or other of these things. It came so unexpectedly. It found him so unprepared for its arrival. It was long before he recovered his habitual buoyancy of spirit; perhaps he has not recovered it to this day. That is a third illustration. Now let us imagine a fourth and last. Suppose a child brought up amid all the comforts, all the luxuries, all the refinements, which great wealth can give, suddenly to be forced to live in the squalor and wretchedness of outcast London, in a foul room tenanted by two families, where all vice and filth abound; where life is a long, awful struggle for the barest maintenance. What wonder would it be were he to die under the altered conditions,

unable to bear the sudden change to poverty and scant living and dirt and rags and misery? Probably he would die; or if amid all he yet managed to live, his life would be so changed as scarcely to be life compared with that which he had formerly been accustomed to. Here we have a fourth illustration.

Now then, what are the points common to all these illustrations? In what feature do they agree? In this: that in them all there has been a change in the surroundings, or to speak in the language of science, in the external relations. In the case of the plant, changed from the warm greenhouse to the frosty night air; of the body, changed from a heated atmosphere to a cold one; of the mind, changed from the sunshine of joy into the gloom of sudden grief; of the child, changed from wealth and luxury to poverty and destitution—in all these cases there has been a change in the surroundings, or, as was said, in the external relations. And because there has not been a corresponding change in the inward nature, or, to speak again in the language of science, in the internal relations, the mischief we have supposed in each case has ensued. The hothouse plant was not able to adapt itself to the frosty night air. The human body was not able to check itself in giving off its heat. The mind plunged in grief could not adapt itself all at once to the changed conditions that came upon it. The child of wealth could not adapt himself to the surrounding wretchedness and cold and poverty. Thus, in the first case, there was death; in the second case, bodily indisposition, a

decrease, for the time being, of the vital force; in the third case, a nervous shock, a decrease, for the time being, of the energy of the mind; in the last case, probably death. But if, with the changed outward conditions in each case, the inward conditions as well could have been as suddenly changed, then the mischief in each case would not have happened. But they were not so changed, and so there was either death or else a diminution of the powers of living. In this way we see what life is, not, indeed, in its nature, but in its manifestations. Briefly defined, life is a complete correspondence between the inward nature and the outward surroundings; or, to use the words of the greatest thinker of to-day, "Life "is the continuous adjustment of internal relations to "external relations."<sup>6</sup> Complete life is complete harmony between our nature and our surroundings, and life approaches completeness as it approaches this complete harmony.

Now, then, let us ascend to the application of these facts to our spiritual life. The limits of this essay forbid the proof of the fact that we have such a life. Most of us, it is to be hoped, have the best of all evidences for it; we feel it living and stirring within us. What its nature is we know not, any more than we know the nature of physical life. But we as certainly have manifestations of the one as we have manifestations of the other. Every holy thought, every solemn sense of sin, every desire for God, every yearning towards the right and the pure

<sup>6</sup> Herbert Spencer: "Principles of Biology."

and the true, every wish to pray to and hold fellowship with the Father, is a sure proof of the spiritual life within us.

Applying what has been said on the subject of life in general to the subject of the life of the human spirit, we may say that that life as well is, in its ultimate meaning, the complete correspondence between the spiritual nature and the spiritual surroundings or, as we said before, the complete adjustment of internal relations to external relations. We must bear in mind that we are dealing with spiritual things, not material things; and that just as the inward nature is spiritual, so its surroundings are spiritual. And what are the surroundings of our spiritual life? What are its external relations? What is its soil, what is its atmosphere, what is its element of life and growth, what is its habitat and dwelling-place? There is only one answer to these questions, which, after all, are but different ways of putting the same question; and that answer is, God, God, God. God is the surroundings, the soil, the atmosphere, the element of life and growth, the dwelling-place of the spiritual life; God as known in Christ, love, compassion, forgiveness, purity, readiness to help and heal, goodness, truth; in a word, our Father who is in heaven, but who, as a spiritual energy, is ever round about us, nay, more, is ever in us; for as Christ himself said, "This is life eternal, that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ."<sup>7</sup> That is to say, that that knowledge of God which is the condition of

<sup>7</sup> John xvii. 3.

eternal, blessed life is that knowledge of Him which came in Jesus. What was that knowledge? "God is "Spirit,"<sup>8</sup> said Christ to the woman at the Samaritan well, as he talked to her about the Father. The knowledge of God, which is the surroundings of the human spirit, is the knowledge of Him as a Spirit who is also a Father, a Fatherly Spirit, a Spiritual Father.

Now let us once more call to mind the definition we have given of life as displayed to us in its manifestations. We said it was the complete harmony between the inward nature and the outward surroundings; the complete adjustment between internal relations and external relations. God revealed as our Spiritual Father is the spirit's outward surroundings, its external relations; when the harmony between our spirits and these surroundings begins, when the adjustment of ourselves to these external relations begins, then spiritual life begins. As the harmony, the adjustment develops, spiritual life develops; and when the harmony, the adjustment shall be complete, then spiritual life will be complete for each of us. And this is the completeness for which we look in the grand hereafter.

Let us briefly dwell on these facts. What is involved in the fact that Christ has revealed God to us as our Spiritual Father? How does this knowledge become to us eternal life? What is implied in the harmony, the adjustment between our spirits and these surroundings? Surely this is implied: that if God, the

<sup>8</sup> John iv. 24.

highest life, be a Spirit, we live most fully, we live the highest life, when we are most spiritual ; and that if God be our Father, that fact involves us in the duty of a cheerful obedience to what He says, and a ready conformity to what He is. And when the harmony between our spirits and our Spiritual Father is complete, when the mutual relations are perfectly adjusted, then there is fulness of spiritual life, beyond which we can conceive no other. This is life, life eternal, life Divine, and life more abundantly.

It is easy to see how the whole question of spiritual life rests just here. Take the case of a man living a life of sin, a sensual life, a selfish life ; a worldly, low, material life. In such a man we say the spiritual life is at its lowest ebb, almost crushed out by the weight of sensuality and worldliness weighing upon it. But why do we say this ? Because it is evident that there is no adjustment of the man's inner life to the knowledge of God as his Spiritual Father. If there were, he would try to be spiritual ; he would obey God, and seek conformity to God's character. The internal relations and the external relations are out of harmony. This is a case in which the defective life of the man's spirit is due not to the man's surroundings, but to the man himself. But there may be, as indeed there has been and still is, the case in which defective spiritual life is due to the surroundings, the external relations, of the human spirit. Such is the case with many a pious heathen to-day, as it was the case in bygone centuries with Socrates, and Plato, and Marcus Aurelius, and Seneca, and many a seeker after God—as Archdeacon Farrar



has well called the two last.<sup>9</sup> In such cases there was not the knowledge of the true God as the Spiritual Father of the human soul, and the good men could not adjust themselves to it. The external relations were at fault, and from this cause there was defective spiritual life. There has been one life and only one in which the harmony between the inward nature and the outward surroundings, the adjustment between the internal relations and the external relations, were perfect and complete; only one life in which there was not only perfect knowledge of God as Spirit and as Father, but as well complete conformity to it. You know whose life that was, the life of Jesus Christ. And in virtue of that perfect adjustment there was perfect spiritual life, life without measure, life wholly Divine. The path of life he ever trod, and lives now in the unseen kingdom for ever and ever. So that in Christ we have the perfect life; in him humanity's desire is fulfilled, its cry answered, its hope realised. The path of life has been shown once and for all. For Christ is himself the Way, as he is also the Life; and unto the God of life we come, as he said, by him.<sup>10</sup>

It is not difficult to see how God has shown us the path of life in Jesus; for Christ has raised the surroundings of our spirits, their external relations, as we have called them, to a pitch of completeness beyond which we cannot go, even if we would. At the conversation around the Last Supper table, he declared to one enquiring disciple that he was the Way.<sup>11</sup> How is he

<sup>9</sup> Farrar's "Seekers after God." <sup>10</sup> John xiv. 6. <sup>11</sup> John xiv. 6.

the Way? That question was answered by the declaration made in response to the enquiry of another disciple. "He that hath seen Me," said Jesus, "hath seen the Father."<sup>12</sup> Christ is the Way, because he was the revelation of God to the human spirit. Our surroundings, our external spiritual relations are perfect, wanting in nothing. To attain perfect spiritual life, perfect harmony with these surroundings, perfect adjustment to these relations, is our work now, a work to be begun here, and to be completed in the hereafter.

<sup>12</sup> John xiv. 9.

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## The Sacrifice of Obedience

"Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; . . . . yea Thy law is within my heart."—*Psalm* xl, 6, 7, 8.

IN spite of considerable division of opinion on the subject among Biblical scholars, I think we cannot do better than accept this Psalm as having certainly been composed by David. If we thus regard it, it would seem to belong to the number of the sacred poems that poured forth from his soul during the time between his being anointed as King of Israel by the prophet Samuel, and his final settlement on his throne. We know that then he was often in circumstances of grave peril, fleeing hither and thither with his life in his hand, the object of Saul's bitter hate. For Saul naturally enough regarded him as a rebel and an enemy. As a rule, men do not show much favour to those who they know will fill their places, whether of wealth or honour or sovereignty, when they themselves are gone. It takes a great deal of grace to stifle the selfish and envious feelings which in such cases are only too apt to arise. And this is especially true when they consider themselves as unjustly treated by their prospective successors, whom they look upon as impatiently waiting for dead men's shoes. Perhaps, then, it was scarcely to be expected that Saul, who never even in the ordinary events of life had much grace to boast of, should show much kindness to David

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under the strange relations in which the two men stood to each other. Still, we can make no valid excuse for the persistent enmity with which he persecuted him. If Saul believed that the Divine voice had called him to the throne, he should as well have believed that the same voice had deposed him, and that therefore the true and noble part was to acquiesce, no matter how painful and mortifying the acquiescence might be. But this he did not do: he did the very opposite instead; and thus David came to be hunted, to use his own words, like a partridge in the mountains.<sup>1</sup>

It was to celebrate deliverance from some péril that arose to him in these circumstances that this Psalm seems to have been written. In such a crisis the Lord for whom he had patiently waited had heard his cry; had brought him up out of a horrible pit and out of the miry clay; had set his feet, as it were, upon a rock; and had established his goings. And this, to David's grateful heart, was only one of the many wonderful works which God had done for him; only one display, out of a number of others, of the merciful thoughts and kindly providence which the Lord was constantly exercising towards His poor, persecuted servant. The least that David could do was to sing a new song of thanksgiving unto God, making mention of the memory of His great goodness. This he does in the opening verses of the Psalm.

But David was not the man to let his gratitude find expression in words only. That is a very cheap and easy way of acknowledging favours received, and

<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel xxvi. 20.

in the case of many people does not mean very much. Words are soon spoken, and at best are a very shallow channel for the deepest feelings, whether of joy or of grief, to flow out in. The strongest and most permanent emotions will not rest content with them. They want a more excellent way of displaying themselves. And that way they find in conduct, in action. A man's gratitude to his benefactor is most truly measured by his behaviour towards him. Accordingly the Psalmist, while glad to celebrate the Divine mercy in a song of praise, feels that the song is very inadequate as a full expression of his thankful mind. "Great and manifold, O God," he seems to say, "are the proofs of Thy loving-kindness to me; "how am I to render Thee thanks for them?" Now the text at the head of this essay is the answer to this question of the Psalmist. The answer is twofold: first, it is negative, for it asserts that what God wants from the thankful heart is not sacrifice and offerings; and, secondly, it is positive, for it says that what He wants is obedience to His law, a delight in doing His will. He does not desire outward forms of service, but an inward state of heart, moulding a man's whole life and character, and causing him to glorify God in his body and his spirit, which are God's.

But in such a statement as this, we cannot help thinking that there is a truth at first sight quite at variance with a great deal that Moses commanded to the people of Israel when he gave them the moral and ceremonial law. As we turn over the pages of the books of Exodus and Leviticus, we are amazed at

the minuteness and exactitude with which the many kinds of offering enjoined on the people are provided for. To our matter-of-fact way of thinking, not only is it a mystery how such an elaborate ritual of worship was carried out, but it is also a matter of thanksgiving that from such a burden we have been delivered by Christ's grand declaration, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."<sup>2</sup> But it is just from such a word as this of Christ, and from such a word as this of David, and from other kindred expressions in both Old and New Testaments, that our difficulty with the law of Moses arises. It was not much more than four hundred years before the Psalmist uttered our text that the long, elaborate, minute commandments about sacrifices and offerings were given by Moses to Israel, professedly by the command of God. And in our text David seems to repeal them by distinctly saying, "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast Thou not required." Had Israel for four hundred years been worshipping God wrongly? Had Moses taught them the Levitical law in vain? Not at all. The difficulty is quite cleared away if we do but remember the progressive character of revelation, the evolution of spiritual truth, and the fact that God did not make known to men all at once what He had to reveal to them concerning themselves and Him, but that He delivered Himself of it gradually, line upon line, here a little and there a little, as He

<sup>2</sup> John iv. 24.

saw they were able to bear it. The grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ would have been lost on a people who were fitted only for the law that Moses brought to them. Babies must be fed with milk before they are prepared to receive meat. The child at school must learn the rudiments of a language before going on to read the productions of its orators, its historians, and its poets. Israel, and the world through Israel, must be taught to worship God through ceremonies before they can worship Him in the spirit. The symbol must be learnt before the thing symbolized; the shadow must be understood before the substance. A spiritual Father to be worshipped in a spiritual way is the very highest truth of revelation that can come to the mind of man. All the ritual of the ceremonial law was only the preparation for the coming of this truth in Jesus Christ.

Whenever, then, we find in the Old Testament such a statement as the Scripture we are dwelling on, we are to look on it not as a repeal and a contradiction of the ritual of Moses, but as an anticipation of the higher truth and worship which came in Christ. It is only natural that we should find the most spiritual minds in Israel leaping beyond the bounds in which they had been brought up; growing out of the straitened spiritual clothing in which the greater part of their fellow-men still wrapped themselves. When the sun rises, the mountain peaks catch the sweet hues of dawn while the valleys are yet dark. The men in Israel who lived nearest God were tinged with the light of the coming fulness of revelation, while

their fellows still groped amongst the shadows of the law. David, like Samuel before him, and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Amos and others of the prophets after him, felt that sacrifice and offering were not what God wanted, but were only a symbol of it to the unspiritual mind. To do His will, to have His law written on the heart, to obey the voice of His word, this was the sacrifice and this the worship with which He was well pleased.

In truth, to anyone who thinks rightly about the matter, such a re-delivery of the law comes as one of the most natural things in the world. It is not hard to see why, as Samuel said to Saul, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.<sup>3</sup> For what is true religion? Is it not a spiritual union between God and the human soul? Is it not the entrance of the whole man, the lifting up of the whole life, into harmony with God, so that His will becomes our law, love to Him the spring of obedience to that will, and His glory the end of the obedience? A man who is trying for the attainment of this in his experience is a really religious man; for he has consecrated himself to God and has entered into union with Him. Therefore we find in others of David's Psalms expressions of this kind, "O God, Thou art my God; "early will I seek Thee; my soul thirsteth for Thee, "my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land "where no water is."<sup>4</sup> We have the man's soul going out towards God in a holy craving for union; and this offering up of himself becomes the true meaning and

<sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel xv. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm lxiii. 1.



type of worship to him. But it is quite evident that sacrifices of bulls and of goats, offerings of meat and of drink, large gifts of a man's substance, might be made without any such consideration of one's self. There might be all this without the oneness between God and the soul which is the essence of real religion. For we know that there is the possibility of drawing near to God by such means while the heart is far from Him. Indeed, the prophets had often to rebuke Judah and Israel because they adopted the outward form in religion without any true spiritual approach to God. Thus Amos spoke in the Lord's name to the people of Israel when he said, "I hate, I despise your feast-days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt-offerings and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts."<sup>5</sup> And why? Because there was no real religion in the national heart. Their conduct proved that they did not care for the worship with which God is best pleased, the worship of the spirit, which alone can sanctify the worship of ceremonies, and which shows itself in a holy life. Therefore, to come into the attitude which God will accept, Amos bids the people "let justice run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."<sup>6</sup> We cannot be religious by proxy. We cannot be God's true suppliants and worshippers by making an offering of service or of substance if our hearts are not meanwhile right with God and at one with Him. The same things are true between one human heart and another.

<sup>5</sup> Amos v. 21, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Amos v. 24.

What loving nature can be satisfied with any amount of kindly formality, any number of benefactions, from the life it loves, if it knows meanwhile that that life's love is not its own? Love cannot live on forms; it is not nourished by ceremony. A kindred love, a holy fellowship, the union of spirit with spirit, this is the food of love and its life as well. Now, this is the essence of the spiritual religion which Christ has taught to mankind. The law of Moses was only a preparation for it. The spiritual minds among the Jewish people looked through the symbol to the thing symbolized. To them the offerings of bulls and lambs only typified the sacrifice of themselves. They looked forward to the higher life and teaching inculcated by Christ. They saw his day, and were glad. Even then, cramped and confined as they were by the religion of ceremony and form, they worshipped God, who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth. And foremost among them was David, saying, "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire: burnt-offering and sin-offering hast Thou not required." No, but this instead: "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within my heart." "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

The Psalmist goes on to tell us by what means he endeavoured to accomplish this end in his own heart and life. When he knew, as a great practical truth, that God did not want offering and sacrifice, he said, "Lo, I come with the volume of the book which is written concerning me." That is the true rendering of the middle verse of the passage we are thinking

about. As the passage stands in our Bibles, it is almost meaningless. The volume of the book of the law was no more written about him in particular than about any other good man who was anointed to the kingly office. But the words as thus rendered make all clear. David was elected to be king over Israel; only Saul stood between him and the throne. He was already on the way to sovereignty. But he recognized before he reached it the great responsibility of his coming honour. He desired to do everything that he ought to do as the vice-gerent of God, as the earthly representative of Israel's heavenly King. Now in the book of Deuteronomy, which was the summary of the law, he would read words that shortly will be quoted. They provide against the time when the children of Israel should be settled in the land whither they were journeying. They would want a king, saying, "I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me."<sup>7</sup> And what was the king to do, that he might reign over Israel rightly and in the fear of God? After saying that he must be chosen from among themselves and not be a foreigner; that he must not multiply horses and wives and gold to himself, to guard himself against the lust of power and of the flesh and of gain; the passage goes on to say, "And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests, the Levites; and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life, that

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy xvii. 14.

“he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep  
“all the words of this law and these statutes, to do  
“them: that his heart be not lifted up above his  
“brethren, and that he turn not aside from the  
“commandment, to the right hand or to the left:  
“to the end that he may prolong his days in his king-  
“dom, he and his children, in the midst of Israel.”<sup>8</sup>  
This was what God required of any man who should  
be chosen to the dignity and power of king. It was  
not sacrifice and offering, burnt-offering nor offering  
for sin. It was knowledge of the Divine law, and  
a faithful observance of it. Even before David was  
settled upon the throne, he would seem to have  
provided himself with a roll or volume of the book  
of the law, written on skins, as was the custom of  
those days, and rolled up together. This volume,  
containing the law concerning the King of Israel,  
was with him constantly. He was preparing for  
his kingship as God had commanded. Therefore  
he could say, “Lo, I come”—words by which he  
as servant places himself at the call of his master—  
“Lo, I come with the volume of the book which  
“is written concerning me”—concerning me, that is,  
as Israel’s anointed king. Here was one instance  
of his obedience which to God was better than all  
offering and sacrifice.

But he had gone a long way beyond this, although  
this was all that the letter of the commandment about  
the king required. He did not only keep with him  
the roll of the book of the law which he was carrying

<sup>8</sup> Deuteronomy xvii. 18-20.

with him to the throne. A mere formal observance of that kind would not have done for the enthusiasm, the spiritual fervour, of David's nature. He had placed the law of God in his heart. As the roll of the law was read to him, he knew that God had opened His ears to hear it. As the sacred words entered into his mind through the sense of outward hearing, the ears of his spiritual and inner man were open as well. The law sank into his heart. It became written on those fleshy tables as a guiding principle, a restraining power, an incentive to serve the Lord his God, a preventive from doing contrary to His will. He did the same thing as did the writer of that long Psalm which celebrates in every verse the statutes and precepts and commandments of the Lord. He hid the Word of God in his heart, that he might not sin against Him.<sup>9</sup> Now it was just because he laid up the Divine law within him, that David found delight in doing God's will. The heart is used as a figure of speech for the affections, the springs of feeling, the deepest places of the nature of man, where the true man, whatever he is, lies hidden, showing himself only through the words and actions of his life. It was there, in his heart, that David had put God's law. He had laid it up among his best affections, among his best emotions. It was no mere matter of the cold, critical intellect, with him now. The roots and fibres of his inmost being had wrapped themselves closely round the law of God, and drew life and spiritual power from it.

<sup>9</sup> Psalm cxix. 11.

"Thy law is within my heart." If this was the case, we cannot for a moment wonder at his saying, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God." For he had taken God as his God; he had taken God's law as his law. He had come to love both God and His law. He had brought his heart into closest union with both. Naturally enough, therefore, he did not find God's will irksome and a burden grievous to be borne. For love lightens all demands. Love tones down the severity of all injunctions. We all of us do readily for those we love things which for anyone else we should refuse to do, with much surprise at ever being asked to do them. What will not a mother do for her own sick child, enduring in the sweetest self-forgetfulness, watching and weariness and discomfort, when she would most reasonably feel it a trouble to do the same for a child not her own? What will not a man do for his friend, when no amount of persuasion would get him to do a tenth part of it for a stranger? If we know the love of God, if it has arisen in our hearts, we may well say with John, the Apostle of love, "His commandments are not grievous."<sup>10</sup> No wonder Christ said, "Ye are my friends, if ye do what-soever I command you."<sup>11</sup> Of course. No one would do anything that Christ commands unless he were a friend of Christ. Anyone keeping Christ's commandments must be a friend of his. And in the same way, when David says, "Yea, Thy law is within my heart," we quite naturally expect to find as the

<sup>10</sup> 1 John v. 3.<sup>11</sup> John xv. 14.

result of this, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God." If we want to know the sweet ease, the cheerful willinghood in obeying God, which is the prophecy to our hearts of the perfect and unfaltering ministry of heaven, let us lay up the law of God within them. Let us bring our affections into intimate union with that law. Then we shall obey it well. For love is the spring and fountain of obedience. Compulsory law-keeping God hates. He wants the service, the worship, the loyalty, arising from a heart of consecrated love.

Now although, as was only right, we have devoted the larger part of this essay to explaining David's words as an expression of his own thoughts and feelings, still, if we took no notice of them as they occur in the New Testament, in the Epistle to the Hebrews,<sup>12</sup> with one or two alterations we need not notice, we should be in error. The writer of that Epistle, speaking about the sacrifice and service of Jesus Christ, says that these were his words on coming into the world. Of course, he does not literally mean what he says. Christ came into the world as a true, human infant, in all the sweet half-consciousness of babyhood; to say and literally to mean that these were his words, as he hung upon the breast of his mother, would be a statement worthy of a place in those Apocryphal Gospels that the Church has long ago rejected as a collection of legends, with no historical foundation at all. No, what the writer to the Hebrews means is that such a state of mind, raised to

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews x. 5-10.

a Divine sinless perfectness, as David exhibits in our text, was Christ's, from the dawn of moral consciousness until his death upon the Cross. He means that Christ, as the Son and Servant of God, as the Redeemer and Saviour of men, recognised that true obedience lay in doing the Father's will, and not in offering sacrifices of bulls and of goats, burnt-offerings and offerings for sin. But he did more than that. David knew and confessed as much, as we have seen. Christ also recognised that that sacrifice for sin which he himself had come to be, that sacrifice which does what the blood of bulls and of goats never did do nor can do, depended solely for its efficacy on the perfect obedience which he, as men's Saviour and Sanctifier, rendered to his Father's will. Were Christ less than perfect, his sacrifice would be robbed of its saving and sanctifying power. That the Lamb of God be without blemish and without spot is the essential matter in the cleansing energy of his blood. Consequently, it is because Christ perfectly fulfilled the will of the Father, and finished the work that was given him to do on the earth, that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, after speaking as I have already said, goes on to say, "By the " which will we have been sanctified through the " offering of the Body of Jesus Christ once for all."<sup>18</sup>

Accordingly we see what is the meaning of the sacrifice of the body of Christ. The Cross was only the final stage in the whole lifelong career of obedience which the Son of Man rendered to the will of the Father. Had not the previous course, in its every

<sup>18</sup> Hebrews x. 10.



minutest detail, been without flaw and sin, the death of the Cross would never have been as it now is, the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. It is sheer nonsense to say that when Christian ministers preach about anything else in the career of Jesus except his death, they are not preaching the Gospel. The Gospel is not only Christ crucified, but Christ as well. We cannot, except in thought, dis sever Christ's life from Christ's death; the two together, in their blessed unity, are the great foundation fact of Christianity. The death of Christ would have been nothing without the preceding life of perfectness; the preceding life of perfectness, I do not say, I never could say, would have been nothing without the death of Christ; but it would not have been the power of God unto salvation which the two taken together now are. It would have been *a* power of God, as every true and noble and beautiful and self-sacrificing life is a power of God, but not *the* power of God. The death of Christ was the seal and crown of all the previous self-sacrifice for men, of all the previous devotion to the will of the Father. Thus his life and his death together constitute Christ's sacrifice for us. They are the full expression of his perfect obedience, even unto death. They are the Gospel of our salvation. "It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins."<sup>14</sup> Why? Because these poor, dumb, driven cattle can render no obedience to God; they cannot do His will. The very suggestion is absurd.

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews x. 4.

But the blood of Christ *does* take away sins. Why? Because, although in whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin God had no pleasure, in Christ there was the more excellent way. "Then said I, Lo, I am come to do Thy will, O God." The blood of Christ, which is his life—for the blood is the life<sup>15</sup>—cleanses from sin because of the purity and perfection of the life.

If, then, we want to know how to please God and yield Him what He requires of us, we have it here. Not by gifts, nor by sacrifices, nor by prayers, nor by penances, nor by religious observances, shall we please Him, when any of these things are done for their own sake. No, but in doing His will. And what is His will? That we should believe on him whom He hath sent. What is meant by this? Assent to a doctrine, to an intellectual proposition? Far, very far, from that. To believe on Christ is to take him as our example; his law of love to God and man as our rule of life; his sacrifice, efficacious through his lifelong perfection of obedience, not only as the motive to repentance from all past sin and thus the way into right relations with our forsaken yet forgiving Father, but also as the fountain of impulse to hatred of sin, love of holiness, and a constant desire and effort to do His will by the help of the Spirit of Christ which is given unto us. Then, with this faith, this spirit, in our hearts, a new music will be heard above all the discord of life; and its rich undertone of harmony will be, "Lo, I am come to do Thy will, O my God."

<sup>15</sup> Deuteronomy xii. 23.

## Spiritual Elevation by the Knowledge of God.

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"I will set him on high, because he hath known My name."  
—*Psalm xci. 14.*

THIS Psalm is a sort of little sacred drama. There are three distinct parts in it, of which two are spoken by human voices, while the third is spoken by a Divine voice. The duty of the first of the two human characters seems to be to utter, as it were on the authority of the Eternal One, promises of help and consolation to the second. Every word of his is full of testimony to the gracious regard of God for the soul that trusts in Him. The second character, speaking only twice in the entire course of the Psalm, addresses himself directly to the Great Being whose protection is assured to him. Then, towards the conclusion of the Psalm, we listen to the Divine Protector, supplementing all that has gone before, and giving to it the weight of his own august authority. His words coming at its close seem to lengthen out, and at the same time to intensify, the beauty of the entire poem, just as the glories of sunset lengthen out and intensify the balmy beauty of the summer's day.

But even though it is a Divine voice that is

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represented as uttering the promise on which we are about to meditate, it seems at first sight as if the greatness of the promise were quite out of proportion to the meagre condition to which its fulfilment is attached. The words "set on high" give us the picture of a fortified city away among the mountain fastnesses which render it almost, if not entirely, inaccessible to enemies, independently of the art and skill that have been put forth to make it a secure retreat. Frowning gloomily from its lofty crag upon the banks of the "wide and "winding Rhine," we probably have seen, not indeed a city, but a castle in such a position as this. Many such defences, some well-preserved and still in use, others dismantled and in ruins, are frequently to be observed in the mountainous parts of Europe.

The meaning of the promise, then, is that, in a figurative sense, a like security will be granted to the man that knows the name of God. He will be protected; he will be safe; using the language of our text, "he will be set on high." Spiritually, he will be as though he dwelt in a fortress through whose walls of granite the darts and arrows of the enemy cannot pierce. From his place of safety, he will be able to look down with calmness, perhaps with contempt, upon the utmost that can be done against him. In the triumphant language of David he will be able to say, "In the time of trouble "God shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret "of His tabernacle shall He hide me; He shall set me "up upon a rock. And now shall mine head be lifted

"up above mine enemies round about me."<sup>1</sup> And all this shall be his portion—why? Simply because, as the text tells us, the man knows the name of God.

But, as already remarked, this condition seems quite trivial in comparison with the greatness of the promised blessing. For to know the name of God in the bare literal meaning of the phrase is in itself nothing and carries nothing with it. Says our great poet—

"What's in a name? that which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet."

And in the same way, provided that my conceptions of God remain the same as they are now, it would make no difference to me whether I called Him, whom now I call God, Allah, as the Mohammedans call Him, or Jupiter, as the Romans called Him, or Zeus, as the Greeks called Him. To this extent we may say with Pope in his "Universal Prayer:"

"Father of All! in every age, in every clime adored,  
By saint, by savage, and by sage, Jehovah, Jove, or Lord;"

So that merely to know the name of God, as we know the name of any other being, cannot certainly be the condition to which this great promise of spiritual security is attached. For it is quite evident that there are thousands of men who have this knowledge, and yet are entirely destitute of the blessed sense of the Divine protection round about the soul.

We may support this statement by the general and broad remark that the name of any person or

<sup>1</sup> Psalm xxvii. 5, 6.

of any object is in itself nothing. Written, it is merely an assemblage of characters; spoken, it is merely a sound. In brief, it is only a convenient sign, an arbitrary symbol, without which ready communication between man and man would be impossible, and valuable only because to the man who knows what the name indicates, it calls up when he hears it the idea of the thing to which the name belongs. Every object in the world possesses certain characteristics, marks, features, attributes, properties, which distinguish it from other objects; and these characteristics, marks, features, attributes, properties, occur with a greater or less degree of completeness to the mind of the man who, knowing the object which possesses them, hears its name spoken or sees its name written. Life would be well-nigh intolerable, our social intercourse well-nigh impossible, if, every time we wanted to call up in the mind of someone to whom we were speaking the idea of a familiar object, we had to describe the object or draw a picture of it, so that he might know what we meant. Our education in the naming of things, as it goes on from infancy upwards, saves us this endless trouble. We learn the names that our ancestors in the centuries of the past have given to this object and to that; and in this way the burden of conversation is vastly lessened, and by one word we can express what, without the word, it would require sentences to make clear. Still, names are mere signs, mere symbols, and nothing more; they imply nothing, they carry no information with them. If, in wishing to

call up in the mind of a man an idea of a certain object that is in my own, I use the word house, for example, the word, although perfectly clear in its meaning to me, will be nothing but an empty sound to him if, supposing such a case possible, he had never seen a house, or had never been told what a house is. To him it will be all the same as if I were speaking in a foreign tongue. The word by which I denote what I mean conveys no meaning to him. It is of no more use to him than a bank-note would be to a savage in the heart of Africa. But if he is familiar with the object we call a house, and knows the signification of the term, all is quite clear. There is no need for me to describe what I mean by the term. Its meaning occurs to his mind directly he hears me mention the word. Now, from these considerations we may draw an important conclusion in regard to this interesting question of names. The knowledge of a name, in itself and merely as a name, is nothing. A name is intelligible to us, and full of meaning to us, and of value to us, precisely in as far as we know the attributes, the qualities, the properties, possessed by the thing which bears the name, or contained in it. The word house means something to me just in as far as I know what a house is. The case is the same with every other name in my own language, or in any other with which I may be familiar.

Bearing these remarks in mind, then, we can see, I think, what is meant in our text by knowing the name of God. To know the name of God, in itself

and merely as a name, is nothing. The name of God is intelligible to me, the name of God is full of meaning to me, in as far as I know who and what God is, and not any further at all. Speaking truly, I know the name of God in proportion as I know the attributes, the elements, the properties, the qualities, if it may be said with reverence, that go to make up God. In a word, I know His name when I know Himself, not otherwise. Knowledge of His name such as this is the knowledge to which the promise on which we are meditating is attached. This is the condition of the fulfilment of the promise. This is the knowledge which lifts a man up, which sets him on high, which protects his soul, as though he dwelt in a defenced city.

If now we ask where this knowledge is to be acquired, the answer to our question is not far to seek. If we believe that the orderly progress of nature—evident not more in the mightiest than in the minutest forms of life, not less in the growth of a blade of grass than in the march of a planet round the sun—goes on in harmony with the workings of Eternal Law, behind which is the wisdom of the Divine Father, we shall find the knowledge of God in part *in the physical universe*. If we believe that the history of human life from its dim beginnings to its latest stages is not a thing of chance, but that the rise and fall of empires, the growth of society, the spread of civilization, and every event written on the pages of the past, have all taken place in accordance with Infinite Wisdom and Infinite Love, we shall find the knowledge of God in part *in the ever-unfolding*



story of man. If we believe that the Bible, and especially that part of it which tells us about Jesus Christ, is a record of the ever-nearing approach of the Divine to the human, till in Jesus they become one, we shall find the knowledge of God in part *in the Everlasting Word*. And as we watch the progressive revelation of the Divine name, which in other words is the progressive revelation of the Divine nature, we shall see how it has been getting continually clearer, continually more worthy, continually more at one with our best and loftiest conceptions of God. First God appeared chiefly as Creator, as men began to awaken to the wonderful world all around them; then as King, as human life began to multiply, and human affairs to assume vaster proportions; then as Father, as Jesus made Him known to us, caring for and loving all things, but especially caring for and loving man. And with this conception of Him as Father, the conceptions of Him as Saviour and as Sanctifier became almost of necessity intertwined.

If, again, going still further, we ask how we are to acquire this knowledge of the Divine nature, whose elements we have just been looking at, we find the best answer to our question in the words of Jesus and the words of the Apostle Paul. "All things," said Jesus, "have been delivered unto me of my Father, and no one knoweth the Son save the Father; neither doth any know the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him."<sup>2</sup> We are told by Paul that the hidden wisdom of

<sup>2</sup> Matthew xi. 27.

God, the things that God prepared for them that love him, are revealed unto us by God through the Spirit. "The things of God," he says, "none knoweth save the Spirit of God."<sup>8</sup> Eye does not see them; ear does not hear them; they do not enter into the heart of man to conceive; they are revealed when our spirits come into union with God's Spirit. In this way is the knowledge of the Divine name—which is, in other words, the knowledge of the Divine nature—attained by the spiritual man. Is the name of God to us the Almighty One, or the Eternal One, or the Infinite Life, or the Stainless Purity, or the Everlasting Love? Then we know His name, worthily and aright, just in proportion as we know, by the communion of our spirits with God's Spirit, these attributes, and elements, and properties of God. If we do not know Himself, His name is nothing more than an empty sound in our ears, conveying no meaning, setting forth no truth, breathing no sense of a blessedness that nothing can take away.

But we must pass on now to consider the protection afforded by such a knowledge of the Divine name as has been described. Already has been pointed out the figure conveyed to us by the words "set on high." A defenced city, away among the mountains, is the image of the security in which the soul of him who knows the name of God is constantly kept. Safety by elevation, by being lifted up—that is the portion of the man.

1 Corinthians ii. 11.

And what is this protection, that is to say, what is its nature? Now, as we look through the Psalm, we find that the nature of the protection here spoken of is of a low, material character. It is quite in keeping with the principle that underlies such a large part of the Old Testament truths and the Old Testament history—the principle that temporal prosperity always follows good conduct, and temporal adversity always follows evil conduct. Therefore we find that for him who knows the Divine name there are promises of deliverance from the noisome pestilence, and from the terror by night, and the arrow that flies by day. There are promises of freedom from harm, and from any plague coming near his dwelling. There are promises of rescue from trouble, and of long life, and of a being shown God's salvation. All this is quite in keeping with Old Testament ideas, which ideas were a natural outcome of the state of childhood, of immaturity, in which the human race was in those long-past centuries. God's way of dealing with Israel was just like the way in which a kind father deals with his boy at school. "Be a diligent scholar, my son," he says, "and learn your lessons thoroughly, and try to come out well in your examinations. Do not give your masters any cause of complaint to me; be obedient and attentive to them; and when you come home for your holidays I will give you a silver watch." But the young man at the university, or the young man just entering his profession, does not want any stimulants of this kind. He knows that if he does not work well and earnestly,

his time of flood-tide will pass away, and all the voyage of his life will be "bound in shallows and in miseries." He would be quite offended if his father thought him able to be lured on to activity in his labours by the offer of a silver watch. He knows quite enough of the conditions of life to be aware that the future of his career depends upon and will be determined by the present; that knowledge is of itself enough to urge him on. But the boy needs stimulating, spurring on with the prospect of a prize. His view of life is much more limited than the young man's. He does not know the infinite value of the present as the parent of the future. Indeed, he probably has few if any thoughts of the future at all.

Now, this is just the way in which God has dealt with the race—the race, that is to say, as typified in the nation of Israel. Right conduct was the condition of temporal success; evil conduct was the condition of temporal failure. "Do good, and you shall live, increase your possessions, get on in the world, leave your name as an illustrious heritage to your many children." These were the sort of stimulants provided for a good and upright life; while failure, loss, adversity, were the deterrents from a vicious and unholy life. Now, if we ask why this was the view taken of the consequences of well-doing or of ill-doing, the answer to our question is very simple. The fact is that in the Old Testament nearly everything is limited to the present life—the life that we live now in the flesh. If there were any ideas of a future life, an immortal life, they were very vague; and these did

not make their appearance till after the people had received deep and lasting impressions from the religion and culture of the nations among whom they were carried captive. There is scarcely a passage in the Old Testament which, without forcing a meaning into it to make it square with our own ideas, contains any clear statement as to the doctrine of an immortal life. So true are the words of St. Paul, that it was our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel."<sup>4</sup> Consequently, Israel was like the boy at school, caring little and knowing less about the future. The national thought was, "Here, not in the future—for we know nothing about it—will good be rewarded; here, not in the future, will evil be punished." Thus it was in the increase of worldly goods, in material prosperity—not so much in spiritual peace, nor in an unsullied conscience—that the sanctions of right conduct were found by them; just as, on the other hand, it was in the loss of worldly goods, in temporal adversity—not so much in a fearful heart, in an accusing conscience—that the sanctions of wrong conduct were found by them. Suffering, personal or relative, was thought of necessity to be a punishment for sin committed by the sufferer; for the ministry of suffering was not understood until the cruel cross of Jesus Christ was set up on the summit of Calvary. It was not believed that a man could be good and at the same time could suffer. It was not known

<sup>4</sup> 2 Timothy i. 10.

that oftentimes perfectness in the image of Jesus can be reached only by the path, which he has trodden before us, of sorrow and of suffering.

But our ideas have been raised since those Old Testament days. We know that spiritual peace is a greater blessing than thousands of gold and of silver; that a conscience void of offence is a better possession than numerous flocks of sheep or herds of cattle; that the hope of immortality infinitely outweighs the hope of a long life; that to be a fellow-citizen with the saints is a nobler heritage than broad acres and purple vintages and waving fields of grain. The future, toward which we look, is the sphere of reward for a well-spent life; as it is the sphere of remorse, of self-inflicted punishment, of the hell of a man's own making, for a life wasted in sin. We know, too, that there are things far worse than the loss of worldly goods. The loss of character, slavery to evil habits, a squandered life, a father's grey hairs, a mother's furrowed cheek, tokens of their agony over a child morally astray, a life with the thought that God is angry with us—all these are worse. To die in a ditch, with a mind at peace, is far, far better than to die in a palace, amid every token of luxury, with the reflection that life has almost gone, and nothing has been done but what stings and burns as often as it is remembered.

In entire accordance, therefore, with this way of looking at things, we find that the protection given to the soul that knows the name of God, is spiritual protection against spiritual foes; spiritual help against

spiritual hindrances ; a lifting up of the entire man, of all, that is, that really makes the man, out of the realm of the sensual and the animal and the vicious and the grovelling, into the defenced heights where the man is engirdled with the Divine. The true heart does not pray, "Father, save me from suffering," for it knows that suffering is one of the ministering angels of God. But it prays, "Father, lift me up to thy level ; fence me round about with thyself ; save me from my spiritual enemies ; save me from grieving thee ; set me on high because I know thy name." The promise of the text is the answer to the prayer.

We pass on to notice in what way this protection results from the knowledge of the Divine name on which we have already dwelt. Is it a merely arbitrary blessedness, granted in some cases, but withheld in others, the portion only of a favoured few ? Nothing of the kind ; that the being set on high is an outcome of knowing the name of God, in the true meaning of the phrase, is as certain as that a stone let fall drops to the ground. Everything in the spiritual realm is quite as subject to fixed laws as everything in the material realm. The Divine Father has no pet children whom He indulges at the expense of the rest. This being set on high as a result of the knowledge of the Divine name, is in accord with the working of an established law. We may illustrate this position by reminding ourselves of the fact that any knowledge whatever, to the extent of the subject matter that the knowledge deals with, is in itself a protection to the man that

knows. For example, we know that if we drink water that contains above a certain proportion of animal impurities, it will poison the blood. That is a proved, a well-authenticated fact. Our knowledge of this fact is a protection against blood-poisoning from drinking water, which, when examined, is found to be impure. Again, the nations of antiquity, in their superstition, in their fondness for referring everything they could not understand to supernatural causes, looked upon an eclipse of the sun or of the moon as a sign of Divine displeasure, just as ignorant peoples abroad similarly look upon such an event at the present day, and are troubled and terrified accordingly. We know that an eclipse of the sun or of the moon takes place in perfect accord with natural and necessary laws. Our knowledge is a protection against these vain and idle fears. We are lifted above them; we are set on high just because of our knowledge. All knowledge whatever, to the extent of the subject matter that the knowledge deals with, is a protection to the man that knows. Precisely in the same way, to know the Divine name, which, as we have seen, is to know the Divine nature, is a protection to the man who has this knowledge. There is nothing mysterious, nothing supernatural, nothing incomprehensible about the thing. All is as simple and clear as can be.

Let us expand this thought, and apply it in two or three directions. I know that God is the Omnipotent One, supporting the great frame of the universe, upholding all things and creatures by His wisdom





and His power, caring not less for the sparrow among the sheltering branches of the tree than for the great worlds that roll through space. On every hand are the proofs of His omnipotence. The man of science tells me that all goes on in harmony with law. I believe him ; but that statement does not rob me of my belief of a personal Spirit behind the laws. Indeed, I am glad to hear that God does work in harmony with law, not arbitrarily and by fits and starts. The most miserable figures on the page of English history are the monarchs who tried to govern arbitrarily, independently of constitutional laws, by virtue of the fiction of a Divine right of kings. They were ruined in their attempt, as they deserved to be. A God working in harmony with law, governing in harmony with law, is a God full of majesty. And if He be wise as He is powerful, and I know Him as such, is not this knowledge a blessed, benign protection to me? Can I fear, can I despond at temporal calamities, can I think He will leave me destitute, forsaken, helpless, when He is what He is? This knowledge lifts me up, shelters me, sets me on high, above the reach of the poisoned shafts of care and doubt and fear. I know His name, I know His nature; He is the Almighty Father, and I am His child.

I know God, moreover, as the Holy One. Every page of Scripture, rightly understood, sets Him forth in this aspect, hating sin, loving righteousness, in both cases with a Divine intensity. The story of Israel, from the call of father Abraham down to the close of the book of Revelation, has this moral for all of us :

"Be ye holy, as the Lord your God is holy." If He is morally lovely, beyond the furthest flight of my imagination, if He is my perfect God, and I love Him and know Him as such, is not this knowledge a protection against sin? Can I come to worship Him, while cherishing evil in my heart? In my daily life, I may fall through weakness, I may be surprised through want of watchfulness; but can I wantonly, wilfully sin, if I carry about with me the knowledge of God as the Holy One? Never. This knowledge, too, lifts me up, shelters me, sets me on high. It is to me a defence against the craftiness of temptation and the deceitfulness of sin.

But, furthermore, I know God as the Loving One. This is what Jesus, the unspeakable gift of God to men, has told us that God chiefly is; and one of Jesus' Apostles went so far as to say that God is love, that this is the essence of His nature, the element of His character from which every other element in it takes its rise. Knowing Him as such, can I ever despair? Can the very worst that can come to me do more than drive me nearer and yet nearer to the bosom of my Father? No, it cannot do more. For the Divine love is my everlasting inheritance, and the Divine life is my everlasting strength. I have got into the very heart of God, and I dwell under the shadow of the Almighty. I am set on high, beyond the reach of real calamity—because I know the name, the nature of God.

## The Way to Hate Evil.

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“Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.”—*Psalm* xcvi. 10.

THERE is every reason to believe that this Psalm was written after the return from captivity of the people of the kingdom of Judah. If this be the case, it is easy to see with what lofty aspirations, with what patriotic hopes, the joyful nature of that event inspires the sacred poet. He looks far away beyond the bounds that enclose the narrow domain of the present to a time when a visible kingdom of God shall be set up on earth, and ushered in amidst world-wide rejoicings. With a faith that regards future things as already existing, he declares that the Lord reigneth, that the heavens declare His righteousness, and that all the people see His glory. The restored fortunes of his loved race and country, and the passing away of the humiliation of exile, are, to the mind of the Psalmist, a type and a prophecy of the coming of that Divine reign of righteousness which he, in common with the devouter spirits of his nation, was longingly looking for.

The beautiful sentiments that pervade the Psalm are no doubt an outcome of the religious consciousness developed in Judah by the wholesome discipline of the Captivity. It was when her sons and her

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daughters, as strangers in a strange land, were sitting down by the rivers of Babylon, and weeping as they remembered Zion, that they learned the lesson which they never afterwards quite forgot—the lesson that national sin is followed by national failure, that national prosperity is bound up with national holiness. In the solitude and desolation of exile they learnt the lesson well. When the heart of the people had been made soft in the fire of affliction, the plastic hand of an over-ruling Providence could shape it to better courses and to worthier ends. Idols were renounced; the oneness and the pre-eminence of God were asserted; righteousness was recognised as the one ground of stability and success. And those who read most clearly the language of events, those who interpreted with prophetic insight the facts of national life and history, pointed the nation's hopes to the coming of the kingdom of purity, the King of which should hold out a golden sceptre, while His throne should be established in judgment.

Now, our text is the call to fulfil the conditions on which alone the ideal kingdom could be realised, and these conditions are as solid and as true as the ideal is poetic and imaginative. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." The words are a command to all who are devoted to Jehovah, as the King of the kingdom of righteousness, to have nothing to do with what is opposed to the very existence of the kingdom, as well as to the principles on which it is to be founded. For only thus could the kingdom come into their hearts; only thus could they become its loving and

loyal subjects. Only thus, moreover, could they extend its influence and enlarge its borders; for, like all movements that are worth much as a power in human life, the kingdom was to come not by any sudden and wonder-working stroke, not even by legislation, but by the personal influence which everyone who loves the Lord, everyone who hates evil, exerts through the force of the moral suasion of a good example. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."<sup>1</sup>

We know how long-delayed has been the fulfilment of the aspirations after the ideal kingdom of God to which the sacred poet gives utterance in this Psalm. We know that, in our own day, the aspirations are still far from being fulfilled, the ideal is still far from being realised. Not in every heart does the Lord reign; not in every life is righteousness the governing principle. The kingdom is of slow growth that its success may be the surer. There are Divine reasons why evil is permitted to be still rife, still destructive, still powerful. Into these reasons we will not attempt to enquire. But yet we may believe it to be a part of the Divine will, while at the same time it is a quite natural means to the Divine end, that men should be sickened of evil that they may learn to hate it, that they should be cowed and crushed under its despotic power in order that they may come to desire a kingdom in which they who are most submissive are they who are most free.

Without, however, saying more on this point, we

<sup>1</sup> Zechariah iv. 6.

cannot fail to notice that in these days we are better off than the Psalmist was in regard to right thoughts about the nature of the kingdom of God. For we see that its true grandeur and glory do not lie in smoking hills, and melting mountains, and a quaking earth, as the signs that the Lord has come to reign. Nor do they lie in a fire going before Him to burn up His enemies round about, though there are some who, like James and John, do not know what spirit they are of, and think that the Son of Man came to destroy men's lives, and not to save them. No; the chief, the real—I had almost said, the only—excellence of the kingdom of God lies in its being founded, in all loyal hearts, on love to God, and on that which is its necessary counterpart, the hatred of evil. It is here that the Old Testament reaches out its hand and grasps the New Testament. It is here where mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other. We are better off than the Psalmist, because, although in our text he gives dim indications of having partly apprehended this truth, he yet mixes it up with images of outward splendour which, in Jesus Christ, we have learnt to think little of, or to put altogether away. For Jesus has divested King and kingdom alike of everything barbaric and fearsome and terrible; Jesus has clothed King and kingdom alike with everything winsome and sweet and gentle. The outward has perished, the inward alone remains. For the kingdom of God does not come by observation, so that we may say of it, "Lo, here," and "Lo, there." The kingdom of God is

within us.<sup>2</sup> That is what Jesus has said about it. Just as it comes in the heart of a man when the spiritual brings the sensual in him under its control, when the Divine love by its pure and active flame burns out the natural evil in him, when his will, and his emotions, and his intellect, and his whole being are pervaded through and through with God ; so it will come in the world at large when these things are a living, practical experience, when these things are true, in all the men and women and children who, widespread and wandering, make up the world of humanity. Therefore, the great thing for us all to remember is, that as we begin to love God, as we grow in love to Him—and, of necessity, begin to hate evil and grow in hatred of it—the kingdom of God has begun in us, and is progressing, until it shall become completely established in us, bringing to us that perfect harmony of soul, that perfect union of God with us, and of ourselves with God, which in itself is happiness, and heaven, and life everlasting.

But let us go on to see what the words at the head of this essay have to say to these things—"Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." In these words we have a great principle implied, a principle recognised by philosophy, a principle acted on by all who adopt wise measures in training children or in elevating their fellow-beings, a principle based on common sense and sanctioned by its teachings. That principle is that a hatred of evil is best created and strengthened by a love for the good, or, in a little different way of

<sup>2</sup> Luke xvii. 20, 21.

putting it, that a love for the good must needs be followed by, or rather accompanied with, a hatred of the evil. Dr. Chalmers spoke of this principle under the rather learned name of "the expulsive power of a "new affection." St. Paul put it in more general terms, in terms capable of being more widely applied, when he said, "Overcome evil with good."<sup>3</sup> Jesus meant much the same truth when he spoke about making the tree good that its fruit might be good.<sup>4</sup> For the new pure life of a good graft on an evil tree spreads through its whole frame of pith and fibre, and trunk and bark, and boughs and branches, and conquers the old corrupt life, in virtue of which it brought forth only corrupt fruit. And just what this new life would be in a corrupt tree, that will the new affection of love to God be to the evil heart into which its sweet forces begin to flow.

Summed up in a few words, this principle means the conquering of one strong feeling by exciting another, when the process is directed towards moral improvement. It is no uncommon experience to find out that, by mere force of will, we may more or less successfully entertain one set of thoughts and emotions, and banish another set. If a person has aroused my anger by an injury which he has done me, I can turn my thoughts to his conduct on other occasions, when it was of a nature to inspire the sentiment of love or admiration or esteem; and I find that the consequence of such a diversion of my thoughts is to suppress the angry feelings by exciting their opposite. This is an illus-

<sup>3</sup> Romans xii. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xii. 33.



tration of the way in which the principle may be applied to one particular occurrence.

Let us take a further illustration of its being applied to the general bent and bias of an evil nature. Suppose that a youth who had contracted vicious habits, who had formed bad tastes, who had become prematurely old in sin, so that his life seemed wholly set to do evil, and he himself unable to live without a constant round of sinful excitement, were put under a good man's care, that he might be helped to better and worthier things. What would be the wisest course for his guardian to adopt? To keep the young fellow idle, to maintain his life in such a monotony that his meals and a daily walk became to him the only lively part of his existence? Not at all. Supposing him to regain his liberty at the end of a twelvemonth, he would go farther and deeper into sin, if that were possible, than he went before. Why? Simply because the old evil affections are still within him, unconquered by any stronger, any superior affections; their force has only been suspended; it has not been permanently abated. The young man has been kept outwardly good just because the opportunities, the temptations to evil-doing have been wanting during the time of his restraint. As soon as ever he finds himself among them again he will fall again, and will fall perhaps far worse than before. His virtue for the time being is only enforced, and therefore it is worthless. It is only negative virtue, and is therefore hardly worth being called virtue at all. Virtue that is real, that is not

merely a semblance, is both positive and spontaneous. It *is* and it *does*; and is and does of itself, and of its own will. The young man, not having gained possession of this kind of virtue, which alone deserves the name, is still weak. When the conflict comes again, he will be again defeated. What, then, ought his guardian to do? He ought to try and overcome the evil affections by good affections; to conquer the vicious habits by the culture of virtuous habits; to combat the wrong tastes by arraying against them tastes for something higher and better; to stand, as it were, in the very belfry of the young man's soul, and "ring out the old, ring in the new;" to substitute for the low excitements, the base pleasures amid which the young man has been wallowing, the pure and lofty attractions of the service of the Divine Father, of cheerful godliness, of the culture of the mind, of moral and genial society, of regular and pleasant work. In this way—always, of course, taking into account God's help and blessing—the guardian may, and probably will, succeed in helping the youth on to a higher level of life, where he may take nobler and truer views of himself and his place in the world. But if the guardian does not see that the only way to drive out evil affections is by inspiring stronger good affections, he may as well give up his charge at once. For to act on such a principle is the only road likely to lead him to success. Nor is it too much to say that these things are recognised everywhere by philanthropists who are wise, by moral reformers who go the right way to their work.

Now, it is this principle which underlies the words—"Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." Affection for evil is to be expelled by the love of God. The new affection is to conquer the old affection. And so true is this truth, so perfectly in accord with the first facts of human nature, that the command to hate evil is almost meaningless if we are not bidden at the same time to love the Lord.

Let us, however, try to see the reason, the meaning, the bearing of these things. In order that we may go to the very root, the very elements of the matter, let us ask what it is to love God. Now, all love that is deserving of the name is based on perception of character. By love is here meant the love of complacency, in which we find what we can admire and approve in the persons whom we love; not the love of compassion, in which we find what we can commiserate and pity. For we must never confuse these two very distinct things. Love, the love of complacency, must be based on perception of character—a perception not, indeed, always true nor always just, but yet a perception of some degree of accuracy nevertheless. For if love have not this foundation, it must collapse and disappear. Nay, more, if there is not this foundation for love, there cannot properly be love at all, just as if we have not a foundation we cannot build a proper house.

When, therefore, we speak of loving God, we mean in part the love of His character. We love Him in that we perceive Him to be merciful, and long-suffering; forgiving, and bountiful, and good; holy, and great,

and fuller of love than the universe is full of life. We love Him in that our own hearts, when they speak truly; and nature, when she utters her deep meanings; and the Bible, when we read it as it ought to be read, all tell us that God is the most beautiful, the most perfect, the most sublime character which thought can conceive or imagination can picture. Love to Him begins when we begin to perceive how worthy of our love He is; as St. John says, "We love Him because He first loved us."<sup>5</sup>

In one respect God's loveliness is like all other moral loveliness; it makes itself manifest by loving. Love to God grows just as our right perceptions of Him grow. They keep pace with each other. For we cannot love God, nor anyone else, except as we find out how worthy He is to be loved—that is, with the love of complacency, in which we delight in Him, and admire Him, and are rapt in holy ecstasy at the thought of His wealth of love-worthiness.

Yet this is not the whole truth. For although it is quite true that true love must be based upon perception of character, yet we must remember that we never love the character alone and by itself and merely as an idea; but we love it as we see it embodied in, and possessed by, the person whose is the character. We cannot love a character that is merely an abstraction. We may admire it, but that is all. Indeed, it is perhaps impossible for us to do

<sup>5</sup> 1 John iv. 19.

even this; for as we cannot see the colour we call red, by itself, that is to say, unless we see it in a red wall, or in red paint, or in a red garment, or in a red sky, or in something else that is red; as we cannot discern the qualities good and evil except as they are in things that we call good or evil, as in a good book or an evil action, so probably we cannot even admire a character merely as an idea, an abstraction. But be this as it may, it is certain we cannot love it; we can love it only when it has a human heart throbbing at its centre, and sending out through the medium of the character its sweet electricity of love.

In regard to our love to God, the same truth holds good. Perhaps, although we cannot be sure of it, we might admire a God who was set before us as an ideal abstraction, an ideal collection of good and beautiful attributes; but we could not love him. There would be in him much to contemplate with the intellect; there would be nothing to grasp in the inter-twinings of our hearts. But the God whom we know is a person, with a central heart of infinite love, that beats in sympathy with the sorrows of His great family of the sons and daughters of men, and yearns tenderly and forgivingly over all their sins. This central heart of the Divine nature is Jesus Christ, he in whom God and man, the Divine and the human, earth's sufferings and heaven's healing ministry, meet, and are made one in blissful union for evermore. Knowing God, therefore, not only as a perfect character, but as a perfect character made personal, developed, unfolded,

focussed in Christ, we have the foundation on which our love can rest, and the sweet impulses besides which move us to place it there.

Now, to love God as we know Him through the revelation of Jesus Christ, of necessity creates an accompanying hatred of everything evil. This result is alike necessary and natural, just as from the very nature of the earth as a globe it is necessary that when one half of its surface is bathed in light, the other half should be wrapped in darkness ; just as from the very nature of the case it is necessary that, when the rays of the sun fall upon any object whatever, the object should cast a shadow. For hatred of the evil is only the counterpart of the love of the perfect God.

These things are quite in keeping with the nature of the soul. For the soul is a simple principle, and not a complex. It is like sight. We cannot look with all our attention at two things at one and the same time. We can, indeed, comprehend several things in one glance, but we can look very intently at one time only at one thing in particular. Similar is the case of the soul. It can think, it can feel, it can will ; but it cannot do any more than one of these things, with all its might, at any one moment. We all know, for example, how impossible it is to think when we are under the influence of strong feeling. We all know how, if we resolutely will to repress our emotions, we can generally do it. And when we rise higher to the sublime question of love, it is utterly foolish to think that the soul can centre

itself, with all its powers of loving, upon more than one object. To do that requires the infinite heart of God, which can take up into itself all the millions of the human family, and yet can make each son, each daughter, feel that the great Father loves as if he, as if she, were the only one that He has to love. But more than one person it is impossible for *us* to love with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. So perfectly true to the facts of the case are the words of Jesus: "No man can serve two masters. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."<sup>6</sup> If, therefore, we are loving God as He bids us love Him, as He wants us to love Him, as He deserves that we should love Him—what have we left of our love to give to evil, which is the very opposite and enemy of God? "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."<sup>7</sup> It cannot be. Light and darkness, love and hate toward one and the same person, cannot exist together. They that love the Lord, of sheer necessity, must hate evil.

Yet there is something more in the matter than even this. For, although it is true that if we love the Lord God fully and fervently, evil will have no *dominion* over us, and we shall not be its slaves, yet it by no means follows that we shall not have conflicts with evil, when it tries to usurp dominion over us, and bring us again under its dreadful power. Therefore we ask, in such moments as these, what will the love of God do for us?

<sup>6</sup> Matthew vi. 24.

<sup>7</sup> 1 John ii. 15.

First, then, it will make us feel that we have God's approval of what we are doing in struggling against that which is His enemy as well as ours. Love has a strange way of its own in coming to know, as if by a sort of spiritual instinct, what is pleasing to the heart on whom its affections are fixed. The only real mode of getting to understand a man is to love him. For love is a key that fits all the wards of the locked doors of his soul. What is true as between man and man is true as between the human soul and God. The love which the soul bears to God almost intuitively knows what will please Him; and of the things that please Him, it is overwhelmingly borne in upon us that hatred of evil, even to the death, is that which pleases Him most. When, therefore, any temptation, great or small, meets us—when any lurking evil rises up from the dark battlefield of life that we hoped we had overcome, and begins to engage in strife with us once more, to feel, as we fight against it, "God approves what I am doing; He sees and knows all, and smiles courage into me all the time"—to feel this is almost of itself a victory.

But, besides this, there is the fact that the love we bear to God brings very near to us the thought of His sympathy and help in the time of our conflict with evil. Even between human beings—between husband and wife, between mother and son—with the limitations of time and space restricting our relations, love is able to create a sweet sense as of the presence of the loved one, even though that one be thousands of miles away. The lad at sea, surrounded



by godless companions ; the young man in the colonies or the great Western world, tempted to evil courses, may each of them get much moral strength from the love he bears to a father, a mother—distant from him by a great distance—who yet throw the mantle of a deep, strong, nervous affection around him, to screen and shield him from the evil. Love leaps over the intervening space, and brings a sense of help, of sympathy near to the tried heart. But with God time is not, space is not, for He fills all space, He transcends all time. And wherever and whenever there is a heart loving Him even with a little love, hating evil even with a weak, faltering, intermittent hatred, struggling against itself and its sin even with a fainting strength, there and then God is at hand with a Divine energy and help and sympathy.

As a closing thought, let it be said that in the Cross of Jesus there are the best and strongest motives both for the love of God and for the hatred of evil. For in the marred visage, in the bruised form of the Son of Man, we see equally what Divine affection and what human sin are able to do. Divine affection can give itself up to suffering and death, that by dying it may vanquish death, which is the offspring of sin. Human sin, hatred of the light, an unholy willingness to walk in darkness, dreadful choice of evil, can nail the eternal Truth, the immortal Life, the incarnate Love, to a cruel cross, and try to put him out of the world. Where else can we find love so great, sin so dreadful? Nowhere. But the love suffered that

its sufferings might be the conqueror of sin. Its Divine intent has been answered in every heart into which the love has come, for its sweet force is superior to evil. The new affection drives out the old. The Cross of Jesus is a perennial inspiration, on the one hand to love God, on the other hand to hate evil.

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## Strength in Suffering.

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“ Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord . . . . they shall walk and not faint.”—*Isaiah* xl. 30, 31.

IN the prophecies of the second Isaiah, Isaiah of Babylon, as he has been called, which commence with this chapter and continue to the end of the book, the captivity of the kingdom of Judah is the standpoint from which the prophet speaks. Evil and dark days had fallen upon the nation, and it had been carried away to Babylon. The enervation which idolatry and sin and corruption had produced had wrought its own sad result, and had rendered the people an easy prey to the conquering arms of Nebuchadnezzar. The whole nation was involved in the calamity.

Yet it was not only the faithless and sinful through whom the calamity had come, who were the sufferers in these gloomy times. As in the days of Elijah, when Jezebel was maintaining the wide-spread worship of Baal, and weak-minded Ahab, her husband, was assenting to all she was doing, there were still seven thousand in Israel who were true to the God of their fathers, and honoured Him alone; so when the King of Babylon came to war against Judah, and carried

away its people into captivity, not only the idolatrous were found amongst his vast train of prisoners. There was an elect remnant of the true Israel; the hope of the nation; the stock in which the vital sap of religion had not wholly dried up; the root from which, under fair, favouring conditions, there should by-and-bye sprout forth again signs of renewed youth and freshness.

Yet even these faithful ones, pure as they were from the infection of idolatry, were involved in the national ruin. It is a great mystery, that of the innocent suffering with the guilty; one of the great difficulties of our life in which knowledge seems to bring us no help, and calls out for faith as the solitary beam that can light up the darkness. Why some little children should begin life with the seeds of a fell disease in them, a dreadful legacy from their parents; why the family of a drunkard should share his poverty and wretchedness and social disgrace; why the honest hard-won earnings of an industrious man should vanish in the crash of a breaking bank, with its balance-sheets falsified by the directors; why things like these, which occur more or less frequently, should occur at all, is one of the problems that show us with what barriers of ignorance our little life is bounded. We need that patient spirit which recognises that now we see and know only a part of God's dealings, and not the whole of them. We need that quiet faith which is a better resort for troubled and perplexed hearts than all the books that men have written and all the sermons that men have preached to "justify the

"ways of God to man." Perhaps the most we can say is, that just as the thunderstorm has its place and use in the economy of nature equally with the calm clear shining of the sun, so this dark truth of the innocent suffering with the guilty, has its own purpose to serve in the Divine discipline of the human family. At any rate, we must not impeach God as though He were responsible for all the discords in the moral world; our ignorance is at fault to harmonize them, not His goodness in allowing them.

This was the view of the question that the prophet urged upon the faithful remnant, the true people of the Lord, when they felt themselves giving way to doubts and murmurings. It was they for whom he was writing his words of comfort in the time when, by the rivers of Babylon, they sat down and wept, unable to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. As they found themselves sharing the fate of the idolatrous and sinful ones, for whose sake all these troubles had come upon the whole people, they were saying, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is overlooked by my God."<sup>1</sup> But why should they speak so? God's dealings, though past finding out, are yet infinitely wise. If there were any seeming inconsistency between His words and His deeds, that would not argue unfaithfulness and weakness on His part. It would only shew that men could not fathom His profound designs. It would only prove that men's knowledge is a line and plummet far too short to get to the bottom of the deep sea of God's counsels. "There

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xl. 27-31.

“is no searching of His understanding.” “Wait on God,” says the prophet to these tried and troubled hearts. “In waiting is your true strength. While others are crushed by their calamities, overwhelmed by them so that they cannot rise, you shall soar aloft like eagles. The race and pilgrimage of life shall not tire you. You shall run and not be weary; you shall walk and not faint. Only wait. Rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.” The prophet refers not so much to prayer, as we sometimes mistakenly interpret the text, as to faith, calm trust, holy expectation. He says that those who, in time of darkness and trial, live in this grace and attitude of soul, shall be strengthened for the worst that can happen to them. “And youths grow faint and weary, and young men suffer a fall. But they that wait for the Lord gain fresh strength; lift up their wings like eagles; run, and are not weary; go forward and do not faint.” Strength through waiting—that is the theme suggested to us by these words.

Now, we must admit that, at first sight, this idea seems to contradict itself. It advises us to adopt a policy in the day of calamity which, to say the least, is a curious one; a policy altogether opposed to the spirit and teaching of this world’s wisdom. We could scarcely have a better illustration of the Divine word which we find in another part of the second Isaiah’s writings:—“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are

“higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”<sup>2</sup> The man who, when the burdens of life press heavily upon him, can keep quiet in patient waiting, would surely seem to move in a different moral orbit from the great majority of his fellow-men. He would seem to have been trained in a different school; to have received a different wisdom; to have resolved to be guided by a different set of principles. For what does the world say to its followers in the hour of disappointment and trial? Does it not say, “Look out for yourselves, or else you will be crushed. Struggle with your sorrows; face your difficulties; don’t bow your head like a bulrush, but lift it up like a man. Otherwise you will be sent to the wall. Assert yourselves. Let people know you are in trouble. Go hither and thither, to this man and to that, seeking help and sympathy. Look after yourselves, for no one else will look after you.” Is not that a fair statement of the counsel of the world? But on the other hand, the voice of religion, the voice of God, speaks very different words to us in time of tribulation. “Wait,” it says, “be patient. You are in the Father’s hands. All is well. What can separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ? It is only a cloud passing over the face of the sun. The light will break forth again presently. Wait. In waiting is your true strength.”

Now, in view of this wide difference between the counsel of the world and the counsel of religion to

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah lv. 8, 9.

men in trouble, there must certainly be something in the nature of the religious life to answer to it. What is the religious life? What does it consist in? I think we cannot find a better reply to this question than that the religious life is a life in which the soul is in conscious union with God. It is a life in which, as one of the most beautiful of modern hymns puts it, the man is

"In all at one with Deity,  
And loyal to the Lord's control."

The heart in which this life dwells feels not merely that it is in harmony with, and on the side of, a mysterious and conquering power in human affairs that "makes for righteousness," but that it enjoys a communion, a fellowship, with the great Spirit, who is not only wise and powerful, but also loving and tender and full of sympathy, and whom Jesus has taught us to call Our Father. The heart is conscious that it dwells in God, and that God dwells in it. It feels that it has become a partaker of the Divine nature. God and the soul are no longer two opposing forces, each working for a different end; but the soul has merged itself in God, and tends evermore to Him. This is what St. John means when he says, in his First Epistle, "We know that whosoever is "begotten of God sinneth not."<sup>3</sup> He does not mean that such a man never sins, because he has already said in the same epistle, "If we say that we have no "sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in "us."<sup>4</sup> But he means that the new nature, the religious

<sup>3</sup> 1 John v. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Id. i. 8.



life as opposed to the old carnal life, has its current set in a direction quite contrary to sin, that is to say, in the direction of holiness. It flows onward evermore to God, the infinite ocean of truth and purity, like a stream or a river runs onward to the sea. And in its best and truest moments, when heaven seems to be most near to earth, the soul feels that to have no end, no aim, no thought, no desire, no spring of action, no principle of conduct, that does not begin and end in God, is the perfection and the climax of all the bliss possible to man. The religious life is a life of conscious union with God.

Let us go a step further. How is the religious life begun in the soul? To this question it is, perhaps, impossible to give a very exact and definite answer. The great Father's methods of dealing with His erring children in bringing them back to Himself are so numerous and so different, that it is often beyond the most patient and careful research to say what and when were the first beginnings of the religious life in any soul in whom that life dwells. As in the family of a human father, the different dispositions of his children need each of them a different treatment on his part, so God deals very differently with different men. One is sluggish, and needs stimulating ; another is wayward, and needs reproofing ; a third is engrossed in earthly cares and pleasures, and needs to find in cares an overwhelming burden, in pleasures a sick satiety.

Still, we may give an answer to our question sufficient for practical purposes. We may say that, on the

soul's part, the religious life is begun in it by faith ; that is to say, that whatever may have first led us to think seriously about religion and its claims, the moment when we begin to be conscious of a new life being in us is the moment when we begin to exercise a true faith in God. We cannot see Him, but we believe that He is. We do not hear His voice, but we believe that He speaks to us in the silent sanctuary of our own hearts. We believe that He has received us into fellowship with Himself, although we have no token of the fact that we can outwardly discern. We know not where He is that we should go to Him ; but we believe that He listens to our confessions, our complaints, our prayers, be they "spoken or unexpressed." We believe that He came in Jesus Christ, to declare to us His love and goodness, His readiness to forgive our sins, His desire that we should live in a fellowship of holiness with Him. We believe that by His Spirit He dwells around us and in us, a bright, a beneficent, a sustaining presence, strengthening us for every conflict, and soothing us in every sorrow.

It is when faith is thus first called into exercise, when it first lays hold of the thought of God, that the consciousness of a new life within the soul breaks into being. It is not meant that the consciousness in every case arises suddenly and all at once. In some people its growth is very gradual ; its beginnings were so dim and shadowy that they have left no remembrance of themselves at all. But yet it is true for all Christian people, whatever be their religious history, that the dawn of the consciousness of the

religious life comes in at the same time with the dawn of faith. For the religious life is a life of faith ; a life having to do with God, whom we cannot see, nor hear, nor handle after the manner of men ; a life which, while trying worthily to do its work and fulfil its duties in the world which is passing away, yet feels above all things that its home and heritage are yonder in the heavenly places in Christ. "Nevertheless, I live," said Paul ; "and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me ; and "that life which I now live in the flesh, I live in faith."<sup>5</sup> The religious life, the life of the soul's conscious union with God, is a life of faith.

Now, it is only when we keep these two facts steadily in view that we can appreciate the truth and worth of the teaching of our text. The text teaches us that in time of trouble our true strength lies not so much in activity, in a resolute wrestling with our trials, as in passiveness—a quiet, patient waiting for God. Nor is it difficult to see that this is quite in accord with the whole nature and genius of the religious life. For the soul, being in a conscious union with God, seeks the same things, labours for the same objects, wants to live the same life as God. It thirsts for holiness, for an inward and never-ceasing welling-up of joy unspeakable and Divine contentment—for a blessed and perfect harmony within itself, which the discords of the outward life seek to disturb in vain. And knowing that these things can be brought about only in proportion to the growth of spiritual-mindedness, it is willing that the flesh and the world—the great foes of spiritual-minded-

<sup>5</sup> Gal. ii. 20.

ness—should be weakened in their dominion over itself, and leave it free to get ever nearer to God, and more at one with Him.

Moreover, it recognises that trouble is a great means of this weakening. The flesh and the world are like two anchors, that hold fast the ship of the soul, and hinder it from launching forth on the great ocean of eternal life—God, the soul's true home and element. The coming of trouble is the loosening of the anchor's grip, the foretaste and the prophecy of a completer union between the soul and God. Then comes in the exercise of faith, in accord with the truth that the religious life is a life of faith. For, like Paul in view of his martyrdom for the sake of Christ and his gospel, the soul can at all times say, "I know him whom I have believed, "and I am persuaded that he is able to guard "that which I have committed unto him against "that day."<sup>6</sup> It believes that, come what will, all is in the hands of God. It believes that, though it be left lonely, this is but to make its fellowship with the Father more real and more sweet. It believes that, though it be stripped of one dear delight after another, this is but to lead it to shelter itself beneath the shadow of the wings of God. It believes that, whatever may be taken away, the Lord is still its portion, and therefore it may hope in Him. It cannot see, and so it trusts; it cannot discern the form of God, and sometimes feels but faintly the pressure of His guiding hand, but yet it goes along the appointed way,

<sup>6</sup> 2 Tim. i. 12.

calmly, confidently, knowing who is near. Well may we say concerning such a condition—

“O blessed life—the heart at rest  
When all without tumultuous seems,  
That trusts a higher Will, and deems  
That higher Will—not mine—the best.

“O blessed life—the mind that sees,  
Whatever change the years may bring,  
A mercy still in everything,  
And shining through all mysteries.”

Of such a condition strength must be the natural outcome. Let us see why it should be so.

But let us get a true notion of the kind of strength spoken of in the Prophet's words. It is not strength to do, but strength to suffer. For strength to suffer is the highest kind of strength we can attain to, because it is at the same time the most difficult. Turn to nature for a figure to illustrate this point. We think of the furious howling wind, hasting like a giant over land and sea, as a type of strength. Its might overthrows great trees, makes firm-built houses quiver to their base, sends the clouds flying fast over the face of the murky sky, lashes the ocean waves into mountainous height, strews the strand with wrecks of the vessels it has destroyed. Looking on such a scene, we say the wind is strong. But the lighthouse on the rock is stronger, for the storm has spent its fierceness upon it in vain. There it stands, a landmark by day, a kindly beacon by night, warning the seamen off the dangerous coast. The wind has done its worst,

for it is strong only to do; the lighthouse abides secure, for it is strong to suffer. It has borne the conflict, and has overcome.

Turn to human life for another illustration. A keen, active man of business, the head of a large house, makes a fortune by hard and honest work. His sympathies with philanthropic and religious enterprises are strong and practical. Whatever agencies raise and benefit the poor, the suffering, the sinful, the ignorant, receive his generous help. But he is smitten with a painful, a lingering disease, which can end only in death. He is fated to the endurance of days and nights of all but sleepless agony. Months—perhaps years—must intervene before the last long, kindly sleep soothes his pain to rest for evermore. With a beautiful resignation he submits to his affliction. On his bed of suffering he lies cheerful and uncomplaining, his face gilded with the very light of heaven, his words expressive of a deep trust in the good providence of his God. When is he the stronger—in the energetic management of his business house and the pursuit of a kindly ministry among his fellow-men, or in the patient endurance of the fate which has fallen upon him? Strong to do, he is stronger to suffer. In suffering, not in action, is his true strength brought out. Jesus Christ was great and strong when, awakened by his fearful disciples, he arose from his sleep in the little boat on Galilee's stormy lake, and with a word laid the winds to rest, and calmed the waves lashed by tempest. He was greater and stronger when he was bowed to the ground in Gethsemane's olive-garden with the weight of his

great sorrow, or when he bore patiently the shame, the darkness, the humiliation, the death, of the Cross of Calvary. True strength—strength which the world knows not of—is seen more in suffering than in doing. And this is the strength which comes of the soul's conscious union with God and of the life of faith.

The connexion between them, as between cause and effect, can be readily seen if we remember that unbelief must of necessity fret the strength away. For unbelief creates a feeling of loneliness which very few of us can stand against, and which for most of us is the thief of all our energy. How much we admire the great heroic souls who now and then appear amongst men ; who have emerged from the ranks of their fellows by sheer determination ; who, feeling all the while that the whole world is against them, have conquered almost unconquerable difficulties, and have fought their way to eminence and renown ! But how many men can do this ? All such in a generation we might very well count with ease. Most men want a start in life, some kind power to push the ship off the stocks, some guiding hand to get them clear of the shoals and quicksands of the channel of early life, before they can set forth into the open sea. To feel that they were alone, friendless, opposed, thwarted, would be the sure forerunner of defeat and despair.

In reference to visitations of trouble, these things are even more true. Some men, even without faith, may brace themselves to meet the trial, and may meet it with fair success. But how many men can do this ? Not many. For most of us, faith in God, conscious

union with Him, is absolutely necessary to bear our sorrows as we ought. Unbelief, a feeling of loneliness, would shatter us; far from being a storm we could safely outride, trouble would be to us a storm that would wreck us, and cast us bruised and broken on the rocky shore of despair. We must feel that though sorrow be a mystery, there is One who will, by-and-bye, explain it to us. We must feel that trials are not the children of chance, but are the messengers of God to us. We must feel that the Everlasting arms are round about us, and the bosom of the Eternal lies open as a resting-place for weary heads. We must feel that we are one with Him, He our Father, we His offspring; that all that comes to us has a ministry of mercy to perform. These things we must feel, or we are undone. Only faith can give us strength. "For youths grow faint and weary, and young men suffer a fall. But they that wait for the Lord gain fresh strength; lift up their wings like eagles; run, and are not weary; go forward, and do not faint."

This is a very blessed condition of soul, one that we may earnestly and wisely covet, one that there is absolute need for amid the trials and changes, common enough to all men, of human life. But there are two or three things necessary for us to bear steadily in mind if we would attain to it.

One is a right view of the whole question of suffering. We are told by some people that every visitation of suffering that comes to a Christian is by way of punishment for sin of which he has been guilty. It is hard to say whether such a statement is more



false or more absurd. As if the Almighty God, the Father of all men, the consciousness of whose presence is ever with them that believe in Him, went on a kind of debit and credit system, with so much suffering in retaliation for so much sin! A being who could act on that plan is a fit object for the worship of the souls who have coined such a fiction for themselves, and are content with it. What is the fact? Suffering is a beneficent minister to the Christian, sent to relax the claims of the world and the flesh, and to call away his thoughts and desires to God and the realities of the life eternal. Recognise its ministry in this light, and the genius and mystery of suffering are made tolerably clear.

Another thing necessary for us grows out of this one. That is a very loving view of God, such a view of Him as Jesus gave when he drew away the curtain of darkness behind which God long had dwelt, and revealed Him in the Divine tenderness, the yearning affection of His great heart. Think of God as an Eastern despot, and the very permission of suffering is a stain upon His character that all your arguments will never rub away. Think of Him as a Father, as a Physician, and suffering is seen at once as a part, an essential part of the discipline of His children, of the kind healing treatment of the wounds and bruises of humanity.

A third thing necessary for us is a sweet submission. We are ready to call God our Father; we rejoice to do it. It is the highest dignity we can reach; for what dignity can be higher than to be a son

or a daughter of the Lord God Almighty? But are we as ready, do we as much rejoice, to live in the spirit of children? A filial spirit, however, is only the right and just counterpart of the Divine Fatherhood. "Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done."<sup>7</sup> That was the spirit of Jesus. That is the spirit of all who share his sonship.

Living, therefore, in the remembrance of these things, we shall be quiet and peaceful in the presence of God, even in the hour of suffering. For strength comes through waiting, and fortitude through faith. The eagle-wing is already ours. By-and-bye the eagle-flight shall be ours as well. "O rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him; and He shall give thee thy heart's desire."

<sup>7</sup> Luke xxii. 42.

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## Rest.

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"And Moses said unto the Lord, See, Thou sayest unto me . . . . . and I will give thee rest."—*Exodus* xxxiii. 12-14.

TO understand the full import of this beautiful passage, we ought to glance at the record of the circumstances that lead up to it.

During the forty days and forty nights that Moses was in Mount Sinai, receiving by inspiration the pattern of the Tabernacle and the order of its services, the people of Israel, impatient at his long absence, wished that a visible representation of God might be made for them, to be carried before them on their wilderness-journeys. The request and the idea that underlay it seem very strange. But the strangeness clears away as we remember that Moses was regarded by Israel as the messenger and servant of God, who stood between them and the dread majesty of Jehovah, and was to them in the place of God. Nothing then was more likely than that the long delay in Moses' return, suggesting the thought that they might never see him again, should lead the ignorant people to wish for another representation of God in his stead. The form of a calf was for them the most natural into which this representation could be thrown. For during their slavery in Egypt, they had seen the wide-spread worship of the

bull, a sacred animal with the Egyptians. Thus the children of Israel chose this form for the visible expression that they wished to give to the invisible Jehovah.

The sequel is too well known to need any lengthened narration. Aaron, with a strange weakness of character, yielded to the popular demand ; made the calf with the golden earrings that the men of Israel brought to him ; set it up and built an altar before it ; and on the next day, with all Israel joining in the worship, sacrificed to it as to a similitude of God.

The sacred history tells us of the wrath of Jehovah being kindled by this insult and degradation. The idolatrous people were to be consumed in the heat and fierceness of the Divine anger. The favour which was to have been conferred on them by an entrance into the Land of Promise, and by the formation of a rabble of slaves into a prosperous kingdom, was now to be given to Moses instead. Like a second Abraham, he was to become the founder of a great nation. But through his intercession, this reversal of the original Divine intentions was stayed. Putting aside, with a beautiful self-forgetfulness, the honour proffered to him, which, for one brief bright moment, must have made his whole future glow with unwonted brilliance, he besought the Divine pardon for the sinful people, which in the end was granted him. But the return of the favour of Jehovah was not complete. Something was kept back which Israel had enjoyed before ; and though from the dim records we cannot clearly make out what it was, we can certainly see that some token of the Divine

presence being amongst them was now no longer to be given. Jehovah would no longer himself be present in their midst; but, instead of this sign of his presence, whatever it was, which they identified with him, something that is called his "angel" should go before them. Accordingly, the tent in which Moses lived while the travelling people were encamped, and which, as he was their Divinely-appointed leader, was naturally enough looked upon as the place where Jehovah vouchsafed his presence, was removed to some distance outside the camp, and called "the tent of meeting." Thither he went to meet Jehovah, making it plain to the people that the Divine presence was no longer in the midst of them—a most expressive way of symbolizing to them, in their ignorance and unspirituality, Jehovah's hatred of anything defiled by idolatry and sin. But this removal of the presence of God from within the camp of Israel to without was a most bitter grief to Moses' meek and tender spirit. Once more, therefore, in unwearied mediation, he pleaded for the sinful people, and besought the Lord that He would return and dwell amongst them. His prayers prevailed, and the answer came, in words that have soothed many a sorrowful soul and have strengthened many a fearful one in the pilgrimage and work of life. "My presence," it said, "shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

The first thought arising from a consideration of the passage which stands at the head of this essay is that Moses furnishes us with a fine example of the spirit which breathes through every true and beautiful life.

That spirit is a spirit of meekness, of self-distrust, of a commendable anxiety as to the possibility of failure, leading to a more complete abandonment of oneself to the care and guidance and help of God. "Moses said "unto the Lord, See, Thou sayest unto me, Bring up "this people; and Thou hast not let me know whom "Thou wilt send with me." To many people, who mistake presumption for faith, such an objection to the immediate acceptance of his Divine commission would appear to be almost criminal. What right had he to pray for further help if he believed that the voice of God had called him to the leadership of Israel in the national pilgrimage? Ought not the very call to have been evidence enough that all needful aid would be granted him in obeying it? But the fact is, that a nature of such fine temper, of such exquisite sensitiveness, as the nature of Moses, was susceptible of a far greater range of feeling than is implied in these questions. For such sentiments issue either from mere animal stolidity or from a presumption born of an insufficient understanding of the facts and surroundings of the case. And neither presumption nor stolidity is faith. The stolid man goes slowly along the path of life, unmoved by joy or by sorrow, by encouragement or by defeat, simply because he is incapable of being moved. He is like a stringed instrument whose chords are slack; and though we touch them never so delicately, or strike them never so rudely, no sound is ever called forth except the dull echo of imperfect vibration. The presumptuous man, strong in an overweening self-confidence, does not comprehend the



bearings of his position, and rushes blindly on, careless because not knowing whither he goes. Scarcely any experience can teach him. To him the voices of the past speak no words of warning or of wisdom. He is one of those of whom the verse speaks in the Proverbs when it says, "The simple pass on, and are punished."<sup>1</sup> He is not one of the prudent men who, seeing danger coming, hide themselves; not one of the believing souls who cast themselves on the strength, or shelter themselves under the protection, of a higher Power. His confidence arises from presumption, not from faith.

Now, the conduct of faith is essentially different from either of these. As in the case of Moses, it is based on meekness, on self-distrust, on an intelligent understanding of all the difficulties of the situation. It hears the Divine call to do this brave deed, or to go on this dangerous errand. But it sees what obedience to the call will involve; what heroic endurance, what swift and sure activity, what a will of iron, what a steady hand, what a strong heart, are necessary to the doing of God's command. Accurately it gauges its own resources, and in its meekness finds that they are not enough for the endeavour. It contemplates the possibility of failure. It estimates the strength of opposing forces at their true rate. It fears they may be too much for it. And from its sense of weakness and insufficiency there arises the cry, "O thou great Master, thou hast laid a burden upon me too heavy for me to bear. Thou biddest me go forward, and behold, in front of me are angry waves in which

<sup>1</sup> Proverbs xxii. 3.

"I dare not venture alone. Leave me not, neither forsake me. Thou art my helper and my strength. I shall be equal to thy commands only as thou strengthenest me." Now, this is faith; this is not stolidity; this is not presumption. For it springs from an intelligent understanding of the circumstances; and feeling its own weakness to cope with them, casts itself on the omnipotence and love of God.

Let us observe the illustration of this character with which Moses furnishes us. After he had obtained forgiveness for their gross sin by his patient, self-forgetful intercession, the command came to him to go on with his leadership of Israel into the Land of Promise. "Bring up this people," was the Divine bidding which fell upon the ears of his inner man. But of himself he felt that he was not equal to the task. He knew all that it involved. The unspiritual people, who walked by sight and not by faith, would be wanting evermore fresh proofs that Omnipotence accompanied them in their journeyings. If the hardships and privations of desert life pressed heavily upon them, there would be instant revolt, a disposition to return to the slavery of Egypt, with its garlicks and flesh-pots, sooner than to endure suffering in the search for liberty. Few amongst the people lived as seeing Him who is invisible; few amongst them were willing to obey the governance of a king who had no outward splendours, no court, no chariots, no horsemen, no grand array of men-at-arms, to attest his greatness. The nation as a whole had not the foresight of faith which knows that the future is often purchased with the price of a self-



denying present. How could one man bring to their promised home a wayward, wilful, unspiritual nation, with all the vices of slavery thick upon them, as the Hebrew nation was? Had Moses been presumptuous, he would have rushed unthinkingly to his task; had he been stolid, he would have undertaken the work, not caring which way it issued, either this or that. But he was meek; he was self-distrustful. "Behold, "thou sayest, Bring up this people, and thou hast not "let me know whom thou wilt send with me. I cannot "do it alone; it is too much to ask of my poor resources. I must have help, or the duty will remain "undone." It was out of this meekness and self-distrust and true estimation of the difficulties of his position, that the opportunity came for the exercise of faith.

On a man in this state of mind the vision of the Invisible dawns in rich and comforting beauty. Perhaps we have noticed, in the summer time, the way in which, after a few days of intense heat, signs have come of an approaching storm. The air has been close and oppressive; the landscape cloudy with a hot haze; the sun like a dull-glowing orb of molten metal; the face of the sky lead-like and lowering. Soon the storm has come in its fierceness; the swift lightnings have leaped from end to end of the heavens, while the thunders have crashed and roared, as if the foundations of the world would be shaken. Then, after all has passed away, we see the beneficent mission which the mighty forces have accomplished. How clear are the heavens and the landscape! How fresh is the air, how brilliant the sun! The stifling heat has gone, the face of nature

has been renewed. Now, a conflict of honest doubt in the breast of a man like Moses has much the same effect on his discernment of God as the storm has on the clearness of the air. Brought to feel his own nothingness by the falling upon him of some great command, there is conflict and tempest for a time. The mist and haze of self-sufficiency may have been between his soul and God. The visible only he has had a sight of; and even the sight of that has not been clear. But after the storm has passed, the obscurities have all dissolved away. The vision of the Invisible has shone forth brightly upon him. New light, buoyant freshness, a youthful energy to do or to suffer, have come to him, and the commands of God seem easy to the strength of faith. "See, thou sayest unto me, bring up this people; and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me." It is out of such meekness and self-distrust that faith grows. It is to the soul capable of conflict that the comforting words of grace come: "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Such a soul endures as seeing Him who is invisible.

Nevertheless, Moses' doubt, like all honest doubt, was not unrelieved by glimpses of comfort. In the tumult within him, he still felt that his feet had a foundation to stand upon; only he wanted to feel the foundation more firmly. "Yet Thou hast said," he said to God, "I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in My sight. Now, therefore, I pray Thee, If I have found grace in Thy sight, show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find grace in Thy sight; and consider that this

"nation is Thy people." The foundation that he rested on was the consciousness of the Divine voice within him, telling him that Jehovah knew him, and that he had found grace in Jehovah's sight. The commission to lead the chosen nation had not come to one who was either unobserved or unfavoured by Jehovah. It was the result of a definite Divine choice of a man who commended himself to God as fit for it, and whose fitness was supplemented by the bestowal of Divine grace. But, considering all that the leadership of Israel involved, Moses wished to have proof of the truth of the comforting words that God had spoken to his soul. When great issues are at stake, there is nothing unreasonable in the demand that we should be inwardly made conscious of the truth. Then, it is not enough for us that there is firm truth without us, if we cannot receive it into ourselves and feel that it is our assured possession for evermore. We are right in certifying ourselves inwardly of the truth of outward facts. Now, in undertaking his great work of the further guidance of Israel, Moses wished to be conscious, to have proof given him, that he had found grace in the sight of God. He wanted to *know* that he had found grace. He felt that only as this knowledge came to him, infallible and sure, would the strength and courage adequate to his task spring up within him. There was nothing unreasonable in his request. To this end he desired to be shown God's way, God's mode of acting, God's principles of dealing with him and others, and of His government of men generally. He

desired that he might know God, in the inward knowledge of a spiritual communion, and that as far as man can comprehend God, that comprehension might be vouchsafed to him. Having already been told that he had found grace in God's sight, it was not too much to ask this favour of God. Having been appointed as the leader of the chosen nation, as God's representative to them, it was only right that he should know Him whom he had to represent, and understand His mode of dealing with men, that he might do nothing inconsistent with the Divine will and purpose toward the nation over which he was set. That this desire did not arise from prying curiosity is evident by the closing words of Moses' prayer, "Consider that 'this nation is Thy people.'" It was because he was placed in trust with such a great charge, with the well-being and the safe-conduct of a nation which God spoke of as His own, chosen for Divine purposes from all the nations of the earth besides, that he wished for this knowledge of the Divine being and the Divine ways. Moses merged himself in his people. For their sakes he was prepared to ask anything of God through which he might the better do his duty towards them. In the last resort, his prayers were not for himself, but for them. "Consider that this nation is Thy people."

Now, the very utmost responsibility under which the vast majority of men are placed withers into nothingness when compared with that resting on Moses as the appointed leader of the Hebrew people. Their influence is confined to at most a comparatively few human souls. They do not sway the fortunes of

thousands. If they were called away from this life, they would be missed here and there ; here and there, let us hope, would be a heart whose pulses would beat less intensely through feeling that one source the less of friendship, of counsel, of help, was accessible to it. But they would not fall in the front of the battle, the observed of all observers. Their lives seem very poor, meagre affairs, so narrow in their range, so monotonous in their course. How can they have the same need to know God and His ways that they may fulfil their duties aright, and how can they desire with the same fervour to be assured that they have found grace in the sight of the Lord ?

To speak in this way is to make the great mistake of thinking that duty is a question admitting of degrees. It is to think that the work of life is important in proportion as it seems to be important ; that those lives only are great which fill a large place in the vision of multitudes ; that the need for the Divine grace and guidance and wisdom is more in weighty matters than in trivial ones. But none of these ideas are right. The fact is, that if a man were called to sweep a crossing, and felt the call, he would as much require to offer the prayer of Moses as if, like him, he had been called to lead a nation out of the house of bondage into the land of promise. When shall we get away from the thought that duty can be measured and weighed, as though it were matter ; that duty can be compared with duty, and one duty pronounced great and another small ?

What is our duty in the station where God has

placed us? That is the question. Is it to deal in thousands of pounds, or to make the best use of but a few shillings? Is it to exert a good influence upon a whole neighbourhood, or only to wipe the tears from a crying child? Whatever our duty be—seemingly great or seemingly small—there is the same stern necessity for its faithful discharge; and to this faithful discharge the knowledge that God is with us to give grace, the knowledge of Himself and of His ways, is always essential. If we measure life and duty by Christ's standard, nothing will be found small, nothing secular; but everything great and sacred and Divine. God may not say to us, "Bring up this people." But if He says, "Bring up this family; do this humble round of duties; manage this business; serve well this master; do whatever thou doest as unto Me;" we need equally with Moses to cry, "Shew me Thy way, that I may know Thee—that I may find grace in Thy sight." The answer will come, full of relief and blessed help, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

This consideration leads up to the answer which God granted to Moses' prayer. Moses, the meek, timid, self-distrustful, yet believing man, received the assurance that the Divine presence would go with him, and be his help and stay in the fulfilment of his great task. The sign of God's being with the journeying people, of whatever nature it was, should not go before them, as something which they had to follow, but with which they could have no community and no fellowship. It should be with them in their midst, at

once a solace and a strength, a protection and a guide. Nor should Moses and the spiritual minds in Israel feel that it was but an outward token of God's favour and care. But they should identify it with God, and say, "God Himself is with us, a mysterious and wonderful, "but yet a beneficent and friendly presence." "*My presence shall go with thee.*"

But this was only one aspect of the blessing about to be conferred. The other aspect was the giving of rest, of quietness of spirit, of freedom from care, of security from alarms. The word suggests the idea of being caused to lie down in peace, like a child, who, as he falls asleep, feels the presence of his mother beside his bed as a protection from all unseen and unknown terrors. This was just such a blessing as Moses most of all needed. He was not altogether, as he has already let us see, the patient, untroubled soul whose life is full of contemplation and holy calm. Nor was he without faith, restless with unceasing anxiety, racked and careworn with the burdening sense of duties he could never fulfil. But in him, as in all beautiful and useful lives, the Mary-spirit and the Martha-spirit dwelt in perfect sisterhood. Yet just because of his meekness, because he had something of self-distrust and insufficiency, because the active Martha-spirit within him dare not wholly shrink from doing its duty, did he need the promise of rest, freedom from anxious care, an assured feeling that if he faithfully did his part, God would not fail in doing His. To the stolid and the presumptuous souls rest is never promised, because

they never feel their need of it. They go blindly and carelessly on, in the one case callous, in the other case self-sufficient, never anxious, never shrinking, never nervous, because they are too coarse-fibred ever to be so. But Moses, and natures like his, of all others, need the promise of rest. Therefore the promise is given them: "I will give thee rest." As already said, the rest consists in freedom from anxiety, from the careworn spirit against which Christ specially gives an antidote in the overshadowing goodness and watchfulness of the Father, in words too well known to need quotation. For Moses, there would be freedom from anxiety as regarded *himself*. Gifts and graces suited to his position would be furnished him. Strength and wisdom, and courage and forbearance, all beautifully tempered with a Divine tenderness and love, would make him the leader that he ought to be. No emergency would arise to which he would not be equal. He might hush all fears, and dismiss all doubts. God's presence was with him; Jehovah would give him rest. There would be freedom, too, from anxiety as regarded *the people over whom he was placed*. Would they obey him? Would they reverently recognise his Divine commission? Would they never rise against God and him in sedition and revolt? Would they complain when food was scarce, when they searched for water and found none, when the hardships of desert-journeyings pressed grievously upon them? Would the wants of the great multitude be provided for? Would they finally, under his guidance, reach the land of promise and of liberty? All these



questions, as they arose, were to be put aside. God's presence, the presence of the Omnipotent, the All-wise, the All-loving One, was to be with Moses continually. The man of God, called and commissioned by a Divine authority, need never torment his soul. "I will give thee rest." That was enough.

If that was enough for Moses, with the destinies of the travelling nation in his hands, it surely ought to be enough for us. Enough, not only because our responsibilities, as already remarked, are much smaller than his, but as well because, since Moses' day, Jesus Christ has come, repeating with manifold tenderness of emphasis the promise of rest to all weary and heavy-laden souls. We are in a better estate than Moses, because we need no sign that God is with us, or that He guides those who commit their way into His care, or that He sends a Divine strength into those who link themselves with the ocean-fulness of His grace by the channel of a living faith.

For Christ has come unfolding the conception not of the God of Israel—not of the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, not of the Deity of a favoured tribe in the vast human family—but of Him the essence of whose nature is love, and whose best, greatest and final name, the name which supersedes and shall survive all others by which men have ever described Him, is the name of Father. It is because Christ has thus made known the Father that he has been able to promise us rest, freedom from anxious care, and vain vexing of ourselves with doubts and fears. For, since God is our Father, nothing will come to us that is

not part of His wise and loving training of us ; no duty will be laid upon us beyond our childhood's strength ; nothing will be asked of us that we cannot give. Day by day we shall be strengthened and guided ; night by night we shall rest under His overshadowing wings ; and when death comes, it will but be the putting forth of His strong and loving arms, and the clasping of the tired child to the bosom of its Father. Through life, in death, in the great unknown hereafter, the Father's voice is heard for evermore, " I will give thee rest."

For all men, what comfort is there in this promise ! This solace should be theirs constantly, for they can never exhaust its healing efficacy. Some of them—the weary and timid souls—need it more than others do. Fresh experiences, it may be, are awaiting them in the immediate future, which they scarcely know how they shall encounter. Great sorrows, heavy trials, perhaps already overshadow them, which may turn the whole course of life, like a river diverted from its ancient channel. There are others, too, who are setting out upon a new-found path of duty ; others, again, disappointed and heart-sick, who feel life's journey to be a wilderness-wandering, without purpose or goal. Let all such be of good cheer. This promise of the Father is theirs for evermore—better than pillar of cloud by day or of fire by night ; better than visions in the mountain-summit or miraculous voices in the sky—this promise : " My presence shall go with thee, " and I will give thee rest."

## Glory and Goodness.

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"And he (Moses) said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, . . . on whom I will show mercy."—*Exodus xxxiii.* 18, 19.

FEW things are more worthy of note than the fact that wherever a nation or an individual is brought into close contact with the Bible, and especially with the New Testament, a striking development is given to what we call the gentler graces. By these are meant the graces of love and tenderness, of forgiveness and pity, the softer and more womanly elements of a perfect human character. We have only to remember what has taken place, for instance, in the conversion of the South Sea Islanders from blood-thirsty cannibals into civilised Christians, to furnish ourselves with an example of this truth. Turning from a people to an individual, no doubt we can recall some one amongst our acquaintance in whom a change has occurred, through the influence of the Bible, from a hard, cold, unforgiving and unloving character into a character quite the reverse. Or, taking a very wide survey, and contrasting the social and moral canons of the modern world with those of the ancient world, we cannot fail to be struck with the humanization that has been and still is in course of

progress. I do not say that the Bible, that Christianity, is the only influence to which this change is due. The natural working of the forces of civilisation counts for something. But I do say that of all the influences that have brought the change about, I believe the influence of the Bible to be the mightiest and most effectual. Wherever the Bible has exerted a considerable power, there the gentler graces have grown up and flourished.

They are by no means, indeed, the first in order of development and time. The sterner attributes of human character come before them. In the sculpture of the surface of the earth, the great mountains and rocky heights have first been formed by the settlement of the earth's crust in its process of cooling down. Only after the lapse of ages have these become carpeted with grass and adorned with beauteous flowers. The severe is the foundation of the gentle, affording it growing-ground and root-hold. As, in men's thoughts of God, the mighty has come before the merciful, so in the development of human character, the stern and warlike has come before the tender and loving. But the progress of the latter has gone on with such intensity that to-day the good, the compassionate, the considerate, the forgiving, the affectionate type of man is regarded by all right-thinking people as much more the ideal type, as much worthier of imitation, than the opposite type of man. And for this change we are, in large measure, indebted to the influence of the Bible.

Of such thoughts and truths as these, this episode

of Moses' life offers us a very beautiful and touching example. Read by its light, his character grows into truer greatness than almost any other part of his remarkable career. Greater is he in pleading, as the sacred story represents him, for Israel in its sin and disobedience and idolatry than in coming down from the Mount armed with the majesty of the moral law, or in leading the nation triumphantly from its Egyptian captivity to the borders of its promised home in Canaan. Greater is he in praying for the continuance of the Divine presence and favour for the people whom he led than if he had embraced the sudden glimpse of fame that broke upon his view when the suggestion came to him to become himself the founder of a new Israel, the father of a new nation. For the man who can set himself aside for the sake of others is one of the very greatest of all earth's heroes.

Let us glance for a moment at the circumstances that gather round his request which forms the first part of our text. The story of Israel's awful apostasy in fashioning the golden calf as a similitude of the unseen God who had brought them up out of Egypt, is too well known to need more than a mere recall of it to our minds. We know what followed the making and the worship of the image. When Moses came down, after a prolonged absence, from the Mountain of the Law, his righteous soul was roused with indignation at this terrible lapse into idolatry. He could not do less than represent to the people the gross nature of the sin of which they had been guilty. It was a putting

back of the clock which it was Israel's great mission to put on ; for Israel's great mission among the nations was the assertion of one true God, and of Him as invisible and holy, against the coarse and brutalising faith in many gods, worshipped by shameless rites, which was held by other nations of Moses' time, and of times later still. Therefore, he told the people how great and grievous was their sin ; how angry he knew the Jehovah, whom they had offended, must be with them ; how needful it was, if they would again obtain His favour, for their repentance to be deep and sincere. Meanwhile, the Divine voice spoke to him—by what means we know not ; nor is it of any consequence that we should know. It bade him still continue his leadership of the travelling nation. Yet it seemed as though it did not speak in the same favourable tones as before. A chasm, an impassable gulf, appeared suddenly opened between Israel and Jehovah, that even Moses was not able to bridge across. Without a certain knowledge that it was closed, that the Divine relations to the people were the same as before, Moses felt he could not bear the great burden of responsibility which rested on him. He must else sink under it, overpowered and despairing. It was this feeling that prompted his prayer. " I beseech Thee," he cried to God, " I beseech Thee, " show me Thy glory." Some revelation of the Divine presence, surpassing anything he had seen before, was needful before he could feel that the relations which had received so severe a strain, so rude a shock, were again what they had been. This alone

could give him the confidence he needed for the successful discharge of his great duties. Without it he would seem like a blind man leading a blind people, wandering aimlessly, wandering nowither. He wanted to cross the chasm which had been made by the apostasy of the nation, so that, for the future, he might have a firmer footing than the former history had given him. For if his own personal fellowship with Jehovah were not fully established, if it were not raised above all possibility of disturbance, how could he have any sure and eternal foundation for the reality and perpetuity of his mediation and his leadership? That was the motive of his prayer, "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory." It was not the result of a prying and unholy curiosity into the Divine mysteries which he felt all about him. It was the cry of a lonely, troubled, burdened heart for a foundation on which faith and hope might rest in peace.

But if we now turn from the motive of Moses' prayer to its meaning, we cannot be so sure of getting a clear conception of it. We do not exactly know what he meant and what he wanted when he asked for a sight of the glory of the Lord, surpassing, as his words imply, any other revelation of it which he had ever seen. But, perhaps, if we refer to one or two other instances in this Book of Exodus in which the glory of God is said to have appeared, we shall be on the right track. When Israel murmured for food, and manna was promised, Moses and Aaron told the people that the glory of the Lord should be seen by them;<sup>1</sup> and we

<sup>1</sup> Exodus xvi. 6.

find afterward that that glory appeared in the pillar of cloud. Some sudden brightness, some remarkable and splendid display of light, is possibly to be understood as the sign which fell upon the eyes of Israel. Again, when, in another place, we read of Moses as receiving on the Mount directions for making the Tabernacle and ordering its services, we find that the glory of the Lord abode upon the Mount, and that the "sight of the glory of the Lord was like "devouring fire on the top of the Mount in the eyes of "the children of Israel."<sup>2</sup> This description seems to point to the same conclusion as before, that the Divine glory was symbolised by some marvellous effect of light and shade. Something, then, of this kind, perhaps, was what Moses desired to see. Only there can be little doubt that it was nevertheless something surpassing all former revelations, as already said; something even going beyond Jehovah's talking with him face to face which, in an earlier verse of this chapter, we learn had been vouchsafed to him. For, even under such circumstances as these—as we are told in the account of Miriam's visitation with leprosy, because she spoke unkindly against Moses, her brother<sup>3</sup>—what Moses saw when God talked with him face to face was merely a similitude of the Lord; some token which, while it revealed, concealed as well, and rendered the invisible being of God visible, under some fitting disguise and covering, to the human eye. But Moses' desire for a new revelation was evidently a desire for the manifestation of the essential

<sup>2</sup> Exodus xxiv. 17. .<sup>3</sup> Numbers xii. 8.



being and glory of Jehovah; not a similitude of God, but God Himself; a manifestation, moreover, given without any medium through which it showed itself, without any figure, without any veil. This, perhaps, is all we can say on a subject which is certainly beset with much mystery. At any rate, it is clear that Moses wanted the highest revelation God gives of Himself to mortals, a revelation summing up and going beyond anything he had before beheld. This alone he felt could support and strengthen him in all the difficulty and responsibility which now gathered round the path of his mission. "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory."

The fact that, when God was believed to show Himself to the eyes of men, it was in some splendid phenomenon of light and power, is only quite in accord with the nature of the human mind. Looked upon as a great King, what can be more natural than for men to expect that, as an earthly king, when seen by his subjects, is surrounded with all the pomp and display of royalty, God will be seen in a similar but in a more magnificent manner? Even with us, who know through Jesus Christ that the truest revelation of God is by His spirit to our spirit, can the feeling sometimes help being present that we see and hear more of God in extraordinary displays of natural forces than in their gentle and silent working? Though we look upon all nature at all times as one of the means in which God shews Himself; though we view it, as Goethe says, as "the garment which we see Him by;" yet who of us has not felt more of God in the crash of the midnight storm, when its hiss and thunder has

wakened him from sleep, than in the sunshine or the shower of the ordinary day? Who of us has not felt more of God amidst the mountains and by the sea than in the busy city streets or in the quiet country lane? The human mind loves the wonderful and the immense. They have for it a sort of pleasing intoxication, opening a new world of mystery to it, as opium to the opium-smoker unlocks the ivory gate of dreams. If these things be true with us, whose surroundings are so different from those of the Israelites in Moses' day and in the days of Psalmists and Prophets, with what significance as revelations of God must extraordinary natural phenomena have come home to them! What wonder if we find in the Hebrew poetry, as we do find, tempests and whirlwinds and thunder-storms looked upon and described in splendid words as manifestations of the glory of God! The nature-psalms, as they have well been called, clearly set forth this truth. The Divine glory was believed to be specially present in the magnificences and splendours of convulsed nature.

Whether Moses looked for something of this sort or not, as the answer to his prayer, we cannot say. But there can be little doubt that the answer that did come to it must have been wholly unexpected by him, lofty and great as were even his thoughts of God. For the answer to his prayer, "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory," came in these words, afterwards realized in fact, "I will make all My goodness pass before thee;" and when the realization came, it consisted in a declaration of the name of God as at that

time understood. "The Lord, the Lord God," said the voice, "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and "abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for "thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and "sin;" a sort of seed-germ from which the Gospel of the New Testament afterwards so richly developed. God's essential glory, brighter far than illuminated clouds and fiery mountain-summits, is His goodness; and His goodness seen at its best and most beautiful in His mercy, His compassion, His forgiveness of sin. Greater goodness is this even than the universal Divine care of all created life, by which the flowers of the field are clothed with loveliness, the sparrows and the ravens are provided for, the very hairs of our heads are all numbered. To forgive sin, and that, in the case of Israel, most offensive sin—for nothing surely can be more offensive to God than to call a four-footed beast a similitude of Him—to forgive sin, that is true goodness, as it is the highest glory that can play around a man or a God. "I beseech Thee, "shew me Thy glory." "I will make all My goodness pass before thee." Goodness is glory.

In this answer, then, we notice a distinct advance upon any revelation of God recorded previously in the history of Israel. It was a preparation for the advent of that Gospel which tells us that God is Spirit and God is Love: a Spirit, and therefore to be discerned and known not by the senses, but by the spirit of man; Love, and therefore to be understood not by splendours and magnificences of nature, but by inward revelations of compassion and tenderness. For if the

glory of God consist in goodness, and if the highest display of His goodness, as it is also the essential nature of His goodness, consists in the forgiveness of sin, how can anything which appeals to the senses set it forth? Does the artist's picture or the athlete's feat of strength make known what either of them is in himself, in his essential nature? To know anyone, we must come into contact and communion with the man himself, and understand him as he really is. God, the great Spirit of Love, is apprehended only by the human spirit. He is an object not of the senses nor of the reason. He is discernible only by the heart.

We notice, moreover, that the goodness of God is implied to be His essential glory, for the display of which Moses prayed. All else appertaining to Him, His attributes of wisdom and of power, His awful purity, are but mere appendages, so to speak, mere regal robes beneath which He discovers dimly to us His real self, but which must be penetrated by eyes of faith and love if we would see Him as He is in reality. They are but the insignia of His royalty, His crown jewels, His sceptre of state, by which those who know Him not as goodness know Him, indeed, but know Him only to stand in awe of Him. They who know Him thus may believe, but they believe and tremble. To see the true glory of God we must behold Him by the light of His goodness, and goodness as set forth in His forgiveness of sin.

This fact, indeed, is quite in keeping with our best sentiments, with our sentiments, that is to say, when infused with the Bible teaching about the true place

and value of the gentler graces to which reference was made at the beginning of this essay. For whatever may have been the opinion of ruder and rougher ages on this point, it is certain that now-a-days glory is regarded by all right-thinking persons as nothing or next to nothing apart from goodness. Glory gained by the use of gunpowder, glory gained at the expense of others, glory gained by wading to it through seas of blood, though once very popular, is now, thanks to Christianity and civilization, going out of fashion. Where is the fame of that he-devil Napoleon Bonaparte to-day? Which will last the longer, the name of a conqueror, or the name of a poet, of a man of science, of a philanthropist, of a missionary of the cross of Christ? What is glory apart from goodness?

The same fact is true of the glory attaching, in the minds of most people, to the possession of great wealth, or of courage, or of intellect, or of good moral character. Wealth without goodness gains the reputation only of miserliness or of extravagance. It acquires glory only when expended in schemes of beneficence and philanthropy. Courage without goodness degenerates into brute force and ferocity. To be glorious it needs to be displayed in a good cause, in the defence of the weak and helpless against their strong oppressors. Intellect without goodness grows proud and contemptuous, looking on other men as fools, on itself as the sole incarnation of wisdom. It becomes glorious when it spends its splendid energy in the cause of human progress and the enlightenment of human ignorance. A lofty moral

character without goodness may be very just and truthful, righteous and pure. But what is it apart from goodness? A clear, sharply-cut iceberg, very beautiful but very cold, and undesirable in the extreme as a companion. It has no sympathy with the erring, no pity for the fallen. It sits impassible, unfeeling, self-contained on its own chilly heights. To be glorious moral character must mingle compassion and tenderness and love with its justice and its purity. A perfect moral character, like that of Jesus, is born only of the marriage of the best elements of the manly character with the best elements of the womanly. Either of these by themselves are incapable of producing it. Glory is nothing apart from goodness. God's true essential goodness is His glory, as His true, essential glory is His goodness.

But we have still to notice that the essence of the goodness of God consists in His free forgiveness of sin. That is its sum and substance, as it is its chief and most perfect form of displaying itself. To Moses, pleading for sinful and idolatrous Israel, fearful of the untried future if the chasm between God and the people, which they had opened as with fearful convulsions by their sin, were not healed up again, such a declaration must have come with sweet, helpful force. It was what he most of all needed—a knowledge that his nation was forgiven, was again installed into the Divine favour, from which it had grievously fallen. All would now be well if the glory for whose display he had cried lay in the forgiveness of sin, in the keeping of mercy for thousands. For us,

too, as for all mankind, such a declaration as this is just what is necessary. No man, be he a true Christian or not, can ever fail at some time or other of feeling a deep sense of sin. Even St. Paul, near the end of his long, useful life, cries out, in one of those strong outbursts of emotion so characteristic of him, that he was chief of sinners.<sup>4</sup> What a comfort, then, must it be to us if that God whom we worship, and whose glory we would ever seek, finds His true glory and the best display of His goodness in forgiving sin and keeping mercy! What despair would else seize us and keep us trembling in the dust were this not the case! But His goodness has been made to pass before us, the goodness which pardons iniquity. We have seen God, and, wonder of wonders, we have not perished, but our lives have been preserved.

That to forgive sin is the very essence of goodness, both human and Divine, will readily appear if we consider for a moment how the case stands with *us*. Now, in nothing is the inward struggle with our natural feelings so intense, in nothing is the crucifixion of self so painful, as in the free forgiveness of those who have done us wrong. And by forgiveness is not meant here that miserable apology for forgiveness which sometimes we seem to be content with granting. A man has offended me without cause, let me suppose. The wrong, the injury is all on his side. I have done nothing to deserve his treatment of me. All my worst feelings of pride and self-esteem and revenge are at once aroused. But he is sorry for what he has done,

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy i. 15.

and comes to ask me to forgive him. I may assume indifference when I really am not indifferent, and under that guise may pretend to forgive. But all the while I am inwardly smarting from what he has done. Is that forgiveness? Or I may forgive him for that time, threatening that if he offends again, he need not expect again to be forgiven. Is that forgiveness? No; both these ways of forgiving are only mockeries of forgiveness. Yet probably most men have professed to forgive in one or other of these ways. But what miserable modes they are of fulfilling the most sublime and God-like duty anyone can be called upon to fulfil! It is forgiveness only when I say to my penitent fellow-man: "Friend, I forgive you from the very bottom of my heart. I have been very sore at what you did to me, but your confession has healed my wound. Say nothing more about it, for I will say nothing. I will bury it among the things of the past. Let bygones be bygones. You shall never see in me—you shall never hear from me—anything which betokens a lingering and rankling remembrance of your injury to me. Here is my hand; take it, as I take yours, in pledge of renewed friendship." That is forgiveness. But what this costs us to do honestly and sincerely! What a struggle—what a series of struggles! How self smarts and throbs when nailed to its cross of pain! We ought never to forgive if we cannot forgive like this, even until seventy times seven. Else we are actors, hypocrites, playing at forgiveness; deceiving others if we do not deceive



ourselves. But when we can forgive in this way, how sweet and excellent and complete is the victory over self! The very spirit of Christ thrills through us, making our life beat with a heavenly pulsation in harmony with the life of God. In nothing, be it repeated, is human goodness more manifest than in our forgiveness of those who have sinned against us.

But we are human and therefore sinful. Consequently if these things be true of us, how much more must they be true of God! For sin to His pure eyes appears as it never can appear to our eyes, as more awful in itself and in its effects, as more like what it really is, nay, as it really is. What, then, must it cost Him to forgive, not because He has feelings of revenge to stifle, not because He has a self to crucify, not because His wounded pride calls out for satisfaction! Not for any of these reasons, let cold-blooded theology say what it will. But because any and every sin is a manifestation and a strengthening of that dreadful principle of evil which mars the harmony of His fair universe, and disfigures in every child of man that Divine image which was stamped upon him at his birth; because every sin shows that there is yet in the heart of him who commits it a fellowship more or less strong with the unfruitful works of darkness and the powers of evil. Therefore, if sin appear to Him, as it does, in this dread light, what must be His goodness when He forgives! Forgive, however, He does with a freedom, a fulness, a forgetfulness which the New Testament well bids us, however difficult be the task, to make

evermore the type and pattern of our own forgiveness of others. "As God," says St. Paul, "for 'Christ's sake hath forgiven you.'"<sup>5</sup> Truly, then, not only does the essence of God's glory consist in goodness, but as well does the essence of His goodness consist in pardoning sin.

We have a more certain proof of the truth of this fact than even Moses and Israel had in the declaration of the Divine character and name. For Jesus Christ has come, telling us of the love of God, of which he himself is the best and fullest revelation. He is the noblest setting-forth of God. "He that 'hath seen me hath seen the Father,'"<sup>6</sup> he said. We see God's goodness in nature, and in the providences of every-day life, and in the course of humanity down the broad, swift-flowing stream of time. But in these things we do not see the essence of His goodness, because we do not see Him as forgiving sin. Nature, at least, knows no forgiveness. Natural law does not forgive, because no natural law can ever be broken. It is as much a law that fire burns as that it warms and vivifies and enlightens. In providence and in history, too, we see indeed the Divine goodness at work in the overruling of events to wise and beneficent ends. But it is still not the essence of that goodness that we see. That is manifested only in the love of God as declared in Jesus Christ; the love which says to the weeping sinner, "Thy sins, which are many, are 'all forgiven thee; go, and sin no more.'"

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians iv. 32.

<sup>6</sup> John xiv. 9.

## The Insufficiency of Pharisaic Righteousness.

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“ For I say unto you, that except your righteousness . . . . enter into the kingdom of heaven.”—*Matt.* v. 20.

THIS solemn statement, occurring very early in the public utterances of Jesus, was the first note of warning of the impending conflict between himself and the religious leaders of his day. Indeed, it was more ; for it was as if he were putting the trumpet to his lips, and with one loud, stern, sounding blast, were declaring that the battle had already begun. It was the proclaiming of war, even to the death, against all that was merely outward and assumed in moral conduct. It was the announcement of the Saviour's utter revulsion against all seeming goodness of word and deed that was not the produce of a living principle within, but was like artificial fruit, tied on here and there among the leaves, just to save the tree from the appearance at least of being barren. For this was precisely the character of the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.

As we read the Gospel history, we cannot but be struck with the peculiar prominence with which these men figure before us from the commencement of

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Christ's ministry onward to its close. Next to the central personage himself, there are none who appear so constantly upon the scene ; and as often as we meet with them we find them opposing themselves to Jesus, " watching him to find matter of accusation against " him," perverting his sayings and his actions, seeking to entangle him by questions, and generally to embarrass him.

The Scribes were the traditional expounders of the law. Originally, after the return from Babylon, when their office seems first to have become frequent, they were transcribers and editors of the Jewish sacred books ; and then, by a natural process, they became their interpreters. But they taught with a most rigid regard to the letter of the law, and made of it a hard, dry, unbending code from which every trace of the living spirit had departed long ago. And as the Scribes were the traditional expounders of the law, the Pharisees were its punctilious observers, whose morality was equally lifeless with the teachings of the Scribes. Although, like most sects and parties, they had their bright and their dark sides, it would seem that the shadow prevailed over the light, leaving, in the mind of the candid observer, a decidedly unfavourable estimate of their general worth and character. For the most part, they were dreadfully exclusive in their ideas of caste ; they inverted the right relation of moral and ceremonial duties, making the ceremonial essential, and the moral optional ; they called the mass of their own countrymen the " brute people of the earth ;" they were rigid in their observance of the Sabbath ; they were hard

and bitter in their spirit. They were lifeless, legal, formal in their doings, as the Scribes were lifeless, legal, formal in their teachings.

These, then, were the principal enemies with whom Jesus waged a conflict that ceased only with his death. On them he poured out the full vials of his righteous wrath, condemning in the strongest terms their pride and self-righteousness, their covetousness and hypocrisy, their strict outward observance of the law coupled with indulgence in secret wickedness.

If we proceed to ask the reason of his stern antagonism to them, the answer to our question is easy. The Scribes by their words and the Pharisees by their deeds were cutting at the very root of the religion that Jesus had come to teach to mankind. The essence of that religion is a sincere spirituality, whose springs, hidden from the eyes of men, lie open to the sight of the Divine Father alone; a spirituality which has for its main object the purifying of the inner life of thought and feeling, assured that if this object be achieved, the outer life of speech and action will of necessity be made pure too; a spirituality which is concerned chiefly, if not altogether, with pleasing God, and is possessed of the calm conviction that if He smile approval, to please anyone else is a very minor consideration. For that this is the character of the religion of Jesus is quite evident from the Sermon on the Mount, in which he unfolds it and enforces it. He contrasts the conduct of the Pharisees with the conduct of those who would live the true and noble life of which he himself was the sublimest example.

The Pharisees fasted and prayed and gave alms in order that they might be seen of men to be doing these things, and win a character for piety accordingly; but the disciples of Jesus, like their Master, must for ever repudiate all this outward show, and live and pray, do deeds of goodness, and fulfil the duties of religion, as always in the sight of the Father who seeth in secret.

Between principles and modes of conduct so opposed as these there could never be anything else than deadly enmity; for the opposition is that of darkness and light, sincerity and hypocrisy, a fair show in the flesh and true purity of heart. Thus it is not at all strange that we should find the Pharisees and Scribes set against Jesus from first to last, because the difference between them and him was not one of degrees or of accidentals, but one of kind and of essentials. In a word, no Pharisee or Scribe could become a disciple of Jesus without a most radical change in every principle of thought and action. Speaking after the manner of men, a publican or a sinner, a drunkard or a sensualist, was in much greater likelihood of entering into the kingdom of heaven than a Scribe or a Pharisee.

In a somewhat recent work, entitled "Philochristus," an attempt has been made to set forth in a very vivid manner the position assumed by these religious partisans toward Jesus Christ. It will illustrate our subject in a lucid and interesting way if an instance, cited by the writer of the book from Jewish authorities themselves, be taken as an example of the

righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. The instance bears upon their observance of the Sabbath, a question that arose more than once in the frequent and severe reproofs which Jesus gave to them. Philo-christus says: "I had joined myself to a certain brotherhood, who all, or almost all, were Pharisees, such as bound themselves to observe the law with strictness, and in particular to pay tithes of all things. . . . Now it was our custom to meet on the Sabbath Day at one another's houses, that we might sup together. But the space between our houses often exceeded two thousand paces, which distance was not to be exceeded by a man journeying on the Sabbath Day. Therefore to a plain man it would have seemed that we could not sup with one another on the Sabbath Day, and at the same time obey the law. But the Scribes were otherwise minded; and many of them, yea, even of the strictest sect, escaped from the law after this fashion. On the evening before the Sabbath Day they would place small pieces of meat, distant two thousand paces one from another, on the road whereon they desired to journey. Where a man's meat is, said they, there is his home. So, when they were come in their journeying to the first piece of meat, they would say, 'Now I am at my home, and may walk yet another two thousand paces.' And so, walking from this home to other homes if need were, they walked as far as they listed."

This instance will suffice to show the hollow hypocrisy of the righteousness of the Scribes and

Pharisees. It was nothing else than a constant attempting to evade the spirit of the law by a rigid and yet deceptive application of its letter. This being its character, nothing was more natural than for Jesus to recognise in these men his most dangerous and determined enemies, who were cutting at the very root of the inward and spiritual religion he had come to teach, and by their wretched legalism were destroying that very law that he had come to fulfil.

Perhaps, however, it was to a large extent unavoidable that from such a religion as that of the Jews this spirit of outwardness should naturally arise. Of course it is perfectly true that not even Jesus and his Apostles went beyond the enforcing of the love of God with all our heart and soul and might as the essential principle of pure and undefiled religion. Beyond this they did not go, for the simple reason that beyond this they could not go. The love of God is the first fount as it is the final goal of religion and the religious life. Every duty starts from it, as every duty is fulfilled in it. Now this essential principle was made quite clear centuries before the birth of Christ, so that the attainment of a spiritual religion was within the reach of all Jews even while the elaborate ritual of Jewish worship was enjoined at the same time. Indeed, the controversy which the Prophets declared Jehovah to have with Israel was that the people rested content with the ceremonial while they neglected the moral law; that, in the simple words of the Old Testament, "they honoured Him "with their lips while their heart was far from Him."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xxix. 13.



Therefore, in one sense, the Pharisees, in whom this character reached its highest development, and all who shared it with them, were without excuse.

Yet, on the other hand, as already observed, it was perhaps unavoidable that this contentedness with the outward, this neglect of the inward, should arise from the religion of the Jews. Its numerous ceremonies, its frequent sacrifices, the conception of God which was bound up with it, all tended to the fostering of the idea that religion was a thing of doing rather than of being, an external conformity rather than an internal spiritual state. If a man observed the appointed feasts and kept the appointed festivals, paid his tithes and presented his offerings, kept from flagrant immorality and did not worship idols, there was every reason for his thinking that he had done and was doing what the law required of him. In this way he would come to forget that thoughts may be equally sinful with acts; he would come to think that, since he did not sin openly, he did not sin at all. He would fancy that as long as he kept the sepulchre white on the outside, it did not much matter what corruption lay festering within. He would come to think that the whole of religion consisted in works, and would pass by the infinitely more important requirement of having the heart right with God. Of course there were some who, like David for example, would see the vanity of all this, and would pray fervently, "Create in me a "clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within "me ;" <sup>2</sup> but men of this stamp were always a minority,

<sup>2</sup> Psalm li. 10.

while the majority rested content with the formal and the outward.

This, unhappily, is the tendency of us all. It was not peculiar to the Pharisees in particular, or the Jews in general. We lean naturally toward a religion of works which gives us something to do. A certain number of prayers to be said, a certain number of deeds to be done, a certain number of penances to be performed, a certain number of laws to be obeyed—this is what we like; for when we have attended to these, we have the sense of satisfaction arising from something done, that we can see and that we can tabulate. A religion that enjoins this kind of thing upon its professors has, in that very fact, greater chances of success with men in general than a religion which demands right thoughts, right states of heart, in those who would live a true life. There need be no hesitation in saying that this is one of the chief reasons why the religion of Jesus numbers a much smaller proportion of the race among its followers than religions which are concerned mainly with the circumference of a man's life rather than with its centre and its spring. But religion is not the adding to a heap of lifeless works more or less good. Religion is a living growth in the soul, a development of the whole man toward holiness and God.

If, then, it was perhaps to a large extent unavoidable that the Pharisees, from the very nature of their religion, should fall into this contentedness with the formal and the outward, in what lay the aggravation of their sin which Christ found it needful to rebuke

in such strong terms? In this, that when light shone among them, in the life and teachings of Jesus, they loved darkness rather than light. When Christ came, inculcating his sweet spirituality; his religion lived before God in the first place, and before men only in the second; his simplicity of life and worship, fresh and beautiful as the flowers of spring; the Pharisees chose to keep still to their outwardness, their formality, their prayers and fasts and deeds of alms, observed that they might be seen of men; to the hard and fast letter of the law, as unproductive of genuine piety as the realms of eternal ice are of the fair growths of the tropic zone. Perhaps, as their religion had come down to them through the generations, getting thickly overlaid with ever-increasing accretions of tradition and form, it was not altogether their fault if they did not know what true righteousness is. Our circumstances, our conditions of life, our faith and practice, are determined for us by our ancestors to a greater extent than we sometimes think. It is not always due to us alone that we do not break through these strengthening fetters into a larger liberty. This may have been the case with the Scribes and Pharisees. But when they saw Jesus before them, ought they not at once to have felt, "This is what we want; this is what the best of the nation have long been sighing for; this Son of Man touches a chord in our hearts that has lain silent for centuries, and makes it vibrate as with heavenly melody"? This is what ought to have been their response to the spirituality of Jesus. But it was not. They preferred

the grave-clothes and the sepulchre to the white robe of righteousness and the life of true religion; they preferred works to love, and doing to being.

Are the majority of those to whom the Gospel comes any better than the Scribes and Pharisees? As a matter of fact, mankind are in a much worse position as regards a true apprehension of what righteousness is than *they* were. Every nation, every tribe has its own standard. Things are tolerated, and even admired, among one nation or tribe that are utterly abhorrent from another. It is a great mistake to think that conscience possesses infallibility, so that it cannot err. It is not too much to say, as someone has said, that conscience is one thing north of the Pyrenees and another south of them. Look at some of the great questions of practical life that have divided the opinions of mankind, and what is the outcome of the investigation? We find that conscience—moral intuition, as it is sometimes called—is utterly helpless to decide them. Think of Macaulay's picture of the Highland chief of former days. "His own vassals, indeed," says the historian, "were few in number, but he came of the best blood in the Highlands. He kept up a close connection with his more powerful kinsmen; nor did they like him the less because he was a robber, for he never robbed them; and that robbery, merely as robbery, was a wicked and disgraceful act had never entered into the mind of any Keltic chief." Lying, deceit, trickery are counted as virtues among many peoples, while among others they meet, when discovered, with

the stern punishment of the national law. With our ideas of morality, we give a well-deserved loathing to the man who is faithless to his marriage vow; but among the Eastern nations it is well known that the keeping of many wives is the rule rather than the exception, while in some cases there is thought to be nothing immoral in men's having wives in common. Not even a qualm of conscience disturbs the degradation of the sleep in revolting sensuality. There are probably no two nations whose ideas, whose standard of righteousness, are precisely the same.

How, then, are we to decide what righteousness is? If the moral faculty, awaking from a heavy stupor, makes us yearn for something higher, something nobler, something greater than we have ever been before, where shall we get the realisation of our desires? Now, God has answered the question for us in Jesus. Jesus is God's ideal of a perfect man; his career was God's idea of a perfect life. He is of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, all that the spiritual development of ourselves or of the race at large is ever likely to need. When he is set forth in his sweet simplicity, in his pure life, as he was when he lived and moved and taught and died among men; when he is set forth not as a theological mystery, but as the soul's personal Saviour, who loves men out of themselves into God, what do we find? We find that even amongst the rudest races, the most heathen nations, the darkest, the most ignorant of men, hearts thrill in response to the tones of his voice as it calls

them back to their Father and their God. "In him," they say, "we have what we want; an example to follow, a friend to trust, a person to love, a Saviour who sealed his devotion to mankind with his blood." Christ is the standard of righteousness, and our doubts and discussions as to the meaning of the great and far-reaching idea, are for ever set at rest if we will but let him do it. We feel that the ideal has been realised, that the best dreams of the best men have been embodied thus for evermore in Jesus.

No doubt there have been moments in our lives when, in looking at a picture, or in reading a poem, or in gazing at some fair scene of natural beauty, we have felt that our loftiest conceptions of the sublime have at last taken tangible form. I remember such a moment very early one morning when I was in Switzerland a few summers ago. From the deck of a little steamer threading its silvery way along Lake Lucerne, I saw the snow-capped peaks beyond the mountains that gird round the lake, kissed with the first beams of the returning sun. At first they blushed with rosy hue, as if they were coy at the coming of their great lover, and then as he rose higher and higher into the heavens they gave themselves up to be clad with gold for the bridal, as it were, of heaven and earth. All was profoundly still, save for the plash of the waters as the boat pushed on. I was on a forsaken part of the deck, alone, and free to drink deep draughts of the beautiful and the sublime. In that moment I felt as though I had lost my personality, and were for the time being a fetterless

spirit, with the gross ties of flesh all burst through, away there amongst the snowy solitudes, with no one near but the universe and God. I shall never forget it: in that moment I had not a want; I seemed to be the inheritor of all things; every hope was realised, every ambition attained; every stretching-out of the soul toward the Infinite abundantly answered by the stooping down of the Infinite to me. Now, on a higher scale, this is just what those in whom the forces of the spiritual life have begun to stir, feel with regard to Jesus when, in all the loveliness of his nature, in all the purity of his character, in all the deep yearning tenderness of his heart, he is set forth before them. God in Jesus has answered our questionings as to the great fact of righteousness and a righteous life. Righteousness is embodied in the character of Jesus; a righteous life is a life based on the model of his. True, inward, spiritual righteousness was his. There was nothing assumed, nothing forced; everything was as simple, as spontaneous, as natural as the opening into fulness and beauty of a summer flower. For it was the righteousness of a life filled to the full with God, a life lived always as in the eye of the Father. This is the righteousness that exceeds the formal, stilted righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. This is the righteousness that we must have if we would enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

There is no need for us to investigate the meaning of the phrase, the kingdom of Heaven, to shew what the Jews understood by it, or the elevation into a spiritual realm which Jesus gave to it. Therefore, it will be enough

if we try to find out why, if our righteousness does not exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven. What the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was we have already seen ; and, further, by taking Jesus Christ as God's expression to the human race of the Divine idea of righteousness, we have implicitly seen what is the nature of the righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees ; what is the righteousness, therefore, which fits him who possesses it to enter into the kingdom.

Now, the kingdom of Heaven, as here spoken of, is something present, something within the reach of all who will become its subjects ; not something future, for the realization of which we must wait till ages of progress have passed away. For, as Jesus has said, "The kingdom of Heaven is "within you."<sup>8</sup> It is not something of which we must say, "Lo, here," or "Lo, there;" for it does not come by observation. It is within all those who are not content with an outward, conventional, formal standard of righteousness ; within all those who strive after a high and spiritual standard ; within all those who, like St. Paul, in regard to this momentous matter, do not count themselves to have apprehended, but, forgetting the things that are behind, reach forward unto those that are before. This arises from the nature of the kingdom, which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit ; from the nature of its King, who is Father as well as King of

<sup>8</sup> Luke xvii. 21.



His subjects ; from the nature of the great law of the kingdom, which is the law of love. And it is just because the King is our Father, and His law is the law of love, that outward righteousness, conforming to a conventional standard, of necessity unfits a man to be a subject of the kingdom. For what child with a father worthy of his love ever felt that he loved that father enough ? Are there any limits to love ? Is love a code of duties, which, when a man has discharged them, he may feel that nothing more remains for him to do, that nothing more can be required of him ? No ! there are no limits to love. Love has always something it has not yet accomplished, some sympathy it has not yet shown, some token it has not yet given. Love and self-complacency are contradictory terms ; for love lavishes itself on others, while self-complacency centres upon itself. If, therefore, a man is content with an outward standard of righteousness ; if he feels, " I have done this ; I have done that ; God can surely ask no more," he never can be, until he gets entirely out of this way of thinking, a subject of the kingdom of Heaven. The true spirit is that which says, " I never can love my King, my Father, a thousandth part as I ought to love Him. My best services are tainted, my loftiest aspirations have traces of the earthly ; if I could do all that I ought to do, I should still feel that I was an unprofitable servant, and had done only that which was my duty." Righteousness born of motives like these is inward, spiritual, acceptable in the eyes of God ; this is the righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees ;

this is the righteousness of the kingdom of Heaven. It springs from love to God, to God as Jesus has made Him known to us; and bringing the heart, and all the forces of the life, into a spiritual element, every duty is transformed into a pleasure, alloyed only by the feeling that the duty is done so ill.

In conclusion, let it be said that it is not hard to possess the principle, although it is often hard to practice it. For God, love to whom is its spring, has everything in Him fitted to excite our love, and God has set Himself forth in Jesus. If we want true views of God, we have them in what Jesus was and what Jesus said. It is of the first importance to gain true views, because no man's religion, no man's righteousness, can be better than his views of the God he worships and the standard of righteousness which he conceives. Why was the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees formal, heartless, devoid of life? Because to them God was a being at an infinite distance from them, august and full of majesty, with Heaven for his throne and earth for his footstool. To the Jew God was something outside of him, after whom he reached with outstretched hands. Why is our righteousness to be different from that which Christ condemned? Because to us God is near, brought down to us from the vast eternities, in Jesus. Because God is with us, in us, a power, a principle, a personality, by whose unfolding we shall grow to spiritual manhood and womanhood, to the maturity of Jesus-Christ.

## The Christ's Mission.

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"Now when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent by his disciples . . . . . and the poor have good tidings preached to them."—*Matthew* xi. 2-5.

"ART thou he that cometh, or look we for another?" That was a strange question for John the Baptist to send his disciples to ask of Jesus. Indeed, so glaring seems to be the inconsistency between the doubt which suggested it and the firm full witness that he had given to Jesus in the baptismal waters of Jordan, that Strauss, the famous German critic of the Gospel documents, gratuitously assumes that the wording of the record is incorrect. He says that we ought to read instead, "Now when John had *not* heard in the prison 'the works of the Christ.'" That is to say, that if John had heard of Christ's doings, his question is inconceivable. The reports which, in that case, were brought to him ought to have been quite enough to convince him that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the Coming One for whom all the people were looking, and for whom John had tried to prepare them. But if, on the other hand, as Strauss supposes, no news had reached him; if despair, the result of his continued imprisonment and enforced inactivity, were settling down upon his sick heart, and were unlit by one ray

of joyous tidings of the successful mission of the Christ, then his question is perfectly natural. If Jesus were indeed the Christ, why did he not give clear evidence that he was so? Was he indeed the Coming One, or had John been deceived? Ought he therefore still to be looking for someone else who really should be the Christ?

But in such a criticism as this Strauss misses the plain point of the entire episode. The fact is, that whatever appearances make for the contrary, this enquiry of John is quite natural and easy to be accounted for. There is not the slightest need to impeach the accuracy of the record, or to suggest an alteration in its wording. The Baptist was at this time, as we can see, suffering from one of those fits of depression to which all great natures like his are especially liable. We may compare the kindred experience of the prophet Elijah, who had a good deal in common with John, both in the character of his work and in the peculiarity of his temperament. The glorious triumph on Carmel, and the despair under the juniper tree in the wilderness-solitudes, afford us a remarkable contrast, but a contrast that we quite expect in an Elijah. Natures that rise to grand heights of exultation are the natures that sink to dark depths of despondency. Depression at one time is the price that we pay for buoyancy at another. Flat countries do not attract tourists on account of their scenery. Lives that are for the most part lived on one level have little about them of natural interest. What interest they may have

comes from extraneous artificial sources. But lives with grand alternations in them, here with sky-kissing peaks of hope and energy, stretching away into the clear air and broad sunlight of heaven, there with deep murky valleys, where the cold shadows of despair affright the too venturesome intruder—these arrest and attract us as different from the monotony of common existence. If we have seasons of depression, wringing from our heart-depths the cry, “O that it were with me as in days past!” we may rejoice. Clouds serve a purpose in the economy of nature that sunshine never could. It is by the working together of manifold and diverse experiences that good results to those that love God; not by the monotonous, unrelieved, constant operation of one experience. God, who weaves our lives as we yield them to Him, must have all colours in His loom. We may believe that He knows best how to intermingle them.

But besides this plain and obvious reason why John sent his disciples to Christ with this question on their lips, there were others lying not so near the surface. One was his own painful experiences at the time. He was in prison in the lonely, gloomy fortress of Machaerus, on the borders of Arabia. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, had been guilty of an impure alliance with Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, and his own niece. John the Baptist, with the holy courage of a true prophet of righteousness, had boldly rebuked the sin of the tetrarch, but had received only seizure and imprisonment for his pains.

How long he had lain in his fetters before he sent to Christ we cannot exactly say, but it was probably not far short of a year. That, however, is a matter of small moment; the point to notice is that it must have been his fate, as a sufferer for righteousness' sake, which led him, amongst other motives, to send and ask of Jesus if he was the Messiah. Was it not a mystery that if he were the being to whom John had borne witness, if he had come to bring in the kingdom of Heaven that John had announced, if he were endowed with the powers and could do the works of which John's disciples had had striking evidence, he could yet suffer John to lie in prison because he had rebuked an adulterous prince?

There was this, moreover; that to such a temperament as that of the Baptist not only would imprisonment be particularly painful, but also the seeming delay in the bringing in of that reign of righteousness for which he looked would seem to be like a winking at the sin of Herod. Men of John's ardent nature are impatient of slow processes. If an evil is to be abolished, they want it abolished at once, and that in the most drastic way. Why did Christ linger one moment more before overturning with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm the throne of the guilty monarch, and erecting on its ruins the kingdom of Heaven? If Jesus were the Christ, and had come introducing that kingdom, surely he would at once set about his work, and that in the method which John had expected he would adopt. Where was the axe that John had said was lying at

the root of the trees that bore evil fruit? Where was the unquenchable fire that was to burn up the chaff after the winnowing fan had cleared it off the threshing floor? John was a true Elijah, and, like the men of Elijah's school, found it hard to believe that the fire of love and forbearance is the true divine fire of purification, and that what God aims at is not the destruction of the sinner, but the destruction of the sinner's sin. The Baptist had prejudged. He was not wrong in believing that the Messiah had judicial and separative functions to fulfil. He was wrong in not seeing that the Messiah had come to save rather than to destroy, that he had come to save by destroying, to save men by destroying men's sinfulness. The Baptist's prejudgments led him to think that Christ would go to work in a certain way; and when he found him not following it, but adopting another that he could not understand, his mind misgave him as to whether this were the Christ or not. "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? I expected that thou wouldst do this and that. I do not see that thou art doing it. Art thou after all the Messiah, whose herald and forerunner I believed myself to be?"

These reflections lead us up to consider what Christ's mission was; because if John had really apprehended that point, we can scarcely think that he would have sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, savouring strongly of doubt and hesitancy.

Now there can be no doubt whatever, as we read

Christ's own words on the subject, that he came as a Saviour. The purpose of his coming was the salvation of mankind. His name of Jesus, the Greek form of the Old Testament Joshua, fully indicates this. Of him it was said that he would save his people from their sins.<sup>1</sup> He had come, he said, not to kill and to destroy, but to save. The Son of man, he said on another occasion, had come to seek and to save that which was lost;<sup>2</sup> to bring the world not death and condemnation, but deliverance and life.

But it was pre-eminently to save from sin that formed the mission of Christ. For it is sin that constitutes all the real evils that men suffer, all the real misery that darkens and curses human existence. For the spiritual is the true deep nature of men; it is their real life. Consequently whatever renders them wretched in spirit is the root and the essence of all other wretchedness. In this sense sin is the parent of suffering. For if the spirit be at peace, if the depths of the soul be undisturbed, save for the flow of the strong noiseless current of the Divine joy through them, it matters comparatively little if the surface be ruffled with the passing gusts of trial and pain. What a calm light rests upon the face of many a sufferer in spite of months and perhaps years of long lingering days and weary wakeful nights during which the will of the Father has caused them to lie aside from the activities of life! What a halo of Divine glory, like that on the brow of many a saint in mediæval paintings, seems to surround the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. i. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xix. 10.



countenance, on which sorrow has stamped its own tearful beauty, in the case of many an one from whom one delight of the eyes after another has been snatched away in too rapid succession! What is the meaning of it all? This: that they are at rest and full of joy in the inward nature of the spirit. The Christ in them has been forming his own nature in the soul. The peace of Christ is theirs, the peace that passeth all understanding, the peace that comes of oneness with God, of return and reconciliation to the Father. Sin is the real destroyer of joy, the real parent of suffering. Break its power in the life and in the heart, and straightway the waters of God, life-giving and fertilizing, flow in upon them. Streams break forth in the desert. The wilderness becomes as it were a garden of God, and blossoms like the rose.

The fact that underlies the mission of Christ as a Saviour is that he is the revelation of the Divine mercy and the Divine love. The power of God finds its fitting display in the wonderful works of Nature, in glowing suns and circling stars, in the unfathomed infinities of space, in the mountains and the forests, in the waving fields and the spreading seas, in the myriad forms of life which, each in its own element, live and die. The purity of God is set forth in the moral law, as written for Israel on tables of stone and for all mankind, with greater or less clearness, on heart and conscience. But by themselves these revelations are not able to save us. Their spiritual emanations and influences have not strength sufficient for bringing men into union with God, that through that union the

power of sin in them may be broken down, and holiness may rule them instead. True union, the union of spirit with spirit, whether between man and woman, or friend and friend, or the human heart and God, can be based only on love. Love is the sacred flame which fuses into one what was before severed and apart. The heathen have nature, the revelation of God's power. Of what union with Him are they conscious? Israel had the law, the revelation of God's purity. What oneness, as of children with a father, did it beget in them? Humanity must look to Christ, the revelation of the Divine love, if they would receive that spirit of adoption, whereby they who have it consciously cry, Abba, Father.

That Christ is the revelation of the Divine love, no proofs need be adduced. We have but to think of his life, full of words and deeds and thoughts of mercy and sympathy, of benevolence and tenderness; of his death, in which all that went before it was summed up and crowned in a most unique winsome exhibition of pathos and affection, to repeat with manifold truth and emphasis the sublime statement of St. John: "God is love." It is by showing us the love of God, by proving to us that He is the Father watching, waiting, yearning for the home-coming of all His wandering children, that Christ opens to us the way of salvation. It is barred no longer. The "love unknown has broken every barrier down." The music of Heaven steals forth upon our ears, and its burden is "Come." We need fear no more. Perfect love has cast out fear. We will arise and go to our Father.

The method of this salvation, its way of working, the means of its attainment, has no mystery about it. Christ saves by imparting his own character, his own spirit, to all who will open their hearts to its incoming. Many people believe the Gospel in such a way, many preachers unfold it in such a way, that one would think the main purpose to be served by believing it, is to escape from an awful fate that will fall upon us if we do not believe it. To them the salvation brought by Christ is a kind of Noah's ark, valuable mainly because it promises deliverance from woe, destruction, and the second death. Was that Christ's view of the matter? It rather seems that Christ's view was something far and away beyond any such degraded idea, in purity and spiritual tone. The lifting off from the human soul of the oppressive burden of its feeling of guilt is only to free it for progress in the path of increasing likeness to the Divine image. What would Peter and James and John have gained if, when Jesus called them from their nets and boats, he had not told them to follow him? What would any man gain from an assurance that his future welfare is secured to him if no Divine ideals come forth from the heavenly places, and raise his thoughts, his desires, his impulses, to the level of their own pure height? To every forgiven heart there comes the command, "Go and sin no more." To every returned penitent prodigal, there opens out gloriously an endless vista of progressive obedience and purity in the house of the Father. Faith, the link between the soul and God, answers its true end only when it remembers that the ideal

of the Christian life is not deliverance from guilt, but a pilgrimage ever onward toward perfection. This perfection is presented to us in the character of Christ. It is followed, aspired after, by the receiving and inward working of the spirit of Christ.

If this, then, be a fair statement of the mission of Christ, we must now see how Christ proved that he answered it by the ministry which he discharged. For it is to be remarked that it was to that ministry he appealed when the messengers from John came with their question. What was the Saviour's answer? "Go your way and tell " John the things which ye do hear and see; the " blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the " lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the " dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings " preached to them."

Now we know that John had heard in the prison the works of the Christ. Luke adds to this knowledge, for he distinctly says that John's disciples had gone and told their poor master about the doings and sayings of Jesus.<sup>8</sup> Instead of making any express declaration such as John seems to have wanted, Jesus appeals again to the facts with which John was already familiar. It was as much as to say, "The thing for John is not fresh " facts, but a different way of looking at those " he already knows. I have nothing beyond " these. If these proofs are not enough for him, " I can give none more clear, none more cogent.

<sup>8</sup> Luke vii. 18.

“ John ought to know that where these works of mine are done there are tokens that the Coming One has indeed come.”

There were two elements in the ministry of Christ, each of which is distinctly set forth in the answer which Christ gave to John's question. We may call them respectively the material element and the spiritual element.

First let us look at the *material* element. It has to do with the miracles that Christ wrought. Of every kind that he enumerated, except one, he had wrought one example at least before the coming to him of John's messengers. Two blind men, as Jesus passed forth from Capernaum, had received their sight; the sick of the palsy, over whose couch the argument as to the power of the Son of man to forgive sins had been debated, had been raised from his paralytic lameness; the leper had been cleansed, when the Sermon on the Mount had been brought to its close; the dead had been raised in the person of the widow's only son at the little town of Nain. We have no reason for doubting that of these things John had had news brought to him in his prison at Machaerus. At any rate, it was to them that Christ appealed as a proof that he was the Messiah whose coming had been looked for and who now had come.

The question then arises, far too wide a question to be discussed fully here. Are miracles a proof of a Divine mission? The answer is, Not altogether; for there are true miracles and false miracles. If the divineness of a man's mission is to be judged by

miracles, that mission would commend itself as divine or not divine to those only who are acute enough to discern between a true miracle and a false one. Thus all men would not be placed upon the same footing of advantage in judging of the claims of one who claimed to come as an authorized servant of God. What then? How are we to judge of those claims? Surely by the way in which they commend themselves to our moral faculties; that is to say, by the way in which the miracle-worker is seen by us to possess wisdom and purity, goodness and truth. For the true work of everyone who claims to come from God to men is not to astonish us, but to raise us to a loftier and more spiritual tone of conduct and life. Why, then, did Christ appeal to his miracles, to his material ministry, as a proof of his Messiahship? Was it to bring home moral truth by means of evidences appreciable only by the senses? Not at all. Moral truth needs moral evidence, and both alike can enter only by our moral sense, by our faculty of discerning right and wrong, purity and impurity, falsehood and truth. Christ appealed to his miracles, at least in this incident, simply because they were a forcible expression of the mercy and love of God which he came to reveal. He wanted John to see that all the Old Testament ideas about the character of the Messiah as the helper of the helpless, the succourer of the distressed, the friend of the sick and the poor, were finding realization in him. His works, all of them helpful, healing, remedial, com-

forting, were the expression of his character. Only in the very last resort, when men's hearts seemed to be so hard that no more gentle means would drive home to them the sense and the claims of his Messiahship, would he appeal to them as displays of power. John's heart was not like this; he was open to conviction; Christ's miracles would call him to fresh faith because they set forth the true character of the Messiah, the character of mercy, love, sympathy, kindness. Therefore it was that Jesus said to John's messengers, "Go your way, and show John the things which ye do hear and see."

But the other element of Christ's ministry, the *spiritual* element, to which he appealed in proof of his Divine mission, was by far the more important: "To the poor the good tidings are preached." This was above all signs and wonders, and Christ seems readily to have admitted it. In the farewell discourse which he held with his disciples around the table of the last supper, he said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto the Father."<sup>4</sup> It is an idle begging of the question to say that this statement concerns only the Apostles during the age in which they lived and laboured. As far as miracles went, we have only to compare the records of such things in the Acts of the Apostles with those in the Gospels, to see that the Apostles did *not* do greater works than those of Christ. All the recorded miracles

<sup>4</sup> John xiv. 12.

of all the Apostles put together will not vie with the recorded miracles of Christ in the Gospels. The words of Christ, then, that have just been quoted cannot refer to visible signs and wonders greater and more striking than his. What, then, do they refer to? To what except to the success which should attend their preaching of the Gospel, to the healing of men's soul-wounds, to the deliverance of men from sin and doubt and despair, to the new-creating of nations and the world? "The poor have the Gospel preached unto them." This was the last and greatest proof of Christ's Messiahship. The poor—the lower ranks in the social scale, the underlying parts of the fabric of society—the poor have good tidings preached to them. The gates of the kingdom of Heaven are thrown open to them. The wine of joy, the milk of spiritual nourishment, the bread of life, are offered to them without money and without price. Christ knew what is the common lot of the poor. He knew the disadvantages under which they labour; the heavy weights which encumber them in the race of life and the struggle for existence; their many sorrows, their few joys; and to them he preached the glad tidings of peace and pardon, of uplifting and renovation, of a treasure in the heavens, of an immortality whose distant glow lights up the dark recesses of the vale of poverty.

Why, then, by preaching to the poor, did Christ give evidence of the divineness of his mission? Mainly because many religious teachers, who are of the spirit of this world, neglected the poor, framing their systems for the rich and the great.



This was what, as we know from the writings of the Jewish rabbis, the Scribes and Pharisees used to do. "Children of Satan, fit food for fire and "worms," are specimens of the way in which they would speak of them. "Even their alms we trample "under foot" was one of their cruel boasts. When we contrast with these expressions Christ's way of treating and speaking of the poor, it is no wonder to us that the common people heard him gladly. For he came to proclaim the republic of God, where there is neither rich nor poor, Jew nor Greek, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ—the Christian spirit—is all and in all. "To the poor the glad tidings "are preached."

Has the Church of Christ—his supposed representative on earth—been faithful to the spirit of the Master? Does the voice of the ages proclaim that the poor have been made the special objects of the Church's mission? Nay, but has it not rather courted and flattered the rich, and coveted the coming into its ranks of the men and women of gold rings and fine linen and goodly clothing? Has there not been too much of the spirit which gives to the rich the best places in our sanctuaries and to the poor the obscure corners—perhaps the privilege of sitting under a great man's footstool? In America there is the selling of pews by auction, knocking down the best to the highest bidder. In England, though we have not come to that, there are the goodliest seats for those who can pay most, while those who cannot pay at all, or can pay but very little, may go anywhere.

Need we wonder why the poor do not enter our places of worship?

Thus we have seen what Christ's mission was. We have seen what the ministry was whereby he gave proof that he was fulfilling that mission. Compare the mission and the ministry, the outline and the way it was filled up, and the conclusion is irresistible, that Christ was he that cometh—the Coming One, as the Greek literally is—and we need not look for another. For it was his mission to save, to save from sin and so to save from all that really constitutes suffering. It was his mission to save by revealing the love and mercy of the Divine nature, even of the Father. His ministry effected this by the works of healing, by the preaching of the Gospel to the poor, by the life which he lived, by the death which he died. Well may we ask with Samaria's sinful daughter, "Is not this the Christ?"<sup>5</sup> Every best instinct within us blends its voice with the voice of every other to answer, "Yes, it is he!"

<sup>5</sup> John iv. 29.

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## God's Revelation in Childhood.

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"See that ye despise not one of these little ones . . . . my Father who is in Heaven."—*Matthew xviii. 10.*

THE first question we should always ask in trying to interpret a passage of Scripture is, "What did it mean to those whom first of all it concerned?" Christian truth would have been saved a great deal of its present confusion and obscurity if this rule had been more carefully observed. What Scripture sayings may mean to us is one thing; what they meant to those who first heard or read them is quite another thing. Yet this last meaning we must in all earnestness try to get at if we are to read the Bible intelligently and truly.

Applying this principle to the above passage, we enquire what the disciples on whose ears it first fell in all probability understood by it. When their Master spoke about the angels of little children, what was he believed to mean?

Many of us no doubt have been wont to regard his words as telling us that the disembodied spirits of the little ones who have left this world after a brief sojourn in it, evermore amid the sunshine of the home of the Heavenly Father, look upon His face. Bereaved parents, as they have laid the tender forms of their dead children in their last

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resting-place, have comforted their heavy hearts with this confidence. Now the confidence is not false, but real and true. Only it is wrong to ground it upon this passage of Scripture, because we have no reason for thinking that Christ meant any such meaning to be affixed to his words.

There cannot be the slightest doubt that the usage of the phrase, the angels of little ones, in the sense of their disembodied spirits, would have been a strange, new, perhaps meaningless usage of it to the first disciples. Whatever light and teaching on the immortality of the soul Christ may afterwards have given to his followers, it is certain that, up to this time, he had given comparatively little, if any at all. Nor, again, were the popular views on that great question at all such that the disciples would at once think that when their Master spoke about angels he meant disembodied spirits. Consequently we must look elsewhere for the meaning of his words.

That meaning we shall find if we take into account the current use among the Jews of the term, a person's "angel." They had a common belief, a pleasant fancy, with how much of truth and how much of error in it we will not presume to judge, that every true Israelite, man, woman, and child, was under the care of a guardian angel, specially appointed to watch over the life thus entrusted to his care. This belief even went further, to the extent that this guardian angel, generally invisible, at times appeared in human form, and that when

he did so, he assumed the likeness of the man or the woman or the child whom he was guardian to. We have an illustrative instance of this in the history of Peter in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>1</sup> When he went to the house where many of his friends, thinking him to be in prison, were met together to pray for him, they could not believe that it was he who stood knocking at the gate. But when the maid-servant assured them yet again that it was so, and that she was not mad, as they thought, and saw Peter when no Peter was there, they said, "It is his angel." That is to say that, according to the views which they still held on these matters, Peter's guardian angel had assumed the Apostle's appearance, and that it was he, not the Apostle, who was waiting to be let in.

This idea, along with a number of others equally mystical, had been imported into the religious mind of the Jews through their association with the Babylonians during the Captivity. And it was such a pleasant, such a comforting idea, that it very naturally took a firm hold of the popular imagination, and became almost a fixed article of belief with every true Israelite. Accordingly when Christ spoke about the angels of little ones, he meant the guardian angels who, according to the Jewish idea, make children the objects of their special care. There can be little doubt that this is what he would be understood to mean by those who heard him utter the words of our text.

How far it is a fact that there are such beings as

<sup>1</sup> Acts xii. 13-15.

guardian angels, and how far Christ was speaking as a Jew to Jews and adopting the current thoughts and theories of his time, it is not for us to determine. Nothing is gained if the idea could be proved to be true, and nothing is lost if it could be proved to be false. The means that the Father in Heaven adopts for the protection and guarding of every life dependent on Him, even the humblest and feeblest, need not concern us. It is enough for us to know that both revelation and reason and faith assure us that such protection is vouchsafed. Our business at present is to find out what bearing the words of the Lord which we are dwelling on have upon the duties and conduct of life. The standard by which religious truth is to be tried is its influence on practical matters. Will it make us better men and women and children? If it will, we must accept and use it. If it will not, we may pass it by as of small practical import.

Now, what Christ evidently meant to teach by his words is that the guardian angels of little children are specially favoured beings.<sup>2</sup> But the question is why this should be the case. On what ground should the guardian angels of children see more of the face of God than the guardian angels of men and women? Whence does this special privilege arise?

We answer this question by asking another. Whom

<sup>2</sup> For the line of thought and interpretation embodied in this and the succeeding paragraph, the writer is indebted—in part to the extent of the very words—to an article in the "*Expositor*" some twelve months since. He regrets that he remembers neither the name of the author nor the title of the article, so that he cannot more particularly express his obligations.

was Christ in particular speaking to in the discourse in which our text occurs? The disciples were agitated with the question that frequently cropped up in their minds, the question as to who was greatest in the kingdom of Heaven, the kingdom that Jesus said he had brought among men. This question arose from their false and material views of the nature of that kingdom, which is in truth a purely spiritual kingdom, and is not capable of being estimated and measured by human standards. The unspiritual minds of the disciples led them to regard the successful pursuit of individual interest as the highest ideal of greatness. The man who determined to advance himself at all costs, no matter whom he elbowed back in his endeavours; who determined to take a foremost place in the field of glory, no matter whom he trod down in trying to do it; who said to himself, "I am the man, and my interests are paramount;" this was the kind of man whom the disciples looked on as a hero to be copied, as an example to be followed. Naturally enough, then, these were the very men who would despise the spirit of childhood, for the reason that to them it seemed to want power. It was not sufficiently self-assertive; it was not sufficiently self-conscious. It was too yielding, too compliant. Anyone might push it aside, anyone might trample it down. Let a man find his highest ideal of greatness in the successful pursuit of his own interest and his own claims, and he is of necessity unfitted to apprehend and appreciate the unconsciousness of the humility and gentleness of the spirit of ideal childhood. He is

like a deaf man in the midst of enchanting music ; he is like a blind man in the midst of romantic scenery. The faculty within him is dead, or at least dormant, by which only he can apprehend and appreciate these characteristics.

Now what Christ said in effect to his mistaken disciples was this: You are altogether in the wrong. That which you despise—the spirit of childhood—is greater than you are, with all your graspings after greatness, with all your vain blusterings after power. It is greater than you are by reason of that very feature in it which in your eyes makes it less—the absence of self-consciousness. I take you on your own level, and judge you out of your own mouths. You say these little children have guardian angels who make them the special objects of their care. Very well. You admit that these angels are beings of superior intelligence, of superior spirituality to yourselves ; that they are of altogether a higher class in the scale of life than you. Then I say to you, that these very angels are students of the child-life. They look upon the little ones whom they guard and tend, as unfolding to their gaze the face of the invisible God. They always behold the face of my Father who is in Heaven. They find in the face of childhood what your own guardian angels can never find in you until you yourselves become little children in heart. They find a mirror in which they behold a more glorious countenance still—the unveiled face of the Heavenly Father. Therefore do you no longer despise even one of these little ones. If you do, you commit a very



grave error. Those whose perception is keener, whose spirituality is more Divine than yours, do not despise them; for to them childhood unfolds God; in the face of childhood they see the invisible face of the Heavenly Father. That was what Christ said in effect to his aspiring, vain, quarrelsome, mistaken disciples.

It is, then, in the absence of self-consciousness in children that the face of God is seen in childhood. This is truly a very remarkable circumstance, one for which nothing but the spirit of Christianity would have prepared us. But indeed the spirit of Christianity has transformed human life in all its bearings, has lit it up with a Divine lustre and illumination, and has informed all its features with new and beautiful meanings. It has sanctified mature manhood, by declaring that man is made in the image of God, by making it plain that, as a German writer well puts it, "the true shekinah is man." Through the humanity of Christ, the Son of Man, the outgrowth of humanity when permeated by the Divine working, it has made a bond of brotherhood between all men, and has laid the foundations of a true philanthropy, of which other faiths than the Christian know next to nothing. It has elevated womanhood to its true level, clothing it with grace and glory, and causing us to see in woman's ministering to the weak, in woman's gentle care for the suffering, in woman's sympathetic oneness with sorrow, the true type of him who came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Childhood, too, it has invested with new meaning, telling us, as it does here, that

childhood itself is a revelation of the face of God, if only our sight be spiritual enough to see it; and that we may behold God most plainly even in childhood's absence of self-consciousness. Is it not strange that in the very feature of ideal childhood, that makes it most likely to be despised, down-trodden, neglected, the features of the Father's face should be most clearly discerned by the spiritual eye; that in the self-unconscious little one there should be a revelation of God? In what way is this the case?

We cannot make this evident to our minds if we do not clearly understand what is meant by the absence of self-consciousness. What is self-consciousness? It must, of course, not be confounded with consciousness. Consciousness is the knowledge of what passes in one's own mind, or of what is going on around one. In healthy sleep, when we are unvisited by dreams, there is complete absence of consciousness. In certain stages of disease, in states of intoxication, in conditions arising from injury to the brain, in swooning, there is no consciousness. The patient does not know what is going on around him, and to a very large extent, although not entirely, does not know what is going on in his own mind. But self-consciousness is a very different thing. It refers to moral states, not to bodily and mental. The word means just what it says, consciousness of self. The self-conscious man is the man who is never able to forget who and what he is; who is always morbidly mindful of his own deeds and words and thoughts as originating in himself; who never can tear himself

away from the idea that he is an object observed by others; who is always sensible of his own presence and can never fly forth, as it were, on the wings of self-forgetfulness and sympathy, and find union and absorbing interest in the being and doings of other people. Consequently a man of this kind will always be posing and strutting like an actor before his fellow-beings, aware that the foot-lights of his life's little stage are fully turned upon him, and engaged in the constant endeavour of making the most of himself. He will always be unnatural, forced, constrained; never wholly at ease till the day is over, and he has turned the key of his room upon the world. This is the self-conscious man, the man ever conscious of himself, unable to get away from himself, unable to lose himself and his interests in the interests and lives of others.

It is quite easy to see how, from such a character as this, self-seeking, such as the disciples were guilty of, and love of power, such as possessed them, necessarily follow. For there is always before the man's eyes one prominent object, himself. Into that all other things merge, like tributary streams flowing into a river. It devours everything else in its insatiable mouth, like Aaron's rod, when turned into a serpent, swallowed the other serpents. The continual contemplation of himself will beget an unnatural fondness for himself, as an ill-favoured countenance by frequently gazing in the looking-glass at last persuades itself that it is beautiful, or as a man who tells a lie and holds fast to it at last comes to believe it

to be the truth. Then, self, taking up too large a space in the man's mental area, will crowd nearly everything else out of the field. No room will be left for others. The belief will come to the man's mind, "I am the greatest. Let other things and "other people give place to me. Let their sheaves, "in life's harvest-field, bow down to my sheaf." This is the penalty paid by the self-conscious man, the growth of self-seeking and of love of power.

Strongly opposed to all this, stands the state of mind in which absence of self-consciousness is the sweet prominent feature. Absence of self-consciousness is self-forgetfulness. It is the feeling that one is but an atom of a collective humanity, one little point in a vast system, and not a whole humanity, not a system by oneself, as the self-conscious man fancies that he is. It is the outgoing of self in sympathy, in a beautiful feeling of oneness with other lives and other hearts, as the mother's self goes out towards her child, as the loving soul loses itself in its beloved, as the benevolent man merges himself in the victims of suffering and distress. Since self takes up only a small place in life's sky, ample room is left for the persons, the claims, the interests of others. There is no inordinate love of power; there is no grasping after greatness; there is no self-seeking.

Now it is this that Jesus recognized as a distinctive feature of ideal childhood, and if we look at childhood with his eyes, we shall recognize it as well. For Jesus viewed childhood, as he viewed all stages and aspects of human life, in its ideal light, suffusing over it the

radiances and excellences of his own beautiful soul. As in the crimson glow of a summer evening, he hid its defects in kindly shadow, and made its best qualities seem better still. In human nature everywhere, he saw the Divinest elements, and all to which those elements might ultimately grow. With them before his eyes, he thought and spoke of it. It is thus, then, that we regard this truth of the revelation of God in childhood.

No one, it may be believed, who loves children, who makes a study of them, who has much to do with them, can fail at times to notice in all of them the appearance, and in the best and most natural children the frequent appearance, of this self-unconsciousness. Their little lives, running on peacefully, have not as yet been crowded with important events to make self, the aggregate of all the past of life, rise into great prominence. Their imaginations are very vivid, and consequently their sympathies are strong; for imagination, the power to transport oneself out of self, is a prime factor in sympathy. Theirs, indeed, is not the sympathy of maturity, the sympathy that comes of having oneself experienced that in which we sympathize with others; but then no one, who is a fair judge of child-nature, expects anything mature in children. Take a child upon your knee and read to him the pathetic story of a poor boy, and how his little eyes will grow dim with tears, and the intensity of his interest will prove the strength of his sympathy! Or weave a history out of your own mind of little girls carried off by

wicked fairies from their parents, and rescued after many sufferings, and coming back as princesses amid glory and honour, and how the little wondering minds that listen to you will weep at the misfortunes of the poor innocents and rejoice over their happiness! Children have a great power of losing themselves in others.

Then, too, in real life, the most natural children manifest a beautiful self-unconsciousness. There is nothing forced or constrained about them. There is nothing which leaves upon your mind the impression that they feel something is expected of them and that they must make the best of themselves. They do not pose, or act, or strike attitudes, as much as to say, "Yes, I know you are looking at me. "See how well I do it!" But on the contrary, there is the utmost self-forgetfulness, the utmost absence of self-consciousness; and all this is naturally enough accompanied by the absence of self-seeking and of a desire for power. Well might the good Shepherd of the lambs, who suffered little children to come unto him, preach a sermon to his ambitious, self-seeking disciples—ever agitated, poor little souls, about who of them was greatest—and take as his text a little child.

It is, then, in their absence of self-consciousness that children, if we were only spiritually perceptive enough to discern it, are the revelation of God. In this feature of the face of childhood at its best, we may see the face of the Father who is in Heaven. Like it, He is all divinely self-unconscious, merging

His own life in the lives of others, and sympathetic with the intensity of childhood's sympathy, but with the maturity of the sympathy of adult life as well. Like it, He is all beautifully natural, all transparently true. Like it, He does not concern Himself with the desire and the thought of greatness, but finds His greatness in His gentleness, and His majesty in serving man.

The type, the proof, the revelation of all this, He has given us in the life of Jesus Christ. In him we have not only the ideal of manhood and womanhood, the moral strength of perfect man, the sacrificing love of perfect woman, but the ideal of childhood in its absence of self-consciousness. "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me."<sup>3</sup> There we have the perfection of manhood's moral strength. "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."<sup>4</sup> There we have the perfection of womanhood's self-forgetting love. But we cannot find, perhaps, any one scripture which adequately shows us the perfection of childhood's self-unconsciousness. It is woven like a golden thread into the entire texture of Christ's perfect life. Jesus and self-absorption are an antithesis, an opposition. Where the spirit of Jesus is, there cannot be self-consciousness. Where self-consciousness is, there cannot be the spirit of Jesus. He lost himself in others. He, the Son of Man, merged himself in humanity. He had tears for its sorrows; balm for its gaping wounds; forgiveness for

<sup>3</sup> John xiv. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xx. 28.

its unkindness; forbearance for its wanderings from God; life for its death; a cross, a broken heart, a sepulchre for its sins. He lost his life in humanity ruined to find it again in humanity regenerated, as the seed-corn falling into the ground dies to its own life that it may live again, in multiplied reproduction, in a full golden ear. Of all this he was capable because he was filled ever with the Spirit of God. All this he was, all this he did, because God dwelt in him and he dwelt in God. From Christ we learn what God is, the self-unconscious, true, natural, sympathizing One. "He that hath seen "me hath seen the Father."<sup>5</sup> Childhood, childhood idealized in Christ, reveals to us the face of the Father who is in Heaven; for the Eternal Father is the Eternal Child, and the Eternal Child is the Eternal Father. This is to us the revelation of the self-unconsciousness of God.

Parents and all who have much to do with children ought to foster in the little ones this unconsciousness of self which they already possess as their childhood's birthright. They ought to check tenderly yet firmly the first symptoms of its opposite, as a gardener takes the blight and the destroying insect off the young trees and the sweet flowers which he cherishes. It is theirs to show the children the ugliness, the baseness of selfishness, the fairness and the nobility of a life that can merge itself in the lives of others; for, once faded, their beautiful self-unconsciousness cannot be restored as it was before, just as no art can restore the bloom

<sup>5</sup> John xiv. 9.



to a peach when once it has been rudely rubbed away. It is theirs to take care that neither with lip nor with life the little ever-watchful eyes may see in them the predominance of self, the greedy grasping after greatness, the rushing at self-assertion, which to the child-mind must appear so strange, so inconsistent. Many fair young lives have been spoiled by the bad example of their elders. There are more ways than one of despising the little ones, and the showing a bad example is probably the worst way.

Further, the children, the little children, the little self-unconscious children, may speak their lesson evermore to us, and we may imitate them. That is a mission which all unknown to them they may accomplish, and will accomplish if only we let them. In childhood's face we may see the face of the Father who is in Heaven. Children may help us up to God. Not long ago a poor woman went to one of the exhibitions of pictures in the Bethnal Green Museum. There her eyes fell upon one of Murillo's beautiful works, the Virgin and the Child-Christ, a wondrous woman and a wondrous babe. As her tears gathered while she gazed, she was heard to murmur, "Who would not try to be a good woman with such a child as that!" The little incident has been cited as a proof of the susceptibility of the poor to the influence of art. Rather may we take it as a proof of the susceptibility of human nature—worn, weary, toiling human nature—to virtue, of which outward beauty ought to be, as art, in its loftiest moods, regards it, the expression and the type. The children are with

us, not all as beautiful, indeed, as Murillo's Child-Christ, but all of them with the capacity for the development of moral beauty. Who, then, will not try to be good? Who will not try to carry into adult life the features and the spirit of childhood's self-unconsciousness? Who will not learn to keep self under, to lose self in sympathy with others?

The spirit of the self-unconscious Christ may be ours, renewing, beautifying, transforming. We may have the spirit of the perfect life, manhood's strength, womanhood's tenderness, most of all, childhood's self-unconsciousness, if only we will live as little children, and in the spirit of childhood walk with the Father.

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## Suffering and Prayer.

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"Is any among you suffering? Let him pray."—*James v. 13.*

EVERY man who attempts to solve the problem and to fathom the mystery of human life, finds that one of the chief things he is bound to take into account is the existence of human sorrow. He may not be able to explain the fact that sorrow does exist. Like John Stuart Mill, he may not be able to reconcile it with the belief in a wise and loving God, the Father of mankind, who wishes for them nothing less than that they may all partake of His own Divine blessedness. As often as the existence of human sorrow presents itself to the enquirer's mind, he may wish to shake off from himself, like the oppressive memories of a troubled dream, the saddening reflections to which it gives rise. He may even feel that it is best for him to try and forget his own sorrows and the sorrows of others as well, lest the thoughts that they awaken should call up from the depths chilling mists of doubt, wrapping themselves closely about his soul, and stifling in their cold embrace all faith in the goodness and, it may be, in the very being of God. Yet, do what he will, the enquirer can never lose sight of the existence of human misery. It is forced home upon him by a thousand powerful

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agencies. It meets him at every turn. He need not go outside of himself or the range of his own life to find it. The dark appalling truth is always with him, that not only in every man is there a great capacity for suffering, but also that in every man there is suffering actually present to a greater or less degree. Human life as we know it would not be human life if it had no sorrow. In that case it would be something quite different, something of which we can scarcely form an idea, something with which we certainly have no practical acquaintance.

Now, the man or the religion that should attempt to solve the problem, to fathom the mysteries, to give directions for the conduct of human life, without taking into account the existence of human suffering, would be about as right and as reasonable as a geographer who should write a description of Switzerland and omit to say anything of the Alps. Not less are those magnificent mountains a chief feature of that country than human sorrow is a chief feature of human life.

The fact that men everywhere have been conscious of this truth is shown very clearly by another fact; that no one has ever ventured to frame and publish a system either of faith or of practice without dealing to some extent with the question of suffering. The feeling has been almost instinctive in the mind of the founder of the system, that if he did not in some way or other deal with this question, his teachings would be worse than useless. The omission would show either that he had altogether failed to understand what he had

set himself to do, or that, while he understood, he practically confessed that he was unable to do it. Men would be sure to ask him why he was mocking them with his philosophic theories when he had no oil to pour into their wounded hearts, no wine with which to cheer their jaded spirits; to tell him that his wisdom might do for the painless existence of a deity, but not for the suffering life of man.

Accordingly, here and there, along the line of the ages, there have arisen those who have professed in one way or another to deal with the great and crying question. But their voices have been raised one against another; their theories have been contradictory either to themselves or to other theories; and meanwhile men and women have been suffering, sighing, lamenting still. We feel, therefore, that there is the greatest need for a guiding voice that shall tell us plainly what we are to do when we suffer; for a word that shall come to us with a benign and blessed authority, not so much because it professes to be a Divine word, as because it finds its echo in our hearts, and its confirmation in human experience. Such a voice speaks to us, such a word is given to us, in this passage from the Epistle of James. As we try to unfold its teachings, we shall see that it reaches down into the deepest meaning of suffering, and gives directions how to meet it with a truth and a consistency all its own. "Is any among you suffering? "Let him pray."

Before looking, however, at the thought suggested by these words—that prayer is the great antidote of

suffering—it behoves us to look a little at the fact of suffering itself.

What suffering is, is a point that needs no attention. But it may be well to ask, whence does it arise? Is there any law as to its distribution, by the working of which one man has more suffering and another less? Of course it is very easy to say that sin is the cause of suffering, and that there would be no suffering if there were no sin. It is equally easy to infer that the man who sins most is the man who suffers most; and that if we see a man suffering we may conclude that either he or his parents or his forefathers, have sinned. This was the foolish notion of the disciples when they saw the man who had been born blind.<sup>1</sup> They said to Jesus, "Master, who did sin—this man or his parents—that he should be born blind?" Jesus answered that neither had the man nor his parents sinned. The man's affliction was something quite beyond the control either of himself or of the authors of his being. The idea that suffering is the consequence of sin is a most erroneous idea, savouring of the old narrow Jewish way of looking at the question of God's moral government, and lacking altogether in the Christian view of suffering. For Christianity looks upon suffering as one of the Divine agencies for bringing out in the face of humanity the sweet pure image of the Son of Man.

But besides this, talk of this kind does not touch the main question after all. It might be very well in a world, if such a world were possible, where men

<sup>1</sup> John ix. 2.

lived as individual units, separated from one another, and having no influence one on another. But in a world like ours, amid all the complexities of social life, it is worse than useless to attempt to appraise the quantity of each man's sin from the quantity of each man's suffering. For, as a matter of fact, a very large part of our suffering comes to us relatively, through those with whom we are connected in one way or another, without any occasion or any fault of our own. What are we to say of the case in which consumptive parents hand on the dread disease to their innocent offspring? What are we to say of the case in which a father's crime involves his family in ruin and disgrace? What are we to say of the case in which, through the bankruptcy of his employer, a man after many years' faithful service is cast adrift upon the labour market, and forced to stand all the day idle because no man will hire him? In none of these cases, and in a thousand others, is the suffering the fault of the sufferer. What is even more, Christ himself has most forcibly and earnestly repudiated any such mistaken method of reckoning. For when he was told of those Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, and of those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, he cautioned his informants against thinking that these men were sinners above all other men, either in Galilee or in Jerusalem, and that the catastrophes which had cut them off were the consequences, at least the immediate consequences, of their sins.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Luke xiii. 1-5.

Now it seems that these thoughts point out the right direction in which to look for an answer to our question, Whence does suffering arise? They show us with tolerable plainness that suffering is the outcome of the working of natural laws, over which we have indeed a partial, but by no means a full, control. Nature has no pet children. With her there is no respect of persons. The blindness of the man born blind was the result of some purely natural cause; and the moral character of his parents had nothing at all to do with his affliction. The falling of the tower in Siloam was due to something that could perfectly well be explained, if it could be found out; and the eighteen persons whom it crushed to death might equally well have been good men or bad men, as far as their unhappy fate was concerned. A steamboat explosion occurs in accordance with the known laws that relate to the nature of steam; and it is quite as fatal to the philanthropist who happens to be on board as to the man who is going away from his country to escape from the hands of the law. If a Christian man's house is badly drained, the typhoid fever that seizes on him and his family is a quite natural consequence; he is no better off in respect of the disease than if he were the greatest scoundrel in the neighbourhood. Suffering, be it repeated, personal and relative alike, is the outcome of the working of natural laws over which our control is only partial. Those laws are guilty of no favouritism. Their kingdom rules over all, over the good and over the evil alike;



all men are in the same position with regard to them.

Of course by these remarks it is not meant that, when suffering does come, the good man, the man of moral life, the man of practical piety, has not flowing into him, even from outward sources, alleviations of his suffering which the evil, the immoral, the irreligious man has not, or has in only a very small degree. It would not be in accordance with acknowledged facts if it were said that the man whose moral conduct has been good is not a great deal better off as regards his bodily constitution than the man whose moral conduct has been loose. The man of pure life, of temperate habits, is much more likely to recover from an attack of disease, or from the effects of an accident, than the man who has undermined his constitution by indulgence in intemperance and vice. Even while the affliction is upon them both, the former is much more likely to have less actual suffering than the latter. For "godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come."<sup>8</sup> In the same way, if a man has tried to carry out what has been well and truly called the "golden rule;" if he has done to others as he would that others should do to him; if he has been charitable and sympathetic and brotherly when all went well with him, he will find that, sorrow having fallen upon him, in bereavement, or reverses of fortune, or sickness, he is then a great deal better off than he would be

<sup>8</sup> 1 Timothy iv. 8.

if he had been a man of loveless thoughts and selfish nature. Even amongst men whose lives are not confessedly the lives of true disciples of Jesus, there is yet a certain blessed law of recompense by which kindness meets with a like return. Much more with a man who earnestly tries to live the Christian life will this law of recompense deal bountifully; for he will find his sufferings, when they come upon him, lessened in their otherwise bitter and crushing force by the responsive affection and the soothing sympathy of his brother men. So true is it that in keeping God's commandments there is great reward.

Nevertheless, it is equally true that suffering comes to all alike, to the good and to the evil, to the servants of Christ and to the slaves of self, to the children in whom the Divine likeness is growing to ever greater perfection and to those in whom it is scarcely if at all traceable under the blots and blurs of sin. "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."<sup>4</sup> "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay."

Now, it would seem that it is just because of the universal visitation of sorrow, because good men and wicked men alike are included in its sweep, that the voice of nature is dumb when we come to ask her the meaning of suffering. This is precisely the point where enquirers have been baffled as one after another they have tried to solve the whole matter. If good men were without exception exempt from

<sup>4</sup> Job v. 7.

suffering, and evil men incurred calamity after calamity, the question would be clear. All would seem to be consistent, to accord with our ideas of the fitness of things. If, on the other hand, good men incurred calamity after calamity, and evil men were exempt from suffering, there would still seem to be a system and an order about the matter, although the principle on which the system was based might seem to be a strange and mysterious one. But when we find it as it is, with suffering coming alike to all, we scarcely know what to say. We almost feel that silence is the truest wisdom.

An appeal to nature can give us no information. With regard to suffering itself, she has perhaps something to tell us. She may point to the winter time as a needful precursor of summer. She may show us that the rain is as needful to the grass and the flowers and the fruits of the earth as are smiling skies and the ripening sun. She may bid us look at storms as essential to the clearing of the air overcharged with sultry heat and noisome vapours. She may show us that between night and day, darkness and light, there is a relation as beautiful as it is necessary. She may tell us that fire expels the dross from the molten mass in the fining pot. But all these indications are only dim hints after all. They point, so far as they go, to suffering as a means of discipline, but they do no more. They do not tell us why the good suffer with the evil. They do not bring us near to the "God who comforteth those that are cast down." They do not do much to correct the dark mistrust,

amounting almost to atheism in some cases, that arises from a view of human misery. When sorrow overshadows us, we want some clearer and more constant light. When suffering brings the silence as of death into the stricken heart, we want a voice alike more tender and less faltering. We want a message with less philosophy and with more religion, a Divine religion, coming to us from above; for the religion of nature, coming to us from round about us, cannot explain the deep secrets and mysteries of suffering. Where can we get what we want? The voice of Scripture answers our question: "Is any among you suffering? Let him pray." That is the full and final word. Suffering does its work when it impels the soul to God. Suffering fulfils its ministry when, though its garb be sable and its countenance be sad, it leads the human spirit to the Father.

Prayer, then, by which we are to understand not so much petition as communion, not so much an asking for this or that as a lifting up of the soul to God, becomes the antidote of suffering. Now, this is not the case on account of any power that prayer may possess tending to remove the outward causes of suffering. Not from that source does prayer get its highest efficacy. Prayer, as Christ taught us to pray, was not intended to puff men up with the idea that by it they can counterwork the working of law. Rather is prayer permitted us that on its soft, white, swift angel-wing we may lift ourselves up to the Father.

Even supposing that every time a Christian man

is in suffering, it were within his power by means of prayer to remove the causes of his suffering, it is difficult to see that he would gain much by the arrangement. For, in the first place, he would virtually acknowledge that the Father had made a mistake in permitting the suffering to come to him, and that for his part he is quite as well without it. As a Christian man, he would surely admit that his whole life and every part of it are under the care and guidance of the Father, and that He has no other end in view for it or any other life than to raise it to its true level, and to develop it to its full destiny. Thus it follows that, if the Father has permitted the suffering, designing to use it for His own wise and loving purpose, and the man meanwhile wants to remove the suffering far away, in this instance, at least, he would as good as confess that Omniscience was in error, and that the child knew better than the Father what is really good for him. In this way prayer, the highest exercise of which the human spirit is capable, would be degraded into a polite way of contradicting the Wisdom which guides the universe.

Moreover, in the second place, the man who should pray his sufferings away from him would never be able to enjoy the peace of Christ, nor to enter into the spirit of Christ. He would never be able to apprehend what it is in the religion of Christ that makes life worth living, ennobles it, lifts it up from a grovelling dependence upon outward conditions to a Divine self-sufficiency in which an everlasting spring of blessedness wells up from the clear still depths within the soul. For the peace of

Christ, which he left as a fair legacy to his disciples, is something that is superior to the man's surroundings, something that the world can neither give nor take away, something that comes from within, and casts its light and quietness over the whole range of the outer life. This something is a deep settled conviction that the entire concerns, the whole mass of interests, bodily and spiritual, temporal and eternal, personal and relative, bound up with the individual life, are in the hands and under the care of the Father. Now, a conviction like this, with its attendant peace and joy, suffering is powerless to assault. But if, when suffering comes, the man should endeavour to pray it away, would it not be an acknowledgment of the power of suffering, and therefore a confession that he had not yet got that peace which is superior to suffering, even "the peace of God which passeth all understanding"?

On one occasion, some Greeks, who had come up to the feast at Jerusalem, wanted to see Jesus. When he was told of them, he saw in them the first-fruits of the wide fields of the Gentile peoples that were lying white unto harvest. He saw in them the pledge of his ultimate sovereignty over the whole world. But he saw also that only by the sacrifice of himself could he achieve this sovereignty. The road to universal empire lay over the summit of Calvary. And it was then that he spoke the memorable words about the corn of wheat and his own being lifted up from the earth. The vision of the decease he was about to accomplish burst upon his view; and he said, 'Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say?

"Father, save me from this hour?" No, he could not say that, since, "for this cause," said he, "came I unto this hour." What, then, should he say? "Father, glorify Thy name."<sup>5</sup> That was the true, full response of his soul. He was fortified by the belief that his life was a perfect plan, and that to this hour he had come not by chance, but by a Divine ordaining. He was doing the will of his Father. Then, too, with this belief there was coupled another belief, equally fortifying, that in him the Father could glorify His name. These two beliefs were always with him, so that at the last, in presence of Gethsemane and the Cross, he could yet say, "I have glorified Thee on the earth. I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do."<sup>6</sup> Fortified thus, what was suffering to Christ? Fortified thus, in our little measure, what will suffering be to us? Every hour that we come to, we come to for a Divine cause, not always known to us, but real nevertheless. Every hour that we come to gives us an opportunity of crying to the Father, "Father, glorify Thy name."

In what way, then, does prayer become the antidote of suffering? If it is not given us to pray that the suffering may be taken away, what is the use of prayer?

It is a better use than if we were armed with the power of working miracles, and could mould our circumstances in such a way as that they should be exactly to our liking. For prayer, communion with the Divine, absorption in God, the lifting up of the

<sup>5</sup> John xii. 20-28.

<sup>6</sup> John xvii. 4.

human spirit to its Father, develop the state of heart to which the meaning of suffering is clear, the state of heart for which the blessed ministry of sorrow is not performed in vain, the state of heart to which the Divine secrets are made known, the state of heart in which faith sees that all things are working together for good to those that love God. To pray, when we are suffering, is to refresh our memories with the thought that above it all there is a God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of open eye, and ready ear, and outstretched hand, and tender heart, to whom the cry of the troubled spirit never rises in vain. Independently of His personal presence in the burdened soul, the thought that He is, and that He is what He is, must of itself be a great comfort in times of suffering.

Moreover, if prayer be real, earnest prayer, the prayer of communion in which the whole being rises to God, it has a wonderful power in lifting a man out of himself, in taking his thoughts off himself, in centering them on the vast and the sublime, still more on the sweet and on the tender, in the Christian conception of God. Every nurse knows that a patient's recovery is likely to be more rapid if he can be saved from morbid self-concentration, from adding to disease of body the workings of an anxious mind. Just in the same way, with reverence be it said, James says, "Is any among you suffering? Let him pray." Let him lift himself up to God. Let him forget himself in the Divine. Let his sufferings be lost in the love of the Father. Let him rise into that state of heart in



which the Divine glory shines through all mysteries, and the human will is sweetly absorbed into the will of God. To this state of heart, fostered as well as begotten by communion with God, the Divine secrets are revealed. To it, as to Moses, the Lord will make known His *ways*, His principles of action; while the stubborn and rebellious, the murmuring and the mistrustful, do but see His *acts*. It will be inwardly fortified. It will be raised above dependence on condition; for the peace of Christ will rule in the entire life.

Let the foregoing thoughts be illustrated from human experience. A parent may train his child in one of two ways. He may train him to complete dependence on a stronger will, so that when this stronger will is withdrawn the child's character will collapse, like ivy falling along with the ruined wall or uprooted oak. He may fence him round about with protection against evil; he may provide him in such a way with temporal comforts that the child would not know what to do if he were to lose the enjoyment of them. He may wrap the child round with covering after covering against storms and temptations and trials. As a result, the child will be a moral weakling, a spiritual parasite, all the rest of his days. But the parent, on the other hand, may train his child so as to develop his independence, to bring out his native resources, to fit him, when the transplantation comes, not grievously to suffer by the exchange of the parental garden for the exposed heights of life. As a result, the child will be morally

strong, sturdy, self-reliant, knowing good and evil, and able to weather the trying times that come to all in some degree or other. The lessons taught him by his father will abide when his father is with him no more; the truth fitting him for practical life will stand when the paternal care can take thought for him no longer.

Now, God wants us to be not weaklings, dependent on outward condition for peace and prosperity and joy; but heroes, independent of everything but Himself, strong to suffer, meeting unmoved the ills of life, because He is within us, and pours Himself into our whole spiritual frame. Therefore He develops us by the discipline of suffering, telling us the while that the discipline will work out His own gracious purposes if, when we suffer, we pray. Prayer takes the poison from the arrow-tip; prayer takes the sting from sorrow; prayer prevents the suffering heart from saying, "Can God be God if I am oppressed like this?" and teaches it to say instead, "Father, glorify Thy name." This is the triumph of faith; this is the victory of prayer. "Is any among you suffering? Let him pray."

If we are thus minded, we may well count it all joy when we fall into manifold trials. For trials are but the ruffling of the surface of the river by passing gusts; and the knowledge of the Father, and communion with Him, will ensure the strong, noiseless flow of the deep undercurrents that bear us peacefully onward to the ocean of the life that is perfect, infinite, and that endures for evermore.

## Human Sin and Divine Forgiveness.

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"And he said, A certain man . . . . . and was lost, and, was found."—*Luke* xv. 11-32.

HUMAN sin and Divine forgiveness are the great subjects suggested by this pearl of parables. Concerning them, we would sit at the feet of Jesus and hear, earnestly and reverently, what he has to say. We may indulge the hope that his words will have a decidedly practical aspect, free from all theological mystery, all useless speculation, all puzzling problems; the hope that they will be of the simplest possible character, so that the wayfaring man though a fool may not err in the broad plain path of the teachings of Christ.

Now, let any man look at this parable of the prodigal son, as we love to call the familiar story, and say whether or not we have just what we want. We might anticipate its simplicity from the character of the class for whose sake chiefly Jesus spoke it. Although he was aiming at a rebuke of the Pharisees and Scribes because they murmured at him, saying, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them," yet it seems that this rebuke was only of a quite secondary and subordinate importance, while the main drift of the story was for those very publicans and sinners whom the Pharisees and

Scribes were sneering at as they drew near to Jesus to hear him. To such a congregation he would naturally speak, on the question of sin and forgiveness, nothing but essential truth, and essential truth in its simplest form. As we glance through the sweet, well-known story in which he conveyed this truth to the minds of his hearers, we see that it contains exactly what we should expect. There are no mysteries of any kind, except the mighty mysteries of sin and love. There are, rather, the two great simple facts of human sin and Divine forgiveness set over against each other in the most striking, vivid, impressive way. There are the two main figures of the prodigal son and his Father. There is the prodigal revolting from the sweet discipline of the Father's home; going into the far-off land and wasting his substance with riotous living; brought to destitution after his mad carousals; coming to his senses amid his rags and his wretchedness; resolving to go to his Father and confess his sins; carrying out his resolution; finally, at home, welcomed, pardoned, restored, and rejoiced over. There is the Father, not remonstrating with his wilful son; giving him the portion of goods that fell to him, without a word of rebuke; watching tenderly for his return, which he felt sure would come to pass some day; going out to meet him as he sees the poor, starving boy while yet a great way off; falling on his neck and kissing him into his restored confidence; taking him home again and making merry over him; glad with an unutterable joy in that his son was dead and is

alive again, was lost and is found. We know the story in its every detail; we know its moral, deep in the history of our own hearts; we know our sin; we know the love of God. When Christ wanted to present the very essence and marrow of the Gospel, this was the way in which he presented it. Nothing could be clearer, nothing could be simpler, and yet nothing could be fuller, nothing could be truer, as setting forth men's sin on the one side and God's forgiveness on the other.

But what is sin? Is it an objective fact, outside of a man, that he can see and feel and handle? No, it is not this. Sin is a principle, a power, an energy, a tendency, which we cannot see any more than we can see gravitation or electricity. We can indeed see and feel the effects of gravitation and of electricity and of sin, but we cannot see and feel the things themselves. In the sublime spectacle of a thunder storm, a vivid flash of lightning almost strikes me blind as it bursts from the black bank of clouds above me. What causes the lightning? Two bodies, full of electricity, meeting in the heavy air, discharging their awful artillery in the swift, intense light, and sending forth the reverberating peals which I hear a few moments after in the thunder. I hear and I see—what? The electricity itself? No, but its effects. Or again, I am walking at the base of a mountain, and a few yards in front of me I see a huge piece of rock come rolling down the steep sides at a rapid pace, till it is stopped by the level of the road. It has been detached by the action of the

weather from its lodging place above, and being loosened, descends in obedience to the law of gravitation. I see—what? The gravitation itself? No, but its effects. Just in the same way, I see ruined lives, wretched homes, withered hopes, degraded characters, immoral morals; men made in the image of God, who, as far as mind and spirit are concerned, have brought themselves down almost to an equality with the brutes; women, whom God meant to live a life like the angels', with every grace of womanhood gone, sunk deep in moral mire. What do I see? Sin itself? No, but the effects of sin. In my own heart I feel wrong desires stirring; in my own mind I feel evil thoughts continually arising; placed in certain circumstances, I feel a strong inclination to do what I know I ought not to do; I feel a harmony between my inward tendencies and the outward circumstances. What do I feel? Sin itself? No, but the effects of sin. Sin is a principle; sin is a state. When I am tempted to do what I know I ought not to do, or to refrain from doing what I know I ought to do, I feel the effects of the principle. When I have yielded to the effects of the principle, having done what I know I ought not to do, or having neglected to do what I know I ought to do, I have brought myself into a state of sin.

We must try carefully to understand this idea of sin, because it is the only idea of sin that is in harmony with the deep facts of our experience, the deep truths of the Bible, and the deepest and worthiest aspect of the work of our Saviour Jesus Christ. To

look upon his death as a sort of fund out of which we may pay the debts that we have incurred in the sight of God and of that moral law which is holy and just and good, is not the Scriptural as it is certainly not the philosophical way of treating the question. Rather is it a conception of the facts of the case founded upon one or two merely figurative Scriptures in the Old Testament, and in the parable of the two debtors,<sup>1</sup> and perhaps in the Lord's Prayer, in the New Testament. But in all these cases, the figure is used only to give picturesque effect to the truth of the awfulness of the Divine hatred of sin. Attention is called to this mode of representing the matter, because those who take this view of sin carry out the figure in viewing the effects of the death of Christ as the cancelling of a debt, as the erasure of the black records which bear witness in the book of God to the number of a man's transgressions.

Now this may be a vivid way of illustrating human sin and Divine forgiveness to the minds of children and ignorant people; but it is certainly not a lofty view of these deep realities; it is not the truest view; it is not the view which was prominent and foremost in the Saviour's method of treating them. What was his view? What else but that sin is a principle, a power, obedience to which brings a man into a state of bondage, the worst of all bondage, bondage to self, which is only another way of speaking of bondage to sin? What, moreover, was Christ's view of the effects of his death upon human sin?

<sup>1</sup> Luke vii. 41, 42.

What else than that his death gives to every believing heart a principle of everlasting life, superior in its energy to the principle of sin, a spiritual power stronger than the power of sin and overcoming it; a principle and a power, obedience to which brings a man into a state of liberty, the liberty of holiness, so that he becomes the free-man of God? What did Christ say to Nicodemus in the solemnity and stillness of the night, as the timid disciple and the great Teacher sat discussing the mysteries of the kingdom of God? As far as we know, it was Christ's first plain statement as to the nature and purpose of his mission and death. What was it? "And as Moses "lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so "must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whosoever "believeth may in him have eternal life. For God "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten "Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not "perish, but have eternal life." <sup>2</sup> Christ frequently represented the character of a disciple of his as one in which the lower, earthly, sensual nature is subdued and directed by the higher, divine, spiritual nature, which is made alive and active by the communicated power of the life of Jesus, by the entrance into the inner being of a man of the spirit of Jesus. With more truth than Moses could he say to men when he left them, as Moses said to the people of Israel before his decease, "See, I have set before you life "and good, and death and evil." Christ was always setting forth the solemn fact that between these

<sup>2</sup> John iii. 14-16.



two the choice of every man must lie. Sin, then, is a principle, and obedience to sin brings us into a state of bondage to sin. Those are the facts on one side of the question. Holiness is a principle, and obedience to holiness brings us into the liberty of holiness, which is only another way of saying, into a state of forgiveness. Those are the facts on the other side of the question.

But there is something more than even this. To break the power of the principle of sin within us is not the whole question involved in the work of salvation. To put away the burden of past transgressions which weighs heavily on the spirit and conscience just awakening to a new and holy life, is not of itself enough. For we need salvation from the sinful habits, not so much of word and deed, as of thought, so that within and without we may be made pure and holy, brave and true. In every sin that a man commits there is a power which confirms within him the habit of sinning; it encourages his evil tendencies; it enfeebles the authority of his conscience; it hardens him against those promptings to good of which even the most depraved nature has a share. Habits and character alike are formed by the doing of single, successive acts. Indeed, character itself is little if anything else than a bundle of habits brought together in one individual. To say that a man has a cautious character is about the same thing as to say that he has the habit, fostered through a lapse of time, of looking carefully and in all its bearings, at a plan of action before he finally commits himself to it. To say

that a man has a generous character is about the same thing as to say that he has cultivated and formed the habit of generosity. Of course, something must always be allowed for what seems to be innate differences, born with the man, and adhering to him more or less closely throughout his life. One man, for instance, has a much more sympathetic, emotional nature than another. But as a matter of fact these differences do not count for much. For nearly anything in the way of character may be formed and produced by education. One child you may educate to be a thief. His brother you may educate to be scrupulously honest. In any case, habits which make up, at the same time that they manifest, character, are formed by single acts. Therefore, as regards the subject before us, it is clear that we need to be saved from the evil habits, the sinful character, which single trespasses, continued yielding to the principle of sin, have formed. Commit one sin, and it will be easier to commit the next. Give way to one temptation, and the next will find us less prepared to meet it, less strong to overcome it. The principle of sin within us must be destroyed; the principle of good within us must be made alive, active, powerful, victorious. These are the moral experiences we require.

Now, it is the breaking away from the old life of moral destitution, and spiritual poverty, and evil surroundings, that is so beautifully illustrated by the parable of the prodigal son. The story sets before us in vivid, pictorial form the coming back from the state of bondage under the proud dominion of self,

from the galling slavery of sin, from the accumulated power of sinful habits, to the love and light, the reconciliation and loyalty, which are secured to those who return to God, their tender, patient, pleading Father. There is the resolve to arise and go to the Father; the carrying out of the resolve; the forgiveness; the restoration. But it is clear that, on the father's side, forgiveness of his prodigal son was the chief thing, the cardinal point of the whole matter; just as on the prodigal's side, the return to his father was the chief thing, the cardinal point. Everywhere in the teachings of Christ, as in the Bible generally, forgiveness is presented side by side with repentance as the Divine response to the human confession of sin. Let us see if we can make the idea of forgiveness clear.

It should be remembered that the great subject of forgiveness can never be understood apart from the equally great subject of law. When a man is forgiven, we must always take into account, in order to comprehend what it is he has been forgiven, the law against which he has sinned. The law may be arbitrary, without any foundation than the mere capricious will of the maker of the law; or it may be holy and just and good, based upon and leading to right principles of action. But yet forgiveness always entails some kind of law.

Now, we find running throughout the universe, as far as we are acquainted with it, certain great fixed laws, the laws of nature, armed with severe sanctions. There is, for example, a law that the human system,

muscles and nerves, organs and brain, requires its due share of rest to keep it in vigour. A man of business is a slave to his business. He toils early and late and all day long, and gives himself much less repose than is really necessary for him. He never takes a holiday. He never gives himself up to the soothing, softening influences of home. By-and-bye he begins to lose his sleep. His appetite fails. His nerves become irritable. His memory is less retentive than it used to be. His head gives him continual pain. What is the matter? He has been breaking nature's law with regard to the bodily and mental need of rest, and he is suffering the consequences. Nature is breaking down her disobedient son. In effect she is saying to him, "You have been sinning against me. As long as you continue in your present course I am at war with you. I cannot forgive you, I cannot be reconciled to you, till you acknowledge that you have been doing wrong, and give up your sin. Leave your work for a few months. Get miles away from your counting-house; abandon letters and newspapers and cash-books. Give yourself up to entire idleness. Do as I tell you; and then I will do the best I can to repair your outworn system and build it up anew."

Now, this is a very simple illustration of the truth to be enforced, but it will do for our purpose. The truth is that forgiveness for sinning against natural laws is impossible till the man who has been breaking them puts himself into harmony with the laws, that is to say, till he comes into that condition on which

forgiveness is alone possible. Let him do this, and forgiveness is certain. There is no caprice, there is nothing arbitrary in the administration of natural law.

In regard to the laws of the spiritual life, of the moral universe, precisely the same state of things prevails. They also are without caprice; they also are not arbitrary. Can a man sin against his warning conscience and be happy? Can he stifle the poor spirit that cries out within him, in the thick muffling-cloths of sense and sin, and not feel that he is a red-handed murderer? Can a man resolutely set himself against whatever is best and noblest, truest and most divine in him, by abandoning himself to whatever is low and animal and coarse, and expect to have the peace that passes all understanding? He cannot. If he thinks he can, he is as foolish as if he put his hand in the fire and thought it would not be burned. When a man has trespassed, then, and becomes conscious of his trespasses, conscious of his breach of the laws of the spiritual life, conscious that he has sinned against God, the yearning tender Father of the prodigal child, what is he to do to secure forgiveness? The answer is as plain as can be. He is to get into harmony with the broken laws by trespassing against which he has been brought into the bondage from which Christ is to save us. He is to come into reconciliation with the laws, that is to say, with Him who made them and gave them, and in that condition forgiveness will be possible, nay, forgiveness will be certain. He will hear the Father say to the servants, "Bring forth quickly the best robe

“and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found.”

Having thus endeavoured to see what sin is, and what forgiveness is, and what kind of a deliverance, what kind of a salvation we feel we need, and the Bible and Jesus Christ tell us that we need, let us now endeavour to see in what way salvation is accomplished for us. If we turn to the teachings of Jesus upon this point, and humbly learn what they have to say to us, there can be no necessity to misunderstand the matter at all. The words of Christ himself when he made the first statement as to the nature and object of his death to Nicodemus, may again be quoted. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,” he said, “even so must the Son of man be lifted up.” The object of this lifting up was that those who believe might have eternal life. When he was instituting the Lord’s Supper, as we call it, he broke bread, and said as he gave it to his disciples, “This is my body which is given for you.” And when, afterwards, he handed them the cup with the wine in it, he said, “This cup is the new covenant, in my blood which is shed for you.”<sup>3</sup> On another occasion he said, “The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”<sup>4</sup> Once again, when the Greeks

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 24, 25.

<sup>4</sup> John vi. 51.

who came to the feast wanted to see him and became to him the first-fruits of the outlying heathen world, he said, as the vision of the decease he was about to accomplish to secure the return of the heathen world to God, its Father, rose vividly before his mind, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me." "This he said," the Evangelist adds, "signifying what death he should die."<sup>5</sup> These passages are only a few of many others that might be quoted. But they all go to show that between Christ's mission as a Saviour and the death by which that mission was completed and crowned, so far as regards Christ's earthly life, there is a deep, inherent, intimate connexion. Between our sin and his blood there is a strong bond of union, mysterious indeed, but yet able to be understood by us, at least as far as its elementary aspects are concerned.

But what do we mean when we speak of the blood of Christ? What is the meaning of this phrase, a phrase which, in the history of Christian thought, has given rise to almost endless controversy? It is needless to say that common sense excludes the interpretation that gives to the expression a material cast. Whatever we may say of the sacred mystery of Christ's nature, the most rigid defenders of his divinity will admit that his body at least was human. It was subject to hunger and thirst, to

<sup>5</sup> John xii. 24, 32.

weariness, to pain, and finally to death. Therefore the crimson drops that fell from the pierced hands and feet, and from the thorn-crowned brow; the stream that gushed from his side when the Roman soldier thrust in his spear, were inherently human, not inherently divine.

When, then, the Saviour and his Apostles spoke of his blood, they did not mean what is material. What did they mean? In reply to this question, let it be said that we are to regard the natural, the material blood of Jesus as the sign, the symbol of the life by sacrificing which he truly and inwardly becomes our Redeemer. We are dealing here not with literal facts, but with spiritual figures. Christ shed his blood in token that he poured out his soul unto death, and this visible sign was selected by himself and his Apostles as the fittest expression of the sublime yet hidden reality. In the Old Testament we find the opinion current that the blood is the seat of the vitality of the body. "The life of the flesh is in the blood."<sup>6</sup> The Jews deemed it unlawful to eat blood: "flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat;" "only be sure that thou eat not the blood; for the blood is the life, and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh."<sup>7</sup> The efficacy of their sacrifices was supposed to consist in the shedding of the blood, that is, the yielding up of the life of the victims. These thoughts must hold a chief place in any discussion as to the meaning of the blood

<sup>6</sup> Levit. xvii. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Deut. xii. 23.



of Christ. The blood of Christ is the symbol of his life. To be cleansed from sin by his blood is to come into purifying contact, morally and spiritually, with the blessed influences of his perfect life.

But this is not the whole truth, although it is a considerable part of it. For the blood of Christ is the symbol not only of his life, but of his life sacrificed. The phrase suggests to us not only his beautiful career of self-denying service, of benevolent activity, from the time when he first began to be about his Father's business till the time when by wicked hands he was crucified and slain, but also the pathetic close of that career when, amid darkness and agony, the perfect life, in all the fulness of its forces, in all the liberality of its love, gave itself away. The life was in the blood, and the shedding of the blood was the sacrifice of the life. It was given to humanity to be the source of all that ever afterwards should be best and noblest and most divine among men, to be a fountain where sin and uncleanness, by sanctifying contact, might cleanse themselves away. It was given to God to be humanity's offering of sweet-smelling savour to Him, to be an abiding link of love between the Divine and the human, the yearning Father and His wandering children, for evermore. The blood of Christ, then, is the symbol of his life and of his life sacrificed.

Now the blood of Christ, that is to say, his life and his life sacrificed, is the great means by which we are brought into the state in which forgiveness is secured to us. For in the cross of Christ we see what sin can do; what evil human passion can

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do; what hatred of the pure, the true, the lovely, the Divine, as embodied in Christ, can do; and this sight, seen by the eye of faith, impressed deep in the depths of the heart, is God's agent for bringing men into disgust with their sins. In the cross of Christ we see, moreover, what love, Divine, incarnate love, can do; for there, as amid the weird darkness and the clamours of the pitiless crowd, Christ prayed for his crucifiers and bore away the sins of the world; as amid pain throbbing in his body, and the sorrows of humanity weighing on his soul, the perfect life ebbed itself away; there, on the cross, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses."<sup>8</sup> If the sight of what human sin did to Christ does not make us hate our sin, if the sight of what Divine love did for us in Christ does not make us love God, even our Father, what else can? Nothing, one would think, in heaven or on earth. But in Christ, in his temper of purity and truth and love, in his thoughts about God and man and sin, "in Him we have our redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses."<sup>9</sup> When our trespasses are forgiven, the bondage they beget of necessity vanishes. The chains of evil habits begin to dissolve; the feeling of guilt disappears before the Divine pardon; the feeling of weakness yields before the strength of Christ's life within us. For we have come into his spirit; and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Cor. v. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Col. i. 14.

## Morality and Self-Surrender.

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“He must increase, but I must decrease.”—*John* iii. 30.

THESE are the words of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ. They occur in a short discourse to which John gave utterance when some of his disciples, perhaps jealous for their master's fame, came and told him of the success which was attending the ministry of the new Teacher to whom a little while before John had borne witness. “All men,” they said, speaking of Jesus, “all men come to him.”<sup>1</sup> It was only natural that they should feel a little annoyance at the way in which the work of John seemed to be cast into the shade by the new light which had arisen and which was daily gathering intensity and lustre. For that light, if it did not appear to be indebted for its creation to John, at least owed its recognition to him; and now it was threatening him with eclipse. It was only right that John's followers should take a deep interest in the matter. They were under great obligations to him; for it was his voice, stern and searching, that had first awakened them from the sleep of their religious formality, and urged them to repentance and the washing away of their sins.

But if John's disciples felt annoyance, he himself felt none. If they were jealous for him, he was not

<sup>1</sup> *John* iii. 26.

jealous for himself. He replies to them by an exposition of the relations subsisting between himself and Jesus Christ, the greater than he. Those relations he sets forth under the guise of the familiar imagery of an Eastern marriage. He compares Jesus to the bridegroom, and himself to the friend of the bridegroom. The office of the friend of the bridegroom was an important one. He was entrusted with the preliminaries of the wedding. He arranged the contract between the intending parties. He acted for the bridegroom during the ceremony of betrothal. He ordered and presided at the festivities of the nuptial day itself. In proportion to the social position and wealth and influence of the bridegroom was the honour of the position of the friend of the bridegroom. In the joy of the bridegroom his friend rejoiced. Throughout the whole affair there was none gayer and brighter than the friend of the bridegroom, who gave proof of his friendship by his sympathetic joy.

Now, this is exactly John's idea of his own office as a religious teacher in Israel at this time. In his thoughts, Christ is the bridegroom; the bride is the Church of God in Israel, comprising all the pure and loyal and loving hearts who are willing to receive him. Christ and they are predisposed to each other, with a holier and devouter predisposition than ever brought together brave man and tender maiden, and bound their hearts in inseparable union. John acknowledges that he is but the friend of the bridegroom who has arranged the betrothal and prepared the bride for the reception of her coming spouse. Now

Christ is near at hand. Behold, the bridegroom cometh! Throngs crowd to hear and see and welcome him. Do John's disciples find in all this matter for regret and food for jealousy? Do they feel envy and annoyance on his account? If they do, they greatly mistake his own view of his office. This meeting of Christ and souls loyal to the truth is just what John has been labouring for. It is to him the fruition of all the hopes which he has cherished from the first dawn of the conviction of what his work in Israel was to be. This prospect, now on the point of realization, has been the animating force of the stern sad ministry of which the wilderness was the theatre. In the bosom of John there is no regret, but rather the rejoicing of a life that has not lived in vain and of a work which has achieved its end. He is glad that his labours are almost over. There is no room for disappointment that they grow pale before the brightness of the labours of another and greater teacher who is beginning to succeed him.

Then in closing he sounds the note of his own retirement. "He must increase, but I must decrease." The office of the friend of the bridegroom ceases when the marriage is accomplished. This is necessary in the nature of things. The very end for which he undertook the office being attained, he must now disappear, at least in the capacity that he has been serving in. In John's application of the figure, the same rule holds good. He had come for a special purpose. The purpose was achieved. Now he must withdraw from the scene. "He must increase, but I must decrease."

John had the rare faculty of knowing when his work was done. He was like a skilled artist who has painted a picture which, as one looks at, one feels that another stroke of the brush upon it would take from and not add to the picture's perfect beauty. In service in the Christian Church, it is a great thing to know what we have to do. It is a greater thing to know when we have done it. Blessed is the man who, when the time comes for him to be nothing and to do nothing, can calmly submit. He is nobler in his submission than ever he was in his activity. For he gives proof of having achieved the greatest of all conquests, even the conquest of himself.

Such a man was John the Baptist. Was it an honour to him when Jerusalem and all Judæa went out to him in the wilderness, confessed their sins at his preaching, and washed them away in the baptismal purifying? It was a greater honour to him, an honour that shines brightly still, when, as he saw the growing success of Jesus, he calmly said, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

It is not with John as an individual, however, that we are more especially concerned now. In this essay I purpose viewing both Jesus and him as representatives respectively of the two principles which gave the tone and colour to each of their ministries. Those principles are, first, morality, and secondly, self-surrender, of which the one lay at the root of John's life and teaching, and the other at the root of Christ's. We are to see why, in the progress of the religious nature, alike in the heart of a man and in the nations

of the world at large, morality, while it precedes self-surrender, must nevertheless give way before it; why morality must decrease and self-surrender must increase in the course of the coming of the kingdom of Heaven. In other words, John must come before Jesus; the baptism with water before the baptism with fire. The ministry of John has a place in the Divine order quite as much as the ministry of Jesus; and yet John's ministry of morality must yield to Jesus' ministry of self-surrender. Morality is but the prelude to self-surrender; it must cease before the arising of the eternal harmonies that vibrate through the soul that has learned the secret of Jesus, and has given itself up in sweet abandonment to God.

First, we must ask what is the meaning of the words morality and self-surrender when used in connection with the religious life? This question can best be answered by an appeal to the ministry both of John and of Jesus, by which we may discover the essential truth that lay at the bottom of each.

Now, when John first came to Israel as a preacher of righteousness, his first call to the people was a call to repentance. He found them for the most part asleep in the hollowness of religious formality. Their leaders and teachers interpreted the law in such a way as that, while the small and comparatively unimportant matters received a great deal of attention, the weighty and all-important matters were shamefully neglected. In the words of Christ, their religion almost consisted in straining out gnats, in filtering out through linen what they drank, that they might

not drink any impurities; while all the time they were swallowing camels, committing and sanctioning great moral iniquities, of which the camel, a large and ceremonially unclean animal, is taken as the symbol.<sup>2</sup> To people in this condition, the preaching of John the Baptist was very needful. "Repent," he cried, "and bring forth fruits meet for repentance." It was no use for the Scribes and the Pharisees and the people generally to pride themselves on being the descendants of Abraham. They were greatly and grievously mistaken if they thought that, on that account, they were excused from the obligations of the moral law. Rather let them turn about from their present evil way, for it could only lead them to death. Rather let them, in a godly life, free from shams and hypocrisies, show by their works that the reformation was real, and that religion had become with them a thing of deed and truth and not of word alone.

Accordingly, when different people asked him what they should do in obedience to his teaching, that they might work the works of God, his answers had all a practical moral tone about them. The common people were told to be charitable toward the needy. The publicans, that is the tax-gatherers, were told to extort no more in their collections than that which was appointed to them. The soldiers on service were commanded to do violence to no man, and not to exact anything wrongfully, and to be content with their wages.<sup>3</sup> These answers

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxiii. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Luke iii. 11-14.



to the enquiries which were made of him as a new prophet and religious teacher, are doubtless given us as a fair sample of John's doctrine. He himself quite admitted it was only of a partial and imperfect character. It was all right as far as it went; but, compared with what was coming from his greater successor, the Christ whom he announced, it was not the whole full-orbed truth, but only part of the truth. Yet he could say no more. He could not anticipate the Christ. He could prepare for him, and that was what he was doing. To lead the people into all truth was the work of him who is himself the truth. Still we can see the character of John's mission and teaching. He gave great prominence to the full and faithful discharge of moral duties, insisting on the fact that the Divine judgment would go upon the principle whether the fruit of the tree were good or no; in other words, that men would be approved or condemned according to their life and conduct. Morality, duty, the outward and social bearing of religion, rather than its inward personal bearing—these were the points to which the Baptist gave the first place in the sermons which Jerusalem and Judæa went out to hear.

Further, as John was the minister of morality, Jesus Christ was the minister of self-surrender. What does this mean? Now, anyone who knows even a little of the workings of his own heart is quite aware that the first great foe which he has to overcome in the moral conflict is the foe of self. In spite of the

self-unconsciousness of ideal childhood, we soon give evidence of the power of self; we seek our own interests, and are disposed to disregard, or at least to think lightly of, the interests of others, but at the same time are anxious that others should not neglect us. In the growth of the science of astronomy, the notion prevailed for centuries that the earth was the centre of the solar system, and that the sun and the moon, the stars and the planets, were made solely for the benefit of its inhabitants. It was only after long and careful enquiry that this notion, which we now regard as so childish that we wonder how anybody could ever have entertained it, was finally banished from the minds of men. Now we quite understand that the earth is only one member, and by no means the most important member, in a vast system, and is only an atom when compared with the mighty and far-reaching systems scattered through the infinities of space.

In the growth of the human mind a development of the same kind takes place. In childhood, our views of the world are extremely limited; their narrowness begets, when the innocence and self-unconsciousness of earliest life has passed away, the character of self-centredness. We become, each to himself, a pivot on which the whole universe of things turns, and round which it revolves. It is only after many bitter struggles and painful disciplines, which go along with the expansion of our minds, that we begin to understand our place in the world, and find out that each of us is only one amongst

millions of beings like ourselves, to each of whom his own interests are quite as dear and quite as important as our own are to us.

Now, Jesus Christ came to teach and to illustrate the blessedness of the surrender of self, the absolute necessity of the surrender of self if we would be his true disciples. He taught the subordination of our own interests to the interests of others. John taught charity, but not at the sacrifice of self. "He that hath two coats," he said, "let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath food, let him do likewise." "Give of your abundance" was the command of John. But Jesus inculcated charity at the expense of self. "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you. . . . If any man would go to law with thee and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. . . . As ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them."<sup>4</sup> In fact, that disciple who drank deepest of his Master's spirit, and most faithfully reproduced his Master's doctrine, said, speaking of Christ's self-sacrifice for us, "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."<sup>5</sup> Put in a few plain words, this is the difference between John's exposition of charity and Christ's exposition of it. You have bread and want it. Your neighbour has no bread and wants it. "If you have more than you want," says John, "give what is over to your neighbour." "No," says Christ, "give your neighbour even that which you want yourself." This is the ministration of self-surrender.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. v. 40.

<sup>5</sup> 1 John iii. 16.

But in the teaching of Christ the subject has another and a higher aspect. Self-surrender towards man is good, self-surrender towards God is better. If there is one thing to which Jesus gave greater prominence than he gave to another, it is the necessity of the absolute devotion of heart and life and will to God, our Father. This is the point on which turns all the difference between a sinful soul and a soul that is striving after holiness. When Christ depicted a sinful soul, how did he do it? He drew the portrait of a prodigal son, tired of his father's restraint, who leaves his home and goes away into a far-off land, and there wastes his substance with riotous living. When he depicted a soul awaking from the sleep of sin, seeing things in their true light, restored to the condition it had foolishly abandoned, how did he do it? He drew the picture of the same son coming back to his father; desiring to be near him, even though only as a servant; content with his rule; happy again in his love. Self is surrendered to God. And with regard to the engrossments of the passing world, the claims of this busy life, how Christ dealt with them is quite clear. "Live for God," he said, "and seek him in all things. Then all will be well. You shall not be entangled as in a net with the cares of the world, or the deceitfulness of riches, or the pangs of poverty tempting to despair. Your Heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of." As to trial, he himself is his own best commentary on his teaching of self-surrender. "The cup which

“my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”<sup>6</sup> In the agony in the garden we find the same spirit rising uppermost in the dread soul-conflict which he was undergoing. “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.”<sup>7</sup> This was the self-surrender which Christ taught, and which he himself so perfectly and beautifully exemplified.

This part of the subject has been treated somewhat at length because it is important that we should gain a clear idea of the character of John's ministry and of Christ's ministry respectively. John's ministry, as we have seen, was one of morality; Christ's ministry was one of self-surrender. John concerned himself mainly with duties, moral duties; Christ dealt rather with the inward sources whence flow those streams of energy that issue in the performance of duties. John's tendency was towards the social aspect of religion, the aspect of religion that affects others. Christ enforced rather the personal aspect, the aspect that is turned inwards towards a man's own self.

Now, although John's ministry, the ministry of morality, was only preparatory to Christ's, we shall make a great mistake if we think that it was not necessary either in the state of the Jewish nation at the time when John appeared in its midst, or in the hearts of men now. The fact is that morality must as a rule precede self-surrender. We are not ready for the pure, sweet freedom of self-surrender until we have been prepared for it by the restraint of morality. The

<sup>6</sup> John xviii. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. xxvi. 39.

religious nature has to be trained around a supporting framework before it can be left to grow alone in accordance with the perfect law of liberty. For how does a wise parent bring up his child? He bids the child do this, or abstain from doing that. In many things the child cannot see the reason for the commands or the prohibitions; and it would be very little good for the parent to attempt to explain the reasons, because the child could not apprehend them and feel their force. He must obey just because it is the will of his wise and loving parent that he should obey. His parent is to him for the time being the embodiment of the moral law. He is the stem around which the clinging tendrils of the child's life entwine themselves and gain support in the embrace. By-and-bye, the child's moral perceptions will have grown and widened and become clearer. Then he may be left to himself to act upon his own responsibility and in accord with the dictates of his own conscience. Restraint becomes in time the author of liberty.

This is pretty much what Paul meant when, unfolding the plan of God's training of the moral nature of man, he said, "The law was our schoolmaster to 'bring us to Christ.'"<sup>8</sup> It is quite true that the law fulfils this office partly by showing us our inability to keep the commands it lays upon us, and to justify ourselves by its works; seeing which we come to the ever-flowing channel of the grace of God as manifested in Christ, for spiritual strength and energy. But on the other hand, the very fact that, as Paul says, "the law

<sup>8</sup> Gal. iii. 24.

"is holy and just and good," prepares us to appreciate the holiness and justice and goodness which are embodied in God and reached through His self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Morality educates us up to self-surrender. John prepares us for Christ. The friend of the bridegroom leads us to the bridegroom himself. If this be so, we can see the usefulness of all agencies which may not indeed have a distinctively religious character, but yet have moral tendencies and aims. There are those who foolishly shake their heads at education, and working-men's institutes, and temperance societies, and many other kinds of good and beneficent instrumentalities. Religion, they say, must be the great spring of all reformation; anything less can do no good. But, on the contrary, whatever has moral tendencies is preparatory to religion. We readily admit that the religion of Jesus, rightly understood, is alone the way into the kingdom of Heaven; yet many things may lead men where they shall not be far from the kingdom, and may ease their entrance into it. Surely if we can make people wise and honest and pure and sober, we are doing something towards making in the desert a highway for our God. We are friends of the bridegroom, and are bringing hearts to him.

Yet, to use again the words of the Baptist, "He must increase, but I must decrease." The ministry of morality is only preparatory, only temporary; and must in the end yield, as it is yielding now, to the ministry of self-surrender. There are several reasons why, in the nature of things, this should be as it is.

One reason is that, as already indicated, the ministry of morality is suited only to children, to people of childish and unspiritual minds, to the human race in the days of its youth. To all people, indeed, it has an office to perform, but not, as we have seen, a permanent office. The law of Moses came at the right time in the history of the world. We cannot fancy its being given to men now in the nineteenth century. We cannot picture its rites and ceremonies, its commands and prohibitions, being imposed upon us as binding now. Nor can we fancy the whole of religion as consisting in morality, in giving away one coat if we have two, in doing violence to no man, and being content with our wages. These things are a part, and an important part, of religion, but are a long way from being the whole of it. They were all right for an ignorant and unspiritual people, and for the childhood of the world. But without arrogating too much for ourselves, may we not say that a great part of the race has grown out of that, and wants something more spiritual, the spirituality of self-surrender?

A second reason is that the religion of morality must always, to a greater or less extent, be an enforced religion, leaving no scope for the free and spontaneous outgoings of the spiritual nature into faith, hope, and love. We all know which kind of service we would sooner have rendered to us, enforced or voluntary. Every master would much sooner have his servant do his work well out of regard to him and love for his work than out of fear lest his wages should be diminished when the time of payment comes, or



lest he should be dismissed from his situation for his indolence. Every father would much rather that his boy were truthful and pure and upright from good desires and filial affection than from dread of punishment if he should be found out in wrong-doing. If this be the case with us, much more is it the case with the great Father of us all, with the great Lord and Master who would have all men to be His faithful servants. For a heart that is self-surrendered to Him must be to Him as an altar from which arises continually the incense of a grateful sacrifice of spiritual service. Therefore, as the religion of morality is lower than the religion of self-surrender, and God always aims at the highest for the hearts that look up to Him, the religion of morality must pass away, merging into the religion of self-surrender, and disappearing for evermore.

A third reason is that, specially in these latter days, when God is revealing Himself through the dispensation of the Spirit, the religion of morality is wholly out of place for all who would enter into the spirit. Let a marble statue be as beautiful as the sculptor can make it, we cannot get away from the thought that it is marble after all. It may be as near life as possible, and yet it is not living. There is no light in the eye, nor hue of health on the face, nor warmth in the hand, nor throbbing heart beneath the breast. There is nothing human about it except the form. It is exquisitely fashioned, yet it is but marble. Such is the man who lives a life of perfect morality, when looked at with the eye of God. No life; not like primeval chaos,

void and without shape, but like a world suddenly turned into stone. Now is the dispensation of the Spirit. As God has manifested Himself in nature and in Christ, so now He is revealed to us by His Spirit. The Divine nature of spontaneous goodness is communicable through the union of the Divine Spirit with our own. But that Spirit comes only to self-surrendered hearts, to as many as are willing to live on and be led by the Spirit of God. To a life of enforced morality, the spirituality of self-surrender is foreign; there is nothing in common between them; there is no kinship, not even the most distant relation. But to as many as receive Christ, there comes the spirit of sonship; of sweet content to be surrendered for ever to the governance of God; of that docility, that submission, that trust, which in the bitterest trials can say, though it be with many a falter, "My Father, not my will, but Thine, be done."

No wonder, if this be the character of Christ's ministry, John's disciples came to him and said of Christ, "All men come unto him." Christ craves for all men that they should come to him. "Come unto me," he says to their labouring and heavy-laden hearts. How can they come? By self-surrender to that Father to do whose will was the life-long nourishment of the Redeemer's soul.

## The Spirit's Thirst and its Satisfaction.

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"Jesus answered and said unto her, Every one . . . . . unto eternal life."—*John* iv. 13, 14.

THE incident of Christ and the Samaritan woman beautifully illustrates the readiness of the Divine Teacher to deal with a human soul just at that point and amid those circumstances where he meets it. In an autobiography of his earlier years, Ernest Renan speaks in terms of highest praise of one of his tutors. He says of him that he tried to find out the very best of which each of his pupils was capable; and then, having made that discovery, he set himself to lead the pupil up to it. Now, to do that is to be a true teacher; and such was Jesus Christ. He did not stand, as it were, on a mountain-summit, and beckon men to come to him where he was. But, on the contrary, he came down to their level, and, taking them as he found them, sought to guide them upward to his own. Whatever their condition, toward which all the past of their lives had been working and contributing, he had the special message and the special treatment for each one. This was the way in which he dealt with the woman who came to draw water at the Samaritan well. He descended to her amid her ignorance, her impurity,

her want of spiritual discernment, and led her onward by a gentle ascent to a knowledge of God as Spirit, as the Father whose heart evermore seeks for that life-worship of Himself in spirit and truth which is the best gift His children can offer to Him. Nay, so thoroughly did the Saviour enter into his work of redeeming the woman from her mistakes and sins, so truly did he come down to her level of every-day life in order to uplift her to her true dignity as one of God's daughters, that he even made his request of a drink of water a starting point from which to begin unfolding some of the divinest spiritual truths he ever spoke. She came on an errand of household ministry; she went away a missionary of the Messiah.

Jesus took the water of the well as a text from which to preach a sermon on the thirst of the human spirit and its satisfaction. "Every one," he said, "that drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but who-soever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life." Of course the first part of this passage, where Christ speaks about the water of the actual well, is literally true. The appetite of thirst, like all other bodily appetites, cries out to be appeased. But when its cry has been responded to, and suitable satisfaction has been given to it, the appetite is presently found to recur. The satisfaction soon exhausts itself. The performance of the bodily functions draws upon the resources of the body and expends them, and they must be replenished. In this

way the course of bodily life goes on, in alternate demand and supply, until death sets all at rest, and the body returns to the dust of which it is made. All life must be fed; it must be supplied with force for the fulfilment of its functions, and these functions, whatever they are, expend the force, and cry out for more. That is the inevitable law. "Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again."

But without doing any violence to the plain meaning of these words, we are quite at liberty to look at them as setting forth the unsatisfying nature of all things temporal. By these is meant whatever a man cannot make a corporate part of his true self, of that deep, invisible underlying essence that we call his spirit, which, when death takes down the tabernacle of flesh, returns, as the Scripture says, to God who gave it;<sup>1</sup> whatever the man's roots and fibres cannot lay hold of as nourishment for the Divine within him; whatever they cannot absorb for the growth of the spiritual inner man that God desires should advance into the perfect stature of a man in Jesus Christ; such things, namely, as the pleasures of sense, the desire of fame and popular applause, the craving to be rich, all that makes us live here as if there were no hereafter, all that brings the life of the flesh into power over the life of the spirit. All these are unsatisfying to the deepest needs of our nature: "Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again."

We must not, indeed, misunderstand the connexion between these things and our life in this present world.

<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes xii. 7.

Little reliance is to be placed upon asceticism, upon any undue rigour and severity of life, save such as may be practised for the sake of others. For Christ did not teach his disciples to mourn and fast, and neither to eat nor to drink. On the contrary, he desires that his joy may be fulfilled in us. Only a poor opinion should be entertained of those who set up as the true children of the Puritans. Rather does the voice of history seem to tell us that Puritanism, as practised in this country somewhat before and during the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell, was a forced, unnatural system of religion and life, from which the licentiousness and obscenities of the Restoration and subsequent years was a rebound only to be expected. No man ever became or ever can become godlike by trying to squeeze himself into a moral strait-waistcoat. Such an instrument of that kind is very well for moral madmen, as imprisonment is very well for people who break the laws of the land. But moral madmen, like criminals, are only a fractional part, and by no means a large fractional part, of the human race. The treatment that is good for them is no guide to the treatment that is good for the rest of mankind. As a matter of fact, we find ourselves possessed of bodies and minds capable of a great deal of pure although perishable enjoyment reaching us from without through the gates and avenues of sense. No man of fair and true opinions can for one moment believe that God gave us these possessions, with many opportunities of making a right use of them, only that we might despise them and trample them down. But, reverting for a moment

to the figure of the text of this essay, we may say that our thirst for things temporal is quite as reasonable as any other healthy appetite, and that, even though we know when we satisfy it with a draught from its proper source of satisfaction, it will certainly recur, yet the satisfaction, temporary as it is, is not wrong, but right and natural.

Where, then, is the necessity of constantly reminding ourselves of the words of Christ: "Everyone that drinketh of this water shall thirst again"? It is in the fact that we are far too apt to forget the recurrence of the thirst; that no amount of satisfaction derived from things temporal can ultimately appease the deepest and truest appetite of our nature, the appetite by virtue of which we thirst for God, the living God, and pant for Him like a wounded hart in a dry and thirsty land where no water is. The consciousness is not ever present with us that though things temporal, the pleasures of the world, the treasures of earth, the good things of this life, may satisfy for a time, like a draught of water from the well of Shechem, there is in them no enduring satisfaction. We do not bethink ourselves that we must make continual application to the well, and that, even after this, the deepest and truest longing of the soul is still unappeased. It is in this that the necessity lies for saying to ourselves while partaking of all temporal good and enjoyment that God gives us: "Everyone that drinketh of this water shall thirst again." The pity is that so many men do not remember that.

It is quite true, indeed, as already observed, that body

and mind are quite at liberty to employ rationally whatever of good comes within the power of each. It is quite true that, whatever may be the conditions of life and joy for us when we "have shuffled off this "mortal coil," we yet here and now have a mortal coil which claims and merits its due share of attention. A man developed all on one side of his complex nature is not the whole man that God means him to be. Nevertheless, we are bound to remember that we are something more than body and mind, that they do not make a man's truest self, that they are both so perishable that a disease of the brain will rob the finest mind of all its activity, while death comes to the body in a thousand forms and hastens it into darkness and decay.

Naturally, then, we must always take as a chief factor in the account the spirit in man that links him with the great Father of mankind; the God within him that yearns for the God without him, and gives him no rest until his spirit has entered into conscious union with God. That is the reason why temporal things can never permanently slake our deepest thirst, and why he who drinks of them thirsts again. While men of science are saying that they cannot discover the link that binds mind and body together in the individual human organism and makes them one, we claim to have found it in the spirit which is our mark of a Divine origin, the impress which the Divine Workman has put upon His handiwork as a sign that it is His, and not the handiwork of chance or fate. It is the spirit that thirsts for God, for union and



communion with Him, for fellowship with the Father as He has been revealed to us in and by Jesus Christ.

Every form of life which exists on the earth must have its own proper nourishment for its sustenance and growth. Plants find their nourishment in the soil and the rain, the sun and the air. Animals subsist on vegetables or on other animals or on both. The mind subsists on thought, on imagination, on memory, on emotion. The nourishment that is adapted to one form of life will not satisfy and promote another. Now this is the case with the human spirit, which must equally find its own true and proper nourishment. That it finds in God. "My soul thirsteth." What will satisfy its thirst? Only God, the living God. We see then that whenever men try to quench the deepest thirst of their being with things temporal, with the pleasures of sense, with the treasures of earth, with things that belong only to this life, and perish for us all when this life comes to its close, the warning voice of Christ is always saying to them, if they will only open their ears to hear it, "Everyone that drinketh of this water shall thirst again."

There are other reasons, too, why the temporal and the material cannot stay the cravings of the soul. One reason is obvious: that draughts from the water of that well must not only be constantly repeated, as we have seen, but must also be increased to satisfy the ever-growing thirst. To those who seek out and follow a life devoted to pleasure, there is no experience more common than the speedy palling

upon them of an enjoyment that only a little while ago was delightfully new. Consequently there must be a search for some other and fresh enjoyment. No doubt something of this kind is a familiar fact to us. We are all aware how anything that has powerfully affected us—as, for example, a tragedy of Shakespeare, a beautiful poem, a pathetic story, a spectacle of pain and misery, a visit to an ancient city, the sight of splendid scenery—loses in effect every time we repeat our experience of it. It is not so moving as it was. The pleasant surprises are less pleasant. The touching pathos is less touching. By-and-bye we become almost unconcerned. Similarly, in the drinking from the well of this world's pleasures, not only does the thirst recur after the satisfaction is spent, but it even recurs with increased urgency. Deeper and larger draughts are demanded. The man that has gained money and fame, and has set his affections upon them, wants more money and more fame to satisfy the larger desires that they have created. The man that has lived for pleasure only, when he finds his pleasures pall upon him, wants newer and keener pleasures to spur on his jaded feelings. If we think to reach heaven by building a tower of Babel, it is certain that we shall continually be finding out that a new and higher layer of bricks is necessary to reach the altitudes of happiness that still lie mockingly above us. But this cannot go on for ever. Our materials must at some time be exhausted. Things temporal are in their nature not infinite, not capable of affording

infinite joy. The bottom of the well must sooner or later be reached, and then the serpent of remorse, that lies coiled up there, will make its fangs felt. In the subsequent wretchedness, the disappointed heart will cry, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." "Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again."

Moreover, the thought that things temporal are in their nature perishable, enters as an element of bitterness into the sweetest draughts that we can drink from the well of our earthly life. It is the skeleton in the cupboard; it is the corpse at the banquet, like that which the Egyptians used to draw round in their merry-makings to remind the guests of their mortality. Oftentimes we do well to forget the nature of this life's pleasures. There is no need to have a mute at a wedding. There is no need to dress the new-born child in black crape as a reminder to the wistful mother that sooner or later it must die. Yet we should always regard as an axiom the thought that material joys cannot last for ever; and it is the recurrence of this thought that mars them all. The immortal soul cannot be satisfied with things that perish in the using. It wants eternity. It wants the infinite God. It wants a well within itself that springs up evermore unto eternal life. The absence of this feature in things material and temporal is a powerful reason for the unsatisfactoriness of them all. "Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again."

Now, we might gather from various sources, and

from very different ages of the world's history, abundant testimony to the truth of these thoughts. But the limits of this essay do not permit that we should do so. We must instead proceed to the more cheerful side of the theme. We must dwell upon the remedy that Christ proposes for the disappointment arising from the thought of the perishable satisfaction afforded by temporal things. It is at this point that, even as a moral teacher only, Jesus was so far in advance of all moral teachers that ever came before him. He not only could say, as others said, "Everyone that drinketh of this water shall thirst again," but he could add what was far more important, and in terms capable of being understood by all men: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life." It does not want much skill and discernment to tell a sick man that he is sick. Anyone can do that. The thing is to tell him by what means he may regain his health—means lying within his power of getting them. Now, all moral and spiritual teachers that came before Christ, and all that have come since who have not followed his method and doctrine, have for the most part either only told men that they were morally diseased, or else have prescribed impracticable remedies. They have either merely said, "Everyone that drinketh of this water shall thirst again," or they have pointed men to wells too deep for the multitude to draw from, or to fountains too high for

them to reach before they died in the attempt. All of them agree on the perishable nature of things temporal; all of them agree on their final unsatisfactoriness; but none of them have said to us, in terms fitted for all men, "Do this, do that, and you shall thirst no more."

This, however, is what Jesus Christ has done once and for all. "Whosoever," he says, "whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life." Over against this world's well of water Jesus sets the water that he gives, and says that this water itself, received into the heart, becomes an inward well, from which the man is evermore to be capable of satisfying his own spiritual desires. As before remarked, Christ comes down to our level, to our circumstances, and begins with us where he finds us. He takes our nature as it is, without demanding that we should do anything before he can be of service and of saving help to us. He gives a full recognition to the fact of the deep need, the unsatisfied soul-thirst of our being, and he says, "I will tell you what to do to get rid of your need, and to quench your thirst. I will give you water, if you will only ask of me. Drink: and the water shall become in you a fountain springing generously forth for evermore."

In order that we may see the meaning of these words of comfort and hope, we must first notice the elements of the spiritual craving which Christ

here recognizes. We may say that those elements are four—the desires for truth, for purity, for immortality, for God. It matters not how those desires come to be within us; we may recognize and admit them without trying to account for them. We desire *truth*, the knowledge of things as they are, whether seen or unseen, whether human or Divine. What is the truth about ourselves, about the universe, about Him who is in and behind it all, and to whom all created things are only a veil that half reveals and half conceals Him, are questions which enter into the mind of every man who thinks at all. They are necessitated by the demands of practical life. Somewhat of truth we must have, or we could not live. We want what we can rely on alike for the life that now is and for the life that is to come; and what we can rely on is the true. The desire of *purity*, too, is another element in our spiritual craving. To every human soul we would believe, or at least would hope, that there comes the voice of God, in less or greater clearness, as it came to Abraham, saying, “Walk before me, “and be thou perfect.”<sup>2</sup> We are so made that even amid the swine and the famine, and at a great distance from the Father’s house, there comes to us now and then the desire to arise and go to our Father, and to live in a Divine love and purity to which we have been strangers too long. As to the desire for *immortality*, scarcely anywhere can we find a people’s religious records and traditions

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xvii. 1.

but they contain a belief, crude or refined, in a life beyond this. The many contradictions of life seem to demand a right and just settlement somewhere and at some time; otherwise happiness and misery seem here most partially and unaccountably served out, and the Judge of all the earth does not do right. It does not, too, seem possible that death ends all. Does good ever die? Is not truth eternal? Does purity perish? Is no immortality awaiting love? The last element of our spiritual craving is the desire for *God*. In this the others are contained and implied. The very existence of every religion that the world has ever known is a proof of the human thirst for God. It is an attempt, more or less successful, to find out Him who is the life of all life, the soul of all truth and love and purity. Is there a God? Then we desire Him, we desire communion with Him, we desire fellowship with our Father. We cry out for the living God; not for an idea, not for a blind force of fate, but for a living personal Spirit, with whom we may enter into union and be at peace for evermore.

It is this thirst, then, of which these are the four elements, that Christ not only recognizes, but promises to quench in every one who comes to him for the living water that he offers. The question, however, arises, what does the figurative expression, living water, mean? We shall be guided to the answer if we take into account the fact that this living water becomes within him who receives it a well of water springing up into eternal life. The expression can

point to nothing else than the creation of a character, of a fixed state of mind, of a disposition which gives to him who has it a blessed and enduring satisfaction which temporal things, as we have seen, never can give. Christ obviously means to say that he will deal with the man that comes to him by faith, in such a way as that a constant, everflowing, self-satisfying, spiritual source shall be opened up within the man, belonging not only to this present life, but also, and much more abundantly, to the life to come. For that is the very highest end that anyone can bring about in a human soul, the formation of a noble character which nothing can destroy.

Christ, then, designs to do this for every man who yields his heart and life to him. He will create within him his own character, will give to him his own spirit; the mind which was in Christ Jesus will be also in him. If this be realized, even though only approximately, the promise of Christ will be fulfilled in him, and he will have within him a well of water springing up unto eternal life. Christ will not be an idea, not even a person, outside of the man; but he will be found within him, a pure perennial living fountain, satisfying every spiritual desire, and making him the man he ought to be.

We ought not, indeed, to regard Christ's promise as meaning that the man shall never have further spiritual desires. If that were the case, it would be hard to see how spiritual progress would be possible for him. Desire is the parent of progress. Had we no desires, we should stagnate in a wretched



self-satisfaction. There is a great difference between a self-satisfied man and a man satisfied from himself. A self-satisfied man is a man without desire, and therefore incapable of growth in wisdom or goodness or grace. A man satisfied from himself is a man with many desires, a man therefore capable of progress, and longing for it. Only, whenever spiritual cravings arise within him, he shall know at once where to quench them; he shall be spared the agony of unsatisfied thirst; he shall always have at hand within himself a well of water springing up unto eternal life. Christ, in his spirit and in his character, is in the heart; therefore the heart is satisfied from itself. That seems to be the signification of Christ's promise. This is the meaning of a well of water within us. It is character, the Christian spirit, the spirit within us made alive by the Spirit of Christ and in union with him, the mind of Christ implanted in us and abiding in us for ever.

We notice, as our closing thought, the way in which the forming of the Christian character within us, thus brought about, quenches the deep spiritual longing of our nature. That longing we found to consist of the four elements of the craving for truth, for purity, for immortality, for God. To receive Christ into the heart, the Christian spirit, the Christian character, the mind which was in Christ Jesus, made efficient by the life-giving energy of God, is the way in which these cravings are appeased. Do we crave truth? Do we want principles of conduct, spiritual laws, certain facts on which to rely in practical every-day life? We have them in the

character of Christ in us. To do the will of God from the heart, as he did, even though that will should lead us into wildernesses of temptation, Gethsemanes of trial—nay, to a Calvary with its cross—this is to satisfy the desire for truth. For Christ himself has said, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.” We need not know in order to do. Knowledge comes in doing. Truth rewards the venture of faithful conduct.

As to the cravings for purity and immortality and God, they are all satisfied by the life of Christ, the character and spirit of Christ within us. For Christ is the revelation of the Divine ideal of perfectness; he is the pledge and proof of a continued life in the hereafter of peace and blessedness and joy unspeakable; he is the setting forth of God who is a Spirit, whom no man hath seen nor can see, but who in Christ makes Himself known in His Divine wealth of love and tenderness, of pardon and fatherhood.

Christ in us, then, as the essence of character, as the basis of self, as the rule of life, as the spring of every thought and word and act, as the origin and goal of every impulse God-ward—this is in him who drinks of the water that Christ gives, a veritable well of water, springing up unto eternal life.

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## Christ's Example of Meekness.

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"So when he had washed their feet, and taken his garments,  
... blessed are ye if ye do them."—*John* xiii. 12-17.

THE immediate occasion of the beautiful incident of Christ's washing the feet of his disciples is not given us by the Evangelist John. To find it we must turn to the Gospel by Luke, where, in the account of the last supper, we are told that, during the meal, a quarrel sprang up among the disciples about a matter on which they had often disputed before. "And there arose also," says Luke, "a contention among them, 'which of them is accounted to be greatest.'"<sup>1</sup> It is quite amazing that, under the pathetic circumstances amid which they met, a subject of this kind should have been allowed one moment's consideration. Their Master was on the eve of his death, which he had now plainly foretold to them. The traitor was already at his work. The sacramental feast had just received its solemn institution. The shadow of Calvary and its cross was already creeping over the little farewell gathering as the darkening evening drew around them. The three wonderful years of life, work, teaching, example, during which they had been with the Son of man, were converging all their rays on the supreme crisis which was immediately to come. Yet, while he

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxii. 24.

sat with the disciples, patient, peaceful, meek, tender, gentle, loving, the embodiment of all graces alike human and Divine, "there arose a contention among them, which of them is accounted to be greatest." Sinful pride, unsanctified ambition, a self where the spirit of Christ is not, are no respecters of time, place, or person. They will as soon thrust themselves forward amid the solemnity of a funeral as amid the splendours of a coronation. The joys or the sorrows of others are nothing to them. Their claims must be attended to. They must have a front seat, a first place, all due court and honour paid to them. It is nothing that the wrangle of their voices jars harshly on feelings already strained to breaking by the stress of suffering. With the struggle of Gethsemane, the shame of the mock trial, the vulgar enmity of the populace, the agony of the Cross, the darkness of death, awaiting their Master, the disciples yet disputed for the pre-eminence among themselves. What should we say of children around the bed of a dying mother quarrelling to be nearest the pillow where lies the wan white face? What are we to say of the disciples contending at the table of the last supper which of them is accounted to be greatest?

We cannot determine with any certainty what led them to the contention at this particular time. Perhaps the most likely reason is to be found in a probable dispute for the place of honour at table—a matter treated with much more scrupulous care in the East than amongst us in the West. But neither the dispute nor its origin need concern us now. The

way in which Christ settled it is the point inviting attention.

When it had arisen before, Christ had taught as its remedy the same lesson of humility which he taught the disciples now, only he had not taught it in such an impressive manner. For when asked who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven, Jesus had called a little child and set him in the midst of those who stood round, and had said, "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven."<sup>2</sup> But now, when he found that all the precept, all the example, all the teaching by word and by act, of the past three years had failed to bring home to his disciples' minds the secret of real eminence among men, he made himself alike the text and the sermon and the preacher to settle once for all the oft-disputed question, "Who is the greatest?" Rising from the supper-table, he laid aside his upper garment, keeping on only the close-fitting tunic, which was the dress of slaves. He girded himself with the towel that he might leave both hands free for carrying the heavy basin of water as he washed the feet of his disciples one after another. Then he poured water into the basin, and washed his disciples' feet, one of the very meanest offices anybody could fulfil. We can almost see the shame-stricken faces, the enquiring looks toward one another, of the men who shortly before were disputing which of them should be accounted greatest. Here was a summary settlement of the question for which they were doubtless quite ill-prepared.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew xviii. 4.

How small they must all have felt ! How their poor, petty pretentiousness must have dwindled into nothing, and less than nothing, as they saw him whom they rightly called their Lord and Master going round the little company and washing their feet ! Their claims to position and power were lost in the presence of this strange display of the sublimity of greatness. As well might mole-hills discuss which of them was the highest in the overhanging presence of a sunlit Alp ! Christ takes the disciples' conflicting claims up into the sphere of his own heaven, and immediately the conflict ceases, the claims vanish, and both are no more.

After this, when he had washed the disciples' feet, and taken again his outer garment, and sat down with them once more, he enforced by word the acted lesson he had just given them. They acknowledged him to be their Master and their Lord, and they were right in their acknowledgment, for such he was. Therefore if he, the Lord, were willing to abase himself to serve them, they, the servants, ought to be willing to abase themselves to serve one another. They were less, not greater, than he. If they, too, would be truly great, they, like him, must pass to greatness through the gate of humility. Among them, among all disciples of Jesus Christ, the greater is he who is ready to become as the younger ; the chief is he who is ready to become as him that serveth. Self-exaltation is self-abasement ; but the path to the highest is through the valley of humiliation. This is the law that settles the order of precedence in the kingdom of Heaven.

But it must be quite evident that this incident,

which Christ himself confessed that he had given his disciples as an example that they also should do as he had done to them, has a far broader area of teaching than it finds in the peculiar circumstances that gave rise to it. Jesus foresaw the fact that the dispute for greatness among his followers would be often likely to arise in the future of Christianity. Jealousy and strife are not confined to Galilean fishermen; they are common to human nature everywhere and in all ages. When the disciples should have passed away and gone to their rest and reward; when the little brotherhood that he had gathered round himself should have grown into an organization and a Church; when the Christian communities of which his own was the first should have indefinitely multiplied—Jesus could see that the question would often be debated among his followers, which of them is accounted the greatest. The claims of self in the vast majority of men are very strong; we readily believe in the importance of the pronoun of the first person. Accordingly, desiring to diminish as much as possible the danger arising from our self-seeking, Jesus gave this forceful, touching, and instructive lesson on the way to true greatness, to real pre-eminence, for all who should afterwards believe on his name. From the upper room in Jerusalem where he ate his last supper with his disciples, and washed their feet as one who served, his voice is sounding across the centuries still, saying to us, "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your slave."

Strange though it seem, the statement is nevertheless true, that danger on this point springs out of the very form that the mission of Jesus assumed. He came to found a kingdom, a kingdom of God, a kingdom of Heaven, a kingdom of the truth. No one can doubt that this idea was very prominent in his mind, that it found full and frequent expression in his discourses. If the Jews had only opened their eyes that they might see, they would have found in this aspect of the mission of Christ one of the most clear and convincing proofs that he was the Messiah for whom they were looking. He had come to restore the kingdom to Israel, only not a kingdom on earth, dependent on outward splendour for its reception among men, or measurable by the lengths and breadths of human standards. The kingdom he came to restore was a true kingdom of God, based on the loyalty of loving hearts, with a spiritual foundation, a spiritual character, a spiritual king. It is quite true that much of Christ's teaching about the kingdom was misunderstood, because those who heard clung with a gross firmness to the letter of his words and did not let the spirit of them have free play in their thoughts. But this was no fault of Christ's; he was clear, explicit, plain. The fault lay with the prejudiced minds of his listeners, in which the belief had grown up that the kingdom of God was a kingdom of earth, and that its restoration to Israel meant the exalting of Israel to the first place among the nations of the world. It was, therefore, from the very fact that Jesus had come



to found a kingdom, that the danger of strife for chief positions among the subjects of it largely arose. The very name of kingdom implies king and subjects, and carries with it the thought that some of the subjects are to be nearer to the king than others are. The very name of kingdom implies an organized society, and an organized society implies ranks of higher and lower. It was some such idea as this that underlay the request which James and John preferred to Christ when they asked that they might sit, one on his right hand, the other on his left, when he came to his kingdom.<sup>3</sup> With views of this kind at work in the minds of the disciples, it could perhaps scarcely fail to happen that the question should be debated amongst them which of them was accounted the greatest. A more spiritual view of the kingdom of Heaven would have very largely taken away the possibility of such disputes, if it had not rooted it out altogether.

It may, however, be said that now we have more spiritual views of the kingdom of God. We see that the disciples were wrong in their expectations, and that after they had more fully received spiritual enlightenment, they themselves saw that they had been wrong. They came to recognize that, in the language of Paul, the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> We have accepted this definition and formed our idea of the kingdom of God in accordance with it. Then has the necessity for Christ's forceful lesson been diminished, or has it gone altogether? By no means.

<sup>3</sup> Mark x. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. xiv. 17.

We do not need it for the correction of earth-born desires springing out of degraded views of what the kingdom of God is, but we need it none the less to teach us what is higher and what is lower within that kingdom. There must be higher and lower. No kingdom, whether of earth or of heaven, can stand on a dead level where every man is as good as every other. Absolute equality between man and man may exist as a pet theory in the minds of social and political philosophers, but it can never be carried out in practice. If all the different ranks of society in our own country were abolished to-day, if all the country's wealth were poured into one common treasury and every one of the sovereign's subjects had an equal portion given to him, a hundred years would see the social ranks reinstated, with some men in the front and some in the rear, some men with more wealth and others with less. A dead social level is only a sickly dream. The case is similar in relation to the kingdom of God. It has its degrees of glory, its grades of grace, its subjects, some in higher stations and others in lower stations. There is something in it that answers to the language of the parable in which one man was made ruler over ten cities and another ruler over five.<sup>5</sup> To have "an abundant entrance administered" to us into the kingdom cannot be the same thing as being "saved yet so as by fire." From the fact that the kingdom of Heaven is a kingdom and not an anarchy, an order and not a chaos, there

<sup>5</sup> Luke xix. 17.

must be higher and lower; and we therefore need in our day, equally with the disciples in theirs, only not from quite the same reasons, the forceful lesson that Christ taught when he washed his disciples' feet. We need to be taught what gives true greatness in the kingdom, what will make us most accepted of its King.

Now, although this teaching is suited to all Christian men and women, and all have need for it in proportion to the strength of self within them, yet there is a special need that it should be attended to in the life of the members of Christian churches. From the fact that there are such churches, organized Christian societies, meeting for worship and uniting for work, Christ's lesson must not be lost on them, but be carried out into all parts of church and congregational life. If our poor vain hearts ever raise the question which of us is the greatest, there can be no better antidote than to remember the Master's washing of the disciples' feet. He, the Master, was among them as one that served. The way to supremacy and power is by self-abasement and humility. Let the man of more wealth remember that as he uses it for the good of the people of less wealth will his wealth bring him honour. Let the man of talent and activity remember that as he is ready for the lowest offices in the service of the church will his labours earn him a position of Christian rank. Let the man of large spiritual endowment and broad sympathies remember that as the poor and sorrowful are soothed and helped by

him will his graces shine forth from him as a crown of glory. Let all remember that whatever their gifts, whatever their graces, readiness to use them in the kindly service of others is the divinely appointed way to rise by them to a high place in the kingdom. By self-seeking we fall; by self-abasement we are exalted.

"All works are good, and each is best  
"As most it pleases thee;  
"Each worker pleases when the rest  
"He serves in charity;  
"And neither man nor work unblest  
"Wilt thou permit to be."

Christ has given us an example, that we also should do as he has done to us.

Since, then, we have seen that there was special need for this example and its lesson, because of the fact that Christ came to found a kingdom, let us go on to look a little more closely at the lesson itself and the thoughts on which it is based. It need scarcely be remarked that the particular form which the lesson took was quite accidental, was derived from the actual circumstances under which Christ and his disciples were meeting, and therefore was only transitory and destined to pass away. None except those who give a crude literal rendering of Scriptural truth would venture to say that Christ meant his disciples, in obedience to his example, to show humility by washing the feet of one another. The form which his teaching assumed was accidental and transitory; it was a symbol only, and not, like

the Lord's Supper, a symbol to be observed in perpetuity. Christ does not say that his disciples are to do to one another *what* he did to them, but *as* he did to them; with the same spirit, although not necessarily in the same form. The symbol has passed away. The lesson it teaches remains. In the kingdom of Christ the means of rising is to descend, of conquering to stoop, of gaining the highest position unhesitatingly to choose the lowest. "Self-abasement to serve, and service to save, these," as one has well said, "these are the moral essence of the act, and its permanent elements."

But why is it that self-abasement exalts, and that the way to the higher in the kingdom is through the gate of the lower? That is not a maxim of worldly wisdom, and any of the world's disciples who should teach and practice it would be counted a dreamer and an enthusiast unfit for the struggle of life. According to that wisdom, a man should assert himself and push himself to the front, no matter whom he elbows back as he does so. Many a force is at work to send him to the wall, without his choosing of his own accord to go there. But the fact is that in many things the world is very foolish, and the Divine philosophy of life that Christ taught and practised turns the wisdom of the world upside down. In the kingdom of Heaven we rise through humility; we find our life by losing it. He who would be chief must be the servant of all. He who would be exalted must abase himself.

This is the case partly because self-abasement for the sake of serving others is to such an extent contrary to

nature, as to show that the man who is capable of it is a real spiritual hero and has gained a great moral victory. To seek our own pleasure, to gain our own ends, to do our own will, are motives very familiar to our experience. Nothing is easier and more agreeable than to yield to them. It always involves more or less of a struggle to thwart ourselves for the sake of others. To have court paid to us, to be seated on a throne while others are serving us, is what we like. To come down from our throne and abase ourselves to serve others is what we do not like, especially when the coming down seems to involve abasement, and those whom we try to serve are conscious of our effort. But it is precisely on this account that he who can act in this way shows that he has risen above his nature, has gained the victory over it, and in the mind of every true Christian becomes a great and noble man. It is easy to float down the stream of our own desire. We only have to give ourselves up to it and let it bear us calmly along. There is nothing heroic in that. But to wrestle against the stream and breast it with earnest self-denying strokes, every one of which takes something out of one, and all this not for the sake of self, but of others, is a part that it takes a moral hero to play. He who does that has really exalted himself, though he may not know it.

Moreover, the man who abases himself to serve others gives proof of his obedience to the great principle of the subordination of self to the general good. His conduct shows that he has learnt the principle and understands it. Perhaps the most difficult lesson

we have to learn in life is that we are only one of many, to whom life and happiness and self-preservation and the enjoyment of good are as dear as they are to ourselves. Many a man is disposed to think that he counts for a good many more than one and should be treated accordingly. To think of ourselves not more highly than we ought to think is a hard task until experiences, not always pleasant, have shown us that we are very little, if any, more than others to the world at large. He, therefore, is wise and great who, to advance the general good, can sink his own in it, and can say as he does that, "If I can "serve others by abasing myself, I am doing right, "and am obeying my Master, Jesus Christ." The men who can imperil their own lives in the lifeboat to save a shipwrecked crew; the soldiers who can risk slaughter in battle to defend the hearths and homes of a whole country; the one man who counts it better that he should die than that an entire nation should perish, are always great men in the eyes of everyone capable of a single generous impulse. Their self-abasement is their exaltation. They rise by themselves falling. Thus in the kingdom of Heaven, where all things are measured by Divine standards, the man who loses himself in the good of others is the man who approves himself to his Master and Lord as no unworthy follower of him.

Jesus put before his disciples two motives to the carrying out of this spirit in their conduct to one another. He knew that it is far easier for us to approve and admire humility than to practise it.

To sound the praises of a self-sacrificing hero is pleasant. We feel that we are doing what we ought to do in not letting such an example go by unnoticed. But to imitate it is much harder. Nevertheless, Jesus brings us to the test and urges two motives upon us bravely to meet it. There is first the motive that as he has abased himself, we cannot do less than abase ourselves when the service of others is at issue. "Ye call me Master and Lord," he said; "and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, a servant is not greater than his lord; neither one that is sent greater than he that sent him." By these words Jesus means that the inferior cannot find any act unworthy of him that his superior has consented to perform. The soldier cannot do other than follow where his captain has gone before him. The servant cannot count any duty beneath him which his master has already condescended to do. This is one of the very sweetest motives, as well as one of the most reasonable, in all that Christ has commanded us. He does not merely say, "Do as I tell you," but he says as well, "Do as I have done." Christ firmly believes in the force of example. His own character is itself the great reason why we should follow in his steps. The painful experience of self-abasement for the sake of serving others loses the largest part



of its bitterness if we remember that the Lord and Master has done the same before us. He bids us do nothing that he has not done. Surely if he has risen through self-abasement, we need not fear to go the same way to the high places of the kingdom.

The second of the two motives put before us to urge us to this conduct is the happiness, the blessedness that results from the performance of it. Jesus well knew the law of the human will, that it pursues pleasure and avoids pain. He knew that to bid men court pain for pain's sake would be one of the most useless of commands. No one ever has done that; no one ever will do that. Jesus clearly says, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, that to abase ourselves for the sake of others will give us the feeling of blessedness in the soul. This result is partly natural, in perfect accord with the constitution of our being. It is as much to be expected that inward complacency will accompany every act of voluntary abasement for others' good as that the flowers will open to the kiss of the morning sun. None of us can be conscious that he has gained a victory over self without feeling pleased that he has gained it. We have preferred greater interests to less, the hour of self-approval to whole years of the world's applause at having trodden to glory over the corpses of fallen foes. A thrill of pleasure runs through the soul. A tender, cheerful, Divine glow illuminates it. We have done something worthy of men and of Christians.

But this is not the only nor the chief element in the

cup of blessedness given to the spiritual hero. He has a really superior position in the sight of God. He has gained the higher by voluntarily passing through the lower. He is greater in the eyes of the Divine Master and stands nearer to the King of the kingdom because he has humbled himself to serve his brethren. The Spirit of God comes to bear witness with his spirit that he is a son of God, a partaker of the Divine nature, the nature whose essence is self-sacrificing love. He hears within his soul the voice of the Lord saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Meanwhile he awaits, in patient, steadfast, continuing service, the addition of the blessed call, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

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## The Revelation of the Father.

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"Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father . . . .  
how sayest thou, show us the Father?"—*John* xiv. 8, 9.

THE ministry and life of Jesus were drawing to their close. Only a few more hours remained to him and his disciples for the continuance of the tender, loving intercourse that had been going on between them during the three years in which they had followed him. The traitor, by whom the Son of man should be delivered into the hands of his enemies, was already in the thickest of his plot, and early on the following morning would bring it to its consummation. The vision of the Cross was throwing its darkening shadows over the little company as they sat round the table of the last supper. On the morrow that vision would change into a sad and stern reality.

Yet the few hours of fellowship that remained to Jesus and his disciples were fraught to them all with great issues. For he had to unfold to them almost more weighty truth than any he had hitherto imparted. He had to tell them what was the meaning of the dreadful time of crisis into which his life was now passing. He had to tell them where he should be and what he should be doing when he had gone whither they could not now follow him. He had

to tell them what was the chief purpose of the ministry of toil and teaching to whose end all things were now pointing. He had to tell them what they should do when he had been taken away from them, and how his place, as their Master and Leader, would be supplied when he was no longer with them to instruct and guide.

He began by telling them of the goal the path to which lay over the ghastly summit of Calvary. That goal was the house of the Father, and he himself was the way thither. This is a figure of speech for the profound truth that he was going back to the Father from whom he had come forth as a revelation of the Divine in humanity, for the purpose of bridging over the great and yawning gulf that stretched darkly in men's thoughts, but not in God's, between themselves and him. So complete was the union, the identity between God and Christ as the revelation of God, that they who knew the revelation knew also Him whom it revealed. Nevertheless, clear as were the words of Jesus, they did not satisfy the enquiring mind of Philip, who doubtless in his request did but represent the mental condition of the rest of the disciples. "Lord, show us the Father," he said, "and it sufficeth us." Who was the Father about whom Christ was thus familiarly speaking? What was He like? Could no semblance, no similitude of Him be given to the disciples, that all their doubts might be finally laid, and all the yearnings of their faith be finally satisfied?

To us this petition appears somewhat unreasonable.

We are alike surprised and grieved that the past three years had not been able to teach Philip and his friends that the very essence of the mission of Christ was to reveal God to men, and through that revelation to save them. In this case, as in many others of which the Gospel story tells us, we see and deplore a childish ignorance and obtuseness incapable, as it seems, of grasping what to us appears as plain as the light of day.

But the fact is that in forming such an opinion we do not sufficiently take into account the enormous strength of the religious traditions in which the disciples, in common with the entire Jewish nation, had grown up. All those traditions pointed one way: to the fact that the nature of God was one which could not be truly communicated or made known. The disciples were quite prepared to admit, as Nicodemus admitted, that no man could do the signs which Christ did, except God were with him.<sup>1</sup> They even went further, and acquiesced in the confession that Peter made on a memorable occasion, that Jesus stood in a relation to God unique and different from that of any prophet or teacher who ever came before Him.<sup>2</sup> But the past history of the people was so luminous with signs and wonders blazing forth from its texture, like gems on the robe of a king, that it was impossible for the disciples wholly to tear themselves away from the idea that when God Himself appeared it could not be in any other form than that of some dazzling

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew xvi. 16.

vision, some magnificent spectacle, some startling splendour. They were like children and others who love much the broad sunshine of the garish day, but are unable to understand and enter into the deep calm and tender beauty of the placid face of night. They were prepared for God the Creator, not for God the Sufferer ; for the God of a pillar of fire and a quaking earth, not for the God of a cross and a sepulchre ; for the God who overthrew the enemies of Israel, not for the God who conquers men's sorrows and sins by himself bearing them. Thus it is not to be wondered at that, although they believed in Christ in the full sense of the term, they should yet say at the close of his ministry, " Lord, show us " the Father, and it sufficeth us."

Moreover, we must not forget that in the ideas which led them to make this request there was something intensely human. There has scarcely been a religion, a form of faith and worship, which has commanded the allegiance of large masses of mankind, in which the gods worshipped have not been endowed with the attributes of might and vastness and sublimity, with but small admixture of tenderness and sympathy and love. Men have delighted to think of the objects of their homage as very great and very wonderful. They have found their emblems in the infinities of space or the depths of chaos, in the roar of the thunder or the swelling surges of the sea. They have felt that nothing less than giant strength and royal sway was worthy the worship which they brought. Indeed, although we

live nearly two thousand years since Jesus first unfolded the Christian conception of God, there are still many in the professing Church who linger fondly over the God of power of the Old Testament and seem to think Him worthier of adoration than the God of love of the New. To them it is strange that the meek and lowly Son of man, who knew the feelings of hunger and thirst and weariness, who could shed the tear of the bereaved heart at the grave of a friend, and could be oppressed with disappointment when men rejected him, who could shrink before the vision of the Cross and pray, as he afterwards prayed, that the cup given him to drink might, if possible, pass away from him, could be indeed the revelation of the Father, of the King of kings, of the Lord of lords, of the Maker of Heaven and earth. For it is much more natural to man to conceive of God as in the vision of Isaiah than as being Himself a minister to human sorrow and a sufferer with human sin. If only we may have a startling splendour in the atmosphere, a dazzling spectacle in the sky, an earthquake, a fire, a mighty wind, this sufficeth us. We think we have seen God and have found a resting place for faith. So far, unhappily, are we from the truth that God's gentleness is His best title to greatness.

Yet, after all, though there was much in the motive of Philip's request that was quite erroneous, there was also much that was in perfect accord with the best instincts of man. For the desire to behold God is the noblest aspiration of which we are capable, and was implanted in man's heart by God Himself. The

history of man on earth is the history of a long series of questions and answers. Man's mind is an everlasting why. When we think, indeed, of the small portion of knowledge that we can take as certain, all that has come in answer to that why seems woefully meagre in comparison with the intensity with which the question presses for response. Yet better is the feeble ray that tells the waking eye that the dawn has at least broken than the slumberous stupor of ignorance. For the waking eye will watch for more light, but ignorance still sleeps on. It is to the patient enquirers into the various branches of knowledge that we owe all the science we now possess. Even in regard to the knowledge of things material and temporal, we like to think that the questioning faculty is the gift of the God of truth.

Much more is this the case with regard to the knowledge of things spiritual and of God who is at the root and essence of them all. The desire to behold God, a desire implanted in man by the Divine hand, is the first step in the path that leads to life everlasting. It is the beginning of man's approach to God. The means which, at different stages of human history, God has adopted for satisfying this desire are so many milestones on the road which mark the progress of the kingdom of Heaven. This vast world in which I live—the blue infinities of space that stretch around it—the myriad forms of life that arise and decay upon it—the mysteries that limit human life—the instinct of worship which grows out of my sense of nothingness and dependence—the many questions of my poor heart



as to whence I came, what I am, why I am here, and whither I am going—what is beneath all this? Of what is it the manifestation? Something outside myself, outside my fellow-beings, outside nature and the universe, and yet within all. This something the Bible tells me is a Person. This Person it further tells me is God. But what is He? What is He that I may worship Him? What is He that I may know Him? What is He that, if I can, I may love Him? Can I see no similitude of Him? Will no ray of light out of the eternities fix His image for me as with a Divine photography? “Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” The desire is perfectly natural, and to the spiritual man is a prophecy of its own fulfilment.

But we must pass on to the answer which Christ gave to the petition of Philip. It was an answer in which sadness mingled with authority, while the sadness was yet further touched with surprise. For three years, Philip, one of the earliest called of the disciples, had followed Christ in close companionship, and yet was ignorant of the true mission of Jesus. For after all the true mission of Jesus was to reveal God, a fact which innumerable plain Scriptures make clear to us. He is indeed the Saviour, the Redeemer; but he saves and redeems in virtue of the fact that he was the manifestation of God in humanity. His outward life was the life of God in human form; his sorrows and sufferings, his works and wearinesses, his tears and prayers, his death and victory were all of them the setting forth of God. That the Divine underlay the

human in Jesus is the only condition on which he can be understood. Though he did not say much about this truth to the multitude, at least during the greater part of his three years' ministry, nevertheless his statements increased in force and clearness to his disciples as he saw they were able to bear them. Yet here was Philip, on the last night of the Lord's life before his crucifixion, saying, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us"! We can almost see the face of Jesus as he turned to answer his disciple. The look of tender astonishment, perhaps the starting tear of pained regret, the half-reproachful, half-sorrowful light in the eye, are all of them vivid in our imagination. We can almost hear the tones of the voice, the voice the disciples had so often listened to in private converse and in public ministry, as it said, "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; how sayest thou, 'Shew us the Father'?" Philip knew Jesus as the Messiah; he had not recognised him as the setting forth of the Father.

Why is it, then, that he who has seen Christ has seen the Father? As already hinted, if the Divine nature consisted solely in power, Philip's request would have been in point. For of any remarkable display of power, such as when men looked upon it they would fall down and confess it a manifestation of God, Jesus had not given any sign. True, he had worked miracles; but so had Moses and Elijah and his successor. No man, indeed, could do the works that

Christ did unless God were with him; but this confession was equally true of all the prophets that had come to Israel and Judah from Moses onward. There had been nothing to the mind of the disciples which made them think that, whereas the Spirit of God rested upon the holy men of old, here at last was God Himself. "Lord, show us the Father." Now, if the Divine nature consisted solely in power, Philip's petition would have been well grounded. He might well have asked for a sign, a manifestation, in which all the wonders of Israel's past should be both summed up and superseded. Power can display itself solely by power. Every form of force, whether mechanical or animal or spiritual, can show itself only in its own characteristic way, and in proportion to the degree of its energy. We do not expect the fierce breath of a storm to cool the throbbing beat of a sick man's brow. We do not expect Niagara to display itself in the gentle watering of a flower garden. A gale of wind and a mighty cataract have their own natural fitting way of showing themselves. If the Divine nature consisted solely in power, some dazzling vision, some magnificent spectacle, some startling splendour, would be the right way of revealing the Divine nature.

But the Divine nature is something besides power, something very much more than power. It has the two other elements, well defined and in large admixture, of holiness and love. The old dispensation, whose central figure is Moses, chiefly revealed the first; the new dispensation, whose central figure is Jesus, chiefly revealed the second. But as the new dispensation

was not the doing away, that is, the destroying of the old, but rather the fulfilment of it, we may expect to find both holiness and love clearly set forth in the new dispensation, though love more prominently than holiness.

As to holiness, we must remember that God is at sworn enmity with sin. It curses the face of His fair world. Humanity is all scarred and seamed with its dreadful marks. It conflicts with the Divine purposes of training for the great family of man. It withholds, under its fatal spell, the gifts of homage of heart and of life that God wants from every member of the family. It blinds the moral eyesight that we cannot see God; it deadens our spiritual perceptions that we cannot know Him. Consequently, God's great mission among men in Jesus Christ, and now by the agency of the Spirit, is to make them holy with His own purity. "Be ye holy, "for I the Lord your God am holy:" that was the Divine message through Moses. "Be ye therefore "perfect, as your Father who is in Heaven is perfect:" that is the Divine message through Jesus Christ. It is the same thought in different garbs, and in a somewhat different aspect.

This end of holiness, however, is accomplished through the revelation of the Divine love, which is the chief constituent element of the Divine nature. It is as impossible to make men holy by power as it is to make a boy at school studious by the imposition of tasks and penalties. To reach the heart, the throne and centre of the moral nature, is a work of which love alone is

capable. Not that force and fear cannot do something ; but at best their effects are only temporary, and will vanish when their causes are taken away. But the effects produced when the moral nature is swayed by love will abide, for love touches the centre of that nature, but force and fear touch only its circumference. Therefore when God would make men holy, partakers of the Divine character, He first seeks to make them love Him, and to this end reveals His love. "My son, "give me thine heart," is His call ; and to make us respond to it, He shews us how worthy He is that we should yield the heart to Him. Hearts are won only by the wooings of love. In Jesus Christ there came the revelation of the love of God, the love that laboured and wept and suffered and died, the love that forms men to holiness and burns away their sin. Throughout the whole history of Jesus we are constrained to say as we contemplate him, "Behold the great love with which God loves us."

If then this be the Divine nature, and no attentive reader of the Bible can dispute that it is, a splendid phenomenon cannot be the way to set it forth. Rather must the revelation take the form of a life of holiness and love, not indeed unaccompanied with displays of power, but still always keeping the power in abeyance, to give place to the love and the holiness, and especially to the love. As love and holiness are attributes which, from their very nature, can be shown only in a person, the revelation of them will of necessity take a personal form. This then is just what we have in Jesus Christ: well might he say, "He that hath

“seen me hath seen the Father.” For Jesus is the perfect purity; Jesus is the perfect love. There is no need to bring forward proofs to substantiate these statements. The Gospels in their simple story are but a clear, constant, overwhelming evidence of them as indisputably true. In them we see that Jesus is the revelation of the Divine love and the Divine holiness. There is no longer any need to say, “Lord, show us the Father.” Any one who now should make that request would show that he has not the most faintly true conception of who and what the Father is.

Let us pass to the bearing of these truths upon the great questions of faith and worship and life.

As regards faith, nothing can be firmer as a foundation for it than such a presentation of God as Jesus gives to us. If the Divine nature were presented to me as consisting of power and nothing else, I confess I could not believe in God, and I think the great majority of men would share with me my unbelief. For when properly used, it is a good rule to argue from the better part of our own nature to the nature of God, that is, from the seen to the unseen; to interpret God by what we find in ourselves. Now the cravings of the great majority of men, and certainly of all good men, are not for power, but for love and purity. But if the God towards whom all the finer feelings of our nature should aspire were only power, His nature would be in conflict with our own, and He would offer us in Himself no ground for faith. If there were any faith called into play, it

would be only the faith of devils who "believe and tremble." But God is far less power than He is love and purity. In such a God it is not hard to believe, for I find the evidences of His being in my own heart. I long for love: I yearn for purity. When I find a God of love and purity, I can believe in Him. I bow before Him; my whole nature goes out to Him in the language of adoration and confidence: "My Lord and my God."

Then, moreover, as regards worship, such a presentation of God as Jesus gives to us makes it not a stern duty but a sweet delight. We may be sure that no man's worship can be better or nobler than the object of his faith. Worship is the child of faith; and the child partakes of the features of its parent. Now it is impossible to worship in spirit and in truth a God who is only absolute power. Before such a being we may shrink and be afraid. We may try to appease him with sacrifices, to propitiate him with gifts, lest he smite us with the thunderbolts of his omnipotence. But there will be no joyous confidence, no glad thanksgivings, no uprisings of the spiritual nature to him; and worship that is wanting in these elements is the worship of slaves and barbarians, not of Christians and children. But a God of love and purity is a fit object of our worship in its best and loftiest moods. We come near to Him because of His love; we are raised above self and sin by the buoyant breath of His purity. The end of worship, the uplifting of man by communion with God, is answered beautifully.

Further, as regards life, the presentation of God given us by Jesus gilds its shadows, lights up its mysteries, explains its meaning, as with the dawn-light of an eternal day. It has just been said that no man's worship can be better or nobler than the object of his faith. Let us go farther, and say that no man's life can be better or nobler than the object of his worship. For life takes its colour and its character from worship. Degraded worship means degraded life. Spiritual worship means a spiritual life. Now, if we worship a God who is absolute power and nothing else, our life will be one of abject fear. We shall be all our lifetime subject unto bondage. There will be nothing free or spontaneous or noble or spiritual about us. We shall lie crushed and writhing like a worm upon which a stone has fallen. We shall be eager for life's ending. Only the fear of what lies beyond life would prevent us from hastening its end. But if the God we worship and believe in is one of love and purity, life is altogether changed. Its cares only make us confide the stronger in His love; its loneliness in His companionship; its sorrows in His sympathy; while, for the present, we may believe that in all things He seeks our purity, desiring to conform us unto His own image, and develop in us His character. Life becomes the sphere of faith and obedience, of filial worship and loyal submission. The end of all is the entering into the fellowship of God's own purity.

Faith and worship and life are inbreathed with a



new spirit through Christ's presentation of God. God is not now the invisible, the arbitrary, the despotic. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

Two things remain to be said. One is by way of warning to Christian teachers, workers, thinkers. Philip had followed Christ from the first, and yet showed by the request he made that he did not even know what the work and purposes of Christ's life had been. It is quite possible for us to be like Philip. We may be in the closest apparent nearness to Christ and yet fail to grasp the central thought of what he is. If we have not yet laid hold of the truth that Christ is the revelation of the Father, we have not yet got the key by which the great mystery of godliness is alone solved. When Paul is telling Timothy of that mystery, what does he put first and foremost? This: "the living God . . . He who was "manifested in the flesh."<sup>3</sup> As teachers and workers, this should hold the first place alike in our teaching and our work. Men want something in religion on which the soul can rest. They are weary of the doubts and strifes and dogmas which are too often called religion. They want something which can be real food and truth and life for the soul. These they can find in Christ, the revealer of God. Let them be shown him, and they will see the Father.

The other thing to be said is by way of consolation. We want God's humanity more than God's divinity, His love and holiness more than His power. Deity, omnipotence, an existence from eternity to eternity,

<sup>3</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 16.



are conceptions in which the mind loses itself like a child wandering in a primeval forest. But human-ness, love, sympathy, tender and uplifting purity, with all these we have kinship. A God to wipe away our tears, and bind up the broken heart, and strengthen the fainting spirit, and carry the other end of life's crosses, is the God whom we need. Such a one we have in the Father as made known by Jesus. No more need we say, "Lord, shew us the Father." For no other revelation of God is better suited to the needs of life than this: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

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## The Gospel to the Corinthians.

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"For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified."—*1 Cor. ii. 2.*

**A**MONG the sins which were disgracing the Corinthian Church at the time of the Apostle's writing his first letter, the sin of division was not the least. From one source and another there had crept in among the members a quarrelsome spirit which had at last carried them to such lengths that they had formed themselves into parties, called each by a distinctive name. In rebuking them for these mischievous doings, Paul does not enquire into the merits of the different sects. He does not pronounce any opinion as to how much of truth and how much of error each of the sects represented. But he goes straight to the centre of the whole matter, and reproves the party spirit itself. It was that that was working all the mischief. Banish that, put an end to that; and union will follow from very necessity. Take away the power that makes the particles repulsive to one another, and mutual attraction will be sure to ensue.

St. Paul endeavours to check this spirit of division by showing the Corinthians that when he first preached among them, calling them into the fellowship of the Gospel, he did nothing to warrant them in exalting him to the leadership of one of the parties in the Church. He had not preached that he had been crucified for

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them and had risen again from the dead to come and tell them so. Like Jesus Christ, he had not, except to a very small extent, administered the rite of baptism to the converts, lest they should attach an undue importance to him, or have ground for saying that they had been baptized into his name. No, he had only preached the Gospel; for that, and nothing else, was what Christ had sent him to do. Therefore they had no reason, because of anything he had done while he was amongst them as their first messenger of Christianity, for taking him out of his divinely-appointed place as a simple preacher of the Gospel, and lifting him to the poor human dignity of the leader of a religious party.

But there was something besides this which showed how little he had aimed at anything like popularity. Before he came to Corinth, he knew quite well the kind of people who dwelt there. There were "Jews, with a keen eye to the profits of merchandize; Greeks, attracted by the fame of the situation of the city, and the glory of the great Isthmian games," which were celebrated every other year, and drew an immense concourse of people from the regions round about. All sorts and conditions of men came to live at Corinth, to enjoy its protection as a Roman colony; "philosophers, merchants, sailors, freedmen, slaves, tradespeople, hucksters, and agents of every form of vice."<sup>1</sup> St. Paul must have been well aware that a message like that with which God had charged him contained just the elements that would call forth different kinds of opposition from the different classes

<sup>1</sup> Farrar's "St Paul," I., pp. 555, 556.

of the citizens of Corinth. A crucified Nazarene—that was the subject of his preaching; a man who twenty years before, far away in Jerusalem, had died a death which every Jew and every Gentile could not but look upon as a most degrading and most revolting punishment—that was what he had come to tell these sensual, sceptical Corinthians about. He must have known that the Greeks would count it all foolishness; that the Jews would find it an offence, a scandal, a stumbling block; that from all classes, on one score or another, it would receive silent contempt or open opposition. Nevertheless, St. Paul determined to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and him crucified. He would make no compromise; he would not accommodate his message to any existing desire or prejudice; he had been sent to preach the Gospel, and the Gospel, in its simplicity, in its naked truth, with all the elements of unpopularity about it, he had solemnly resolved to preach. Truly it was manifest that he had never sought a false glory for himself by trying to make the matter of his message pleasing to Corinthian ears and minds. Nor had he courted acceptance either for himself or for his message by the manner in which he had delivered it to his hearers. He had not ornamented it with any gaudy trappings of rhetoric; he had not decked it out with any clever theories, any fanciful speculations. The Cross that he lifted up in Corinth was not hung about with wreaths and flowers; the Christ who was crucified on it was not crowned and clothed after the manner of a king. “Not with excellency of speech or

"of wisdom" had he proclaimed to the Corinthians "the mystery of God." For he wanted the faith of those who should believe what he said to "stand not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." Alike in the matter of his preaching, and in its manner, there was nothing that gave the Corinthians ground for exalting him at the expense of his Master. Therefore—this is the moral—let the Corinthian Church put an end to its divisions, and return to the simplicity and unity of that Gospel which Paul had first preached among them five years before.

But it is not with the Church at Corinth and its errors of doctrine and practice that we are mainly concerned now. It is with the subject matter of Paul's preaching to which, as we have just seen, he refers as an argument for the restoration to the Church of its lost unity. "For I determined," he says, "not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and "him crucified." What Paul preached and why he preached it—those are the two points around which our thoughts will gather in this essay.

In the first place, then, let us dwell a little on the subject matter of his testimony to the Corinthians. It was testimony concerning a person—Jesus Christ; it was testimony concerning this person under a particular aspect—as crucified. Now, on the religious side of their character, the Apostle's hearers answered to the differences existing among them as people of distinct nationalities. Broadly speaking, they could be divided into Jews and Greeks; and as they had difference of race, so they had difference of religion, of

religious ideas, of religious prejudices. Indeed, race has a great deal to do with religion, at least with the character of religious faith and the forms of religious worship. Even within comparatively recent times, we cannot fail to see what different developments one and the same Christianity has undergone in the Greek Church of the East and the Latin Church of the West. In many respects the differences between these two great Churches are so wide that we wonder how they can both be the children of their common mother, the Christianity of Christ and his Apostles. And yet they are. How then have their differences arisen? Are they matters of accident? Scarcely. They seem to be the natural outcome of the broad and well-defined features that distinguished Eastern nations from Western nations in the time of Christ and that distinguish them still. At any rate there was as marked a difference between the religious character of the Jews and the religious character of the Greeks as between their national characters. Therefore when the Gospel came to them, each party treated it in a different way, and opposed it for a different reason.

The Jews, with the Oriental love of mystery and magic, especially with the Old Testament history behind them, asked for signs. This was a request so often made to Christ by the generation of his day that he even said to them, "Except ye see the signs and wonders ye will not believe."<sup>2</sup> They wanted something marvellous, something startling, which would be to them the credentials that the Gospel was

John iv. 48.

indeed of Divine origin and worthy their acceptance. But although Christ and his Apostles worked miracles, they never intended to pander to this morbid love of the astonishing and the mysterious. They desired only to soothe human suffering, to comfort human sorrow. They scarcely ever appealed to their miracles as a proof of their Divine mission, and then only as a last resource because of the hardness of men's hearts. Miracles may be a confirmation of faith, they can never be a ground of faith: "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." It is they whom Christ wants for his disciples. Thus when the Jews in Corinth asked for signs, Paul would not gratify them. It certainly seems that he would not even dwell upon the miraculous in the life of Jesus, as being the least important element, and as seeming like a concession to the craving for the mysterious as a proof of the Divine. On the contrary, Paul kept on with his testimony of Christ and him crucified, not as a Messiah working wonders, but as a Saviour suffering a shameful death. He had determined to know nothing else among the Corinthians.

Besides the Jews, however, who asked for signs, there were the Greeks who sought after wisdom. They were a people fond of subtle reasonings about every conceivable subject, very frequently getting out of their depth in their adventurous thinking, and floundering about in follies and sophistries innumerable. They wanted arguments rather than facts, speculations rather than testimony, elaborated theories of the



Gospel rather than the simple preaching of it. The possibility and the means of the Incarnation, the precise relationship between the Son and the Father, the meaning and the mystery of the Trinity, the nature of angels and spirits and the unseen world, the connexion between man's sin and Christ's atonement—these were the sort of questions which the Greeks, with their logic and their philosophy, would have liked Paul to discuss with them. But when they found him insisting on simply giving testimony to Christ as a historical person, and to his crucifixion as a historical fact, then they called it all foolishness, and turned away from him in contempt. He ought to have known better, forsooth, than to have come to them—clever, subtle, philosophical Greeks—with his simple message of Christ and him crucified. But Paul kept to his theme, grand from its very simplicity ; for he had determined to know nothing else among the Corinthians. Neither the miraculous nor elaborate theories of the Gospel could draw him away from his great subject-matter. Let us look a little more closely at the subject-matter itself.

It divides itself into two parts : first, Christ, and secondly Christ crucified. What are we to understand when the Apostle tells the Corinthians that he preached Christ? The question is one of importance, because in our own time, with the great majority of religious people, a minister of religion finds favour or disapproval according as he appears to them to preach Christ or not to preach him. Much of the man's influence and authority depends upon their

estimate of him as judged by this standard. Nor indeed ought it to be otherwise, because a Christian minister's business is to preach Christ. If he fail to do that, he is not discharging the duties of his office, and his title becomes a misnomer. But what is it to preach Christ? Evidently to preach Christ is first of all to preach a *Person*; not speculations or theories or opinions, but a Person, a real historical Person, who lived and taught and worked and died among the Jews in Palestine more than eighteen centuries ago. It is to preach the facts about him as they were currently believed by St. Paul and his fellow-apostles, as we have them in the four Gospels which profess to give, each from the writer's standpoint, the record of his life. It is to preach his humility, his purity, his devotion to God's will, his tenderness, his sympathy, his benevolence, his love. It is to preach him as he went about doing good, teaching men about God their Father, and setting before them in himself the Divine ideal of a perfect life. It is to preach him as dying, and as dead, and as rising again, and as dwelling for evermore in the hearts of his followers by the Spirit which is given unto them. But it is more than this. To preach Christ is also to preach his *doctrines*. When it is said that Bacon is taught in our universities, it is meant that the system of philosophy which that great man published to the world is taught there. Similarly, when Paul says that he preached Christ, we are to understand that he preached the great truths which formed the foundation of Christ's message to men. To look up

with child-like love to God as our Father, to count it our noblest duty as it is our greatest privilege to do His will, to seek in everything His glory and honour, to strive after His purity, to confide in His care, to repress our sinful selves, to love all men as our brethren, to sacrifice ourselves for their sakes, to forgive our enemies and do good to them who do harm to us—to preach to men these truths and doctrines, which no one can deny to occupy a very large place in Christ's teachings, this is to preach Christ. To preach Christ, then, is first to preach him as a historical person, and secondly to preach the doctrines that he taught.

The second part of the subject matter of Paul's preaching was Christ as crucified. That is to say, he set forth the historical person, Jesus Christ, under the particular aspect of his death upon the Cross. Just as he testified to the other facts of Christ's career, the other features of Christ's character, so he testified with especial force to the fact that Christ had been crucified, to the feature of his character which his crucifixion prominently brought out. Strange that Paul should dwell on this with such stress! If he had come to Corinth with a merely human mission, impelled by merely human motives, eager for success measured by the world's standard, is it likely that he would have fastened upon Christ's death as the great topic of his testimony? Not for one moment. There is in France a political party called the Bonapartists. They want to overthrow the Republic in that country and restore the monarchy from among the Bonapartist princes.

In trying to enamour their fellow-countrymen of the glory and splendour of royalty, they would no doubt recall the magnificence and power of France under the great Napoleon. But would they dwell on his defeat at Waterloo, or his captivity at St. Helena? They would be wiser than that. Not his downfall and degradation, but his might and victory, are what they would speak of most. But the preachers of the Gospel, in extending the kingdom of Heaven, adopt a different plan. The betrayal of Jesus, Gethsemane and its anguish, Calvary and its Cross, the Saviour's humiliation and shame and suffering and death, these have a large, a foremost place in the story which those who preach Christ tell to men. Why? Because these truths and facts are the essence of the Gospel: "to the Jews indeed a stumbling block, to the Gentiles foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

Look at this fact for one moment. The Gospel has three ends to serve: first, it desires to reconcile men to God, "for the mind of the flesh is enmity against" Him; secondly, it desires to give them a hatred of the sin which hides God's face from them, and hinders them from knowing the truth and love and light of God; thirdly, it desires to bring them into a love of His law of holiness, into devotion, self-surrender to His will as the will of their Father. To bring about these ends, God came amongst men in Jesus Christ, live and loved and died amongst them. Christ crucified is the great means of the achieve-

ment of these ends. For there, on the Cross, God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, pouring out the love of His great Divine heart as it throbbed amid its agony, fulfilling in the sight of Heaven and earth that deep true word, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the death of Christ makes known the Divine hatred and holy loathing of sin, and gives to men a dark, dark picture of what sin can do, that they may learn to abominate and forsake it. A young man has broken his father's heart by his evil doings. The news of his father's death reaches him, and he resolves to go home to take one last look at the well-remembered face with all the traces of its sorrow deep written upon it, before it is hidden from his sight for ever. The thoughts of the past come rushing in upon his mind like a great wave as he stands alone by the side of the open coffin. The prayers and tears with which his father implored him to abandon his evil ways; the disgraces from which his father's never-ceasing kindness has rescued him; the love against which he has sinned obstinately and long; the fond hopes which his vice has blasted, all come flocking to him as he stands gazing upon the dead face with its silver crown of thin white hair. "That is what my sin has done," thinks he; "I have broken the heart now stilled in death; this is the return I have made for all my father has been to me and done for me. God forgive and pity me. I will go and sin no more." In Christ crucified

<sup>8</sup> John xiv. 13.

we see the effects of human sin. Goodness and purity and love came amongst us, and we put them to death when we killed Christ. At the foot of the Cross we learn to hate sin, to share the Divine hatred of it, and the second end of the Gospel is answered.

The third end is to teach us devotion to the will of God. We think of the agony in the garden. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." We think of the Lord's words to Peter, when that impulsive disciple used a sword in the defence of his Master: "The cup which the Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" In Christ the crucified, when "these things reached their crisis, and he was bearing the humiliation of his unalterable destiny, we learn devotion to the will of God, the splendour and nobility of utter self-surrender. This is the Gospel: reconciliation to God, hatred of sin, devotion to the Father's will, and the means of effecting these in each human heart is Christ crucified.

Having thus dealt with the first part of our theme, which is at the same time the larger part, let us now come to the second part, and ask why Paul preached Christ and him crucified. There must have been strong reasons, for he says with great emphasis, "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." So strong was his conviction as to what he ought to proclaim to the Corinthians, that not merely would he not preach anything else, but he would not even know, even be conscious of anything else. It was as

though all other knowledge had been resolutely sunk in this; as though the consciousness of all other facts had been absorbed in these facts, that Christ had lived, and that Christ had been crucified. Those facts were for St. Paul the sum and substance of his theology and his preaching while at Corinth.

We cannot understand the difficulties of the Apostle's position as the messenger of such a theme as this. We cannot appreciate the strength of the temptation to keep back what he knew his hearers would feel to be repulsive to them. "For us," as a modern writer has well said, "the Cross is illumined with "the glories of eighteen centuries of civilization, "and consecrated with the memory of all that is "best and noblest in the history of Christendom." These words are very true. With us the man who blasphemes the name of Christ, who derides the story of the Cross as maudlin sentiment, is a man with whom we feel that good and pure-minded people have nothing in common. We are intensely grieved that the human heart should be so securely closed against the tenderly beautiful as to find matter for ridicule in the melting records of the death of Jesus. But with the people of Corinth, both Jews and Greeks, things were far otherwise. To them the Cross was a great offence, a scandal, a stumbling block, foolishness, all that was base, contemptible. The scoffer was applauded; it was a subject fit only for opposition and sneers and laughter and derision. To them the Cross afforded no other spectacle than that of a sufferer undergoing a most revolting and

most degrading punishment. There was thus a great temptation to present God's message to men under other forms than that of a crucified Christ. Could the preacher not compromise with the known prejudices of his hearers? No; for Christ and him crucified is Christianity in theory as to live in his Spirit is Christianity in practice. If Paul had preached other things he would not have fulfilled his prime calling as an ambassador for God. If he had not disdained all other kinds of knowledge, his testimony would not have remained free from excellency of speech and of wisdom, from signs for which the Jews asked, from speculative theories such as would tickle the ears and please the minds of the Greeks. If men had believed, as a result of his preaching, other things than Christ and him crucified, their faith would have stood in the wisdom of men, not in the power of God. And Paul well knew that faith with such a foundation would not be worth anything. For in the darkness its poor flicker would go out, and in the rude storm it would be shaken to pieces like a house of cards. Therefore, he kept on with the one theme that he had been sent to preach, the theme of Christ and him crucified.

But besides this reason for the subject matter of his preaching, the reason of his fidelity to his calling and the particular necessities of his hearers, there was another which probably was stronger still—namely, that Christ and him crucified is the only great Divine answer to human spiritual needs. It is the voice, the word out of the eternal silences in response to men's



cries for an explanation of the mysteries of human life. Nothing else would do for the people of Corinth; nothing else will do for us. We are sinful: what is the meaning of sin? We are sorrowful: what is the meaning of sorrow? We thirst, we long for purity, for nobleness, for something greater and better than art and science, literature and human wisdom, earthly comforts and the world which is passing away, can give us: what is the meaning of this thirst, this longing? Finite, we yearn for infinity; mortal, for immortality; human, for the Divine. What, what is the meaning of it all? The Cross, Christ crucified, answer our questionings. Let us be crucified with Christ, and rise with him into newness of life, and straightway we shall understand it all. There we shall learn what sorrow means; from the broken heart of God gush forth sweet streams of consolation and sympathy. There we shall learn what our longings mean; for by overcoming our lower life of flesh and sense, we shall rise into the higher Divine life of immortality and holiness and love. Becoming conformed unto Christ's death, we taste the fellowship of his sufferings. We pass through them as through a gloomy vale, and rise to the sunlit heights of the power of his resurrection. Christ and him crucified: that satisfies our needs, explains life's mysteries, points out to us the path whose goal and end is God. Knowing these things, how could Paul preach anything else? He could not but lose all consciousness and sink all other knowledge in the consciousness and the knowledge of the Cross of Christ.

There was, moreover, a reason even stronger still, if that be possible, why Paul should make this the great theme of his ministry. For not only did he recognise the truth that Christ crucified is the answer to the needs of human spirits, but he had also found that Christ crucified had answered his own needs. There is no proof so certain, so convincing, as the proof of one's own experience. There is no fact so well attested as a fact of our own consciousness. This was the case with Paul as regarded the power of Christ and him crucified. He had been a proud, self-righteous Pharisee; he had persecuted the Church of God; he had opposed with bitter hatred the teachings and the followers of the Man of Nazareth. But all was changed when he wrote: "Far be it from me to "glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, "through which the world hath been crucified unto "me, and I unto the world." <sup>4</sup> The despised Nazarene, the crucified Jesus had become his dear Master, the symbol of shame transfigured into a ground of glorying. There was the effect. Where was the cause? In the Gospel, which to the humble, devout, believing spirit of Saul of Tarsus had become the power of God unto salvation. Can we wonder, then, that he had determined to know nothing among the Corinthians save Jesus Christ and him crucified?

<sup>4</sup> Galatians vi. 14.

## Conformity through Contemplation.

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“ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit.”—2 *Cor.* iii. 18.

I N every sphere of thought, moral, political, social, scientific, there are two tendencies ever at work, the conservative and the progressive. The conservative tendency tries to maintain the old order, finding in the fact that certain creeds and modes and customs have had a long lease of life, a reason why they should continue to live. The progressive tendency recognises that, in the words of Tennyson, “ the old “ order changeth, giving place to new,” and that it is as reasonable for one generation to think that the conditions of a previous generation will suffice for it as it would be for a man to return to the clothes of his childhood.

Nevertheless, to true progress both tendencies are necessary. In the earth's course around the sun, two forces operate to keep the earth in its place. There is the centrifugal force, which, if it were not corrected by the other, would cause the earth to fly off at a tangent into the infinite realms of space. There is the force of gravitation exerted by the sun, attracting the earth toward itself, but prevented from doing this by the former. In the sphere of thought the tendencies of

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progress and conservation answer respectively to these two forces in the sphere of matter.

Now in the Christian Church, from the time of its great Founder onward, the existence of these two tendencies may be clearly seen. Christ himself, in the perfection of his wisdom, embodied both in his teachings. He did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. His watchword was not abolition, but reform; his method was not a plucking-up of the evil tree and its destruction root and branch, but the ingrafting of a new, pure, good life, the life of the Spirit, expelling in its progress the old corruption, till it had attracted and assimilated all to itself. But after Christ the two tendencies of progress and conservation diverged from the union which they enjoyed in him. Each of them thenceforward embodied itself in a distinct school with its own partisans and disciples. Neither, indeed, was violently hostile to the other. They both worked together for good, and good was the result of their co-operation. Yet the line of action of each is too marked to be confused with or mistaken for the other.

The Apostle Paul was the leader of the party of progress. Although brought up amid the traditions of the Jewish Scribes, and learned in all the wisdom of the Rabbis; although a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin, and, as touching the law, a Pharisee—he yet recognised that since the coming of Jesus Christ the old order had changed, and had given place to new. The recognition must ever be one of the brightest gems in the Apostle's crown. Next to Jesus

himself, we owe more to Paul on the question of the place and the use of the ministry of Moses, in the Divine education of the race, than to any other man whose words or writings have come down to us in the New Testament. He understood these things because he believed in them; for faith is often the parent of understanding. The memories of the religious experiences of child-life and youth and early manhood were for him bound up with the Jewish law. Though we know how he afterwards became free from its bondage, and exulted in Christian liberty, it was still from his own personal experiences that he was best enabled to point the moral of that law and show its utility in the religious education of the human race. He did not cast his fetters away from him when by the magic touch of a spiritual hand they fell off from his wrists. He kept them by him, as the English nation keeps its great Charter of liberty, as mementos and explanations of the past.

In the chapter from which the text of this essay is taken, the Apostle is dealing, under one of its aspects, with the difference between Mosaism and Christianity, and the way in which the one has grown and developed into the other. He describes the Christian ministry, the ministry of the Gospel, in contrast and contradiction to the Jewish ministry, the ministry of the Law. Paul, the Apostle of progress, recognised that the coming of Christ radically and vitally altered the conditions of the religious life. Keen as was his eye for the glory of the face of Moses, he admitted that the glory was passing away, eclipsed by the greater

brilliancy of the Divine glory as it shone forth in the face of Jesus Christ. The recognition of this fact, as St. Paul evidently implies, is essential to the spiritual transformation of heart and life, which is the end of religion. If we think that the Christian character is made by a kind of cast-iron process over which he in whom it is formed has no control, we are very much mistaken. The Christian character is the result of a long course; it is the end of a transformation, and that not a sudden one as if brought about by the wave of a magician's wand, but a gradual progressive one, like that which takes place between winter when the fields lie bleak and white with snow, and autumn when the same fields are clothed with a golden harvest beneath the eyes of a gracious sun and the rejoicing heavens. Still to abide by Moses and the Law when Christ and the Gospel have come amongst men is to veil our faces, and to prevent the light of that glory falling full upon us, transforming at the same time that it illumines. St. Paul did not do this; of himself and of Christians generally he says, "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit."

There are two thoughts which meet us in considering this subject of spiritual transformation. The one is the end to be attained by it; the other is the means of the attainment of that end.

First, then, what is the end of this transforming process? It is to reproduce in us the Divine image; to make us like unto God, in those elements of His

character which are possible for us to possess. Of course there are some elements which, in the nature of things, lie wholly outside the range of our possession, such as omnipotence. There cannot be two omnipotences, just as there cannot be two infinities. Nor indeed, even if omnipotence were set before us as a desirable object of pursuit, would the best and noblest among men care to pursue it. There are few appetites so base and contemptible as the appetite of power. There are few sights more despicable than a man grasping at power. Almightyness is indeed one of the essential elements in our conception of God, but it is one which we are nowhere called upon to reach after. The elements in which God is most worthy to be imitated are His holiness and His love, and these are set before us as desirable objects of pursuit. It is in these elements that we are to covet likeness to God; it is in these elements that we are to seek conformity to the Divine image.

To propose this conformity to us as the end and aim of the Christian life is quite in accord with what we should be led to expect of the wisdom and love of God. For it simplifies the entire question of what is the nature and the purport of that life. As soon as we grasp the fact that to be transformed to the Divine image is the broadest and deepest meaning of the Christian calling, we begin to see that that calling is not vague and dim and mysterious and shadowy—a matter of frames of mind and states of feeling—but is in truth real and definite. It is not, of course, meant that we can ever say in regard to our attainment of

the Divine image that it is completed. For the perfection of the character of God transcends the furthest flight of our imagination in love and purity. An eternity will scarcely suffice to unfold it. It passes knowledge. But it is meant that to understand the end of the Christian life as being transformation into the Divine image, gives us a fixed, certain, definite conception, which, when once laid hold of, nothing can destroy. It seems to raise us above the strife of conflicting creeds and theories, each struggling with the others for mastery; and to hide us in that peaceful pavilion of the great heart of God where strife dies away into silence and conflict passes into the victory of faith.

In addition to this advantage, it furnishes us with this even greater one, that such a conception of the end of the Christian life is most admirably suited to our growth in grace and spiritual knowledge. Whatever may await us in the hereafter, here we know only in part, and that part only imperfectly. We are but children in the school of God, and our great business is to learn conformity to Him who is both our Father and our Teacher. There are some who seem to think that the secret of religion is to comprehend the principles on which God administers the affairs of the universe, or mighty and profound questions of a kindred nature. But the secret of religion is nothing of the kind. Rather is it something infinitely more practical, more real, more beneficial, than any such speculations. The end of the Christian life is likeness to God, conformity to the Divine image; that is what we are here



to lay hold of and learn. We are to be perfected by imitation. God reveals Himself to us, and He bids us learn to be like Him. He does not give us a table of rules or a code of morals. No solid, worthy character was ever fashioned by such means as these. Can any man who feels that he owes much to a brave and upright father, to a pure and gentle mother, do otherwise than admit that their example, lived day by day before his eyes from his infancy onwards, did infinitely more towards the formation of his moral character than any religious instruction which they ever gave him by word of mouth? If a child has bad examples in the lives of his parents, his perceptions of right and wrong are receiving a warp and a bias which scarcely any amount of subsequent training will entirely correct. Now we are children in the school of God. The sum of our learning is conformity to the Divine image. The Divine image is revealed to us that we may become conformed to it.

The Apostle says that this process goes on from glory to glory. This does not merely mean a progress from one degree of glory to another, till at length the highest degree is attained. It means rather that the transformation, as it begins in glory, also ends in glory. It begins in the glory of God and issues in our glory. God's glory is revealed that we may become glorious. The heart of God is infinitely benevolent. It is His delight to minister to the wants of mankind, in a less degree to their material wants, in a greater degree to their spiritual wants. He has nothing which it will be to men's real good to partake that He does not desire

us to share with Him. His purity, His joy, His peace, even His own Divine nature, He calls to us to receive. For He knows that good is made doubly good by making others partakers of it. The enjoyment of it is multiplied in the ratio of its distribution. The man who has the minimum of enjoyment out of life is the selfish man. God's glory is therefore revealed to make us glorious. The transforming process takes its rise in His glory and finds its completion in ours.

But we must pass to the second and more important part of our subject, which has been said to be the means of the attainment of the Divine image. "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit." As is quite evident, the Apostle is explaining the spiritual truth on which we have been dwelling by an apt and striking comparison. When we see the sun as reflected in a polished mirror of silver, such as the ancients used in the place of our ordinary looking glass, the reflected light illumines us. It sheds itself forth again upon us. For the time we are, as it were, clothed with a garment of living light, and transformed and transfigured by its brightness. That is the idea which the Apostle has in his mind. What is the application that he makes of it? It is this: the light which shines upon the mirror is the symbol of the glory of God; the mirror upon which the light shines and in which it is seen is the symbol of Jesus Christ, the revelation of the glory of God in humanity; the light which is reflected from the mirror, and streams forth

upon the beholders in transforming brightness, is the symbol of the spiritual influences which are at work through the revelation of God in the Spirit.

If we compare this explanation with the Apostle's words themselves, there are evidently three parts which go to make up the means by which our transformation into the Divine image is brought about. There is, first, the revelation of God in Christ ; there is, secondly, the beholding this revelation ; and, thirdly, there is the influence of the revelation upon us as we behold it.

The revelation of God in Christ is the first part of the agency. God is the eternal light, glorious beyond comprehension, and of a brightness so intense that of Himself He says, "No man can see my face "and live." In all the passages throughout the Bible where favoured men are said to have seen God, we are of course to understand either that it was only in their inner consciousness, in that hidden realm where the Divine Spirit can come in contact and communion with the human ; or else it was by means of some outward phenomenon, strange and majestic, which a voice within them told them to regard as a similitude of God. It cannot be otherwise ; mortal eyes cannot discern spirit ; "flesh and blood do not inherit the kingdom of God." Therefore, when God would reveal Himself more clearly than ever before ; when He would show us His essential attributes of holiness and love and, in a less degree, of power ; when the Divine nature itself should come and dwell amongst men, it could not be except through the mediation of humanity, through Jesus

Christ. "For there is one God, and one mediator "between God and man, the man Christ Jesus."<sup>1</sup> The eternal light, of a brilliancy surpassing that of the sun at noon-day, can be looked upon only as in a mirror. Christ is that mirror, as St. Paul says in this same Epistle, "God hath shined in our "hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the "glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> Thus, because Christ is the setting forth of the love and purity of God, it is true that, to use his own words, he that has seen Christ has seen the Father. For although no man hath seen God at any time, yet in Christ we behold his glory, full of grace and truth. Christ mirrors forth for us the eternal light.

But it is beyond all things else the glory of God that Christ reveals. Now, as we think of the lowly birth and obscure childhood, the life of trial and the death of shame of Jesus, it seems rather a contradiction to say that he is a revelation of the Divine glory. If we want that glory described, we should be inclined to turn to some of the great nature-psalms, as they are called, where, in the world shaken with convulsions, or in the restless heaving sea, or in the march of the thunderstorm, or in the gladness of the summer heavens, we almost see the might and hear the footfalls of the great Jehovah. These sublime sights are what we should rather be disposed to call the display of his glory. The grandeur of a summer's noontide, that is glory; the splendours of the rising or the setting sun, they are glory; not the tender, timid,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. ii. 5.<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 6.

weeping face of night. The vision which St. John had of the City of God, whose light is the Lord God Almighty, eclipsing the brightness of a universe of suns, that is glory ; not the vision of a lowly sufferer under Gethsemane's olive trees, with the paschal moonbeams glinting through their boughs, nor the vision of the same Sufferer uplifted, amid shame and mockery, upon the altar of the Cross. But in such an estimate of the glory of God we are mistaken. When, after the Israelites' worship of the golden calf, and Moses' intercession for the idolaters, he received a command to go on in his leadership of the travelling nation, Moses, to strengthen him in his duties, to assure himself that all was well, prayed to the Lord and said, "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory." What was the answer to his prayer? "I will make," said God, "I will make all My goodness pass before thee."<sup>8</sup> The essence of the Divine glory is the Divine goodness. When this promise was shortly after fulfilled, the fulfilment came in a revelation of the name and nature of the Lord, a revelation suited to the poor, half-civilized nation, with the vices of slavery still upon it, a revelation such as humanity needs continually for its comfort and progress. The essence of the revelation was this: "The Lord God, merciful and "gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness "and truth." This is the Divine glory, the glory of a love that does good even to the evil, and sympathizes with the sufferer, and, as the end of its benevolence, sets before itself the bringing in of righteousness.

<sup>8</sup> See a previous Essay : "Goodness and Glory."

Now, in Jesus Christ we have the display of the Divine glory, because we have the display of the Divine goodness. He showed the love, the sympathy, the tenderness, the fatherhood, the readiness to forgive of Him whom one of Christ's Apostles defines to us in that exhaustless word, "God is love." Of Christ we read, "He went about doing good." He was among men as one that served. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. In the goodness of God as seen in Jesus we have the glory of God. God is mirrored in Christ, and shines forth from him.

The next element in the agency of our being transformed into the Divine image is the contemplation of the glory of God as seen in Christ. This is the contribution on the human side to the bringing about of the Divine purposes of mercy. "We all," says the Apostle, "beholding as in a mirror, with unveiled face, 'the glory of the Lord.'" God is mirrored for us in Christ, and bids us gaze upon the image therein set forth, with earnest contemplation. The Christian life is not one of absolute passivity; the Christian calling is not a calling to spiritual indolence. On the contrary, the Christian life is a life of effort, the Christian calling is a calling to activity. "So 'run,'" says the Apostle to the Church at Corinth, "so run that ye may obtain." "I press toward the 'mark,'" he says, speaking of himself. This is neither passivity nor indolence. Exactly similar is it with the figure with which our text presents us. "Beholding" expresses the long, earnest, enquiring gaze of rapt

and attentive contemplation. Only to those who in this way study the image of God as mirrored in Christ is granted the transforming power which issues from the image. We have not now, as they had who lived in the days of Christ upon earth, and whom he favoured with his converse and his company, the opportunity of perceiving with the senses this revelation of God. But to the spiritual mind this is a matter of little moment. Because, after all, it is only to the spiritual mind, as St. Paul says, that the things of God are revealed.<sup>4</sup> To the natural man, the man engrossed with the information and the pleasure coming to him through the senses, they are foolishness. He cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned. The revelation of God in Christ is a revelation not to the sense nor to the intellect, but to the emotions and the heart. As soon as ever we begin to reason about it we lose ourselves in useless wordiness. We leave the cool and sweet refreshment of the tree and the river of life, and get into the sandy arid region of speculation. That Christ is on earth no longer matters scarcely at all to those who really wish to enjoy the self-revelation of God in him. We have the Gospels, fresh as a May morning in their simplicity, turning the full rays of their concentrated light upon him who is the prominent figure of them all. With not less truth than John may we say, "We beheld his glory." As we turn over the pages of those wonderful records, we see God in humanity. His love and tenderness, His

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 14.

purity and truth are there made manifest. If in a prayerful, and humble, and reverent spirit we look on God mirrored in Christ as Christ is mirrored in the Gospels, we do indeed behold the glory of God. We are not a whit behind the very chiefest Apostles in an apprehension of Christ.

It is with unveiled face that we look. This expression had a meaning for the Apostle Paul which it has not for us. The veil which was upon the heart of the Jewish nation when he wrote his letter to the Corinthian Christians, and which, alas! is upon it still, had once been upon Paul's. But through his conversion from the law of Moses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, through his turning to the Lord the Spirit, the veil had been taken away. Like Moses, of whom we read in the Book of Exodus, that "when he went in before the Lord to speak "with him, he took the veil off until he came out,"<sup>5</sup> the Apostle, with all Christians, looked upon the glory of God in Christ with an unveiled face. This is essential. For if the beholding of the glory presented in the mirror should take place with a covered countenance, the reflection of the glory could not operate on the beholders so as to make them glorious with its light. There is a deep truth for us in this. A man may veil his face, and the glory of God in Christ cannot reach and illumine him. Any cherished sin, any lingering love of evil, any proud thoughts, any unbelief, any worldliness, any want of spirituality, is a veil over the face of the inward man.

<sup>5</sup> Exodus xxxiv. 34.



A few words must suffice in speaking of the third element in the agency of our transformation into the Divine image. That element is the influence which the beholding of the glory of God in Christ has upon us. It is declared to be a spiritual influence, "even "as from the Lord the Spirit." This is just what we should expect. The transformation is one of character, of life, of spirit, beginning from within and working outwards, and naturally enough cannot be accomplished otherwise than through the action of the Divine Spirit upon our own. This process goes on while we contemplate God mirrored in Christ. The light that comes from the mirror and falls upon the faces of the beholders is the symbol of the influence of the Spirit of God. That is the continued and continuing effect of the revelation of God in humanity. When that revelation had passed away, when Christ had been taken from among men, God perpetuated the force and fulness of that revelation by means of the Spirit. "The past fact of Christ in history," as a recent writer well remarks, "the past fact of Christ in "history becomes the present truth of the Spirit of "Christ in human hearts." Let this point be illustrated by a well-authenticated incident of the romance of missions: "A boy in Japan once found a leaf of the "Bible—a simple, bare record of historical fact. But "it led him across the ocean in search of the Chris- "tian's God. He learned our language, and as "historical Christian records were brought to his "knowledge, just as any other book might have been "brought, his mind seemed to pass through what was

“almost a new creation. It rose to such conceptions  
“of the Deity as it had never before imagined. The  
“witness of the Spirit within confirmed the record of  
“God given in the historical Gospel. And that boy,  
“become now a Christian man, has gone back to Japan  
“a missionary of the Cross of Christ, and has lived to  
“see his own parents destroy their idols under the  
“influence of the same historical testimony to God in  
“Christ.” Now that is the same kind of thing that  
goes on whenever what is called conversion takes  
place. The glory of God in Christ is the Divine con-  
tribution to it. The contemplation of it by us is the  
human contribution. In the course of contemplation,  
the influences of the Divine Spirit work upon us. The  
reflected beams from the mirror fall upon us, and  
change us into the same image from glory to glory.

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## Comfort for the Lowly.

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"He that comforteth the lowly, even God."—2 *Cor.* vii. 6.

WHEN the Apostle Paul wrote the letter from which these words are taken, he was in Macedonia. It was his second visit to that country, and in its quiet character contrasted somewhat feebly with his first visit, paid about five years before. Of its events and circumstances we know nothing definitely and in detail. All that Luke tells us of it is couched in the general terms that the great preacher went about to the various churches established in those regions and gave them much exhortation. This brief summary is enough to assure us that no such stirring incidents took place as had taken place during the previous visit at Philippi and at Thessalonica. The weak and wearied frame of the Apostle, not naturally vigorous, and bearing now manifest signs of the travels and labours and sufferings which for twenty years he had cheerfully undergone for Christ's sake, was not again called upon to endure the trials encountered once before in those cities. But, notwithstanding this, his second sojourn in Macedonia was far from being free from affliction. Indeed, in this respect, it was perhaps even worse than the first sojourn. Bodily sufferings are by no means the most trying that a man can be called upon to bear. The bitter remembrance

that the hand which he was holding out to be first consumed in the flames had signed a recantation of his faith and a submission to Papal authority five months before, was a heavier woe to the mind of Thomas Cranmer than all the tortures he was enduring at the moment amid the fierce heat of the martyr-fires of Oxford. Paul and his fellow-traveller Silas, though their hands were fettered, their feet fast in the stocks, their backs bleeding and smarting with the stripes of the cruel thongs, yet sang cheerfully their hearts' praises to God in the dark and loathsome inner-dungeon of the gaol at Philippi. For the joyous soul must be joyous everywhere. Now, however, on this second visit to that city, although no more called to undergo such degrading afflictions, he was suffering even more than before. For his trials were mental; sorrow sat oppressively upon his spirit. "Our flesh had no relief," he writes, in a strong figure conveying the idea of a very climax of woe. "We were afflicted on every side; without were fightings, within were fears."<sup>1</sup>

It was through no fault of his own that these troubles had come upon him. Nor did they relate to himself. These reflections were probably a mitigation of his sorrow; for the remembrance that a man has mixed the ingredients of his own cup of bitterness must always make the bitter draught more bitter still. Nevertheless, the Apostle's sufferings, as we learn from his own words, were acute. The Church at Corinth, that Church so rich in spiritual gifts and yet

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor., vii. 5.

so full of shame and scandal, had brought them on him. His tender, mother-like heart, quivering to its core with yearning sympathy and disinterested love, was pierced through and through with the sharp sword of sorrow on its account. The spirit of party and division had rent in tatters the seamless robe of the Church's unity. Heavenly gifts had been prostituted to unworthy purposes. The vilest immorality, which even in that vile city and that vile age a pagan might have shrunk from committing, was practised by some and tolerated by others. For the Apostle there were indeed "fightings without;" strife and conflicts in the Church which, with its manifold privileges, ought to have been so peaceful and so pure.

And as there were "fightings without," so also there were for the Apostle "fears within." He trembled for the future of the Church which he had founded amid so many self-denying and incessant labours. What would be the end of the present state of things? Was all his work to be in vain? Were all the fond hopes, ardently cherished, to be blasted; all the fair blossoms that promised such precious fruit to be rudely shaken down and scattered to the winds? Was Christianity in Corinth to become, as it seemed in imminent danger of becoming, a laughing-stock, through the lapse of its recent converts from their faith and their practice? To the Apostle, because of his wonderful power of making the sorrows of others his own, still more because of his fervid devotion to the cause of the kingdom of Christ, possibilities like these, by no means groundless, could not present themselves without

exciting the gravest apprehensions. Truly he had "fears within."

How deeply he was moved by them may be inferred from his acts only a few months before he wrote this second letter to Corinth. On first hearing of the sad state of affairs that had come to pass in the Church there, he despatched Titus thither, bearing what we know as the First Epistle to the Corinthians. After staying a short time longer in Ephesus, where he was at the time, he passed on to Troas. He had instructed Titus to meet him there on his return from Corinth. Paul went to Troas probably with the view of continuing the evangelistic work that had been so suddenly interrupted five years before by the vision of the man from Macedonia beckoning to him and saying, "Come over and help us."<sup>2</sup> But Titus had not yet reached Troas. Paul worked on as well as he could, waiting for his friend; but still Titus did not come. The Apostle's intense anxiety for news from Corinth, telling him of the effect of his letter on the Church he loved so deeply and disinterestedly, grew more intense. But no relief came. At last he could endure the suspense no longer. He felt that he could not carry on his work at Troas while so heavy a burden was weighing on his mind. Once more that work was interrupted. He passed over to Macedonia, in the hope of meeting Titus on his return from Corinth, or at all events of lessening his mental tension by the excitement of travel, by revisiting old scenes and reviving old interests. By-and-bye, however, Titus

<sup>2</sup> Acts xvi. 9.

came. He brought the good news that, notwithstanding the sad condition into which the Corinthian disciples had lapsed, the general effect of the Epistle had been satisfactory. Matters had not passed beyond the hope of reform. Reform of a certain kind had even zealously been begun. Much yet remained to cause anxiety, but much also gave ground for thankfulness and hope. Light again broke forth upon Paul's heart, over which grief had been casting its sombre shadows. "He that comforteth the lowly, even God, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not by his coming only, but also by the comfort wherewith he was comforted in you, while he told us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced the more."

In that part of these words which stands at the head of this essay, "He that comforteth the lowly, even God," it is not difficult to read a hint of the ministry of affliction to the human soul. "Sweet are the uses of adversity," sings our national poet. But most men need a training in the school of sorrow before they can appreciate the meaning of this great truth. It is a great truth, nevertheless, not only of the Bible, but of human life as well; as, indeed, is every great truth found in the Bible. For whatever in the Bible does not bear on human life may be passed by as comparatively of small importance; interesting, perhaps, to students of history or of prophecy, but not at all of moment for busy practical people like the majority of men, for whom the stern claims of the present are too pressing to allow them to have much to do either with

the past or with the future. On the great truth of the mission of affliction, which no one can deny to have an intimate bearing on human life—a life so full of sorrow and disappointment—our text has somewhat to say. For when the Apostle speaks of God comforting the lowly, it is surely implied that one end of the ministry of trouble is to make us lowly, that we may receive the comfort which God gives to all who are of that spirit.

That Paul recognised this truth is manifest from a chapter in the history of his own life which he gives in this very Epistle. His “stake in the flesh,” as he forcefully calls the affliction, whatever it was, from which he suffered so much and so long, was seen by him to have been sent lest, by his great spiritual privileges, he should be exalted above measure.<sup>8</sup> The thorns pricked him sharply lest he should be too proud of the beauty and the fragrance of the roses given him from the gardens of God. Similar was his experience in the particular case to which our text refers. When he thought of his labours, zealous and ceaseless and self-denying, in the city of Corinth; of the Church in whose establishment they had resulted; of the abundant spiritual gifts and ministrations with which that Church had been blessed; of the ludicrous failure of the agitation set on foot against him by the persecuting Jews; of the manifest signs of success that had crowned his Corinthian sojourn and work—there was only too good ground for congratulating himself on what had been done. Of all the slippery places

<sup>8</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 7.



in which a man's feet may be set, the place of a popular preacher, of a successful missionary is, perhaps, the most slippery. His work, of all human activities, demands self-abnegation, it requires that he should lose himself in it; that he should be submerged in a wave of sacred enthusiasm; that he should be, like the forerunner of Jesus, a voice and scarcely anything more; and meanwhile his success is a force driving him, or at least tending to drive him, in a quite opposite way, and prompting to pride and self-assertion. This we may be quite sure Paul knew well. In the mischiefs which threatened the stability of his past work in Corinth, he recognized the counter-weight put in the scales by a Divine hand to keep him lowly. The anxieties that wracked his yearning mind prevented him from being exalted overmuch. The affliction, heavy and bitter as it was, was not destitute of good and gain. Happy was he in thus learning the meaning of trial; and happy are those whose trials teach them the same great lesson. For the touch of sorrow makes all men kindred one with another. The truths taught in the school of adversity are of universal application. Foremost among them is the truth on which we are dwelling now: that one great end of trial, disappointment, loss, reverse, is to give that lowly mind which is one of the fairest features of a Christ-like character.

How much we need the discipline which, if rightly received, brings with it this lowly mind, is manifest to every one who observes himself and others, and sees

how little of it there is in the world generally. That mock humility, that sham lowliness, which Dickens has satirized so scathingly in his character of Uriah Heep, is not what is meant here; for the man who is always telling us how humble he is, is thereby proved not to be humble; else he would not merely not be conscious of it, but also would have no need to publish it to the world. True humility is like that modest spring-flower, sweet harbinger of the glories of the coming summer, that poets have agreed upon as its most fitting emblem. It sheds its fragrance unconsciously, and yet the fragrance cannot be concealed. It is this true humility which is here meant. It is of this that it is to be feared little indeed is found generally amongst us. For amid life's surging throng, amid the rough jostling of man by man in the struggle for existence, the self-assertiveness of our nature is called forth rather than its self-repression. Lowliness of mind is looked on as a weakness. The priests of Mammon's oracle prophesy that it must carry its possessor to the wall, must force him to a back place on the stage of life's theatre. "Blessed are the meek" is a sentence from the book of God's philosophy that at first sight is hard to understand. That "they shall inherit the earth" is a promise which, in the present state of human affairs, seems almost impossible of fulfilment. If we know anything of ourselves, anything of others, we know that the vice of selfishness is one of the hardest to combat; that the grace of lowliness is one of the most delicate and difficult to cultivate.

The boisterous, self-assertive man; the man whose very look and bearing betoken a sense of his own importance, and whose success in life, as the world's poor little foot-rule measures success, seems to warrant his behaviour—is not he too often taken as a typical hero? The meek and quiet spirit, the lowliness of Christ and of his true disciples, are too often despised as wanting in power; admitted, perhaps, to be beautiful as an ideal, but ill adapted to the conditions of human life, especially in this overwrought nineteenth century, with its stress and strain.

There is little need, however, to point out that if we would be true Christians, practising the Christianity not of the creeds and the churches, but of the lowly Christ himself, all such thoughts as these must be abandoned for ever. For true Christianity is union with God as revealed in Christ Jesus, a blessed union of our spirits with his Spirit. Now this union, considering who and what God is and who and what we are, must be a union of dependence on him. God must be, as Plutarch said eighteen centuries ago, "our Leader and King," and we must "hang on Him wholly." And for this union of dependence, lowliness of mind is an essential, indispensable condition. Whatever is opposed to the one must be also opposed to the other. It is they who bear Christ's burden, wear his yoke, carry their cross as he carried his, that are his real disciples; for their spirits cling in close union to God. Thus, since this lowliness of mind, of the essence of true Christianity and of spiritual life, is naturally so rare a growth in the broad acres of adult humanity,

what wonder is it if God, who does all in love and fatherly kindness, allow disappointment to vex, and sorrow to wring, and pain to rack the heart of man, that in the midst of all humility may spring up and flourish? If we are wise, we shall understand these things. We shall see in every painful discipline, whether short and sharp, or prolonged and dull, a call to lower depths yet of Christ-like humbleness. We shall not rebel and murmur; we shall not ask fretfully and complainingly, "What doest Thou, O God?" but we shall rather say, "I see Thy purpose, O my Father. "May I be humble, meek, lowly, as Thou dost design "that I should be." In the valley of humiliation, though it be dark and tenanted with devils, light will arise upon us, and the angel of the Divine mercy will breathe comfort in our ears.

These words of the Apostle, moreover, point to another truth, equally important with that on which we have just dwelt. For although they seem to be introduced into their verse just by way of parenthesis, they are not chance words lightly spoken, and with a significance by no means deep. This further truth is that the lowly, in whom affliction has done its good work, are peculiarly fitted to receive the comfort which God gives. "He that comforteth the lowly, even "God." When we come to dwell on the matter for a little, we see that this is what we should expect. For in the first place, those whom affliction has rendered lowly are in especial need of comfort. The self-confidence which once sustained them in the hour of storm and trial has crumbled away, like the cliffs on

some of our coasts, through the advancing sea; the satisfaction with self, which makes other men say when afflicted, "Why these troubles? I am sure that I do "not deserve them," is not theirs, even though once it may have been. In their humiliation the natural sources of comfort, human sympathy, the healing ministry of time, the diversion of the mind through the business of life, seem even to flow not so amply as once they did. They have been brought very low—these humble souls; they have been led into the darkest places of the valley. They are in especial need of comfort, in much greater need of it than the buoyant lives which, after a moment's submersion in sorrow's sea, forget their woes as they stand again on hope's sunlit promontory. Therefore it is not at all surprising that God, whose consolations abound to every suffering heart if only it will make them its own, comforts especially the lowly. For if He did not, it surely would be as though He broke the bruised reed, and quenched the smoking flax, and exposed the newly-shorn lamb to the biting breath of the strong east wind.

Still further is it the case that the lowly are peculiarly fitted to receive the Divine comfort, because they are the most susceptible of its gentle ministry. In them it falls upon no ungrateful soil; it touches no unresponsive chords. This effect, too, is quite in the nature of things. For what is the essence of the idea of one human heart, amid its woes and trials, receiving comfort from another? Is it not this—that the one, weakened for the time



being by the blows that have fallen upon it from the heavy hand of adversity, gets strengthening sympathy from the other and stronger? Is it not this—that the comforter says to the saddened one, “Come, O my friend; thou hast had deep and bitter draughts enough; come, drink out of my cup of joy which has enough within it for both thee and me”? But it is quite manifest that only to those in whom affliction has wrought lowliness will such words be spoken, or at least spoken a second time. For only such will accept the comforting sympathy. Scarcely any one, however large and loving his heart may be, would be inclined twice to offer comfort to one who in a former time of trial told him in silly pride, in mistaken vanity of independence, “I do not want your consolation; I prefer to bear my sorrows alone!” In order that comfort may fall with healing grace upon the sad heart, there needs the same condition on which alone there can be the enjoyment of pictures or music or poetry. There needs self-surrender. All true art needs self-surrender on the part of those to whom it would bring its blessedness, its purity. They must give themselves up to it, or it will have no meaning and no mission to them. And such is the case with the comfort which wishes to flow from the joyous human heart into the saddened one. The saddened one must yield its comforter the tribute of self-surrender. This is the forging of the link between them, along which the magnetism of sympathy can pass. As it is between kindred human souls, so is it between man and God.

It is the lowly, in whom the afflictions He has permitted have done their perfect work, who are the most susceptible of the comfort He would give. For pride has gone; trust in self, and its counterpart, independence of God, have gone. Instead, there is lowness, there is self-surrender; and under such conditions the consolations of God may well be given. Not without truth is it said of God that "He comforteth the lowly."

Let us pass now to the third main thought suggested by the Apostle's words, namely, the way in which God comforts the lowly. Now, as for those who think and speak of this life as a life in which there is nothing but sorrow, and of the world as a wilderness where nothing grows except weeds and thorns; who assert, with manifold emphasis, that when sorrow falls upon a man, there is no comfort for him save in religion and the hope of Heaven; a wise view, a Divine philosophy of life, certainly contradicts much of what they say. For in the saddest life, the life that seems to be a sandy desert where anything fresh and fair scarcely appears, not to say does not flourish, there is here and there a little rill of comfort which the eye, cleansed by faith in the goodness of God, will by no means overlook. In the heaviest sorrows of life, every one can avail himself of certain natural resources of comfort that flow alike for all. There is the business of the every-day world, there is the necessity for satisfying the claims of life itself, both of which count for something. Sorrow grows heavier by being brooded on; lighter when the

mind is concerned for a time with other things. There was a weight of strong good sense, even though somewhat roughly expressed, in the opinion which Dr. Johnson once gave on the case of a lady who herself had died through grief at the death of her husband. He said that her life would no doubt have been saved if she had been put in charge of a small chandler's shop, with a baby to nurse. All wise men who have suffered much in mind know how full of comfort is the call to hard work, if it be obeyed. Time, too, the devourer of all things, as the Romans said of it, devours even our heaviest trials, or at least some part of them. Then, again, the mind itself seems endowed with a singular power of adjusting itself to new circumstances and changed conditions. Other natural sources of comfort, open to us all, might be mentioned, but enough has probably been said. They are part of the way in which God comforts the lowly to whom nothing in life comes in vain, but everything has a voice of consolation, a mission of mercy. For the very lowliness of such, never allowing them to question either how much of good or how much of ill they deserve, causes them to feel that all is meant in kindness to them.

But there is still a second and a higher way in which God comforts the lowly. That is by the assurance, which their humble faith well qualifies them to believe, that He is over all their life, with its joys and its sorrows, its paths rough and smooth, its difficulties and contradictions, its days of brightness and nights of gloom; and that He is not only over all *their* life, but



over *all* life, guiding it to its consummation, teaching it to play its part in the great world-drama which is going on. Be the end what it will, the lowly heart, trusting in the goodness of God, in that tender mercy which is over all His works, cannot believe that the drama will prove to be a tragedy, save in as far as all evil shall one day be slain. On the contrary, it believes, spite of appearances to the contrary, that all things, even sin and sorrow and suffering and death, are working together for good. Not that the world cannot be made a much happier place than it is now, if only men choose to do it; not that many a struggling life could not be calmed, many a wretched home be made joyful, many a wearied, worn heart be revived as in the days of its long-past childhood, if glaring social inequalities were modified and bitter social wrongs redressed. But leaving these things to the progress of time and civilization, the lowly hearts lean on the goodness of God and are happy in their trust. No wonder that, as Christ promised them, the meek and lowly find rest to their souls.

We notice, in conclusion, a third and last way in which the Divine comfort is given to the lowly, a way more tender, appealing more intimately to them than either of the other two. That way is the direct ministry of God's good and comforting Spirit to the human spirit. Now, there seems nothing mysterious in this, save in as far as all interplay of spirits on one another, whether Divine or human, is mysterious. But that one human spirit can comfort another, nay, that even a dog's wistful gaze and affectionate licking of the

hand of his troubled master, may bring the man comfort—these are matters of every-day experience. What a poor place the world would be were there not this impression of spirit by spirit for purposes of kindness and sympathy! If, then, human spirits are thus able to minister to one another in the hour of trial, would it not be strange were God not able to minister to us, the Divine Spirit to the human? God would then have created something greater than Himself, a manifest impossibility. But, indeed, what we do so imperfectly, He does perfectly. His wealth of love and consolation is open to relieve the woes and wounds of afflicted man. In His heart the sigh of the sorrowful awakes an echo that forthwith bodies itself in a voice, a living voice of love, speaking to the lowly and tried spirits, and saying, “It is I, O my “children: be not afraid. As one whom his mother “comforteth”—there can be no tenderer consolation than that—“as one whom his mother comforteth, so “will I comfort you.”

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## The Repeated Incarnation.

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“My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you.”—*Gal.* iv. 19.

THE circumstances in which the Churches of Galatia stood at the time of the Apostle's writing them this letter, were such as to give his liberal mind and loving heart great cause for anxiety. These circumstances were the result of causes partly internal and partly external. The chief internal cause lay in the character of the people themselves. They were of that family of the human race that we know by the name of Kelts, whose descendants in our own day are the Welsh and the Irish and the French. The prevalent element in the nature of that family is the element of emotion. They are consequently as fickle and variable and changeful as an April day, with its intermittent sunshine and showers. They are very easily moved. For no one in whom emotion is strongly marked is in the same mind for long together. Such a person blows alternately hot and cold. He is governed not so much by reason as by feeling. He makes a great demonstration of affection about one at first, but is sure pretty soon to change to the opposite extreme. He cannot help himself, perhaps. Every excuse should be made for him. He is the victim and slave of his master-

emotions; he is the sport of his feelings, on whose fitful tide he is tossed about like a toy boat. Yet to know this does not lessen one's disappointment when one has to pay the price of the fickleness of his emotional nature.

This is in large measure the solution of the case in which matters stood between Paul and the village churches of Galatia. When he had first gone amongst them with the Gospel of Christ they had received him, as he says, "as an angel of God." Nay, more, they had received him as though he had been Christ Jesus himself.<sup>1</sup> They had not despised him on account of the disagreeable affection of the eyes from which there is every reason to believe that the great Apostle acutely suffered. Indeed, he bore them witness that, if it had been possible, they would have plucked out their own eyes and have given them to him. Among emotional people like the Galatians, the new faith made rapid progress, enlisting many disciples. Paul's heart was overjoyed. His sensitive nature gave a grateful response to all the displays of affection of which he and his gospel were the objects. But in less than three years, when he visited them a second time on his way to Ephesus, it would seem that he found it needful to give them some very serious warnings. Already, in that brief interval, he could trace a perceptible diminution of the earlier zeal and love of "the bright but fickle people." When, too, later still, he was a second time at Corinth, it seems that news was brought to him which gave the worst confirmation to

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iv. 14.

his fears. The external causes of the unhappy circumstances of the Galatian Churches, which constrained him to write his Epistle, were busily at work, and were working with great success—with such success, indeed, that his beloved converts were removing into a different gospel. Judaising teachers had got amongst them, like disguised wolves into a flock of sheep. They were persuading them that Paul was no apostle of Christ; that his gospel was not the true gospel; that to believe in Jesus was of no avail without an equally strong faith in Moses; and that the grace of God into which they had been called was quite inefficacious, quite inadequate for salvation, unless coupled with a strict observance of the demands and ceremonies of the Jewish ritual and law. The mobile Galatians had received these Judaisers as readily as they had received Paul. They were assenting to their doctrine. They were submitting themselves to their authority. They were renouncing the spirit for the letter, grace for law, the gospel for ceremonial, Jesus for Moses and the Scribes. Having begun in the spirit, they were seeking to be made perfect in the flesh, which was like building a house of sand on a foundation of rock. Surely such a foundation was worthy of a better house. How could the Galatians, after a glad experience of the liberty of Christ, stoop their necks under the yoke of legal bondage, fetter their feet, enchain their hands, and go into the dark prison-house of the law? How could they make into gravecloths the swathing-bands of their new life of faith? These were the questions that agitated the Apostle's mind, and rent his

loving heart with the conflicting emotions of anger and grief.

Under the circumstances, one thing was perfectly clear: that, since these erroneous teachers were insisting on the necessity of the outward, he must not abate a thousandth part of his earnestness in insisting again, as he had ever done, on the necessity of the inward. These two terms, outward and inward, express in fact the great ground of difference not only between Paul and the men who were upsetting his work in Galatia, but between the genius of the Gospel and the genius of the Law as well. The Law works from the outward inward. It enjoins the observance of certain rites and ordinances and ceremonials and sacrifices, in the hope that it will produce inward states of righteousness. It takes the sinful heart into its house of correction, and setting it rigid tasks, bids it do these works and fulfil those duties in the hope that meanwhile the discipline may prove beneficial. Carried to its extreme, as in the case of the Pharisees and the Scribes, it washes the outside of the cup and the platter, and adorns the exterior of the sepulchre of the flesh. But the Gospel proceeds upon lines quite different. It aims at producing inward states first, in the belief that if this be done, outward conformity to the rule of right must follow. Its way of working is ever from the centre of a man's life to its circumference. It makes the tree good by a new living principle of truth and purity, for if the tree be made good, its fruit will be good as a matter of course. Therefore

its message is, "Believe and love;" for "in Christ  
"Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor  
"uncircumcision, but faith working through love."<sup>2</sup>

It is one of Paul's great titles to the everlasting gratitude of the Christian Church that, when the Judaisers of his day, who received only too much countenance, unhappily, from Peter and James and the rest, wanted to put back the clock that Christ had set going for future ages, Paul would not let them, and against their wretched conservatism of law and legal bondage was the undaunted champion of life and living liberty in Christ. Thus it is that we find him in this Epistle asserting the necessity of the inward, the spiritual, as the one great condition of the Christian life. If we want a summary of his thoughts, a keynote of his teaching, we have them in the words, "Until Christ be formed in you." It was his remedy against the evils to which his Galatian converts were exposed, and from which at least some if not many of them were already suffering. It was an inward remedy, and not an outward remedy. They had not to learn a Catechism, nor ponder a body of doctrine, nor investigate a confession of faith. For knowledge of itself is no sufficient safeguard against wrongdoing. Proportionately to the respective numbers of the educated class and of the uneducated class of our country, we get quite as many criminals from the one as from the other. Mere cognition of right is no guarantee for the right being done. The Galatians had already received

<sup>2</sup> Gal. v. 6.

instruction from the Apostle in all the questions that vitally concerned their Christian life and standing. Yet this had not guarded them against falling into errors with as much readiness as if they had never been taught. This had not dug the channel deep enough for their emotions to flow in the right direction. They wanted more of what Mr. Matthew Arnold has well called the secret of Jesus; the secret, namely, of inwardness, which is the very kernel and centre of the religion of Christ. "My little children," Paul says, with tenderest solicitude, "My little children, of whom I am again in travail"—a figure expressing his prolonged pangs, his almost motherly yearning for them—"of whom I am again in travail till Christ be formed in you." The conception, the formation, the renewed incarnation of Christ in them was the only antidote to their present errors.

Moreover, as this was the remedy against the errors and the lapses to which the Galatians were exposed, this is as well the grand idea of what the Christian life is in general. That it was Paul's idea of that life, many passages of his writings most conclusively show. "I have been," he says in this very epistle, "I have been crucified with Christ, yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me."<sup>8</sup> He tells the Ephesian Christians that he bows his knees in prayer unto the Father that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith.<sup>4</sup> The mystery of the Gospel, he declares to the Church at Colosse, is Christ in them, the

<sup>8</sup> Gal. ii. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Eph. iii. 17.



hope of glory.<sup>5</sup> Jesus himself, in the last long discourse given to his disciples before his Passion, earnestly insists upon his own dwelling in the hearts of his followers as the secret and condition of their new and spiritual life.<sup>6</sup> That is the end of what the Apostle, in the present passage, speaks of as a process: the formation of Christ in the soul of man. In every Christian heart there is a new birth, a new incarnation of Christ, and a development onward from infancy through childhood and youth until he attains in it his perfect Divine maturity.

What is the meaning of this idea, the formation of Christ in us? Of course it is easy to see at once that whatever its meaning, it is a spiritual meaning, in harmonious keeping with the character of the New Testament dispensation. But is there an element of mystery about it, except in as far as all spiritual things, because they lie out of the region of our common material every-day life, are more or less mysterious? There is not. If we go to the root of the matter, we shall find it quite plain enough for us, to the extent that human thought allows us to go.

Let us ask this question: What is the meaning in the last place, the result of the ultimate analysis, of any object of sense around us, any object which we can touch or taste, or handle or see or smell? Now, every such object has, in greater or less degree, a certain colour, and a certain form, and a certain taste, and a certain smell, which respectively appeal to and impress our senses of sight and of

<sup>5</sup> Col. i. 27.

<sup>6</sup> John xv. 4.

touch, of taste and of smell. But if we could conceive each one of these qualities, each one of these attributes taken away in succession, first the colour, then the form, then the taste, and then the odour, obviously nothing would be left of the object. The object would be annihilated if each one of its qualities was removed, for there would be nothing to give us the various sensations which we experience in its presence. We therefore infer that everything which is an object of sense is, in its last analysis, nothing but a collection, a fixed, definite collection of qualities occurring together in the external world.

Let us ascend from this plain illustration to the thought that Paul gives us in his words, "until Christ be formed in you." Who is Christ? One who presents us with a fixed, definite collection of qualities which compose what we call his character. There is his purity, stainless as mountain snow; his benevolence, inclusive and far-reaching as space itself; his tenderness, like that of a mother; his love, fervent and deep and infinite, the love of man and the love of woman in one, raised to a divineness which our thought reaches after in vain; for the love of Christ, as Paul says, "passeth knowledge." There are besides other attributes in him, such as his humility and meekness, his yearning sympathy with human sorrow and his infinite pity for human sin, his utter devotion to the will of his Father even unto death, not as to a fate which he must follow whether he would or not, but as to a plan of life to whose development he cheerfully submitted. There is a very ocean-fulness of perfection,

to describe which our poor language toils in fruitless labour. Annihilate these and we annihilate the Christ. Christ is Christ in virtue of his attributes. Therefore for Christ to be formed in us it is needful that his attributes, such as we have faintly pictured, live and develop in the heart.

In this way one of the meanings of the Incarnation dawns upon us. Human development in intellect and in morals is not a blind, unconscious growth. Rather is it the earnest striving after an ideal that has formed itself and grows to ever-nearing perfection in the consciousness of an individual man, in the consciousness of the collective race. Step by step and stage by stage men come up out of the animal into the spiritual, out of a degraded humanity into a purified and lofty divinity. But to secure the outward standard of absolute perfection the divinity must be presented to men in an ideal form which nevertheless can appeal to the heart and conscience of all mankind. It must be, as it were, a moral high-water mark, showing where the tide has once reached and offering a prophecy of the point which it shall reach to again. Humanity's ideal is God in Christ, not the incarnation of power but of purity and love. Humanity's moral high-water mark is God in Christ. There the spiritual tide once reached, and there in a regenerated race it shall reach again. The Incarnation is a Divine as well as a human necessity; not a chance occurrence, but an essential part of a great saving plan. To become Divine is to have the Divine attributes in us. But to have the Divine attributes in us we must first know what they are. We

have them presented to us in a gentle yet powerful light in Jesus Christ.

“ And so the Word had breath, and wrought

“ With human hands the Creed of creeds

“ In loveliness of perfect deeds,

“ More strong than all poetic thought ;

“ Which he may read that binds the sheaf,

“ Or builds the house, or digs the grave,

“ And those wild eyes that watch the wave

“ In roarings round the coral reef.” <sup>7</sup>

This, however, is only part of what is meant by Christ being formed in us. Not only does that expression mean, as we have just seen, to have the attributes of Christ in us, and set forth in our characters, but it means as well to have them living and growing within us in virtue of the activity of the same Divine life that was in him. When Paul said “ Christ liveth in me,” he did not merely mean the expression as equivalent to “ I have “ the Christian character in me.” Of course the first statement involves and implies the other, but its sphere of meaning is greater than the sphere of meaning of the other. Paul meant that the Christian character was being formed in him not by way so much of imitation of the ideal presented in Jesus Christ as by the growth of a living principle within him, the living principle by virtue of which Christ was what he was, the living principle which is best described as a Divine life, the life of God. “ In Him was life,” says John. There we have the living principle set forth. “ And *the*

<sup>7</sup> Tennyson, “ In Memoriam,” xxxvi.

"life,"—the life which was the outgrowth and the embodiment of the living principle—"the life was the light of "men."<sup>8</sup> There we have the collection of Divine attributes in a real, concrete life. Both these factors are essential to Christ being formed in us. We dare not leave out either, or the Divine plan of the renewal of the soul would be made void.

Let us take an illustration from nature in the growth of an oak tree. There is an oak tree fully grown, with sturdy trunk and spreading boughs and beautiful full foliage. It is the ideal of what an oak tree ought to be. Here, again, is an acorn from which such a tree has developed. If we could only see clearly enough as we lay the acorn open to our view, we should see it has all the elements, all the attributes, all the qualities of an oak lying wrapped up in its small compass. It is an oak in miniature, as the baby is the man in miniature. But is that all? No, for there is something of far greater importance. The acorn has in it the mysterious principle of life, in virtue of which, when implanted and buried in the forest soil, it will by-and-by break its hard covering, and send up struggling through the dark overlying earth its fresh green sprout into the light and air of heaven. We cannot see the living principle. We may lay the seed bare with the sharp-cutting knife. We may subject every particle to the closest examination of the most powerful microscope. But the hidden life eludes us still. Only in its proper place in the soil will it show itself, and then not directly, but through its

<sup>8</sup> John i. 4.

manifestations. It will grow into the oak because of the active working of this obscure, mysterious principle of life. In it is life, which will presently become *a* life, an individual life in an oak tree.

Again let us ascend to the spiritual truth which we have brought this example into our service to illustrate. When we speak of Christ being formed in us, we mean not only that, as we have seen, the attributes of the Christ-character are in us, but they are there as living and growing in virtue of the Divine life in us. They are there not as a mere heap, a mere aggregation of so much love, and so much benevolence, and so much humility, and so much holiness, and so much devotion to the will of God and the good of man. But they are there as held together in an organic whole by the union-principle of the life of God, the life in whose energies Christ lived, the life which is in every faithful heart that seeks truth and righteousness and likeness to God. This is the meaning of being born of the spirit. It is the union of God's Spirit with the human spirit; it is the mingling of the life of God with the life of man. It is the inward life, the hidden life, whose consummation shall be the perfect life.

That this life should have its own proper source and sustenance is surely no strange thing. For that is the case with every other kind of life that we are familiar with. Although God is behind every form of life and every form of life is but a different manifestation of Him; although in one sense He is

thus the source of all life, yet we are quite at liberty to draw distinctions between one form of life and another. Plant-life has its own proper source and sustenance, as animal life and mental life have theirs. In the same way spiritual life, the life of truth and purity, of faith and love, has its own proper source and sustenance, as it has its own proper way of making itself known. Its source and sustenance are found in God, in God as we know Him in Jesus Christ. Its way of making itself known is the growth of a character formed upon the model of the perfect character of the Son of man.

Thus we are able to see another of the great meanings of the Incarnation. It is a proof that we could not otherwise have gained of the possibility of the life of God coming into union with the life of man, taking man's life up into itself, making the earthly heavenly, and the human Divine. In Jesus Christ, in him in whom the Spirit of God dwells without measure, man's life meets the life of God; and from the union there results the perfect life, more Divine because more human, and more human because more Divine. We might be tempted to question whether so great and mighty and wonderful a thing as the life of God can mingle with so poor and mean a thing as the life of man; whether man has in him capacity for the Divine. We know that for long ages men vexed themselves with these questions, and tried to answer them by the fabled unions of gods with beautiful women and of goddesses with heroic men. They liked to think of the possibility,

in those old-world days, of the wedding of the Divine with the human. In Jesus Christ we have the proof of the possibility. God and man can become one. God and man have become one. The Incarnation is a fact, and not a fact that has happened once for all; but a fact that is repeated whenever a heart of man, in response to the call of God, says, "O God, come to me; dwell in me; let thy life enter into union with my life, let thy Spirit become one with my spirit." In such a heart the Christ is born, and goes on in the course of formation till he reaches a perfect Divine maturity. Christ is formed in it.

This, then, is the meaning of the Apostle's thought. For Christ to be formed in us is to have the attributes of the Christ-character, and to have them in living growth, in active power, until the image of Christ is seen in us, shining forth with its own fair features, so that we ourselves are known, even as he is known, as the sons and daughters of God.

But we must remember that when Christ is, as it were, born in us, this is but the initial stage of the formation of Christ in us. The formation is to go on to maturity with a splendid development. This development is due to a twofold working, a working on God's part and a working on ours. In the growth of a plant, provision is made for it in the soil and the air, the sunlight and the rain. But if the plant does not take from this provision the elements of its growth, the carbon and the nitrogen and the other substances which enter into its structure, if it does not put forth



its energies and make the means of nourishment its own, it cannot grow, whatever be the abundance of the elements of growth around it. In like manner, God fulfils His part toward the formation of Christ in us by opening out to us fully and freely the sources of His life, in the Bible, in the events of our daily life, in communion with Him. Our part is by faith and prayer, by conquest of the flesh and other means to take from God's bounty the elements of growth, and assimilate them so that the Christ in us may hereafter be fully formed.

It is a solemn thing to think that we can hinder the growth of Christ in us, but we can hinder it. The Galatian Christians hindered it in themselves by falling away into Jewish ceremonialism. We are, perhaps, in little danger of committing the same fault, or rather of committing the fault in the same way. But yet, by self-indulgence, by more care to make a fair show in the flesh than to be perfected in the spirit, by worldliness, by unkindliness in thought and word and deed, by anything opposed to the character of Christ, we can hinder the formation of Christ in us. What advantage is it to us that Christ was born in Bethlehem and died in agonies on Calvary if he does not develop in us, if we are not crucified with him? By being crucified with him, by dying, as Paul says, daily, we shall mortify and make to die the hindrances to his growth in us, and full scope will be afforded for his beautiful and conforming development. Thus the Incarnation will be raised in our experience from a barren dogma into a living, practical, powerful truth. Christ will be

formed in us, the secret of a pure and spiritual life here, and the hope of glory in the hereafter. Our fellow-men will see in us a new and fair incarnation of the Divine. In our humble measure we shall be, as Christ was in his full measure, the representation of God in a true human and yet Divine life. Each in his own way will hasten on the coming of that time when all shall hear the voice of God saying to them in winning tones of love, "My children," and with responsive affection and trustful hearts, shall reply, "Our Father."

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## Three Stages of the Christian Life.

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“But God, being rich in mercy . . . and made us to sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”—*Eph.* ii. 4, 5, 6.

IN these words the Apostle Paul is describing the spiritual state of the Ephesian Christians at the time of his writing to them, and is contrasting it with their spiritual state of former days. He has just cast them back on the recollection of what they were that he may the more vividly delineate the great change that has taken place in their experience. Light never looks as bright and beautiful as when we see it side by side with the deepest shadows. The present condition of the Christians at Ephesus must have seemed to them all the more remarkable when they contrasted it with the dark past.

Two separate sets of influences flow from a review of bygone days, each of them respectively dependent upon what was the character of those days. One set is stimulative, full of encouragement and hope; the other set is oppressive, sitting heavily upon the soul like an evil dream that is changing into a reality; producing despair, it may be remorse, a paralysis of the best powers of the nature of man. If we are painfully conscious that we were better in the past than we are now, a review of the past can only make us wish

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to forget it as the thoughts of it wrap us in a shroud of misery. If, on the contrary, we may without boastfulness be assured that the present witnesses progress, that we are nearer Heaven and the light than we were, the memory of the past is blessed and helpful; a brook in the way of which we may drink, and refreshed go on our pilgrimage.

Of this second kind was the review to which the Apostle invites the mind of the Ephesian Christians. They had been dead through their trespasses and sins; the evil spirit that works in those whom, by a powerful figure of speech, he calls the sons of disobedience, had swayed them; they had lived in the lusts of the flesh, they had done the restless, ungoverned desires of the mind. But this had all been altered, transformed as by the stroke of a beneficent wonder-worker. They were now spiritually quickened, alive from their death in sins; they were in a new life, as if they had risen from a tomb; they were even sitting, as it were, in heavenly places, dwelling amid the things of the world unseen and eternal; at home amongst its mysteries, and feeling them to be realities to their souls. A contrast like this could not but be encouraging, full of hope and brightness for them; for if such a change had come to them in the past, lifting them up to their present position, what might they not expect of the future, pregnant with gladsome prophecies, with infinite possibilities of undying progress?

Of such a change as this, what was the source? Who was the author? That was a question which the Apostle felt no difficulty in answering. For the

remembrance of his own spiritual history conspired with that of the Ephesians to assure him that the change was due to a Divine work. "God quickened us," he said. Thinking of what they had been, of what he himself had been, and contrasting it with what both of them now were, he could not but be confident that when his heart told him it was God who had brought the change about, his heart did not tell him false.

The very sphere in which the change had taken place, the sphere of the human spirit, pointed to a spiritual agency as its fountain. Spiritual results are not effected by physical force. We cannot alter men's souls by working upon their bodies. An ophthalmist cannot give men a perception of the beautiful in art and nature by any treatment whatever of the eye and its allied nerves. Spiritual results are effected by spiritual force. The change of heart of which the Apostle and the Christians at Ephesus were conscious, pointed to the operation of a spiritual power outside of them; the change was the result of its operation.

Then, too, the vastness of the change which the contrast of past with present rendered all the more vivid, pointed to an omnipotent spiritual force at work within them. Results are always proportioned to the magnitude of the power employed to effect them. If large trees are rooted up by a storm, we are sure that the wind must have had a violent energy. When the heart of man awakes from its death in sins and becomes alive unto God, when

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the sensual man becomes spiritual, the profane man holy, the disobedient man loyal, the worldly man heavenly-minded, the very greatness of the change points to a spiritual force of no mean might, to an omnipotent spiritual force; for nothing short of this could have produced the change. This omnipotent spiritual force is God: "God quickened us," says the Apostle; and his words told only the truth.

The conviction is growing, it seems, that the best evidence of the truth of Christianity lies here; for it is difficult to see that any assault can shake evidence of this character. The progress of scientific knowledge may show that those parts of the Bible where such knowledge is involved are unsatisfactory. Historical criticism may prove that some parts of the Bible are full of difficulties, even of contradictions. The miracles may be myths, deposits of a stream of fond adoring enthusiasm flowing over simple facts, overlaying and obscuring them. The traditional views of inspiration may have to be indefinitely modified. At the bare thought of such awful possibilities, many a Christian heart shudders and grows pale, or indignantly drives the thought away. Such fears, such indignation, are comprehensible, but they do not deserve much sympathy. Who that has a faith in Christianity that is worth anything believes in it one atom the more for all the lectures, all the publications on what are called Christian evidences? The reasonings of science, the keen knife of historical criticism, may do their worst. Let them do it. What matters it what they do? Is

Christ a power in our hearts? Does the Gospel give us moral energy for living a true and noble life? Has the Cross changed us, as it changed Paul, as it changed the Ephesians? Is it, through the appropriative power of faith, the power of God unto salvation to us? Are these experiences multiplied in an innumerable company of other hearts, who live and die in the reality of them? If this be the case, we have all the evidence we want for the truth of Christianity; evidence beyond the domain of science, beyond the range of historical criticism; evidence which is self-witnessing and therefore most secure. For it is the testimony of our own consciousness, and nothing can be surer. The whole matter lies here in a nutshell: do we know that we are spiritually quickened? Then of the truth of God's being and working we need no other proof. For it is God, who is rich in mercy, who has quickened us. The change of which we are conscious is the result of a Divine work.

Let us pass now to another point suggested by the words of the Apostle as to this Divine work in the soul of man—namely, its source. This, the Apostle tells us, is the nature of God, which is "rich in mercy." Mercy is not merely benevolence, a feeling of kindness, a well-wishing towards the unfortunate and the unhappy. But it is benevolence in action; kindly feelings showing themselves in deeds in their behalf. It is because the nature of God is rich in such a quality that the Divine work of which the Apostle and the Ephesian Christians were conscious, of which all

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sincere Christians are conscious, is rendered possible in them. If God had no sympathy with human suffering ; if He had no horror of sin as hindering the spiritual progress of the great family of mankind and as the parent of untold miseries ; if He had no desire to banish suffering and sin from among men by opening through Jesus Christ the fountains of purity and joy which ever flow forth from himself, then the Divine work of quickening the soul into life would never have become a possibility. If, moreover, while feeling all this towards mankind, the Divine nature were such that it could not communicate itself to us, dwelling on its own serene heights, incapable of coming down to human wants and human woes, the same Divine work would equally be unknown to us. But such is not the nature of God. It is rich in mercy. It is actively benevolent. It not only feels kindly towards us, but it as well expresses its kindly feelings in deeds. It communicates itself in Jesus Christ. It meets in a thousand revelations of itself, most of all in its revelation in the Son of man, our struggling desires, our impotent researches, after the knowledge of the Divine name and the Divine nature. Through this revelation it pours out its wealth of mercy, of active benevolence, of saving and sanctifying power, quickening the soul of man into newness of life. This is the source of the Divine work, the nature of God, rich in mercy. It is the celestial mount where the stream of Divine goodness takes its rise, far away amid the heights and mysteries of God ; but, widening ever as it flows, it comes down to the human waste, the wilderness of



sin and suffering, bringing fertilization and life and beauty as of the rose.

In addition to the source of the Divine work in the soul of man, the Apostle speaks of the motive which prompted the unsealing of that source. This display of the Divine mercy took place on account of God's great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses. Here we touch even a deeper spring of the Divine nature than its mercy; for if it be true that that nature is mercy, it is even truer that it is love.

The conception of what that love is, is heightened when we take into account the solemn fact cited by the Apostle, that God loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses. Well might it be called a great love, a love passing knowledge, a love into whose heights we cannot soar, into whose depths we cannot dive, into whose lengths and breadths we cannot reach. Have we ever thought of what is involved in the truth of God's love of His imperfect, sinful children? The average love of man or of woman, what is it? Is it not a love of the like, and not of the unlike? Is it not infinitely hard to love that towards which we have a strong feeling of repugnance? Even in the language of common life, when we hear it said of a boy at school that he loves his books, of a man of active habits that he loves work, of an artist that he loves his profession, of a statesman that he loves politics, what is implied? At least this: that in none of these cases is any repugnance felt towards those

employments to which the attention and the energies are devoted. Such a feeling would be fatal to that strong liking for the employment which we express by saying that the person engaged in it loves it. We are sure that the work of reading or of business, of painting or of politics, is congenial to those respectively employed in them. They like their work. It suits them. They are happy in it. As we say, they love it.

When, rising higher, we carry our thoughts to the case of the love between two human lives, what, as a general rule, is implied in that love? This certainly is implied, that they have a community of disposition, of tastes, of sympathies, of aims, of sentiments. Of course there may be, as there ought to be, a number of diversities on minor matters. If the two were exact fac-similes of each other, one would think their united life would be rather tame and monotonous. But upon all main questions involved in the conduct of life, agreement, union, harmony are implied in the fact of their love. How can there be love if one be religious while the other is profane; one honest, the other dishonest; one true, the other false; one active, the other idle; one sober, the other intemperate; one noble, ever striving towards light and purity, the other degraded, ever tending towards darkness and sin? Average love, and therefore the easier love, is always the love of like for like. Love is infrequent, to say the least of it, where one life is the exact opposite and antithesis of the other. But this is the condition under which God loves His sinful

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children. The eternal Life loves those who are spiritually dead. The infinitely Holy One loves those who are in their trespasses. The heavenly loves the earthly. The spiritual loves the carnal. The absolute perfection loves the imperfect and the sinful. The Divine heart yearns tenderly over the disobedient and the erring. The Good Shepherd loves the wandering sheep. God loves what is not godlike. He loves what is not like Himself. How great then must be the love wherewith He loves us! How Divine it is, that it could stretch out its yearning arms to take us to its forgiving heart even when we were dead through our trespasses! This is the love of God to us; the motive from which the Divine work of quickening the soul of man drew its breath and its inspiration.

But we must proceed to consider the nature of the Divine work which, as it produced such a change in Paul and the Ephesian Christians, produces a similar change in all who yield themselves to its energy. The Apostle describes that work in three short clauses: first, it is a being quickened together with Christ; then, it is a being raised up together with Christ; finally, it is a being made to sit with him in the heavenly places. It is a work which has these three distinct progressive stages, which cover the whole course of the development of the life of God in the soul of man. Perhaps we may say that the three stages respectively point to life, active life, active life directed towards a definite end. Let us dwell briefly on each of them.

The first stage is that which is described as a being

quicken together with Christ. An implicit reference is made here to the death in trespasses of which Paul has spoken in the previous clause. It is that spiritual death in which, as we lie in it, we are quickened, and out of which we arise. When such a figure of speech is used, what is meant by it? What is the death through trespasses? Take the case of physical death, which the Apostle evidently uses as the foundation of his language in this place. When an organism dies, whatever its nature, whatever its degree of complexity, whatever its place in the scale of creation, there is obviously an absence of power to fulfil the functions of physical life. It cannot take in its nourishment; it cannot assimilate it; it cannot grow. A plant, an animal, a man, as long as any one of them is alive, has the power of receiving what life requires for its maintenance, of assimilating it, of employing it for the repair of the tissues which are used up in the wear and tear of existence, of making it subservient to its growth. When this power goes away the organism is dead, or soon will be dead.

But there is more involved in death than this. For as soon as death ensues, decay begins. That mysterious principle which has held the organism together in the unity of life is gone; the whole commences to fall away into division and corruption. Death is not only the absence of power to fulfil the functions of life, but it is also the presence of decay.

If we apply these thoughts to the question of spiritual death, we find the same facts present there. The man who is spiritually dead does not fulfil the functions of

spiritual life. He does not take in nourishment from spiritual sources for the inner life of his spirit. He does not assimilate that nourishment. He does not grow. Though God be everywhere around Him, in His spirit, in His word, in nature, in the life of holy men, he remains closed to the entrance of the spiritual nutriment which, if he would take it in, would sustain his soul. Nay, more, he gets from bad to worse in the progress of spiritual decay. As in politics so in life, bodily, mental, spiritual, there is no such thing as standing still. Either we go forward or we go backward. No man will be the same to-morrow as he is to-day. No man is the same to-day as he was yesterday. He is better or he is worse—a solemn thought which we cannot too closely or too often lay to heart. Spiritual death is not only an absence of the fulfilment of the functions of spiritual life, it is also the presence of spiritual decay.

The matter becomes clearer when we remember that the Apostle speaks of this death as a death through trespasses, or sins, or transgressions of the law of God, by whichever term we choose to designate the thing. For when a man sins and is not sorry for it, when he is living in disobedience to God, what is the state of his spirit? Possessed by the principle of evil and the love of it, how can he open his heart to the spiritual influences which would otherwise be the nourishment of his inner life? How can he fulfil the functions of spiritual life? Nor is it any marvel that continuance in trespasses brings about spiritual decay. For every new trespass, if unrepented



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of, does but leave the man worse than before; the conscience less tender and more seared; the spiritual sight more clouded; the spiritual pulse more feeble; the whole spiritual nature generally worse. Truly that was a fine, penetrating glance into the laws of the spiritual realm when the Psalmist said, "Evil shall "slay the wicked."<sup>1</sup> A man's own ill deeds intensify his spiritual death and hasten on his spiritual decay.

Now, from this state of death and decay, the believing heart is quickened together with Christ. The quickening of the Son of man as he lay in darkness and the chills of death in the virgin tomb in Joseph's garden, is a symbol of the fact which takes place in the believing heart. The Apostle in this very Epistle declares that the same energy which raised Christ from the dead raises us from our spiritual death in trespasses.<sup>2</sup> As soon as faith has established a connection between the heart of man and the revelation of God in Jesus Christ over which death itself had no power, the new risen life of Christ comes into the soul of the believer. The warm life stirs within him; the spiritual pulse begins to throb; the decaying organism is arrested in its corruption; there is a quickening in its centre; it breathes a new atmosphere; it is pervaded with a new life; it lives with an undying principle, over which death, as over Christ, has no dominion. We are quickened together with Christ. This is the first stage of the Divine work—the stage of life.

But there is a second stage, the stage of active life, and which the Apostle more fully describes as a being

<sup>1</sup> Psalm xxxiv. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. i. 20.

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raised up with Christ. It is quite necessary to our idea of full life that this stage should follow upon the first, because mere life, life destitute of activity, does not realise that idea. We do not regard the life of a plant as being so full and complete a life as that of an animal. The plant remains in the earth at the spot where was sown the seed from which it sprang. It has not the active, moving life of the animal. For a somewhat similar reason we do not regard the life of a bedridden invalid as being so full and complete a life as that of a vigorous, healthy man. It lacks energy, activity. It seems to be mere life, not active life.

Now, in the spiritual realm not only are we quickened from the death through trespasses, but we are raised up together with Christ into the life of spiritual activity. It is not a mere quickening which we undergo; it is more: it is a resurrection. For this experience, as for that on which we have already dwelt, the resurrection of Christ is taken as the symbol, as a spiritual emblem repeated in fact in the soul of man. The symbol is full of mystery. The earthly life of Christ after his resurrection from the tomb grows more strange, more inexplicable, the longer we think about it. The Divine form at one time passes into a room with closed doors; at another time is seen to be a real human body, with the wounds of the Passion upon it; capable of the functions of physical life. At one time it is instantly recognized as the form of Jesus; at another it is not known even to those most intimate with him. To the understanding all is



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mystical, unfathomable, dim. But to the heart, the meaning of the mystery is clear. We discern the emblem, and the truth that it teaches. As the life of the Saviour after the resurrection differed infinitely from the life before it, so in the experience of the soul that becomes one with Christ through faith's strong sympathy, an entirely new life begins, a risen life, a life of spiritual activity, in which sense is subordinated to the spirit, and old tendencies, ambitions, aims, principles of life, have been exchanged for new. We rise into newness of life, walking in its Divine energy in all well-pleasing before God our Father. We bear the image of the heavenly, the image in which, as in Jesus Christ, the Divine elements become ever more clear, the merely human ever more faint and dim. This is the second stage of the Divine work—the stage of active life.

Not yet, however, even as far as the progress of the work on this side the grave is concerned, is that progress complete. A third stage remains, which the Apostle describes by saying that God has made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. This is life directed towards a definite end. No life, not even the humblest, is purposeless. It has an aim which it answers itself, or is made to answer. It has a destiny which, consciously or unconsciously, it fulfils. Our strong confidence is, to use the beautiful words of Tennyson :—

- “ That nothing walks with aimless feet ;
- “ That not one life shall be destroyed,
- “ Or cast as rubbish to the void,
- “ When God hath made the pile complete.



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"That not a worm is cloven in vain;

"That not a moth with vain desire

"Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire,

"Or but subserves another's gain." <sup>3</sup>

Every form of life, however humble, however complex, has a definite end and tendency. Strange would it be, then, if the new life of the believing heart were undirected toward any end. But that is not its character. Quickened together with Christ by the spiritual power that wrought in him, raised with him into a life of holy activity, we are made to sit with him in the heavenly places.

This is a more figurative way of saying that if we are risen with Christ, it is ours to set our affections on things above, lofty things, spiritual things, things which have their home in those heights where are the spirits of just men made perfect, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report."<sup>4</sup> These are the things which inhabit the heavenly places, and towards these will the quickened and active life of the believing spirit ever aspire. Nor will it merely look at them as in the quiet night we look at the stars, thinking them very beautiful, but far off, out of reach, infinitely beyond any vain effort of man to attain them. But after the heavenly things the quickened spirit will strive, feeling that it has something in common with them, that it has not begun to fulfil the destiny of its new life till it has begun to make these things its own. The true

<sup>3</sup> "In Memoriam," liv.

<sup>4</sup> Phil. iv. 8.

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new life is that which lifts the old on to its own high level. The true heavenly life is that which makes the earthly like itself. The things above never perform their mission until they take up into themselves, until they purify, ennoble, transform, and make divine, every duty, engagement, labour, calling of the human life.

Is not this—so true as an experience, so beautiful as an inspiration—a worthy final stage of the life of God in the soul of man?

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## Conformity to Christ.

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"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship . . . . attain unto the resurrection from the dead."—*Phil.* iii. 10, 11.

THE letter to the Church at Philippi was written by St. Paul during his captivity in Rome. The closing words of the record of the Acts of the Apostles tell us that for two whole years he dwelt in that city in his own hired dwelling, preaching the kingdom of God. A considerable degree of liberty seems to have been allowed him. The treatment he received was not very rigorous. Nevertheless, we know from his own account of the matter that he was in bonds, and was not looked upon otherwise than as a prisoner. The hand that held him was gloved in velvet, yet its iron fingers could be felt underneath. It was at some time during these two years that he addressed to the Philippian Christians the Epistle that bears their name.

The wretched Judaizing teachers that caused the Apostle so much trouble and anxiety in the churches of Galatia appear to have attempted to introduce their false doctrine among the Philippians as well. With what success they met we do not know. But they were sufficiently dangerous to make St. Paul put his friends and converts on their guard against

the subtle errors of these teachers. He found it needful to insist upon the emptiness of all confidence in the flesh; upon the necessity of the righteousness which is of God by faith. That alone can be of any service to men when the searching eye of God looks upon them. Rites and ceremonies and ordinances are but as a robe of tawdry rags, making moral ugliness still more ugly, and giving no protection against wind and storm. The man who arrays himself in rags requires fine weather and warm sunshine if he is to be comfortable in them. Otherwise the cold's keen tooth will bite him and the driving rain will drench him, leaving him a more pitiful object than he was before. So it is with the soul that makes to itself a covering of legal righteousness in the day of temptation and trial.

The Apostle refers to his own experience as an example of the abandonment of all confidence in the flesh in exchange for the true righteousness which alone can answer the Divine idea of a holy life. Truly he of all men had had good ground for glorying, if Jewish blood, a moral walk, and the righteousness which is in the law created a ground. It was useless for these Judaizing teachers to put themselves into competition with him. He outstripped them all. They were nowhere compared with him. Yet the very things which, according to their judgment, were great gain to any man who possessed them, he had renounced and counted loss for Christ. Otherwise he could not attain to the righteousness which is as true as it is Divine. For

the righteousness of Christ is the righteousness of faith and of the spirit; not of the letter and of works.

There is a very close connexion between the righteousness which is of God by faith and conformity to Christ. Indeed, the one expression is only another way of stating the other. For to be conformed to Christ is to be righteous, as God counts righteousness. God has set forth the Divine ideal of righteousness in Christ. The great end of Christianity is to make us like Christ, that he may be the first-born among many brethren. The commanding word for the whole Christian life is the same as it was when Jesus called his disciples: "Follow me." The true Christian is the man who seeks always to obey the call, not allowing himself to be turned aside from his obedience by self or the world or sin. Day by day he tries to become ever more like his Master, giving the blessed spirit of that Master scope to work out in him the Divine image in all its purity and beauty. Thus is conformity to Christ alike the course and the end of the Christian life.

The words of St. Paul on which this essay is based follow up and amplify the train of thought we have just followed. They tell us two things about this conformity to Christ: first, what it consists in; and, secondly, how it is attained.

What, in the first place, are the constituent parts of this conformity? In what respects is the Christian disciple to seek to become as his Master? There are three of them. The order in which they are placed by St. Paul is both remarkable and instructive. We must

follow it closely if we would grasp his thought and meaning.

First comes the knowledge of the power of Christ's resurrection. The word power in this passage has been taken to signify efficacy, and the whole phrase to mean the knowledge of the benefits which in the New Testament are closely connected with the rising of Christ from the dead, as effects are connected with a cause. These benefits are chiefly justification from sin and the gift of the Spirit, which in the preaching of the Apostles are continually coupled with the fact of Christ's resurrection. This may be the right interpretation of the words, and nothing is to be said against it. But it would appear that they mean rather the knowledge of the power which was at work in the resurrection of Christ and which brought it about. This meaning is certainly quite as Pauline as the other, if not more so. The reader familiar with St. Paul's Epistles will readily remember how frequently he speaks of the Christian's fellowship with Christ alike in his death and in his resurrection. For example, in his letter to the Ephesians he says, "Even when we were dead through our trespasses, God quickened us together with Christ, and raised us up with him."<sup>1</sup> Upon the Colossians he enjoins the duty of seeking the things that are above, and urges as the ground of this duty that the Colossian Christians were raised together with Christ.<sup>2</sup> To the Romans he writes: "We were buried therefore with Christ through baptism into death; that, like as Christ was raised

<sup>1</sup> Eph. ii. 5, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Col. iii. 1, 2.

“from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we “also might walk in newness of life.”<sup>3</sup> In the letter to the Ephesians there is a passage even more to the purpose, where, speaking of the exceeding greatness of the Divine power to those who believe, he describes it as being “according to that working of the strength of “his might which God wrought in Christ when He “raised him from the dead.”<sup>4</sup> With more quotations than these we need not concern ourselves. It is sufficient to observe that the Apostle evidently desires to make it clear that the resurrection of Christ answers to a kindred spiritual experience in the hearts of his disciples, and that the same power that brought about the one brings about the other as well. The power of Christ's resurrection, then, we take to mean the Divine energy that accomplished it.

What, then, was Christ's resurrection to him? It was the close of one period of his life and the commencement of another of a character wholly different. His life before his death and burial was a life of weakness, of humiliation, of suffering. It was capable of feeling hunger and thirst, of being weary and needing rest. It was subject to the limitations of time and space. His body was, for all practical purposes, a purely human one. In the last great crisis of Calvary, its humanness was proved by succumbing to the awful tortures of the Crucifixion, and by taking refuge in over-taxed nature's last resort, the resort of death. But all these more purely human attributes of physical life Christ left behind him in the tomb in which his

<sup>3</sup> Rom. vi. 4.<sup>4</sup> Eph. i. 19, 20.

body was lovingly laid. His old state of being had for him come to an end. Thenceforward we find him endowed with a form which, although visible and tangible, seems to have been no longer subject to natural laws. He was not a disembodied spirit, for on one occasion he said to his disciples, "See my hands" and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; "for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye behold me having."<sup>5</sup> Yet he could appear amongst his friends suddenly and mysteriously, and could as suddenly and mysteriously withdraw from them. So altered was his aspect that even the devoted Mary Magdalene did not know him till the well-remembered voice spoke to her, calling her by her name. In a word, the days between the resurrection of Christ and his final disappearance from the eyes of his worshipping disciples were passed in the glorified body, that could be seen and touched and yet was not like its former self. This is a mystery we need not attempt to explain, for it is incapable of being clearly comprehended. But whatever the facts of the case may be, the chief thing is the symbolic spiritual teaching which they convey. For as Christ's resurrection-life was a new epoch, a new experience in his career, so the Christian life, which we begin by a practical acquaintance with the working of the same power that raised Christ from the dead, is a new epoch, a new experience in the career of the man that enters into it. "Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." In the part of Christ's life lived before his crucifixion, the physical element

<sup>5</sup> Luke xxiv. 39.



was the predominant one, as already shown. But when, after the crucifixion and burial, he rose from the tomb, the physical for the most part disappeared, and the spiritual took its place. The old life lay for ever among the things of the past. He had entered into the new life of glory and immortality.

Now, this is the symbol, the picture, of the experience of every man who comes out of the death of trespasses and sins into the life of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. He has passed over, as it were, into a new state of being. Before, he lived in the life of flesh, not of necessity in its gross, animal forms; but yet he was sufficiently absorbed in the world that is passing away to be forgetful of the world to come, and deaf to the voice that called him to prepare for it as his true sphere and element. Now, he lives the life of the spirit, cultivating it by communion with God, and giving fit expression to it in a holy and heavenly-tempered character. Before, he worshipped the senses as his god, and served self as his master. Now, his worship and his service are given to the Father who is in Heaven, in whose sight he would seek ever to live and work and pray. In short, the Christian life is a new life, lived in a new atmosphere, possessed of a new nature, governed by new principles, directed toward new ends, hopeful of a new destiny. As St. Paul says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a 'new creation.'"<sup>6</sup> To sum all up in one sentence, the Christian man lives the spiritual life, whereas

<sup>6</sup> 2 Cor. v. 17.

before he lived the life of flesh, whether grosser or more refined. Giving a spiritual, mystical meaning to our words, we may say that he shares Christ's resurrection; like him, he has left the old life in the grave which is its fitting home; like him, he has risen into the new life of glory and holiness and immortality.

In the knowledge of the power, then, which brought about the resurrection of Christ, and in the spiritual experience of which the resurrection is the symbol, consists the first part of the conformity of the Christian to Christ. But we must not think that this power is arbitrary in its workings, visiting some hearts for no merit of their own, passing by other hearts for no demerit of their own. This idea is a relic of the old Calvinism, which even now finds a lurking place here and there, but which has long ago been exploded for every one who looks at the matter in the light of progressive thought. In every man who wishes to know the power that raised Christ from the dead, as working in his own experience, the want is no sooner felt than it may be satisfied. For it is with the resurrection of the spiritual life in man as it is with the resurrection of nature after the winds and frosts, the rains and snows of winter. The sun's sweet light and genial heat, the warm spring showers and soft spring breezes, visit the fields, the hedgerows, the gardens of our land. The conditions of returning life are furnished to the whole vegetable creation. Every tree, every plant, every herb, every grass-blade may lay hold

of them if it will. The reviving forces are round about each living thing. Let them enter in, and each one will arise from winter's death into the life and glory of the spring. The case seems to be the same with the resurrection of the spiritual being. All around us is the Spirit of God, anxious and willing to waken us into life. Let the desire for life be there, and its fulfilment will immediately follow. God does not mock us by bidding us arise from the dead when he knows that the conditions of resurrection are withheld all the while. Rather does the very command imply that the conditions are given if we will only avail ourselves of them. There is the generous reviving power: the question is whether men will make it active in the soul, or whether they will not.

It is easy to see why St. Paul put the knowledge of the power that brought about Christ's resurrection, at the head of the matters in which the Christian has conformity with Christ. For without it there would be no Christ, no Christian, no Christianity. It is the gateway of the spiritual life, the entrance to the whole subsequent development. Only life develops. Death cannot, except to become more corrupt, more full of decay. But he who has risen with Christ, who has felt the power of Christ's resurrection within him, lives in union with a living, Divine energy, and unfolds ever into fuller life. Christ came not only that we might have life, but that we might have it more abundantly.

The second thing in which we are to seek conformity to Christ is his sufferings and death. At first sight,

this would seem to be a reversal of the natural order ; for if Christ be our pattern and representative, and he died before he rose from the dead, would it not seem that we must have fellowship with him in his sufferings and death before we can have fellowship with him in his resurrection ? But, in truth, the order in which St. Paul has put the clauses of our text is profoundly instructive. The resurrection with Christ stands at the very entrance to the Christian life. It is the first, the essential step. It is taken once for all, and once taken is not retraced or taken again. But the partaking of Christ's sufferings, the conformity to Christ's death, is something that covers the whole of the Christian career, and for the putting in practice of which there is a constant need. It is the completion of the death unto sin which we only begin when we first become Christ's disciples. It is what St. Paul means when, in the second letter to the Corinthians, he speaks of himself and his fellow-labourers as "always bearing about in the body the dying"—the putting to death—"of the Lord Jesus."<sup>7</sup> It is what Christ himself means when he says that those who would come after him must take up the cross daily and follow him. What was Christ's death to him ? It was the passage, the dark, dreadful passage, by which he went from his life of shame and weakness to the life of strength and glory and immortality, of which something has already been said. It was the way from the physical to the spiritual, and three hours of untold agony were enough for him to pass along it.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 10.

But that is not the case with us. For we have sins to conquer that Jesus had not. We have an evil self, a host of evil habits to get the better of, that he knew nothing about. We do not effect the conquest all in a moment. We do not become spiritual on a sudden. The patient struggles of years scarcely suffice to know what it is to be crucified unto the world and to have the world crucified unto us. There is a daily, almost an hourly strife. The structure of a Christian character cannot be summoned into existence as by the wave of a magician's wand. It must be built quietly, toilsomely, earnestly, stone by stone, until the whole is complete.

The attainment of holiness is not to be achieved in an instant. Sin, its opposite, is any departure, even the slightest, from the perfect purity of God. And who shall say that he has come to the possession of that perfect purity? Who shall say that his every thought, his every word, his every act, is absolutely without a single stain of sin? No; sanctification is a process going on in the Christian heart throughout the whole of this present life, and extending even to the life to come. For one of the most beautiful thoughts suggested by the idea of the future life is that the soul will there have the sweet consciousness that throughout the eternal ages it is growing more and more like the perfect God.

If any one doubts that the attainment of holiness is a long, long work, let him try to conquer any evil habit that has been cherished for a length of time. It need not be a habit that most men look upon as

gross and revolting, like intemperance. Let it be the habit of selfishness, or of speaking ill of his neighbour. He will find that he has engaged in a severe struggle, which knows scarcely any cessation, and calls for the exercise of his most resolute will. He will find himself continually surprised, attacked in the most unexpected places. He will find the roots of the evil growth running down deep into the soil of his soul, and possessed of an awful vitality. He will find that when he beats the habit down in one place, it appears again in another. Even after he has fairly achieved the victory over it, the old cravings for its indulgence will not seldom return, sometimes more strong, sometimes less, yet always summoning him again to conflict, again to courage. But if this be the case with one evil habit, what shall be said of a collection of evil habits, of an entire character? For the whole nature, in its every thought, and principle, and motive, and desire, has to be brought into utter harmony with the will of God. Who, then, shall say that almost an eternity is not required for this?

At all events, there is constant need now that we partake of Christ's sufferings and become conformed unto his death. The pains and wearinesses, the prayers and watchings, the self-denials, the crucifixions of hopes, the bearing of the sins of others—all the sufferings of the Son of man that were summed up in the last great crisis of Calvary, are the example of our own. His sufferings are not the measure of ours; and we may be thankful they are

not. Their waves and billows would overwhelm us. Only the Christ could rise triumphant from them. Nevertheless, his sufferings are the pledge of ours. It is through much tribulation that we enter into the kingdom of Heaven ; not of necessity tribulation from without, like the Apostles and early Christians met with, but certainly from within. The Founder of the kingdom trod this path and went under this portal into it. His loyal subjects must do the same, following him. They must always bear about in the body the mortification of the Lord Jesus.

The third element in the Christian's conformity to Christ is in the attainment of the resurrection from the dead. Its consideration must of necessity be very limited, for the whole question is begirt with mystery, and no practical good can come from speculation upon it. We can, however, at least grasp St. Paul's meaning, and see how fitly the Christian's conformity to Christ is crowned and glorified in the resurrection from the dead. The Apostle is here speaking not of an ethereal, a spiritual partaking of the resurrection of Christ. He has dealt with that, as we have seen, in the first element of the conformity already treated. But he is speaking of the resurrection of the body to life and glory and immortality, which is one of the fairest fruits, as it is one of the most comforting revelations, of Christianity. If we accept the teachings of the New Testament as our guide and authority in this matter, there can be no doubt that it makes known two resurrections, the one of those who have fallen asleep

in Christ, the other of all the dead. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul says, "The dead in Christ shall rise first."<sup>8</sup> St. John, again, in the Revelation, most distinctly speaks of a first and a second resurrection, and declares that he who has part in the first resurrection is holy and blessed, inasmuch as the second death has no power over him.<sup>9</sup> In the words of Christ, he is accounted worthy to attain to the spiritual world and the resurrection from the dead.<sup>10</sup> This was the object of hope to which St. Paul sought that by any means he might attain. Of the general, the final resurrection, and of his part in it, it is impossible to conceive that he had any doubt. It was an article of his faith even as a Pharisee; much more was it an article of his faith as a Christian. Yet to take part in the first resurrection was such a high honour that even St. Paul seems as if he dared not as yet anticipate it with the confidence which we know from his last words to Timothy did at last soothe and strengthen him in the prospect of death.

Of the resurrection to life which awaits all who fall asleep in Christ, Christ's own resurrection is not only the pledge, but also the earnest. "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and is become the first fruits of them that slept." "If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." The precise import of these words we do not know. What is meant by the spiritual and glorified body, we do not know. They who vex themselves with the question as to how the

<sup>8</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 16.<sup>9</sup> Rev. xx. 6.<sup>10</sup> Luke xx. 35.



dead are raised and with what body they come, are deservedly called foolish by St. Paul. It is enough to know that when He who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory. It is enough to know that we shall be like God, for we shall see Him as He is. With these hopes and promises we may rest content, remembering that the main thing is spiritually to have risen with Christ, and spiritually to partake of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death. If that be so, we shall by some means attain unto the resurrection from the dead.

A few words upon the means by which this conformity to Christ is reached, may fitly close this essay. Nor is there need for more than a few, because the connexion between the means and the end is easily seen. The means is the knowledge of Christ: "that I may know him," said St. Paul. By this expression the Apostle does not mean a mere intellectual acquaintance with Christ's teachings and works and character. Nor does he mean the understanding of any formal doctrinal statement as to who Christ was and what he did. Knowledge that does not guide the life and fashion the conduct, that is not transmuted into a controlling and directing force by a patient, earnest application of it, is only so much mental lumber, taking up space that might be better occupied. If we know that fire burns and then thrust the hand into a flame, our knowledge obviously profits us nothing. The case is similar with regard to the knowledge of Christ. To know Christ is to know him as the full and fair expression of the Divine in humanity,

as the setting forth of God's love to man, as the embodied ideal of what the great Father wants all His children to be, as the best and purest and loveliest that imagination can conceive, or hope can anticipate.

But it is more than this. For it is to know Christ in these aspects of his nature in such a way as that the knowledge shall become a living, transforming energy within us, changing us into the same image from glory to glory. It is to have such a spiritual knowledge that Christ shall be in us and we in him, in the unity and union of the branch and the vine. It is to possess, by virtue of this unity, the Spirit of God in our measure that rested on Him without measure. For it is by the action of the Spirit that the knowledge of Christ becomes a saving and sanctifying force within the soul, influencing the whole life and character, and conforming it to the Divine image set forth in him.

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## The Two Abiding Realities.

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"But now I come to Thee."—*John* xvii. 13.

THERE was something insurpassably grand and touching about the old Hindu doctrine of immortality. The religious thinkers who advanced it taught the final absorption of the soul of man into the God from whom it originally sprang. They represented man's life as a bubble blown into being on the surface of the infinite sea of existence. After being tossed hither and thither by sins and sorrows and life's many vicissitudes, it burst and disappeared, its little spell of independent existence over for ever. The eternal and shoreless ocean of life received it back into its bosom.

The preachers of this doctrine exhorted their hearers to strive to be worthy of this destiny. To gain it was the splendid ambition of all earnest heroic living. To the suffering it was presented as the compensation for all the ills that life had brought them. The most painful and toilsome career could want and could have nothing better as its end and aim.

There was, indeed, something insurpassably grand and touching in the idea. It is one of the indications of the struggle of man's mind toward the truth of immortality which the Gospel of Jesus has brought to light. To offer this absorption of the soul into God as

the goal of life; as the explanation of its sadness and its mysteries; as the wedge of gold which, put into the scales of life, outweighs all its trials and labours, all its disappointments and losses—this, surely, was one of the supremest efforts of the strivings and aspirings of man's spirit toward God and truth.

But, except perhaps for a few highly-cultured minds, this doctrine could never be satisfactory. The multitude of toiling, suffering humanity want something more than an unconscious immortality such as it proposed. For an unconscious immortality is only another name for annihilation, for the loss of all sense of self and of individual being. We do indeed crave an immortality, and an immortality in God. The man who has learned of Christ looks forward to a time when his will shall be merged in God's will; when his consciousness of living shall be the consciousness of his life in God's and God's life in his; when his longings for complete union, for spiritual oneness with the Divine, shall be fully realized; when his feeling of this union shall be perpetual, and not, as now, obscured often by sense and the world and sin. But yet, in the eternal inheritance to which he looks forward, this consciousness is present as an essential element. He will be in God, but he will feel that he is in God, that he lives in God with a conscious life. He will be within the great, the infinite Life; but he will be, as it were, a circle within a circle, a life within an ensphering life. Take away from immortality the prospect of conscious immortality, and no immortality worthy the name will be left. It will

be the play of "Hamlet" with the character of Hamlet left out. It will be a life pulseless, and with its heart torn away.

It is such an immortality as we need that the Gospel of Christ offers to us. In fulfilment of our hopes and wishes, he comes to us from God with his hands laden with the blessing of conscious immortality. His voice speaks to us in no trembling and uncertain tones of a life beyond the tomb that shall be as real to us, as sentient, as full of the consciousness of living, as the life that we now live in the flesh. We shall dwell for evermore in God, and we shall feel that we dwell in Him. All that in our better moments we hope for; all that our desires long after and our imaginations conceive—the purity, the love, the glad service, the freedom from self-will—that form for us the best elements and the fairest attractions of the life to come, shall be consciously realized in our experience. Christ the Lord closed his mortal career with the conviction of this conscious immortality clear and fresh and full. His disciples, immeasurably behind him in every spiritual grace as they are, possess this conviction no less firmly. When life's work ends for them, as, when he poured forth from his soul this wonderful prayer, it had almost ended for him, they will be able to say, "As he said, to the Father, "But now I come to Thee." Into His own blessedness the Master opens the gate for the servants, and when the time comes for them they enter in.

Indeed, when we think a little about the matter,

it seems to be quite natural and necessary that this word of Christ, "But now I come to Thee," should be the last, the final word of the soul. If this be not the grand chord into which the conflicting strains of life after all resolve themselves, there can be no other. Life's discords will become perpetual, or else will give place to sullen, everlasting silence. If the end of life do not bring into clear light the relation between God and the soul, between the Infinite Life and the individual life which has sprung from it, and in virtue of which we are each of us what we feel ourselves to be, so that God and self stand over against each other as the two abiding realities of which each man is conscious, then life has no meaning, its mysteries no solution, its discipline no end, its course no goal. All is darkness behind us; all is darkness before us. It would have been better for us, perhaps, had we not lived at all. What is life finally worth if, above the grim vision of death, there rise not the glorious prospect that leads each of those who see it to say to God, as Christ said, "But now I come to Thee"? Indeed, then, it is necessary and natural that this should be the last word, the final hope, the eternal sunlit inheritance, of the soul of man.

Now, one of the greatest facts, if not the greatest fact, which experience of life brings into clear and sharply-defined prominence is the fact of self, the fact that each of us is a living individuality, shut off on some of its sides from all other such individualities, with secret places into which they can never enter;

where at times, as far as other human lives and sympathies are concerned, we dwell alone, labouring under the feeling of a solemn solitude. Not, indeed, that we are unmindful of the loving intercourse, the sacred communion of kindred natures; of that mysterious power by which we can enter into the life of one another, and feel that we have in common many of the joys and sorrows, the pains and pleasures, the victories and defeats, which life brings to us. An awful solitude would life be without this faculty of communion, this power of sympathy. Pitiable is the man who hears the pulsation of his own life only, with no others beating in rhythm with it. Yet beneath sympathy and love, and the communion of life with life, there is still for every man the fact of self, the feeling of individuality, the consciousness that I am I, and not someone else. This fact, this feeling, this consciousness, grow with our growth, strengthen with our strength; becoming most pronounced when life is most mature and developed.

In childhood they are comparatively weak. The consciousness of self is mostly submerged beneath the constant ebb and flow of the pleasures and pains of dawning life. We cannot contemplate child-life without noticing as one of its chief features a fair degree of freedom from the consciousness of self; the absence, in any large measure, of the feeling of individuality. A child's surroundings are the chief thing for him: his home, his parents, his brothers and sisters, his school, his games, his playmates, his story-books—in these self is absorbed. He feels

in his little mind that he lives only as he lives in them. If any of them be taken away, to that extent, and for the time being, a part of his feeling of life is taken away. Children have the most extraordinary power of unconscious sympathy, of blending their lives in whatever is going on around them. Theirs is emphatically an outward life; nothing do they dislike so much as being thrown in upon themselves, as being forced through circumstances or unwise discipline to find their resources of activity and enjoyment in themselves. It is contrary to the child-nature to do this. Neither mentally nor bodily do children like being told to keep quiet, to sit still. Like climbing-plants, they want something outward to fasten themselves upon, as it were; to grow to, and find support in as they grow.

The same fact of childhood's submergence of self in its surroundings is seen in the readiness with which children adapt themselves to outward changes. If a wet day spoils the prospect of a ramble in forest or field, a game in the house, a story such as they love told them by nurse or mother, soon takes away the feeling of disappointment, and the remembrance of the murky sky and driving rain. Even in respect of what are infinitely greater sorrows, the death of those nearest and dearest to them, for example, the same plasticity, the same power of adapting themselves to circumstances, are seen. The father away from home on a long voyage, the mother lying in her cold grave, are not indeed forgotten, but in the majority of cases their unwonted absence, at first poignantly felt, begins soon



to be overgrown by fresh experiences, as the new-made tomb is overgrown by grass and daisies.

Not that it is not well that the consciousness of self, the feeling of individuality, should be weak in children. When we think of the disappointments, the labours, the sorrows, the wearinesses, the discipline, which enter largely into life, we see how merciful a provision it is that, before these things thrust the mind in upon itself, it is able, in the days of childhood, to forget itself in its surroundings. The feeling of self is perhaps the most oppressive, as it is the most constant, of all the feelings of maturer life. It is good that, for some years at life's commencement, we are largely delivered from it.

But childhood passes away, and with it the readiness with which we merge self in what is immediately around us. Opening manhood and womanhood bring with them the deepening feeling of individuality. The mind and inward life begins to be more conscious of itself, to be less a part of what is going on around it. The walls of the secret shrine of the soul rise slowly but surely, and within them the self, the ego, begins consciously to take up its abode. We come to feel that there are many experiences, temptations, trials, sorrows, doubts, questionings, sins, through which, as far as human companionship is concerned, we must pass absolutely alone. The care of father and mother, the protection and guidance given to us in younger days by those older and wiser than ourselves, are seen to be powerless to defend us from discipline which we must undergo each for himself. We begin to read a new

meaning in the words of the prophet, "I have trodden "the wine-press alone; and of the people there was "none with me."<sup>1</sup> A dawning perception, growing ever clearer, comes to us of the fact that life cannot be lived by proxy.

The necessity of this truth becomes plain when we consider what is involved in the growth of self. Self, in a few words, is a developed life. It is not until life has undergone a considerable development that the feeling of self becomes at all pronounced. If new-born babes could speak, giving expression to their ideas, they would all say very nearly the same things. They all have the same wants of food and warmth and nursing and tender handling; the supply of these wants produces much the same feeling of pleasure in them all. Their minds are all cast much in one mould. To a very large extent, though not altogether, it is difference of experience that produces the marked difference between man and man in maturer life. Life's development, life's experiences, bring into prominence the fact of self, the feeling of individuality. Every change in outward circumstance, every spiritual victory and every spiritual defeat, every sorrow and every joy, every effort after the true and the beautiful and the good, every yielding to the false and the ignoble and the bad, leaves its mark upon us, interweaves its one thread, dark or bright, into the texture of our life, and gives to life in each of us its own pattern. At any moment of life we are made up of two things: the individual life, God-given,

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah lxiii. 3.

with which we came into the world, and the mass of experiences of all kinds that have gathered round it; crystallized around it as round a string; been absorbed into its tissues and fibres, like the food which enters into an animal or a plant. Self is a developed life; at the end of life, whether it come soon or late, except in those cases where age or disease impairs the powers of thought and memory, the feeling of self, the fact of individuality is stronger than ever before. The ego, the I, has reached its climax. With life and its experiences lying all behind it, the soul is more conscious of itself than ever. Death and the untried future, so full of awe and wonder, drive it in upon itself more than ever before. "But now *I* come to "Thee."

But this is only one side of the matter. If what we have been considering hitherto, the development of the fact and consciousness of self, were all that our course of life had to give us at its end, that surely would be a very meagre compensation for all that we have suffered and passed through. But life, if it has been lived rightly, and as He who is its Author wishes it to be lived, has something not perhaps more important but yet more valuable and blessed to give us. It has another fact, another consciousness to bring into greater vividness at its end than ever before during its career. That is the fact, the consciousness of God; which—with reverence be it said—seem to have been more prominent in the mind of Jesus when he uttered this prayer, so shortly before his death, than at any time previously of his beautiful, toilsome, self-sacrificing

life. The central word of the prayer, over which his past and his future clasped holy hands, was this: "But now I come to Thee." Nor is there any reason to doubt that if we try to make the spirit of our lives conform to the spirit of his, we too shall find that the end of our earthly history will have its last page more luminous and glowing with the fact and consciousness of God than any former page. For if it is, as we have seen, in the nature of things, that life as it goes on develops the feeling of self, the fact of individuality, it is equally the desire of God that our feeling and consciousness of Him should grow ever more vivid, ever more real; so that the final word of the soul as it closes its earthly course may be, "But now I come to Thee."

Of course there is, unhappily, little doubt that life does not bring this great blessedness to some men. It develops only the fact of self, and not, along with this, the consciousness and fact of God, overtopping self with its sublimity and glory. But in that case it is evident that such have not lived healthy and normal spiritual lives; they have not answered God's end and design for them. Nor ought we any more to select them as examples of a life developed as God wishes, than we should select a blind or a deaf man as the type of humanity. For one thing is certain: if we answer to the gracious influences with which God surrounds us, His revelation in nature, in the Bible, in human love and goodness, in Jesus Christ, in His Spirit, if we deal with these things as He wishes that we should, and

let them work out in us the happy results that they can work out, life will assuredly give us, as its last and greatest blessing, a most vivid consciousness of God. The feeling will be uppermost at its close: "But now I come to *Thee*."

Indeed, the necessity of the growth of our consciousness of God seems to be implied in the growth of our consciousness of self which has already been treated. This implication rests upon two or three weighty reasons.

One reason is that our inward life, the life of our spirits, the life in the possession of which lies our claim to have been made in the image of God and to be His children, not merely His handiwork, is the result of the direct inbreathing of God into us. We may say with all reverent confidence that we have come forth from God. All that constitutes our idea of Him, intelligence, will, love, we share with Him and have received from Him. Our growing life only makes our feeling that we possess these god-like attributes clearer and more full. As the Psalmist said, we too may say, "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."<sup>2</sup> The experience of life, as we have seen, deepens the feeling of the individuality which we have received from God. But is this feeling to blot out the feeling of God? Has He created us only to render us eternally independent of Himself? Are

<sup>2</sup> Psalm cxxxix. 16.

we to leave, as it were, the Father's house, to go beyond sea into a far-off land, to make shift there for ourselves, never to correspond with, seldom to think upon, never to return again to our Father? When self is most matured, and the feeling of individual life has grown most full, is there to be everlasting severance from God, everlasting solitude for the soul of man? When we have come to the limit of earthly life, and in the nature of things cannot go back again to its beginning, is there nothing before us but a leap into the lonely darkness? Is there no growth, no development still before us? Questions such as these may well die into silence, or be answered with a triumphant No! The feeling of God, if we live as He designs we should, grows with our feeling of self. If the I develops, the Thou also develops. Life leads up only to this: "But now I come to Thee."

A second reason why the consciousness of God must needs grow with the consciousness of self is this: that we must have something to rest upon that we feel to be not less abiding than we feel ourselves to be. Our very nature demands society, companionship, communion. "It is not good for man to be alone." Not even the most self-contained and self-reliant man can shut out his need of others, or be as though that need, one of the laws of his nature, had no existence. Now, in our deepest nature we need a communion with what is not less than ourselves, but greater. We cannot get this need satisfied unless what we hold communion with be at least equally abiding with ourselves.

But our consciousness of self is the consciousness of what is permanent. I feel to-day that I am the same being in the essence of my nature that I was at the furthest point to which memory reaches back. Life's experiences have been varied; its changes numerous. But underlying them all there is the I, the ego, the self, of which I am conscious now. *I* abide amid all changes. We may say with Tennyson in his "Geraint and Enid,"

"Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile or frown ;

"With that wild wheel we go not up nor down."

This permanent, abiding self, of which we are conscious, needs some one who is not less than it is. Only with such an one will the communion it craves be worthy of it. Who is such an one? God. He is the answer to our question, the supply of our need. He must abide, or He is less than we, the creatures whom He has made. He is the Abiding One; the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He is the eternal reality without us who answers to the eternal reality of self within us. To Him we must turn. He is the portion of our soul for ever and ever.

Still another reason remains why the consciousness of God should grow with the consciousness of self. That is, that as the consciousness of self grows, it carries with it the discovery in increasing measure of what our nature is capable of, what are its needs, what are its desires. Deepest of its desires is the desire of living. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Next to this is the need of loving and of being loved. Above this is



the need of joy. Above this, again, the need of purity. Now, these desires cannot have been implanted in us only to mock us because they cannot be fulfilled. That would be to make of God, our Creator and Father, a monster as great as the old Greek god who punished Tantalus by placing him within reach of food and water which, as often as he tried to get them, fled before his hand. The very existence of need, of faculty, points to somewhat answering to them. The means in which lies the satisfaction of these wants on their earthly side, draw us on to those where their heavenly side may meet its answer. The need of living leads on to immortality; of earthly love to the love of God; of joy to the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory; of purity to the purity that is born of the Spirit of God dwelling in us. Our consciousness of self demands a consciousness of God. Our knowledge of the needs of our nature is a part of the journey toward the Divine nature which is the complement, the filling up, the completion of our own. Knowing who and what we are, learning through Christ who and what God is, God and self stand over against each other. "But now I come to Thee."

Of all holy men, in all ages of the world, this has been the experience. "Fear not, Abraham," came the word of God to one of them, "I am thy shield and 'thine exceeding great reward.'"<sup>8</sup> This was the grand, gracious answer to the needs of the patriarch which had impelled him to go out after a purer faith, a truer knowledge of the Most High. The soul of David said unto

<sup>8</sup> Gen. xv. 1.



the Lord, "O Lord, Thou art my God; I have no "good above Thee."<sup>4</sup> "Whom have I in Heaven but "Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire "beside Thee,"<sup>5</sup> said another sweet singer of Israel. "My God," said Paul, "shall fulfil every need of yours "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."<sup>6</sup> God in Christ, our all and in all, is the keynote of the Christian life, the life whose consciousness of self here on earth, as it shall be in the heavenly hereafter, is encircled by the consciousness of God.

We may, then, well look upon life in its whole course and discipline as an ever-growing consciousness of God. The more we know of self, the more we should seek to get the greater knowledge of God, as He is revealed fully in Jesus Christ. Then when life's labour draws to its close, and the weary worker's head lies on what soon shall be the pillow of death, the spirit will be buoyant with the confidence that it is going forth into the infinite only to find more fully than before how great, how gracious, how satisfying, how abiding is the reality of the Eternal.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm xvi. 2.    <sup>5</sup> Psalm lxxiii. 25.    <sup>6</sup> Phil. iv. 19.

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