

WRITINGS OF ALEXANDER MACLAREN

by Alexander Maclaren

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Alexander Maclaren, compiled for study and devotional reading.

54 Chapters

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01.00.00. The Conquering Christ

THE CONQUERING CHRIST and

OTHER SERMONS by Alexander Maclaren

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01.01. THE CONQUERING CHRIST.

Chapter 1 THE CONQUERING CHRIST " Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world ! "

John 1:29 "And I beheld, and lo, . . . a Lamb as it had been slain."

Revelation 5:6

One of the disciples of the Baptist who heard his proclamation of the Lamb of God was John, afterwards the apostle and writer of the Apocalypse. Long years had passed since that hour. The Baptist slept in a bloody grave. The young fisherman had learned to know Jesus with a larger knowledge, and to love Him with a love more than life. He had found in Jesus depths which he had little dreamed of, on that day by the fords of Jordan ; and now, in his rocky Patmos, with the waves dashing round him, in a scene so unlike the earlier one, and himself most changed of all, the heavens were opened, and the vision of his Lord granted to him again. Is it not beautiful and significant that the words in which he tells of what he saw through the door opened in heaven read like an echo of those spoken so long ago, and never to be forgotten? - " Behold the Lamb ! " " And I beheld, and, lo, . . . a Lamb !" The word for lamb is, indeed, different, and in the difference lies a pathetic and lovely lesson ; for that employed to describe the heavenly state of the exalted Christ is humbler than that used by the Baptist, being a diminutive form, which we might represent by lambkin. But the whole ring of the sentence is like that of the original proclamation in the Gospel. If we further notice that the fourth Gospel alone has preserved this testimony of the forerunner, and that John alone of New Testament writers uses this name for Christ, and that it occurs in the Apocalypse some twenty-five times, we see how deeply his first teacher's words had sunk into his heart, and how constantly, as years advanced and his experience widened, he had found them assuming new meaning. Happy is it for us if life but reveals to us the fulness which lies in our earliest glimpses of Christ, if our old age can repeat the creed of youth with deepened significance, and if we can hope that heaven itself will but give us a clearer vision of the same Christ, in the same character as we had dimly seen Him amid the confusions and sorrows of earth ! The purpose of this sermon is to gather into one view the Apocalyptic uses of this name for Jesus Christ, and thus to try to bring out the remarkable fulness and variety of the representation of what Christ is to men, thence deducible. We may arrange the whole roughly in four classes, and consider the teaching of the Apocalypse as to the slain Lamb, the enthroned Lamb, the Shepherd-Lamb, and the Warrior-Lamb.

I We have first the representation given in the words of our second text - the slain Lamb, the Sin-bearer for the world.

If we recur for a moment to the testimony of the forerunner, and try to throw ourselves back to his standpoint, and to ask the meaning on his lips of that remarkable saying, we shall better understand the vision in Patmos. The aspect in which Jesus appeared to the last of the Old Testament prophets was necessarily moulded by Old Testament facts, and if we seek what these

may have been, we shall not go far wrong if we point to a triple source for that testimony of his, in the Lamb of history, the Lamb of ritual, and the Lamb of prophecy. As for the first of these three, recall the pathetic question and answer which passed between Abraham and his son as they traveled to the mountain of sacrifice. "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" said the unconscious son, bearing the wood for the pile. "My son," said the father - and how hard it must have been to have steadied his voice to say it, and to look the confidence which he did not feel! - "God Himself will provide the lamb." The despairing father was "wiser than he knew," and the event shamed the little faith which he had in his own words. Surely that utterance, floating down from the sacred past, helped to shape the Baptist's speech, and the remembrance of it suggests the interpretation of the "Lamb of God," as being the Sacrifice appointed and provided by God Himself.

Further, a second source, confluent with the former, is the Lamb of ritual, whether the daily sacrifice or the Paschal lamb. In this connection it is to be noted that John in his Gospel lays stress on the fact that, by reason of the remarkable rapidity with which death followed our Lord's crucifixion. His sacred body escaped the cruel indignity practiced on the two robbers to hasten their end. He sees therein the fulfillment of the prescription concerning the Paschal sacrifice, "a bone of it shall not be broken," and thus by that one passing allusion identifies Jesus with the Passover - an identification which is also distinctly asserted by our Lord in His institution of the Last Supper.

Further, we must take into account also, and perhaps chiefly, the Lamb of prophecy - the great picture of the meek and suffering Servant of the Lord in the second part of Isaiah. "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth." But not meekness only was predicated of this Sufferer, but also that in some mysterious fashion He should "bear our griefs and carry our sorrows," and that the Lord should "make to meet on Him the iniquity of us all." The coincidence of representation is too striking to be fortuitous; and the interpretation of the words of the Baptist, which takes no account of the words of the prophet, may be admired for its courage, but scarcely for its clear-sightedness.

If we give due weight to these three sources - history, ritual, and prophecy - we shall be shut up to the conclusion that the title given by the Baptist to Jesus is a name of function rather than of character. It is a transparently inadequate explanation to make the Name a mere expression of meekness or of innocence. True, these qualities must and do attach to the Sacrifice which is to avail for men, but it is not these qualities, but the fact of sacrifice, which is insisted upon in the title. That is made certain as having been the Baptist's meaning by his own following words, which place the point of comparison between Jesus and "the lamb" in His sin-bearing rather than in His disposition. And how strong and emphatic the description of His mighty work is! He "taketh away" by taking on Himself. The burden is not "sins," but "sin;" as if all the black deeds were gathered into one huge mass, enough to crush any shoulders but His on whom it is laid. The universality of His work of bearing, and bearing away sin, is put in the strongest form by the addition - "of the world." So far the Baptist carries us. John had heard and dimly understood his words. But much had happened since then to open their depths to his gaze. He had stood by the cross, had seen his risen Lord, had received His guiding Spirit, had learned through long years his own and the world's need, had pondered and prayed and preached and lived, and so had come to know how "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." Therefore, with whatever sacrifice of congruity of

metaphor, the vision which he sees when heaven opens is "a Lamb as it had been slain." Whatever may be said about other points of comparison as being present in the Baptist's use of the emblem, the sacrificial import of the vision in Revelation is settled by that one expression. "As it had been slain" leaves no doubt that Christ's death, and nothing else, is in the seer's mind ; and that to that fact he would lead us as the centrepiece of all else which we can know about Him, and as the foundation of all that He has further to reveal of His glory and power. That symbolical representation is a vivid and picturesque way of saying that, in heaven as on earth, Christ's sacrifice is efficacious and necessary. Much besides may be contained in the symbol, but this is plainly its lesson, that there is no heaven nor any cleansing but through the blood of the slain Lamb. For earth and heaven, to the last moment of time and all through the dateless cycles of eternity, Christ's sacrifice is men's need, and is present before the throne as the medium of all blessings to sinners here who struggle to be saints, and to saints there who were sinners. Purity, peace, life, and all other Divine gifts, are ours and theirs, because the " Lamb as it had been slain " is before the throne. " This Man, when He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of the throne of God." This is the aspect of Christ with which we must begin, if we would know Him in the full greatness of His gifts and sweep of His work. Unless we do, we shall have but an unworthy conception of His wondrous love and an inadequate estimate of His all-healing power. The Christianity which strikes out the sacrifice on the cross from its idea of Jesus has not fathomed the depths of His mercy nor of our need. The wounds of humanity are not to be stanchd by one who is but a meek and pure pattern man, however stimulating and lovable such a figure may be, but need for their binding up a wounded hand. A Christ without a cross is an impotent Christ. He can neither bless nor sway. It used to be believed that adamant was soluble only by the blood of a kid. The adamantine heart is melted by nothing else than by the sacrifice of that unblemished and spotless Lamb. Take away that figure from the vision of the future, and the vision itself melts into mist, and instead of the solid certainties of a real and accessible home of all blessedness and perfection, there remains but a great Perhaps, shimmering uncertainly in the vapor, and in our hearts the aching doubt of its reality and of our power to reach it, if real it be.

II A second group of passages presents the enthroned Lamb. The vision from which our second text comes shows the Lamb between the throne and the ring of worshipers, and in other places of the Apocalypse we read of " the Lamb in the midst of the throne," and, still more remarkably, of " the throne of God and of the Lamb," as if joint possessors of the one seat of majesty. These are but symbolical ways of proclaiming the truth that the cross leads to the crown, that the dominion of Jesus is founded upon His suffering and death, that the many crowns which He wears are His by right of His having worn the crown of thorns. That Divine Word, which became flesh for our sakes, returned to the glory which had been its home before the world was ; but it bore a new companion with it - even the humanity which it assumed, and which died for our salvation. Manhood is exalted to the sovereign place in the universe. The slain Lamb is the enthroned Lamb. This vision brings clearly into view the activity of Jesus in His heavenly state, as well as His sovereign exaltation. For the ground plan of the universe is contained in it. In the centre rises the throne. Round it afar off are gathered the living creatures, the representatives of the fulness of creature life ; and the elders, the representatives of redeemed humanity ; and between these and the throne stands the slain Lamb, through whom all communications between the throne and the worshipers pass. By Him all blessings flow out, and by Him all praise rises up. " By Him all things consist." By Him the creatures receive their meat according to their hunger and capacity. By Him redeemed manhood

receives all its graces and hopes. He is the Channel of all good, and bestows all fulness on an else empty world. He is the Medium by which thanksgiving, devotion, aspiration, hope, dare to clasp the else inaccessible seat of God. Nor is this the only thought enforced by the vision, for its subsequent part tells how this throned Lamb took into His hand the book with seven seals, and as He broke them one by one, set loose as it were the mighty forces which were to mould the world's destiny. Jesus Christ is the Lord of history. The hand that was pierced on the cross holds the helm. The voice which cried, "It is finished!" says to His servants, who ride upon the mysterious horses of the vision, "Go!" and they go on their errand of woe or gladness. He is the King of nations. Do we not see that, in spite of all the talk about Christ having done His part and Christianity being worn out, the principles and powers that spring from His cross are more and more becoming the guides of the "civilized" world? Much of the evidence of His rule is plain to all who are not blinded by antagonism and prejudice, and the fact of His rule should be the unalterable conviction of every Christian soul, for its own peace amid noisy rebellion. But we need purged eyes to see that great sight which John saw in Patmos.

It is of the utmost importance for the vigor of Christian life to keep clear and vivid that present activity of our Lord. We have not only to look back to His cross, but upwards to His throne. We have not only to rejoice that He was wounded for a world's transgressions, and to adore Him who was slain for us, but to think of Him as at the right hand of God, ready to help and royal to defend all who love Him. The nobleness, peacefulness, and strength of our lives largely depend upon our having that vision of the enthroned Jesus ever before us. It will give substance and nearness to the else shadowy and remote thoughts of heaven, if we feel that He is actually there in the manhood which is ours, and actually wielding the energies of omnipotence on behalf of our feebleness and for effecting the mighty purposes of His death. The distant land is more real and less distant when one dear vision fills it, and our Brother is known to be there. We shall have more vivid conceptions of Him, when our thoughts are not only directed to Him as to an historical figure in the past centuries, but embrace Him as at this moment working for the completion of that great work, which, though in one aspect it was "finished" when He bowed His head and died, in another will not be completed till the voice from heaven proclaims, "It is done. The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ."

It is difficult to keep that vision clear before our eyes, amid our low cares and sense-bound thinkings. But how small and poor the noise of Ephesus and the storms of persecution would seem to John, when the heavens opened and showed him the throned Christ! There is no reason why that sight should not bless us as really as it blessed him. He saw "the things that are," and they are to-day and for ever. It was no transient splendor which he saw, nor was he befooled by the phantasms of his own imagination. To him was granted but the Apocalypse or the unveiling of what was always there, behind the curtain. For us, too, it will be drawn back, if we will. It is but a thin separating veil, which will soon be rent asunder, and may at any time be drawn aside, for faithful eyes to gaze lovingly on the glories which it partially hides. How small cares, and sorrows, and joys, and aims of this life would look if we really saw, with the inward eye whose revelations are more trustworthy than those of sense, the enthroned Lamb, the Mediator of the fulness of God, and the Arbiter of the fates of men! If we would purge our vision from earthly stain, we too should have it granted to us to see this great sight, and to walk all the day in the light of the countenance of the present and exalted Christ.

III Another group of passages gives the figure of the Shepherd-Lamb. In that tender description of the perfected flock that came out of great tribulation, which has solaced so many sad hearts with a glimpse of the blessedness of their dear ones gone, we read that " the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life ; " and in another vision we hear of the redeemed as "following the Lamb whither soever He goeth." Of course the coloring of this representation, like all the symbolism of the Apocalypse, is derived from the Old Testament, and carries us back to many a sweet ancient word of psalmist and prophet. Especially is there an allusion in the former of these passages to the words of Isaiah 49:10, and it is noteworthy that the same office which the earlier words ascribed to God is here unhesitatingly attributed in even higher form to the Lamb.

There is a striking anomaly, and at first sight incongruity, in that daring symbol, that the Lamb is the Shepherd. But the reality underlying the symbol is that Jesus Christ, by His death, becomes the Guide, Protector, and Nourisher of men. We may perhaps venture still further to draw from the incongruity of the symbol the great truth that the Leader of men is one in nature with the men whom He leads. The Shepherd is Himself a Lamb, and is our Leader just because He shares our nature. But that is not in the intention of the seer, and can only be taken as a permissible ploy of allusion on our parts.

We are on firmer ground when we see in this sweet metaphor the thought that the Christ who died and reigns is the eternal Pattern for us, whether on earth or in the calm perfection of Mount Zion. Here we have to go after the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, who has left us an example that we should tread in His steps. Here we follow afar off, lingering, straying, and all unfit to tread in His footprints. There " they shall follow the Lamb whither soever He goeth," with complete imitation, and steps not unequal to His. But for both states, to follow Him is blessedness and to be like Him is perfection. Nor shall that future be without advance. There will be growing approximation to Him, a more perfect conformity to His likeness, a fuller appropriation of His life, and an ever increasing nearness to Him which shall fill eternity . with freshness, and make its joys and service ever new. The symbol suggests that the slain and enthroned Lamb is, by both characteristics, the Source of security and the Author of nourishment. True, there will be no outward dangers to guard against ; but the reason why " they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat," is, " for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd," and therefore are they safe from evil, and replenished with all good. He is the eternal Source of satisfaction for heaven as for earth, and is Himself the Fountain of living waters to which He leads the flock. Heaven is Christ, and Christ is Heaven. The future state of the redeemed is stable blessedness and full delight, not because of physical changes or added glories, but because Christ is theirs, and the full issues of His cross and reign are reaped by them in their following the Shepherd-Lamb, and sharing with Him His glories. The relation of the flock to the shepherd in the good pastures of the mountains of Israel above is in some respects the opposite of that experienced here, and in others the completion of it. There we shall have no valley of the shadow of death, no ravenous beasts to prowl round the fold and pounce upon the wanderers from the flock, no dark gorges, no stony ways, no thirsty deserts, no straying in the wilderness and tearing the fleeces among thorns, no losing sight of the Shepherd, and panting with panic fears. There the Shepherd needs no weapons- neither rod to smite nor sling to defend. If we give ourselves to His gentle guidance here, where all these terrors and hindrances are, He will bring us

thither where they are not ; and if, with stumbling steps, we try to follow Him as we best can in this rough road, He will seek us when we wander, and restore us when we faint, and bring us to the one fold, where we shall be near Him, and at rest for evermore. But there is a grim verse in one of the psalms which tells us of another shepherd whose flock consists of those self-destroying souls, who will not take the Lamb for their Sacrifice, King, and Guide. Of these we read, " Death shall be their shepherd," and the fold to which they are driven is the shambles. The choice is before us. Shall we be of the flock of the good Shepherd, or of that which is marked for the slaughter ?

IV The final group of passages to which we direct attention represents Jesus as the Warrior-Lamb.

" These shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them ; for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings." So is the conflict between the vassal kings of the beast and the conquering Christ described in one vision of this book, while in that portraying the final conflict, though the name with which we are here concerned is not employed, the same title is given to the victor, which in the passage just quoted is ascribed to the Lamb. " He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written. King of kings, and Lord of lords." The very strangeness and incongruity of the combination of the ideas of the Lamb and of warfare is part of the felicity of the symbol. For so is the thought set forth that Christ conquers by gentleness, and that the instrument by which He subdues is the great manifestation of His love in His sacrifice. But, further, the paradox of the Warrior-Lamb hints at the terrible possibilities of destructive wrath which lie as dormant in that gentle Christ. The same double aspect of His character and energy is set forth in the striking juxtaposition in the context of our second text : " Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah . . . and I beheld, and, lo, a Lamb." Nothing is so terrible as the wrath of gentle love and patience. No wonder that the rebels against the long-suffering, meek Christ, when they see Him coming in the clouds of heaven, call despairingly on rocks and hills to crush them, if thereby they may be hid from the " wrath of the Lamb." Divine love is not incapable of anger. The Lamb of God is the Lion of Judah. Let us not trifle with His power to smite and rend. The Lion of the tribe of Judah is the Lamb of God. Let us trust and take refuge in His power to heal and save. But this vision of the conquering gentleness, which overcomes by sacrifice, derives still further significance when contrasted with its antagonist. The Lamb and the Beast are the two powers arrayed against each other. Now, it is profitless to ask whether there has been or will be a personal manifestation of the tendencies which are embodied in that image. It is more to the purpose to inquire. What makes the beast a beast, whoever or wherever he may be ? And the answer is not far to seek. What did God mean manhood to be ? Is not union with Him, in love, desire, and obedience, the ideal for man ; and does not the humanity which is separated from him and self-centered, sink to the animal level, and become like, and therein beneath, the beasts that know not the Divine hand that feeds them, and can have no other object than themselves in their dumb and narrow lives ? The God-centered man is truly a man ; the self-centered man is somewhat less than a man. Where these self-regarding impulses are supreme the animalizing process is complete, and "the beast" is the perfection of that imperfection - the embodiment, as it were, of self separated from God. Against that sinful self hood Jesus fights now, and He will help us, if we will, in our daily struggle with the beast in our own natures. If we will open our hearts to the cleansing of His sacrifice, the authority of His reign, the guidance of His Shepherd's care, He will fill them with power which shall make us victorious over all in ourselves that draws us away from God, and " the lion and the dragon " that are in us we " shall trample underfoot." The Warrior-Lamb is the Hope of each soul

struggling with its own evil and seeking to help its fellows. He is the Hope for the world. They who understand the meaning of His sacrifice, enthronement, gracious guidance, and protection, cannot but be confident that He will cast out evil, and that the fruit of the travail of His soul shall be rich and ample and eternal enough to satisfy even the universal love of His heart, and to correspond to even the might of His sacrifice and the unspeakable price with which He has redeemed the world. For ourselves, all depends on our beginning with the vision of the slain Lamb. The call comes to each of us, " Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world ! " Our sins are in that gigantic mass beneath which He sank fainting, but which He has borne away. Have we laid our hands, like the offerers of old, on the head of the sacrifice and thus associated ourselves with Him by faith ? Have we ever truly cried, " O Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us " ? If we truly and habitually live obeying the merciful call to behold Him, then in life He will be for us Sacrifice, King, Shepherd, Champion. If we look to Him through the mists and clouds of time, His face will beam upon us and make the darkness light about us. When He leads us through the valley of the shadow of death and the swellings of Jordan, He will be with us ; and when we open our eyes again, after the brief darkness, and wipe the cold waters from our faces, our first sight in heaven will be the Lamb in the midst of the throne, and He will lead us among the good pastures of the sunlit hills, where no foes nor fears will disturb, nor sin and sorrow vex any more for ever.

01.02. SPOKEN NEED, UNSPOKEN REQUEST.

Chapter 2 SPOKEN NEED, UNSPOKEN REQUEST " And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto Him, They have no wine."

John 2:3 " Therefore his sisters sent unto Jesus, saying, Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick."

John 11:3

There can be no greater contrast than that presented by these two scenes. In the one we have the homely merriment of a rustic wedding, in the other the despair of two desolate women's hearts. The mother of Jesus and the sisters of Lazarus stand at opposite poles of feeling. But from the station of each a straight line can be drawn to where Jesus is. Sorrow and joy have an equally open road to Him, and find equal sympathy there. The gravity of the respective needs in these two incidents is singularly different. The one is a trifle, the other a crushing weight. But, great or small, transient or lifelong, as cares or wants may be, they are best met and conquered and supplied when told to our Lord. Not less noticeable is the identity in manner of the two sayings. The mother of our Lord simply says, "They have no wine," and adds no more. The sisters send only the message, " He whom Thou lovest is sick," and proffer no request. That manner of addressing Christ, alike in sorrow and joy, in trivial and in great necessity, with the simple statement of what presses on life or heart, and the suppression of all prescription to Him of what He is to do, may suggest some not useless considerations as to the tone and manner which should mark our intercourse with Jesus.

I Our intercourse with Him should be characterized by frank familiarity of communication, such as befits love and friendship.

It was a natural impulse which brought both these utterances to Jesus. His mother was troubled when the scanty store of her friends at Cana began to give out, and, as she saw the wineskins becoming more and more flaccid, a spirit in her feet carried her to her Son, perhaps before she well knew what she did, or wished Him to do. The two sad hearts at Bethany, as they saw the black wing of the angel of death hovering over their home, turned spontaneously to Jesus, and, though they did not know what He could do if He came, still felt that the sorrow would be more easily borne if they knew that He knew it. Now, that same instinctive prompting to tell dear ones all our thoughts and wishes is an unfailing character of real love. It makes the blessedness of many a happy pair of hearts, to whom knowing and being known are equal delight and simple necessity. The depth and purity of our human love may be roughly, but with tolerable accuracy, measured by the strength of that impulse. Where reserve is possible, love is shallow or coarse. The impulse affects all that interests or concerns a pair of friends. Not even dark secrets of shame escape, for true love seeks to share these too, and they are less of a barrier when told than when hidden. The magnitude of the thing is of no importance. We do not ask whether it is large enough to trouble those whom we love with it. A child runs to its mother with a broken toy, or the scratch of a pin on

its finger, or an untied shoe. Love has no care for great or small. Concealment of little is concealment also of much, and the confidence which tells trifles is perhaps greater than that which tells important things; and what love prizes is the confidence, more than the knowledge given. The love which binds human hearts to one another is not different in kind from that which knits men to Jesus. Love is love, to whomsoever it is directed and whatever may be the differences of its accompaniments. What our love does in us when it is fixed on one another, that it should do when it is fixed in humble faith on Jesus Christ. Many of its signs and effects will necessarily be different, but in the one case, as in the other, perfect frankness of communication and delight in yielding to the impulse of laying bare every corner of our hearts, whatever inner baseness may lurk there, will assuredly attend real love. We may live in the light of an ever gladdening consciousness of Christ's love and sympathy, and if we walked in that light as we may, and therefore should, we should no more be able to carry secret cares hidden beneath our cloaks to gnaw at our hearts, than loving husband or wife can hide troubles or thoughts from wife or husband loved.

Now, that is a very sharp test of Christian character, and makes short work of much complacent profession. If we really love Christ and feel to Him as to a friend, and if we heartily believe that we can speak to Him and be heard, we shall not need any one to tell us that it is our duty to pray to Him. "Access with confidence" will come spontaneously, as a relief to overcharged hearts and the blessing of solitary ones - and, after all companionship, who is not solitary ? The impossibility of imparting our whole selves to any makes our hearts often ache, and if we feel to Christ as we should, we shall thankfully still the aching by uttermost frankness of self revelation to Him. We should instinctively feel that whatever irritates or affects us, be it slight as a mosquito's puncture or grave as a whip adder's sting, must be told to Him. He who only invokes Christ's sympathy and help when there comes a "knot" in his fortunes which he thinks "worthy" of such a hand to unravel, will seldom invoke Him, and will not usually do it to much purpose. Trifles are the bulk of life, and unless our communion with our Lord extends to trifles, it will be poor and partial indeed. We may well ask ourselves, then, whether such instinctive impulse, prior to all reflection as to duty or advantage, sends us to Jesus Christ, to make Him our confidant and unload our hearts to Him, in that frank outpouring which is the native tongue of love. Do we find ourselves telling Him of our annoyances, calamities, little wants and the like, almost before we know it ? There are heights and depths of Christian communion beyond such self regarding speech, but these sanctities and sublimities will seldom be reached except we first have acquired the habit of telling Him all that interests and harasses us in daily life. The mountain summits of a continent do not usually rise at the water's edge, but from high uplands. How different our lives would be if we brought them all in their veriest trifles into touch with Jesus- noble, calm, joyous in the midst of sorrow, and with a certain breath of heaven rustling through them and freshening them ! " Pour out your hearts before Him," as a man might invert some golden vase, and empty its contents to the last drop trickling from the lip. The heart thus emptied in frank confidence will be filled with peace, and be conscious of an all-sufficing presence.

II

These two sayings may further suggest the trustful and submissive suppression of desire which should accompany this frank confidence.

" They have no wine." Did that mean, " Give them some"? It can scarcely be supposed that, at that early stage, the virgin expected her Son to work a miracle, even though she kept all the unforgettable events of the Nativity in her heart. " He whom Thou lovest is sick." Did that mean, " Come and heal him " ? Some faint hope of that sort may have been in the sisters' hearts, as may be inferred from their half-reproachful greeting of Jesus when He came, but it was probably of the vaguest character. If there were such wishes in either case, the suppression of them indicates the speakers' absolute trust in Christ's superior wisdom and perfect sympathy, which makes their utterance of their wishes superfluous and presumptuous. But probably in neither case was there a definite expectation, and if there were anything in their minds beyond the impulse of which we have spoken, they apparently trustfully left the decision of what He should do in His own hands.

Let us tell Christ our needs and stop there. Surely we are well enough acquainted with His loving purpose to be certain that for Him to know is to pity, and to pity is to stretch out a full and strong hand of supply and help. We say that we believe in His Divine nature. If we do, we must believe that His knowledge needs no informing by us to move His sympathy. Why, then, should we tell Him our needs, if He knows them already ? We have already partly answered that question by pointing to the instinct of love ; but, further, we must remember that our communication of our wants is preliminary to His supply of them, not because it informs Him, but because it prepares us. He does not need to be told, but we need to tell Him. That being so, it is the part of faith to spread our needs before Jesus, and to do no more. All need makes appeal to Him, and many forms of it are supplied from His loving hand, without other prayer than the dumb, unconscious one of the necessity's existence. " He heareth the ravens when they cry ; He openeth His hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing." When on earth, many miracles were wrought without either faith or petition. " He healed them that had need of healing," for no other reason than because they had need, and the silent pleading of their misery entered into His heart. That rock needed no stroke of a rod, nor even a word, to make its waters gush forth. The presence of the thirsty was enough. But for higher gifts there must needs be the confidence already spoken of, and where that exists there need not and should not be the prescribing of a course to Jesus. To do that is consonant neither with faith nor with reverence. Humble submission to Christ's better wisdom breathed through His mother's words and the sisters' message. True prayer is not pestering the Throne with passionate entreaties that a certain method of deliverance, which seems best to us, should be forthwith effected, but is a calm utterance of need, and a patient, submissive expectance of fitting help, of which we dare not define the manner or the time. They are wisest, most trustful and reverent, who do not seek to impose their notions and wills on the clearer wisdom and deeper love to which they betake themselves, but are satisfied with leaving all to His arbitrament. True prayer is the bending of our own wills to the Divine, not the urging of ours on it. When Hezekiah received the insolent letter from the invader, he took it and " spread it before the Lord," asking God to read it, and leaving all else to Him to determine ; as if he had said, " Behold, Lord, this boasting page. I bring it to Thee, and now it is Thine affair more than mine." The burden which we roll on God lies lightly on our shoulders ; and if we do roll it thither, we need not trouble ourselves with the question of how He will deal with it. The less we seek to prescribe to God, the truer and more blessed will be our intercourse with Him. It is enough to tell Him that the wine fails, or that Lazarus is ill. Leave Him a free hand to do as He will, in supplying deficiencies and healing diseases. A confident assurance of the fact that needs will be met, a blank sheet in our expectation as to how they will be, and a sharpened attention, alert to mark the direction which His help may take, should ever accompany

our speech to Christ. The highest prayer is, " Not my will, but Thine, be done," and the best answer is, " The peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." The cares which are imparted to the beloved lose their poison, the tasks shared with them are lightened, and all joys become more joyful, and all objects of interest more poignantly stimulating when shared. The law of earthly love applies to the highest, in so far that to tell Jesus of burdens shifts them from us to Him, and disturbances are less disturbing when our disquiet has been breathed into His calm heart. Mary shook off responsibility for the empty wineskins when she told Jesus of them, and we bring a stronger arm than ours to deal with difficulties when we in like manner speak of them to our Lord. The sisters at Bethany felt less lonely and crushed when they thought that Jesus knew, though they did not venture to send requests to Him. So from these two instances, the one of a most trivial need, the other of a most tragic, we may learn the one lesson - tell your need, and then be silent, and let Him settle how it is to be met. Only be on the watch for what He may do, and be sure that He will do something, and that the right thing.

III These two incidents give two ways of taking Christ's delays. Our Lord's treatment of the two appeals is substantially the same. The answer to Mary sounds more repellent in English than in Greek, inasmuch as " woman " has in it a tinge of roughness not conveyed by the original. The question simply suggests independent action and not alienation ; but the request was certainly put aside, and its repetition forbidden. In the remaining clause, " Mine hour is not yet come," a promise, like a sweet kernel, is hidden in the words ; for " not yet " warrants and seems to be meant to create expectance that the hour will strike soon, and be heard by His ear. Precisely similar is Christ's action in the other case. " When Jesus heard that he was sick, He abode still two days in the same place where He was." There again he delayed till His "hour" had come. That expression, so frequent on our Lord's lips, implies that each act of His was regulated by the conviction, clear to Himself, that the time for it, appointed by the Father, had arrived. Whether it were the hour " when the Son of man should be glorified" by the supreme sacrifice of the cross, or the hour when the peasant wedding should have replenished stores. His ear heard it strike, without the possibility of mistake ; and till it was heard, nothing - not even a mother's wistful look, or the sad hearts at Bethany - could induce Him to act. In proportion as we approach the same perfection of filial obedience, we shall be blessed with the same certainty of perception, and may hear, even amid the vulgar, loud noises of life, the solemn tones announcing the hour for great service or "small duty. Well for those who have so silenced the ringing in their own ears that they hear beyond mistake God's chimes, and hearing, obey ! The time between Christ's refusal to act on His mother's hint and His acting on it was probably brief ; but much may happen in short space, and requisite conditions may have been quickly supplied. God's clock does not go; at the same rate as ours, but " a thousand years " may some times be crowded into " one " of His days, and one of His days be lengthened to a slow thousand of our years. Two days seemed an eternity to the sisters, and no doubt bewilderingly long to some of the attendant disciples ; but, longer or shorter, the delays teach us the truth that Christ's time is determined by considerations which we are little able to appreciate. " The Lord is not slack concerning His promises, as men count slackness." The same connection of ideas is presented also in that remarkable incident which this evangelist alone records, when our Lord's brethren scoffingly suggested to Him to go up to the feast, and received the same answer as did Mary, "My time is not yet come." It came in a few hours, and probably was marked to Christ's consciousness by an inward impulse rather than by any change in circumstances. Thus, an action which looked like mere vacillation, and has often

been felt as a difficulty, becomes, when rightly understood, a striking witness to the continual communion with the guiding will of the Father, and regulation of all His life thereby, which Jesus enjoyed and practiced. But, in regard to His answers to our requests, as in regard to His answers to those in our texts, though the considerations which determine His hour are beyond our sight, the great governing principle of which they were products is clear. Whatever holds back His hand, it is not lack of sympathy with our sorrow, disregard of our confidence, nor unwillingness nor inability to respond to our cry. The consideration of what is best for us and others who may be helped by our experience is sovereign with Him. All delay is the result of His love, and meant for highest good, not only to the individual most concerned, but to others also. "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe." The similarity which we have traced in the two superficially so different instances does not extend to the manner in which the two delays were received by the persons interested. These are contrasted rather than parallel, and while the one is an example, the other is a warning. Mary's meek faith, though there had been so little hitherto to feed it, drew hope from the seeming rebuff. Apparently she clung to the glimmer of hope in that "not yet," else her charge to the servants has nothing in the narrative to account for it. It was but a slight foothold, but it was enough for her. A heart truly in harmony with Christ will ever hear in His most discouraging words the undertones of promise. "Not yet" may darken today, but it ensures a bright tomorrow. "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" The very sorrow is a veiled prophet, and the night of weeping leads in the morning of joy. That was a noble and wise faith which bore away from Christ's "not yet," not fear, doubt, disappointment, nor the sense of repulse, but a hope certain as to the fact of His help, and quietly ignorant of the time and way, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it," was a triumph of faith, penetrating the surface denial, and sucking the sweet drop stored in the depths of the flower. The six water pots full of wine vindicated the confidence which translated "not yet" into "in good time." So will it be with us, if we leave Him to settle when "right early" is. We shall "wonder at the beautiful hours, the slow result of winter showers," and see at last what we believed while He tarried, that delay is a form of love, and His hour the right hour. The two sisters at Bethany seem to have had natural regrets during the four days between their message and Christ's coming. Apparently, indeed, their brother was already dead when their messenger reached our Lord. But, if we may judge from the salutation with which each met Him, "If Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," they had often wearily looked at one another in their lonely misery and said the same thing. How we may recognize ourselves in them! That same weakening and useless regret that something did not happen which, if it had happened, would have changed everything, tortures us all in our sorrows. The sisters did not so much complain as regret. They did not think that Jesus should or might have come, they only thought - How blessed if He had come, or never gone! They had to learn the purpose of His delay and of their sorrow, and when in a few minutes they did learn it, how ashamed of their "if" they must have been! The delay to heal was in order to prepare a mightier blessing, and the sharp sorrow was allowed in order that its wounds might be filled with fragrant balm, which only a wounded heart could receive. It was more to give back to empty hands the blessing that had been torn from them than to have kept it there. Jesus did not come to heal the brother who was sick, because He would come to restore to the sisters' embrace the brother that "was dead and is alive again, was lost" in the dark grave, "and found again" in the gladsome light of life. So it ever is with the experience of those who wait His time, nor let their faith droop, nor doubt that His absence and their sorrows are the fruits of His love and the preparation for larger blessings and deeper joy. So He vindicates His delays. So

He answers the confidence which tells Him all its needs and troubles, and leaves Him to determine how and when to work. So He rewards the faithful and submissive prayer, of which the inmost spirit is, " Not my will, but Thine ; not my time, but Thine ! '

01.03. GLIMPSES OF THE HEART OF JESUS.

Chapter 3 GLIMPSES OF THE HEART OF JESUS " Being moved with compassion, He stretched forth His hand."

Mark 1:41 The Gospels seldom speak of what Jesus felt. They are for the most part content to let His words and deeds speak for themselves, as they have indeed spoken, leaving an impression, marvellous in its clearness, depth, and universality, when compared with the four tiny booklets which have made it. But this evangelist somewhat more frequently than the others lifts a corner of the veil, and gives a momentary glimpse into the holy of holies in the heart of Jesus. If the old idea that Peter was the source of this Gospel is true, we have a natural explanation of its minute details, and can picture the apostle, whose quickness of observation was accelerated and sharpened by passionate love, watching with keen eye, and remembering in a faithful memory, every look and gesture and fleeting expression of countenance which told of the heart's emotions. The image of Christ enshrined in the hearts of men owes much of its sweetness to the small traits contributed by this evangelist to the common stock. We purpose, then, in this sermon, to deal with Mark's glimpses of the heart of Jesus, of which the words taken as our text are the earliest.

It may be well at the outset to enumerate them. There is first the compassion noted in the text. Next we have (Mark 3:5) anger blended with grief at the hardening of His opponents' hearts. Further, we find two instances in chapter five : one (Mark 5:6), wonder at unbelief; and another (Mark 5:34), compassion for the helplessness of the untaught multitude. There are also two instances in Mark 10:1-52, in which are recorded our Lord's displeasure with the disciples' keeping children from His embrace, and the outgoing of His love to the young ruler. Then there is a solemn and pathetic pair in Mark 14:1-72 : one, the evangelist's description of Jesus as " sore amazed and very heavy ; " and the other, His own plaintive word to the three drowsy disciples : " My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." If we study the picture resulting from the combination of all these, we may gain some deepened impressions of the glory and sweetness of that pure manhood, which may knit our thankful hearts in closer affection and service to Him.

I We note then, first, the Christ who pities all sorrow. The two instances in which compassion is attributed to our Lord by Mark may be taken as covering the whole ground of human misery. The former is that in our text, which represents the pity that welled forth at the sight of physical suffering. The other (Mark 5:34) is that in which the emotion sprang up at the sight of the weary multitude who had followed Him for His teaching, as His penetrating gaze looked beneath their bodily weariness to their spiritual want of guidance from prophet, priest, or ruler. Thus, physical evil and spiritual darkness and weariness smote on His heart. Once besides in this Gospel we find Christ's compassion mentioned, but by Himself, not by the evangelist (Mark 8:6), when He assigns it as His motive for consulting the disciples as to how the crowds are to be fed. Luke, who only once speaks of our Lord's compassion, does so in connection with a specially sad story, that of the poor woman whom Jesus and His disciples met as they toiled up the hill to Nain, weeping behind the bier of the sole light of her widowed home, her only son. No wonder that such grief and

such loneliness touched the springs of pity in His solitary heart. Matthew, too, tells of our Lord's compassion in the parallel passage to our text, and in other places.

These two cases teach us the impartial width of our Lord's compassion. He was open to appeals to His pity made by sickness, hunger, and the other ills that flesh is heir to, and He was not less quickly and deeply touched by compassion for ignorance, spiritual and intellectual want of guidance, and the weariness and unrest which these caused. Such capacity of feeling with equal strength the appeal of the two great forms of man's misery is rare, and more frequently we find that the men who are quick to pity the hungry and the sick have little sympathy for the ignorant and them that are out of the way, while, on the other hand, the compassion of religious men is often apt to be somewhat indifferent to material wants, and to leave dealing with them to others. So it comes to pass that there are two sets of philanthropists in the world, who do not look at each other with altogether friendly eyes, the one of whom cares for men's bodies, and thinks it rather waste to spend pity and effort on their "souls," and the other of whom is so much concerned about their souls that it gives little help to attempts to improve material conditions. The Church has often laid itself open to the world's taunt of neglecting the lower needs, which are more clamorous than the higher ; but there are many tokens that a clearer understanding of the width of Christian compassion and duty is beginning to prevail. Possibly the warning against the impending possibility of harmful exaggeration in a new direction may not be unnecessary. The new impulses to recognizing the mission of Christianity in regard to social questions are sure to carry some light weights too far. As Luther says somewhere, in his rough strong way, "Human nature is like a drunken peasant. If he is put up on one side of his horse, he is sure to fall over on the other." It will be a dark day for the progress of the Christian Church if good men suffer themselves to be drawn aside from its primary work, the preaching of the gospel and the dealing with the deepest sources of human misery in human sin, to throwing their chief energy into the needful but secondary work of dealing with the fruits of spiritual evil in physical distress. It is true that Jesus pitied the hungry and fed them, and therein He has taught us how wide our sympathies and efforts should be, but it is also true that He rebuked the crowds who came after Him only for loaves, and pressed upon them as His true and proper gift the flesh and blood which are the sources and supports of a better life.

Christ's sympathy was incalculably deeper and more poignant than ours can ever be. For His eye was clearer than ours, and saw deeper. To Him the single sufferer represented crowds. The one black drop brought to His mind all the sullen ocean of blackness, which rolls its heavy tides round the whole world. We see but the wave or two that break nearest us, and all the other multitudinous billows escape our knowledge. We mass men in the race, and, generalizing, lose the impression of individuals. We have a vague notion that there is a great deal of sorrow in the world, but we do not receive the impact of it all on our own hearts as Jesus Christ did. He saw as a God what he pitied as a Man. His compassion was not only the pity of a Divine nature which, if it be love, must needs be pity too, but it was the fellow-feeling of one of ourselves, which knew a kindred pang, and was fed by a Divine clearness and sweep of perception that summoned up before Him on the occasion of one bier all the mourners and the dead, and saw in every sorrow but the nearest member of a linked procession girdling the world. Nor did the underlying Divine knowledge alone deepen His sympathy. The purity of His manhood increased it. In Him were no spots insensitive by reason of selfishness, as there are in all others - true witches' marks, which can be pricked without feeling. A

soul entirely delivered from selfish regards would be like an infant's hand for sensitiveness, whereas our palms are indurated in the cuticle by selfishness, and our fingers have lost the fineness of touch which would secure sympathy with others' sorrows. With Jesus it was as if the very nerves of His own frame had been prolonged into that of others, so close was His union with them, by the wonderful completeness of his self oblivion. Thus in truest fashion His sympathy answered to the meaning of the word, which so far transcends the ordinary manifestations of it in our hearts, being a real suffering together with those whom He pitied. Our selfishness puts an armour of brass over our hearts, through which the sharp point of others' woes scarcely reaches us, except as a dull blow that does not pierce deeply enough to bring the blood ; but Jesus came among men with His naked breast exposed to all the slings and arrows that were showered on all, and He was sore wounded by them all. His pity was His life. He was a Man of sorrows because He bare our griefs and carried our sorrows, and the burden was laid upon His shoulders by the perfectness of His pity which made them all His own, long before He fainted beneath the cross on the short journey from the judgment hall to Calvary. Christ's pity was essential to His service of men. "Looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said, Ephphatha." The sigh had to come before the word of power could come. He was not only impelled to put forth His miraculous power by the cries of the sufferers or of their intercessors, but sometimes by the quick spontaneous outgoing of His own pity. Before men called He answered, for His own heart anticipated their desires. His pity was no luxurious idle emotion, but the impulse to action. The like should be true of all Christians. No help can be rightly rendered unless it come from a sympathetic heart. Much Christian work is spoiled and made worse than useless by being done in hard, supercilious fashion. Benefits need to be wrapped in softest down of sympathy, or they will cut the hand that receives them. A man may be knocked down by a charitable gift flung at his head like a stone. For all forms of Christian service the law is valid - without sympathy no good will be done. Nor is the converse less needful to remember - that with out practical issues no sympathy is worth anything. Not merely is it useless to benefit the sufferers, but it harms the person cherishing it. Every emotion which is allowed to rise and pass without its appropriate action tends to harden the heart. If mercy is twice blessed, lazy compassion is twice cursed.

Christ's sympathy clings to Him still, and is a permanent attribute of His perpetual and exalted manhood. He bears our griefs on His heart now, and bends over us each with as true a knowledge of our trouble, and as complete a partaking of it, as when on earth He wept by the grave of Lazarus, or felt the loneliness of that sonless widow. If our griefs be small and affecting mainly our material fortunes, we may take heart to believe that since they are great enough to trouble us they are not too small to move His sympathy, when we remember that He Him self declared that He "had compassion on the multitude" because they were hungry.

II We note the Christ who feels anger, grief, and wonder because of men's evil.

We find one instance in Mark 3:5, in which He " looked on them with anger, being grieved at the hardening of their heart." The word rendered "grieved " is a compound term expressing the coexistence of some other feeling with the anger. Again we find (Mark 10:14) that our Lord was " moved with indignation " (R.V.). In the first case, the cause of the anger was the obstinate and increasing obduracy of the Pharisees, who had no eyes for anything but a breach of ceremonial law, into which they hoped He would be led. All the beauty of His character, all the power of His words, the mystery of His miraculous working, the joy of the cured man, were nothing to them.

That the cure was a miracle brought no conviction to their minds, which could only grasp the fact that the miracle was a breach of rabbinical law. In the second case, the disciples, as it were, dammed up the flow of His tenderness and interfered with access to His mercy. So the evils which especially drew forth His anger were not the gross flagrant transgressions of notorious evil livers, but the sins of formal religionists to whom sacrifice was more than mercy, and of disciples who had imperfectly apprehended the continual flow and width of His love. Surely the lesson is needed at all times and in all Churches. Nothing more effectually blinds to the highest vision of Jesus Christ than a pedantic over estimate of the mere externals of religion. How many of us would not listen to a prophet or to Christ Himself, if He neglected or brushed aside our jealously guarded ceremonials and proprieties of worship ! On the other hand, how often Christian Churches and individuals have, like the disciples, put hindrances in the way of the " little ones " coming to Him ! How often have misplaced regard for the honour of the Master, and other even less reputable motives, forbidden humble souls to draw near for His embracing arm and the benediction of His lips ! A sharper accent marks Christ's rebuke to His disciples, who cluster round Him like a body guard to keep off the profane, lest they should by their continual coming weary Him, than that which remonstrated with far more coarse guilt. But that anger was not all which these sins excited in His heart. Through the thundercloud looked the sun, and across the heavy drops was flung the rainbow. Grief blended with Christ's anger. Both emotions must be in that perfect manhood, which is at once the realization of the human ideal and the revelation of the Divine reality. Their union saves us from the misconception of His anger. There can be no heat of passion in it, for it burns side by side with a great fountain of sorrowing pity which would quench any such blaze of wrath. His anger is a noble Divine aversion from evil. Unless Jesus is but half a man and maimed of an essential element in healthy and whole souled humanity, there must be in Him a true recognition of the badness of bad things and an indignant recoil from these. Nor is such aversion less inseparable from lofty conceptions of the Divine nature than from true ones of the human. Nor is there any malevolence in Christ's anger. It is but a low kind of anger which includes the desire for evil on its objects. The highest kind necessarily includes the opposite desire, as every parent and child knows. Evildoers are to be blamed but pitied too, and however rigorously retribution may be awarded to them, compassion is not to be withheld. Jesus saw the essential character of sin as none else can do, and He knew its issue. Therefore He " grieved " and " was angry," in a blended stream of emotion wherein the darker current neighbored without weakening the other, which in turn accompanied and softened without diluting its sister-flow. That union of anger and grief saves us from exaggeration of His pity, as if He could not condemn or punish. His compassion does not contradict, nor put in the background, the certainty of His righteous judgment. The two are perfectly harmonious. The tears that fell for Jerusalem did not hinder Him from pronouncing her doom, nor did the judicial act of sentencing arrest the tears. Many modern representations of the gentle Christ need correction, for what they call gentleness is nothing nobler than weakness. Let us not forget that the Lamb of God is the Lion of Judah, and that even the Lamb "has seven horns." All truth and pity are in Him, but in Him, too, are righteous anger and fiery indignation. The revelations of an earlier time are not canceled. God in Christ is still " a consuming fire," but in Him we learn that side by side with that fire, or perhaps we may even say, as a necessary element in it, burns lambent the white flame of infinite tenderness and pity. In their deepest roots wrath and pity are one, even as the heat which blisters and the Light which gladdens have the same source. But there is another glimpse given us by Mark of the manner in which men's evils affected Jesus, in

that remarkable expression that He "marveled at their unbelief" (Mark 6:6). We are apt to wonder that Christ could wonder, seeing that He knew what was in man. But His manhood was under distinct limitations in regard to knowledge, and the fact that He shared that feeling too is precious, as attesting how truly He emptied Himself of His glory when He assumed the fashion of a man. In another place we read that He also wondered with happier wonder at the ripe faith of a heathen. Here He marvels at the dogged unbelief of "His own." If unbelief evoked Christ's astonishment, how unreasonable and contrary to all probability it must be! It may have an "excuse," or rather those guilty of it may "make excuses" for it; but these are only got up for show, and are not its real reason, which is found in that perfection of unreason which prefers death to life. The mystery of the world is sin. If we could explain it, we should know all things. It can give no rational account of itself. Try to put the reasons for it into plain words, and their blank irrationality is manifest. What reason can there be why men should be blind to facts which stare them in the face, and should deliberately choose ruin, and turn away from their highest good, and, admitting the most tremendous truths, should straightway proceed to huddle them out of sight lest they should influence conduct? All sin is flagrant unreason, and nothing is more marvellous than that the beauty and sweetness of Jesus should be resisted, and His offered gifts refused. His meek heart had been well schooled in the possibilities of men's unkindness and contempt; but, even in its calm, a moment of wonder rose when once again He was forced to feel that He called in vain, and in vain loved. Thus His whole soul was disturbed by contact with sin. It left Him grieved and hurt, wounded and saddened. The compulsory association of some pure heart with criminals and profligates, as in some prison where an innocent man is shut up with criminals, and "vexed" in soul with their "filthy conversation," is but a faint shadow of what Christ bore all His life long. He was "a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," because He "dwelt among them that are set on fire," and all this sorrow, pity, and wonder He bore because He loved the men who thus tortured Him, even as He loves us who can still grieve Him, and may still find balm in His compassion.

III We note, further, the Christ yearning in love towards very imperfect desires after good.

Mark tells us that Jesus "looking upon" the young ruler "loved him." There was much about the youth to draw out love. He was ingenuous, earnest in his desire to do right, had restrained his passions in his hot early manhood, and aspired with some genuine lifting of desire after the world to come. But there were flaws in his character which Jesus manifestly read from the beginning of the conversation. He had but a superficial notion of goodness, and a false conception of the requisites for inheriting eternal life. To him "good" was a thing to "do," and "eternal life" was wholly future, and was payment for acts done here, not because he loved them, but because he wanted their wages. He had so little apprehension of the sweep of the Divine Law, that he was certain that his obedience had been comprehensive of all its precepts and unbroken through his life. And when the final test was put he failed, and thereby proved that there was something in him deeper than the desire for goodness or for eternal life. Yet, for all the flaws, Jesus loved him, and would fain have drawn wholly to Himself a character with so many buds of promise in it. The great heart of Jesus Christ has room in it for all evildoers, and bends with pitying sorrow over debased wills that cleave to earth, and paralyzed spirits that have no touch of aspiration after things lovely and of good report. His love rests with peculiar tenderness on those who have yielded themselves wholly to Him and are walking in the light with Him. But there is a third class, touched with yearning after something higher than they possess, and yet not brought to the point of following Jesus with

clear resolve and entire surrender ; and on these, too, His love falls. A harsh word, like a hasty blow struck at a feeble fire, may put out a spark which care would have fostered ; but Jesus does not " quench the dimly burning wick," nor frown away imperfect seekers after a better life. What would become of any of us, if He was not patient with partial knowledge and superficial conceptions of good ? It befits His followers to cherish the beginnings and faint dawnings of such in others, as their Lord did, and as they themselves need that He should do with them. For the most advanced and perfect saint on earth is nearer the most incomplete beginner who has but turned his face to the far off light, than he is to the light to which both are looking and neither have attained. Degrees of imperfection should not despise one another. One arc of a circle may be swept through more degrees of circumference than another, but it is only an unfinished arc after all.

Christ's love for imperfect goodness is shown in His clear laying down of the stringent conditions with which it must comply in order to be complete. It was precisely because Jesus, looking on His youthful and eager questioner, "loved him," that " He said unto him, One thing thou lackest," and demanded of him the surrender of all that he had, and the following of Him. Frankness is the truest kindness. What such characters as the ruler's most need is to see clearly that aspirations and outward acts are not enough, and that it is no slight matter to be "good," but one demanding the entire suppression of self and the use of all possessions as auxiliary thereto. He had been playing with wishes and surface virtues long enough. If he were in earnest, he would welcome the call which showed him the depths. If he were not in earnest, the kindest thing to do for him was to make him conscious that he was not. Therefore our Lord did not hesitate to put the condition of discipleship in the form that would most sharply test the depth and sovereignty of the "will to be perfect." The thin veneer of noble aspiration fell away, and the solid basis of worldly and self regarding worldliness stood confessed. So much the better for the man ; for now that he knew what to do, and that his wealth was the hindrance to his doing it, there was some possibility that present refusal might lead to searchings of heart, and that at a future time he might be ready to accept as a joy what he now shrank from as too great a sacrifice. We may be sure that the love which laid down the conditions did not turn away from him when he recoiled from them, nor cease to follow the young heart which had been touched with real though imperfect longings, though its owner ceased for the moment to follow Jesus. Still He looks with love on such hearts, and still His best gift to them is the clear call to full surrender, in which alone they will find the satisfaction of their desires, and be the objects of His yet tenderer love.

IV We note, finally, Christ bowed down under the burden of the world's sin.

We turn lastly to Mark's account of Gethsemane, concerning which the less we say the less shall we err. " Put off thy shoes from off thy feet." Cold analysis is out of place, but a reverent word or two may be permitted. We get a glimpse of Jesus beneath the olives by the quivering moonlight, as one may see by a lightning flash through the darkness of storm a laboring ship out on a wild sea. Mark employs two words to indicate Christ's emotions at that dread hour. "Greatly amazed" is perhaps scarcely strong enough to modern ears to represent the mental condition intended, since astonishment has encroached on bewilderment, which is the true idea of " amazed." " Appalled " or " stupefied " would probably convey the meaning more clearly. The other expression is better given by the Revised Version as " sore troubled " than by the Authorized Version's " very heavy." To these two pathetic words we have to add our Lord's own unique acknowledgment of weakness

and appeal for sympathy, " My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," in which the word rendered "exceeding sorrowful" suggests the image of sorrows as ringing Him round in an unbroken circle. That strong expression, " unto death," must not be weakened into a mere superlative, but taken in its literal force as implying that the grief was all but fatal. One turn more of the rack and actual death would have ensued. Well may such a state be called, as it is by Luke, " agony."

Now we may reverently ask what it was which thus appalled and all but crushed Him, and we shall answer the question most unworthily and inadequately if we suppose that it was merely the apprehension of approaching death. Such an explanation dishonors Him, putting Him lower in fortitude than many of His servants, who have drawn their calmness in the prospect and actual suffering of martyrdom from Him; and it is transparently insufficient. A far heavier weight than that pressed Him down, even the burden of the sins of the whole world, which then met on Him, not only because, in His perfect sympathy and self oblivion, He identified Himself with sinful men, but also because, in a manner which we cannot explain but must accept, if we would do justice to Scripture teaching, " the Lord made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all." Unless the element of vicarious suffering entered into that mysterious agony, it will be very hard to account for it in any manner which will save the character of Jesus from disadvantageous comparisons with that of many a saint, hero, and sage. Socrates with his hemlock cup, and not a few other dying men, are far nobler persons than this shuddering Suppliant beneath the trembling olives, unless His agony was caused by something much deeper than the natural recoil of the living from death. The world for nearly nineteen centuries has bowed in reverence before that pathetic picture of Christ in Gethsemane. Why ? Be it reverently said, that unless the picture shows us "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," it shows us a very weak man, unmanned by what thousands have faced far better than He did.

Such are the glimpses which this evangelist affords of that infinite heart. It is full today of all the tenderness and pitying love which filled it in that past. It bled and ached for us while it beat on earth, and it still wells over with fellow feeling for the sorrows, and pitying disapproval of the sins, of each of us. Some shade of sadness perhaps flits across even the joy of the Lord, when His brethren, whom He loved to the death, turn from His love, and it may still be possible for us to grieve Him. Be that as it may. He loves and pities all. Each may say, " He loves me, and I have a place in that heart." Let us turn our eyes to behold and our hearts to love that sum of all beauty and infinite mine of all human and Divine perfection made known to us in the heart of Jesus. The glimpses which we have into it here are blessedness. To know it fully is heaven.

01.04. GATHERED IN PEACE.

Chapter 4 GATHERED IN PEACE.

" Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace."

2 Chronicles 34:28

" The archers shot at King Josiah ; and the king said unto his servants. Have me away ; for I am sore wounded. . . . And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died."

2 Chronicles 35:23-24 In these two passages we have a prophecy and its fulfillment The event seems strangely unlike the prediction, " I will gather thee to thy fathers in peace." Is that fulfilled by the keen arrow, and the blood dropping from the king's heart on the floor of the chariot, and the premature death ? Even so. Josiah, the King of Judah, to whom these words were spoken, and in whose death they were so strangely accomplished, had been smitten by the sudden discovery of the departure of himself and his nation from the precepts of the book of the Law, which had been found during the restoration of the neglected temple. It is not my purpose to enter at all on the questions of present interest connected with that discovery. Whatever that book was, and whether, as is thought by many now, those who hid knew where to find, the effect produced on the king was horror and penitence. He bade his advisers "inquire of the Lord" for him and his diminished people " concerning the words of this book " - apparently whether there was possibility of averting its threatenings. Remarkably, the godly counselors turned at once to a woman, the wife of an inferior officer, who seems to have been principally known as his father's son, and from Huldah the prophetess they received the answer of which our first text is part. The judgments on the nation were declared irreversible, but the penitence of the king opened a way for his individual safety. Threatening and pardon were both revealed in the answer. Because Josiah's heart was tender, and he had humbled himself before God, therefore the mitigation announced in the former of our texts should be extended to him. Then, some twelve or fourteen years after, came the bloody death in battle, which seems to give the lie to the prophetess's assurance. It is worth while to lay the two side by side and gather the lessons of the juxtaposition.

I We may first notice how these two passages of Scripture disclose the true Worker at the centre of things.

" I will gather thee," says God, speaking through Huldah. We turn the page, and where do we see His hand in the story of vulgar motives and godless strife ? Josiah's death came about as " naturally " as possible, as the sequel of conflicts with which he had nothing directly to do. The chronic strife between Egypt and the kingdoms to the north of Judah had broken out again. This time the reigning Pharaoh was on his march against the strong Carchemish, which has recently, after so many millenniums of eclipse, become more than a name to us. He had no quarrel with Josiah, who seems to have pushed himself into the strife quite unnecessarily, with wrongheaded haste and obstinacy, in spite of the dignified and kindly remonstrances of the King of Egypt. The latter asserts his Divine commission, which he does not trace to any Egyptian deity, but to " God,"

and which he warns Josiah, as a worshiper of God, from opposing to his own ruin. The Chronicler endorses Pharaoh's claim, and declares his words to have been "from the mouth of God." So God sought to stay Josiah from the rashness which was to be his ruin, even though that ruin was determined, and determined to be effected by that act. Men are the authors of their own fall, and if they rush to their deaths, it is by their own obstinacy, in spite of Divine warnings. God can speak through a heathen king's lips, and good counsel has ever its source in Him, whatever be its channel. But if Josiah will be obstinate, and mix himself up in a quarrel which is not his, God works out His purposes through even the obstinacy of one man and the ambitions of another. Then came the fatal skirmish on that plain of Megiddo, which has run with blood so often from the days of Deborah and Barak down to almost our own, and perhaps has not yet heard for the last time "the noise of the captains and the shouting," nor seen Kishon sending a reddened current to the sea. The poor precaution of a disguise availed nothing for the hapless king. The archer's bow drawn at a venture sent an unaimed arrow, which a Divine hand directed, into his side. Lifted into a spare chariot, he lived over the jolting and agony of a swift flight to Jerusalem, and there died - one of the best of the kings of Judah, mourned by a nation's tears, and having thrown away his life out of pure wilfulness. And all this play of commonplace motives - Pharaoh's pugnacity, Josiah's obstinacy, the forgotten politics of two empires, the chance arrow of an unconscious archer - is the fulfillment of that word, "I will gather thee to thy fathers." Is not this a penetrating glance beneath the whirling surface? Sometimes one sees on a swift river a tiny whirlpool, opening a pit an inch or two deep into the tawny raging flood. So here is, as it were, an eddy in the stream, that goes down to the very bottom and shows us the bed. We look through the cross-play of human purposes and acts, which are in themselves cognizant of nothing more than themselves, and discern what is really at work, determining their flow, and dashing one against the other or blending them in smooth flow.

Now, we say that we believe this and regard it as such a commonplace, that it is scarcely worth my while to repeat it, or yours to listen to it. But do we carry that steady eye which looks through all the play of so called causes, and discerns God's hand in them all? Is it a living, ever present conviction with us, influencing all our lives and thoughts? If we really believed it - and we do not really believe anything that is not present with us, shaping our habitual thinking - how different everything else would look! It is easy for us to set metaphysical puzzles. Any quantity of such may be picked up anywhere. But the old thought, which is here illustrated anew, has practical and devotional uses so manifold and valuable that we cannot afford to dismiss it as a commonplace. Commonplaces have to be reiterated till they are incorporated with the web of our thoughts, far more thoroughly than this one has yet become in the case of any of us. Not till we habitually see a present God working everywhere, and all things become transparent to His light, shining through them to our eyes, can we afford to put aside this truth as threadbare. If it ruled in us as it should do, how it would nourish faith and stimulate effort; how it would strengthen resignation and unreluctant submission; how it would deliver from vain and weakening regrets; how it would keep us from being angry with anything, or fretted with carking cares which gnaw at the very seat of life! If we saw God working everywhere and always, we should not be jaded with futile effort, nor disappointed or despairing, nor should we live among the tombs of a dead and buried past, and be blind to the worth of the living present. If we heard God speaking through all voices and sounds, whether of tempest and thunder, or of harpers harping with their harps, and saw His mighty hand moving all that moves, and His will dominant in all, fear would be far from us, and sorrow would

wear a benignant cheer, and in our hearts would dwell the great peace, which is the dower of him who says, " It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good." Let us pray and strive for the clear and constant vision which looks through the things seen, which are but recipients and transmitters of power, to the energy which they receive and transmit. " I will gather thee to thy fathers," though the instruments be thine own obstinacy, the conflict of heathen powers, and the arrow of an ignorant bowman, who aimed at nothing, and never knew that he had killed a king and executed a Divine sentence.

II There is, further, in these words a glimpse, though it be but dim, into the regions beyond the grave. The two expressions in the former of these texts are by no means synonymous. " I will gather thee to thy fathers" is one thing; "Thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace " is quite another. The former phrase seldom occurs in the Old Testament, and never is found in the New. It appears principally in the Pentateuch, and in the closely related Book of Judges, and in these is found in a slightly different form, namely, "gathered to thy people" instead of " to thy fathers." It is used in that shape in reference to the deaths of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Ishmael, Aaron, and Moses. The generation contemporary with Joshua are spoken of as being "gathered to their fathers," and the same expression is employed in our text and in the parallel in 2 Kings, The variation of " people " and " fathers " is natural. The former phrase is applied to the fathers themselves, beyond whom the vision of their descendants did not travel backwards, whereas the latter is fitting when applied to later generations, to whom union with the venerable ancestors of the nation was honour. Now, this " gathering to thy people " or " thy fathers " is distinctly separated from both death and burial. The account of the last days of Abraham (Genesis 25:8) is a fair specimen of all the narratives in which this expression occurs, and in it three stages are clearly distinguished: "Abraham gave up the ghost, and died . . . and was gathered to his people. And Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him." The lonely tomb on Mount Hor did not hinder Aaron's being gathered to his people, nor did the mysterious burial on Nebo shut out Moses from their society. That conception of accession to the great company somewhere is no mere euphemism for death, and still less refers to what may afterwards befall the body of the dead man. If, then, we are led, in all honesty of interpretation, to exclude both death and burial from the meaning of the phrase, what remains but to regard it as a faint gleam of insight into the condition, after death and burial, of the true self, which passes through death undying, and is not laid to moulder with the disused garment of flesh ? The Cuneiform inscriptions have taught us how developed the doctrine of a future life was in Abraham's native country, and there is nothing improbable now in ascribing some share in that knowledge to Israel, however faint the traces of it in Scripture. To see in this remarkable phrase the conception of a future social life is not to read later ideas into a vague expression, which we make unnecessarily definite, but not to see that thought in it seems rather to evacuate it of its true significance. There is no doubt a danger, against which we are abundantly warned, of committing the anachronism of reading the results of later Revelations into the earlier records ; but there is also a danger, which is less often insisted upon, of reading out of the earlier Revelations what is really in them, and of thus exaggerating the ignorance of early ages.

Surely this sweet and pathetic expression did spring from, and did suggest, some conceptions of a life beyond life, in which those who have lived solitary here should be knit together in a great company. In the earlier form the phrase held forth the hope that, after death, the desert wanderers should join the community to which they be longed, and from which they had been parted in life. In

its later form, as in our text, it gave the hope that the descendants of the ancestors who had become august and sacred by lapse of time should be set with these venerated heroes and patriarchs of the nation, and that there should be, somehow and somewhere, as it were a great family home with many mansions, where the kindred of the fathers should dwell. The principle of the anticipated association seems to have been purely that of natural kinship. The children of Abraham were to be gathered round him, a happy clan in that dim world. Beyond these two ideas of society and repose, the hope expressed in this phrase apparently did not soar. But we may use the earlier and inadequate phrase as the vehicle of our deeper conceptions and higher hopes. We too have to look forward to a state where, "in solemn troops and sweet societies," souls that have toiled weary and lonely through the changeful desert of this life, shall find at last rest and companionship, and shall "sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom" of the great Father of all. The earlier hope is translated into a loftier, for we know that the principle of association in that solemn, blessed state, where perfect society is realized by hearts isolated in life, is not that of natural but of spiritual affinity, and that there the same law of like to like, which binds happy souls to their Lord and to one another, shall knit other spirits alien from these into a dark confraternity of repulsion and yet of contiguity.

Here and now men are grouped by other uniting forces, but hereafter spiritual character shall determine company and sphere, and each shall find himself surrounded by the environment of persons and circumstance for which he has fitted himself. "What maketh heaven, that maketh hell." That is manifoldly true, and this is one sphere in which it holds. "Being let go, they went unto their own company." When set free from the disturbing influences of life here, men will arrange themselves according to character. The stones on the eternal shore will lie in order, as on some beaches we see the heavier blocks laid in long rows and the lighter ranged together, and then the sand. The tide has sorted them. Life classifies and aggregates men, and yonder they are with their likes. So Judas "went to his own place," wherever that may have been. He passed into the sphere fitted for him, and there found others. A solemn law of spiritual affinity as determining the future associations of each lies hid in the old words, "I will gather thee to thy fathers," and still more clearly in the other form of the saying, "He was gathered to his people." The former expression suggests, too, the hope of personal communion with the venerable names whose spiritual children we smaller men are proud to call ourselves. A community implies communication, and a gathering together of spirits which forbade intercourse would be no gathering; for spirits are not together by juxtaposition, but by intercourse and affinity. It would be easy to let fancy run wild in pictures of that intercourse, and to summon up a long list of glorious names; but the fact itself is more than all our ignorant amplifications of it, and the vividness of expectation does not increase with the increase of imaginative details, which smother rather than enforce the truth. It is enough to believe that those who are united to the same Lord shall form a real unity, which necessarily includes communication. The future is set forth as a city. Are the citizens not to exchange thought and feeling by some better means than words, our imperfect medium here? They shall dwell in deep peace, encompassed by congenial natures, and delivered from the lifelong torture of grating against harsh contraries of their truest selves. While they are in the midst of their own people, in that they are surrounded with those like them, they shall be gathered to their fathers, in that they will be capable of association with those who excel them in strength, and are before them in spiritual stature. The whole blissful company shall partake of a common progress, yet retaining the individuality of its separate parts and the unity of the whole, like some cloud saturated with

sunshine, and slowly drifting nearer the sun. The loftiest will be the helpful companions of the lowliest. The unity of life in each will forbid the diverse degrees of life from becoming barriers. In that blessed society will be both impulse and rest. The same law will work in darker fashion in souls that are void of that Christ derived life ; but there likeness will bring no repose, and the community of alienation from God will ensure no community of friendship among the alienated. It is conceivable that such aggregation may be worse than solitude or than hostile neighborhood; for companions in evil here are not friends, and yonder the same result may follow in an intenser degree. There may be a kingdom, but a kingdom of anarchy. There may be similarity in the fundamental relation to God, along with fierce antagonism and repulsion otherwise. One awestruck glance is all permitted us, and it shows us how this principle of association according to character in a future world, may be as a fountain doing what James said that no fountain could do, sending forth both sweet waters and bitter. The word rendered " gather" is often employed for the action of the reaper or of him who collects fruits. May we not blend some such allusion with its use here ? It is God who says, " I will gather thee," and there is tenderness and care in the word. That last parting from the familiar things of earth is no violent dragging away, but the act of the great Husbandman, who plucks the ripe fruit because it is precious to Him. Sentiment talks of Death as the reaper, but the antique simplicity of our text goes far deeper than that representation. Not Death, but God, is the Reaper. Death is only His sickle. It is He who gathers in His sheaves and stores them in His great storehouse.

III Finally, we may see here a discovery of the true sphere of peace. Was Huldah one of the juggling prophetesses who palter with a double sense, keeping a promise in some fashion and yet breaking it? So it might seem to one looking at the poor young king in his chariot, faint with loss of blood and fleeing from the fatal field. Was this being " gathered to his fathers in peace " ? If the prophecy was fulfilled thus, what would nonfulfilment be? The fact looks like a flat contradiction of the promise, and so prosaic commentators have puzzled themselves as to how to reconcile the two. But surely there is no mystery in the matter, and the reconciliation of the apparent contradiction is easy, as is so often the case, if we understand the meaning of the words employed. For what does God's Spirit mean by " peace " ? Surely something deeper and more inward and inwrought with the substance of the soul than the mere absence of outward strife and battle. The peace which was promised to Josiah was maintained whether or no Pharaoh Necho's soldiers stormed across Palestine, and the arrows flew thick on the plain of Jezreel.

Such a promise so fulfilled is meant to teach us the great truth for life and for death, that true peace does not depend on the absence of tumult, but on the presence of God. It is an attribute of the soul, not of circumstances, and is often more fully possessed in conflict than in calm. They who look for it in any conjunction of outward good, search for it in the wrong place. If it live not in the heart of the seeker, he seeks it in vain, and it lives only in the heart where God abides. The foot of Christ is the only charm to still the heaving billows, and round Him, as He moves in the greatness of His strength across the wild ocean, is an atmosphere of calm. If we pass into it, the wildest storm will not ruffle a fluttering garment or lift a light hair. We may carry our own weather with us through all storms, and dwell in the peace of God, as in a fortress, though enemies rage around. " In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Me ye shall have peace." The outward life in the world must be disturbed, harassed, beset in a hundred ways by strifes and annoyances ; but the true life which is rooted in Jesus Christ, by faith, and love, and desire, and obedience, may all the while be

the seat of holy calm, as some still oratory in the centre of a beleaguered castle. To be " in Christ " is to be " in peace." In like manner, the fulfillment of this prophecy in the death of Josiah referred not to the outward fashion of his dying, but to the composure and resignation of spirit, not haply without some fore-gleams of a great assemblage of saints to welcome his coming, with which he passed hence. As for the outward fact, the fierce current of the fight, the shout of battle, the agony and flight, were very unlike what the recipient of the promise may have expected ; but may not his death have been as peaceful there as if in the seclusion of his palace, amid careful tending? Not the curtained chamber, the loving hands to smooth the pillow, or any of the other alleviations of the last conflict, make it death " in peace." That is secured only by the same thing as secures the like blessing for life- even the presence of God in Christ, realized by faith. Many of us may have seen the horrible frescoes in a church in Rome, where all varieties of cruel martyrdoms are grossly pictured. " These all died in faith," and if they did, they died in peace, though nameless tortures wrung their poor frames. Virgins whose blood reddened the sands of the amphitheater, confessors wrapped in pitch and set flaming in Caesar's garden, martyrs stretched on the rack or burned at the stake, died, according to the estimate of sense, in agony and tumult which it would be foolish to call peace ; but according to the estimate of God, which is the ultimate truth and reality of things, their deaths were but as the peaceful harvesting of the shock of corn fully ripe. The first Christian martyr, crushed by the heavy stones flung by fanatic hands, and kneeling outside the city wall in a pool of his own blood, died so peacefully that the only word to describe his gentle departure is, " he fell asleep," like a tired child on its mother's lap. (Psalms 131:1-3) So this King of Israel, smitten between the joints of his armour by the keen Egyptian arrow, was by battle brought to his grave in peace. So we, whatever be the circumstances attending our passage from this death which we call life into the life which men call death, may meet them and pass through them with quiet hearts, and have peace as well as hope in our death.

Let us understand the deep meaning of the great promise of peace, which this story obliges us to recognize, and we shall see in the apparent contradiction its real fulfillment, and gain a lesson very profitable for life and for death. If, living, we live unto the Lord, and dying, die unto Him, and so, living and dying, are the Lord's, then, living or dying, we shall keep and be kept in His last gift of perfect peace, which shall not be broken by any of the tumults of life or the terrors and tempests of death.

01.05. SOME REASONS WHY THE WORD BECAME FLESH.

Chapter 5 SOME REASONS WHY THE WORD BECAME FLESH

" He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the Church will I sing praise to Thee. And again, I will put My trust in Him. And again. Behold I and the children which God hath given Me."

Hebrews 2:11-13

" Ashamed to call them brethren " - why should He be ? It is no condescension to acknowledge the fact of brotherhood with humanity, any more than it is humiliation to be born. But there was a Man who emptied and humbled Himself by being " found in fashion as a man," and for whom it was infinite condescension to call us His brethren. We can say of a prince that he is not ashamed to call his subjects friends, and to sit down to eat with them, but it would be absurd to say so of one of the subjects in reference to his fellows. The full, lofty truth of the first chapter of this Epistle underlies that word " ashamed," which is meaningless unless Jesus was the " effulgence of the Father's glory, and the very image of His substance." Only on that understanding are His birth and enrolment of Himself among us men the transcendent instances of His loving self-abasement. The writer quotes three Old Testament passages which he regards as prophetic of our Lord's identifying of Him self with humanity.

It is no part of my present purpose to inquire into the principles on which the writer asserts the Messianic refer ence of the passages quoted. I desire rather to point out that these three cited sayings deal with three different aspects of our Lord's manhood, and of the purpose of His incarnation, and that, therefore, they unitedly give, if not a complete, yet a comprehensive answer to the question. Why did God become Man? The first of them shows us our Lord assuming manhood in order to declare God to men ; the second gives the purpose of His incarnation as being the providing of a Pattern of the devout life for men ; and the third presents it as being the bringing of men into the relationship of sons.

I Jesus is Man that He may declare God to men. The first quotation in our text is taken from that psalm whence our Lord drew the awful words which pierced the darkness and broke the silence as He hung on the cross, " My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? " The psalm springing directly from the heart of one sorely afflicted (whether David or another, and whether the sufferer be the ideal of the nation or no, matter nothing for the purpose of the writer of the Epistle), and referring in the consciousness of the psalmist to his own feelings in the midst of his sorrows, has yet been so moulded into language a world too wide for the psalmist's case, and corresponding in a number of minute details - such as the parting of the vesture by lot, the piercing of the hands and feet, and the mockery of the passersby - with the facts of the crucifixion, that we cannot fail to perceive the figure of the Man of sorrows, the Prince of all the afflicted, shimmering through the words of the single sufferer who pours out his plaint in the psalm, whether he himself was conscious or no that his words portrayed anything more than his own misery. Every true mourner's

cries fit the lips of every other, and every lesser sorrow may be regarded as a miniature of the greatest, which is Christ's. But in these laments of the psalmist we shall miss their deepest pathos unless we recognize something more than this mere general correspondence of grief with grief, heart answering to heart, deep answering to deep across the ages, because all hearts are alike, and hear in them the tones of prophecy speaking through the possibly unconscious psalmist. The words quoted in our text are those in which he grasps in faith the certainty of deliverance, and vows that, delivered, he will magnify his delivering God among his brethren. Sorrow had driven him to supplication. Supplication and sorrow had brought deliverance. The experience of all three had fitted him to speak with fuller assurance and insight of the Name of God, and thankfulness for all had put a new song into the lips that had groaned and prayed. Therefore his thankfulness must needs pass into proclamation to all around of what God would do, and in the estimate of faith had already done, for his soul, even while sorrow pressed on him. And is not this true of Jesus and of His earthly life ? Was He not made perfect by suffering, not indeed in regard of His own moral nature, but in reference to His fitness to be the Author of eternal salvation to us? His fullest declaration of the Father's name was only possible after and by reason of His sufferings and ascended glory, as He Himself has taught us when He prayed, and said, " I have declared Thy name, and will declare it."

What, then, is this office of declaring the name of the Father? That name is not the mere syllables by which men address God, but is the manifested character, as always in Scripture. Therefore the declaration of it must be by acts more than by words. And so the highest revelation of God must be by a human life, A personal God can only be revealed by a person. He can only be shown to men by a life. Words, however beautiful, tender, true, and self evidencing, will not suffice. They represent men's thinkings, but they can never certify God's fact. They may suggest hopes, fears, peradventures ; but unless we have a living person, whose deeds on the plain level of history are the manifestation of God, our thoughts of Him will neither be solid with certainty nor sweet with healing and comfort. Our highest conceptions of God must be moulded after the analogy of the only spiritual existence of which we have experience, namely, the human, and the anthropomorphism, against which we are often solemnly warned, is a necessity of thought, and in its purest forms is the most worthy idea of the infinite God. It may be gross or refined, but it is inevitable. Man was made in the image of God and that fact guarantees the truth of the conceptions of God which think of His infinite perfection as the reality of which our limited and stained manhood is yet the image, distorted and diminished though it be. The analogy is such, that the brightness of the Father's glory can be mirrored and manifested in a human life. The life of Jesus is the making visible for men of the glory of the invisible God. The human life that reveals God must be more than human. It is not enough for us to think of Jesus as revealing God in the manner in which saints have done. Only when we believe in His Divinity does His humanity assume for us revealing power.

What is the substance of His declaration of God ? The " attributes," as they are called, of supreme Being, such as omniscience, omnipotence, and other majestic appendages of Divinity, which are the opposites of the characteristics of finite humanity, are but superficial, not of the essence of the Name. They are but the fringe of the light; the central brightness is a milder light than blazes in these. High above these forms of power, tower the moral attributes of purity and righteousness. But when we have passed through the outer court of the former and the holy place of the latter,

there is yet a veil to be lifted, and within it there is a mercyseat, and above it the still presence of the Glory, filling the shrine with uncoruscating rays of lambent light. God is Power. That has been the belief and the dread of the world from of old. God is Righteousness. That has been the faith of purer souls, and the halfstifled witness of conscience. God is Love. That is the new message which Christ has brought by something better than saying so, even by living that gentle life of pity, and dying that death of sacrifice, and telling us, for the interpretation of both, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." God has wisdom, power, eternal Being, and so on; but God is Love. These other mighty things are but the " attri butes " of the love which is Himself.

All other means of knowing God are imperfect. Nature gives but ambiguous responses, and while " the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord," it is no less true that much in it seems to speak of either malignant or thwarted beneficent power, and might well be the support of dualism or of atheism. Nature needs to be interpreted in the light of Christ's revelation of God before it yields clear evidence of the love of God. History and our own intuitions do little to supply the deficiency. These, and all other sources apart from Christ, are like the fragmentary inscriptions in some ruined temple, from which may be pieced together, by much pains and at much risk of error, some more or less incomplete and illegible records of the gods once enshrined there. But the whole name is in Jesus Christ given for reading by the least learned, in whom all the syllables which were uttered at sundry times and divers manners, and of which the broken echoes have been reverberating confusedly in men's ears, are gathered into one majestic full-toned Name. All other sources of knowledge of God fail in certainty. They yield only assertions which may or may not be true. At the best, we are relegated to peradventures and guesses and theories if we turn away from Jesus Christ. Men said that there was land away across the Atlantic for centuries before Columbus went and brought back its products. He discovers who proves. Christ has not merely spoken to us beautiful and sacred things about God, as saint, philosopher, or poet might do, but He has shown us God ; and hence forward, to those who receive Him, the Unknown Root of all being is not a hypothesis, a great Perhaps, a dread or a hope, as the case may be, but the most certain of all facts, of Whom and of whose love we may be surer than we can be of aught besides but our own being.

If Jesus Christ has not declared God's name to His brethren, we have no knowledge of that name. It is becoming more and more plain with every day that the tendencies of thought now are bringing us full front with this alternative - either Jesus Christ or none. Either He has shown us God, and in His light we see light, or we are left to grope in the dark. Either God is manifested in Him, or there is no manifestation at all. Unless " the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, hath declared Him," no man hath seen God at any time. Deism or Theism will not sustain itself against the corrosion of the acid of the modern spirit. Men may reject Christ's revelation of God, and still say, " We think, " We hope," or " We fear " ; but they cannot say, " We know," unless they accept His " Verily, verily, I say unto you." Either He has shown us God, or God is a mere sound which tells little and assures of less. The educated mind of England is confronted with this choice - either God manifest in the flesh; or a God who is at the best "a stream of tendency not ourselves, that makes for righteousness ; " or a great unknown somewhat, of whom, or rather of which, we know only that it cannot be known. From all these cheerless and nebulous thoughts we turn to Jesus, and as we hear Him saying, " I will declare Thy name unto My brethren," we see the sun again instead of the doleful grey that veiled our sky, and regain a God who loves and pities ; a God of

whom we can be certain ; a God who has an ear, a heart, and a hand ; a God whom in Christ, and in Christ alone, we can know, and whom to know is life eternal.

Il Jesus is Man that He may show to men the life of devout trust.

" And again, I will put My trust in Him." This quotation is from Hebrews 2:13 and Isaiah 12:2. The prophet, like the sufferer in the former passage, speaks his own devout dependence on God, apparently with no consciousness of any prophetic reference in his words. Our writer sees in Isaiah a fore shadowing of Jesus. The whole prophetic order was a prophecy of the Prophet. This prophet, exalted as he was to declare the will of God, at a crisis of the nation's history, standing before his generation in the fulness of inspiration, feels himself not absolved from the necessity of devout dependence on God. That sense of dependence and exercise of faith are part of the prophetic ideal. He who declares God's name to his brethren must share with his brethren the emotions of personal religion, which may all be summed up in that one of trust or faith.

This, too, is true of Jesus. He is one of us, and His brotherhood is shown in that He too lived the life which He lived in the flesh by faith in God. He is not only the Object, but also the Pattern, of faith. Many orthodox believers in the Divinity of our Lord are too much afraid of giving due weight to that aspect of His manhood. There is much confusion in many minds, in which there is no proper belief either in Christ's true manhood or in His proper Divinity, but only in a strange amalgam of both, in which each element neutralizes to some extent the characteristics of the other. Hence men who do see clearly the real humanity of Jesus and nothing more, will shatter such perplexed belief.

Perfect manhood is dependent manhood. A reasonable creature who does not live by faith is a monster arrogating the prerogative of God, and therein assuming the likeness of the devil. Christ's perfect manhood did not release Him from, but bound Him to, the exercise of faith. Nor did His true Deity make faith impossible to His manhood. Christ's perfect manhood perfected His faith, and in some aspects modified it. His trust had no relation to the consciousness of sin, and no element either of repentance or of longing for pardon. But it had relation to the consciousness of need, and was in Him, as in us, the condition of continual derivation of life and power from the Father. Himself has said, " I live through the Father," and the indwelling Divinity of the Son did not make superfluous the influx of the Father's life into His manhood by the channel of faith. His faith was unlike ours, in that it was steady. Our hands tremble with the very pulses of our blood, as we hold the telescope which shows us the things not seen. His hand knew no tremor or perturbation from throbbing flesh, and no mist dimmed His vision. Our faith is often interrupted, and is like an intermittent spring. His was a perennial flow.

Christ's perfect faith brought forth perfect fruits in His life, issuing, as it did, in obedience which was perfect in purity of motive, in gladness of submission, and in completeness of the resulting deeds as well as in its continuity, through His life. " I do always the things that please Him," was His own summing up of His activity. Was that arrogant and ignorant self-satisfaction, or the true utterance of a manhood which, in its absolute nonparticipation in the universal consciousness of defect and transgression, stands unique, and demands the supposition of something more than manhood in Him ? That perfect faith further issued in unbroken communion. Like two metal plates of which the surfaces are so true that when brought together they adhere, the Father and the Son were inseparably united, in the trustful and obedient consciousness of Jesus.

Thus our Lord not only comes among us to show us God, but also to show us the true glory and strength of man, and to let us see how Divine a thing our nature may be made when it is knit to the Divine by faith. He teaches us the possibilities of faith, both in itself and in its ennobling effect on life. Out of His example we may take both shame and encouragement - shame when we measure our poor, purblind, feeble, and interrupted faith against His, and encouragement when we raise our hopes to the height of the revelation in it of what ours may become. The staff that He leaned on He has bequeathed to us, who still travel the rough road where His footprints are yet visible. The shield which He bore, unpierced and undinted by all the fiery darts that struck it, He has left for us to brace on our arms. The Captain and Perfecter of faith was once in the arena where we wrestle and fight. He conquered because He ever said, " I will put My trust in Him ; " and we too shall be victors, if we look away from all besides, and up to Him where He now sits enthroned, the object and the pattern of our trust. " This is the victory that over cometh the world, even our faith."

III Jesus is Man that He may bring men into the family of sons of God.

" Behold I and the children which God hath given Me." These words are taken from the immediate context of the last quotation. In their original application, the prophet speaks of himself and of his family, and of the little group of disciples who had been drawn to him, as being associated with him as God's witnesses - the salt of the nation, which but for them would perish in its rottenness. The writer of the Epistle sees in that Israel within Israel a shadow of the New Testament Church, and in the prophet's humility, which united these little ones, who had received natural life or spiritual impulse from him, with himself in his prophetic office, some hint of the greater condescension of Christ, who in like manner bestows life on those who trust Him, and lifts them to a wondrous participation in His Sonship to God and in His work for men. We can scarcely say that this quotation stands on the same level as the first of the passages quoted. It gives an illustration rather than an actual type or prophecy, and is analogy rather than purposed foreshadowing. The change from " brethren," as in the first quotation, to " children " is to be noticed. Isaiah was parent, and " the children " were partly his family and partly his followers. Christians receive spiritual life from Christ, but God is the Father and Christ is the elder Brother. "Children" does not refer to relationship in the same sphere as " brethren " does. The latter means kindred by a common manhood; the former, kindred by possession of the same spiritual life. While Christ is Source of spiritual life for us. He Himself lives through the Father ; and since the paradox that the Father hath given Him to have life in Himself is true, the more common representation of brotherhood with Him and this of sonship are equally in accordance with the facts. We have, then, presented in this final clause, the effect of the Incarnation as being power to us to become sons of God. The three clauses of our text give a regular progress of idea. Christ becomes Man to show us God. In His humanity He lives, like us, by faith. The result of his identifying Himself with us as our Brother is that we are identified with Him as children of God. The former clauses dealt with Christ's becoming like us, this with our becoming like Him. Our Lord, then, becomes Man that through Him men may receive a new life which is His own. That impartation of a new Divine life is the deepest truth and the richest gift of the gospel. Do not be satisfied with any less conception of what God gives us in the unspeakable gift of His Son than this, that He therein gives to all who accept Jesus in faith a spark of His own life, which will transform our deadness into quick and joyous sensibility and activity worthy of its source. But for that gift of life more than incarnation is needed. Jesus Christ can only impart His life on condition of His death. The alabaster box must be broken, though so

precious, and though the light of the pure spirit within shone lustrous and softened through it, in order that the house may be filled with the odour of the ointment. By His death He puts Death to death, and takes away the hindrances to the bestowal of the true life.

Again, He becomes Man that men may, by the communication of His life, become sons of God. Since He is the Son, those who receive life from Him enter thereby into the relationship of sons. They are God's children, being Christ's brethren. They are brought into a new unity, and being members of one family are one by a more sacred oneness than the possession of a common humanity. The brotherhood of men will only become a reality to which men's institutions and sentiments will correspond, when it rests on the fatherhood of God, realized through faith in that elder Brother, who grudges nothing to the prodigal sons, but Himself has come to seek them and bring them back.

Further, Jesus is Man that men may become sharers in His prerogatives and offices. As Isaiah gathered his children and scholars into a family, and gave them to partake in his prophetic office, and to be "for signs and wonders," so Christ gathers us into marvellous oneness with Himself. He becomes like us in our lowliness and flesh of sin, that we may become like Him in His glory and perfection. The identification of Jesus and His disciples is represented in Scripture with extraordinary boldness, as being like the ineffable union of the Father with the Son ; as being faintly shadowed by the vital relation of head and body ; as being closer and more inward than the union of husband and wife, who are but "one flesh," while "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Accordingly, the same names are applied to them and to Him. Is He the Light of the world ? So are they. Is He the Anointed? So are they. The Christian Church is the prolongation of the life of Christ on earth, and while the great sacrifice which He has made once for all on the cross cannot be repeated, copied, or paralleled, and needs no repetition, there are aspects even of His sufferings in which His servants have to fill up their measure for the sake of the brethren. The union is as of the graft into the tree, with the difference that here it is not the good graft which is inserted in the wild stock, but the wild slip which is introduced into the good tree and partakes both of its root and fatness.

Further, Christ is Man that He may present His family at last to God. If we love and trust Him, He will hold us in His strong and tender grasp, and never part from us till He presents us at last faultless and joyful before the presence of His and our Father - "No wanderer lost, A family in heaven." The sum of the whole matter is this. There is but one way of knowing God. All else is darkness and uncertainty, shifting as cloudrack, and unsubstantial as it. God has spoken to us in the Son. If we see Christ, we see God. There is but one noble, peaceful, worthy life for man - a life of faith in Him, who is at once the Object and the Example of our faith, and believing in whom we believe in the Father also. There is but one fountain of life opened in this grave yard of a world, of whose waters whosoever drinks shall "have in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." There is but one way of becoming sons of God. Christ our Brother is the Revealer of God, the Pattern of devotion, the Source and Upholder of life. Listen to Him declaring the name of the Father. Put your trust in Him, for you trust in God when you have faith in Christ. Open your heart that His life may flow into your death. Then His strong hand will hold you up, and at last He will acknowledge you for His in the presence of the Father and of the holy angels, and will point to you, saved, glorified, and like Himself, with the triumphant words, "Behold I and the children whom God hath given Me."

01.06. ARMED RECREANTS.

Chapter 6

ARMED RECREANTS " The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle."

Psalms 78:9 The great tribe of Ephraim was the principal constituent in the kingdom of Israel, and so important that the whole kingdom is frequently in Scripture called by the name of the tribe. Whether that be so here or no is difficult to determine, because the historical reference of our text is uncertain. It evidently points to some old, forgotten battle, of which we know nothing. But the psalm, as a whole, comes from the southern kingdom of Judah, and culminates in the triumphant celebration of God's rejection of the northern portion of the nation in favour of Judah, in which He set His tabernacle. The dereliction of duty expressed in my text seems to be suggested as one cause of the withdrawal of the Divine favour. What was that dereliction of duty ? It is difficult to settle whether " turned back in the day of battle " means a cowardly flight from the field, being beaten, or a slothful and selfish refusal to go into the field and fight. Either idea would explain the language. But the emphasis which is put upon the thorough equipment of the soldiers, seems rather to favour the idea that what is meant by " turning back in the day of battle " is that these men, thus equipped with weapons for the fight, refused the fight for which they were equipped. And so, I think, we have in the words lessons that we may well lay to heart.

I Note, then, first, the fact.

Now, the assertion here, when applied to us, is just this — that every Christian, by virtue of his Christianity, is sufficiently armed for the great conflict. We all have the gift of that Divine Spirit, who " will teach our hands to war and our fingers to fight." Jesus Christ imparts Himself to every soul that trusts Him ; and " this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Then, in addition to the universal sufficient equipment which belongs to every Christian soul, there are also included the variety of gifts. In a great army such as Eastern despots used to gather, before military science had reached its present diabolical perfection, there were men armed in all sorts of fashions ; the foremost ranks with spears and swords and bows, perhaps, the hindmost with clubs and sticks ; but all with something in their hands with which they could strike a brave stroke for their king. And so all we Christian people, in the variety of our gifts, have sufficient weapons for the warfare, and sufficient tools for the tasks allotted to us. There are " diversities of administrations, but it is the same Lord ; " and there are differences of gifts, but it is He that ministers to each and to all.

Then this is the fact that we, who, by virtue of our being Christian people, are sufficiently armed for offensive and defensive warfare and for victory, do yet to a terrible extent shirk the fight, let opportunities slip away unused, like so much water through slack hands, neglect to stir up the gift that is in us, and "being armed, and carrying bows," look at the seiried ranks in front of us, and slink away out of the field, leaving who will to bear the brunt.

There are two phases of the warfare to which every Christian soul is summoned : the one is the fight with our own evil, which is not to be subdued merely by peaceful culture, but needs stern antagonism ; and the other is the effort to spread the name of Jesus Christ, which is to be done not merely by the missionary work of proclamation, but also by warring against the evils that infest and hag-ride the world. These two branches of the one conflict are set before all Christian men ; and all of us, more or less, have to take to ourselves the indictments of this text of ours, and to confess that, with our opportunities and equipments, our gifts and capacities and possessions, we have turned away in the day of battle.

Brother, who is there amongst us that has worked and fought up to the edge of his capacity ? There is no more wasteful instrument, they tell us, than a steam engine ; so little motive power comes out for so much heat applied, and such a quantity is lost. So it is with us. All the warmth that radiates from Jesus Christ is poured into the icy deadness of the reservoirs of our hearts, and the effect is only to raise the temperature such a very little, and to get two or three feeble strokes of the piston. We hang our weapons on the wall, as they do in baronial mansions, for ornament, instead of taking them down for use. None of us can plead "not guilty" to the charge of neglected opportunities and unused powers, and talents hid in a napkin, and there are some of us to whom this charge of my text comes with a very special weight of accusation and condemnation. What a dead mass of idle people there are in every Christian congregation and Church ! I do not mean merely those who do not take any part in the organized activities of the community to which they belong — that is for their conscience; but I mean that, professing themselves Christian men and women, and living in some feeble fashion as such, they yet do nothing with the forces entrusted to them, and have hardly any growth in godliness for themselves, and have seldom lifted a finger to do anything for Christ among men.

Ah ! there are more noneffective soldiers in the roll call of Christ's army than in that of any volunteer corps that was ever heard of; and at the musters there are a dreadful number "absent without leave," whose names might just as well be struck off the muster roll altogether.

Another suggestion may be made here. The men that are best armed are very often the first to run away. It is by no means the fact that the rich man, for instance, is the large giver. It is by no means the fact that the relatively largely endowed man, with the greatest educational advantages or intellectual power, is the vigorous worker in the Church. It is generally the other way. The men that have the bows — which was the mightiest instrument of warfare with Israel in those rude old days — are not the fighting men. These are generally the poor people in the back ranks, who have only sticks and knives, and make the best of their poor weapons, because they are more loyal to the King and Captain. Oh ! you rich men, if there are any of you here ; you clever people ; you well educated folk ; you men and women with leisure; recognize that the endowment that distinguishes you from others is God's way of saying to you, " Go into My vineyard!" and let us all try that the charge of my text shall be less applicable to us.

II Note, next, the black, deep guilt of this negative crime.

We are all quite ready to admit, and forward to plead, that inability absolves from duty. Do we ever remember, or do we remember as quickly when tasks present themselves, the converse, that ability prescribes duty? You cannot take the benefit of the excuse on the one hand unless you are ready to accept the obligation on the other. Power settles duty. "Can" and "ought" cover precisely

the same ground to an inch, both in regard of manner and of measure. Ability settles the duty, and obligation is only another way of saying capacity. So, then, brethren, we come to this, that the negative refusal, so to speak, to go into the fight is positive treason. For what lies in it? What does a man who simply does not visit the imprisoned Christ, or bring consolation to His comfortless servants, or simply hides his talent in a napkin, and does not use it, — what does he do in his not doing? He betrays his Master, is disloyal to his King, is hurtful to himself and cruel to his fellows. And what I wish to urge upon you is this, that the negative fault that is charged in my text is a positive crime, of as deep and dark a dye as any Christian man can commit ; and more dangerous, because more subtle, and less apparently perilous than many an act which looks a great deal worse. Negligence is enough to damn a man. In order to go down to the nethermost depths, you do not need to do anything ; you have simply not to do something, and down you will go by gravitation. Although there may be nothing else to condemn a man at Christ's tribunal, do not forget that the worst condemnation that ever He spoke was directed in parable to a man who had no positive faults at all, or at least none that are named. and none that come into condemnation. He could apparently say and with perfect truth, as the Pharisee in the parable said, "I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." He was a member of the Church ; he filled his place ; nobody could say a word against him. Jesus Christ had nothing to say against him. All that was wrong with him was — what? That he took his talent wrapped it up in a cloth, and hid it away somewhere. I wonder if there are any professing Christians here, blameless before the eyes of the world, blameless even before the tribunal of their own callous consciences, who live decent respectable, orderly, law abiding lives, up to the standard of Christian morality in a great many respects ; only — only, " having bows, they turn back in the day of battle."

III Now let me say a word about the reasons for this cruel, cowardly, and criminal dereliction of duty.

One of them is a want of honest study of ourselves in reference to our duty. Did you ever spend a quiet half hour in thinking over what is really in your power, in order to ascertain what you are bound to do ? Or do you take your forms of Christian service for others, and of Christian culture for yourselves, at haphazard, or by mere slavish imitation of other people? I believe that there are few parts of Christian culture more neglected by the average Christian people of this generation than the old fashioned habit of self examination ; not in order to find out reasons for confidence — God forbid ! — nor in order to find out reasons for diffidence either, but in order to find out paths of work, and to try and ascertain, by an examination of their own capacities, what are their duties. I believe that if you would do that habitually, prayerfully, in the sight of God, your whole lives would be revolutionized, and your "profiting would appear unto all men."

There are a great many of us who are never so modest as when we are asked to work for Christ. It is then that we find out, and are ready to say, " Oh, I cannot do this, that, or the other thing." The discovery generally coincides with the appeal of apparent duty. So it is rather suspicious, is it not?

There is another very widely operative cause, namely, absorbing attention to and interest in selfish and transitory needs. Suppose these men of Ephraim had said, " Bows ? Oh yes ! we've got bows. We use them principally to shoot wild goats for our food. That is the employment of them that we find most profitable." That is what many of us do with our capacities. The men are armed, and they are so busy, as sportsmen say, " shooting for the pot," that they have no time for the fight. A

Christian who gives as much of his life's blood and his heart's energy as most of us do to the mere provision of external good has very little leisure to spare, and less freshness of spirit to consecrate to Jesus Christ. And although I know that the honest pursuit of daily bread is a first duty for heads of families, and is part of the "seeking of the kingdom of God and His righteousness," yet no man who has to preach the gospel in a great commercial centre can help seeing that to a far more than is needful extent, in multitudes of cases, the cares of this world fill men's souls, and leave no leisure for higher things. The bows were not given you only to shoot rabbits with for your own meals and your children's. They were given you to fight the good fight of faith with them. The foundation of all is, that if we loved Jesus Christ better, and were brought more closely into the fellowship of His love, and more under the dominion of the quickening, protective, and hallowing influences that flow from Him, we should not be able to help casting ourselves into the conflict which He has commanded, and in which He leads. Oh ! brethren, if our faith were deeper, our love warmer, our devotion more ardent, our consecration more complete, our lives would be more befitting the lives of the soldiers of Jesus Christ.

If these things be the causes of the criminal dereliction of duty, the cures lie in the opposites of them. Especially we should seek to get and to keep nearer to Him for whom, if we fight at all, we shall fight; and by whom, if we conquer, we shall be victorious.

You remember the old story of the Scottish knight, with the king's heart in a golden casket, who, beset by crowds of dusky, turbaned believers, slung the precious casket into the serried ranks of the enemy, and with the shout, "Lead on, brave heart ; I follow thee !" cast himself into the thickest of the fight, and lost his life that he might save it. And so, if we have Christ before us, we shall count no path too perilous that leads us to Him, but rather, hearing Him say, "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me," we shall walk in His footsteps, and fight the good fight, sustained by His example. And then, at the end, perhaps even we, all unworthy as we are, stained and imperfect as our poor service has been, may have the rapture of hearing from His lips the generous sentence which He once spoke in reference to an utterly useless gift, "She hath done what she could."

01.07. "AN INCREASING PURPOSE."

Chapter 7 AN INCREASING PURPOSE

" These all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

Hebrews 11:39-40 (R.V.) In their original application these words refer to the heroes of the faith whom the grand roll call of this chapter has been enumerating. The whole company of Old Testament believers is included in " these all; "the whole company of New Testament believers in " us." The promise, the fulfillment of which they did not receive, was that of the Messiah and His salvation. They stretched out empty hands to greet it from afar, as sailors the dimly descried land, and possessed not that for which they longed, because God, looking onward through the ages, had mercifully willed that later generations should share in the blessing. The "better thing" foreseen, as given to us New Testament Christians, is the work of Christ, done at a point of time, but sending its influences backwards and forwards to bless all generations. The "perfecting" which it was not fitting that they should reach without us, is that final completeness in which all Christ's servants shall be united, and of which, since Christ has come, the saints of the older period have already received the earnest, as is manifest from their being subsequently spoken of as spirits " made perfect," and of which we too receive an earnest in another fashion, in the gift of the sanctifying Spirit.

Such being the original bearing of these words, we may venture to apply the principles contained in them in a somewhat different direction, as setting forth truths as to the relation of successive generations in the Church, all of whom have received that " better thing," which, given once for all in full completeness, is yet apprehended gradually by both individuals and the community, and blesses each generation of believing souls with new gifts of knowledge and power, till all are united in the ultimate perfection of the heavens. Our connection with the past, our task in the present, our anticipations in the future, are all taught in these great words.

I We note, first, the bond uniting us with past generations.

" These all " had witness borne to them through their faith. That faith was their common characteristic, supplying a principle of unity which counter wrought the differences of era and circumstance, and made one company of persons so unlike as Abel and Rahab, Enoch and Jephthah. If we throw ourselves back to the condition of things at the date of this Epistle, this chapter appears even more remarkable than we usually consider it. The question then agitating men's minds was. Is not this new faith in Christ Jesus the destruction of Judaism ? The writer of this Epistle answers the question by the broad assertion that Christianity is the real Judaism, and that the true line of succession runs through the Church, and not through the synagogue. Fancy a stiff Pharisee's face at hearing a Christian teacher claim Abraham, Jacob, and, most audaciously of all, Moses for his side ! But why did he do so ? Because the foundation of their lives was faith.

Their faith was the same. Their creeds were different, if not in essence, yet in comprehensiveness. Their faith was the same exercise of spirit as ours. Nay, the identity goes further still; for though faith in this Epistle be generally meant chiefly in its Old Testament sense of trust in God, and therefore in a future which is the subject of Divine promises, rather than in its New Testament specific sense of trust in Jesus, yet, since Jesus is the Revealer of God, its objects are substantially the same in both epochs of revelation. The secret of the religious life of the ancient believers is laid bare in one sentence concerning the father of them all : " Abraham believed God, and He counted it to him for righteousness." The object of their faith was God, as He spake at sundry times and in divers manners. The object of the Christian faith is God speaking in a Son, to listen to whom is to hear God, to see whom is to see the Father, and who is, as this Epistle elaborately proves, Priest and Temple and Sacrifice. The writer will not allow any difference, except that of development, between the call of prophet and psalmist, " Trust ye in the Lord for ever," and the preaching of apostles, " Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." There has never been but one way to heaven, and faith has always been one, however different in completeness its creed.

It is but applying the same principle in a slightly different direction to say that all in Christian ages who have the same Spirit of faith are one. All who lay hold of the same Christ with the same confidence are knit together. But it must be the same Christ, the Divine human Christ, the world's Redeemer ; and the faith must be so far the same that it leans the whole weight of man's weakness on that incarnate Strength, and hangs all his hopes on that one Lord. If these things be the same, then no other differences, however great, can break the real unity, though, alas ! they have often been permitted to break the consciousness of it. No matter in what age they lived, or what were their relations to one another, all holders of that faith, or rather all who are held by it, are one. Jewish converts with chips of the shell of Judaism still sticking to them, Egyptian hermits, African bishops, Donatist and orthodox, Latin monks, Lutheran professors, English Churchmen and Non conformists, half civilized converts in missionary stations- they all have the King's broad arrow on them. Faith is deepest, and they who are one in it are fundamentally one, however superficially separate. So, when we look back, there should be more than apathetic or curious glances,, and more than the interest of the historian or controversialist. There should be the generous glow of kindred, and we should feel as we would by the graves of our ancestors. We should be aware of the tingle of the electric chain which binds in one all who hold by the one Lord ; and however some narrow theories may part brethren from us, we should hold fast by the resolve that in heart at any rate we will not be parted from them, but in our sympathies strive to be true to the animating conviction that faith in Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, makes all its possessors one.

II

We note the better things foreseen for us. There is no such advance within the limits of Christianity as separated it from the earlier revelation. The further " light " which each age has a right to expect is to " break forth from the Word " already given. " The Christ that is to be " is the Christ that was and is - "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."

He is " for ever," as being complete. As for truth, all treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Him, and may be drawn from the deepening understanding of the principles embodied in His life

and death, in His resurrection and reign. All theology, morality, sociology, lie in Him as gold in ore, or diamonds in a matrix. As for powers, all that can be needed or done for the regeneration of the world and of single souls has been done and supplied in the work of Christ. What remains is but the application of the power which has been lodged in humanity. But while objective revelation is complete, and God's treasures contain no "better thing" than the unspeakable gift once bestowed and ever possessed, there is meant to be advancement in understanding of the truth and in appropriation of the power. Jesus is inexhaustible. No one man can absorb Him all ; no one age can. A thousand mirrors set round that central light will each receive its beam at its own angle, and flash it back in its own fashion. So true progress will consist in a fuller understanding and firmer grasp of Him as Son of God and Redeemer of the world, and in a more complete reception of His Spirit, manifested in more Christ like characters and more Christ pleasing service. It does not mean casting away the old, but finding new force in the old commandment and new depth of meaning in the old revelation. In this alphabet, alpha is omega, and both Alpha and Omega are Christ. Each generation, then, has to receive an incomplete work from its predecessors, and to hand on an incomplete work, made a little less incomplete by its faithful diligence, to its successors. The great cathedral took centuries to rear, and each generation had but to raise its walls a yard or two, and a man might be glad if it were granted him to add some fair carving to a single shaft, or to lay but a single stone. But within these limits there is room for large advance, and in periods of swift change like ours, it is hard to estimate gains and losses as between the new and the old. Temperament and age will affect our sympathies and make our appreciation partial, and it is a piece of very pressing Christian duty for each of us to see that we do not let the " personal equation " so influence us as to make us either the sanguine and exclusive eulogists of the new, or the pessimistic and obstinate partisans of the old. We may not be better than our fathers, but we have some better thing than they had, for which we have to thank God. We have gained inasmuch as theology has become more Christ centered. The Gospels are more to the Church of today than they ever were before. There is less of mere doctrine, and more of Jesus Christ. His present activity as Lord of the universe and King of men is increasingly set forth, and the good news of God is being dis-embarrassed of misty metaphysics which were once thought to be theology. The interminable controversy between the bare conception of an omnipotent will, and the equally crude one of a free human will, has ceased to interest. The love of God stands where for many generations the will of God was set - in the centre. The progressive character of revelation has become an article of belief, and has made the Bible a new book, throbbing with life on all its pages. Christianity has become more sympathetic, and begins to recognize its duty as to social questions. The missionary task of the Church has been accepted by all Churches which have any life in them, and of late years we have seen wonderful increase of personal service by all sorts of Christian people. Nor should we overlook, in our summing up of the good in this our day, the sharpened interest in religious questions, so characteristic of it, even though that interest is often hostile to the claims of Christ. We should share the confidence of the brave apostle, who counted " many adversaries " as the sign of "a great door and effectual," and a reason for protracting his stay in so hopeful a field. But every better may become a worse. If former generations grasped too exclusively the conception of the sovereign Divine will, they were made strong men thereby. If their religion was too largely dogmatic theology, they thereby won intense convictions, and a familiarity with profound and ennobling thoughts, which saved life from triviality, and devotion from degenerating into mere emotion. If their morality was somewhat rigid and stern,

it kept them grave and pure. If they were too much secluded from the currents of literature, art, and science, their souls were focused on one thing, and the concentrated light burned. Their narrowness meant depth, and if a stream is to be wholesome, which it can only be by movement, depth is better than a breadth which too often is possible only through shallowness.

They had the defects of their qualities. So have we. There is danger that definite doctrinal belief and teaching shall be diminished to the vanishing point, partly from the infection of the unreasonable revolt against "theology," and partly from the influence of evangelistic fervor, which asks for "the simple gospel." There is danger of so presenting the love of God as to neutralize His righteousness and His wrath, thereby losing the mighty power for persuading men which lies in knowing the terror of the Lord.

There is danger of obscuring the characteristic of the gospel as good news of redemption, and of the pulpit's becoming a professor's desk or a social reformer's platform. We have said that all social and ethical truth is involved in and to be deduced from the facts of Christ's nature and mission, but the first aspect of these facts is their power to bring forgiveness and peace to guilty consciences. Our wisdom and our success will be to keep to the Divine order, and ever make the first and prominent characteristic of the gospel, which we believe and hold forth, its power to deliver the single soul from its burden of sin, through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and then to set forth its power to furnish the bases of all individual and social action, in the ethics that are en-wrapped in its glad tidings that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish." We hear much now of applied Christianity and of the social mission of the gospel. Let us not forget that there must be individual Christianity before there can be social, and that it must be possessed before it can be applied, and that the personal faith of sinful men in Jesus Christ's work as their personal Saviour is the beginning of all.

There are dangers, too, arising from changed conditions of life. Wealth has brought secularity in its train. Education has introduced familiarity with unchristian and anti-Christian works of genius and learning. Public and political life has opened a more attractive arena for those who in other days would have found their work in more distinctively religious service. The whirl of modern life in which religious people are caught up has diminished habits of quiet meditation and devotion. Even the awakened sense of responsibility for the neglected, and the consequent abundance of work and of workers, bring snares. On the whole, it may well be questioned whether the modern types of religion have not lost much that it would have been gain to keep, and gained something that it would have been better to have lost. Is not personal religion at a low ebb? Have we not lost much of the depth and unworldliness of ancient piety? Where are the ancient intense realization of unseen realities, the ardor of communion, the continual sense of a Divine presence, the atmosphere of separation surrounding the Christian heart? The change from old days is not all progress. We need the exhortation, unwelcome as it is in the ears of an epoch which is so proud of its gains in mechanical arts and physical sciences that it has made contempt of the past into an article of its creed, "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will show thee; thine elders, and they will tell thee."

Let us beware lest we let go the precious with the vile, and, while we fancy ourselves far ahead of the "simple and narrow" religion of the past, should really be casting away the very essence of revealed Christianity, and with it the depth and fervor of personal godliness, in grasping at the

impossible phantom of a religion in harmony with that kind of " modern thought " which will not tolerate the supernatural, nor bow before the Christ who is the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world. If these two fundamental truths are falteringly held, we shall soon have to cry, " Where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of ? " But if to the good things which past ages discovered in these, we add the better things which God, by the march of events and the evolution of new powers in the old gospel to deal with new problems of this eager day so full of possibilities and promise even in its antagonisms, is bestowing on the Churches, if they are wise and large hearted enough to welcome and accept them, then the former days will not be better than these ; but this age too shall be able to reproduce and transcend the triumphs of the past, and shall acknowledge with thankful wonder, " As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God."

III The yet better things in reserve for our successors.

Naturally the progress is not to stop with us, but will go on as long as there is a Church on earth. We, too, have but partial light, and have partially appropriated the gifts and discharged the duties given and enjoined in the partly understood gospel. How much has yet to be done before all the truth as it is in Jesus is drawn out into the consciousness of Christians and incorporated in their lives ! How much more before it passes from the Church to the world, and transforms it into a Church ! No doubt future generations will look back on our insensibility to the flagrant contradictions of the social ethics of Christianity, which they will, no doubt, discern in our lives, with the same kind of half pitying, half amused condemnation with which we look back on "ages of faith," which were ages of cruelty, ignorance, and persecution, or with which we discover that the devout author of the great treatise on the "Freedom of the Will " was a devout slaveholder. Slavery is now recognized as unchristian. War is beginning to be so. What venerable institution which the Churches have canonized will the keener insight of our successors expel from the place of honour? The Church of the future will have broken down all sects. Religion will one day be harmonized with "science." Christian principles will be applied to social and national life with revolutionary effects. Many of the evils are already like ringed trees in Australian forests, forbidden at all events to expand, and sure in time to die. There will be a fuller baptism of the Spirit on the happier Church that is to be, resulting in more consecrated lives, in more missionary and evangelistic effort, and in a finer harmony of nature and a more symmetrical and majestic development of capacities in the individual and the community. Much destructive work will have to be done before that consummation is reached. Does any man suppose that the existing embodiments of Christianity, the churches of this day, are meant to be permanent ?

Let us not fear. There is a trembling for the ark of God, which is the fitting issue of the trembler's consciousness of his own unfaithful service. But the ark is safe, whatever may become of the cart that bears it, or the oxen that draw it. Out of the wild sea of tossing contraries of opinion will rise a shape of fairer beauty than hitherto has blessed the earth, like the moon swimming up serene and large from some unquiet ocean. Not one grain of the true wheat shall fall to the ground, though a million Satan's had the Churches to sift. There is an exaggerated conservatism which does not love the old so much as it hates the new, and which understands neither. The men who stoned Stephen for the sake of Moses would have stoned Moses for the sake of Abraham. The things that can be shaken will be removed, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain; as some great building, round whose sides have clustered paltry sheds that hid its fair proportions with their

obtrusive meanness, stands out the fairer when they are swept away. The central truth of the Divinity and sacrifice of the Christ of God is the imperishable core of the Christian faith. These and the related necessarily involved truths being preserved, everything is preserved ; for these truths, wielded by the Spirit dwelling in the Church, have power to weave their own vestures, and will in every age mould the forms of Christian thought and life into such shapes as may best correspond to the wants of each age, and most completely sub-serve the increasing purpose which runs through all the ages, and which each age is honored by helping forward towards realization.

IV Our text necessarily includes the idea of the final perfecting in which all are united. The saints of the old and the believers of the new covenant are not to be perfected apart. A blessed future union is shadowed in the words, as it is required by the whole scope of the considerations suggested to us by them.

There is to be a perfect union of all in the common joy of possession of the common gift. On the march the pilgrims were widely separated, but in the camp their tents will be near each other. All who follow the one Shepherd shall be one flock. We can say nothing of the manner of that wondrous future union, which baffles our grasp when we think of the multitudes of whom the flock is composed. But just as Dante saw Paradise under the symbol of a great rose, whose many petals were yet one flower, and just as astronomers tell us that the giant nebulae, consisting of infinite numbers of suns, are yet each one whole, though we cannot imagine what forces bind together across such bewildering spaces, so all who in solitude here, and amid misconceptions and diversities, have yet loved the one Lord and followed the one Shepherd, shall couch round Him above, and in some mysterious but most blessed manner know that they "live together" and all " together with Him," as the bond of their unity and perhaps the medium of their intercourse. There will be a united perfecting in the common possession of the whole Christ. Even then star will differ from star, and we may venture to believe that each will share his special refraction of the central light with others, and the beams of the variously colored stars lovingly blend in perfect whiteness. " Neither said any among them that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common."

There will be united perfection in enjoying the results of the long unfolding through the ages of the fulness of Christ. Here one generation originates and another completes. It is given to few to see the triumph of the cause for which they have fought, or the successful working of the plans which they have inaugurated. "One soweth, and another reapeth," is the law for earth. But the time comes when all the workers shall share in the gladness of the finished work ; when all who, separated by long ages, and thick walls of mutual misconception and divergence in practice and opinion, have yet been unknowingly toiling towards the same end, shall clasp inseparable hands in the great result which contains all their work. Division of labour is multiplication of joy and reward. The sower cannot go into the waving harvest and pick out the ears which have sprung from the seed which he sowed. The reaper cannot go up to the stack and identify the sheaves that fell before his sickle. The brook cannot recover its drops from the mighty river or the all enclosing ocean. But the one great result shall gladden all who have ever helped to bring it, and the sower who went forth in sadness shall come back, bearing "the sheaves" that are his, though another reaped them.

So, then, friends, let us set ourselves to our small tasks, happy if we can push forward by the least space the boundary of Christ's kingdom, or absorb and reflect a sparkle of His light. Let us be reverent of those who have gone before, and thankful for that which they have handed down to us. Let us pass it on, mended and increased by our toil, to those who shall catch up our dropped torches and complete our unfinished work. And, above all, let us take as the end of these thoughts that stirring exhortation to which our text leads up : " Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus," in whom every age finds its Leader, and all the generations of His saints shall at last find their common heaven of perfection.

01.08. THE DEFENCE OF THE DEFENCELESS.

Chapter 8 THE DEFENCE OF THE DEFENCELESS

"A land of unwall'd villages . . . them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates."

Ezekiel 38:2

" Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls. . . . For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."

Zechariah 2:4-5

I HAVE taken these two passages together because the language in the latter is evidently the echo of that in the former. In both, we have the description of a community dwelling in a fashion very unusual, and very risky in old times, namely, in the open country, without any walls, bars, or gates to their cities. But in the former passage these dwellers in the open are represented as becoming, by reason of their defenseless and fancied security, the prey of a cruel conqueror, who comes to " take them for a spoil ; " whereas in the latter text, people living in precisely the same fashion, without walls, bars, or bolts, are represented as being in absolute security - "because I, saith the Lord, will be a wall of fire round about them, and a glory in the midst of them." That is to say, there are two kinds of carelessness in the world, two kinds of security and supposed safety; the one foolish and fatal, the other devout and good. We may be dwelling like fools in unwall'd cities, when all the land around us is laid waste by enemies; or we may be dwelling like wise men in unwall'd cities, because there is a flaming barrier between us and evil, through which nothing that harms can ever come. And these two conditions, to the eye of sense, will look very much the same ; but, to an eye that sees deeper, will be as different as heaven is from hell. We have brought out, then, by the juxtaposition of these two passages, with their identities and differences, the vivid contrast between these two ways of life, and the tragic unlikeness of their respective ends.

I The first text presents an instance of a defenceless security which is blind presumption. In old times the first condition of dwelling safely was to find either a site which was inaccessible, or to surround the city with a wall which was impregnable.

All old cities are usually perched upon hilltops, or are surrounded by walls, which, in these " piping times of peace," are generally being turned into boulevards and gardens. Cities that trusted to anything except strong natural or artificial fortifications, sooner or later became the prey of the enemy. So the phrases of these texts, which are found in Ezekiel, and caught up by Zechariah, appear once or twice besides in Scripture, describing the condition of exceptional communities - in one case far away in the desert, and in another, hidden in an almost inaccessible corner between the spurs of the Lebanon, where the men of Dan, as it is said, dwelt quiet and secure, far from any men, and having no business with any.

Such defenselessness was unwise, augured rashness, and was likely to lead to disaster. Is the temper of security in which so many of us live less absurd or dangerous ? An extraordinary access of foolhardiness seems to dominate the lives of the mass of men, which leads them to neglect the plainest facts, and run risks that can only be called tremendous. Every life has possible and certain dangers, against which it is surely the part of common sense to provide. A wise man will look ahead, and make sure, before they come, that he has some protection against them. Death will come ; changes and losses will come. The strongest props will be taken away, the closest embrace unclasped ; hearts will be torn apart, and the one which bleeds to death be happier than its companion which feebly throbs and keenly aches alone. Strength will decay, disappointments will fret, and failures depress the powers. Sickness, solitude, pecuniary losses, abortive schemes, prodigal sons, and a thousand other ills, are either certain or possible. These are the heavy armed battalions of the foe; and besides them, there are swarms of more lightly accoutred skirmishers - like gnats from a bog - sure to harass, and making up in numbers what they want in weight.

And, for the most part, calamities come suddenly. Sometimes, indeed, there is the slow gathering of the livid thunderclouds, and an awful brooding pause before the crash. But generally evils come with little warning, however long they stay. How many lives we have all known shattered for all their remaining years by a bolt from the blue ! One sudden blow, the unheralded work of a moment, puts an apparent eternity between the moment before it and that after it. No day dawns on earth without rising on some, happy, careless, and secure, on whom it sets, desolate, ruined, crushed ; and no man knows when he wakes in the morning, but that he may be rising to meet the blackest day of his life ; unless, indeed, he may have already drunk the bitterest draught that Fortune can compound, and so have a kind of sad immunity, as having outlived the worst, and bought security by the loss of his dearest treasure. We are like the inhabitants of a winding glen, the curves of which hide the enemy till he bursts, with fire and sword, on the undefended huts. We know not what may be just ready to rush on us at the next turning.

Seeing, then, that so many evils must come, and so many may come, and that both the certain and the uncertain are likely to break on us without warning, how unaccountable and incredible, if it were not so universal, is the habit of living quite comfortably without any defence against these ! There is nothing stranger in all the strange vagaries and irrationalities of men, than their way of blinding themselves to unwelcome certainties and probabilities. Most men are impatient of serious reflection on the realities of their position, and the indisposition is fostered by the continual demands of the moment, and the necessity for prompt attention to them. We possess, and are foolish enough to exercise, that strange power of ignoring disagreeable things, however certain. It is difficult, too, to realize in thought a condition unlike the present, or to make vivid and operative on conduct the picture of one's self when deprived of some familiar and long enjoyed good. "Tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant," is the natural language of unreflecting levity. It is not only the " sluggard" who might profitably go to school to an anthill. The improvident man, who will not believe that winter is coming, while the land is yellow with autumn sheaves, may well " consider her ways," and, like her, " gather food in harvest" for the certainly dark and cold days that are at hand. Many of us are like the peasants who build their houses and plant their vineyards on the slopes of Vesuvius, and live lightheartedly, ignoring the possible future, though in the day the thin column of ominous smoke whitens a thin strip of ominous blue sky, and in the night the dull red of the lava tinges the sides of the cone. Some day there must be, and any day

there may be, an outburst, and grey ashes will cover the vines, and earthquake crack the walls of the houses, and ruin and haply death fall upon the careless tenants. They run all risks, and manage somehow to banish thoughts of the risks which they run. So do thousands of us in regard to far graver perils, far more certain to assail us and more disastrous in their destructiveness. Whole battalions of them threaten us all. We may make " conditions of peace " with them, if by prudent foresight and appropriate precautions we "send an embasage " while they are at a distance ; for evils foreseen and prepared for are robbed of much of their power to hurt, in losing their power to surprise. We may even make them our friends if we take them aright, which we are much more likely to do if we have anticipated their coming and rehearsed them beforehand. Come they will, and if they find us unprepared, their blow will be stunning and may be fatal. Nor is it only the usual refusal to contemplate these lowering certainties and possibilities beforehand which leaves us defenceless. Another phase of favorite folly is the conceit of our power to cope with the enemy when he comes. " Unwalled villages" are tokens of an overweening confidence in the strong arms of the villagers, which will be rudely shattered some day. How can a man front his probable and certain future, and keep his sanity, if he have not God for his Defence ? One is tempted to say that he can only do it because he has not sense enough to go mad. If we had clearly before us the reality, in its true color, form, magnitude, pressure, and duration, who of us could venture to say, " Alone I can meet it and endure " ? But, partly because we ignore the unwelcome, partly because our power of forecast is mercifully limited, lest future bitterness should poison present sweetness, partly because that too feeble realization of impending disaster enables us to cheat ourselves into believing that we can cope with it when it falls, we go on, comfortably enough, in our " unwalled villages," without bars or bolts, and seldom think of the sudden foe who may burst into the quiet seclusion of the unguarded valley. Like the people of Dan, to whom one of our texts refers, we may dwell " quiet and secure," in the proper meaning of that word - without care - though, alas ! to be without care is not to be without peril, and to be "secure" is a very different thing from being "safe." The original reads in our first text, " them that are at rest, that dwell securely," or confidently, and thereby expresses not the reality of the villagers' condition, but the foolhardy illusions of their imaginations, which were so soon to be shattered by the invader bursting in " to take the spoil and to take the prey."

So, sooner or later, comes the crash, as the context of our first text tells us. The destroyer is attracted by the defenselessness of the self confident villagers, and they fall an easy prey. The less the preparation and defence, the more bitter the defeat and destruction. Surely, then, it is madness to carry on full sail till a typhoon strikes the ship. It is no time then to be hauling down sails and battening down hatches. If we do not prepare for the storm, and prefer not to look at the sinking barometer, we shall probably founder while we are trying to do what could have been easily done before. When the enemy is blowing his trumpets for the assault just outside the village, it is too late to begin drawing plans of fortifications, or hurrying with spades and barrows to fling up earthworks. It is no doubt well not to be "over exquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain evils," but not to look certain ones in the face, nor have any notion beforehand of what we propose to do when they come, as come they will, is simple insanity, and would be recognized as such, if the bulk of men did not keep each other in countenance in committing it. This is no world for unwalled villages. Flesh is too sensitive and swords too sharp to allow of wisely dwelling in such. The "quiet" of the men who do so will be terribly disturbed. Their defence less security is blind presumption.

II Our second text brings out, in strong contrast to the former, a security which is externally like it, but really opposed to it, namely, the security of quiet faith. The two states of mind are apparently identical, just as the ideal Jerusalem of Zechariah's vision looked exactly like these other unwalled towns. The prophecy was not fulfilled in the real, rebuilt Jerusalem ; but the prophet's eye saw the ideal city, extending beyond the rocky peninsula, to which the real one was confined, and stretching far on every side, like some of the great cities which the exiles had learned to know, containing wide pastures and much cattle, and looking like an assemblage of villages, each among its fields and groves. But the ideal Jerusalem is to have no walls as Babylon had, and to be safer without than Babylon was with these. One thing made the difference between the unwalled Jerusalem, in which dwelling is safe, and the unwalled villages which seemed like it, and dwelling in which is ruinous. The reason why Jerusalem has no walls is, "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and I will be the glory in the midst of her." A fiery bulwark around, a flaming glory within, belong to her, and make other walls ludicrous superfluities. The presence of Jehovah is at once defence and illumination. That flaming fire is everywhere at once, around and within. At one and the same time it burns threateningly between the city and her foes, and shines lambently, a light in every dwelling; "and the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God did lighten it." Therefore it is safe to have no other walls.

Take the truth conveyed in this grand vision, laying aside metaphor, and it is this : The very same temper which without God is insanity, with God is simple duty, high privilege, and the supremest wisdom. " Take no thought for the morrow." He that has not God to take thought for him, and puts that exhortation in practice, will wreck his life. " I would have you without carefulness." A man that has no " carefulness " for himself, and yet has not cast all his anxiety upon God, who takes an interest in him and undertakes for him, will soon have cause to repent his recklessness. " Tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." The drunkard says that in the original use of the phrase. The saint says it too. The former is wrong and foolish for saying it ; the other says it, and is as sure that it is so as that there is a God in heaven. So the very same temper of careless security, which in a godless man wrecks and ruins both heart and life, in a Christian man is highest joy and clearest wisdom. For the all important difference between the two is that round one of them there is, and round the other there is not, the strong defence of an Almighty protection ; and in the heart of the man that thus has cast himself upon God, and not in the other, there burns, beneficent and illuminating, the unflickering flame of a Divine glory.

" A wall of fire round about us." Yes ! but if it is to be outside us, to defend, it must first be within us, to enlighten and make us glad. And if thus guarded by, and thus filled with, the Divine light, which is at once purity and gladness and knowledge, we cast all our care upon Him, it is not folly to say, " I need no bulwarks, no towers along the steep. The Lord is my Defence, because the Holy One of Israel is my King." Of course we are not to suppose that such words as those of my second text forbid the use of common sense, diligence, and effort in providing for the inevitable future, in so far as these can help to provide for it. Zechariah prophesied that the Jerusalem which he saw should have no walls. But Zechariah was one of the men who helped to build the walls of the real Jerusalem, whose restoration was largely owing to him. In like manner, we are not forbidden, by the requirements of Christian resignation and faith in God, to forsake any precautions which common prudence - which, in fact, is His voice - suggests to us to take. But we are forbidden to fancy that these are our defenses and security. Use them, and yet look beyond them to Him who

alone can give the blessing.

Now, all that I have been saying may be gathered into two words. How foolish it is to front life and what it may bring, and death and what it must bring, without God for our Defence ! And how yet more foolish, if that be possible, it is for those who have God for their Defence to be troubled and careful about many things, or anything ! " We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." Let us keep behind them, and trust in no arm of flesh, but in the unseen defence of the ever present God ; and let us seek first to have Him for a glory in the midst of us, and then surely He will be a wall of fire round about us.

01.09. HOW A CHURCH LIVES AND GROWS

Chapter 9 HOW A CHURCH LIVES AND GROWS

" From whom the whole body, by joints and bands having nourishment ministered and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God."

Colossians 2:19

It may assist us to grasp more clearly the fulness of thought in these words if we disentangle the main idea from the subsidiary clauses gathered round it. That main thought is that from Christ, the Head, the whole body increases. Three things are contained therein - the source of the life, the derived growth, the oneness of the body and the participation of all its parts in that growth. But this main thought is enriched and arabesqued, as it were, in Paul's eager, impetuous fashion, with pregnant additions. He seldom draws a plain straight line, but surrounds it with many a curve and involution, like the light, flower like decorations which encrust the firm framework of the upper spire of Antwerp Cathedral. They hide but do not weaken the direct upward spring of the rigid metal. His thoughts come fast and press on one another, and the result seems, to careless readers, confusion, when it is but the prodigality of a fertile soil quickened by the warmth of Christ's love into productiveness, which is richness, not riot. The subsidiary clause describes more fully the twofold manner of the growth of the body, and the office in relation to that growth, of the subordinate parts. The body is a whole, made up of parts differing, and therefore adapted and harmonious. These have each their function in transmitting the life. That life manifests itself in the double effect of assimilating nourishment and effecting compaction. There are, then, large truths involved in this representation, as to the source of vitality, the various and harmonious action of all the parts, the consequent growth of the whole, and the individual union to Christ, which is the condition of all individual and corporate increase which is healthy and according to God.

I We have to consider the Source of all the life of the body.

According to the context, Christ is the Head, and, as Paul puts it without being very careful about physiological accuracy, therefore the source from which all parts of the body partake of a common life. There are three symbols chiefly employed to represent the union of Christ with His Church, one of them being that used by Christ Himself, and the others principally by Paul. One knows not which presents that real and mysterious bond in the most striking fashion. These are the emblems of the vine, the body, and the marriage bond - the first drawn from the noblest example of plant life as conceived by the old world ; the second, from the noblest type of animal existence ; and the third, from the deepest and closest union of human spirits. The first expresses the calm, effortless, uninterrupted process by which the sap rises in the branches and broadens in the leaves, and loads the boughs with purple clusters. The repetition of similar parts is the characteristic of vegetable growth. The second brings into view more of the notion of exercise and office on the part of the limbs of the body, which do not grow without effort, and maybe diseased and disabled. Variety of parts cooperating in one growing whole is the characteristic of animal increase. The third

lifts our thoughts into the region of love and voluntary choice, and reminds us of the original distinctness of the persons who become one, because they love and therefore wish to be one. When we look up into some great tree, which to our northern eyes is a nobler type of vegetable growth than a vine, and mark the clouds of foliage, and measure how far it is from the firm bole and the deep roots to the tiny leaflet at the topmost tip of the furthest branch, we gain a wonderful image of the unity of life which permeates the Church. But still more expressive of the deep mystery which is involved in the thought of the oneness of Christ and His people is that other symbol of the body and its head. The mystery is part of the felicity of the figure. Who can explain the connection of soul and body, the process by which the thrill of a nerve becomes emotion, and the throb of a bit of grey matter in the skull a thought ? Who can tell us what life is ? Verbal definitions are plentiful enough, but they help little to the comprehension of the thing. That commonest of facts, which makes dead matter glow and move under spiritual stress, is still inexplicable after anatomist's scalpels and psychologist's abstractions have done their best to lay bare its secret. Of man in his complex nature we may reverently say, as we say of God, in whose image he is made in regard to part of his being, "clouds and darkness are round about him." We may expect no less thick darkness to rest upon that mysterious and blessed union which intakes the dust and ashes of sinful humanity into a living body, glowing and molded by the spirit of life which was in Christ. We can get no deeper down nor further back than His own claim, " I am the Life." But that union, though mysterious, is most real. It is not merely that Jesus Christ gives to those who trust and obey Him certain gifts as from without, which gifts may be possessed and retained in the absence of the Giver, but that He is in His people individually and collectively, and by His indwelling imparts life within. What keeps a body from becoming a carcase ? The life. What keeps a Church from becoming an offense and a stench? Christ, who is the Head to the body. His Church, and more than the head is to the physical body, since He is not only the sovereign Member but the all pervading Life, whose seat is not in this gland or that part of the brain, but everywhere, filling all, and quickening each part of the mighty whole with the capacity for reception and the power of action proper to it.

II Note the various and harmonious action of all the parts.

We need not inquire particularly as to the physiological doctrines underlying the metaphor of the text, or seek for the precise equivalents in the social organization of the Church for the "joints and bands" referred to. It is enough for our purpose to note the twofold office which these discharge. They receive from the Head and communicate to the body the double gifts of nutrition and unity. They originate nothing, but all which they impart they first derive from Him. However it may be in the physical body, in the spiritual analogue which is the community of Christian souls, each member has both the direct communication of life and its gifts from the Head, even Christ, and the indirect participation by means of gifts received through the brotherly mediation of others. He who has no personal access to the fountain of life, nor ever draws at first hand from it, will profit little by anything that men can say or do for him ; but, on the other hand, he who does not value and use the gifts bestowed at first on his brethren that they may filter to others, will be apt to have a disproportionate development of the life, and often to mistake his own imaginations for Christ's voice, and his own inclinations for Christ's command. Exaggerated individualism on the one side, and dependence on the reports of Christ's mind and will brought by others on the other, are equally far from the type of character which corresponds to the two facts in question, namely, that

the life which the Head imparts to His Church is imparted both by direct contact of the individual soul with its Lord, and through the medium of other members of the body. The direct communication between Jesus and the soul does not make the help of brethren superfluous. The agency of human teachers and guides or of the collective body, does not supersede the need for the direct contact of each soul with Christ. "Joints and bands" minister nutriment and compaction, but only on condition that they are fed from the true bread of life, partaken of by that faith which is the personal contact of the single soul with the sole Redeemer, and are knit to all who hold the Head, because they realize their own union to Him by their own grasp. The linked chain clasp hands and thus transmit the thrill from Him, but each unit in the chain grasps the Lord's hand with his own, or no tingle of influence will reach him through his fellows. From Jesus comes all nourishment of the Divine life, even when we think that we instruct or stimulate each other. He is the Fountain of wisdom and good, and what ever may be the vessels which bring the water to our lips, they are filled by Him and with Him. Just as the bread which we earn by the sweat of our own brows, or receive by the hospitality of others, comes in truth from a Divine hand opened to supply the wants of every living thing, so, but in still more wonderful all pervasiveness of influence, does Jesus feed all souls with the Bread which is Himself. From Jesus comes the oneness of the body. Many attempts have been made to secure that unity in other ways, and to knit other bonds than His own all present and compacting life; but these are vain, substituting mechanical and formal for real oneness. Agreement in opinions as expressed by creeds, uniformity of polity as crystallized in organizations or forms of worship, and the like, are but poor travesties of the one true principle of unity. The oneness of the branches of the vine, in which the same life manifests itself in wood and leaf and cluster, is not more unlike the artificial oneness of a bundle of faggots held together by a piece of string, than is the true oneness of the true Church of Christ to that of these artificial agglomerations. The one derived life is the only real bond of unity. In the old covenant, the seven branched candlestick represented the formal unity of Israel, which was one by reason of mere natural descent from one ancestor, and the rigid stiffness of the symbol may be taken as expressive of the mechanical and external nature of the bond which held the tribes together. But the golden candlestick lies deep in the sea, and in the new covenant order its place is taken by the seven which the seer beheld, which are one in their seven foldness because the ascended Lord walks in the midst of them. This is a better unity than that of old. The nearer, then, we draw to Jesus Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another. The radii of a circle are closer together the closer they are to the centre, and if we who stand round Jesus Christ travel each on our own direct line of progress towards Him, we shall find ourselves in closer neighborhood with separated brethren journeying to the one point to which widely removed and even opposite paths converge. Life, and life alone, resists the chemical and other forces which tend to disintegrate the physical body. Death means resolving that into its elements. Union to Jesus Christ is the bond and the power of true unity.

Since these issues of the Divine life are ministered by the members, even while all derived from the Head, we may lay to heart the manifold uses of fellowship and the need which each has of others. The true value of Church union is much obscured today, not only by the many other forms of association which fill so large a place in modern life, but also by the opposite and mutually producing exaggerations of theories in which the Church is everything and the individual nothing, and of those in which individualism is so asserted that there is scant justice done to the idea of the community. It is hard to keep the true path between these extremes. But if we give due weight to

the two short clauses of this text, " from whom " on the one hand, and " by joints and bands " on the other, we shall at least have the materials for a duly proportioned estimate of the two modes of thought, which are complementary and harmonious, though often pitted against each other.

It is not good for man to be alone, and the religious life which is developed in solitary reliance on the individual perception of truth in Christ and reception of grace from Him will usually be deformed by exaggeration of individual peculiarities, and disproportionate prominence given to fragments of truth. It is not good for man to be so lost in the community as to distrust his own judgment, enlightened by the Spirit of Christ, unless he has its sentences endorsed by the body, or to depend only on other men and on rites for spiritual supplies. "From Christ" relegates the soul in the last resort to Jesus as the Source of all its life and nourishment; "by joints and bands" bids it thankfully use brotherly mediation.

Since the laws of nourishment and growth are thus stated, each member of the whole body has its work. In these offices there is the greatest variety, just as there are many organs with different functions in the physical body. The same life is light in the eye, strength in the arm, color in the cheek, music on the tongue, swiftness in the foot. " So also is Christ." The higher we rise in the scale of being, the more the organs are differentiated, and each confined to its special function. The lowest form of life is but a sac, which can be turned inside out without harm, and has no division of labour to separate portions of the unspecialized whole. So in society, the more it is developed, the more are its members confined to ever narrower ranges of work. In primitive communities, each man does all the simple offices which any man does. The measure of "civilization" is the limitation of function. So in the Church, the effect of Christianity is to develop individual character, and also to knit men more closely together. The whole octave is needed. Diversity is the condition of harmony. Do we not, then, fail in tolerance ? We are all apt to require that all voices shall sing our part, forgetting that the whole score must be sounded in order to represent the great master's purpose. We fail in welcoming different modes of work, different reproductions of the perfect life, different reflections and refractions of the light. We fail in courage to be ourselves, to see for ourselves and to act accordingly, one after this manner and one after that. White light is produced by the blending of all rays of different hue. It needs the combination of all types of excellence and of all partial glimpses of truth to set forth the fulness of that Christ who filleth all in all, and is more than all. " All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will." Let us, then, take heed that we are good stewards of the manifold grace of God, honoring its variety of operations in the Christians most unlike ourselves, and cultivating the special form of its gifts entrusted to us, neither trying to make others like ourselves nor ourselves like others.

III Note the consequent increase of the whole.

" The increase of God " is a solemn expression, which may either refer to the increase of the Divine life in the members of the body, or to the increase of the body from without. Probably both ideas were in the apostle's mind. He would have us discriminate between other sorts of growth and that only wholesome kind, of which God is the Author which is imparted from Christ to those who, as the previous verse describes, " hold the Head." The increase of life in the Church, then, both as a community and in its separate elements, depends on the harmonious activity of all the parts. Not only does each organ contribute to health and growth, but the condition of its own health

and growth is its activity. The disused member atrophies. The used faculty is strengthened. " To him that hath shall be given." If a man in Christ desires His own religious character to be deepened, let him exercise the religion he has, and by it control his life. Let it underlie his actions, and let him translate all his creed into conduct, and set all his devout emotions to drive the wheels of daily duty. Faith exercised will become more clear and longsighted, like the sailor's keen eyes, and will see the land that is very far off, where others are aware of nothing but cloud. The true way to increase any Christlike trait of character is to give it full scope in life. The collective growth in the Divine life is also dependent on the activity of all, and sadly hampered when some are idle. A very insignificant member of the physical frame can become of immense importance by failing to do its work, and there are many professing Christians who are able by the same method to stop much progress. The dead weight of carelessness and non-participation in Christian life and service which every Church has to carry terribly retards its progress. A tiny clot of blood blocking a thread like artery can kill a man. The inert masses of nominal Christians have arrested the march of every out burst of quickened religious life, as we hear of armies of caterpillars stopping trains. So much heat has to be expended in converting ice into water, that there is little left for making the water boil and give steam. We have all more power to help than we often believe, and far more to hinder than we think. In like manner the increase of the Church from without depends on its vitality within, and on the concurrent activity of all its members. The great Lord of the household has left " to every man his work," and no one can neglect his own task without damaging the well being of the household. Great gifts designate for great work, as it is called by vulgar opinion ; but great or small are adjectives which have no place in God's judgment of our service. The smallest part of a machine is as needful as the largest for the working of the machine. Ignorant spectators admire the huge cranks and polished columns of steel which serve as pistons; but take away a screw or two half an inch long and unseen, and crank and piston are motionless. The feeble members, says Paul, are necessary. Great and small, weak and strong, are man's adjectives, often wrongly applied and always foreign to the Divine criterion of work, which is not its magnitude, but its motive and its aim. But the increase of the body from without depends not only on the action of all its parts, but on their health and vitality. Work for Christ is warranted and efficacious only when it is a consequence of life in Christ. There must first be life, and then the acts of life. And this sequence is needful to be kept steadily in view in these busy days, when so many voices urge to activity. It has come to be the fashion to engage in some kind of Christian service, and, amid all this bustle, there is danger that the inward communion, without which all the outward service lacks its consecration and its power, may be starved. The galvanized twitchings of a corpse simulate life's movements in a ghastly parody ; and much of the whipped up activity of Christian people, to which so many voices urge now, is little better than these.

There is an increase which is not " the increase of God." The vulgar worldly estimate of success invades the Church, and popular preaching, crowds to listen, wealth, social status, fine buildings, large contributions, vigorous organizations and the like, which shopkeepers would count prosperity in their business, are too often complacently pointed to as signs of a healthy Church, But all these can be attained without one tingle of the Divine life passing through the carcase. Such increase, without the deepening and spread of the quick vitality drawn from Jesus Christ, is not healthy growth, but a diseased wen, which must be excised before soundness returns, or a dropsical swelling which must be reduced. The autumn meadows are full of puffballs which look white and solid, but have nothing inside but an acrid powder. The difference between these and the ripening

fruit in the orchard, is the difference between the increase with which too many Christian communities are pleased, and that which is worthy of being called "the increase of God." It is not hard to build quickly and high, if we are content to take our mortar from the slime pits, and to make bricks a substitute for stones. But, sooner or later, the lightning will fall on the tower, and the speech of its builders be confounded, and their confederation scattered. The true building can only rise when each stone is built on the one Foundation, and all are held together by no outward bond, but by the life that pulsates through all the courses of the temple that rises through the ages for an habitation of God.

IV Note the personal hold of Jesus Christ which is the condition of all life and growth.

Nourishment, unity, growth, all come from Him, and are realized by us if we fulfill the plain condition stated in the context, and are "holding the Head." In the vine the sap rises naturally without effort on the part of tendril or leaf, and the life circulates through the body by the automatic and unconscious action of the organs. But these metaphors fail in describing the requisites for the reception of life from Jesus, and we have to make them out with the other symbol of the bride and bridegroom, in which the union of persons is ennobled, because it requires voluntary choice and conscious cleaving of the one to the other, in an effort which itself is blessedness, and is the condition of tasting the fullest sweetness of the purest joy of earth, which in its purity mirrors the heaven bending above loving hearts.

What, then, is the effort which we should put forth in order to secure the flow of Christ's life through ourselves and our Churches? The apostle uses a vigorous word, the force of which may be felt by reference to other instances of its employment. It is used to describe the action of the women after the Resurrection, when they clasped Christ's feet with the grasp of love that had passed in one astounding leap from the depth of misery to the height of rapture. It is used to describe the tight clasp with which the lame men held Peter and John, afraid that, if he let go, he would fall. So it implies a firm, almost desperate clutch, in which Love and Need, like two hands, clasp Him and will not let Him go. Such tenacious grip implies the adhesive energy of the whole nature - the mind laying hold upon truth, the heart clinging to love, the will submitting to authority. It will not be attained and continued without effort. The fingers slacken unless their grasp is continually renewed, and the appeals of sense and of the necessary tasks concerned with the material present, through they may be so answered and done as to bring us nearer to our Lord, may also part us from Him. They will certainly separate us from Him unless we have sacred times in our lives when we shut out the world and renew our hold of Him. The will has much to do with the firmness of a Christian's hold of Christ. If we honestly and earnestly resolve that, God helping us, we will not let the world and the flesh loosen our grasp of Him, we shall have a new criterion for the world's good and evil, a new test for its treasures, a new insight into what is our true felicity. That firm grasp is the indispensable condition of drawing life from Him, and the measure of our adherence to Jesus Christ is the measure of our vitality. So all the manifold duties of the Christian life come at last to be summed up in this one, of keeping close to Jesus. When Barnabas was sent down to see into the strange new phenomenon of Gentiles who had received Christ, what did he exhort these new converts, just rescued from heathenism, and weak and ignorant, to do? He did not bid them seek to acquire fuller theological knowledge, or to secure an orderly ministry of ordained men, or to organize themselves in proper fashion. All these things, if necessary, would come, if what he did enjoin were done. "He exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they

should cleave unto the Lord." Do that, and all else will follow. Hold fast by Him, like the limpet to the rock. He Himself has summed all our duty and pointed the path of safety in His parting invitation, which offers all blessedness, and enjoins a duty which love will find a sweet necessity and purest joy : " Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine ; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me."

01.10. WISE HASTE.

Chapter 10

WISE HASTE " See that ye hasten the matter."

2 Chronicles 24:5 The young King Joash, under the tutelage of the high priest Jehoiada, made up his mind to attempt a Jewish reformation. The first step was building, or at all events repairing, the neglected and ruinous temple. The king summoned the proper ecclesiastical authorities, by whose default it had come into such a condition, and instructed them immediately to take steps to gather in the necessary contributions. He does not seem to have been quite sure of his men- or, rather, he was tolerably sure of them ; for he thought it necessary to stir them with this somewhat curt and stringent exhortation : " See that you do not let the grass grow under your feet ; but hasten the matter," namely, the raising of funds. And we are told, notwithstanding, " the Levites hastened it not." Church authorities do not often much like laymen's interference with their prerogatives, and are accustomed to take matters a great deal more easily than the more impetuous outsiders, who are enthusiastic, and seek to quicken official and professional indifference. However, we need not say anything more about Joash and his lazy Levites, but take these words as a very imperative and earnest exhortation to ourselves. "See that ye hasten the matter," whatever it be that God has entrusted to you.

I There are two kinds of haste, the right and the wrong.

Haste which comes from imperfectly appropriated convictions is wrong. The seed that sprung up quickly did so because it had no depth of earth, and since it had not, it could have no length of root, and because it had no length of root it had nothing to sustain it in the scorching heat and the sunshine, and it withered away. There are many earnest people who are in such a hurry to begin Christian work - in these days of exhortation to good people to be doing something for God - and who make it their occupation so completely, that they have no time to look after the roots of their Christian life, and consequently they bear no fruit worth harvesting. The haste which seeks to abbreviate the preparatory processes of meditation and communion with God, and appropriation of His grace, is unblest haste. And, in regard to its apparent results in matters of Christian effort, the cynical saying in the Book of Proverbs will come true, " An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning ; but the end thereof shall not be blessed."

There is another kind of haste, which is a counterfeit of the true. Hurry pretends to be haste, but it is "half sister to delay." The quickness which vamps up superficial work is not the conduct enjoined on us in the words of our text. Time spent in digging deep foundations is not lost, though there is nothing above ground to show for it after many days' work. It looks rapid work to run up walls a brick and a half thick, and with scarcely any depth of foundation, but they will fall even more quickly than they were built if a gale blow.

Another kind of spurious haste we are sometimes tempted to fall into, namely, the haste which is sure to tire the worker because he began too fast. In a long footrace the competitor who is "

leading " at the first " lap " is very seldom the winner. It is better to begin at such a pace as we can keep up, than at such as takes away all our breath before we have covered half the course. Look at the work men who have for ten hours a day to use trowel or hammer. We think that we could do it twice as fast, and quite as thoroughly. So perhaps we could for a few minutes, but when the task has to be kept up all day long, and six days a week, the amateur will find out how much homely wisdom there is in the old proverb, "The more haste the less speed." Something that is " slow to begin, and never ending," is the kind of haste to be recommended. It is easy to light a fire with straw and brown paper, and it will burn up cheerily and brightly long before coals begin to smoke ; but which fire will last the longer? "See that ye hasten the matter " by all means ; but see, too, that you do not cut short the private, meditative, contemplative side of your Christian life ; and see that you do not put in superficial work ; and see that you calculate your strength and your persistence wisely, and begin at the same rate as that at which you mean to end. For when the apostle said, " Ye did run well ; what did hinder you ? " it would have been a true answer if some of the Galatians had replied, " We ran so well at first that that hindered us from keeping up the pace."

II Consider some of the fields in which the enjoined hastening of the matter is to be put in practice.

If I were now preaching to a congregation that was not so largely composed of professedly Christian people, of course the first thing that I should say would be, " See that you hasten the matter of your own personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as your Saviour." For that is the foundation of all, and "now is the accepted time." There may be some one to whom these words may come, some young man or woman, or perhaps some older person, who has been thinking and hesitating, and all but actually leaning his or her whole trust upon Christ, and who yet has delayed it. "See that ye hasten the matter."

But, then, seeing that the most of you are, at all events, nominal Christians, our exhortation is mainly to be directed to the subsequent steps of the Christian life. For instance, see that nothing comes between us and the immediate abandonment of anything and everything that we know or suspect to be wrong. There are things which cannot be done quickly, and there are some other things which can scarcely be done except quickly, and I doubt whether any man ever plucked up strongly rooted sin or fault unless he did it suddenly, and out and out, and by one supreme effort of will, which loosened the fangs of the roots. You cannot draw decayed teeth gradually. There must be a wrench. Of another of the Jewish religious reformations it is said, "The thing was done suddenly," and therefore it was thoroughly done, and so " all the people rejoiced." When the serpent came out of the heat, " and fastened upon Paul's hand," suppose he had said to himself, " Now, this thing must be done gradually. We must get rid of this evil by degrees ; it will not do to hurry the process too much." You cannot take a serpent off a man's arm at the rate of a coil a day, but must shake it into the fire as quickly as possible, with one vigorous motion at once. The beginning of all true conquest of our evil is an instantaneous resolve to cast it from us, followed by immediate, persistent, and unrelenting action. I know it will be a lifelong work. The embankments meant to bring the erratic course of the river into bounds and to keep in the floods may be swept away and have to be rebuilt. They will certainly want constant watching and frequent strengthening. But the longer and more difficult the work, the more reason for the ringing summons, " See that ye hasten the matter " since, if a thing is wrong, it cannot be given up too soon, and delay only gives the evil more power. In like manner, whenever we know a thing to be duty, do not let us delay a second in the performance of it. One of the old psalms says, " I made

haste, and delayed not, but made haste to keep Thy commandments." That is the language of all true obedience. When I was a boy, in the days when parental discipline was rather more of a reality than it is now, my father used to say, " My boy, not obedience only, but prompt obedience." Most of us, no doubt, have found out by this time that when a disagreeable duty has to be performed it is best to get it over at once. The more nauseous the draught, the more need there is to gulp it down quickly. No unwelcome tasks become any the less unwelcome by putting them off till tomorrow. It is only when they are behind us and done, that we begin to find that there is a sweetness to be tasted afterwards, and that the remembrance of unwelcome duties unhesitatingly done is welcome and pleasant. Accomplished, they are full of blessing, and there is a smile on their faces as they leave us. Undone, they stand threatening and disturbing our tranquility, and hindering our communion with God. If there be lying before you, my brother, any bit of work from which you shrink, go straight up to it and do it at once. The only way to get rid of it is to do it. In the quaint dialect of the early Quakers, "to be clear of my burden" meant to fulfill some hard task which God was felt to have enjoined ; and there is no other escape from the pressure of disagreeable duties than this, "See that ye hasten the matter."

I might apply this exhortation of our text in another direction, upon which, however, I do not need to dwell. The original application of the saying was to one form of what has too much monopolized the title of " work for God," namely, efforts directed specially to the diffusion of religion. If men dawdled at their business in the way in which they dawdle at doing their Christian work, they would all be in the bankruptcy court before the year was out. And unless we form a vigorous determination that we shall be like our Master, " unhasting " in the false sense of the word, " but unresting," and promptly filling every moment - and how elastic the moments are ! - with the service which the moment requires, we shall pass out of life with very little done. "See that ye hasten the matter."

III

Let me for a moment, before I close, suggest one or two of the plain reasons why such haste as I have been trying to describe is absolutely necessary for us.

There is so much to do, so much in perfecting our own Christian character and in winning the world for our King. "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." How little we have accomplished in all these years ! How little like our Master we are than we were five, ten, twenty years ago ! How little victory we have won over our be setting weaknesses ! How few of the habits that we long ago knew to be deleterious we have got rid of! So much waits and craves to be done. If we are slothful, the devil and his angels are not. Why does the fire engine go through crowded streets at such a pace ? Because the fire is burning at such a pace. Therefore they have to whip the horses into a gallop, and everything has to get out of the way. "See that ye hasten the matter " for the other side hastens its matters with a vengeance - so much remains to be done, and the evil is growing so fast ; every moment's delay adds so enormously to its power, and the issues at stake are so tremendous, and the Christian life which is slothful and does the work of the Lord negligently is so vapid, uninteresting, and wearisome to the liver, as compared with one crowded to the very margin with work, and that has no time for unwholesome brooding and melancholy retrospection, because it feels that so much is crying out to be done.

I need not remind you of the example of Jesus Christ and His toilsome life. At the beginning of that Gospel which is practically the Gospel of the Servant, the words seem to hurry one after another, telling the swift succession of toils and services in which He engaged, and how, like beneficent flame, He leaped from one cold, dark misery to another, bringing to each swift radiance and unwonted fire of joy. Observe those "immediatlys" and "forthwiths" and "straight ways" that crowd the first pages of Mark's Gospel. And let us take the lesson taught us by Him who Himself recognized that, even in His great work, there was need for diligence, and who Himself has told us that He shared with us one of the motives for hastening the matter which we might have thought could not belong to Him, when He said, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is called day : the night cometh, when no man can work." The night for Thee, blessed Lord ! Is there any time for Thee, O Thou Omnipotent Christ, when Thou canst not work? Yes, a time when, the conditions and limitations and associations of earth having ceased, it was no longer possible for Him to manifest the human sympathy which He delighted to give, nor to alleviate by the touch of His hand the ills that He was willing to bear. Even that thought, that so little time is left us to do so great a work, Jesus Christ shared with us, and we ought to seek to share it with Him.

There is an old curse in the Book against "the men that did the work of the Lord negligently," under the lash of which a great many Christian people today will come. And there is an old description in one of the prophets of "the doers of evil," which may well be held up as a rebuke and an exhortation to us in our poor attempts at doing good. We are told that they did it "with both hands earnestly." Some of us are contented to do good with one hand slackly, and some of us will not touch the burden "with the tip of one of our fingers." Shame, that in a universe in which unresting motion is the law of its being, and over which reigns a Father who worketh hitherto, and a Lord who works with His servants, and in which the powers of evil are ever active the laggards should be those who profess to have been bought with an inestimable price, and to be bound by the strongest and tenderest motives to a service which they discharge so ill ! Be not slothful, but work while it is called day, and "see that ye hasten the matter."

01.11. PHASES OF FAITH.

Chapter 11

PHASES OF FAITH "Many believed on Him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him . . ."

John 8:30-31 The Revised Version accurately represents the original by varying the expression in these two clauses, retaining "believed on Him" in the former, and substituting the simple "believed Him" in the latter. The variation in two contiguous clauses can scarcely be accidental in so careful a writer as the Apostle John. And the reason and meaning of it are obvious enough on the face of the narrative. His purpose is to distinguish between more and less perfect acceptance of Jesus Christ. The more perfect is the former, "they believed on Him;" the less perfect is the latter, the simple acceptance of His word on His claim of Messiahship, which is stigmatized as shallow, and proved to be transient by the context.

They were "Jews" which believed, and they continued to be so whilst they were believing. Now, the word "Jew" in this Gospel always connotes antagonism to Jesus Christ; and as for these persons, how slight and unreliable their adhesion to the Lord is, comes out in the course of the next few verses; and by the end of the chapter they are taking up stones to stone Him. So John would show us that there is a kind of acceptance which may be real, and may be the basis of something much better hereafter, but which, if it does not grow, rots and disappears; and he would draw a broad line of distinction between that and the other mental act, far deeper, more wholesome, more lasting, and vital, which he designates as "believing on Him." I take these words, then, for consideration, not so much to make them the basis of my observations, as because they afford me a starting point for the consideration of the various phases of the act of believing; its blessings and its nature, and its relation to its objects, which are expressed in the New Testament by the various connections and constructions of this word.

Now, the facts with which I wish to deal may be very briefly stated. There are three ways in which the New Testament represents the act of believing, and its relation to its Object, Christ. These three are, first, the simple one which appears in the text as "believed Him." Then there is a second, which appears in two forms, slightly different, but which, for our purpose, may be treated as substantially the same - "believing on Him." And then there is a third, which, literally and accurately translated, is, "believing unto" or "into Him." That phrase is John's favorite one, and rather unfortunately, though perhaps necessarily, it has been generally rendered by our translators by the less forcible "believing in," which gives the idea of repose, but does not give the idea of motion towards. These three, then, I think, do set forth, if we will ponder them, very large lessons as to the essence of this act of believing, as to the Object upon which it fastens, and as to the blessings which flow from it, which it will be worth our while to consider now. I may cast the whole into the shape of three exhortations - believe Him, believe on Him, believe unto Him.

I First, then, believe Christ.

We accept a man's words when we trust the man. Even if belief, or faith, is represented in the New Testament, as it very rarely is, as having for its object the words of revelation, behind that acceptance of the words lies confidence in the person speaking. And the beginning of all true Christian faith has in it, not merely the intellectual acceptance of certain propositions as true, but a confidence in the veracity of Him by whom they are made known to us - even Jesus Christ our Lord.

I do not need to insist upon that at any length here - it would take me away from my present purpose ; but what I do wish to emphasize is, that from the very starting point, the smallest germ of the most rudimentary and imperfect faith which knits a soul to Jesus Christ has Him for its Object, and is thus distinguished from the mere acceptance of truths which, on other grounds than the authority of the speaker, may legitimately commend themselves to a man.

Then believe Him. Now, that breaks up into two thoughts, which are all that I intend to deduce from it now, although many more might be suggested. The one is this, that the least and the lowest that Jesus Christ asks from us is the entire and unhesitating acceptance of His utterances as final, conclusive, and absolutely true. What ever more Jesus Christ may be. He is, by His life and words, the Communicator of Divine and certain truth. He is a Teacher, though He is a great deal more. And whatever more Christian faith may be - and it is a great deal more - it requires, at least, the frank and full recognition of the authority of every word that comes from His lips. A Christianity without a creed is a dream. Bones without flesh are very dry, no doubt ; but what about flesh without bones ? An inert, shapeless mass. You will never have a vigorous and true Christian life if it is to be molded according to the fantastic dream of these latter days, which tells us that we may take Jesus as the Guide of our conduct and need not mind about what He says to us. " Believe Me " is His requirement. The words of His mouth, and the revelations which He has made in the sweetness of His life, and in all the graciousness of His dealings, are the very unveiling to man of absolute and final and certain truth.

But, then, on the other hand, let us remember that, while all this is most clear and distinct in the teaching of Scripture, it carries us but a very short way. We find, in the instance from which we take our starting point in this sermon, the broad distinction drawn, and practically illustrated in the conduct of the persons concerned, between the simple acceptance of what Christ says, and a true faith that clings to Him for evermore. And the same kind of disparagement of the lower process of merely accepting His word is found more than once in connection with the same phrases. We find, for instance, the two which are connected in our texts used in a previous conversation between our Lord and His antagonists. When He says to them, " This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent," they reply, dragging down His claim to a lower level, " What sign showest Thou, that we may see, and believe Thee ? " He demanded belief on Himself; they answer, "We are ready to believe you, on condition that we see something that may make the rendering of our belief a logical necessity for us."

Let us lay to heart the rudimentary and incomplete character of a faith which simply accepts the teaching of Jesus Christ, and does no more. The notion that orthodoxy is Christianity, that a man who does not contradict the teaching of the New Testament is thereby a Christian, is a very old and very perilous and very widespread one. There are plenty of us who have no better claim to be called Christians than this, that we never denied any thing that Jesus Christ said, though we are

not sufficiently interested in it, I was going to say, even to deny it. This rudimentary faith, which contents itself with the acceptance of the truth revealed, hardens into mere formalism, or liquefies into mere careless indifference as to the very truth that it professes to believe. There is nothing more impotent than creeds which lie dormant in our brains, and have no influence upon our lives. I wonder how many readers of this sermon, who fancy themselves good Christians, do with their creed as the Japanese used to do with their emperor - keep him in a palace behind bamboo screens, and never let him do anything, whilst all the reality of power was possessed by another man, who did not profess to be a king at all. Do you think you are Christians because you would sign thirty nine or three hundred and ninety articles of Christianity, if they were offered to you, while there is not one of them that influences either your thinking or your conduct ? Do not let us have these " sluggish kings," with a mayor of the palace to do the real government, but set on the throne of your hearts the principles of your religion, and see to it that all your convictions be translated into practice, and all your practice be informed by your convictions. This belief in a set of dogmas, on the authority of Jesus Christ, about which dogmas we do not care a rush, and which make no difference upon our lives, is the faith that James has so many hard things to say about ; and he ventures upon a parallel that I should not like to venture on unless I were made bold by his example : " Thou believest, O vain man; thou doest well : the devils also believe, and" - better than you, in that their belief does something for them they - " believe, and tremble." But what shall we say about a man who professes himself a disciple, and neither trembles, nor thrills, nor hopes, nor dreads, nor desires, nor does any single thing because of his creed ? Believe Jesus, but do not stop there.

II Believe on Christ.

Now, as I have remarked already, and as many of you know, there is a slightly different, twofold form of this phrase in Scripture. I need not trouble you with the minute distinction between the one and the other. Both forms coincide in the important point on which I wish to touch. That representation of believing on Christ carries us away at once from the mere act of acceptance of His word on His authority to the far more manifestly voluntary, moral, and personal act of reliance upon Him. The metaphor is expanded in various ways in Scripture, and instead of offering any thoughts of my own about it, I would simply ask attention to three of the forms in which it is set forth in the Old and in the New Testaments. The first of them, and the one which we may regard as governing the others, is that in the book of the Prophet Isaiah, " Behold, I lay in Zion a Stone, a sure Foundation ; " and, as the Apostle Peter comments, " He that believeth on Him shall not be confounded." There the figure presented is the superposition of the building upon its Foundation, the rest of the soul, and the rearing of the life on the basis of Jesus Christ.

How much that metaphor says to us about Him, as the Foundation, in all the aspects in which we can apply that term ! He is the Basis of our hope, the Guarantee of our security, the Foundation Stone of our beliefs, the very Ground on which our whole life reposes, the Source of our tranquility, the Pledge of our peace. All that I think, feel, desire, wish, and do, ought to be rested upon that dear Lord, and builded there by simple faith. By patient persistence of effort rearing up the fabric of my life firmly upon Him, and grafting every stone of it - if I might so use the metaphor - into the bedding-stone, which is Christ, I shall be strong, peaceful, and pure. The storm comes, the waters rise, the winds howl, the hail and the rain "sweep away the refuge of lies," and the dwellers in these frail and foundation-less houses are hurrying in wild confusion from one peak to another,

before the steadily rising tide. But he that builds on that Foundation "shall not make haste," as Isaiah has it; shall not need to hurry to shift his quarters before the flood overtake him ; shall look out serene upon all the hurtling fury of the wild storm, and the rise of the sullen waters. So, reliance on Christ, and the honest making of Him the Basis, not of our hopes only, but of our thinking's and of our doings, and of our whole being, is the secret of security, and the pledge of peace.

Then there is another form of the same phrase, " believing on," in which is suggested not so much the figure of building upon a foundation, as of some feeble man resting upon a strong stay, or clinging to an outstretched and mighty arm. The same metaphor is implied in the word "reliance." We lean upon Christ when, forsaking all other props, and realizing His sufficiency and sweetness, we rest the whole weight of our weariness and all the impotence of our weakness upon His strong and unwearied arm, and so are saved. All other stays are like that one to which the prophet compares the King of Egypt - the papyrus reed in the Nile stream, on which, if a man leans, it will break into splinters which will go into his flesh, and make a poisoned wound. But if we lean on Christ, we lean on a brazen wall and an iron pillar, and anything is possible sooner than that that stay shall give.

There is still another form of the metaphor, in which neither building upon a foundation, nor leaning upon a support which is thought of as below what rests upon it, is suggested, but rather the hanging upon something firm and secure which is above what hangs from it. The same picture is suggested by our word " dependence." " As a nail fastened in a sure place," said one of the prophets, " on Him shall hang all the glory of His Father's house."

" Hangs my helpless soul on Thee," The rope lowered over the cliffs supports the adventurous bird-nester in safety above the murmuring sea. They who clasp Christ's hand outstretched from above, may swing over the deepest, most vacuous abyss, and fear no fall.

So, brother, build on Christ, rely on Him, depend on Him, and it shall not be in vain. But if you will not build on the sure Foundation, do not wonder if the rotten one gives way. If you will not lean on the strong Stay, complain not when the weak one crumbles to dust beneath your weight. And if you choose to swing over the profound depth at the end of a piece of pack-thread, instead of holding on by an adamant chain wrapped round God's throne, you must be prepared for its breaking and your being smashed to pieces below.

III The last exhortation that comes out of this comparative study of these phrases is - Believe into Christ. That is a very pregnant and remarkable expression, and it can scarcely, as you see, be rendered into our language without a certain harshness ; but still it is worth while to face the harshness for the sake of getting the double signification that is involved in it. For when we speak of " believing unto or into Him," we suggest two things, both of which, apparently, were in the minds of the writers of the New Testament. One is motion towards, and the other is repose in, that dear Lord.

So, then, true Christian faith is the flight of the soul towards Christ. Therein is one of the special blessedness's of the Christian life, that it has for its object and aim absolutely infinite and unattainable completeness and glory, so that unwearied freshness, inexhaustible buoyancy, end less progress, are the dower of every spirit that truly trusts in Christ. All other aims and objects are

limited, transient, and will be left behind. Every other landmark will sink beneath the horizon, where so many of our landmarks have sunk already, and where they will all disappear when the last moment comes. But we may have, and if we are Christian people we shall have, borne before us, sufficiently certain of being reached to make our efforts hopeful and confident, sufficiently certain of never being reached to make our efforts blessed with endless aspirations, the great light and love of that dear Lord, to yearn after whom is better than to possess all besides, and following hard after whom, even in the very motion there is rest, and in the search there is finding. Religion is the flight of the soul, the aspiration of the whole man after the unattainable Attainable - "that I may know Him, and be found in Him."

Oh, how such thoughts ought to shame us who call ourselves Christians ! Growth, progress, getting nearer to Christ, yearning ever with a great desire after Him ! - do not the words seem irony when applied to most of us ? Think of the average type of sluggish contentment with present attainments that marks Christian people ; tortoises in their crawling rather than eagles in their flight. And let us take our portion of shame, and remember that the faith which believes Him, and that which believes on Him, both need to be crowned and perfected by that which believes towards Him ; of which the motto is, "Forgetting the things that are behind, I reach forward to the things that are before." But there is another side to this last phase of faith. That true believing towards or unto Christ is the rest of the soul in Him. By faith that deep and most real union of the believing soul with Jesus Christ is effected which may be fitly described as our entrance into and abode in Him. The believer is as if incorporated into Him in whom he believes. Indeed, the apostle ventures to use a more startling expression than incorporation when he says that "he that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit." If by faith we press towards, by faith we shall be in Christ. Faith is at once motion and rest, search and finding, desire and fruition. The felicity of this last form of speech is its expression of both these ideas, which are united in fact as in word. A rare construction of the verb to believe, with the simple preposition , coincides with this part of the meaning of believing unto or into, and need not be separately considered. With this understanding of its meaning, we see how natural is John's preference for this construction. For surely, if he has anything to tell us, it is that the true Christian life is a life enclosed, as it were, in Jesus Christ. Nor need I remind you how Paul, though he starts from a different point of view, yet coincides with John in this teaching. For, to him, to be " in Christ " is the sum of all blessedness, righteousness, peace, and power. As in an atmosphere, we may dwell in Him. He may be the strong Habitation to which we may continually resort. One of the Old Testament words for trusting means taking refuge, and such a thought is naturally suggested by this New Testament form of expression. " I flee unto Thee to hide me." In that Fortress we dwell secure. To be in Jesus, wedded to Him by the conjunction of will and desire, wedded to Him in the oneness of a believing spirit and in the obedience of a life, to be thus in Christ is the crown and climax of faith, and the condition of all perfection. To be in Christ is life ; to be out of Him is death. In Him we have redemption ; in Him we have wisdom, truth, peace, righteousness, hope, confidence. To be in Him is to be in heaven. We enter by faith. Faith is not the acceptance merely of His Word, but is the reliance of the soul on Him, the flight of the soul towards Him, the dwelling of the soul in Him. " Come, My people, into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee . . . until the indignation be overpast."

01.12. TENT AND ALTAR.

Chapter 12

TENT AND ALTAR " Abram pitched his tent, . . . and there he builded an altar."

Genesis 12:8

Entering the land of Canaan from the north, as an emigrant from Harran would do, Abram and his company passed southwards, through the possessions of a civilized and settled race, till they reached the fertile country round Shechem, and there, in a place the luxuriant beauty of which would excite the wanderer's desire to call it his, as much as the tokens on every side of an established order would shake his confidence in his power to win it, the Divine promise was renewed. God chooses the right scenes and times for His appearances, and the very fact that Abram again received the promise of the land at the " terebinth of Moreh" implies that he then specially needed it. The reason for the gracious repetition is told us : " And the Canaanite was then in the land." Abram was brought into contact with the fierce strength which had to be met and crushed before the land could be his, and no doubt he quailed at the prospect. Therefore "the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said. Unto thy seed will I give the land." The reiterated assurance and the distant date assigned for its fulfillment would strengthen his faith and lessen his fears. Therefore with lightened heart, absolved from conflict with the Canaanites by the terms of the promise designating future generations as the conquerors, he reared an altar beside the sacred tree, to " Jehovah who appeared unto him." Quickened faith thankfully commemorates God's tender fostering of tremulous faith. But Shechem was not to be his goal. In this first journey Abram seems to intend a survey of the whole territory, and therefore he passed on still southwards towards what was afterwards to be called Bethel, and to bear a name sacred and dear in all centuries and countries. On the stony hillside to the east of Bethel, a stern contrast to the smiling fertility of Shechem, he stayed for a time, a temporary encampment there being probably less likely to be disputed than in the better place, and there once more he pitched his tent, and once more built an altar - whether for sacrifice, or like that at his previous station, simply as a memorial and declaration of his faith, does not appear. It is sufficient for our purpose to note the combination of these two acts, by which Abram inaugurated his first halting place for any lengthened stay, and as it were took possession of the land for himself and for Jehovah. The combination may suggest some useful lessons.

I

All life should blend the earthly and the heavenly. As soon as the tent is pitched, and the necessities of bodily life in some measure satisfied, the next thing is the altar of God.

Religion is meant to run through the whole of common life, not to be crowded and clotted in corners, leaving the rest of our days empty and unblessed by it. It is all very well to pray and praise and preach on Sundays; what about Saturday and Monday? It is all very well to call ourselves Christians, and to profess to belong to some ecclesiastical body or other ; what about the daily life

? Is my prayer only a matter of fixed times and perhaps formal words, or are all my days devotion ? Abram twined these two aspects of life in most intimate union, not only in this instance but habitually ; and therein is an example for us, who are so far in advance of him as regards the objects of our religion. He did not know nearly as much about God as we do ; he was not as favored with teaching of the lofty and spiritual side of religion as we are. His faith was very imperfect as far as its contents are concerned, but it had a penetrative and diffusive power in it ; perhaps to some extent owing to its less transcendent and lofty character, which may well shame us, who, with a fuller knowledge, and the material for a loftier and more all pervasive faith, manage to make such ghastly separation between the two halves of the devout life, and keep the heavenly and its principles so widely apart from the earthly and its practices. There is no sanity, nor sweetness, nor nobleness in earthly life, unless through and through, as light is flashed into some dull, dense, watery cloud, it be shot and interpenetrated with the light of the mighty and ennobling principles that flow from the gospel ; and no religion is worth being called so, nor has it any pith of reality in it, unless it has force to press into the most close grained solids and most minute trifles, and into them to infuse its hallowing and ennobling spirit, working like lifting leaven on lumpish dough. By the side of every tent in which we dwell we should raise an altar to God.

Today, millenniums after this man lived, and amongst people who do not share either his faith or ours, namely, the Mohammedan populations of the East, the name for Abraham is "the Friend" - the Friend of God, that is. The expression is borrowed from Scripture. Whatever besides that name may express, this at all events is distinctly set forth by it, that the salient characteristics of the patriarch's life was close and habitual intimacy with God. That communion did not interfere with the whole hearted discharge of common duties, the simple enjoyment of common blessings, or the heroic readiness to rise to difficult heights of uncommon sacrifice or effort. Like all the Old Testament "saints," he came " eating and drinking," marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling and getting gain, and practicing in all a wholesome religion which sought for no solitary, supercilious, or selfish separateness, but "Traveled on life's common way In cheerful godliness," filling all occupations and circumstances with a new spirit, and so finding in things of smallest worth materials for a sacrifice more costly than much fine gold. The fact that he and all these Old Testament " saints " were " men of affairs," and not recluses, and that their religion did not impel them to a new mode of life, but to a new way of doing the old things, may well teach us how close the blending of our religious and our common life should be. But not only do Abraham and the men of faith, who lived by faith before it had a historical Christ to grasp, read us this lesson. The worshipers of less pure gods do so too. It is not often that one finds a Christian as little ashamed of practicing his religion and presenting his worship before unsympathizing onlookers as Turks or idolaters are. True, the very fact that to them religion is so much a matter of external observance makes it easier for them to practice the external observances in any circumstances. But, making all allowance for that, I venture to say that there is not a false faith on the face of the earth which does not preach a lesson and administer a rebuke to us Christian people in regard of this one matter, the way in which religion and life - a very poor religion, no doubt, and a very imperfect life - touch each other at all points ; and because they thus touch, are really one. Does our better religion so interpenetrate our lives? Have we this same experience of making every act worship, and of carrying the motives and strengths drawn from our gospel into every corner of our daily life. Go back in thought over today. Can you lay your finger upon a single act that you have done today which would have been done differently if you had not believed that Jesus Christ loved you ? Can

you lay your finger upon any inclination that you have abstained from gratifying because you knew that loyalty to Him forbade your yielding ? I hope the answer is not in the negative universally; but oh, how faint, how few, scattered through our lives like points, or as stars thinly sown in the vacant regions of the sky, are the moments and the acts in which we have lived like Christians, and carried our religion into our shops and commerce, and our studies and our daily duties !

Let us take the pattern from Abram, who " pitched his tent, and builded an altar."

II Another lesson may be suggested. The family should be a Church. In the old patriarchal times, before priesthood had attained to any development, the head of the family or clan, the patriarch, was priest. Abram built the altar, and Abram offered the sacrifice. In the New Testament we find a number - relatively a large number, and absolutely a considerable number, of households - all the members of which were Christians. We read, too, of more than one instance in the house of some Christian, which expression must at least include the idea of domestic worship and household religion, whether other Christians than those of the family belonged to that " Church " or no. In days not beyond the memories - the thankful memories - of some of us, it was understood that a Christian household was one in which the father and mother taught their children. It was considered, too, that it meant a household in which there was family worship.

Now although I do not know, and therefore will not take upon me to affirm, I do shrewdly suspect and therefore venture to ask, whether these things are so now as generally as they once were. I wonder how many households in our class of Christian society there are, in which father and mother think that they have done their duty to their children when they have sent them to the Sunday school, while they are idle at home ; and I wonder how many there are who never open their lips in their houses, as leading the devotions of their family. Suffer the word of exhortation. I believe that one reason why some aspects of religious life are dark and unpromising at this time is the decay of family religion as expressed in family worship and family instruction in the households of professing Christians. " Abram pitched his tent, and builded an altar."

III Further, let me ask you to note here the illustration of another thought. God should get our best. A black camel's hair tent, with a couple of sticks at either end of it to hold up the roof, and a peg or two in the ground to fasten the ropes to, was neither expensive nor difficult to set up. Ten minutes would do that. That was quite enough for Abram. But he gathered the great stones of the place together, and built the altar. As for the tent, it is sufficient that it be pitched anywhere, with little expenditure of time and trouble. It is to come down tomorrow, and while it stands its purpose is only the shelter of myself. But as for the altar, with toil and strain of muscle, and many a deep breath and drop of sweat from the brow, roll the great stones together, and lay them true, without trace of tool on them, but majestic in simplicity, to witness to the massive solidity of the faith which reared them, and the unadorned, uncontaminated purity of the revelation of the God for whose worship they were laid.

" Lo ! I dwell within cedar, and the ark of the Lord dwells within curtains," said David. Whose fault was that, David ? Did you not build the house of cedar before you thought about a house for God ? We do the opposite of what Abram did. Most of us build our own houses, and, if there are any stones left over, are good enough to spare them for building some altar to God. We give Him the superfluities. We allow Him the second place, thinking about self first ; and so losing all the blessings of thorough consecration and noble surrender, and of yielding up what is highest to Him

who is the Highest. Give God the best - that is the minimum of duty ; for unless we do, we give Him nothing.

" Give all thou canst !

High Heaven rejects the lore Of nicely calculated less or more." Do not think that anything of your own is worthy of as sedulous care, as generous bestowment, as intense effort, as thorough devotion, as is the service of the Lord. I do not mean in material things only, because the true wealth of a man is not the abundance of the things that he possesses, and that best which we are to give to God is not merely the best portion of the things that belong to us, but the best devotion of our hearts - their best affections ; the strongest resolve of obedient wills, the intensest desire of aspiring spirits, the fullest consecration of surrendered lives, the firmest confidence of reliant, and therefore loving and obedient hearts. Give God the superiorities of your nature, whatever you keep for yourselves ; and try so to blend the motive of devotion to Him with all action of heart and mind, as that there shall be nothing retained from Him to whom the best is consciously given.

IV Lastly, this incident may suggest to us how building for God lasts, while building for ourselves perishes. The tent has disappeared ; the altar remains. I dare say these stones halfway between Bethel and Ai are there still, standing where and as Abram piled them, though hard to find, and impossible to identify amid the rocks and ruins that strew the face of the land around. What has become of his tent? It was pitched for a little while. In his nomad life it was struck soon, and no trace remained but a little heap of rubbish, and a circle of charred ashes where the fire had glistened cheerily for a day or two. All was gone but the altar. In the great cities of antiquity which the spade is now laying bare for us, what has become of the houses which the people built for themselves? Gone - where the snow and the rain of the years when they were built have gone. It is the temples that are left, in the marsh which is now where Ephesus once was; in the desolation which is now where Babylon once was ; beneath the mounds which are now where Heliopolis once was. The houses of the people are gone ; the temples of the gods remain. Which things are an allegory. " He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap," and of selfish lives there will be nothing left but a foul flavor and a bad memory. "The world passeth away, and the fashion thereof: he that doeth the will of God shall abide for ever." It was Abraham's religion that made him dwell in tents. He came from a settled civilization, where there were cities, as we can see in the narratives. He came into a settled civilization, where there was city life, and plenty of stone houses if he had chosen to go into them. " He dwelt in tabernacles ; for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." If we in like manner have come to fix and anchor our lives on the only permanent, and to feel ourselves parts of that great order which lives beyond the grave and above the stars, we shall be penetrated with a sense of the transiency of all things here below, and so be well contented to pitch but a moving tent for ourselves, if we can, by God's grace, lay were it even one stone in the temple which, through all the ages, is rising, on the one Foundation, unto Him.

01.13. THE FORGIVING SON OF MAN

Chapter 13 THE FORGIVING SON OF MAN

" That ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith He to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house."

Matthew 9:6 The great example of our Lord's teaching, which we call the Sermon on the Mount, is followed in this and the preceding chapter by a similar collection of His works. These are arranged by the evangelist with some care in three groups, each consisting of three miracles, and separated from each other by other matter. The miracle to which our text refers is the last member of the second triad, of which the others are the stilling of the tempest and the casting out of demons from the two men in the country of the Gadarenes.

One can discern a certain likeness in these three incidents. In all of them our Lord appears as the Peace bringer. But the spheres in which He works are different in each. The calm which was breathed over the stormy lake was peace, but of a lower kind than that which filled the souls of the demoniacs when the power that agitated them and made discord within had been cast out. Even that peace was lower in kind than that which brought repose by assurance of pardon to this poor paralytic. Forgiveness is a loftier blessing than even the casting out of demons. The manifestation of power and love rises steadily to a climax. The text subordinates the mere miracle to the authoritative assurance of pardon, and thus teaches us that the most important part of the incident is not the healing of disease, but the accompanying forgiveness of sins. Here we have noteworthy instruction given by our Lord Himself as to the relation between His miracles and that perpetual work of His, which He is doing through the ages and today, and will do for us, if we will let Him. It towers high above the miracle, and the miracle is honored by being its attestation. We deal, then, with this narrative as suggesting great principles over and above the miraculous fact.

I Man's deepest need is forgiveness.

How strangely irrelevant and wide of the mark seems Christ's response to the eager zeal of the bearers and the pleading silence of the sufferer ! " Son," — or as the original might more accurately and tenderly be rendered, "Child," — "be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." That sounded far away from their want. It was far away from their wish ; but it was the direct answer to the man's true need. Possibly in this case the disease was the result of early profligacy —

"A sin of flesh avenged in kind."

Probably, too, the paralytic felt, whatever his four kindly neighbors may have done, that what he needed most was pardon ; for Christ casts not His pearls before eyes that cannot see their luster, nor offers His gift of pardon to hearts unwounded by the consciousness of sin. The long hours of compelled inactivity may have been not unvisited by remorseful memories, and the conscience may have Stirred in proportion as the limbs stiffened. Be that as it may, it is to be observed that our Lord points to the miracle as a proof of His power to pardon, given not to the palsied man, but to

the cavilers standing by, as if the former needed no proof, but had grasped the assurance while it was yet unverified. Thus both Christ's declaration and the swift acceptance of it seem to imply that in that motionless form stretched on its pallet an inward tempest of penitence and longing raged, which could only be stilled by something far deeper than any bodily healing. At all events, the plain lesson from Christ's treatment of the case is that our deepest need is pardon. Is not our relation to God the most important and deep reaching relation that we sustain ? If that be right, will not every thing else come right ? As long as that is wrong, will not everything be wrong? And is it not true that, whatever may be our surface diversities, we all have this in common, that we are sinners ? King and clown, philosopher and fool, cultured and ignorant, are alike in this, that " all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Royal robes and fustian jackets cover the same human heart, which in all is gone astray, and in all writhes more or less consciously under the same unrest, the consequence and token of separation from God.

Hence is seen the wisdom of Christ and the adaptation of His gospel to all men, in that it does not trifle with symptoms, but goes direct to the deep lying and often latent disease. It is waste time and energy to dally with surface and consequential evils. The only way of making the fruit good is to make the tree good, and then it will bring forth according to its kind. Cooling draughts and waterbeds are alleviations for the sick, but the cure must be something more potent. The fountal source of sorrow is sin, for even to the most superficial observation, the greater part of every man's misery comes either from his own wrongdoing or from that of others; and, for the rest of it, the judgment of faith which accepts the declaration of God regards it as needed because of sin, in order to discipline and purify. The first thing to do in order to stanch men's wounds and redress their misery is to make them pure, and the first thing to do in order to make them pure is to assure them of God's forgiveness for their past impurity. So the sarcasms which are often launched at religious men for " taking tracts to people when they want bread," and the like, are excessively shallow, and simply indicate that the critic has but superficially diagnosed the disease, and is therefore woefully wrong about the needed medicine. God forbid that we should say a word that even seemed to depreciate the value of other forms of philanthropic effort, or to be lacking in sympathy and admiration for the enthusiasm that fills and guides many self sacrificing and earnest workers amid the squalor and vice of our complex and half barbarous " civilization." It is the plain duty of Christian people heartily to rejoice in and to help all such work, and to recognize it as good and blessed, being as it is a direct consequence of the Christian view of the solidarity of humanity and of the stewardship of possession. But we must go a great deal deeper than aesthetic, or intellectual, or political, or economic reforms can reach before we touch the real reason why men are miserable. The black wellhead must be stanchd, or it is useless trying to drain the bog and make its quaking morass solid, fertile soil. We shall effectually and certainly cure the misery only when we begin where the misery begins, and where Christ began, and deal first with sin. The true "saviour of society " is he who can go to his paralyzed and wretched brother, and, as a minister declaring God's heart, can say to him, " Be of good cheer ; thy sins be forgiven thee." Then the palsy will go out of the shrunken limbs, and a new energy will come into them, and the sufferer will rise, take up his bed, and walk.

II Forgiveness is exclusively a Divine act.

We read that there were sitting by, with jealous and therefore blind eyes, a company of learned men, religious formalists of the first water, gathered, as one of the ether evangelists tells us, out of

every corner of the land, as a kind of ecclesiastical inquisition, or board of triers, to report on this young Galilean Teacher, whom His disciples unauthorizedly called Rabbi. They were unmoved by the dewy pity in Christ's gaze as by the nascent hope beginning to swim up into the paralytic's dim eyes. But they had a keen scent for heresy, and so they fastened with sure instinct on the one questionable point, " This man speaketh blasphemies. Who can forgive sins but God only?" Formalists, whose religion is mainly a bundle of red tape tied round men's limbs to keep them from getting at things that they would like, are blind as bats to the radiant beauty of lofty goodness, and insensible as rocks to the wants of sad humanity. But still these scribes and doctors were perfectly right in the principle which they conceived Jesus to be outraging. Forgiveness is an exclusively Divine act. Of course it is so. Sin is the perversion of our relation to God, The word " sin " implies God, and is meaningless unless the deed be thought of in reference to Him. The same act may be regarded as being sin, or crime, or vice. As sin, it has to do with God; as crime, it has to do with public law and with other men ; as vice, it has to do with the standard of morality, and may affect myself alone. The representatives of national law can pardon crime. The impersonal tribunal of morals is silent as to the forgiveness of vice. God alone has to do with vice or crime considered as sin, and He alone against whom only we have sinned can pardon our transgression.

God only can forgive sins, because the essential in forgiveness is not the remission of external penalty, but the unrestrained flow of love from the offended heart of Him who has been sinned against. When you fathers and mothers forgive your children, does the pardon consist simply in sparing the rod ? Does it not much rather consist in this, that your love is neither deflected nor embittered any more, by reason of your child's wrongdoing, but pours on the little rebel, as before the fault ? So God's forgiveness is at bottom, " Child, there is nothing in My heart to thee but pure and perfect love." Our sins fill the sky with mists, through which the sun itself cannot but look a red ball of lurid fire. But it shines on the upper side of the mists all the same and all the time, and thins them away and scatters them utterly, and shines forth in its own brightness on the rejoicing heart. Pardon is God's love, unchecked and unembittered, granted to the wrongdoer. That is a Divine act exclusively. The carping doctors were quite right ; "no man can forgive sins but God only."

Such forgiveness may coexist with the retention of some penalties for the forgiven sin. " Thou wast a God that forgavest them, and Thou tookest vengeance on their inventions." When sins are crimes they are generally punished. The penalties of sins considered as vices or breaches of the standard of morality are always left. For the evil thing done has entered into the complex whole of the doer's past, and its "natural issues" are not averted, though their character is modified, when they are borne in consciousness of God's forgiveness. Then they become merciful chastisement, and therefore tokens of the Father's love. The true penalty of evil, considered as sin, is wholly abolished for the man whom God forgives, for that penalty is separation from God, which is the only real death, and he who is pardoned and knows that he is, knows also that he is joined to God by the pouring on him, unworthy, of that infinitely placable and patient love. Pardon is love rising above the black dam which we have piled up between us and God, and flooding our hearts with its glad waters.

We might add here, though it be somewhat apart from our direct purpose, that the forgiveness of sin is a possibility, in spite of modern declarations that it is not. Many confident voices say so now, and when we venture to ask, with the humility which becomes a mere believer in Christianity when addressing our modern wise men, why forgiveness is impossible, we are referred to the iron links

of necessary connection between a man's present and his past, and assured that in such a universe as we live in, neither God nor man can prevent the seed sown from springing, and the sower from reaping what he has sown. But we may take heart to answer that we, too, believe that " whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," and then may ask what that has to do with the Scripture doctrine of forgiveness, which leaves that solemn law quite untampered with, in so far as the iron links which the objectors contemplate are concerned, and proclaims this as the very heart of God's pardon, that the sinful man, who forsakes his sin and trusts in Christ's sacrifice, will be treated as if his sin were non-existent, in so far as it could interfere with the flow of the full tide of God's love. But we need a definite conveyance of this Divine forgiveness to ourselves. If we have ever been down into the cellars of our own hearts and seen the ugly things that creep and sting there, a vague trust in a vague mercy from a half hidden God will not be enough for us. The mere peradventure that God is merciful is too shadowy to grasp, and too flimsy for a troubled conscience to lean on. No thing short of the King's own pardon, sealed with His own seal, is valid ; and unless we can come into actual contact with God, and hear, somehow, with infallible certitude from . His own lips His assurance of forgiveness, we shall not have enough for our souls' needs.

III Christ claims and exercises this Divine prerogative of forgiveness. The fact that Jesus answered the muttered thought of these critics might have convinced them that He exercised other Divine prerogatives, and read men's hearts with a clearer eye than ours. He must be rightly addressed as " Lord" of whom it can be said, " There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo. Thou knowest it altogether." If He possess the Divine faculty of reading hearts. He is entitled to exercise the Divine power of forgiving what He discerns there. But mark His answer to the objectors. He admits their premises completely. They said, " No man can forgive sins, but God only." Now, if Jesus were only a man like the rest of us, standing in the same relation to God as other saints, prophets, and teachers, and having nothing more to do with God's forgiveness than simply to say to a troubled heart, as any of us might do, " Brother, cheer up ; I tell you that God forgives you and all who seek His pardon ; " if His words to the paralytic were, in His intention, only ministerial and declaratory ; — then He was bound, by all the obligations of a religious Teacher, to turn to the objectors and tell them that they misapprehended His meaning. Why did He not say to them in effect, "I speak blasphemies ! No, I do not mean that. I know that God alone forgives, and I am only telling our poor brother here, as you might also do, that He does. The blasphemy exists only in your misunderstanding of My meaning " ? But Christ's answer is not in the least like this, though every sane and devout teacher of religion would certainly have answered so. In effect He says, " You are quite right. No man can forgive sins, but God only. I forgive sins. Then whom think ye that I, the Son of man, am ? I claim to forgive sins. It is easy to make such a claim, easier than to claim power to raise this sick man from his bed, because you can see whether his rising follows the word, whereas the other claim cannot be visibly sub-substantiated. Both sentences are equally easy to say, both things equally impossible for a man to do ; only the doing of the one is visible, and of the other is not. I will do the visible impossibility, and then you can judge whether I have the right which I allege to do the invisible one."

Clearly there is in this answer of Jesus a distinct claim to forgive sins as God does. The objection which He meets and the manner of meeting it alike forbid us to take " power to forgive sins " in this context in any but the highest Divine sense. Now, this claim seems to bring us face to face with a very distinct alternative, which I venture to urge on your consideration. To offer the choice of being

impaled on one or other horn of a dilemma is not the best way of convincing hesitating minds of the truth ; but still it is fair, and to some may be cogent, to say that a very weighty " either ... or " is here forced on us. Either the Pharisees were right, and Jesus Christ, the meek, the humble, the religious Sage, the Pattern of all self-abnegation, the sweet reasonableness of whose teaching eighteen centuries have not exhausted nor obeyed, was an audacious blasphemer, or He was God manifest in the flesh. The whole incident compels us, in all honest interpretation, to take His words to the sick man as the Pharisees took them, as being the claim to exercise an exclusively Divine prerogative. He assumed power to blot out a man's transgressions, and vindicated the assumption, not on the ground that He was but declaring or bringing the Divine forgiveness, but on the ground that He could do what no mere man could. If Jesus Christ said and did anything like what this narrative ascribes to Him — and if we know anything at all about Him, we know that He did so — there is no hypothesis as to Him which can save His character for the reverence of mankind, but that which sees in Him the Word made flesh, the world's Judge, from whom the world may receive, and from whom alone it can certainly receive, Divine forgiveness.

IV Jesus Christ brings visible witnesses of His invisible power to forgive sins. Of course the miracle of healing the paralytic was such evidence in very complete and special form, inasmuch as it and the forgiveness which it was wrought to attest were equally Divine acts, beyond the reach of man's power. We may note, too, that our Lord here teaches us the relative importance of these two, subordinating the miraculous healing to the higher work of giving pardon. But we may permissibly extend the principle, and point to the subsidiary external effects of Christianity in the material and visible sphere of things as attestations of its inward power, which only he who feels his burden of sin falling from his shoulders at the cross knows as a matter of experience. The manifest effects of the Christian faith on individuals, and of the less complete Christian faith which is diffused through society, do stand as strong proofs of the reality of Christ's claim to exercise the power to forgive. The visible results of every earnest effort to carry the gospel to men, and the effects produced in the lives of the recipients, do create an immense presumption in favour of the reality of the power which the gospel proclaims that Jesus exercises. We may admit the extravagance, the coarseness, the narrowness, which too often deform such efforts, and dwarf the spiritual stature of their converts ; but when the bitterest criticism has blown away much as froth, is there not left in the cup a great deal which looks and tastes very like the new wine of the kingdom ? Passions tamed, hopes hallowed, new and noble direction given to aspirations, self subdued, the charities of life springing like flowers where were briars and thorns or waste barrenness, homes made Bethels, houses of God, that were pandemonium's, — these and the like are the witnesses that Jesus Christ advanced no rash claims, nor raised hopes which He could not fulfill, when He said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." Wherever Christ's forgiving power enters a heart, life is beautified, purified, and ennobled, and secondary material benefits follows in its train. We have a right to claim the difference between so called Christian and non Christian lands as attestations of the reality of Christ's saving work. It is a valid answer to much of the doubt of today ; — If you wish to see His credentials, look around. His own answer to John's messengers still remains applicable : " Go and tell John the things that ye see and hear." There are miracles, palpable and visible, still wrought by Jesus Christ, more convincing than were those to which the forerunner was directed when his faith faltered. It is still true that " His name, through faith in His name, makes men whole," and that in presence of unbelievers, who may test the cure. Still the dead are raised, deaf ears are opened, dormant faculties are quickened, and, in a thousand channels, the quick spirit of life flows

from Jesus, and " everything lives whither soever that river Cometh." Let any system of belief or of no belief do the like if it can. This rod has budded, at all events. Let the modern successors of Jannes and Jambres, who have found out that Christianity is a " creed outworn," and Jesus an exhausted Source of power, do the same with their enchantments.

These thoughts yield two very plain lessons. One is addressed to professing followers of Jesus Christ. You say that you have received in the depths of your spirit the touch of His forgiving hand, blotting out your sins. No body can tell whether you have or not, but by observing your life. Does it look as if your profession were true ? The world takes its notions of Christianity a great deal more from you, its professors, than it does from preachers or apologists. You are the books of evidences which most men read. See to it that your lives worthily represent the redeeming power of your Lord, and that men, looking at your beautiful, holy, and gentle life, may be constrained to say, " There must be something in the religion that makes him such a man." The other lesson is for us all. Since we are all alike in that forgiveness is our deepest need, let us seek to have that prime and fundamental necessity supplied first of all; and since Jesus Christ assures us that He exercises the Divine prerogative of forgiveness, and gives us materials for verifying His claim by the visible results of His power, let us all go to Him for the pardon which we need most of all our needs, and which He and only He can give us. Do not waste your time in trying to purify the stream of your lives, miles down from its source ; but let Him heal it, and make the bitter waters sweet at the Fountainhead. Do not fancy, friend, that your palsy or your fever, your paralysis of will towards good, or the diseased ardor with which you follow evil and the consequent restless misery, can be healed anywhere besides. Go to Christ, the forgiving Christ, and let Him lay His hand upon you, and from His own sweet and infallible lips listen to the blessed words that shall work like a charm in all your nature, " Son, be of good cheer ; thy sins be forgiven thee ; " " Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole ; depart in peace." Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing. Then limitations, sorrows, and the diseases of the spirit shall pass away, and forgiveness will bear fruit in joy and power, in holiness, health, and peace.

01.14. CHRIST'S "VERILY, VERILY".

Chapter 14 CHRIST'S "VERILY, VERILY."

"Verily, verily, I say unto you."

John 1:51

We owe the preservation of this remarkable form of asseveration to this evangelist. In the other Gospels the single " Verily " habitually appears, but the double never ; while in John's Gospel the double occurs some twenty-five times, and the single not at all. Most of us are, no doubt, aware that the word rendered "Verily" is the simple " Amen," which properly means " firm " or "steadfast." It is used sometimes to confirm an assertion which follows it, and sometimes to sum up a prayer which precedes it. In the former case its force is, "Thus it certainly is ; " in the latter it may be paraphrased, "So may it be." Its reduplication gives emphasis, and may be regarded as a superlative, "Most certainly." This doubled form of the phrase is used by Christ only. It becomes no other lips. It may be useful to ponder its significance, and to bring together the various declarations which our Lord heralds by this solemn attestation. We may learn from the study lessons of three kinds - as to the authority of the Teacher, the certainty and importance of His teaching, and as to the duty of the scholars.

I First, then, we note what that doubled "Verily" claims for the Teacher.

Nothing is more remarkable and distinctive in our Lord's words than their air of authority, combined with the most perfect gentleness, meekness, and humility. He lays down His bare word before us, as if saying, " Accept this because I say it," and for no other reason. Such a tone is unique, at least among sane teachers. There have been fanatics and self-deceived enthusiasts in abundance, who have clashed down their unsupported assertions before men, and insisted on their reception; but they have been over whelmed by universal scorn, or by still more galling laughter. One Teacher alone has succeeded in persuading men that He had a right to speak thus, and been taken at His own valuation. The phenomenon is absolutely unique. Contrast the authoritative ring of this doubled "Verily, verily," with the prophets' standing formula, " Thus saith the Lord." The loftiest of the inspired men who dwelt nearest the throne of the Ineffable, and were in fullest possession of the secret of the Lord, never ventured to obtrude or even to show their own personality, but hid themselves behind the word of which they were but the vehicles. Christ never uses their manner of speech, and seeks not, as they did, to secure acceptance for His utterances by tracing them to the Lord ; but while He declares that He speaks that which He heard of the Father, He separates His manner of hearing from that of ordinary inspiration as much as He does His manner of communicating the thing heard from that of other organs of the Divine Word. " Thus saith the Lord" was the seal impressed on the prophetic word; "I say unto you " is the characteristic of Christ's. Thus He stands above the prophets, by whom at sundry times and in divers manners God spake unto men, being not only, as they were, messengers, but Himself the Message.

Contrast His authoritative teaching with that sort which was in vogue in Palestine at the time. We are told that to understand Jesus we must study the rabbinical teaching of His day, in which we shall find the germs of His. That teaching is well worthy of study by competent persons, and affords much interesting material for the elucidation of the Gospels; but the verdict of the generation which heard both it and Jesus is nearer the truth than the modern idea that He was only a Rabbi of a better sort. The difference between Him and the doctors of the Law, not the likeness, was what struck the people who were familiar with both. " They were astonished at His doctrine : for He taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes." However little they apprehended the substance of His teaching, they felt the difference in its manner from that to which they were accustomed ; and the difference lay precisely here, in the tone of authority with which He spoke. The rabbis and scribes founded their decisions on tradition, as any one who reads a page of the Talmud will see. Rabbi This says so and so ; Rabbi That says thus. Rabbi A, in the name of Rabbi B, said this ; and so on to weariness. They passed from one to another some stale drops of water drawn long ago by other hands. Jesus Christ stood forth among these retailers of other men's wisdom, from which any freshness that it ever had possessed had evaporated, as a fresh Fountain of certitude and truth, and " cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink." In His own Being are hidden the springs of wisdom and knowledge. His word is sovereign, and He has learned from no man. The contrast of His manner of teaching with that of the doctors His contemporaries is more important, and leads to truer conceptions of His nature and work than any fortuitous and isolated resemblances in specific sayings, which may be discovered, though these were more numerous and striking than they have yet been shown to be.

Contrast Christ's "Verily, verily," with the tone suitable to all thinkers who have learned the truths which they preach, and have come to apprehend them through meditation or study. It becomes them to argue. Christ asserts. The thinker shows the path by which he has cut his way through the tangled under woods of error into the open where he sees the sky. Christ never speaks as if any previous ignorance or doubt had been His experience. He never traces His illumination to others. He never takes the place of a learner, either in the moment of speaking or in any previous time. He seldom or never supports His utterances by reasons, even although many of them are by no means self evident or axiomatic. The virtues of all other servants and missionaries of truth, humility, self oblivion, calm allegation of grounds for statements, acknowledgment of having grown by degrees to the apprehension of truth, are entirely absent in Jesus Christ. He clashes down His bare word before us, if we may so say, and bids us take it, simply and solely because it is His. As one of our old divines has it, " Man is problematical ; Christ is dogmatical." And yet the world has recognized in this Teacher, who does the very things that would ruin any other teacher's reputation and influence, as the true " Master of those who know," and exalts Him as the Pattern and realized Ideal of what the guide of men should be. Strange that such an anomalous Master should have won such disciples ! Stranger still that so many of them should so little understand the Master whom they profess to accept, as to be blind to the meaning of that anomaly in His method ! For if we once recognize this peculiarity in Christ's teachings, we should not stop till we have dealt fairly with the question, What right had Jesus to speak thus ? Why should I take from His lips, on the authority of His bare word, what He chooses to say to me ? By what title does He assume the place of a Teacher who has done all that is required of Him when He asserts? Surely there is but one answer possible to such questions. It cannot be too strongly stated or too often reiterated that the authority which He claims is unwarrantable usurpation unless He is "the Word of God." Unless

we are prepared to accept Jesus as standing in an altogether different relation to the truth which He utters from that in which other men stand to those truths which they have attained to perceive, we cannot vindicate His method of teaching from the charge of arrogance, nor His character from a serious and well nigh filial flaw. But if it be the fact that He not merely apprehended, but was, the Truth, then we can understand His self assertion, inasmuch as the self manifestation of His personality is the fullest declaration and vindication of the Truth, which He is. Then, bowing before Him in whom the fulness of the wisdom of God did bodily dwell, and receiving Him as the Word who is the self revelation of God and the Light of men, we learn the deep significance of His method. Only on the ground of His Divine authority is He vindicated from the charge of arrogant presumption, when instead of argument He gives Himself, and does not deign to commend His deepest and most mysterious utterances by any other reason for our acceptance of them than this, " Verily, verily, I say unto you."

II Let me point out what this formula implies as to the certitude and impertinence of Christ's lessons.

" Verily, verily," is substantially equivalent to " Most certainly," and by its attachment to certain sayings of our Lord's, these are placed as in His estimation beyond cavil or hesitation. Other teachers have to say, " Peradventure," or " This I deem to be true ;" but Jesus asserts, with unfaltering confidence, the irrefutable certitude and immovable stability of His utterances, and lays them down for the foundation of all pure thinkings on the subjects which they touch. In such a day as this, when all things seem to be cast into the cauldron again, and the firmest institutions and beliefs are melting away in the heat, the world needs, more perhaps than ever it did, to listen to that Voice, so calm and quiet, which yet rises clear above the hubbub of men, proclaiming their doubts or questionings, and speaks to us the ultimate and eternal truths on which mind, heart, and spirit can build, and, building, be at rest. Much is dark, much in organized institutions and written creeds is doubtful and perishable ; but here at least is a central core of solid rock, which no pressure can cause to crumble nor any force shift : " Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a Stone, a tried Corner Stone, a sure Foundation."

Think of the difference between the freshness and adaptation to the wants of this day, of the words of Jesus Christ, and the film of old fashioned remoteness which has crept over all sayings of all the wise men of the past, except Himself, and tell us what is the secret of the immortal youth and close fittingness of this Man's words. How happens it that today, amidst a world so different outwardly and inwardly from the simple life amid the Galilean hills, where these words were first spoken, they come as close to us, and in many respects even closer than they did to those who heard them first? How happens it, except because they are so limpidly free from all admixture of the soil that there is nothing in them to decay, and hence all ages may drink and find them sparkling and fresh? Christ's words have no marks of human limitations, and therefore no fate of transitoriness, but are to every generation the basis of certitude. That sure foundation abides, like the massive blocks still to be seen in their places in the walls of Jerusalem, on which a hundred generations have looked as they passed into oblivion, and which still remain sharp cut and solid as on the long forgotten day when they were first laid. Christ's " Verily, verily," guarantees the absolute certainty of the truths which it heralds.

Further, this formula declares the importance of His teachings which are introduced by it. It calls special attention to these, and is, as it were, an underscoring of them, or printing them in italics. As I have already remarked, these truths are often by no means self evident. On the contrary, the utterances to which Jesus attaches the double " Verily " are usually those which deal with most recondite and profound teachings. A rough classification of the instances of the occurrence of the phrase, however imperfect it must necessarily be within our limits, may serve in some measure to bring out the importance of the truths commended to us by it. First, then, it points attention to teachings concerning Himself. With it He calls us to believe, on His authority, in His preexistence : " Before Abraham was, I am." With it He asserts His unity of being and identity of action with the Father: "The Son can do nothing of Himself; but what soever things the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." He assumes the office of medium of all communication between earth and heaven: "Ye shall see the heavens open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." He claims to be the means by which men enter the fold of God : " I am the Door of the sheep." He asserts that He is the infallible Teacher, speaking from personal experience of unseen things : " We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." He presents Himself as the God-given Source and Sustenance of true life : " My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven." He promises the certain acceptance of all prayer truly offered in His name : " What soever ye shall ask of the Father in My name. He will do it." Finally, He proclaims that He must die 'in order to accomplish His life-giving purpose and mission: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." So His Divine nature, preexistence, absolute union of being and identity of action with the Father, His position and office as the Channel of all God's approach to us and of ours to Him, His infallible reading off to us of the things which He has seen and heard in the depths of eternity and the glories of the throne, and the solemn necessity for His death of shame, are all commended to us, not by argument, but simply by His " Verily, verily, I say unto you." These are not self evident truths, but, recondite and mysterious as some of them are, Jesus brings nothing to support them but His own word. " Because He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself." A second set of His sayings thus prefaced refers to us and our relations to Him. Thus He reveals the condition of spiritual life as being union with Him by faith : " Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you ; " " He that heareth My word, and believeth in Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life ;" " If a man keep My sayings, he shall never see death." He asserts with the same strong confirmation the necessity of a new nature being communicated ere men can either see or enter the kingdom of God : " Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ; " and again, " Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom." With the same strong confirmation He presents Himself as the Pattern of lowly love and self abasing service to all His followers : " The servant is not greater than his lord." He lovingly identifies Himself with us, and hints at a transcendent unity of being with Him : " He that receiveth whomsoever I send, receiveth Me." He even holds out the promise, that as He, in His mysterious oneness with the Father, did the same Divine works, so His servants, by virtue of their corresponding union with Him, shall exercise activities like His : " The works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall He do,"

There remain one or two other instances of the use of the double "Verily," which belong to less profound matters. It is sometimes employed in Christ's predictions, both of a near and of a remote future, which could only be made by supernatural knowledge, and must obviously be accepted on

His bare word. " One of you shall betray Me ; " "Ye shall weep and lament, . . . but your sorrow shall be turned into joy ; " " The cock shall not crow till thou hast denied Me thrice ; " " When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, . . . but when thou art old, another shall gird thee."

Still further, He employs the expression once or twice when, with Divine penetration of insight and certitude of stroke, He lays bare to men their hidden foulness of nature, as when He says, " Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracle, but because ye did eat of the loaves ; " or again, " He that doeth sin is the servant of sin."

So, in all the sayings to which this double " Verily " is attached, we can discern more or less clearly the appeal to His Divine authority as Revealer ; and the most of them are truths which would never have dawned on men's minds except He had uttered them, but, being uttered, become the pillars of our faith and the core of the gospel.

III Lastly, we have to consider what this form of confirmation implies as to the scholars.

It implies that those to whom it was addressed had dull ears, whose languid attention needed to be stimulated, or ' that the words were too great to be easily believed, or too unwelcome to be swiftly accepted. So it is a solemn warning against prejudice, apathy, and sloth ; an exhortation to earnest attention and sharpened listening ; an appeal to us to permit no indifference to come between us and His Word, nor to stop our ears with the clay of earthliness and sin against His gentle but authoritative voice.

Plainly, the course of our thoughts thus far leads to the conclusion that, since Christ is a Teacher thus authoritative, and His words are thus certain and important, our attitude as His scholars should be that of absolute submission. That which it is degradation to give to a man, it is sin to withhold from Christ. When men speak to us, we have the right and the obligation to say, "How do you know ? Why should I believe you ? " We have the right to question and to disagree. When Christ speaks, the only fit reply is, "Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth." Much is uncertain. On this voice we may absolutely rely. None other is authoritative. Let us, then, silence all other voices, and let Him speak. Come to Christ for yourself, and for yourself hearken to, and take from Him at firsthand what He has to say to you. Thinkers, speculators, books, reviews, currents of opinion, the Zeitgeist, and the like, are poor substitutes for the supreme authority of the one Teacher, the Teacher of all truth, the Teacher for all generations. Do not take your conceptions of Him and His words at secondhand. Do not let your own wishes, or sentiments, or thinkings shape your creed. Listen to Jesus Christ, and what He says do you take into your inmost heart, and on it build all your beliefs. The absolute certitude of His message has for its corresponding altitude our unwavering steadfastness. It seems' to be thought a mark of " advanced Christianity " that we should not be sure as to any of its doctrines, but hold them all provisionally - as if such an attitude were possible. Provisional belief is practical unbelief. I do not wish any man to say, " I am sure," when he is not. Premature certainty ends in too late doubt. But whilst there will always be for us, in our beliefs, based on Christ's self revelation, a circumference or horizon of darkness, there would be no circumference unless there were a centre, and no consciousness of the dark rim unless the centre were light. There will always be much about which we shall be wisest to say, " The Lord hath not showed it unto me." But that should not hinder us from firmly grasping the grand certainties, which we can without presumption affirm, and cannot without presumption deny, since Jesus has sealed them with His own attesting word. Let us not falter in adding our voices to the chorus of believers

who take up the old triumphant words, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true." When Jesus speaks His "Verily, verily, I say unto you," let us add our "Amen" of acceptance to His "Verily" of assurance. Let us respond to His faithfulness with our faith, and build rock on the rock, and, turning to that gentle and infallible Teacher, the incarnate Truth, as our refuge from the jangle of controversies and the strife of tongues, let us humbly and resolutely say to Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words, of eternal life."

02.00.1. The Life of David as Reflected in His Psalms

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02.01-I. INTRODUCTION.

I.--INTRODUCTION.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the life of David is its romantic variety of circumstances. What a many-coloured career that was which began amidst the pastoral solitudes of Bethlehem, and ended in the chamber where the dying ears heard the blare of the trumpets that announced the accession of Bathsheba's son! He passes through the most sharply contrasted conditions, and from each gathers some fresh fitness for his great work of giving voice and form to all the phases of devout feeling. The early shepherd life deeply influenced his character, and has left its traces on many a line of his psalms.

"Love had he found in huts where poor men lie; His daily teachers had been woods and rills; The silence that is in the starry sky, The sleep that is among the lonely hills." And then, in strange contrast with the meditative quiet and lowly duties of these first years, came the crowded vicissitudes of the tempestuous course through which he reached his throne--court minstrel, companion and friend of a king, idol of the people, champion of the armies of God--and in his sudden elevation keeping the gracious sweetness of his lowlier, and perhaps happier days. The scene changes with startling suddenness to the desert. He is "hunted like a partridge upon the mountains," a fugitive and half a freebooter, taking service at foreign courts, and lurking on the frontiers with a band of outlaws recruited from the "dangerous classes" of Israel. Like Dante and many more, he has to learn the weariness of the exile's lot--how hard his fare, how homeless his heart, how cold the courtesies of aliens, how unslumbering the suspicions which watch the refugee who fights on the side of his "natural enemies." One more swift transition and he is on the throne, for long years victorious, prosperous, and beloved.

"Nor did he change; but kept in lofty place The wisdom which adversity had bred," till suddenly he is plunged into the mire, and falsifies all his past, and ruins for ever, by the sin of his mature age, his peace of heart and the prosperity of his kingdom. Thenceforward trouble is never far away; and his later years are shaded with the saddening consciousness of his great fault, as well as by hatred and rebellion and murder in his family, and discontent and alienation in his kingdom.

None of the great men of Scripture pass through a course of so many changes; none of them touched human life at so many points; none of them were so tempered and polished by swift alternation of heat and cold, by such heavy blows and the friction of such rapid revolutions. Like his great Son and Lord, though in a lower sense, he, too, must be "in all points tempted like as we are," that his words may be fitted for the solace and strength of the whole world. Poets "learn in suffering what they teach in song." These quick transitions of fortune, and this wide experience, are the many-coloured threads from which the rich web of his psalms is woven. And while the life is singularly varied, the character is also singularly full and versatile. In this respect, too, he is most unlike the other leading figures of Old Testament history. Contrast him, for example, with the stern majesty of Moses, austere and simple as the tables of stone; or with the unvarying tone in the gaunt strength of Elijah. These and the other mighty men in Israel are like the ruder instruments of

music--the trumpet of Sinai, with its one prolonged note. David is like his own harp of many chords, through which the breath of God murmured, drawing forth wailing and rejoicing, the clear ring of triumphant trust, the low plaint of penitence, the blended harmonies of all devout emotions. The man had his faults--grave enough. Let it be remembered that no one has judged them more rigorously than himself. The critics who have delighted to point at them have been anticipated by the penitent; and their indictment has been little more than the quotation of his own confession. His tremulously susceptible nature, especially assailable by the delights of sense, led him astray. There are traces in his life of occasional craft and untruthfulness which even the exigencies of exile and war do not wholly palliate. Flashes of fierce vengeance at times break from the clear sky of his generous nature. His strong affection became, in at least one case, weak and foolish fondness for an unworthy son. But when all this is admitted, there remains a wonderfully rich, lovable character. He is the very ideal of a minstrel hero, such as the legends of the East especially love to paint. The shepherd's staff or sling, the sword, the sceptre, and the lyre are equally familiar to his hands. That union of the soldier and the poet gives the life a peculiar charm, and is very strikingly brought out in that chapter of the book of Samuel (2 Samuel 23) which begins, "These be the last words of David," and after giving the swan-song of him whom it calls "the sweet psalmist of Israel," passes immediately to the other side of the dual character, with, "These be the names of the mighty men whom David had."

Thus, on the one side, we see the true poetic temperament, with all its capacities for keenest delight and sharpest agony, with its tremulous mobility, its openness to every impression, its gaze of child-like wonder, and eager welcome to whatsoever things are lovely, its simplicity and self-forgetfulness, its yearnings "after worlds half realized," its hunger for love, its pity, and its tears. He was made to be the inspired poet of the religious affections.

And, on the other side, we see the greatest qualities of a military leader of the antique type, in which personal daring and a strong arm count for more than strategic skill. He dashes at Goliath with an enthusiasm of youthful courage and faith. While still in the earliest bloom of his manhood, at the head of his wild band of outlaws, he shows himself sagacious, full of resource, prudent in counsel, and swift as lightning in act; frank and generous, bold and gentle, cheery in defeat, calm in peril, patient in privations and ready to share them with his men, modest and self-restrained in victory, chivalrous to his foes, ever watchful, ever hopeful--a born leader and king of men. The basis of all was a profound, joyous trust in his Shepherd God, an ardour of personal love to Him, such as had never before been expressed, if it had ever found place, in Israel. That trust "opened his mouth to show forth" God's praise, and strengthened his "fingers to fight." He has told us himself what was his habitual temper, and how it was sustained: "I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth." (Psalms 16:8-9.)

Thus endowed, he moved among men with that irresistible fascination which only the greatest exercise. From the day when he stole like a sunbeam into the darkened chamber where Saul wrestled with the evil spirit, he bows all hearts that come under his spell. The women of Israel chant his name with song and timbrel, the daughter of Saul confesses her love unasked, the noble soul of Jonathan cleaves to him, the rude outlaws in his little army peril their lives to gratify his longing for a draught from the well where he had watered his father's flocks; the priests let him take the consecrated bread, and trust him with Goliath's sword, from behind the altar; his lofty

courtesy wins the heart of Abigail; the very king of the Philistines tells him that he is "good in his sight as an angel of God;" the unhappy Saul's last word to him is a blessing; six hundred men of Gath forsake home and country to follow his fortunes when he returns from exile; and even in the dark close of his reign, though sin and self-indulgence, and neglect of his kingly duties, had weakened his subjects' loyalty, his flight before Absalom is brightened by instances of passionate devotion which no common character could have evoked; and even then his people are ready to die for him, and in their affectionate pride call him "the light of Israel." It was a prophetic instinct which made Jesse call his youngest boy by a name apparently before unused--David, "Beloved." The Spirit of God, acting through these great natural gifts, and using this diversified experience of life, originated in him a new form of inspiration. The Law was the revelation of the mind, and, in some measure, of the heart, of God to man. The Psalm is the echo of the law, the return current set in motion by the outflow of the Divine will, the response of the heart of man to the manifested God. There had, indeed, been traces of hymns before David. There were the burst of triumph which the daughters of Israel sang, with timbrel and dance, over Pharaoh and his host; the prayer of Moses the man of God (Psalms 90:1-17), so archaic in its tone, bearing in every line the impress of the weary wilderness and the law of death; the song of the dying lawgiver (Deuteronomy 32:1-52); the passionate pæan of Deborah; and some few briefer fragments. But, practically, the Psalm began with David; and though many hands struck the harp after him, even down at least to the return from exile, he remains emphatically "the sweet psalmist of Israel." The psalms which are attributed to him have, on the whole, a marked similarity of manner. Their characteristics have been well summed up as "creative originality, predominantly elegiac tone, graceful form and movement, antique but lucid style;"[A] to which may be added the intensity of their devotion, the passion of Divine love that glows in them all. They correspond, too, with the circumstances of his life as given in the historical books. The early shepherd days, the manifold sorrows, the hunted wanderings, the royal authority, the wars, the triumphs, the sin, the remorse, which are woven together so strikingly in the latter, all reappear in the psalms. The illusions, indeed, are for the most part general rather than special, as is natural. His words are thereby the better fitted for ready application to the trials of other lives. But it has been perhaps too hastily assumed that the allusions are so general as to make it impossible to connect them with any precise events, or to make the psalms and the history mutually illustrative. Much, no doubt, must be conjectured rather than affirmed, and much must be left undetermined; but when all deductions on that score have been made, it still appears possible to carry the process sufficiently far to gain fresh insight into the force and definiteness of many of David's words, and to use them with tolerable confidence as throwing light upon the narrative of his career. The attempt is made in some degree in this volume.

[A] Delitzsch, Kommentar, u. d. Psalter II. 376.

It will be necessary to prefix a few further remarks on the Davidic psalms in general. Can we tell which are David's? The Psalter, as is generally known, is divided into five books or parts, probably from some idea that it corresponded with the Pentateuch. These five books are marked by a doxology at the close of each, except the last. The first portion consists of Psalms 1-41; the second of Psalms 42-72; the third of Psalms 73-89; the fourth of Psalms 90-106; and the fifth of Psalms 107-150. The psalms attributed to David are unequally distributed through these five books. There are seventy-three in all, and they run thus:--In the first book there are thirty-seven; so

that if we regard Psalms 1:1-6 and Psalms 2:1-12 as a kind of double introduction, a frontispiece and vignette title-page to the whole collection, the first book proper only two which are not regarded as David's. The second book has a much smaller proportion, only eighteen out of thirty-one. The third book has but one, the fourth two; while the fifth has fifteen, eight of which (Psalms 138-145) occur almost at the close. The intention is obvious--to throw the Davidic psalms as much as possible together in the first two books. And the inference is not unnatural that these may have formed an earlier collection, to which were afterwards added the remaining three, with a considerable body of alleged psalms of David, which had subsequently come to light, placed side by side at the end, so as to round off the whole. Be that as it may, one thing is clear from the arrangement of the Psalter, namely, that the superscriptions which give the authors' names are at least as old as the collection itself; for they have guided the order of the collection in the grouping not only of Davidic psalms, but also of those attributed to the sons of Korah (Psalms 42-99) and to Asaph (Psalms 122-133) The question of the reliableness of these superscriptions is hotly debated. The balance of modern opinion is decidedly against their genuineness. As in greater matters, so here "the higher criticism" comes to the consideration of their claims with a prejudice against them, and on very arbitrary grounds determines for itself, quite irrespective of these ancient voices, the date and authorship of the psalms. The extreme form of this tendency is to be found in the masterly work of Ewald, who has devoted all his vast power of criticism (and eked it out with all his equally great power of confident assertion) to the book, and has come to the conclusion that we have but eleven of David's psalms, - which is surely a result that may lead to questionings as to the method which has attained it.

These editorial notes are proved to be of extreme antiquity by such considerations as these: The Septuagint translators found them, and did not understand them; the synagogue preserves no traditions to explain them; the Book of Chronicles throws no light upon them; they are very rare in the two last books of the Psalter (Delitzsch, 2:393). In some cases they are obviously erroneous, but in the greater number there is nothing inconsistent with their correctness in the psalms to which they are appended; while very frequently they throw a flood of light upon these, and all but prove their trustworthiness by their appropriateness. They are not authoritative, but they merit respectful consideration, and, as Dr. Perowne puts it in his valuable work on the Psalms, stand on a par with the subscriptions to the Epistles in the New Testament. Regarding them thus, and yet examining the psalms to which they are prefixed, there seem to be about forty-five which we may attribute with some confidence to David, and with these we shall be concerned in this book.

02.02-II. EARLY DAYS

II.--EARLY DAYS The life of David is naturally divided into epochs, of which we may avail ourselves for the more ready arrangement of our material. These are--his early years up to his escape from the court of Saul, his exile, the prosperous beginning of his reign, his sin and penitence, his flight before Absalom's rebellion, and the darkened end.

We have but faint incidental traces of his life up to his anointing by Samuel, with which the narrative in the historical books opens. But perhaps the fact that the story begins with that consecration to office, is of more value than the missing biography of his childhood could have been. It teaches us the point of view from which Scripture regards its greatest names--as nothing, except in so far as they are God's instruments. Hence its carelessness, notwithstanding that so much of it is history, of all that merely illustrates the personal character of its heroes. Hence, too, the clearness with which, notwithstanding that indifference, the living men are set before us--the image cut with half a dozen strokes of the chisel.

We do not know the age of David when Samuel appeared in the little village with the horn of sacred oil in his hand. The only approximation to it is furnished by the fact, that he was thirty at the beginning of his reign. (2 Samuel 5:4.) If we take into account that his exile must have lasted for a very considerable period (one portion of it, his second flight to the Philistines, was sixteen months, 1 Samuel 27:7),--that the previous residence at the court of Saul must have been long enough to give time for his gradual rise to popularity, and thereafter for the gradual development of the king's insane hatred,--that further back still there was an indefinite period, between the fight with Goliath, and the first visit as a minstrel-physician to the palace, which was spent at Bethlehem, and that that visit itself cannot have been very brief, since in its course he became very dear and familiar to Saul,--it will not seem that all these events could be crowded into less than some twelve or fifteen years, or that he could have been more than a lad of some sixteen years of age when Samuel's hand smoothed the sacred oil on his clustering curls.

How life had gone with him till then, we can easily gather from the narrative of Scripture. His father's household seems to have been one in which modest frugality ruled. There is no trace of Jesse having servants; his youngest child does menial work; the present which he sends to his king when David goes to court was simple, and such as a man in humble life would give--an ass load of bread, one skin of wine, and one kid--his flocks were small--"a few sheep." It would appear as if prosperity had not smiled on the family since the days of Jesse's grandfather, Boaz, that "mighty man of wealth." David's place in the household does not seem to have been a happy one. His father scarcely reckoned him amongst his sons, and answers Samuel's question, if the seven burly husbandmen whom he has seen are all his children, with a trace of contempt as he remembers that there is another, "and, behold, he keepeth the sheep." Of his mother we hear but once, and that incidentally, for a moment, long after. His brothers had no love for him, and do not appear to have shared either his heart or his fortunes. The boy evidently had the usual fate of souls like his, to grow up in uncongenial circumstances, little understood and less sympathised

with by the common-place people round them, and thrown back therefore all the more decisively upon themselves. The process sours and spoils some, but it is the making of more--and where, as in this case, the nature is thrown back upon God, and not on its own morbid operation, strength comes from repression, and sweetness from endurance. He may have received some instruction in one of Samuel's schools for the prophets, but we are left in entire ignorance of what outward helps to unfold itself were given to his budding life.

Whatever others he had, no doubt those which are emphasized in the Bible story were the chief, namely, his occupation and the many gifts which it brought to him. The limbs, "like hinds' feet," the sinewy arms which "broke a bow of steel," the precision with which he used the sling, the agility which "leaped over a rampart," the health that glowed in his "ruddy" face, were the least of his obligations to the breezy uplands, where he kept his father's sheep. His early life taught him courage, when he "smote the lion" and laid hold by his ugly muzzle of the bear that "rose against him," rearing itself upright for the fatal hug. Solitude and familiarity with nature helped to nurture the poetical side of his character, and to strengthen that meditative habit which blends so strangely with his impetuous activity, and which for the most part kept tumults and toils from invading his central soul. They threw him back on God who peopled the solitude and spoke in all nature. Besides this, he acquired in the sheepecote lessons which he practised on the throne, that rule means service, and that the shepherd of men holds his office in order that he may protect and guide. And in the lowly associations of his humble home, he learned the life of the people, their simple joys, their unobtrusive toils, their unnoticed sorrows--a priceless piece of knowledge both for the poet and for the king. A breach in all the tranquil habits of this modest life was made by Samuel's astonishing errand. The story is told with wonderful picturesqueness and dramatic force. The minute account of the successive rejections of his brothers, Samuel's question and Jesse's answer, and then the pause of idle waiting till the messenger goes and returns, heighten the expectation with which we look for his appearance. And then what a sweet young face is lovingly painted for us! "He was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to" (1 Samuel 16:12)--of fair complexion, with golden hair, which is rare among these swarthy, black-haired easterns, with lovely eyes (for that is the meaning of the words which the English Bible renders "of a beautiful countenance"), large and liquid as become a poet. So he stood before the old prophet, and with swelling heart and reverent awe received the holy chrism. In silence, as it would seem, Samuel anointed him. Whether the secret of his high destiny was imparted to him then, or left to be disclosed in future years, is not told. But at all events, whether with full understanding of what was before him or no, he must have been conscious of a call that would carry him far away from the pastures and olive yards of the little hamlet and of a new Spirit stirring in him from that day forward. This sudden change in all the outlook of his life must have given new materials for thought when he went back to his humble task. Responsibility, or the prospect of it, makes lads into men very quickly. Graver meditations, humbler consciousness of weakness, a firmer trust in God who had laid the burden upon him, would do in days the work of years. And the necessity for bidding back the visions of the future in order to do faithfully the obscure duties of the present, would add self-control and patience, not usually the graces of youth. How swiftly he matured is singularly shown in the next recorded incident--his summons to the court of Saul, by the character of him drawn by the courtier who recommends him to the king. He speaks of David in words more suitable to a man of established renown than to a stripling. He is minstrel and warrior, "cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man," and "skilled in speech (already eloquent),

and fair in form, and the Lord is with him." (1 Samuel 16:18.) So quickly had the new circumstances and the energy of the Spirit of God, like tropical sunshine, ripened his soul. That first visit to the court was but an episode in his life, however helpful to his growth it may have been. It would give him the knowledge of new scenes, widen his experience, and prepare him for the future. But it cannot have been of very long duration. Possibly his harp lost its power over Saul's gloomy spirit, when he had become familiar with its notes. For whatever reason, he returned to his father's house, and gladly exchanged the favour at court, which might have seemed to a merely ambitious man the first step towards fulfilling the prophecy of Samuel's anointing, for the freedom of the pastoral solitudes about Bethlehem. There he remained, living to outward seeming as in the quiet days before these two great earthquakes in his life, but with deeper thoughts and new power, with broader experience, and a wider horizon, until the hour when he was finally wrenched from his seclusion, and flung into the whirlpool of his public career.

There are none of David's psalms which can be with any certainty referred to this first period of his life; but it has left deep traces on many of them. The allusions to natural scenery and the frequent references to varying aspects of the shepherd's life are specimens of these. One characteristic of the poetic temperament is the faithful remembrance and cherishing of early days. How fondly he recalled them is shown in that most pathetic incident of his longing, as a weary exile, for one draught of water from the well at Bethlehem--where in the dear old times he had so often led his flocks. But though we cannot say confidently that we have any psalms prior to his first exile, there are several which, whatever their date may be, are echoes of his thoughts in these first days. This is especially the case in regard to the group which describe varying aspects of nature--viz., Psalm 19; Psalm 8; Psalm 29. They are unlike his later psalms in the almost entire absence of personal references, or of any trace of pressing cares, or of signs of a varied experience of human life. In their self-forgetful contemplation of nature, in their silence about sorrow, in their tranquil beauty, they resemble the youthful works of many a poet whose later verse throbs with quivering consciousness of life's agonies, or wrestles strongly with life's problems. They may not unnaturally be regarded as the outpouring of a young heart at leisure from itself, and from pain, far from men and very near God. The fresh mountain air of Bethlehem blows through them, and the dew of life's quiet morning is on them. The early experience supplied their materials, whatever was the date of their composition; and in them we can see what his inward life was in these budding years. The gaze of child-like wonder and awe upon the blazing brightness of the noonday, and on the mighty heaven with all its stars, the deep voice with which all creation spoke of God, the great thoughts of the dignity of man (thoughts ever welcome to lofty youthful souls), the gleaming of an inward light brighter than all suns, the consciousness of mysteries of weakness which may become miracles of sin in one's own heart, the assurance of close relation to God as His anointed and His servant, the cry for help and guidance--all this is what we should expect David to have thought and felt as he wandered among the hills, alone with God; and this is what these psalms give us.

Common to them all is the peculiar manner of looking upon nature, so uniform in David's psalms, so unlike more modern descriptive poetry. He can smite out a picture in a phrase, but he does not care to paint landscapes. He feels the deep analogies between man and his dwelling-place, but he does not care to lend to nature a shadowy life, the reflection of our own. Creation is to him neither a subject for poetical description, nor for scientific examination. It is nothing but the garment of God, the apocalypse of the heavenly. And common to them all is also the swift transition from the

outward facts which reveal God, to the spiritual world, where His presence is, if it were possible, yet more needful, and His operations yet mightier. And common to them all is a certain rush of full thought and joyous power, which is again a characteristic of youthful work, and is unlike the elegiac tenderness and pathos of David's later hymns.

Psalms 19:1-14 paints for us the glory of the heavens by day, as the eighth by night. The former gathers up the impressions of many a fresh morning when the solitary shepherd-boy watched the sun rising over the mountains of Moab, which close the eastern view from the hills above Bethlehem. The sacred silence of dawn, the deeper hush of night, have voice for his ear. "No speech! and no words! unheard is their voice." But yet, "in all the earth goeth forth their line,[B] and in the end of the habitable world their sayings." The heavens and the firmament, the linked chorus of day and night, are heralds of God's glory, with silent speech, heard in all lands, an unremitting voice. And as he looks, there leaps into the eastern heavens, not with the long twilight of northern lands, the sudden splendour, the sun radiant as a bridegroom from the bridal chamber, like some athlete impatient for the course. How the joy of morning and its new vigour throb in the words! And then he watches the strong runner climbing the heavens till the fierce heat beats down into the deep cleft of the Jordan, and all the treeless southern hills, as they slope towards the desert, lie bare and blazing beneath the beams.

[B] Their boundary, i.e., their territory, or the region through which their witness extends. Others render "their chord," or sound (LXX. Ewald, etc.) The sudden transition from the revelation of God in nature to His voice in the law, has seemed to many critics unaccountable, except on the supposition that this psalm is made up of two fragments, put together by a later compiler; and some of them have even gone so far as to maintain that "the feeling which saw God revealed in the law did not arise till the time of Josiah." [C] But such a hypothesis is not required to explain either the sudden transition or the difference in style and rhythm between the two parts of the psalm, which unquestionably exists. The turn from the outer world to the better light of God's word, is most natural; the abruptness of it is artistic and impressive; the difference of style and measure gives emphasis to the contrast. There is also an obvious connection between the two parts, inasmuch as the law is described by epithets, which in part hint at its being a brighter sun, enlightening the eyes.

[C] "Psalms chronologically arranged"--following Ewald. The Word which declares the will of the Lord is better than the heavens which tell His glory. The abundance of synonyms for that word show how familiar to his thoughts it was. To him it is "the law," "the testimonies" by which God witnesses of Himself and of man: "the statutes," the fixed settled ordinances; that which teaches "the fear of God," the "judgments" or utterances of His mind on human conduct. They are "perfect, firm, right, clean, pure,"--like that spotless sun--"eternal, true." "They quicken, make wise, enlighten," even as the light of the lower world. His heart prizes them "more than gold," of which in his simple life he knew so little; more than "the honey," which he had often seen dropping from "the comb" in the pastures of the wilderness. And then the twofold contemplation rises into the loftier region of prayer. He feels that there are dark depths in his soul, gloomier pits than any into which the noontide sun shines. He speaks as one who is conscious of dormant evils, which life has not yet evolved, and his prayer is more directed towards the future than the past, and is thus very unlike the tone of the later psalms, that wail out penitence and plead for pardon. "Errors," or weaknesses,--"faults" unknown to himself,--"high-handed sins," [D]--such is the climax of the evils

from which he prays for deliverance. He knows himself "Thy servant" (2 Samuel 7:5, 2 Samuel 7:8; Psalms 78:70)--an epithet which may refer to his consecration to God's work by Samuel's anointing. He needs not only a God who sets His glory in the heavens, nor even one whose will is made known, but one who will touch his spirit,--not merely a Maker, but a pardoning God; and his faith reaches its highest point as his song closes with the sacred name of the covenant Jehovah, repeated for the seventh time, and invoked in one final aspiration of a trustful heart, as "my Rock, and my Redeemer."

[D] The form of the word would make "reckless men" a more natural translation; but probably the context requires a third, more aggravated sort of sin. The eighth psalm is a companion picture, a night-piece, which, like the former, speaks of many an hour of lonely brooding below the heavens, whether its composition fall within this early period or no. The prophetic and doctrinal value of the psalms is not our main subject in the present volume, so that we have to touch but very lightly on this grand hymn. What does it show us of the singer? We see him, like other shepherds on the same hills, long after "keeping watch over his flocks by night," and overwhelmed by all the magnificence of an eastern sky, with its lambent lights. So bright, so changeless, so far,--how great they are, how small the boy that gazes up so wistfully. Are they gods, as all but his own nation believed? No,--"the work of Thy fingers," "which Thou hast ordained." The consciousness of God as their Maker delivers from the temptation of confounding bigness with greatness, and wakes into new energy that awful sense of personality which towers above all the stars. He is a babe and suckling--is that a trace of the early composition of the psalm?--still he knows that out of his lips, already beginning to break into song, and out of the lips of his fellows, God perfects praise. There speaks the sweet singer of Israel, prizing as the greatest of God's gifts his growing faculty, and counting his God-given words as nobler than the voice of "night unto night." God's fingers made these, but God's own breath is in him. God ordained them, but God visits him. The description of man's dignity and dominion indicates how familiar David was with the story in Genesis. It may perhaps also, besides all the large prophetic truths which it contains, have some special reference to his own earlier experience. It is at least worth noting that he speaks of the dignity of man as kingly, like that which was dawning on himself, and that the picture has no shadows either of sorrow or of sin,--a fact which may point to his younger days, when lofty thoughts of the greatness of the soul are ever natural and when in his case the afflictions and crimes that make their presence felt in all his later works had not fallen upon him. Perhaps, too, it may not be altogether fanciful to suppose that we may see the shepherd-boy surrounded by his flocks, and the wild creatures that prowled about the fold, and the birds asleep in their coverts beneath the moonlight, in his enumeration of the subjects of his first and happiest kingdom, where he ruled far away from men and sorrow, seeing God everywhere, and learning to perfect praise from his youthful lips.

02.03-III. EARLY DAYS--CONTINUED.

III.--EARLY DAYS--CONTINUED. In addition to the psalms already considered, which are devoted to the devout contemplation of nature, and stand in close connection with David's early days, there still remains one universally admitted to be his. The twenty-ninth psalm, like both the preceding, has to do with the glory of God as revealed in the heavens, and with earth only as the recipient of skyey influences; but while these breathed the profoundest tranquillity, as they watched the silent splendour of the sun, and the peace of moonlight shed upon a sleeping world, this is all tumult and noise. It is a highly elaborate and vivid picture of a thunderstorm, such as must often have broken over the shepherd-psalmist as he crouched under some shelf of limestone, and gathered his trembling charge about him. Its very structure reproduces in sound an echo of the rolling peals reverberating among the hills.

There is first an invocation, in the highest strain of devout poetry, calling upon the "sons of God," the angels who dwell above the lower sky, and who see from above the slow gathering of the storm-clouds, to ascribe to Jehovah the glory of His name--His character as set forth in the tempest. They are to cast themselves before Him "in holy attire," as priests of the heavenly sanctuary. Their silent and expectant worship is like the brooding stillness before the storm. We feel the waiting hush in heaven and earth.

Then the tempest breaks. It crashes and leaps through the short sentences, each like the clap of the near thunder. a. The voice of Jehovah (is) on the waters. The God of glory thunders. Jehovah (is) on many waters. The voice of Jehovah in strength! The voice of Jehovah in majesty! b. The voice of Jehovah rending the cedars! And Jehovah rends the cedars of Lebanon, And makes them leap like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young buffalo The voice of Jehovah hewing flashes of fire! c. The voice of Jehovah shakes the desert, Jehovah shakes the Kadesh desert. The voice of Jehovah makes the hinds writhe And scathes the woods--and in His temple-- --All in it (are) saying, "Glory."

Seven times the roar shakes the world. The voice of the seven thunders is the voice of Jehovah. In the short clauses, with their uniform structure, the pause between, and the recurrence of the same initial words, we hear the successive peals, the silence that parts them, and the monotony of their unvaried sound. Thrice we have the reverberation rolling through the sky or among the hills, imitated by clauses which repeat previous ones, as indicated by the italics, and one forked flame blazes out in the brief, lightning-like sentence, "The voice of Jehovah (is) hewing flashes of fire," which wonderfully gives the impression of their streaming fiercely forth, as if cloven from some solid block of fire, their swift course, and their instantaneous extinction. The range and effects of the storm, too, are vividly painted. It is first "on the waters," which may possibly mean the Mediterranean, but more probably, "the waters that are above the firmament," and so depicts the clouds as gathering high in air. Then it comes down with a crash on the northern mountains, splintering the gnarled cedars, and making Lebanon rock with all its woods--leaping across the deep valley of Coelo-Syria, and smiting Hermon (for which Sirion is a Sidonian name), the crest of

the Anti-Lebanon, till it reels. Onward it sweeps--or rather, perhaps, it is all around the psalmist; and even while he hears the voice rolling from the furthest north, the extreme south echoes the roar. The awful voice shakes[E] the wilderness, as it booms across its level surface. As far south as Kadesh (probably Petra) the tremor spreads, and away in the forests of Edom the wild creatures in their terror slip their calves, and the oaks are scathed and stripped of their leafy honours. And all the while, like a mighty diapason sounding on through the tumult, the voice of the sons of God in the heavenly temple is heard proclaiming "Glory!"

[E] Delitzsch would render "whirls in circles"--a picturesque allusion to the sand pillars which accompany storms in the desert. The psalm closes with lofty words of confidence, built on the story of the past, as well as on the contemplation of the present. "Jehovah sat throned for (i.e., to send on earth) the flood" which once drowned the world of old. "Jehovah will sit throned, a King for ever." That ancient judgment spoke of His power over all the forces of nature, in their most terrible form. So now and for ever, all are His servants, and effect His purposes. Then, as the tempest rolls away, spent and transient, the sunshine streams out anew from the softened blue over a freshened world, and every raindrop on the leaves twinkles into diamond light, and the end of the psalm is like the after brightness; and the tranquil low voice of its last words is like the songs of the birds again as the departing storm growls low and faint on the horizon. "The Lord will bless His people with peace."

Thus, then, nature spoke to this young heart. The silence was vocal; the darkness, bright; the tumult, order--and all was the revelation of a present God. It is told of one of our great writers that, when a child, he was found lying on a hill-side during a thunderstorm, and at each flash clapping his hands and shouting, unconscious of danger, and stirred to ecstasy. David, too, felt all the poetic elevation, and natural awe, in the presence of the crashing storm; but he felt something more. To him the thunder was not a power to tremble before, not a mere subject for poetic contemplation. Still less was it something, the like of which could be rubbed out of glass and silk, and which he had done with when he knew its laws. No increase of knowledge touching the laws of physical phenomena in the least affects the point of view which these Nature-psalms take. David said, "God makes and moves all things." We may be able to complete the sentence by a clause which tells something of the methods of His operation. But that is only a parenthesis after all, and the old truth remains widened, not overthrown by it. The psalmist knew that all being and action had their origin in God. He saw the last links of the chain, and knew that it was rivetted to the throne of God, though the intermediate links were unseen; and even the fact that there were any was not present to his mind. We know something of these; but the first and the last of the series to him, are the first and the last to us also. To us as to him, the silent splendour of noonday speaks of God, and the nightly heavens pour the soft radiance of His "excellent name over all the earth." The tempest is His voice, and the wildest commotions in nature and among men break in obedient waves around His pillared throne.

"Well roars the storm to those who hear A deeper voice across the storm!"

There still remains one other psalm which may be used as illustrating the early life of David. The Twenty-third psalm is coloured throughout by the remembrances of his youthful occupation, even if its actual composition is of a later date. Some critics, indeed, think that the mention in the last verse of "the house of the Lord" compels the supposition of an origin subsequent to the building of

the Temple; but the phrase in question need not have anything to do with tabernacle or temple, and is most naturally accounted for by the preceding image of God as the Host who feasts His servants at His table. There are no other notes of time in the psalm, unless, with some commentators, we see an allusion in that image of the furnished table to the seasonable hospitality of the Gileadite chieftains during David's flight before Absalom (2 Samuel 17:27-29)--a reference which appears prosaic and flat. The absence of traces of distress and sorrow--so constantly present in the later songs--may be urged with some force in favour of the early date; and if we follow one of the most valuable commentators (Hupfeld) in translating all the verbs as futures, and so make the whole a hymn of hope, we seem almost obliged to suppose that we have here the utterance of a youthful spirit, which ventured to look forward, because it first looked upward. In any case, the psalm is a transcript of thoughts that had been born and cherished in many a meditative hour among the lonely hills of Bethlehem. It is the echo of the shepherd life. We see in it the incessant care, the love to his helpless charge, which was expressed in and deepened by all his toil for them. He had to think for their simplicity, to fight for their defencelessness, to find their pasture, to guard them while they lay amid the fresh grass; sometimes to use his staff in order to force their heedlessness with loving violence past tempting perils; sometimes to guide them through gloomy gorges, where they huddled close at his heels; sometimes to smite the lion and the bear that prowled about the fold--but all was for their good and meant their comfort. And thus he has learned, in preparation for his own kingdom, the inmost meaning of pre-eminence among men--and, more precious lesson still, thus he has learned the very heart of God. Long before, Jacob had spoken of Him as the "Shepherd of Israel;" but it was reserved for David to bring that sweet and wonderful name into closer relations with the single soul; and, with that peculiar enthusiasm of personal reliance, and recognition of God's love to the individual which stamps all his psalms, to say "The Lord is my Shepherd." These dumb companions of his, in their docility to his guidance, and absolute trust in his care, had taught him the secret of peace in helplessness, of patience in ignorance. The green strips of meadow-land where the clear waters brought life, the wearied flocks sheltered from the mid-day heat, the quiet course of the little stream, the refreshment of the sheep by rest and pasture, the smooth paths which he tried to choose for them, the rocky defiles through which they had to pass, the rod in his hand that guided, and chastised, and defended, and was never lifted in anger,--all these, the familiar sights of his youth, pass before us as we read; and to us too, in our widely different social state, have become the undying emblems of the highest care and the wisest love. The psalm witnesses how close to the youthful heart the consciousness of God must have been, which could thus transform and glorify the little things which were so familiar. We can feel, in a kind of lazy play of sentiment, the fitness of the shepherd's life to suggest thoughts of God--because it is not our life. But it needs both a meditative habit and a devout heart to feel that the trivialities of our own daily tasks speak to us of Him. The heavens touch the earth on the horizon of our vision, but it always seems furthest to the sky from the spot where we stand. To the psalmist, however,--as in higher ways to his Son and Lord,--all things around him were full of God; and as the majesties of nature, so the trivialities of man's works--shepherds and fishermen--were solemn with deep meanings and shadows of the heavenly. With such lofty thoughts he fed his youth. The psalm, too, breathes the very spirit of sunny confidence and of perfect rest in God. We have referred to the absence of traces of sorrow, and to the predominant tone of hopefulness, as possibly favouring the supposition of an early origin. But it matters little whether they were young eyes which looked so courageously into the unknown

future, or whether we have here the more solemn and weighty hopes of age, which can have few hopes at all, unless they be rooted in God. The spirit expressed in the psalm is so thoroughly David's, that in his younger days, before it was worn with responsibilities and sorrows, it must have been especially strong. We may therefore fairly take the tone of this song of the Shepherd God as expressing the characteristic of his godliness in the happy early years. In his solitude he was glad. One happy thought fills the spirit; one simple emotion thrills the chords of his harp. No doubts, or griefs, or remorse throw their shadows upon him. He is conscious of dependence, but he is above want and fear. He does not ask, he has--he possesses God, and is at rest in Him. He is satisfied with that fruition which blesseth all who hunger for God, and is the highest form of communion with Him. As the present has no longings, the future has no terrors. All the horizon is clear, all the winds are still, the ocean at rest, "and birds of peace sit brooding on the charmed wave." If there be foes, God holds them back. If there lie far off among the hills any valley of darkness, its black portals cast no gloom over him, and will not when he enters. God is his Shepherd, and, by another image, God is his Host. The life which in one aspect, by reason of its continual change, and occupation with outward things, may be compared to the journeyings of a flock, is in another aspect, by reason of its inward union with the stability of God, like sitting ever at the table which His hand has spread as for a royal banquet, where the oil of gladness glistens on every head, and the full cup of Divine pleasure is in every hand. For all the outward and pilgrimage aspect, the psalmist knows that only Goodness and Mercy--these two white-robed messengers of God--will follow his steps, however long may be the term of the days of his yet young life; for all the inward, he is sure that, in calm, unbroken fellowship, he will dwell in the house of God, and that when the twin angels who fed and guided him all his young life long have finished their charge, and the days of his journeyings are ended, there stretches beyond a still closer union with his heavenly Friend, which will be perfected in His true house "for ever." We look in vain for another example, even in David's psalms, of such perfect, restful trust in God. These clear notes are perhaps the purest utterance ever given of "the peace of God which passeth all understanding."

Such were the thoughts and hopes of the lad who kept his father's sheep at Bethlehem. He lived a life of lofty thoughts and lowly duties. He heard the voice of God amidst the silence of the hills, and the earliest notes of his harp echoed the deep tones. He learned courage as well as tenderness from his daily tasks, and patience from the contrast between them and the high vocation which Samuel's mysterious anointing had opened before him. If we remember how disturbing an influence the consciousness of it might have wrought in a soul less filled with God, we may perhaps accept as probably correct the superscription which refers one sweet, simple psalm to him, and may venture to suppose that it expresses the contentment, undazzled by visions of coming greatness, that calmed his heart. "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have smoothed and quieted my soul: like a weanling on his mother's (breast), like a weanling is my soul within me." (Psalms 131:1-2) So lying in God's arms, and content to be folded in His embrace, without seeking anything beyond, he is tranquil in his lowly lot.

It does not fall within our province to follow the course of the familiar narrative through the picturesque events that led him to fame and position at court. The double character of minstrel and warrior, to which we have already referred, is remarkably brought out in his double introduction to Saul, once as soothing the king's gloomy spirit with the harmonies of his shepherd's harp, once as

bringing down the boasting giant of Gath with his shepherd's sling. On the first occasion his residence in the palace seems to have been ended by Saul's temporary recovery. He returns to Bethlehem for an indefinite time, and then leaves it and all its peaceful tasks for ever. The dramatic story of the duel with Goliath needs no second telling. His arrival at the very crisis of the war, the eager courage with which he leaves his baggage in the hands of the guard and runs down the valley to the ranks of the army, the busy hum of talk among the Israelites, the rankling jealousy of his brother that curdles into bitter jeers, the modest courage with which he offers himself as champion, the youthful enthusiasm of brave trust in "the Lord, that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear;" the wonderfully vivid picture of the young hero with his shepherd staff in one hand, his sling in the other, and the rude wallet by his side, which had carried his simple meal, and now held the smooth stone from the brook that ran between the armies in the bottom of the little valley--the blustering braggadocio of the big champion, the boy's devout confidence in "the name of the Lord of hosts;" the swift brevity of the narrative of the actual fight, which in its hurrying clauses seems to reproduce the light-footed eagerness of the young champion, or the rapid whizz of the stone ere it crashed into the thick forehead; the prostrate bulk of the dead giant prone upon the earth, and the conqueror, slight and agile, hewing off the huge head with Goliath's own useless sword;--all these incidents, so full of character, so antique in manner, so weighty with lessons of the impotence of strength that is merely material, and the power of a living enthusiasm of faith in God, may, for our present purposes, be passed with a mere glance. One observation may, however, be allowed. After the victory, Saul is represented as not knowing who David was, and as sending Abner to find out where he comes from. Abner, too, professes entire ignorance; and when David appears before the king, "with the head of the Philistine in his hand," he is asked, "Whose son art thou, young man?" It has been thought that here we have an irreconcilable contradiction with previous narratives, according to which there was close intimacy between him and the king, who "loved him greatly," and gave him an office of trust about his person. Suppositions of "dislocation of the narrative," the careless adoption by the compiler of two separate legends, and the like, have been freely indulged in. But it may at least be suggested as a possible explanation of the seeming discrepancy, that when Saul had passed out of his moody madness it is not wonderful that he should have forgotten all which had occurred in his paroxysm. It is surely a common enough psychological phenomenon that a man restored to sanity has no remembrance of the events during his mental aberration. And as for Abner's profession of ignorance, an incipient jealousy of this stripling hero may naturally have made the "captain of the host" willing to keep the king as ignorant as he could concerning a probable formidable rival. There is no need to suppose he was really ignorant, but only that it suited him to say that he was. With this earliest deed of heroism the peaceful private days are closed, and a new epoch of court favour and growing popularity begins. The impression which the whole story leaves upon one is well summed up in a psalm which the Septuagint adds to the Psalter. It is not found in the Hebrew, and has no pretension to be David's work; but, as a résumé of the salient points of his early life, it may fitly end our considerations of this first epoch.

"This is the autograph psalm of David, and beyond the number (i.e., of the psalms in the Psalter), when he fought the single fight with Goliath:

"(1.) I was little among my brethren, and the youngest in the house of my father: I kept the flock of my father.

(2.) My hands made a pipe, my fingers tuned a psaltery.

(3.) And who shall tell it to my Lord? He is the Lord, He shall hear me.

(4.) He sent His angel (messenger), and took me from the flocks of my father, and anointed me with the oil of His anointing.

(5.) But my brethren were fair and large, and in them the Lord took not pleasure.

(6.) I went out to meet the Philistine, and he cursed me by his idols.

(7.) But I, drawing his sword, beheaded him, and took away reproach from the children of Israel."

02.04-IV. THE EXILE.

IV.--THE EXILE.

David's first years at the court of Saul in Gibeah do not appear to have produced any psalms which still survive.

"The sweetest songs are those Which tell of saddest thought."

It was natural, then, that a period full of novelty and of prosperous activity, very unlike the quiet days at Bethlehem, should rather accumulate materials for future use than be fruitful in actual production. The old life shut to behind him for ever, like some enchanted door in a hill-side, and an unexplored land lay beckoning before. The new was widening his experience, but it had to be mastered, to be assimilated by meditation before it became vocal. The bare facts of this section are familiar and soon told. There is first a period in which he is trusted by Saul, who sets him in high command, with the approbation not only of the people, but even of the official classes. But a new dynasty resting on military pre-eminence cannot afford to let a successful soldier stand on the steps of the throne; and the shrill chant of the women out of all the cities of Israel, which even in Saul's hearing answered the praises of his prowess with a louder acclaim for David's victories, startled the king for the first time with a revelation of the national feeling. His unslumbering suspicion "eyed David from that day." Rage and terror threw him again into the gripe of his evil spirit, and in his paroxysm he flings his heavy spear, the symbol of his royalty, at the lithe harper, with fierce vows of murder. The failure of his attempt to kill David seems to have aggravated his dread of him as bearing a charm which won all hearts and averted all dangers. A second stage is marked not only by Saul's growing fear, but by David's new position. He is removed from court, and put in a subordinate command, which only extends his popularity, and brings him into more immediate contact with the mass of the people. "All Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them." Then follows the offer of Saul's elder daughter in marriage, in the hope that by playing upon his gratitude and his religious feeling, he might be urged to some piece of rash bravery that would end him without scandal. Some new caprice of Saul's, however, leads him to insult David by breaking his pledge at the last moment, and giving the promised bride to another. Jonathan's heart was not the only one in Saul's household that yielded to his spell. The younger Michal had been cherishing his image in secret, and now tells her love. Her father returns to his original purpose, with the strange mixture of tenacity and capricious changefulness that marks his character, and again attempts, by demanding a grotesquely savage dowry, to secure David's destruction. But that scheme, too, fails; and he becomes a member of the royal house. This third stage is marked by Saul's deepening panic hatred, which has now become a fixed idea. All his attempts have only strengthened David's position, and he looks on his irresistible advance with a nameless awe. He calls, with a madman's folly, on Jonathan and on all his servants to kill him; and then, when his son appeals to him, his old better nature comes over him, and with a great oath he vows that David shall not be slain. For a short time David returns to Gibeah, and resumes his former relations with Saul, but a new victory over the Philistines rouses the slumbering

jealousy. Again the "evil spirit" is upon him, and the great javelin is flung with blind fury, and sticks quivering in the wall. It is night, and David flies to his house. A stealthy band of assassins from the palace surround the house with orders to prevent all egress, and, by what may be either the strange whim of a madman, or the cynical shamelessness of a tyrant, to slay him in the open daylight. Michal, who, though in after time she showed a strain of her father's proud godlessness, and an utter incapacity of understanding the noblest parts of her husband's character, seems to have been a true wife in these early days, discovers, perhaps with a woman's quick eye sharpened by love, the crouching murderers, and with rapid promptitude urges immediate flight. Her hands let him down from the window--the house being probably on the wall. Her ready wit dresses up one of those mysterious teraphim (which appear to have had some connection with idolatry or magic, and which are strange pieces of furniture for David's house), and lays it in the bed to deceive the messengers, and so gain a little more time before pursuit began. "So David fled and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah," and thus ended his life at court.

Glancing over this narrative, one or two points come prominently forth. The worth of these events to David must have lain chiefly in the abundant additions made to his experience of life, which ripened his nature, and developed new powers. The meditative life of the sheepfold is followed by the crowded court and camp. Strenuous work, familiarity with men, constant vicissitude, take the place of placid thought, of calm seclusion, of tranquil days that knew no changes but the alternation of sun and stars, storm and brightness, green pastures and dusty paths. He learned the real world, with its hate and effort, its hollow fame and its whispering calumnies. Many illusions no doubt faded, but the light that had shone in his solitude still burned before him for his guide, and a deeper trust in his Shepherd God was rooted in his soul by all the shocks of varying fortune. The passage from the visions of youth and the solitary resolves of early and uninterrupted piety to the naked realities of a wicked world, and the stern self-control of manly godliness, is ever painful and perilous. Thank God! it may be made clear gain, as it was by this young hero psalmist.

David's calm indifference to outward circumstances affecting himself, is very strikingly expressed in his conduct. Partly from his poetic temperament, partly from his sweet natural unselfishness, and chiefly from his living trust in God, he accepts whatever happens with equanimity, and makes no effort to alter it. He originates nothing. Prosperity comes unsought, and dangers unfeared. He does not ask for Jonathan's love, or the people's favour, or the women's songs, or Saul's daughter. If Saul gives him command he takes it, and does his work. If Saul flings his javelin at him, he simply springs aside and lets it whizz past. If his high position is taken from him, he is quite content with a lower. If a royal alliance is offered, he accepts it; if it is withdrawn, he is not ruffled; if renewed, he is still willing. If a busy web of intrigue is woven round him, he takes no notice. If reconciliation is proposed, he cheerfully goes back to the palace. If his life is threatened he goes home. He will not stir to escape but for the urgency of his wife. So well had he already begun to learn the worthlessness of life's trifles. So thoroughly does he practice his own precept, "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers;" "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." (Psalms 37:1, Psalms 37:7.) This section gives also a remarkable impression of the irresistible growth of his popularity and influence. The silent energy of the Divine purpose presses his fortunes onward with a motion slow and inevitable as that of a glacier. The steadfast flow circles unchecked round, or rises victorious over all hindrances. Efforts to ruin, to degrade, to kill--one and all fail. Terror and hate, suspicion and jealousy, only bring him nearer the goal. A clause which comes in thrice in the

course of one chapter, expresses this fated advance. In the first stage of his court life, we read, "David prospered" (1 Samuel 18:5, margin), and again with increased emphasis it is told as the result of the efforts to crush him, that, "He prospered in all his ways, and the Lord was with him" (1 Samuel 18:14), and yet again, in spite of Saul's having "become his enemy continually," he "prospered more than all the servants of Saul" (1 Samuel 18:30). He moves onward as stars in their courses move, obeying the equable impulse of the calm and conquering will of God. The familiar Scripture antithesis, which naturally finds its clearest utterance in the words of the last inspired writer--namely, the eternal opposition of Light and Darkness, Love and Hate, Life and Death, is brought into sharpest relief by the juxtaposition and contrast of David and Saul. This is the key to the story. The two men are not more unlike in person than in spirit. We think of the one with his ruddy beauty and changeful eyes, and lithe slight form, and of the other gaunt and black, his giant strength weakened, and his "goodly" face scarred with the lightnings of his passions--and as they look so they are. The one full of joyous energy, the other devoured by gloom; the one going in and out among the people and winning universal love, the other sitting moody and self-absorbed behind his palace walls; the one bringing sweet clear tones of trustful praise from his harp, the other shaking his huge spear in his madness; the one ready for action and prosperous in it all, the other paralyzed, shrinking from all work, and leaving the conduct of the war to the servant whom he feared; the one conscious of the Divine presence making him strong and calm, the other writhing in the gripe of his evil spirit, and either foaming in fury, or stiffened into torpor; the one steadily growing in power and favour with God and man, the other sinking in deeper mire, and wrapped about with thickening mists as he moves to his doom. The tragic pathos of these two lives in their fateful antagonism is the embodiment of that awful alternative of life and death, blessing and cursing, which it was the very aim of Judaism to stamp ineffaceably on the conscience.

David's flight begins a period to which a large number of his psalms are referred. We may call them "The Songs of the Outlaw." The titles in the psalter connect several with specific events during his persecution by Saul, and besides these, there are others which have marked characteristics in common, and may therefore be regarded as belonging to the same time. The bulk of the former class are found in the second book of the psalter (Psalms 42-72), which has been arranged with some care. There are first eight Korahite psalms, and one of Asaph's; then a group of fifteen Davidic (Psalms 51-65), followed by two anonymous; then three more of David's (Psalms 68-70), followed by one anonymous and the well-known prayer "for Solomon." Now it is worth notice that the group of fifteen psalms ascribed to David is as nearly as possible divided in halves, eight having inscriptions which give a specific date of composition, and seven having no such detail. There has also been some attempt at arranging the psalms of these two classes alternately, but that has not been accurately carried out. These facts show that the titles are at all events as old as the compilation of the second book of the psalter, and were regarded as accurate then. Several points about the complete book of psalms as we have it, seem to indicate that these two first books were an older nucleus, which was in existence long prior to the present collection--and if so, the date of the titles must be carried back a very long way indeed, and with a proportionate increase of authority. Of the eight psalms in the second book having titles with specific dates, five (Psalms 52:1-9; Psalms 54:1-7; Psalms 56:1-13; Psalms 57:1-11; Psalms 59:1-17) are assigned to the period of the Sauline persecution, and, as it would appear, with accuracy. There is a general similarity of tone in them all, as well as considerable parallelisms of

expression, favourite phrases and metaphors, which are favourable to the hypothesis of a nearly contemporaneous date. They are all in what, to use a phrase from another art, we may call David's earlier manner. For instance, in all the psalmist is surrounded by enemies. They would "swallow him up" (Psalms 56:1-2; Psalms 57:3). They "oppress" him (Psalms 54:3; Psalms 56:1). One of their weapons is calumny, which seems from the frequent references to have much moved the psalmist. Their tongues are razors (Psalms 52:2), or swords (Psalms 57:4; Psalms 59:7; Psalms 64:3). They seem to him like crouching beasts ready to spring upon harmless prey (Psalms 56:6; Psalms 57:6; Psalms 59:3); they are "lions" (Psalms 57:4), dogs (Psalms 59:6, Psalms 59:14). He is conscious of nothing which he has done to provoke this storm of hatred (Psalms 59:3; Psalms 64:4.) The "strength" of God is his hope (Psalms 54:1; Psalms 59:9, Psalms 59:17). He is sure that retribution will fall upon the enemies (Psalms 52:5; Psalms 54:5; Psalms 56:7; Psalms 57:6; Psalms 59:8-15; Psalms 64:7-8). He vows and knows that psalms of deliverance will yet succeed these plaintive cries (Psalms 52:9; Psalms 54:7; Psalms 56:12; Psalms 57:7-11; Psalms 59:16-17).

We also find a considerable number of psalms in the first book of the psalter which present the same features, and may therefore probably be classed with these as belonging to the time of his exile. Such for instance are the seventh and thirty-fourth, which have both inscriptions referring them to this period, with others which we shall have to consider presently. The imagery of the preceding group reappears in them. His enemies are lions (Psalms 7:2; Psalms 17:12; Psalms 22:13; Psalms 35:17); dogs (Psalms 22:16); bulls (Psalms 22:12). Pitfalls and snares are in his path (Psalms 7:15; Psalms 31:4; Psalms 35:7). He passionately protests his innocence, and the kindness of his heart to his wanton foes (Psalms 7:3-5; Psalms 17:3-4); whom he has helped and sorrowed over in their sickness (Psalms 35:13-14)--a reference, perhaps, to his solacing Saul in his paroxysms with the music of his harp. He dwells on retribution with vehemence (Psalms 7:11-16; Psalms 11:5-7; Psalms 31:23; Psalms 35:8), and on his own deliverance with confidence.

These general characteristics accurately correspond with the circumstances of David during the years of his wanderings. The scenery and life of the desert colours the metaphors which describe his enemies as wild beasts; himself as a poor hunted creature amongst pits and snares; or as a timid bird flying to the safe crags, and God as his Rock. Their strong assertions of innocence accord with the historical indications of Saul's gratuitous hatred, and appear to distinguish the psalms of this period from those of Absalom's revolt, in which the remembrance of his great sin was too deep to permit of any such claims. In like manner the prophecies of the enemies' destruction are too triumphant to suit that later time of exile, when the father's heart yearned with misplaced tenderness over his worthless son, and nearly broke with unkingly sorrow for the rebel's death. Their confidence in God, too, has in it a ring of joyousness in peril which corresponds with the buoyant faith that went with him through all the desperate adventures and hairbreadth escapes of the Sauline persecution. If then we may, with some confidence, read these psalms in connection with that period, what a noble portraiture of a brave, devout soul looks out upon us from them. We see him in the first flush of his manhood--somewhere about five-and-twenty years old--fronting perils of which he is fully conscious, with calm strength and an enthusiasm of trust that lifts his spirit above them all, into a region of fellowship with God which no tumult can invade, and which no remembrance of black transgression troubled and stained. His harp is his solace in his wanderings; and while plaintive notes are flung from its strings, as is needful for the deepest

harmonies of praise here, every wailing tone melts into clear ringing notes of glad affiance in the "God of his mercy."

Distinct references to the specific events of his wanderings are, undoubtedly, rare in them, though even these are more obvious than has been sometimes carelessly assumed. Their infrequency and comparative vagueness has been alleged against the accuracy of the inscriptions which allocate certain psalms to particular occasions. But in so far as it is true that these allusions are rare and inexact, the fact is surely rather in favour of than against the correctness of the titles. For if these are not suggested by obvious references in the psalms to which they are affixed, by what can they have been suggested but by a tradition considerably older than the compilation of the psalter? Besides, the analogy of all other poetry would lead us to expect precisely what we find in these psalms--general and not detailed allusions to the writer's circumstances. The poetic imagination does not reproduce the bald prosaic facts which have set it in motion, but the echo of them broken up and etherealised. It broods over them till life stirs, and the winged creature bursts from them to sing and soar.

If we accept the title as accurate, Psalms 59:1-17 is the first of these Songs of the Outlaw. It refers to the time "when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him." Those critics who reject this date, which they do on very weak grounds, lose themselves in a chaos of assumptions as to the occasion of the psalm. The Chaldean invasion, the assaults in the time of Nehemiah, and the era of the Maccabees, are alleged with equal confidence and equal groundlessness. "We believe that it is most advisable to adhere to the title, and most scientific to ignore these hypotheses built on nothing." (Delitzsch.)

It is a devotional and poetic commentary on the story in Samuel. There we get the bare facts of the assassins prowling by night round David's house; of Michal's warning; of her ready-witted trick to gain time, and of his hasty flight to Samuel at Ramah. In the narrative David is, as usual at this period, passive and silent; but when we turn to the psalm, we learn the tone of his mind as the peril bursts upon him, and all the vulgar craft and fear fades from before his lofty enthusiasm of faith. The psalm begins abruptly with a passionate cry for help, which is repeated four times, thus bringing most vividly before us the extremity of the danger and the persistency of the suppliant's trust. The peculiar tenderness and closeness of his relation to his heavenly Friend, which is so characteristic of David's psalms, and which they were almost the first to express, breathes through the name by which he invokes help, "my God." The enemies are painted in words which accurately correspond with the history, and which by their variety reveal how formidable they were to the psalmist. They "lie in wait (literally weave plots) for my life." They are "workers of iniquity," "men of blood," insolent or violent ("mighty" in English version). He asserts his innocence, as ever in these Sauline psalms, and appeals to God in confirmation, "not for my transgressions, nor for my sins, O Lord." He sees these eager tools of royal malice hurrying to their congenial work: "they run and prepare themselves." And then, rising high above all encompassing evils, he grasps at the throne of God in a cry, which gains additional force when we remember that the would-be murderers compassed his house in the night. "Awake to meet me, and behold;" as if he had said, "In the darkness do Thou see; at midnight sleep not Thou." The prayer is continued in words which heap together with unwonted abundance the Divine names, in each of which lie an appeal to God and a pillar of faith. As Jehovah, the self-existent Fountain of timeless Being; as the God of Hosts, the Commander of all the embattled powers of the universe, whether they be spiritual or material; as

the GOD of Israel, who calls that people His, and has become theirs--he stirs up the strength of God to "awake to visit all the heathen,"--a prayer which has been supposed to compel the reference of the whole psalm to the assaults of Gentile nations, but which may be taken as an anticipation on David's lips of the truth that, "They are not all Israel which are of Israel." After a terrible petition--"Be not merciful to any secret plotters of evil"--there is a pause (Selah) to be filled, as it would appear, by some chords on the harp, or the blare of the trumpets, thus giving time to dwell on the previous petitions. But still the thought of the foe haunts him, and he falls again to the lower level of painting their assembling round his house, and their whispers as they take their stand. It would appear that the watch had been kept up for more than one night. How he flings his growing scorn of them into the sarcastic words, "They return at evening; they growl like a dog, and compass the city" (or "go their rounds in the city"). One sees them stealing through the darkness, like the troops of vicious curs that infest Eastern cities, and hears their smothered threatenings as they crouch in the shadow of the unlighted streets. Then growing bolder, as the night deepens and sleep falls on the silent houses: "Behold they pour out with their mouth, swords (are) in their lips, for 'who hears?'" In magnificent contrast with these skulking murderers fancying themselves unseen and unheard, David's faith rends the heaven, and, with a daring image which is copied in a much later psalm (Psalms 2:4), shows God gazing on them with Divine scorn which breaks in laughter and mockery. A brief verse, which recurs at the end of the psalm, closes the first portion of the psalm with a calm expression of untroubled trust, in beautiful contrast with the peril and tumult of soul, out of which it rises steadfast and ethereal, like a rainbow spanning a cataract. A slight error appears to have crept into the Hebrew text, which can be easily corrected from the parallel verse at the end, and then the quiet confident words are-- "My strength! upon Thee will I wait, For God is my fortress!" The second portion is an intensification of the first; pouring out a terrible prayer for exemplary retribution on his enemies; asking that no speedy destruction may befall them, but that God would first of all "make them reel" by the blow of His might; would then fling them prostrate; would make their pride and fierce words a net to snare them; and then, at last, would bring them to nothing in the hot flames of His wrath--that the world may know that He is king. The picture of the prowling dogs recurs with deepened scorn and firmer confidence that they will hunt for their prey in vain.

"And they return at evening; they growl like a dog, And compass the city. They--they prowl about for food If (or, since) they are not satisfied, they spend the night (in the search.)"

There is almost a smile on his face as he thinks of their hunting about for him, like hungry hounds snuffing for their meal in the kennels, and growling now in disappointment--while he is safe beyond their reach. And the psalm ends with a glad burst of confidence, and a vow of praise very characteristic on his lips--

"But I--I will sing Thy power, And shout aloud, in the morning, Thy mercy, For Thou hast been a fortress for me. And a refuge in the day of my trouble. My strength! unto Thee will I harp, For God is my fortress--the God of my mercy."

Thrice he repeats the vow of praise. His harp was his companion in his flight, and even in the midst of peril the poet's nature appears which regards all life as materials for song, and the devout spirit appears which regards all trial as occasions for praise. He has calmed his own spirit, as he had done Saul's, by his song, and by prayer has swung himself clear above fightings and fears.

The refrain, which occurs twice in the psalm, witnesses to the growth of his faith even while he sings. At first he could only say in patient expectance, "My strength! I will wait upon thee, for God is my fortress." But at the end his mood is higher, his soul has caught fire as it revolves, and his last words are a triumphant amplification of his earlier trust: "My strength! unto thee will I sing with the harp--for God is my fortress--the God of my mercy."

02.05-V. THE EXILE--CONTINUED.

V.--THE EXILE--CONTINUED.

"So David fled, and escaped and came to Samuel to Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done unto him. And he and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth" (1 Samuel 19:18)--or, as the word probably means, in the collection of students' dwellings, inhabited by the sons of the prophets, where possibly there may have been some kind of right of sanctuary. Driven thence by Saul's following him, and having had one last sorrowful hour of Jonathan's companionship--the last but one on earth--he fled to Nob, whither the ark had been carried after the destruction of Shiloh. The story of his flight had not reached the solitary little town among the hills, and he is received with the honour due to the king's son-in-law. He pleads urgent secret business for Saul as a reason for his appearance with a slender retinue, and unarmed; and the priest, after some feeble scruples, supplies the handful of hungry fugitives with the shewbread. But David's quick eye caught a swarthy face peering at him from some enclosure of the simple forest sanctuary, and as he recognised Doeg the Edomite, Saul's savage herdsman, a cold foreboding of evil crept over his heart, and made him demand arms from the peaceful priest. The lonely tabernacle was guarded by its own sanctity, and no weapons were there, except one trophy which was of good omen to David--Goliath's sword. He eagerly accepts the matchless weapon which his hand had clutched on that day of danger and deliverance, and thus armed, lest Doeg should try to bar his flight, he hurries from the pursuit which he knew that the Edomite's malignant tongue would soon bring after him. The tragical end of the unsuspecting priest's kindness brings out the furious irrational suspicion and cruelty of Saul. He rages at his servants as leagued with David in words which have a most dreary sound of utter loneliness sighing through all their fierce folly: "All of you have conspired against me; there is none of you that is sorry for me" (1 Samuel 22:8.) Doeg is forward to curry favour by telling his tale, and so tells it as to suppress the priest's ignorance of David's flight, and to represent him as aiding and comforting the rebel knowingly. Then fierce wrath flames out from the darkened spirit, and the whole priestly population of Nob are summoned before him, loaded with bitter reproaches, their professions of innocence disregarded, and his guard ordered to murder them all then and there. The very soldiers shrink from the sacrilege, but a willing tool is at hand. The wild blood of Edom, fired by ancestral hatred, desires no better work, and Doeg crowns his baseness by slaying--with the help of his herdsman, no doubt--"on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear an ephod," and utterly extirpating every living thing from the defenceless little city.

One psalm, Psalms 52:1-9, is referred by its inscription to this period, but the correspondence between the history and the tone of the psalm is doubtful. It is a vehement rebuke and a prophecy of destruction directed against an enemy, whose hostility was expressed in "devouring words." The portrait does not apply very accurately to the Doeg of the historical books, inasmuch as it describes the psalmist's enemy as "a mighty man,"--or rather as "a hero," and as trusting "in the abundance of his riches,"--and makes the point of the reproach against him that he is a confirmed liar. But the dastardly deed of blood may be covertly alluded to in the bitterly sarcastic "hero"--as if

he had said, "O brave warrior, who dost display thy prowess in murdering unarmed priests and women?" And Doeg's story to Saul was a lie in so far as it gave the impression of the priests' complicity with David, and thereby caused their deaths on a false charge. The other features of the description are not contrary to the narrative, and most of them are in obvious harmony with it. The psalm, then, may be taken as showing how deeply David's soul was stirred by the tragedy. He pours out broken words of hot and righteous indignation:

"Destructions doth thy tongue devise, Like a razor whetted--O thou worker of deceit."

* * * * * "Thou lovest all words that devour:[F] O thou deceitful tongue!"

[F] Literally, "words of swallowing up."

He prophesies the destruction of the cruel liar, and the exultation of the righteous when he falls, in words which do indeed belong to the old covenant of retribution, and yet convey an eternal truth which modern sentimentalism finds very shocking, but which is witnessed over and over again in the relief that fills the heart of nations and of individuals when evil men fade: "When the wicked perish, there is shouting"--

"Also God shall smite thee down for ever, Will draw thee out,[G] and carry thee away from the tent, And root thee out of the land of the living; And the righteous shall see and fear, And over him shall they laugh." In confident security he opposes his own happy fellowship with God to this dark tragedy of retribution:

"But I--(I am) like a green olive tree in the house of God."

[G] The full force of the word is, "will pluck out as a glowing ember from a hearth" (Delitzsch). The enemy was to be "rooted out;" the psalmist is to flourish by derivation of life and vigour from God. If Robinson's conjecture that Nob was on the Mount of Olives were correct (which is very doubtful), the allusion here would gain appropriateness. As the olives grew all round the humble forest sanctuary, and were in some sort hallowed by the shrine which they encompassed, so the soul grows and is safe in loving fellowship with God. Be that as it may, the words express the outlaw's serene confidence that he is safe beneath the sheltering mercy of God, and re-echo the hopes of his earlier psalm, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." The stormy indignation of the earlier verses passes away into calm peace and patient waiting in praise and trust:

"I will praise Thee for ever, for Thou hast done (it), And wait on Thy name in the presence of Thy beloved, for it is good."

Hunted from Nob, David with a small company struck across the country in a southwesterly direction, keeping to the safety of the tangled mountains, till, from the western side of the hills of Judah, he looked down upon the broad green plain of Philistia. Behind him was a mad tyrant, in front the uncircumcised enemies of his country and his God. His condition was desperate, and he had recourse to desperate measures. That nearest Philistine city, some ten miles off, on which he looked down from his height, was Gath; the glen where he had killed its champion was close beside him,--every foot of ground was familiar by many a foray and many a fight. It was a dangerous resource to trust himself in Gath, with Goliath's sword dangling in his belt. But he may have hoped that he was not known by person, or may have thought that Saul's famous commander would be a welcome guest, as a banished man, at the Philistine court. So he made

the plunge, and took refuge in Goliath's city. Discovery soon came, and in the most ominous form. It was an ugly sign that the servants of Achish should be quoting the words of the chant of victory which extolled him as the slayer of their countryman. Vengeance for his death was but too likely to come next. The doubts of his identity seem to have lasted for some little time, and to have been at first privately communicated to the king. They somehow reached David, and awoke his watchful attention, as well as his fear. The depth of his alarm and his ready resource are shown by his degrading trick of assumed madness--certainly the least heroic action of his life. What a picture of a furious madman is the description of his conduct when Achish's servants came to arrest him. He "twisted himself about in their hands" in the feigned contortions of possession; he drummed on the leaves of the gate,[H] and "let his spittle run down into his beard." (1 Samuel 21:13.) Israelitish quickness gets the better of Philistine stupidity, as it had been used to do from Sampson's time onwards, and the dull-witted king falls into the trap, and laughs away the suspicions with a clumsy joke at his servants' expense about more madmen being the last thing he was short of. A hasty flight from Philistine territory ended this episode.

[H] The Septuagint appears to have followed a different reading here from that of our present Hebrew text, and the change adds a very picturesque clause to the description. A madman would be more likely to hammer than to "scrabble" on the great double-leaved gate.

Psalms 56:1-13, which is referred by its title to this period, seems at first sight to be in strange contrast with the impressions drawn from the narrative, but on a closer examination is found to confirm the correctness of the reference by its contents. The terrified fugitive, owing his safety to a trick, and slaving like an idiot in the hands of his rude captors, had an inner life of trust strong enough to hold his mortal terror in check, though not to annihilate it. The psalm is far in advance of the conduct--is it so unusual a circumstance as to occasion surprise, that lofty and sincere utterances of faith and submission should co-exist with the opposite feelings? Instead of taking the contrast between the words and the acts as a proof that this psalm is wrongly ascribed to the period in question, let us rather be thankful for another instance that imperfect faith may be genuine, and that if we cannot rise to the height of unwavering fortitude, God accepts a tremulous trust fighting against mortal terror, and grasping with a feeble hand the word of God, and the memory of all his past deliverances. It is precisely this conflict of faith and fear which the psalm sets before us. It falls into three portions, the first and second of which are closed by a kind of refrain (Psalms 56:4, Psalms 56:10, Psalms 56:11)--a structure which is characteristic of several of these Sauline persecution psalms (e.g., Psalms 57:5, Psalms 57:11; Psalms 59:9, Psalms 59:17). The first part of each of these two portions is a vivid description of his danger, from which he rises to the faith expressed in the closing words. The repetition of the same thoughts in both is not to be regarded as a cold artifice of composition, but as the true expression of the current of his thoughts. He sees his enemies about him, ready to swallow him up--"there be many fighting against me disdainfully"[I] (Psalms 56:2). Whilst the terror creeps round his heart ("he was sore afraid," 1 Samuel 21:12), he rouses himself to trust, as he says, in words which express most emphatically the co-existence of the two, and carry a precious lesson of the reality of even an interrupted faith, streaked with many a black line of doubt and dread.

[I] Literally, "loftily." Can there be any allusion to the giant stature of Goliath's relations in Gath? We hear of four men "born to the giant in Gath," who were killed in David's wars. (2 Samuel 21:22.) "(In) the day (that) I am afraid--I trust on Thee." And then he breaks into the utterance of

praise and confidence--to which he has climbed by the ladder of prayer.

"In God I praise His word, In God I trust, I do not fear:-- What shall flesh do to me?"

How profoundly these words set forth the object of his trust, as being not merely the promise of God--which in David's case may be the specific promise conveyed by his designation to the throne--but the God who promises, the inmost nature of that confidence as being a living union with God, the power of it as grappling with his dread, and enabling him now to say, "I do not fear." But again he falls from this height; another surge of fear breaks over him, and almost washes him from his rock. His foes, with ceaseless malice, arrest his words; they skulk in ambush, they dog his heels, they long for his life. The crowded clauses portray the extremity of the peril and the singer's agitation. His soul is still heaving with the ground swell of the storm, though the blasts come more fitfully, and are dying into calm. He is not so afraid but that he can turn to God; he turns to Him because he is afraid, like the disciples in later days, who had so much of terror that they must awake their Master, but so much of trust that His awaking was enough. He pleads with God, as in former psalms, against his enemies, in words which go far beyond the occasion, and connect his own deliverance with the judgments of God over the whole earth. He plaintively recalls his homelessness and his sorrows in words which exhibit the characteristic blending of hope and pain, and which are beautifully in accordance with the date assigned to the psalm. "My wanderings dost Thou, even Thou, number." He is not alone in these weary flights from Gibeah to Ramah, from Ramah to Nob, from Nob to Gath, from Gath he knows not whither. One friend goes with him through them all. And as the water-skin was a necessary part of a traveller's equipment, the mention of his wanderings suggests the bold and tender metaphor of the next clause, "Put my tears in Thy bottle,"--a prayer for that very remembrance of his sorrows, in the existence of which he immediately declares his confidence--"Are they not in Thy book?" The true office of faithful communion with God is to ask for, and to appropriate, the blessings which in the very act become ours. He knows that his cry will scatter his foes, for God is for him. And thus once again he has risen to the height of confidence where for a moment his feet have been already planted, and again--but this time with even fuller emphasis, expressed by an amplification which introduces for the only time in the psalm the mighty covenant name--he breaks into his triumphant strain--

"In God I praise the Word; In JEHOVAH I praise the Word: In God I trust, I do not fear:-- What shall man do to me?" And from this mood of trustful expectation he does not again decline. Prayer has brought its chiefest blessing--the peace that passeth understanding. The foe is lost to sight, the fear conquered conclusively by faith; the psalm which begins with a plaintive cry, ends in praise for deliverance, as if it had been already achieved--

"Thou hast delivered my life from death, (Hast Thou) not (delivered) my feet from falling, That I may walk before God in the light of the living?"

He already reckons himself safe; his question is not an expression of doubt, but of assurance; and he sees the purpose of all God's dealings with him to be that the activities of life may all be conducted in the happy consciousness of His eye who is at once Guardian and Judge of His children. How far above his fears and lies has this hero and saint risen by the power of supplication and the music of his psalm!

David naturally fled into Israelitish territory from Gath. The exact locality of the cave Adullam, where we next find him, is doubtful; but several strong reasons occur for rejecting the monkish tradition which places it away to the east, in one of the wild wadies which run down from Bethlehem to the Dead Sea. We should expect it to be much more accessible by a hasty march from Gath. Obviously it would be convenient for him to hang about the frontier of Philistia and Israel, that he might quickly cross the line from one to the other, as dangers appeared. Further, the city of Adullam is frequently mentioned, and always in connections which fix its site as on the margin of the great plain of Philistia, and not far from Gath. (2 Chronicles 11:7, etc.) There is no reason to suppose that the cave of Adullam was in a totally different district from the city. The hills of Dan and Judah, which break sharply down into the plain within a few miles of Gath, are full of "extensive excavations," and there, no doubt, we are to look for the rocky hold, where he felt himself safer from pursuit, and whence he could look down over the vast sweep of the rich Philistine country. Gath lay at his feet, close by was the valley where he had killed Goliath, the scenes of Samson's exploits were all about him. Thither fled to him his whole family, from fear, no doubt, of Saul's revenge falling on them; and there he gathers his band of four hundred desperate men, whom poverty and misery, and probably the king's growing tyranny, drove to flight. They were wild, rough soldiers, according to the picturesque description, "whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains." They were not freebooters, but seem to have acted as a kind of frontier-guard against southern Bedouins and western Philistines for the sheep-farmers of the border whom Saul's government was too weak to protect. In this desultory warfare, and in eluding the pursuit of Saul, against whom it is to be observed David never employed any weapon but flight, several years were passed. The effect of such life on his spiritual nature was to deepen his unconditional dependence on God; by the alternations of heat and cold, fear and hope, danger and safety, to temper his soul and make it flexible, tough and bright as steel. It evolved the qualities of a leader of men; teaching him command and forbearance, promptitude and patience, valour and gentleness. It won for him a name as the defender of the nation, as Nabal's servant said of him and his men, "They were a wall unto us, both by night and by day" (1 Samuel 25:16). And it gathered round him a force of men devoted to him by the enthusiastic attachment bred from long years of common dangers, and the hearty friendships of many a march by day, and nightly encampment round the glimmering watchfires, beneath the lucid stars.

02.06-VI. THE EXILE--CONTINUED.

VI.--THE EXILE--CONTINUED.

We have one psalm which the title connects with the beginning of David's stay at Adullam,--the thirty-fourth. The supposition that it dates from that period throws great force into many parts of it, and gives a unity to what is else apparently fragmentary and disconnected. Unlike those already considered, which were pure soliloquies, this is full of exhortation and counsel, as would naturally be the case if it were written when friends and followers began to gather to his standard. It reads like a long sigh of relief at escape from a danger just past; its burden is to tell of God's deliverance, and to urge to trust in Him. How perfectly this tone corresponds to the circumstances immediately after his escape from Gath to Adullam need not be more than pointed out. The dangers which he had dreaded and the cry to God which he had sent forth are still present to his mind, and echo through his song, like a subtly-touched chord of sadness, which appears for a moment, and is drowned in the waves of some triumphant music.

"I sought the Lord, and He heard me, And from all my alarms He delivered me." (Psalms 34:4)

* * * * * "This afflicted (man) cried, and Jehovah heard, And from all his troubles He saved him." (Psalms 34:6) And the "local colouring" of the psalm corresponds too with the circumstances of Adullam. How appropriate, for instance, does the form in which the Divine protection is proclaimed become, when we think of the little band bivouacking among the cliffs, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." Like his great ancestor, he is met in his desert flight by heavenly guards, "and he calls the name of that place Mahanaim" (that is, "two camps"), as discerning gathered round his own feeble company the ethereal weapons of an encircling host of the warriors of God, through whose impenetrable ranks his foes must pierce before they can reach him. From Samson's time we read of lions in this district (Judges 14:8-9), and we may recognise another image as suggested by their growls heard among the ravines, and their gaunt forms prowling near the cave. "The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good" (Psalms 34:10). And then he passes to earnest instructions and exhortations, which derive appositeness from regarding them as a proclamation to his men of the principles on which his camp is to be governed. "Come, ye children, hearken unto me." He regards himself as charged with guiding them to godliness: "I will teach you the fear of the Lord." With some remembrance, perhaps, of his deception at Gath, he warns them to "keep" their "tongues from evil" and their "lips from speaking guile." They are not to be in love with warfare, but, even with their swords in their hands, are to "seek peace, and pursue it." On these exhortations follow joyous assurances of God's watchful eye fixed upon the righteous, and His ear open to their cry; of deliverance for his suppliants, whatsoever hardship and trouble they may have to wade through; of a guardianship which "keepeth all the bones" of the righteous, so that neither the blows of the foe nor the perils of the crags should break them,--all crowned with the contrast ever present to David's mind, and having a personal reference to his enemies and to himself:

"Evil shall slay the wicked, And the haters of the righteous shall suffer penalty. Jehovah redeems the life of His servants, And no penalty shall any suffer who trust in Him."

Such were the counsels and teachings of the young leader to his little band,--noble "general orders" from a commander at the beginning of a campaign!

We venture to refer the twenty-seventh psalm also to this period. It is generally supposed, indeed, by those commentators who admit its Davidic authorship, to belong to the time of Absalom's rebellion. The main reason for throwing it so late is the reference in Psalms 27:4 to dwelling in the house of the Lord and inquiring in His temple.[J] This is supposed to require a date subsequent to David's bringing up of the ark to Jerusalem, and placing it in a temporary sanctuary. But whilst longing for the sanctuary is no doubt characteristic of the psalms of the later wanderings, it is by no means necessary to suppose that in the present case that desire, which David represents as the longing of his life, was a desire for mere bodily presence in a material temple. Indeed, the very language seems to forbid such an interpretation. Surely the desire for an abode in the house of the Lord--which was his one wish, which he longed to have continuous throughout all the days of his life, which was to surround him with a privacy of protection in trouble, and to be as the munitions of rocks about him--was something else than a morbid desire for an impossible seclusion in the tabernacle,--a desire fitter for some sickly mediæval monarch who buried his foolish head and faint heart in a monastery than for God's Anointed. We have seen an earlier germ of the same desire in the twenty-third psalm, the words of which are referred to here; and the interpretation of the one is the interpretation of the other. The psalmist breathes his longing for the Divine fellowship, which shall be at once vision, and guidance, and hidden life in distress, and stability, and victory, and shall break into music of perpetual praise.

[J] "The fourth verse in its present form must have been written after the temple was built."--"The Psalms chronologically arranged," p. 68--following Ewald, in whose imperious criticism that same naked "must have been," works wonders.

If, then, we are not obliged by the words in question to adopt the later date, there is much in the psalm which strikingly corresponds with the earlier, and throws beautiful illustration on the psalmist's mood at this period. One such allusion we venture to suppose in the words (Psalms 27:2), "When the wicked came against me to devour my flesh, My enemies and my foes,--they stumbled and fell;" which have been usually taken as a mere general expression, without any allusion to a specific event. But there was one incident in David's life which had been forced upon his remembrance by his recent peril at Gath--his duel with Goliath, which exactly meets the very peculiar language here. The psalm employs the same word as the narrative, which tells how the Philistine "arose, and came, and drew near to David." The braggart boast, "I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air and the beasts of the fields," is echoed in the singular phrase of the psalm; and the emphatic, rapid picture, "they stumbled and fell," is at once a reminiscence of the hour when the stone crashed through the thick forehead, "and he fell upon his face to the earth;" and also a reference to an earlier triumph in Israel's history, celebrated with fierce exultation in the wild chant whom rolls the words like a sweet morsel under the tongue, as it tells of Sisera--

"Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay; Between her feet he bowed, he fell; Where he bowed, there he fell down dead."

Another autobiographical reference in the psalm has been disputed on insufficient grounds:

"For my father and my mother forsake me, And Jehovah takes me up." (Psalms 27:10.)

It is, at all events, a remarkable coincidence that the only mention of his parents after the earliest chapters of his life falls in precisely with this period of the history, and is such as might have suggested these words. We read (1 Samuel 22:3-4) that he once ventured all the way from Adullam to Moab to beg an asylum from Saul's indiscriminate fury for his father and mother, who were no doubt too old to share his perils, as the rest of his family did. Having prepared a kindly welcome for them, perhaps on the strength of the blood of Ruth the Moabitess in Jesse's veins, he returned to Bethlehem, brought the old couple away, and guarded them safely to their refuge. It is surely most natural to suppose that the psalm is the lyrical echo of that event, and most pathetic to conceive of the psalmist as thinking of the happy home at Bethlehem now deserted, his brothers lurking with him among the rocks, and his parents exiles in heathen lands. Tears fill his eyes, but he lifts them to a Father that is never parted from him, and feels that he is no more orphaned nor homeless. The psalm is remarkable for the abrupt transition of feeling which cleaves it into two parts; one (Psalms 27:1-6) full of jubilant hope and enthusiastic faith, the other (Psalms 27:7-14) a lowly cry for help. There is no need to suppose, with some critics, that we have here two independent hymns bound together in error. He must have little knowledge of the fluctuations of the devout life who is surprised to find so swift a passage from confidence to conscious weakness. Whilst the usual order in the psalms, as the usual order in good men's experience, is that prayer for deliverance precedes praise and triumph, true communion with God is bound to no mechanical order, and may begin with gazing on God, and realizing the mysteries of beauty in His secret place, ere it drops to earth. The lark sings as it descends from the "privacy of glorious light" to its nest in the stony furrows as sweetly, though more plaintively, than whilst it circles upwards to the sky. It is perhaps a nobler effect of faith to begin with God and hymn the victory as if already won, than to begin with trouble and to call for deliverance. But with whichever we commence, the prayer of earth must include both; and so long as we are weak, and God our strength, its elements must be "supplication and thanksgiving." The prayer of our psalm bends round again to its beginning, and after the plaintive cry for help breaks once more into confidence (Psalms 27:13-14). The psalmist shudders as he thinks what ruin would have befallen him if he had not trusted in God, and leaves the unfinished sentence,--as a man looking down into some fearful gulf starts back and covers his eyes, before he has well seen the bottom of the abyss.

"If I had not believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!"

Then rejoicing to remember how even by his feeble trust he has been saved, he stirs up himself to a firmer faith, in words which are themselves an exercise of faith, as well as an incitement to it:

"Wait on Jehovah! Courage! and let thy heart be strong! Yea! wait on Jehovah!"

Here is the true highest type of a troubled soul's fellowship with God, when the black fear and consciousness of weakness is inclosed in a golden ring of happy trust. Let the name of our God be first upon our lips, and the call to our wayward hearts to wait on Him be last, and then we may between think of our loneliness, and feebleness, and foes, and fears, without losing our hold of our Father's hand.

David in his rocky eyrie was joyful, because he began with God. It was a man in real peril who said, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?" It was at a critical pause in his fortunes, when he knew not yet whether Saul's malice was implacable, that he said, "Though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." It was in thankfulness for the safe hiding-place among the dark caverns of the hills that he celebrated the dwelling of the soul in God with words coloured by his circumstances, "In the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me; He shall set me up upon a rock." It was with Philistia at his feet before and Saul's kingdom in arms behind that his triumphant confidence was sure that "Now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me." It was in weakness, not expelled even by such joyous faith, that he plaintively besought God's mercy, and laid before His mercy-seat as the mightiest plea His own inviting words, "Seek ye My face," and His servant's humble response, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Together, these made it impossible that that Face, the beams of which are light and salvation, should be averted. God's past comes to his lips as a plea for a present consistent with it and with His own mighty name. "Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." His loneliness, his ignorance of his road, and the enemies who watch him, and, like a later Saul, "breathe out cruelty" (see Acts 9:1), become to him in his believing petitions, not grounds of fear, but arguments with God; and having thus mastered all that was distressful in his lot, by making it all the basis of his cry for help, he rises again to hope, and stirs up himself to lay hold on God, to be strong and bold, because his expectation is from Him. A noble picture of a steadfast soul; steadfast not because of absence of fears and reasons for fear, but because of presence of God and faith in Him.

Having abandoned Adullam, by the advice of the prophet Gad, who from this time appears to have been a companion till the end of his reign (2 Samuel 24:11), and who subsequently became his biographer (1 Chronicles 29:29), he took refuge, as outlaws have ever been wont to do, in the woods. In his forest retreat, somewhere among the now treeless hills of Judah, he heard of a plundering raid made by the Philistines on one of the unhappy border towns. The marauders had broken in upon the mirth of the threshing-floors with the shout of battle, and swept away the year's harvest. The banished man resolved to strike a blow at the ancestral foes. Perhaps one reason may have been the wish to show that, outlaw as he was, he, and not the morbid laggard at Gibeah, who was only stirred to action by mad jealousy, was the sword of Israel. The little band bursts from the hills on the spoil-encumbered Philistines, recaptures the cattle which like moss troopers they were driving homewards from the ruined farmsteads, and routs them with great slaughter. But the cowardly townspeople of Keilah had less gratitude than fear; and the king's banished son-in-law was too dangerous a guest, even though he was of their own tribe, and had delivered them from the enemy. Saul, who had not stirred from his moody seclusion to beat back invasion, summoned a hasty muster, in the hope of catching David in the little city, like a fox in his earth: and the cowardly citizens meditated saving their homes by surrendering their champion. David and his six hundred saved themselves by a rapid flight, and, as it would appear, by breaking up into detachments. "They went whithersoever they could go" (1 Samuel 23:13); whilst David, with some handful, made his way to the inhospitable wilderness which stretches from the hills of Judah to the shores of the Dead Sea, and skulked there in "lurking places" among the crags and tangled underwood. With fierce perseverance "Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand." One breath of love, fragrant and strength-giving, was wafted to his fainting heart, when Jonathan found his way where Saul could not come, and the two friends met once

more. In the woodland solitudes they plighted their faith again, and the beautiful unselfishness of Jonathan is wonderfully set forth in his words, "Thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee;" while an awful glimpse is given into that mystery of a godless will consciously resisting the inevitable, when there is added, "and that also Saul, my father, knoweth." In such resistance the king's son has no part, for it is pointedly noticed that he returned to his house. Treachery, and that from the men of his own tribe, again dogs David's steps. The people of Ziph, a small place on the edge of the southern desert, betray his haunt to Saul. The king receives the intelligence with a burst of thanks, in which furious jealousy and perverted religion, and a sense of utter loneliness and misery, and a strange self-pity, are mingled most pathetically and terribly: "Blessed be ye of the Lord, for ye have compassion on me!" He sends them away to mark down his prey; and when they have tracked him to his lair, he follows with his force and posts them round the hill where David and his handful lurk. The little band try to escape, but they are surrounded and apparently lost. At the very moment when the trap is just going to close, a sudden messenger, "fiery red with haste," rushes into Saul's army with news of a formidable invasion: "Haste thee and come; for the Philistines have spread themselves upon the land!" So the eager hand, ready to smite and crush, is plucked back; and the hour of deepest distress is the hour of deliverance. At some period in this lowest ebb of David's fortunes, we have one short psalm, very simple and sad (Psalms 54:1-7) It bears the title, "When the Ziphims came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us?" and may probably be referred to the former of the two betrayals by the men of Ziph. The very extremity of peril has made the psalmist still and quiet. The sore need has shortened his prayer. He is too sure that God hears to use many words; for it is distrust, not faith, which makes us besiege His throne with much speaking. He is confident as ever; but one feels that there is a certain self-restraint and air of depression over the brief petitions, which indicate the depth of his distress and the uneasiness of protracted anxiety. Two notes only sound from his harp: one a plaintive cry for help; the other, thanksgiving for deliverance as already achieved. The two are bound together by the recurrence in each of "the name" of GOD, which is at once the source of his salvation and the theme of his praise. We have only to read the lowly petitions to feel that they speak of a spirit somewhat weighed down by danger, and relaxed from the loftier mood of triumphant trust.

(Psalms 54:1) O God, by Thy name save me, And in Thy strength do judgment for me (Psalms 54:2) O God, hear my prayer, Give ear to the words of my mouth.

(Psalms 54:3) For strangers are risen against me, And tyrants seek my life. They set not God before them. The enemies are called "strangers;" but, as we have seen in the first of these songs of the exile, it is not necessary, therefore, to suppose that they were not Israelites. The Ziphites were men of Judah like himself; and there is bitter emphasis as well as a gleam of insight into the spiritual character of the true Israel in calling them foreigners. The other name, oppressors, or violent men, or, as we have rendered it, tyrants, corresponds too accurately with the character of Saul in his later years, to leave much doubt that it is pointed at him. If so, the softening of the harsh description by the use of the plural is in beautiful accord with the forgiving leniency which runs through all David's conduct to him. Hard words about Saul himself do not occur in the psalms. His counsellors, his spies, the liars who calumniated David to him, and for their own ends played upon his suspicious nature,--the tools who took care that the cruel designs suggested by themselves should be carried out, kindle David's wrath, but it scarcely ever lights on the unhappy monarch

whom he loved with all-enduring charity while he lived, and mourned with magnificent eulogy when he died. The allusion is made all the more probable, because of the verbal correspondence with the narrative which records that "Saul was come out to seek his life" (1 Samuel 23:15.) A chord or two from the harp permits the mind to dwell on the thought of the foes, and prepares for the second part of this psalm. In it thanksgiving and confidence flow from the petitions of the former portion. But the praise is not so jubilant, nor the trust so victorious, as we have seen them. "The peace of God" has come in answer to prayer, but it is somewhat subdued:

"Behold, God is my helper; The Lord is the supporter of my life." The foes sought his life, but, as the historical book gives the antithesis, "Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand." The rendering of the English version, "The Lord is with them that uphold my soul," is literally accurate, but does not convey the meaning of the Hebrew idiom. God is not regarded as one among many helpers, but as alone the supporter or upholder of his life. Believing that, the psalmist, of course, believes as a consequence that his enemies will be smitten with evil for their evil. The prophetic lip of faith calls things that are not as though they were. In the midst of his dangers he looks forward to songs of deliverance and glad sacrifices of praise; and the psalm closes with words that approach the more fervid utterances we have already heard, as if his song had raised his own spirit above its fears:

(Psalms 54:6) With willinghood will I sacrifice unto Thee. I will praise Thy name for it is good.

(Psalms 54:7) For from all distress it has delivered me. And on my enemies will mine eye see (my desire) The name--the revealed character of God--was the storehouse of all the saving energies to which he appealed in verse Psalms 54:1. It is the theme of his praise when the deliverance shall have come. It is almost regarded here as equivalent to the Divine personality--it is good, it has delivered him. Thus, we may say that this brief psalm gives us as the single thought of a devout soul in trouble, the name of the Lord, and teaches by its simple pathos how the contemplation of God as He has made Himself known, should underlie every cry for help and crown every thanksgiving; whilst it may assure us that whosoever seeks for the salvation of that mighty name may, even in the midst of trouble, rejoice as in an accomplished deliverance. And all such thoughts should be held with a faith at least as firm as the ancient psalmist's, by us to whom the "name" of the Lord is "declared" by Him who is the full revelation of God, and the storehouse of all blessings and help to his "brethren." (Hebrews 2:12.) A little plain of some mile or so in breadth slopes gently down towards the Dead Sea about the centre of its western shore. It is girdled round by savage cliffs, which, on the northern side, jut out in a bold headland to the water's edge. At either extremity is a stream flowing down a deep glen choked with luxurious vegetation; great fig-trees, canes, and maiden-hair ferns covering the rocks. High up on the hills forming its western boundary a fountain sparkles into light, and falls to the flat below in long slender threads. Some grey weathered stones mark the site of a city that was old when Abraham wandered in the land. Traces of the palm forests which, as its name indicates, were cleared for its site (Hazezon Tamar, The palm-tree clearing) have been found, encrusted with limestone, in the warm, damp gullies, and ruined terraces for vineyards can be traced on the bare hill-sides. But the fertility of David's time is gone, and the precious streams nourish only a jungle haunted by leopard and ibex. This is the fountain and plain of Engedi (the fount of the wild goat), a spot which wants but industry and care to make it a little paradise. Here David fled from the neighbouring wilderness, attracted no doubt by the safety of the deep gorges and rugged hills, as well as by the abundance of water in the fountain

and the streams. The picturesque and touching episode of his meeting with Saul has made the place for ever memorable. There are many excavations in the rocks about the fountain, which may have been the cave--black as night to one looking inward with eyes fresh from the blinding glare of sunlight upon limestone, but holding a glimmering twilight to one looking outwards with eyes accustomed to the gloom--in the innermost recesses of which David lay hid while Saul tarried in its mouth. The narrative gives a graphic picture of the hurried colloquy among the little band, when summary revenge was thus unexpectedly put within their grasp. The fierce retainers whispered their suggestion that it would be "tempting providence" to let such an opportunity escape; but the nobler nature of David knows no personal animosity, and in these earliest days is flecked by no cruelty nor lust of blood. He cannot, however, resist the temptation of showing his power and almost parading his forbearance by stealing through the darkness and cutting away the end of Saul's long robe. It was little compared with what he could as easily have done--smite him to the heart as he crouched there defenceless. But it was a coarse practical jest, conveying a rude insult, and the quickly returning nobleness of his nature made him ashamed of it, as soon as he had clambered back with his trophy. He felt that the sanctity of Saul's office as the anointed of the Lord should have saved him from the gibe. The king goes his way all unawares, and, as it would seem, had not regained his men, when David, leaving his band (very much out of temper no doubt at his foolish nicety), yields to a gush of ancient friendship and calls loudly after him, risking discovery and capture in his generous emotion. The pathetic conversation which ensued is eminently characteristic of both men, so tragically connected and born to work woe to one another. David's remonstrance (1 Samuel 24:9-15) is full of nobleness, of wounded affection surviving still, of conscious rectitude, of solemn devout appeal to the judgment of God. He has no words of reproach for Saul, no weak upbraidings, no sullen anger, no repaying hate with hate. He almost pleads with the unhappy king, and yet there is nothing undignified or feeble in his tone. The whole is full of correspondences, often of verbal identity, with the psalms which we assign to this period. The calumnies which he so often complains of in these are the subject of his first words to Saul, whom he regards as having had his heart poisoned by lies: "Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold! David seeketh thy hurt." He asserts absolute innocence of anything that warranted the king's hostility, just as he does so decisively in the psalms. "There is neither evil nor transgression in my hand, and I have not sinned against thee." As in them he so often compares himself to some wild creature pursued like the goats in the cliffs of Engedi, so he tells Saul, "Thou huntest my life to take it." And his appeal from earth's slanders, and misconceptions, and cruelties, to the perfect tribunal of God, is couched in language, every clause of which may be found in his psalms. "The Lord, therefore, be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thy hand." The unhappy Saul again breaks into a passion of tears. With that sudden flashing out into vehement emotion so characteristic of him, and so significant of his enfeebled self-control, he recognises David's generous forbearance and its contrast to his own conduct. For a moment, at all events, he sees, as by a lightning flash, the mad hopelessness of the black road he is treading in resisting the decree that has made his rival king--and he binds him by an oath to spare his house when he sits on the throne. The picture moves awful thoughts and gentle pity for the poor scathed soul writhing in its hopelessness and dwelling in a great solitude of fear, but out of which stray gleams of ancient nobleness still break;--and so the doomed man goes back to his gloomy seclusion at Gibeah, and David to the free life of the mountains and the wilderness.

02.07-VII. THE EXILE--CONTINUED.

VII.--THE EXILE--CONTINUED.

There are many echoes of this period of Engedi in the Psalms. Perhaps the most distinctly audible of these are to be found in the seventh psalm, which is all but universally recognised as David's, even Ewald concurring in the general consent. It is an irregular ode--for such is the meaning of Shiggaion in the title, and by its broken rhythms and abrupt transitions testifies to the emotion of its author. The occasion of it is said to be "the words of Cush the Benjamite." As this is a peculiar name for an Israelite, it has been supposed to be an allegorical designation for some historical person, expressive of his character. We might render it "the negro." The Jewish commentators have taken it to refer to Saul himself, but the bitter tone of the psalm, so unlike David's lingering forbearance to the man whom he never ceased to love, is against that supposition. Shimei the Benjamite, whose foul tongue cursed him in rabid rage, as he fled before Absalom, has also been thought of, but the points of correspondence with the earlier date are too numerous to make that reference tenable. It seems better to suppose that Cush "the black" was one of Saul's tribe, who had been conspicuous among the calumniators of whom we have seen David complaining to the king. And if so, there is no period in the Sauline persecution into which the psalm will fit so naturally as the present. Its main thoughts are precisely those which he poured out so passionately in his eager appeal when he and Saul stood face to face on the solitary hill side. They are couched in the higher strain of poetry indeed, but that is the only difference; whilst there are several verbal coincidences, and at least one reference to the story, which seem to fix the date with considerable certainty. In it we see the psalmist's soul surging with the ground swell of strong emotion, which breaks into successive waves of varied feeling--first (Psalms 7:1-2) terror blended with trust, the enemy pictured, as so frequently in these early psalms, as a lion who tears the flesh and breaks the bones of his prey--and the refuge in God described by a graphic word very frequent also in the cotemporaneous psalms (Psalms 11:1; Psalms 57:1, etc.). Then with a quick turn comes the passionate protestation of his innocence, in hurried words, broken by feeling, and indignantly turning away from the slanders which he will not speak of more definitely than calling them "this."

(Psalms 7:3) Jehovah, my God! if I have done this-- If there be iniquity in my hands--

(Psalms 7:4) If I have rewarded evil to him that was at peace with me-- Yea, I delivered him that without cause is mine enemy--

(Psalms 7:5) May the enemy pursue my soul and capture it, And trample down to the earth my life, And my glory in the dust may he lay!

How remarkably all this agrees with his words to Saul, "There is neither evil nor transgression in my hand, ... yet thou huntest my soul to take it" (1 Samuel 24:11); and how forcible becomes the singular reiteration in the narrative, of the phrase "my hand," which occurs six times in four verses. The peculiarly abrupt introduction in Psalms 7:4 of the clause, "I delivered him that without cause

is mine enemy," which completely dislocates the grammatical structure, is best accounted for by supposing that David's mind is still full of the temptation to stain his hands with Saul's blood, and is vividly conscious of the effort which he had had to make to overcome it. And the solemn invocation of destruction which he dares to address to Jehovah his God includes the familiar figure of himself as a fugitive before the hunters, which is found in the words already quoted, and which here as there stands in immediate connection with his assertion of clean hands.

Then follows, with another abrupt turn, a vehement cry to God to judge his cause; his own individual case melts into the thought of a world-wide judgment, which is painted with grand power with three or four broad rapid strokes.

(Psalms 7:6) Awake for me--Thou hast commanded judgment.

(Psalms 7:7) Let the assembly of the nations stand round Thee, And above it return Thou up on high.

(Psalms 7:8) Jehovah will judge the nations. Judge me, O Jehovah, according to my righteousness and mine integrity in me!

Each smaller act of God's judgment is connected with the final world-judgment, is a prophecy of it, is one in principle therewith; and He, who at the last will be known as the universal Judge of all, certainly cannot leave His servants' cause unredressed nor their cry unheard till then. The psalmist is led by his own history to realize more intensely that truth of a Divine manifestation for judicial purposes to the whole world, and his prophetic lip paints its solemnities as the surest pledge of his own deliverance. He sees the gathered nations standing hushed before the Judge, and the Victor God at the close of the solemn act ascending up on high where He was before, above the heads of the mighty crowd (Psalms 68:19). In the faith of this vision, and because God will judge the nations, he invokes for himself the anticipation of that final triumph of good over evil, and asks to be dealt with according to his righteousness. Nothing but the most hopeless determination to find difficulties could make a difficulty of such words. David is not speaking of his whole character or life, but of his conduct in one specific matter, namely, in his relation to Saul. The righteous integrity which he calls God to vindicate is not general sinlessness nor inward conformity with the law of God, but his blamelessness in all his conduct to his gratuitous foe. His prayer that God would judge him is distinctly equivalent to his often repeated cry for deliverance, which should, as by a Divine arbitration, decide the debate between Saul and him. The whole passage in the psalm, with all its lyrical abruptness and lofty imagery, is the expression of the very same thought which we find so prominent in his words to Saul, already quoted, concerning God's judging between them and delivering David out of Saul's hand. The parallel is instructive, not only as the prose rendering of the poetry in the psalm, explaining it beyond the possibility of misunderstanding, but also as strongly confirmatory of the date which we have assigned to the latter. It is so improbable as to be almost inconceivable that the abrupt disconnected themes of the psalm should echo so precisely the whole of the arguments used in the remonstrance of the historical books, and should besides present verbal resemblances and historical allusions to these, unless it be of the same period, and therefore an inlet into the mind of the fugitive as he lurked among the rugged cliffs by "the fountain of the wild goat." In that aspect the remainder of the psalm is very striking and significant. We have two main thoughts in it--that of God as punishing evil in this life, and that of the self-destruction inherent in all sin; and these are

expressed with such extraordinary energy as to attest at once the profound emotion of the psalmist, and his familiarity with such ideas during his days of persecution. It is noticeable, too, that the language is carefully divested of all personal reference; he has risen to the contemplation of a great law of the Divine government, and at that elevation the enemies whose calumnies and cruelties had driven him to God fade into insignificance. With what magnificent boldness he paints God the Judge arraying Himself in His armour of destruction!

(Psalms 7:11) God is a righteous Judge, And a God (who is) angry every day.

(Psalms 7:12) If he (i.e., the evil-doer) turn not, He whets His sword, His bow He has bent, and made it ready.

(Psalms 7:13) And for him He has prepared weapons of death, His arrows He has made blazing darts.

Surely there is nothing grander in any poetry than this tremendous image, smitten out with so few strokes of the chisel, and as true as it is grand. The representation applies to the facts of life, of which as directed by a present Providence, and not of any future retribution, David is here thinking. Among these facts is chastisement falling upon obstinate antagonism to God. Modern ways of thinking shrink from such representations; but the whole history of the world teems with confirmation of their truth--only what David calls the flaming arrows of God, men call "the natural consequences of evil." The later revelation of God in Christ brings into greater prominence the disciplinary character of all punishment here, but bates no jot of the intensity with which the earlier revelation grasped the truth of God as a righteous Judge in eternal opposition to, and aversion from, evil. With that solemn picture flaming before his inward eye, the prophet-psalmist turns to gaze on the evil-doer who has to bear the brunt of these weapons of light. Summoning us to look with him by a "Behold!" he tells his fate in an image of frequent occurrence in the psalms of this period, and very natural in the lips of a man wandering in the desert among wild creatures, and stumbling sometimes into the traps dug for them: "He has dug a hole and hollowed it out, and he falls into the pitfall he is making." The crumbling soil in which he digs makes his footing on the edge more precarious with every spadeful that he throws out, and at last, while he is hard at work, in he tumbles. It is the conviction spoken in the proverbs of all nations, expressed here by David in a figure drawn from life--the conviction that all sin digs its own grave and is self-destructive. The psalm does not proclaim the yet deeper truth that this automatic action, by which sin sets in motion its own punishment, has a disciplinary purpose, so that the arrows of God wound for healing, and His armour is really girded on for, even while it seems to be against, the sufferer. But it would not be difficult to show that that truth underlies the whole Old Testament doctrine of retribution, and is obvious in many of David's psalms. In the present one the deliverance of the hunted prey is contemplated as the end of the baffled trapper's fall into his own snare, and beyond that the psalmist's thoughts do not travel. His own safety, the certainty that his appeal to God's judgment will not be in vain, fill his mind; and without following the fate of his enemy further, he closes this song of tumultuous and varied emotion with calm confidence and a vow of thanksgiving for a deliverance which is already as good as accomplished:

(Psalms 7:17) I will give thanks to Jehovah according to His righteousness, And I will sing the name of Jehovah, Most High.

We have still another psalm (Psalms 57:1-11) which is perhaps best referred to this period. According to the title, it belongs to the time when David "fled from Saul in the cave." This may, of course, apply to either Adullam or Engedi, and there is nothing decisive to be alleged for either; yet one or two resemblances to Psalm 7 incline the balance to the latter period.

These resemblances are the designation of his enemies as lions (Psalms 7:2; Psalms 57:4); the image of their falling into their own trap (Psalms 7:15; Psalms 57:6); the use of the phrase "my honour" or "glory" for "my soul" (Psalms 7:5; Psalms 57:8 --the same word in the original); the name of God as "Most High" (Psalms 7:17; Psalms 57:2), an expression which only occurs twice besides in the Davidic psalms (Psalms 9:2; Psalms 21:7); the parallelism in sense between the petition which forms the centre and the close of the one, "Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens" (Psalms 57:5, Psalms 57:11), and that which is the most emphatic desire of the other, "Arise, O Lord, awake, ... lift up Thyself for me" (Psalms 7:6). Another correspondence, not preserved in our English version, is the employment in both of a rare poetical word, which originally means "to complete," and so comes naturally to have the secondary significations of "to perfect" and "to put an end to." The word in question only occurs five times in the Old Testament, and always in psalms. Four of these are in hymns ascribed to David, of which two are (Psalms 57:2), "The God that performeth all things for me," and (Psalms 7:9), "Let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end." The use of the same peculiar word in two such dissimilar connections seems to show that it was, as we say, "running in his head" at the time, and is, perhaps, a stronger presumption of the cotemporaneousness of both psalms than its employment in both with the same application would have been.

Characteristic of these early psalms is the occurrence of a refrain (compare Psalms 56:1-13 and Psalms 59:1-17) which in the present instance closes both of the portions of which the hymn consists. The former of these (Psalms 56:1-5) breathes prayerful trust, from which it passes to describe the encompassing dangers; the second reverses this order, and beginning with the dangers and distress, rises to ringing gladness and triumph, as though the victory were already won. The psalmist's confident cleaving of soul to God is expressed (Psalms 56:1) by an image that may be connected with his circumstances at Engedi: "In Thee has my soul taken refuge." The English version is correct as regards the sense, though it obliterates the beautiful metaphor by its rendering "trusteth." The literal meaning of the verb is "to flee to a refuge," and its employment here may be due to the poetical play of the imagination, which likens his secure retreat among the everlasting hills to the safe hiding-place which his spirit found in God his habitation. A similar analogy appears in the earliest use of the expression, which may have been floating in the psalmist's memory, and which occurs in the ancient song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32:1-52). The scenery of the forty years' wanderings remarkably colours that ode, and explains the frequent recurrence in it of the name of God as "the Rock." We have false gods, too, spoken of in it, as, "Their rock in whom they took refuge," where the metaphor appears in its completeness (Deuteronomy 32:37). Our psalm goes on with words which contain a further allusion to another part of the same venerable hymn, "And in the shadow of Thy wings will I take refuge," which remind us of the grand image in it of God's care over Israel, as of the eagle bearing her eaglets on her mighty pinions (Psalms 57:1), and point onwards to the still more wonderful saying in which all that was terrible and stern in the older figure is softened into tenderness, and instead of the fierce affection of the mother eagle, the hen gathering her chickens under her wings becomes the type of

the brooding love and more than maternal solicitude of God in Christ. Nor can we forget that the only other instance of the figure before David's psalms is in the exquisite idyl which tells of the sweet heroism of David's ancestress, Ruth, on whose gentle and homeless head was pronounced the benediction, "A full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust" (Ruth 2:12). We may perhaps also see in this clause an extension of the simile which unquestionably lies in the verb, and may think of the strong "sides of the cave," arching above the fugitive like a gigantic pair of wings beneath which he nestles warm and dry, while the short-lived storm roars among the rocks--a type of that broad pinion which is his true defence till threatening evils be overpast. In the past he has sheltered his soul in God, but no past act of faith can avail for present distresses. It must be perpetually renewed. The past deliverances should make the present confidence more easy; and the true use of all earlier exercises of trust is to prepare for the resolve that we will still rely on the help we have so often proved. "I have trusted in Thee" should ever be followed by "And in the shadow of Thy wings will I trust." The psalmist goes on to fulfil his resolve. He takes refuge by prayer in God, whose absolute elevation above all creatures and circumstances is the ground of his hope, whose faithful might will accomplish its design, and complete His servant's lot. "I will call to God Most High; to God who perfects (His purpose) for me." And then assured hope gleams upon his soul, and though the storm-clouds hang low and black as ever, they are touched with light. "He will send from heaven and save me." But even while this happy certainty dawns upon him, the contending fears, which ever lurk hard by faith, reassert their power, and burst in, breaking the flow of the sentence, which by its harsh construction indicates the sudden irruption of disturbing thoughts. "He that would swallow me up reproaches (me)." With this two-worded cry of pain--prolonged by the very unusual occurrence, in the middle of a verse, of the "Selah," which is probably a musical direction for the accompaniment--a billow of terror breaks over his soul; but its force is soon spent, and the hope, above which for a moment it had rolled, rises from the broken spray like some pillared light round which the surges dash in vain. "God shall send forth His mercy and His truth"--those two white-robed messengers who draw nigh to all who call on Him. Then follows in broken words, the true rendering of which is matter of considerable doubt, a renewed picture of his danger:

(Psalms 57:4) (With) my soul--among lions will I lie down. Devourers are the sons of men; Their teeth a spear and arrows, And their tongue a sharp sword The psalmist seems to have broken off the construction, and instead of finishing the sentence as he began it, to have substituted the first person for the third, which ought to have followed "my soul." This fragmentary construction expresses agitation of spirit. It may be a question whether the "lions" in the first clause are to be regarded as a description of his enemies, who are next spoken of without metaphor as sons of men who devour (or who "breathe out fire"), and whose words are cutting and wounding as spear and sword. The analogy of the other psalms of this period favours such an understanding of the words. But, on the other hand, the reference preferred by Delitzsch and others gives great beauty. According to that interpretation, the fugitive among the savage cliffs prepares himself for his nightly slumbers in calm confidence, and lays himself down there in the cave, while the wild beasts, whose haunt it may have been, prowl without, feeling himself safer among them than among the more ferocious "sons of men," whose hatred has a sharper tooth than even theirs. And then this portion of the psalm closes with the refrain, "Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: let Thy glory be above all the earth." A prayer that God would show forth His power, and exalt His name by delivering His servant. What lofty conviction that his cause was God's cause,

that the Divine honour was concerned in his safety, that he was a chosen instrument to make known God's praise over all the world!--and what self-forgetfulness in that, even whilst he prays for his own deliverance, he thinks of it rather as the magnifying of God, than as it affects himself personally! The second part continues the closing strain of the former, and describes the plots of his foes in the familiar metaphor of the pit, into which they fall themselves. The contemplation of this divine Nemesis on evil-doers leads up to the grand burst of thanksgiving with which the psalm closes-- (Psalms 57:7) Fixed is my heart, O God! fixed my heart! I will sing and strike the harp.[K] (Psalms 57:8) Awake, my glory! awake psaltery and harp![L] I will awake the dawn.

[K] Properly, "sing with a musical accompaniment."

[L] Two kinds of stringed instrument, the difference between which is very obscure.

If the former part may be regarded as the evening song of confidence, this is the morning hymn of thankfulness. He lay down in peace among lions; he awakes to praise. He calls upon his soul to shake off slumber; he invokes the chords of his harp to arouse from its chamber the sleeping dawn. Like a mightier than himself, he will rise a great while before day, and the clear notes of the rude lyre, his companion in all his wanderings, will summon the morning to add its silent speech to His praise. But a still loftier thought inspires him. This hunted solitary not only knows that his deliverance is certain, but he has already the consciousness of a world-wide vocation, and anticipates that the story of his sorrow and his trust, with the music of his psalms, belong to the world, and will flow over the barriers of his own generation and of his own land into the whole earth.

(Psalms 57:9) I will praise Thee among the peoples, O Lord, I will strike the harp to Thee among the nations.

(Psalms 57:10) For great unto the heavens is Thy mercy, And to the clouds Thy truth.

These two mighty messengers of God, whose coming he was sure of (Psalms 57:3), will show themselves in his deliverance, boundless and filling all the creation. They shall be the theme of his world-wide praise. And then with the repetition of the refrain the psalm comes round again to supplication, and dies into silent waiting before God till He shall be pleased to answer. Thus triumphant were the hopes of the lonely fugitive skulking in the wilderness; such bright visions peopled the waste places, and made the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose.

Psalms 142:1-7 is also, according to the title, one of the cave-psalms. But considerable doubt attaches to the whole group of so-called Davidic compositions in the last book of the psalter (Psalms 138-144), from their place, and from the fact that there are just seven of them, as well as in some cases from their style and character. They are more probably later hymns in David's manner. The one in question corresponds in tone with the Psalms which we have been considering. It breathes the same profound consciousness of desolation and loneliness: "My spirit is darkened within me;" "Refuge fails me, no man cares for my soul." It glows with the same ardour of personal trust in and love to God which spring from his very loneliness and helplessness: "I cry unto Thee, O Jehovah! I say Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living." It triumphs with the same confidence, and with the same conviction that his deliverance concerns all the righteous: "They shall crown themselves in me, for Thou hast dealt bountifully with me;" for such would appear to be the true meaning of the word rendered in our version "compass me

about;" the idea being that the mercy of God to the psalmist would become a source of festal gladness to all His servants, who would bind the story of God's bounty to him upon their brows like a coronal for a banquet.

02.08-VIII. THE EXILE--CONTINUED.

VIII.--THE EXILE--CONTINUED. As our purpose in this volume is not a complete biography, it will not be necessary to dwell on the subsequent portions of the exile, inasmuch as there is little reference to these in the psalms. We must pass over even that exquisite episode of Abigail, whose graceful presence and "most subtle flow of silver-paced counsel" soothed David's ruffled spirit, and led him captive at once as in a silken leash. The glimpse of old-world ways in the story, the rough mirth of the shearers, the hint of the kind of black mail by which David's little force was provided, the snarling humour and garrulous crustiness of Nabal, David's fierce blaze of hot wrath, the tribute of the shepherds to the kindness and honour of the outlaws, the rustic procession, with the gracious lady last of all, the stately courtesy of the meeting, her calm wise words--not flattery, yet full of predictions of prosperity most pleasant to hear from such lips; not rebuke, yet setting in the strongest light how unworthy of God's anointed personal vengeance was; not servile, but yet recognising in delicate touches his absolute power over her; not abject, and yet full of supplication,--the quick response of David's frank nature and susceptible heart, which sweeps away all his wrath; the budding germ of love, which makes him break into benedictions on her and her wisdom, and thankfulness that he had been kept back from "hurting thee," and the dramatic close in their happy union,--all make up one of the most charming of the many wonderful idyls of Scripture, all fragrant with the breath of love, and fresh with undying youth. The story lives--alas! how much longer do words endure than the poor earthly affections which they record!

After a second betrayal by the men of Ziph, and a second meeting with Saul--their last--in which the doomed man parts from him with blessing and predictions of victory on his unwilling lips, David seems to have been driven to desperation by his endless skulking in dens and caves, and to have seen no hope of continuing much longer to maintain himself on the frontier and to elude Saul's vigilance. Possibly others than Nabal grudged to pay him for the volunteer police which he kept up on behalf of the pastoral districts exposed to the wild desert tribes. At all events he once more made a plunge into Philistine territory, and offers himself and his men to the service of the King of Gath. On the offer being accepted, the little town of Ziklag was allotted to them, and became their home for a year and four months. To this period of comparative security one psalm has been supposed to belong-- Psalms 31:1-24, which, in tone and in certain expressions, corresponds very well with the circumstances. There are many similarities in it with the others of the same period which we have already considered--such, for instance, as the figure of God his rock (Psalms 31:3), the net which his enemies have laid for him (Psalms 31:4), the allusions to their calumnies and slanders (Psalms 31:13, Psalms 31:18), his safe concealment in God (Psalms 31:20 : compare Psalms 27:5; Psalms 57:1; Psalms 17:8, etc.), and the close verbal resemblance of Psalms 31:24 with the closing words of Psalms 27:1-14. The reference, however, which has been taken as pointing to David's position in Ziklag is that contained in the somewhat remarkable words (Psalms 31:21): "Blessed be the Lord, for He hath showed me His marvellous loving-kindness in a strong city." Of course, the expression may be purely a graphic figure for the walls and defences of the Divine protection, as, indeed, it is usually understood to be. But the general idea of the

encompassing shelter of God has just been set forth in the magnificent imagery of the previous verse as the tabernacle, the secret of His presence in which He hides and guards His servants. And the further language of the phrase in question, introduced as it is by a rapturous burst of blessing and praise, seems so emphatic and peculiar as to make not unnatural the supposition of a historical basis in some event which had recently happened to the psalmist. No period of the life will so well correspond to such a requirement as the sixteen months of his stay in Ziklag, during which he was completely free from fear of Saul, and stood high in favour with the King of Gath, in whose territory he had found a refuge. We may well believe that to the hunted exile, so long accustomed to a life of constant alarms and hurried flight, the quiet of a settled home was very sweet, and that behind the rude fortifications of the little town in the southern wilderness there seemed security, which made a wonderful contrast to their defenceless lairs and lurking-places among the rocks. Their eyes would lose their watchful restlessness, and it would be possible to lay aside their weapons, to gather their households about them, and, though they were in a foreign land, still to feel something of the bliss of peaceful habitudes and tranquil use and wont healing their broken lives. No wonder, then, that such thankful praise should break from the leader's lips! No wonder that he should regard this abode in a fortified city as the result of a miracle of Divine mercy! He describes the tremulous despondency which had preceded this marvel of loving-kindness in language which at once recalls the wave of hopelessness which swept across his soul after his final interview with Saul, and which led to his flight into Philistine territory, "And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1 Samuel 27:1). How completely this corresponds with the psalm, allowance being made for the difference between poetry and prose, when he describes the thoughts which had shaded his soul just before the happy peace of the strong city--"I said in my haste,[M] I am cut off from before Thine eyes; nevertheless Thou heardest the voice of my supplication" (Psalms 31:22). And rising, as was ever his manner, from his own individual experience to the great truths concerning God's care of His children, the discovery of which was to him even more precious than his personal safety, he breaks forth in jubilant invocation, which, as always, is full of his consciousness that his life and his story belong to the whole household of God.

(Psalms 31:23) O love Jehovah, all ye beloved of Him! The faithful doth Jehovah preserve, And plentifully repayeth the proud-doer.

(Psalms 31:24) Courage! and let your heart be strong, All ye that wait for Jehovah!

[M] Confusion (Perowne), distrust (Delitzsch), anguish (Ewald), trepidation (Calvin). The word literally means to sway backwards and forwards, and hence to be agitated by any emotion, principally by fear; and then, perhaps, to flee in terror. The glow of personal attachment to Jehovah which kindles in the trustful words is eminently characteristic. It anticipates the final teaching of the New Testament in bringing all the relations between God and the devout soul down to the one bond of love. "We love Him because He first loved us," says John. And David has the same discernment that the basis of all must be the outgoing of love from the heart of God, and that the only response which that seeking love requires is the awaking of the echo of its own Divine voice in our hearts. Love begets love; love seeks love; love rests in love. Our faith corresponds to His faithfulness, our obedience to His command, our reverence to His majesty; but our love resembles His, from which it draws its life. So the one exhortation is "love the Lord," and the ground of it lies in that name--"His beloved"--those to whom He shows His loving-kindness (Psalms 31:21). The

closing words remind us of Psalms 27:14. They are distinctly quoted from it, with the variation that there the heartening to courage was addressed to his own soul, and here to "all who wait on the Lord." The resemblance confirms the reference of both psalms to the same epoch, while the difference suits the change in his circumstances from a period of comparative danger, such as his stay at Adullam, to one of greater security, like his residence in Ziklag. The same persons who were called to love the Lord because they were participant of His loving-kindness, are now called to courage and manly firmness of soul because their hope is fixed on Jehovah. The progress of thought is significant and obvious. Love to God, resting on consciousness of His love to us, is the true armour. "There is no fear in love." The heart filled with it is strong to resist the pressure of outward disasters, while the empty heart is crushed like a deserted hulk by the grinding collision of the icebergs that drift rudderless on the wild wintry sea of life. Love, too, is the condition of hope. The patience and expectation of the latter must come from the present fruition of the sweetness of the former. Of these fair sisters, Love is the elder as the greater; it is she who bears in her hands the rich metal from which Hope forges her anchor, and the strong cords that hold it; her experience supplies all the colours with which her sister paints the dim distance; and she it is who makes the other bold to be sure of the future, and clear-sighted to see the things that are not as though they were. To love the Lord is the path, and the only path, to hoping in the Lord. So had the psalmist found it for himself. In his changeful, perilous years of exile he had learned that the brightness with which hope glowed on his lonely path depended not on the accident of greater or less external security, but on the energy of the clear flame of love in his heart. Not in vain had his trials been to him, which cast that rich treasure to his feet from their stormy waves. Not in vain will ours be to us, if we learn the lesson which he here would divide with all those "that wait on the Lord." Our limits prevent the further examination of the remaining psalms of this period. It is the less necessary, inasmuch as those which have been already considered fairly represent the whole. Psalms 11:1-7, Psalms 13:1-6, Psalms 17:1-15, Psalms 22:1-31, Psalms 25:1-22, and Psalms 64:1-10 may, with varying probability, be considered as belonging to the Sauline persecution. To this list some critics would add Psalms 40:1-17 and Psalms 69:1-36, but on very uncertain grounds. But if we exclude them, the others have a strong family likeness, not only with each other, but with those which have been presented to the reader. The imagery of the wilderness, which has become so familiar to us, continually reappears; the prowling wild beasts, the nets and snares, the hunted psalmist like a timid bird among the hills; the protestation of innocence, the passionate invocation of retribution on the wicked, the confidence that their own devices will come down on their heads, the intense yearning of soul after God--are all repeated in these psalms. Single metaphors and peculiar phrases which we have already met with recur--as, for instance, "the shadow of Thy wings" (Psalms 17:8, Psalms 57:1), and the singular phrase rendered in our version, "show Thy marvellous loving-kindness" (Psalms 17:7, Psalms 31:21), which is found only here. In one of these psalms (Psalms 35:13) there seems to be a reference to his earliest days at the court, and to the depth of loving sympathy with Saul's darkened spirit, which he learned to cherish, as he stood before him to soothe him with the ordered harmonies of harp and voice. The words are so definite that they appear to refer to some historic occasion: And as for me--in their sickness my clothing was sackcloth, With fasting I humbled my soul, And my prayer into my own bosom returned. (Psalms 35:13) So truly did he feel for him who is now his foe. The outward marks of mourning became the natural expression of his feelings. Such is plainly the meaning of the two former clauses, as well as of the following verse. As the whole is a description of the outward signs

of grief, it seems better to understand the last of these three clauses as a picture of the bent head sunk on the bosom even while he prayed,[N] than to break the connection by referring it either to the requital of hate for his sympathy,[O] or to the purity of his prayer, which was such that he could desire nothing more for himself.[P] He goes on with the enumeration of the signs of sorrow: "As if (he had been) a friend, a brother to me, I went,"--walking slowly, like a man absorbed in sorrow: "as one who laments a mother, in mourning garments I bowed down,"--walking with a weary, heavy stoop, like one crushed by a mother's death, with the garb of woe. Thus faithfully had he loved, and truly wept for the noble ruined soul which, blinded by passion and poisoned by lies, had turned to be his enemy. And that same love clung by him to the last, as it ever does with great and good men, who learn of God to suffer long and be kind, to bear all things, and hope all things.

[N] So Ewald and Delitzsch.

[O] Hupfeld.

[P] Perowne. Of these psalms the 22 is remarkable. In it David's personal experience seems to afford only the starting-point for a purely Messianic prophecy, which embraces many particulars that far transcend anything recorded of his sorrows. The impossibility of finding occurrences in his life corresponding to such traits as tortured limbs and burning thirst, pierced hands and parted garments, has driven some critics to the hypothesis that we have here a psalm of the exile describing either actual sufferings inflicted on some unknown confessor in Babylon, or in figurative language the calamities of Israel there. But the Davidic origin is confirmed by many obvious points of resemblance with the psalms which are indisputably his, and especially with those of the Sauline period, while the difficulty of finding historical facts answering to the emphatic language is evaded, not met, by either assuming that such facts existed in some life which has left no trace, or by forcing a metaphorical sense on words which sound wonderfully like the sad language of a real sufferer. Of course, if we believe that prediction is an absurdity, any difficulty will be lighter than the acknowledgment that we have prediction here. But, unless we have a foregone conclusion of that sort to blind us, we shall see in this psalm a clear example of the prophecy of a suffering Messiah. In most of the other psalms where David speaks of his sorrows we have only a typical foreshadowing of Christ. But in this, and in such others as Psalms 69:1-36 and Psalms 109:1-31 (if these are David's), we have type changing into prophecy, and the person of the psalmist fading away before the image which, by occasion of his own griefs, rose vast, and solemn, and distant before his prophet gaze,--the image of One who should be perfectly all which he was in partial measure, the anointed of God, the utterer of His name to His brethren, the King of Israel,--and whose path to His dominion should be thickly strewn with solitary sorrow, and reproach, and agony, to whose far more exceeding weight of woe all his affliction was light as a feather, and transitory as a moment. And when the psalmist had learned that lesson, besides all the others of trust and patience which his wanderings taught him, his schooling was nearly over, he was almost ready for a new discipline; and the slowly-evolving revelation of God's purposes, which by his sorrows had unfolded more distinctly than before "the sufferings of the Messiah," was ripening for the unveiling, in his Kingdom, of "the glory that should follow."

02.09-IX. THE KING.

IX.--THE KING.

We have now to turn and see the sudden change of fortune which lifted the exile to a throne. The heavy cloud which had brooded so long over the doomed king broke in lightning crash on the disastrous field of Gilboa. Where is there a sadder and more solemn story of the fate of a soul which makes shipwreck "of faith and of a good conscience," than that awful page which tells how, godless, wretched, mad with despair and measureless pride, he flung himself on his bloody sword, and died a suicide's death, with sons and armour-bearer and all his men, a ghastly court of corpses, laid round him? He had once been brave, modest, and kind, full of noble purposes and generous affections--and he ended so. Into what doleful regions of hate and darkness may self-will drag a soul, when once the reins fall loose from a slackened hand! And what a pathetic beam of struggling light gleams through heavy clouds, in the grateful exploit of the men of Jabesh, who remembered how he had once saved them, while yet he could care and dare for his kingdom, and perilled their lives to bear the poor headless corpse to its rude resting-place! The news is received by the fugitive at Ziklag in striking and characteristic fashion. He first flames out in fierce wrath upon the lying Amalekite, who had hurried with the tidings and sought favour by falsely representing that he had killed the king on the field. A short shrift and a bloody end were his. And then the wrath melts into mourning. Forgetting the mad hatred and wild struggles of that poor soul, and his own wrongs, remembering only the friendship and nobleness of his earlier days, he casts over the mangled corpses of Saul and Jonathan the mantle of his sweet elegy, and bathes them with the healing waters of his unstinted praise and undying love. Not till these two offices of justice and affection had been performed, does he remember himself and the change in his own position which had been effected. He had never thought of Saul as standing between him and the kingdom; the first feeling on his death was not, as it would have been with a less devout and less generous heart, a flush of gladness at the thought of the empty throne, but a sharp pang of pain from the sense of an empty heart. And even when he begins to look forward to his own new course, there is that same remarkable passiveness which we have observed already. His first step is to "inquire of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up to any of the cities of Judah?" (2 Samuel 2:1). He will do nothing in this crisis of his fortunes, when all which had been so long a hope seemed to be rapidly becoming a fact, until his Shepherd shall lead him. Rapid and impetuous as he was by nature, schooled to swift decisions, followed by still swifter action, knowing that a blow struck at once, while all was chaos and despair at home, might set him on the throne, he holds nature and policy and the impatience of his people in check to hear what God will say. So fully did he fulfil the vow of his early psalm, "My strength! upon thee will I wait" (Psalms 59:9).

We can fancy the glad march to the ancient Hebron, where the great fathers of the nation lay in their rock-hewn tombs. Even before the death of Saul, David's strength had been rapidly increasing, by a constant stream of fugitives from the confusion and misery into which the kingdom had fallen. Even Benjamin, Saul's own tribe, sent him some of its famous archers--a sinister omen of the king's waning fortunes; the hardy half-independent men of Manasseh and Gad, from the

pastoral uplands on the east of Jordan, "whose faces," according to the vivid description of the chronicler (1 Chronicles 12:8), "were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as roes upon the mountains," sought his standard; and from his own kinsmen of Judah recruits "day by day came to David to help him, until it was a great host like the host of God." With such forces, it would have been child's play to have subdued any scattered troops of the former dynasty which might still have been in a condition to keep the field. But he made no attempt of the sort; and even when he came to Hebron he took no measures to advance any claims to the crown. The language of the history seems rather to imply a disbanding of his army, or at least their settling down to domestic life in the villages round Hebron, without a thought of winning the kingdom by arms. And his elevation to the partial monarchy which he at first possessed was the spontaneous act of "the men of Judah," who come to him and anoint him king over Judah. The limits of his territory are substantially those of the kingdom over which his descendants ruled after Jeroboam's revolt, thus indicating the existence of a natural "line of cleavage" between north and south. The geographical position of Benjamin finally attached it to the latter monarchy; but for the present, the wish to retain the supremacy which it had had while the king was one of the tribe, made it the nucleus of a feeble and lingering opposition to David, headed by Saul's cousin Abner, and rallying round his incompetent son Ishbosheth.[Q] The chronology of this period is obscure. David reigned in Hebron seven years and a half, and as Ishbosheth's phantom sovereignty only occupied two of these years, and those evidently the last, it would appear almost as if the Philistines had held the country, with the exception of Judah, in such force that no rival cared to claim the dangerous dignity, and that five years passed before the invaders were so far cleared out as to leave leisure for civil war.

[Q] The Canaanitish worship of Baal seems to have lingered in Saul's family. One of his grand-uncles was named Baal (1 Chronicles 9:36); his son was really called Eshbaal (Fire of Baal), which was contemptuously converted into Ishbosheth (Man of Shame). So also Mephibosheth was properly Meribbaal (Fighter for Baal). The summary narrative of these seven years presents the still youthful king in a very lovable light. The same temper which had marked his first acts after Saul's death is strikingly brought out (2 Samuel 2:1-32, 2 Samuel 3:1-39, 2 Samuel 4:1-12) He seems to have left the conduct of the war altogether to Joab, as if he shrank from striking a single blow for his own advancement. When he does interfere, it is on the side of peace, to curb and chastise ferocious vengeance and dastardly assassination. The incidents recorded all go to make up a picture of rare generosity, of patient waiting for God to fulfil His purposes, of longing that the miserable strife between the tribes of God's inheritance should end. He sends grateful messages to Jabesh-Gilead; he will not begin the conflict with the insurgents. The only actual fight recorded is provoked by Abner, and managed with unwonted mildness by Joab. The list of his children born in Hebron is inserted in the very heart of the story of the insurrection, a token of the quiet domestic life of peaceful joys and cares which he lived while the storm was raging without. Eagerly, and without suspicion, he welcomes Abner's advances towards reconciliation. He falls for a moment to the level of his times, and yields to a strong temptation, in making the restoration of his long-lost wife Michal the condition of further negotiations--a demand which was strictly just, no doubt, but for which little more can be said. The generosity of his nature and the ideal purity of his love, which that incident shadows, shine out again in his indignation at Joab's murder of Abner, though he was too meek to avenge it. There is no more beautiful picture in his life than that of his following the bier where lay the bloody corpse of the man who had been

his enemy ever since he had known him, and sealing the reconciliation which Death ever makes in noble souls, by the pathetic dirge he chanted over Abner's grave. We have a glimpse of his people's unbounded confidence in him, given incidentally when we are told that his sorrow pleased them, "as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people." We have a glimpse of the feebleness of his new monarchy as against the fierce soldier who had done so much to make it, in his acknowledgment that he was yet weak, being but recently anointed king, and that these vehement sons of Zeruah were too strong for him; and we have a remarkable trace of connection with the psalms, in the closing words with which he invokes on Joab the vengeance which he as yet felt himself unable to execute: "The Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness." The only other incident recorded of his reign in Hebron is his execution of summary justice upon the murderers of the poor puppet-king Ishbosheth, upon whose death, following so closely that of Abner, the whole resistance to David's power collapses. There had never been any real popular opposition. His enemies are emphatically named as "the house of Saul," and we find Abner himself admitting that "the elders of Israel" wanted David as king (2 Samuel 3:17), so that when he was gone, it is two Benjamites who give the coup-de-grâce to Ishbosheth, and end the whole shadowy rival power. Immediately the rulers of all the tribes come up to Hebron, with the tender of the crown. They offer it on the triple grounds of kinship, of his military service even in Saul's reign, and of the Divine promise of the throne. A solemn pact was made, and David was anointed in Hebron, a king by Divine right, but also a constitutional monarch chosen by popular election, and limited in his powers. The first result of his new strength is the capture of the old hill-fortress of the Jebusites, the city of Melchizedek, which had frowned down upon Israel unsubdued till now, and whose inhabitants trusted so absolutely in its natural strength that their answer to the demand for surrender was the jeer, "Thou wilt not come hither, but the blind and lame will drive thee away." This time David does not leave the war to others. For the first time for seven years we read, "The king and his men went to Jerusalem." Established there as his capital, he reigns for some ten years with unbroken prosperity over a loyal and loving people, with this for the summary of the whole period, "David went on and grew great, and the Lord God of Hosts was with him" (2 Samuel 5:10). These years are marked by three principal events--the bringing up of the ark to the city of David, the promise by Nathan of the perpetual dominion of his house, and the unbroken flow of victories over the surrounding nations. These are the salient points of the narrative in the Book of Samuel (2 Samuel 5:1-25, 2 Samuel 6:1-23, 2 Samuel 7:1-29, 2 Samuel 8:1-18), and are all abundantly illustrated by the Psalms. We shall have next then to consider "The Songs of the King."

How did the fugitive bear his sudden change of fortune? What were his thoughts when at last the dignity which he had ever expected and never sought was his? The answer is ready to our hand in that grand psalm (Psalms 18:1-50) which he "spake in the day that the Lord delivered him from all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul." The language of this superscription seems to connect the psalm with the period of internal and external repose which preceded and prompted David's "purpose to build an house for the Lord" (2 Samuel 7:1-29) The same thankfulness which glows so brightly in the psalm stimulated that desire, and the emphatic reference to the mercy promised by God to "his seed for evermore," which closes the hymn, points perhaps to the definite promise of the perpetuity of the kingdom to his descendants, which was God's answer to the same desire. But whether the psalm belongs to the years of the partial sovereignty at Hebron, or to those of the complete dominion at Jerusalem, it cannot be later than the second of these two dates; and

whatever may have been the time of its composition, the feelings which it expresses are those of the first freshness of thankful praise when he was firmly settled in the kingdom. Some critics would throw it onwards to the very close of his life. But this has little in its favour beyond the fact that the author of the Book of Samuel has placed his version of the psalm among the records of David's last days. There is, however, nothing to show that that position is due to chronological considerations. The victories over heathen nations which are supposed to be referred to in the psalm, and are relied on by the advocates of later date, really point to the earlier, which was the time of his most brilliant conquests. And the marked assertions of his own purity, as well as the triumphant tone of the whole, neither of which characteristics corresponds to the sad and shaded years after his great fall, point in the same direction. On the whole, then, we may fairly take this psalm as belonging to the bright beginning of the monarchy, and as showing us how well the king remembered the vows which the exile had mingled with his tears.

It is one long outpouring of rapturous thankfulness and triumphant adoration, which streams from a full heart in buoyant waves of song. Nowhere else, even in the psalms--and if not there, certainly nowhere else--is there such a continuous tide of unmingled praise, such magnificence of imagery, such passion of love to the delivering God, such joyous energy of conquering trust. It throbs throughout with the life blood of devotion. The strong flame, white with its very ardour, quivers with its own intensity as it steadily rises heavenward. All the terrors, and pains, and dangers of the weary years--the black fuel for the ruddy glow--melt into warmth too great for smoke, too equable to blaze. The plaintive notes that had so often wailed from his harp, sad as if the night wind had been wandering among its chords, have all led up to this rushing burst of full-toned gladness. The very blessedness of heaven is anticipated, when sorrows gone by are understood and seen in their connection with the joy to which they have led, and are felt to be the theme for deepest thankfulness. Thank God that, for the consolation of the whole world, we have this hymn of praise from the same lips which said, "My life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing." "We have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." The tremulous minors of trustful sorrow shall swell into rapturous praise; and he who, compassed with foes, cries upon God, will, here or yonder, sing this song "unto the Lord, in the day that the Lord delivers him from the hand of all his enemies."

02.10-X. THE KING--CONTINUED.

X.--THE KING--CONTINUED. In our last chapter we have seen that the key-note of "The Songs of the King" may be said to be struck in Psalms 18:1-50. Its complete analysis would carry us far beyond our limits. We can but glance at some of the more prominent points of the psalm. The first clause strikes the key-note. "I love Thee, O Jehovah, my strength." That personal attachment to God, which is so characteristic of David's religion, can no longer be pent up in silence, but gushes forth like some imprisoned stream, broad and full even from its well-head. The common word for "love" is too weak for him, and he bends to his use another, never elsewhere employed to express man's emotions towards God, the intensity of which is but feebly expressed by some such periphrasis as, "From my heart do I love Thee." The same exalted feeling is wonderfully set forth by the loving accumulation of Divine names which follow, as if he would heap together in one great pile all the rich experiences of that God, unnamed after all names, which he had garnered up in his distresses and deliverances. They tell so much as the poor vehicle of words can tell, what his Shepherd in the heavens had been to him. They are the treasures which he has brought back from his exile; and they most pathetically point to the songs of that time. He had called on God by these names when it was hard to believe in their reality, and now he repeats them all in his glad hour of fruition, for token that they who in their extremity trust in the name of the Lord will one day have the truth of faith transformed into truth of experience. "Jehovah, my rock and my fortress," reminds us of his cry in Ziklag, "Thou art my rock and my fortress" (Psalms 31:3), and of the "hold" (the same word) of Adullam in which he had lain secure. "My deliverer" echoes many a sigh in the past, now changed into music of praise. "My rock" (a different word from that in a preceding clause), "in whom I take refuge," recalls the prayer, "Be Thou my rock of strength" (Psalms 31:2), and his former effort of confidence, when, in the midst of calamities, he said, "My soul takes refuge in Thee" (Psalms 57:1.) "My shield" carries us back to the ancient promise, fresh after so many centuries, and fulfilled anew in every age, "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield," and to his own trustful words at a time when trust was difficult, "My shield is upon God" (Psalms 7:10). "My high tower," the last of this glowing series, links on to the hope breathed in the first song of his exile, "God is my defence" (the same expression); "Thou hast been my defence in the day of trouble" (Psalms 59:9, Psalms 59:16). And then he sums up his whole past in one general sentence, which tells his habitual resource in his troubles, and the blessed help which he has ever found, "I call on Jehovah, who is worthy to be praised;[R] and from my enemies am I saved" (Psalms 18:3).

[R] The old English word "the worshipful" comes near the form and meaning of the phrase. No comment can heighten, and no translation can adequately represent, while none can altogether destroy the unapproachable magnificence of the description which follows, of the majestic coming forth of God in answer to his cry. It stands at the very highest point, even when compared with the other sublime passages of a like kind in Scripture. How pathetically he paints his sore need in metaphors which again bring to mind the songs of the outlaw: The snares of death compassed me, And floods of destruction made me afraid; The snares of Sheol surrounded me, The toils of death surprised me. As he so often likened himself to some wild creature in the nets, so here

Death, the hunter, has cast his fatal cords about him, and they are ready suddenly to close on the unsuspecting prey. Or, varying the image, he is sinking in black waters, which are designated by a difficult phrase (literally, "streams of Belial," or worthlessness), which is most probably rendered as above (so Ewald, Hupfeld). In this dire extremity one thing alone is left him. He is snared, but he has his voice free to cry with, and a God to cry to. He is all but sinking, but he can still shriek (so one of the words might be rendered) "like some strong swimmer in his agony." And it is enough. That one loud call for help rises, like some slender pillar of incense-smoke, straight into the palace temple of God--and, as he says, with a meaning which our version obscures, "My cry before Him came into His ears." The prayer that springs from a living consciousness of being in God's presence, even when nearest to perishing, is the prayer that He hears. The cry is a poor, thin, solitary voice, unheard on earth, though shrill enough to rise to heaven; the answer shakes creation. One man in his extremity can put in motion all the magnificence of God. Overwhelming is the contrast between the cause and the effect. And marvellous as the greatness, so also is the swiftness of the answer. A moment suffices--and then! Even whilst he cries, the rocking earth and the quivering foundations of the hills are conscious that the Lord comes from afar for his help. The majestic self-revelation of God as the deliverer has for its occasion the psalmist's cry of distress, and for its issue, "He drew me out of many waters." All the splendour flames out because a poor man prays, and all the upheaval of earth and the artillery of heaven has simply this for its end, that a poor man may be delivered. The paradox of prayer never found a more bold expression than in this triumphant utterance, of the insignificant occasion for, and the equally insignificant result sought by, the exercise of the energy of Omnipotence. The Divine deliverance is set forth under the familiar image of the coming of God in a tempest. Before it bursts, and simultaneous with the prayer, the "earth rocks and quivers," the sunless "pillars of the hills reel and rock to and fro," as if conscious of the gathering wrath which begins to flame far off in the highest heavens. There has been no forth-putting yet of the Divine power. It is but accumulating its fiery energy, and already the solid framework of the world trembles, anticipating the coming crash. The firmest things shake, the loftiest bow before His wrath. "There went up smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it." This kindling anger, expressed by these tremendous metaphors, is conceived of as the preparation in "His temple" for the earthly manifestation of delivering vengeance. It is like some distant thunder-cloud which grows on the horizon into ominous blackness, and seems to be filling its ashen-coloured depths with store of lightnings. Then the piled-up terror begins to move, and, drawing nearer, pours out an avalanche of gloom seamed with fire. First the storm-cloud descends, hanging lower and lower in the sky. And whose foot is that which is planted upon its heavy mass, thick and frowning enough to be the veil of God?

"He bowed the heavens, and came down, And blackness of cloud was under His feet."

Then the sudden rush of wind which heralds the lightning breaks the awful silence:-- "And He rode upon a cherub, and did fly, Yea, He swept along upon the wings of the wind." The cherubs bear, as in a chariot, the throned God, and the swift pinions of the storm bear the cherubs. But He that sits upon the throne, above material forces and the highest creatures, is unseen. The psalmist's imagination stops at its base, nor dares to gaze into that light above; and the silence is more impressive than all words. Instead of pagan attempts at a likeness of God, we have next painted, with equal descriptive accuracy, poetic force, and theological truth, the pitchy blackness which hides Him. In the gloom of its depths He makes His "secret place" His "tent." It is "darkness of

waters," that is, darkness from which streams out the thunder-rain; it is "thick clouds of the skies;" or perhaps the expression should be rendered, "heavy masses of clouds." Then comes the crash of the tempest. The brightness that lies closer around Him, and lives in the heart of the blackness, flames forth, parting the thick clouds--and through the awful rent hail and coals of fire are flung down on the trembling earth. The grand description may be rendered in two ways: either that adopted in our version, "At the brightness that was before Him His thick clouds passed--hailstones and coals of fire;" or, "Through His thick clouds there passed hailstones and coals of fire." The former of these is the more dramatic; the broken construction expresses more vividly the fierce suddenness of the lightning blaze and of the down-rush of the hail, and is confirmed by the repetition of the same words in the same construction in the next verse. That verse describes another burst of the tempest--the deep roll of the thunder along the skies is the voice of Jehovah, and again the lightning tears through the clouds, and the hail streams down. With what profound truth all this destructive power is represented as coming from the brightness of God--that "glory" which in its own nature is light, but in its contact with finite and sinful creatures must needs become darkness, rent asunder by lightning! What lessons as to the root and the essential nature of all punitive acts of God cluster round such words! and how calm and blessed the faith which can pierce even the thickest mass "that veileth Love!"--to see the light at the centre, even though the circumference be brooding thunder-clouds torn by sudden fires. Then comes the purpose of all this apocalypse of Divine magnificence. The fiery arrows scatter the psalmist's enemies. The waters in which he had well nigh drowned are dried up before the hot breath of His anger. "That dread voice" speaks "which shrinks their streams." And amid the blaze of tempest, the rocking earth, and the failing floods, His arm is thrust forth from above, and draws His servant from many waters. As one in later times, "he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me; and immediately He stretched forth His hand and caught him." A calmer tone follows, as the psalmist recounts without metaphor his deliverance, and reiterates the same assertion of his innocence which we have already found so frequently in the previous psalms (Psalms 18:17-24). Rising from his personal experience to the broad and lofty thoughts of God which that experience had taught him, as it does all who prize life chiefly as a means of knowing Him, he proclaims the solemn truth, that in the exercise of a righteous retribution, and by the very necessity of our moral nature, God appears to man what man is to God: loving to the loving, upright to the upright, pure to the pure, and froward to the froward. Our thoughts of God are shaped by our moral character; the capacity of perceiving depends on sympathy. "Unless the eye were light, how could it see the sun?" The self-revelation of God in His providence, of which only the psalm speaks, is modified according to our moral character, being full of love to those who love, being harsh and antagonistic to those who set themselves in opposition to it. There is a higher law of grace, whereby the sinfulness of man but draws forth the tenderness of a father's pardoning pity; and the brightest revelation of His love is made to froward prodigals. But that is not in the psalmist's view here, nor does it interfere with the law of retribution in its own sphere. The purely personal tone is again resumed, and continued unbroken to the close. In the former portion David was passive, except for the voice of prayer, and God's arm alone was his deliverance. In the latter half he is active, the conquering king, whose arm is strengthened for victory by God. This difference may possibly suggest the reference of the former half to the Sauline persecution, when, as we have seen, the exile ever shrunk from avenging himself; and of the latter to the early years of his monarchy, which, as we shall see, were characterized by much successful military activity; and if so, the date

of the psalm would most naturally be taken to be the close of his victorious campaigns, when "the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies round about" (2 Samuel 7:1). Be that as it may, the latter portion of the psalm shows us the soldier king tracing all his past victories to God alone, and building upon them the confidence of a world-wide dominion. The point at which memory passes into hope is difficult to determine, and great variety of opinion prevails on the matter among commentators. It is perhaps best to follow many of the older versions, and the valuable exposition of Hupfeld, in regarding the whole section from Psalms 18:37 of our translation as the expression of the trust which past experience had wrought. We shall then have two periods in the second half of the psalm--the past victories won by God's help (Psalms 18:31-36), the coming triumphs of which these are the pledge (Psalms 18:37-50). In the former there shine out not only David's habitual consciousness of dependence on and aid from God, but also a very striking picture of his physical qualifications for a military leader. He is girded with bodily strength, swift and sure of foot like a deer, able to scale the crags where his foes fortified themselves like the wild antelopes he had so often seen bounding among the dizzy ledges of the cliffs in the wilderness; his hands are trained for war, and his sinewy arms can bend the great bow of brass. But these capacities are gifts, and not they, but their Giver, have made him victorious. Looking back upon all his past, this is its summing up:

"Thou hast also given me the shield of Thy salvation, And Thy right hand hath holden me up, And Thy lowliness hath made me great." (Psalms 18:35)

God's strength, God's buckler, God's supporting hand, God's condescension, by which He bows down to look upon and help the feeble, with the humble showing Himself humble--these have been his weapons, and from these has come his victory. And because of these, he looks forward to a future like the past, but more glorious still, thereby teaching us how the unchanging faithfulness of our God should encourage us to take all the blessings which we have received as but the earnest of what is yet to come. He sees himself pursuing his enemies, and smiting them to the ground. The fierce light of battle blazes through the rapid sentences which paint the panic flight, and the swift pursuit, the vain shrieks to man and God for succour, and the utter annihilation of the foe:

(Psalms 18:42) "And I will pound them like dust before the wind, Like street-filth will I empty them out."

Then he gives utterance to the consciousness that his kingdom is destined to extend far beyond the limits of Israel, in words which, like so many of the prophecies, may be translated in the present tense, but are obviously future in signification--the prophet placing himself in imagination in the midst of the time of which he speaks:

(Psalms 18:43) "Thou deliverest me from the strivings of the people (i.e., Israel), Thou makest me head of the heathen; People whom I knew not serve me.

(Psalms 18:44) At the hearing of the ear they obey me. The sons of the stranger feign obedience to me.

(Psalms 18:45) The sons of the stranger fade away, They come trembling from their hiding-places." The rebellion which weakened his early reign is subdued, and beyond the bounds of his own people his dominion spreads. Strange tribes submit to the very sound of his name, and crouch before him in extorted and pretended submission. The words are literally "lie unto me,"

descriptive of the profuse professions of loyalty characteristic of conquered orientals. Their power withers before him like a gathered flower before a hot wind, and the fugitives creep trembling out of their holes where they have hid themselves.

Again he recurs to the one thought which flows like a river of light through all the psalm--that all his help is in God. The names which he lovingly heaped together at the beginning are in part echoed in the close. "The Lord liveth, and blessed is my rock, and the God of my salvation is exalted." His deliverances have taught him to know a living God, swift to hear, active to help, in whom he lives, who has magnified His own name in that He has saved His servant. And as that blessed conviction is the sum of all his experience, so one glad vow expresses all his resolves, and thrills with the expectation which he had cherished even in his lonely exile, that the music of his psalm would one day echo through all the world. With lofty consciousness of his new dignity, and with lowly sense that it is God's gift, he emphatically names himself His king, His anointed, taking, as it were, his crown from his brows and laying it on the altar. With prophetic eye he looks onward, and sees the throne to which he had been led by a series of miracles enduring for ever, and the mercy of God sustaining the dominion of his house through all generations:

(Psalms 18:49) "Therefore will I give thanks to Thee among the nations, O Jehovah, And to Thy name will I strike the harp:

(Psalms 18:50) Who maketh great the deliverances of His king And executeth mercy for His anointed, For David and his seed for evermore." And what were his purposes for the future? Here is his answer, in a psalm which has been with considerable appropriateness regarded as a kind of manifesto of the principles which he intended should characterize his reign (Psa. 51): "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes." For himself, he begins his reign with noble self-restraint, not meaning to make it a region of indulgence, but feeling that there is a law above his will, of which he is only the servant, and knowing that if his people and his public life are to be what they should be, his own personal and domestic life must be pure. As for his court and his ministers, he will make a clean sweep of the vermin who swarm and sting and buzz about a throne. The froward, the wicked, privy slanderers, proud hearts, crafty plotters, liars, and evil-doers he will not suffer--but "mine eyes shall be upon the faithful in the land; he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me." He is fired with ambition, such as has brightened the beginning of many a reign which has darkened to cruelty and crime, to make his kingdom some faint image of God's, and to bring the actual Israel into conformity with its ancient Magna Charta, "Ye shall be to me a holy nation." And so, not knowing perhaps how hard a task he planned, and little dreaming of his own sore fall, he grasps the sword, resolved to use it for the terror of evil-doers, and vows, "I will early destroy all the wicked in the land, that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord." Such was his "proclamation against vice and immorality" on his accession to his throne.

02.11-XI. THE KING--CONTINUED.

XI.--THE KING--CONTINUED. The years thus well begun are, in the historical books, characterized mainly by three events, namely, the bringing up of the ark to the newly won city of David, Nathan's prophecy of the perpetual dominion of his house, and his victories over the surrounding nations. These three hinges of the narrative are all abundantly illustrated in the psalms. As to the first, we have relics of the joyful ceremonial connected with it in two psalms, the fifteenth and twenty-fourth, which are singularly alike not only in substance but in manner, both being thrown into a highly dramatic form by question and answer. This peculiarity, as we shall see, is one of the links of connection which unite them with the history as given in the Book of Samuel (2 Samuel 6:1-23). From that record we learn that David's first thought after he was firmly seated as king over all Israel, was the enthronement in his recently-captured city of the long-forgotten ark. That venerable symbol of the presence of the true King had passed through many vicissitudes since the days when it had been carried round the walls of Jericho. Superstitiously borne into battle, as if it were a mere magic palladium, by men whose hearts were not right with God, the presence which they had invoked became their ruin, and Israel was shattered, and "the ark of God taken," on the fatal field of Aphek. It had been carried in triumph through Philistine cities, and sent back in dismay. It had been welcomed with gladness by the villagers of Bethshemesh, who lifted their eyes from their harvest work, and saw it borne up the glen from the Philistine plain. Their rude curiosity was signally punished, "and the men of Bethshemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God, and to whom shall He go up from us?" It had been removed to the forest seclusion of Kirjath-jearim (the city of the woods), and there bestowed in the house of Abinadab "upon the hill," where it lay neglected and forgotten for about seventy years. During Saul's reign they "inquired not at it," and, indeed, the whole worship of Jehovah seems to have been decaying. David set himself to reorganize the public service of God, arranged a staff of priests and Levites, with disciplined choir and orchestra (1 Chronicles 15:1-29), and then proceeded with representatives of the whole nation to bring up the ark from its woodland hiding-place. But again death turned gladness into dread, and Uzzah's fate silenced the joyous songs, "and David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of God come unto me?" The dangerous honour fell on the house of Obed-edom; and only after the blessing which followed its three months' stay there, did he venture to carry out his purpose. The story of the actual removal of the ark to the city of David with glad ceremonial need not be repeated here; nor the mocking gibes of Michal who had once loved him so fondly. Probably she bitterly resented her violent separation from the household joys that had grown up about her in her second home; probably the woman who had had teraphim among her furniture cared nothing for the ark of God; probably, as she grew older, her character had hardened in its lines, and become like her father's in its measureless pride, and in its half-dread, half-hatred of David--and all these motives together pour their venom into her sarcasm. Taunts provoke taunts; the husband feels that the wife is in heart a partisan of the fallen house of her father, and a despiser of the Lord and of His worship; her words hiss with scorn, his flame with anger and rebuke--and so these two that had been so tender in the old days part for ever. The one doubtful act that stained his accession was quickly avenged. Better for both

that she had never been rent from that feeble, loving husband that followed her weeping, and was driven back by a single word, flung at him by Abner as if he had been a dog at their heels! (2 Samuel 3:16). The gladness and triumph, the awe, and the memories of victory which clustered round the dread symbol of the presence of the Lord of Hosts, are wonderfully expressed in the choral twenty-fourth psalm. It is divided into two portions, which Ewald regards as being originally two independent compositions. They are, however, obviously connected both in form and substance. In each we have question and answer, as in Psalms 15:1-5, which belongs to the same period. The first half replies to the question, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord, and who shall stand in His holy place?"--an echo of the terror-struck exclamation of the people of Bethshemesh, already quoted. The answer is a description of the men who dwell with God. The second half deals with the correlative inquiry, "Who is the King of Glory?" and describes the God who comes to dwell with men. It corresponds in substance, though not in form, with David's thought when Uzzah died, in so far as it regards God as drawing near to the worshippers, rather than the worshippers drawing near to Him. Both portions are united by a real internal connection, in that they set forth the mutual approach of God and man which leads to communion, and thus constitute the two halves of an inseparable whole.

Most expositors recognise a choral structure in the psalm, as in several others of this date, as would be natural at the time of the reorganization of the public musical service. Probably we may gain the key to its form by supposing it to be a processional hymn, of which the first half was to be sung during the ascent to the city of David, and the second while standing before the gates. We have then to fancy the long line of worshippers climbing the rocky steep hill-side to the ancient fortress so recently won, the Levites bearing the ark, and the glad multitude streaming along behind them.

First there swells forth from all the singers the triumphant proclamation of God's universal sovereignty, "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein. For He hath founded it upon the seas and established it upon the floods." It is very noteworthy that such a thought should precede the declaration of His special dwelling in Zion. It guards that belief from the abuses to which it was of course liable--the superstitions, the narrowness, the contempt of all the rest of the world as God-deserted, which are its perversion in sensuous natures. If Israel came to fancy that God belonged to them, and that there was only one sacred place in all the world, it was not for want of clear utterances to the contrary, which became more emphatic with each fresh step in the development of the specializing system under which they lived. The very ground of their peculiar relation to God had been declared, in the hour of constituting it to be--"all the earth is Mine" (Exodus 19:5). So now, when the symbol of His presence is to have a local habitation in the centre of the national life, the psalmist lays for the foundation of his song the great truth, that the Divine presence is concentrated in Israel, but not confined there, and concentrated in order that it may be diffused. The glory that lights the bare top of Zion lies on all the hills; and He who dwells between the cherubim dwells in all the world, which His continual presence fills with its fulness, and upholds above the floods.

Then, as they climb, a single voice perhaps chants the solemn question, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in the place of His holiness?" And the full-toned answer portrays the men who shall dwell with God, in words which begin indeed with stringent demands for absolute purity, but wonderfully change in tone as they advance, into gracious assurances, and the clearest

vision that the moral nature which fits for God's presence is God's gift. "The clean-handed, and pure-hearted, who has not lifted up his soul to vanity, nor sworn deceitfully;" there is the eternal law which nothing can ever alter, that to abide with God a man must be like God--the law of the new covenant as of the old, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." But this requirement, impossible of fulfilment, is not all. If it were, the climbing procession might stop. But up and up they rise, and once again the song bursts forth in deeper and more hopeful words, "He shall receive the blessing from Jehovah, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." Then that righteousness, which he who honestly attempts to comply with such requirements will soon find that he does not possess, is to be received from above, not elaborated from within; is a gift from God, not a product of man's toils. God will make us pure, that we may dwell with Him. Nor is this all. The condition of receiving such a gift has been already partially set forth in the preceding clause, which seems to require righteousness to be possessed as the preliminary to receiving it. The paradox which thus results is inseparable from the stage of religious knowledge attained under the Mosaic Law. But the last words of the answer go far beyond it, and proclaim the special truth of the gospel, that the righteousness which fits for dwelling with God is given on the simple condition of seeking Him. To this designation of the true worshippers is appended somewhat abruptly the one word "Jacob," which need neither be rendered as in the English version as an invocation, nor as in the margin, with an unnecessary and improbable supplement, "O God of Jacob;" but is best regarded as in apposition with the other descriptive clauses, and declaring, as we have found David doing already in previous psalms, that the characters portrayed in them, and these only, constituted the true Israel.

"This is the generation of them that seek Him, That seek Thy face--(this is) Jacob." (Psalms 24:6) And so the first question is answered, "Who are the men who dwell with God?"--The pure, who receive righteousness, who seek Him, the true Israel. And now the procession has reached the front of the ancient city on the hill, and stands before the very walls and weather-beaten gates which Melchizedek may have passed through, and which had been barred against Israel till David's might had burst them. National triumph and glad worship are wonderfully blended in the summons which rings from the lips of the Levites without: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates! and be ye lift up, ye doors (that have been from) of old!" as if even their towering portals were too low, "and the King of glory shall come in." What force in that name here, in this early song of the King! How clearly he recognises his own derived power, and the real Monarch of whom he is but the shadowy representative! The newly-conquered city is summoned to admit its true conqueror and sovereign, whose throne is the ark, which was emphatically named "the glory,"[S] and in whose train the earthly king follows as a subject and a worshipper. Then, with wonderful dramatic force, a single voice from within the barred gates asks, like some suspicious warder, "Who then is the King of glory?" With what a shout of proud confidence and triumphant memories of a hundred fields comes, ready and full, the crash of many voices in the answer, "Jehovah strong and mighty, Jehovah mighty in battle!" How vividly the reluctance of an antagonistic world to yield to Israel and Israel's King, is represented in the repetition of the question in a form slightly more expressive of ignorance and doubt, in answer to the reiterated summons, "Who is He, then, the King of glory?" With what deepened intensity of triumph there peals, hoarse and deep, the choral shout, "The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of glory." That name which sets Him forth as Sovereign of the personal and impersonal forces of the universe--angels, and stars, and terrene creatures, all gathered in ordered ranks, embattled for His service--was a comparatively new name in Israel,[T]

and brought with it thoughts of irresistible might in earth and heaven. It crashes like a catapult against the ancient gates; and at that proclamation of the omnipotent name of the God who dwells with men, they grate back on their brazen hinges, and the ark of the Lord enters into its rest.

[S] "And she named the child Ichabod (Where is the glory?) saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken."-- 1 Samuel 4:21.

[T] It has been asserted that this is the first introduction of the name. ("Psalms Chronologically Arranged by Four Friends," p. 14). But it occurs in Hannah's vow (1 Samuel 1:11); in Samuel's words to Saul (1 Samuel 15:2); in David's reply to Goliath (1 Samuel 17:45). We have it also in Psalms 59:5, which we regard as his earliest during his exile. Do the authors referred to consider these speeches in 1 Samuel as not authentic?

02.12-XII. THE KING--CONTINUED.

XII.--THE KING--CONTINUED. The second event recorded as important in the bright early years is the great promise of the perpetuity of the kingdom in David's house. As soon as the king was firmly established and free from war, he remembered the ancient word which said, "When He giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety, then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there" (Deuteronomy 12:10-11). His own ease rebukes him; he regards his tranquillity not as a season for selfish indolence, but as a call to new forms of service. He might well have found in the many troubles and vicissitudes of his past life an excuse for luxurious repose now. But devout souls will consecrate their leisure as their toil to God, and will serve Him with thankful offerings in peace whom they invoked with earnest cries in battle. Prosperity is harmless only when it is accepted as an opportunity for fresh forms of devotion, not as an occasion for idle self-indulgence. So we read, with distinct verbal reference to the words already quoted, that "when the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies, the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth in curtains." The impulse of generous devotion, which cannot bear to lavish more upon self than it gives to God, at first commended itself to the prophet; but in the solitude of his nightly thoughts the higher wisdom speaks in his spirit, and the word of God gives him a message for the king. The narrative in 2 Samuel makes no mention of David's warlike life as unfitting him for the task, which we find from 2 Chronicles was one reason why his purpose was set aside, but brings into prominence the thought that David's generous impulse was outrunning God's commandment, and that his ardour to serve was in some danger of forgetting his entire dependence on God, and of fancying that God would be the better for him. So the prophetic message reminds him that the Lord had never, through all the centuries, asked for a house of cedar, and recalls the past life of David as having been wholly shaped and blessed by Him, while it pointedly inverts the king's proposal in its own grand promise, "The Lord telleth thee that He will make thee an house." Then follows the prediction of a son of David who should build the house, whose kingdom should be perpetual, whose transgressions should be corrected indeed, but never punished as those of the unhappy Saul; and then, in emphatic and unmistakable words, the perpetuity of David's house, his kingdom, and his throne, is reiterated as the close of the whole. The wonderful burst of praise which sprang from David's heart in answer cannot be dealt with here; but clearly from that time onwards a new element had been added to his hopes, and a new object presented to his faith. The prophecy of the Messiah enters upon a new stage, bearing a relation, as its successive stages, always unmistakably did, to the history which supplies a framework for it. Now for the first time can he be set forth as the king of Israel; now the width of the promise which at first had embraced the seed of the woman, and then had been narrowed to the seed of Abraham, and thereafter probably to the tribe of Judah, is still further defined as to be fulfilled in the line of the house of David; now the personal Messiah Himself begins to be discerned through the words which are to have a preparatory fulfilment, in itself prophetic, in the collective Davidic monarchs whose very office is itself also a prophecy.

Many echoes of this new message ring through the later psalms of the king. His own dominion, his conquests, and his office, gradually became to himself a solemn prophecy of a mysterious descendant who should be really and fully all that he was in shadow and in part. As the experience of the exile, so that of the victorious monarch supplied the colours with which the spirit of prophecy in him painted "beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." In both classes of psalms we have two forms of the Messianic reference, the typical and the purely prophetic. In the former the events of David's own biography and the feelings of his own soul are so portrayed and expressed as to suggest his greater Son. In the latter, the personality of the psalmist retreats into the background, and is at most only the starting-point for wails of sorrow or gleams of glory which far transcend anything in the life of the singer. There are portions, for instance, of Psalms 22:1-31 and Psalms 69:1-36 which no torturing can force into correspondence with any of David's trials; and in like manner there are pæans of victory and predictions of dominion which demand a grander interpretation than his own royalty or his hopes for his house can yield. Of course, if prophecy is impossible, there is no more to be said, but that in that case a considerable part of the Old Testament, including many of David's psalms, is unintelligible.

Perhaps the clearest instance of distinct prophecy of the victorious dominion of the personal Messiah is the 110th psalm. In it we do see, no doubt, the influence of the psalmist's own history, shaping the image which rises before his soul. But the attributes of that king whom he beholds are not his attributes, nor those of any son of his who wore the crown in Israel. And whilst his own history gives the form, it is "the Spirit of Christ that was in" him which gives the substance, and transfigures the earthly monarchy into a heavenly dominion. We do not enter upon the question of the Davidic authorship of this psalm. Here we have not to depend upon Jewish superscriptions, but on the words of Him whose bare assertion should be "an end of all strife." Christ says that David wrote it. Some of us are far enough behind the age to believe that what He said He meant, and that what He meant is truth. This psalm, then, being David's, can hardly be earlier than the time of Nathan's prophecy. There are traces in it of the influence of the history of the psalmist, giving, as we have said, form to the predictions. Perhaps we may see these in Zion being named as the seat of Messiah's sovereignty and in the reference to Melchizedek, both of which points assume new force if we suppose that the ancient city over which that half-forgotten name once ruled had recently become his own. Possibly, too, his joy in exchanging his armour and kingly robe for the priest's ephod, when he brought up the ark to its rest, and his consciousness that in himself the regal and the sacerdotal offices did not blend, may have led him to meditations on the meaning of both, on the miseries that seemed to flow equally from their separation and from their union, which were the precursors of his hearing the Divine oath that, in the far-off future, they would be fused together in that mighty figure who was to repeat in higher fashion the union of functions which invested that dim King of Righteousness and Priest of God in the far-off past. He discerns that his support from the right hand of God, his sceptre which he swayed in Zion, his loyal people fused together into a unity at last, his triumphant warfare on the nations around, are all but faint shadows of One who is to come. That solemn form on the horizon of hope is his Lord, the true King whose viceroy he was, the "bright consummate flower" for the sake of which the root has its being. And, as he sees the majestic lineaments shimmering through the facts of his own history, like some hidden fire toiling in a narrow space ere it leaps into ruddy spires that burst their bonds and flame heaven high, he is borne onwards by the prophetic impulse, and the Spirit of God speaks through his tongue words which have no meaning unless their theme be a Divine ruler and

priest for all the world.

He begins with the solemn words with which a prophetic message is wont to be announced, thus at the outset stamping on the psalm its true character. The "oracle" or "word of Jehovah unto my Lord," which he heard, is a new revelation made to him from the heavens. He is taken up and listens to the Divine voice calling to His right hand, to the most intimate communion with Himself, and to wielding the energies of omnipotence--Him whom David knew to be his lord. And when that Divine voice ceases, its mandate having been fulfilled, the prophetic spirit in the seer hymns the coronation anthem of the monarch enthroned by the side of the majesty in the heavens. "The sceptre of Thy strength will Jehovah send out of Zion. Rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies." In singular juxtaposition are the throne at God's right hand and the sceptre--the emblem of sovereignty--issuing from Zion, a dominion realised on earth by a monarch in the heavens, a dominion the centre of which is Zion, and the undefined extent universal. It is a monarchy, too, established in the midst of enemies, sustained in spite of antagonism not only by the power of Jehovah, but by the activity of the sovereign's own "rule." It is a dominion for the maintenance of which devout souls will burst into prayer, and the most powerful can bring but their aspirations. But the vision includes more than the warrior king and his foes. Imbedded, as it were, in the very heart of the description of the former comes the portraiture of his subjects, for a witness how close is the union between Him and them, and how inseparable from His glories are those who serve Him. They are characterised in a threefold manner. "Thy people (shall be) willing in the day of Thine array." The army is being mustered.[U] They are not mercenaries, nor pressed men. They flock gladly to the standard, like the warriors celebrated of old in Deborah's chant of victory, who "willingly offered themselves." The word of our psalm might be translated "freewill offerings," and the whole clause carries us into the very heart of that great truth, that glad consecration and grateful self-surrender is the one bond which knits us to the Captain of our salvation who gave Himself for us, to the meek Monarch whose crown is of thorns and His sceptre a reed, for tokens that His dominion rests on suffering and is wielded in gentleness. The next words should be punctuated as a separate clause, co-ordinate with the former, and adding another feature to the description of the army. "In the beauties of holiness" is a common name for the dress of the priests: the idea conveyed is that the army is an army of priests, as the king himself is a priest. They are clothed, not in mail and warlike attire, but in "fine linen clean and white," like the armies which a later prophet saw following the Lord of lords. Their warfare is not to be by force and cruelty, nor their conquests bloody; but while soldiers they are to be priests, their weapons purity and devotion, their merciful struggle to bring men to God, and to mirror God to men. Round the one image gather all ideas of discipline, courage, consecration to a cause, loyalty to a leader; round the other, all thoughts of gentleness, of an atmosphere of devotion calm and still as the holy place, of stainless character. Christ's servants must be both soldiers and priests, like some of those knightly orders who bore the cross on helmet and shield, and shaped the very hilts of their swords into its likeness. And these soldier-priests are described by yet another image, "From the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth," where we are to regard the last word as used in a collective sense, and equivalent to "Thy young warriors." They are like the dew sparkling in infinite globelets on every blade of grass, hanging gems on every bit of dead wood, formed in secret silence, reflecting the sunlight, and, though the single drops be small and feeble, yet together freshening the thirsty world. So, formed by an unseen and mysterious power, one by one insignificant, but in the whole mighty, mirroring God and quickening and beautifying the worn

world, the servants of the priest-king are to be "in the midst of many people like the dew from the Lord."

[U] The word translated "power" in our version, has the same double meaning as that has in old English, or as "force" has now, sometimes signifying "strength" and sometimes an "army." The latter is the more appropriate here. "The day of Thine army" will then be equivalent to the day of mustering the troops.

Another solemn word from the lips of God begins the second half of the psalm. "Jehovah swears," gives the sanction and guarantee of His own nature, puts in pledge His own being for the fulfilment of the promise. And that which He swears is a new thing in the earth. The blending of the royal and priestly offices in the Messiah, and the eternal duration in Him of both, is a distinct advancement in the development of Messianic prophecy. The historical occasion for it may indeed be connected with David's kingship and conquest of Melchizedek's city; but the real source of it is a direct predictive inspiration. We have here not merely the devout psalmist meditating on the truths revealed before his day, but the prophet receiving a new word from God unheard by mortal ears, and far transcending even the promises made to him by Nathan. There is but one person to whom it can apply, who sits as a priest upon his throne, who builds the temple of the Lord (Zechariah 6:12-13). As the former Divine word, so this is followed by the prophet's rapturous answer, which carries on the portraiture of the priest-king. There is some doubt as to the person addressed in these later verses. "The Lord at thy right hand crushes kings in the day of His wrath." Whose right hand? The answer generally given is, "The Messiah's." Who is the Lord that smites the petty kinglets of earth? The answer generally given is, "God." But it is far more dramatic, avoids an awkward abruptness in the change of persons in the last verse, and brings out a striking contrast with the previous half, if we take the opposite view, and suppose Jehovah addressed and the Messiah spoken of throughout. Then the first Divine word is followed by the prophetic invocation of the exalted Messiah throned at the right hand and expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. The second is followed by the prophetic invocation of Jehovah, and describes the Lord Messiah at God's right hand as before, but instead of longer waiting He now flames forth in all the resistless energy of a conqueror. The day of His array is succeeded by the day of His wrath. He crushes earth's monarchies. The psalmist's eye sees the whole earth one great battle-field. "(It is) full of corpses. He wounds the head over wide lands," where there may possibly be a reference to the first vague dawning of a hope which God's mercy had let lighten on man's horizon--"He shall bruise thy head," or the word may be used as a collective expression for rulers, as the parallelism with the previous verse requires. Thus striding on to victory across the prostrate foe, and pursuing the flying relics of their power, "He drinks of the brook in the way, therefore shall He lift up the head," words which are somewhat difficult, however interpreted. If, with the majority of modern commentators, we take them as a picturesque embodiment of eager haste in the pursuit, the conqueror "faint, yet pursuing," and stooping for a moment to drink, then hurrying on with renewed strength after the fugitives, one can scarcely help feeling that such a close to such a psalm is trivial and liker the artificial play of fancy than the work of the prophetic spirit, to say nothing of the fact that there is nothing about pursuit in the psalm. If we fall back on the older interpretation, which sees in the words a prophecy of the sufferings of the Messiah who tastes death and drinks of the cup of sorrows, and therefore is highly exalted, we get a meaning which worthily crowns the psalm, but seems to break somewhat abruptly the sequence of thought, and to force the metaphor

of drinking of the brook into somewhat strained parallelism with the very different New Testament images just named. But the doubt we must leave over these final words does not diminish the preciousness of this psalm as a clear, articulate prophecy from David's lips of David's Son, whom he had learned to know through the experiences and facts of his own life. He had climbed through sufferings to his throne. God had exalted him and given him victory, and surrounded him with a loyal people. But he was only a shadow; limitations and imperfections surrounded his office and weakened himself; half of the Divine counsel of peace could not be mirrored in his functions at all, and death lay ahead of him. So his glory and his feebleness alike taught him that "one mightier than" he must be coming behind him, "the latchet of whose shoes he was not worthy to unloose"--the true King of Israel, to bear witness to whom was his highest honour. The third characteristic of the first seventeen years of David's reign is his successful wars with surrounding nations. The gloomy days of defeat and subjugation which had darkened the closing years of Saul are over now, and blow after blow falls with stunning rapidity on the amazed enemies. The narrative almost pants for breath as it tells with hurry and pride how, south, and east, and north, the "lion of the tribe of Judah" sprang from his fastness, and smote Philistia, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Amalek, Damascus, and the Syrians beyond, even to the Euphrates; and the bounding courage of king and people, and the unity of heart and hand with which they stood shoulder to shoulder in many a bloody field, ring through the psalms of this period. Whatever higher meaning may be attached to them, their roots are firm in the soil of actual history, and they are first of all the war-songs of a nation. That being so, that they should also be inspired hymns for the church in all ages will present no difficulty nor afford any consecration to modern warfare, if the progressive character of revelation be duly kept in mind. There is a whole series of such psalms, such as Psalms 20:1-9, Psalms 21:1-13, Psalms 60:1-12, and probably Psalms 68:1-35. We cannot venture in our limited space on any analysis of the last of these. It is a splendid burst of national triumph and devout praise, full of martial ardour, throbbing with lofty consciousness of God's dwelling in Israel, abounding with allusions to the ancient victories of the people, and world-wide in its anticipations of future triumph. How strange the history of its opening words has been! Through the battle smoke of how many a field they have rung! On the plains of the Palatinate, from the lips of Cromwell's Ironsides, and from the poor peasants that went to death on many a bleak moor for Christ's crown and covenant, to the Doric music of their rude chant:

"Let God arise, and scattered Let all His enemies be; And let all those that do Him hate, Before His presence flee." (Psalms 68:1) The sixtieth psalm is assigned to David after Joab's signal victory over the Edomites (2 Samuel 8:1-18). It agrees very well with that date, though the earlier verses have a wailing tone so deep over recent disasters, so great that one is almost inclined to suppose that they come from a later hand than his. But after the first verses all is warlike energy and triumph. How the glad thought of ruling over a united people dances in the swift words, "I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth;" he has, as it were, repeated Joshua's conquest and division of the land, and the ancient historical sites that fill a conspicuous place in the history of his great ancestor are in his power. "Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine, Ephraim also is the defence of my head, Judah my staff of command." He looks eastward to the woods and pastoral uplands across the Jordan, whose inhabitants had been but loosely attached to the western portion of the nation, and triumphs in knowing that Gilead and Manasseh own his sway. The foremost tribes on this side the river are to him like the armour and equipments of a conqueror; he wears the might of Ephraim, the natural head of the northern region, as his helmet,

and he grasps the power of Judah as his baton of command or sceptre of kingly rule (Genesis 49:10).

Thus, strong in the possession of a united kingdom, his flashing eye turns to his enemies, and a stern joy, mingled with contempt, blazes up as he sees them reduced to menial offices and trembling before him. "Moab (is) my washing-basin; to Edom will I fling my shoe; because of me, Philistia, cry out" (in fear). The three ancestral foes that hung on Israel's southern border from east to west are subdued. He will make of one "a vessel of dishonour" to wash his feet, soiled with battle; he will throw his shoes to another the while, as one would to a slave to take care of; and the third, expecting a like fate, shrieks out in fear of the impending vengeance. He pants for new victories, "Who will bring me into (the) strong city?" probably the yet unsubdued Petra, hidden away in its tortuous ravine, with but one perilous path through the gorge. And at last all the triumph of victory rises to a higher region of thought in the closing words, which lay bare the secret of his strength, and breathe the true spirit of the soldier of Jehovah. "In God we shall do valiantly; and He, even He, shall tread down our enemies." The twentieth psalm, another of these stirring war-songs, is in that choral manner which we have already seen in Psalms 24:1-10, and the adoption of which was probably connected with David's careful organization of "the service of song." It is all ablaze with the light of battle and the glow of loyal love. The army, ready drawn up for action, as we may fancy, prays for the king, who, according to custom, brings sacrifices and offerings before the fight. "Jehovah hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee, send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion, remember all thine offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice." Then, as they wave their standards in the sunshine, or plant before the ranks of each tribe its cognizance, to be defended to the death, the hoarse shout rises from the files, "In the name of our God we will set up (or wave) our banners." Then the single voice of the king speaks, rejoicing in his soldiers' devotion, which he accepts as an omen that his sacrifice has not been in vain: "Now know I that Jehovah saveth His anointed. He will hear him from the heaven of His holiness with the strength of the salvation of His right hand;" not merely from a God dwelling in Zion, according to language of the previous prayer, but from the Lord in the heavens, will the strength come. Then again the chorus of the host exclaims, as they look across the field to the chariots and cavalry of the foe--forces which Israel seldom used--"These (boast[V]) of chariots, and those of horses, and we, of the name of Jehovah, our God, do we boast." Ere a sword has been drawn, they see the enemy scattered. "They are brought down and fallen; and we, we are risen and stand upright." Then one earnest cry to God, one more thought of the true monarch of Israel, whom David would teach them to feel he only shadowed; and with the prayer, "Jehovah! save! Let the King hear us in the day when we cry," ringing like the long trumpet blast that sounds for the charge, they dash forth to victory!

[V] Lit. "make mention of" or "commemorate."

02.13-XIII. THE TEARS OF THE PENITENT.

XIII.--THE TEARS OF THE PENITENT.

Adversity had taught David self-restraint, had braced his soul, had driven him to grasp firmly the hand of God. And prosperity had seemed for nearly twenty years but to perfect the lessons. Gratitude had followed deliverance, and the sunshine after the rain had brought out the fragrance of devotion and the blossoms of glad songs. A good man, and still more a man of David's age at the date of his great crime, seldom falls so low, unless there has been previous, perhaps unconscious, relaxation of the girded loins, and negligence of the untrimmed lamp. The sensitive nature of the psalmist was indeed not unlikely to yield to the sudden force of such a temptation as conquered him, but we can scarcely conceive of its having done so without a previous decay of his religious life, hidden most likely from himself. And the source of that decay may probably be found in self-indulgence, fostered by ease, and by long years of command. The actual fall into sin seems to have been begun by slothful abdication of his functions as captain of Israel. It is perhaps not without bitter emphasis that the narrative introduces it by telling us that, "at the time when kings go forth to battle," David contented himself with sending his troops against Ammon, and "tarried still at Jerusalem." At all events, the story brings into sharp contrast the levy en masse, encamped round Rabbath, and their natural head, who had once been so ready to take his share of blows and privations, loitering behind, taking his quiet siesta in the hot hours after noon, as if there had been no soldiers of his sweltering in their armour, and rising from his bed to stroll on his palace roof, and peer into the household privacies below, as if his heart had no interest in the grim tussle going on behind the hills that he could almost see from his height, as they grew purple in the evening twilight. He has fallen to the level of an Eastern despot, and has lost his sense of the responsibilities of his office. Such loosening of the tension of his moral nature as is indicated in his absence from the field, during what was evidently a very severe as well as a long struggle, prepared the way for the dismal headlong plunge into sin. The story is told in all its hideousness, without palliation or reserve, without comment or heightening, in that stern judicial fashion so characteristic of the Bible records of its greatest characters. Every step is narrated without a trace of softening, and without a word of emotion. Not a single ugly detail is spared. The portraiture is as vivid as ever. Bathsheba's willing complicity, her punctilious observance of ceremonial propriety while she is trampling under foot her holiest obligations; the fatal necessity which drags sin after sin, and summons up murder to hide, if it be possible, the foul form of adultery; the stinging rebuke in the conduct of Uriah, who, Hittite as he was, has a more chivalrous, not to say devout, shrinking from personal ease while his comrades and the ark are in the field, than the king has; the mean treason, the degradation implied in getting into Joab's power; the cynical plainness of the murderous letter, in which a hardened conscience names his purposed evil by its true name; the contemptuous measure of his master which Joab takes in his message, the king's indifference to the loss of his men so long as Uriah is out of the way; the solemn platitudes with which he pretends to console his tool for the check of his troops; and the hideous haste with which, after her scrupulous "mourning" for one week, Bathsheba threw herself again into David's arms;--all these

particulars, and every particular an aggravation, stand out for ever, as men's most hidden evil will one day do, in the clear, un pitying, unmistakable light of the Divine record. What a story it is! This saint of nearly fifty years of age, bound to God by ties which he rapturously felt and acknowledged, whose words have been the very breath of devotion for every devout heart, forgets his longings after righteousness, flings away the joys of Divine communion, darkens his soul, ends his prosperity, brings down upon his head for all his remaining years a cataract of calamities, and makes his name and his religion a target for the barbed sarcasms of each succeeding generation of scoffers. "All the fences and their whole array," which God's mercies and his own past had reared, "one cunning sin sweeps quite away." Every obligation of his office, as every grace of his character, is trodden under foot by the wild beast roused in his breast. As man, as king, as soldier, he is found wanting. Lust and treason, and craft and murder, are goodly companions for him who had said, "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes." Why should we dwell on the wretched story? Because it teaches us, as no other page in the history of God's church does, how the alchemy of Divine love can extract sweet perfumes of penitence and praise out of the filth of sin; and therefore, though we turn with loathing from David's sin, we have to bless God for the record of it, and for the lessons of hope that come from David's pardon. To many a sin-tortured soul since then, the two psalms (Psalms 51:1-19, Psalms 32:1-11), all blotted with tears, in which he has sobbed out his penitence, have been as footsteps in a great and terrible wilderness. They are too familiar to need, and too sacred to bear, many words here, but we may briefly note some points connected with them--especially those which assist us in forming some image of the psalmist's state of mind after his transgression. It may be observed that of these two psalms, the fifty-first is evidently earlier than the thirty-second. In the former we see the fallen man struggling up out of the "horrible pit and miry clay;" in the latter he stands upon the rock, with a new song in his mouth, even the blessedness of him "whose sin is covered." It appears also that both must be dated after the sharp thrust of God's lancet which Nathan drove into his conscience, and the healing balsam of God's assurance of forgiveness which Nathan laid upon his heart. The passionate cries of the psalm are the echo of the Divine promise--the effort of his faith to grasp and keep the merciful gift of pardon. The consciousness of forgiveness is the basis of the prayer for forgiveness.

Somewhere about a year passed between the crime and the message of Nathan. And what sort of a year it was the psalms tell us. The coarse satisfactions of his sin could not long content him, as they might have done a lower type of man. Nobody buys a little passing pleasure in evil at so dear a rate, or keeps it for so short a time as a good man. He cannot make himself as others. "That which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, in that ye say, We will be as the families of the nations, which serve wood and stone." Old habits quickly reassert their force, conscience soon lifts again its solemn voice; and while worse men are enjoying the strong-flavoured meats on sin's table, the servant of God, who has been seduced to prefer them for a moment to the "light bread" from heaven, tastes them already bitter in his mouth. He may be far from true repentance, but he will very soon know remorse. Months may pass before he can feel again the calm joys of God, but disgust with himself and with his sin will quickly fill his soul. No more vivid picture of such a state has ever been drawn, than is found in the psalms of this period. They tell of sullen "silence;" dust had settled on the strings of his harp, as on helmet and sword. He will not speak to God of his sin, and there is nothing else that he can speak of. They tell of his "roaring all the day long"--the groan of anguish forced from his yet unsoftened spirit. Day and night God's heavy hand weighed him

down; the consciousness of that power, whose gentleness had once holden him up, crushed, but did not melt him. Like some heated iron, its heaviness scorched as well as bruised, and his moisture--all the dew and freshness of his life--was dried up at its touch and turned into dusty, cracking drought, that chaps the hard earth, and shrinks the streamlets, and burns to brown powder the tender herbage (Psalms 32:1-11). Body and mind seem both to be included in this wonderful description, in which obstinate dumbness, constant torture, dread of God, and not one softening drop of penitence fill the dry and dusty heart, while "bones waxing old," or, as the word might be rendered, "rotting," sleepless nights, and perhaps the burning heat of disease, are hinted at as the accompaniments of the soul-agony. It is possible that similar allusions to actual bodily illness are to be found in another psalm, probably referring to the same period, and presenting striking parallelisms of expression (Psalm 6), "Have mercy upon me, Jehovah, for I languish (fade away); heal me, for my bones are affrighted. My soul is also sore vexed. I am weary with my groaning; every night make I my bed to swim. I water my couch with my tears." The similar phrase, too, in psalm fifty-one, "The bones which Thou hast broken," may have a similar application. Thus, sick in body and soul, he dragged through a weary year--ashamed of his guilty dalliance, wretched in his self-accusations, afraid of God, and skulking in the recesses of his palace from the sight of his people. A goodly price he had sold integrity for. The bread had been sweet for a moment, but how quickly his "mouth is filled with gravel" (Proverbs 20:17). David learned, what we all learn (and the holier a man is, the more speedily and sharply does the lesson follow on the heels of his sin), that every transgression is a blunder, that we never get the satisfaction which we expect from any sin, or if we do, we get something with it which spoils it all. A nauseous drug is added to the exciting, intoxicating drink which temptation offers, and though its flavour is at first disguised by the pleasanter taste of the sin, its bitterness is persistent though slow, and clings to the palate long after that has faded utterly.

Into this dreary life Nathan's message comes with merciful rebuke. The prompt severity of David's judgment against the selfish sinner of the inimitable apologue may be a subtle indication of his troubled conscience, which fancies some atonement for his own sin in stern repression of that of others; for consciousness of evil may sometimes sting into harshness as well as soften to lenity, and sinful man is a sterner judge than the righteous God. The answer of Nathan is a perfect example of the Divine way of convincing of sin. There is first the plain charge pressed home on the individual conscience, "Thou art the man." Then follows, not reproach nor further deepening of the blackness of the deed, but a tender enumeration of God's great benefits, whereon is built the solemn question, "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight?" The contemplation of God's faithful love, and of the all-sufficient gifts which it bestows, makes every transgression irrational as well as ungrateful, and turns remorse, which consumes like the hot wind of the wilderness, into tearful repentance which refreshes the soul. When God has been seen loving and bestowing ere He commands and requires, it is profitable to hold the image of the man's evil in all its ugliness close up to his eyes; and so the bald facts are repeated next in the fewest, strongest words. Nor can the message close until a rigid law of retribution has been proclaimed, the slow operation of which will filter bitterness and shame through all his life. "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord." Two words (in the Hebrew) make the transition from sullen misery to real though shaded peace. No lengthened outpouring, no accumulation of self-reproach; he is too deeply moved for many words, which he knows God does not need. More would have been less. All is contained in that one sob, in which the whole

frostwork of these weary months breaks up and rolls away, swept before the strong flood. And as brief and simple as the confession, is the response, "And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin." How full and unconditional the blessing bestowed in these few words; how swift and sufficient the answer! So the long estrangement is ended. Thus simple and Divine is the manner of pardon. In such short compass may the turning point of a life lie! But while confession and forgiveness heal the breach between God and David, pardon is not impunity, and the same sentence which bestows the remission of sin announces the exaction of a penalty. The judgments threatened a moment before--a moment so far removed now to David's consciousness that it would look as if an age had passed--are not withdrawn, and another is added, the death of Bathsheba's infant. God loves His servants too well to "suffer sin upon them," and the freest forgiveness and the happiest consciousness of it may consist with the loving infliction and the submissive bearing of pains, which are no longer the strokes of an avenging judge, but the chastisements of a gracious father. The fifty-first psalm must, we think, be conceived of as following soon after Nathan's mission. There may be echoes of the prophet's stern question, "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight?" and of the confession, "I have sinned against the Lord," in the words, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done evil in Thy sight" (Psalms 51:4), though perhaps the expressions are not so peculiar as to make the allusion certain. But, at all events, the penitence and prayers of the psalm can scarcely be supposed to have preceded the date of the historical narrative, which clearly implies that the rebuke of the seer was the first thing that broke up the dumb misery of unrepented sin.

Although the psalm is one long cry for pardon and restoration, one can discern an order and progress in its petitions--the order, not of an artificial reproduction of a past mood of mind, but the instinctive order in which the emotion of contrite desire will ever pour itself forth. In the psalm all begins, as all begins in fact, with the grounding of the cry for favour on "Thy loving-kindness," "the multitude of Thy tender mercies;" the one plea that avails with God, whose love is its own motive and its own measure, whose past acts are the standard for all His future, whose compassions, in their innumerable numbers, are more than the sum of our transgressions, though these be "more than the hairs of our head." Beginning with God's mercy, the penitent soul can learn to look next upon its own sin in all its aspects of evil. The depth and intensity of the psalmist's loathing of self is wonderfully expressed in his words for his crime. He speaks of his "transgressions" and of his "sin." Looked at in one way, he sees the separate acts of which he had been guilty--lust, fraud, treachery, murder: looked at in another, he sees them all knotted together, in one inextricable tangle of forked, hissing tongues, like the serpent locks that coil and twist round a Gorgon head. No sin dwells alone; the separate acts have a common root, and the whole is matted together like the green growth on a stagnant pond, so that, by whatever filament it is grasped, the whole mass is drawn towards you. And a profound insight into the essence and character of sin lies in the accumulated synonyms. It is "transgression," or, as the word might be rendered, "rebellion"--not the mere breach of an impersonal law, not merely an infraction of "the constitution of our nature"--but the rising of a subject will against its true king, disobedience to a person as well as contravention of a standard. It is "iniquity"--perversion or distortion--a word which expresses the same metaphor as is found in many languages, namely, crookedness as descriptive of deeds which depart from the perfect line of right. It is "sin," i.e., "missing one's aim;" in which profound word is contained the truth that all sin is a blunder, shooting wide of the true goal, if regard be had to the end of our being, and not less wide if regard be had to our happiness. It ever misses the

mark; and the epitaph might be written over every sinner who seeks pleasure at the price of righteousness, "Thou fool." Nor less pregnant with meaning is the psalmist's emphatic acknowledgment, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned." He is not content with looking upon his evil in itself, or in relation only to the people who had suffered by it; he thinks of it in relation to God. He had been guilty of crimes against Bathsheba and Uriah, and even the rough soldier whom he made his tool, as well as against his whole subjects; but, dark as these were, they assumed their true character only when they were discerned as done against God. "Sin," in its full sense, implies "God" as its correlative. We transgress against each other, but we sin against Him. Nor does the psalmist stop here. He has acknowledged the tangled multiplicity and dreadful unity of his evil, he has seen its inmost character, he has learned to bring his deed into connection with God; what remains still to be confessed? He laments, and that not as extenuation (though it be explanation), but as aggravation, the sinful nature in which he had been born. The deeds had come from a source--a bitter fountain had welled out this blackness. He himself is evil, therefore he has done evil. The sin is his; he will not contest his full responsibility; and its foul characteristics declare the inward foulness from which it has flowed--and that foulness is himself. Does he therefore think that he is less to blame? By no means. His acknowledgment of an evil nature is the very deepest of his confessions, and leads not to a palliation of his guilt, but to a cry to Him who alone can heal the inward wound; and as He can purge away the transgressions, can likewise stanch their source, and give him to feel within "that he is healed from that plague." The same intensity of feeling expressed by the use of so many words for sin is revealed also in the reiterated synonyms for pardon. The prayer comes from his lips over and over again, not because he thinks that he shall be heard for his much speaking, but because of the earnestness of his longing. Such repetitions are signs of the persistence of faith, while others, though they last like the prayers of Baal's priests, "from morning till the time of the evening sacrifice," indicate only the suppliant's doubt. David prays that his sins may be "blotted out," in which petition they are conceived as recorded against him in the archives of the heavens; that he may be "washed" from them, in which they are conceived as foul stains upon himself, needing for their removal hard rubbing and beating (for such is, according to some commentators, the force of the word); that he may be "cleansed"--the technical word for the priestly cleansing of the leper, and declaring him clear of the taint. He also, with similar recurrence to the Mosaic symbols, prays that he may be "purged with hyssop." There is a pathetic appropriateness in the petition, for not only lepers, but those who had become defiled by contact with a dead body, were thus purified; and on whom did the taint of corruption cleave as on the murderer of Uriah? The prayer, too, is even more remarkable in the original, which employs a verb formed from the word for "sin;" "and if in our language that were a word in use, it might be translated, 'Thou shalt un-sin me.'" [W] [W] Donne's Sermons, quoted in Perowne, in. loc. In the midst of these abased confessions and cries for pardon there comes with wonderful force and beauty the bold prayer for restoration to "joy and gladness"--an indication surely of more than ordinary confidence in the full mercy of God, which would efface all the consequences of his sin. And following upon them are petitions for sanctifying, reiterated and many-sided, like those that have preceded. Three pairs of clauses contain these, in each of which the second member of the clause asks for the infusion into his spirit of some grace from God--that he may possess a "steadfast spirit," "Thy Holy Spirit," "a willing spirit." It is perhaps not an accident that the central petition of the three is the one which most clearly expresses the thought which all imply--that the human spirit can only be renewed and hallowed by the entrance into it of the

Divine. We are not to commit the theological anachronism which has been applied with such evil effect to the whole Old Testament, and suppose that David meant by that central clause in his prayer for renewal all that we mean by it; but he meant, at least, that his spiritual nature could be made to love righteousness and hate iniquity by none other power than God's breathing on it. If we may venture to regard this as the heart of the series, the other two on either side of it may be conceived as its consequences. It will then be "a right spirit," or, as the word means, a steadfast spirit, strong to resist, not swept away by surges of passion, nor shaken by terrors of remorse, but calm, tenacious, and resolved, pressing on in the path of holiness, and immovable with the immobility of those who are rooted in God and goodness. It will be a free, or "a willing spirit," ready for all joyful service of thankfulness, and so penetrated with the love of his God that he will delight to do His will, and carry the law characterized in the spontaneous impulses of his renewed nature. Not without profound meaning does the psalmist seem to recur in his hour of penitence to the tragic fate of his predecessor in the monarchy, to whom, as to himself, had been given by the same anointing, the same gift of "the Spirit of God." Remembering how the holy chrism had faded from the raven locks of Saul long before his bloody head had been sent round Philistine cities to glut their revenge, and knowing that if God were "strict to mark iniquity," the gift which had been withdrawn from Saul would not be continued to himself, he prays, not as anointed monarch only, but as sinful man, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." As before he had ventured to ask for the joy of forgiveness, so now he pleads once more for "the joy of Thy salvation," which comes from cleansing, from conscious fellowship--which he had so long and deeply felt, which for so many months had been hid from him by the mists of his own sin. The psalmist's natural buoyancy, the gladness which was an inseparable part of his religion, and had rung from his harp in many an hour of peril, the bold width of his desires, grounded on the clear breadth of his faith in God's perfect forgiveness, are all expressed in such a prayer from such lips at such a time, and may well be pondered and imitated by us. The lowly prayer which we have been tracing rises ere its close to a vow of renewed praise. It is very beautiful to note how the poet nature, as well as the consciousness of a Divine function, unite in the resolve that crowns the psalm. To David no tribute that he could bring to God seemed so little unworthy--none to himself so joyous--as the music of his harp, and the melody of his songs; nor was any part of his kingly office so lofty in his estimation as his calling to proclaim in glowing words the name of the Lord, that men might learn to love. His earliest song in exile had closed with a like vow. It had been well fulfilled for many a year; but these last doleful months had silenced all his praise. Now, as hope begins to shine upon him once more, the frost which had stilled the stream of his devotion is melting, and as he remembers his glad songs of old, and this miserable dumbness, his final prayer is, "O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." The same consciousness of sin, which we have found in a previous verse discerning the true significance of ceremonial purification, leads also to the recognition of the insufficiency of outward sacrifices--a thought which is not, as some modern critics would fain make it, the product of the latest age of Judaism, but appears occasionally through the whole of the history, and indicates not the date, but the spiritual elevation of its utterer. David sets it on the very summit of his psalm, to sparkle there like some stone of price. The rich jewel which he has brought up from the abyss of degradation is that truth which has shone out from its setting here over three millenniums: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." The words which follow, containing a prayer for the building up of Zion, and a prediction of the continuous offering of sacrifice, present some

difficulty. They do not necessarily presuppose that Jerusalem is in ruins; for "build Thou the walls" would be no less appropriate a petition if the fortifications were unfinished (as we know they were in David's time) than if they had been broken down. Nor do the words contradict the view of sacrifice just given, for the use of the symbol and the conviction of its insufficiency co-existed, in fact, in every devout life, and may well be expressed side by side. But the transition from so intensely personal emotions to intercession for Zion seems almost too sudden even for a nature as wide and warm as David's. If the closing verses are his, we may, indeed, see in them the king re-awaking to a sense of his responsibilities, which he had so long neglected, first, in the selfishness of his heart, and then in the morbid self-absorption of his remorse; and the lesson may be a precious one that the first thought of a pardoned man should be for others. But there is much to be said, on the other hand, in favour of the conjecture that these verses are a later addition, probably after the return from captivity, when the walls of Zion were in ruins, and the altar of the temple had been long cold. If so, then our psalm, as it came from David's full heart, would be all of a piece--one great gush of penitence and faith, beginning with, "Have mercy upon me, O God," ending with the assurance of acceptance, and so remaining for all ages the chart of the thorny and yet blessed path that leads "from death unto life." In that aspect, what it does not contain is as noteworthy as what it does. Not one word asks for exemption from such penalties of his great fall as can be inflicted by a loving Father on a soul that lives in His love. He cries for pardon, but he gives his back to the smiters whom God may please to send. The other psalm of the penitent (Psalms 32:1-11) has been already referred to in connection with the autobiographical materials which it contains. It is evidently of a later period than the fifty-first. There is no struggle in it; the prayer has been heard, and this is the beginning of the fulfilment of the vow to show forth God's praise. In the earlier he had said, "Then will I teach transgressors the way;" here he says, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go." There he began with the plaintive cry for mercy; here with a burst of praise celebrating the happiness of the pardoned penitent. There we heard the sobs of a man in the very agony of abasement; here we have the story of their blessed issue. There we had multiplied synonyms for sin, and for the forgiveness which was desired; here it is the many-sided preciousness of forgiveness possessed which runs over in various yet equivalent phrases. There the highest point to which he could climb was the assurance that a bruised heart was accepted, and the bones broken might still rejoice. Here the very first word is of blessedness, and the close summons the righteous to exuberant joy. The one is a psalm of wailing; the other, to use its own words, a "song of deliverance."

What glad consciousness that he himself is the happy man whom he describes rings in the melodious variations of the one thought of forgiveness in the opening words! How gratefully he draws on the treasures of that recent experience, while he sets it forth as being the "taking away" of sin, as if it were the removal of a solid something, or the lifting of a burden off his back; and as the "covering" of sin, as if it were the wrapping of its ugliness in thick folds that hide it for ever even from the all-seeing Eye; and as the "non-reckoning" of sin, as if it were the discharge of a debt! What vivid memory of past misery in the awful portrait of his impenitent self, already referred to--on which the mind dwells in silence, while the musical accompaniment (as directed by the "selah") touches some plaintive minor or grating discord! How noble and eloquent the brief words (echo of the historical narrative) that tell the full and swift forgiveness that followed simple confession--and how effectively the music again comes in, prolonging the thought and rejoicing in the pardon! How sure he is that his experience is of priceless value to the world for all time, when he sees in his

absolution a motive that will draw all the godly nearer to their Helper in heaven! How full his heart is of praise, that he cannot but go back again to his own story, and rejoice in God his hiding-place--whose past wondrous love assures him that in the future songs of deliverance will ring him round, and all his path be encompassed with music of praise. So ends the more personal part of the psalm. A more didactic portion follows, the generalization of that. Possibly the voice which now speaks is a higher than David's. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eye," scarcely sounds like words meant to be understood as spoken by him. They are the promise from heaven of a gentle teaching to the pardoned man, which will instruct by no severity, but by patient schooling; which will direct by no harsh authority, but by that loving glance that is enough for those who love, and is all too subtle and delicate to be perceived by any other. Such gracious direction is not for the psalmist alone, but it needs a spirit in harmony with God to understand it. For others there can be nothing higher than mere force, the discipline of sorrow, the bridle in the hard mouth, the whip for the stiff back. The choice for all men is through penitence and forgiveness to rise to the true position of men, capable of receiving and obeying a spiritual guidance, which appeals to the heart, and gently subdues the will, or by stubborn impenitence to fall to the level of brutes, that can only be held in by a halter and driven by a lash. And because this is the alternative, therefore "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about." And then the psalm ends with a great cry of gladness, three times reiterated, like the voice of a herald on some festal day of a nation: "Rejoice in Jehovah! and leap for joy, O righteous! and gladly shout, all ye upright in heart!"

Such is the end of the sobs of the penitent.

02.14-XIV. CHASTISEMENTS.

XIV.--CHASTISEMENTS. The chastisements, which were the natural fruits of David's sin, soon began to show themselves, though apparently ten years at least passed before Absalom's revolt, at which time he was probably a man of sixty. But these ten years were very weary and sad. There is no more joyous activity, no more conquering energy, no more consciousness of his people's love. Disasters thicken round him, and may all be traced to his great sin. His children learned the lesson it had taught them, and lust and fratricide desolated his family. A parent can have no sharper pang than the sight of his own sins reappearing in his child. David saw the ghastly reflection of his unbridled passion in his eldest son's foul crime (and even a gleam of it in his unhappy daughter), and of his murderous craft in his second son's bloody revenge. Whilst all this hell of crime is boiling round him, a strange passiveness seems to have crept over the king, and to have continued till his flight before Absalom. The narrative is singularly silent about him. He seems paralysed by the consciousness of his past sin; he originates nothing. He dares not punish Ammon; he can only weep when he hears of Absalom's crime. He weakly longs for the return of the latter from his exile, but cannot nerve himself to send for him till Joab urges it. A flash of his old kingliness blazes out for a moment in his refusal to see his son; but even that slight satisfaction to justice vanishes as soon as Joab chooses to insist that Absalom shall return to court. He seems to have no will of his own. He has become a mere tool in the hands of his fierce general--and Joab's hold upon him was his complicity in Uriah's murder. Thus at every step he was dogged by the consequences of his crime, even though it was pardoned sin. And if, as is probable, Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather, the most formidable person in Absalom's conspiracy, whose defection wounded him so deeply, was no doubt driven to the usurper's side out of revenge for the insult to his house in her person. Thus "of our pleasant vices doth heaven make whips to scourge us." "Be not deceived; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

It is not probable that many psalms were made in those dreary days. But the forty-first and fifty-fifth are, with reasonable probability, referred to this period by many commentators. They give a very touching picture of the old king during the four years in which Absalom's conspiracy was being hatched. It seems, from the forty-first, that the pain and sorrow of his heart had brought on some serious illness, which his enemies had used for their own purposes, and embittered by hypocritical condolences and ill-concealed glee. The sensitive nature of the psalmist winces under their heartless desertion of him, and pours out its plaint in this pathetic lament. He begins with a blessing on those who "consider the afflicted"--having reference, perhaps, to the few who were faithful to him in his languishing sickness. He passes thence to his own case, and, after humble confession of his sin,--almost in the words of the fifty-first psalm,--he tells how his sickbed had been surrounded by very different visitors. His disease drew no pity, but only fierce impatience that he lingered in life so long. "Mine enemies speak evil of me--when will he die, and his name have perished?" One of them, in especial, who must have been a man in high position to gain access to the sick chamber, has been conspicuous by his lying words of condolence: "If he come to see me he speaketh vanity." The sight of the sick king touched no chord of affection, but only increased

the traitor's animosity--"his heart gathereth evil to itself"--and then, having watched his pale face for wished-for unfavourable symptoms, the false friend hurries from the bedside to talk of his hopeless illness--"he goeth abroad, he telleth it." The tidings spread, and are stealthily passed from one conspirator to another. "All that hate me whisper together against me." They exaggerate the gravity of his condition, and are glad because, making the wish the father to the thought, they believe him dying. "A thing of Belial" (i.e., a destructive disease), "say they, is poured out upon him, and now that he lieth, he shall rise up no more." And, sharpest pang of all, that among these traitors, and probably the same person as he whose heartless presence in the sick chamber was so hard to bear, should be Ahithophel, whose counsel had been like an oracle from God. Even he, "the man of my friendship, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread"--he, like an ignoble, vicious mule--"has lifted high his heel" against the sick lion.

We should be disposed to refer the thirty-ninth psalm also to this period. It, too, is the meditation of one in sickness, which he knows to be a Divine judgment for his sin. There is little trace of enemies in it; but his attitude is that of silent submission, while wicked men are disquieted around him--which is precisely the characteristic peculiarity of his conduct at this period. It consists of two parts (Psalms 39:1-6 and Psalms 39:7-13), in both of which the subjects of his meditations are the same, but the tone of them different. His own sickness and mortality, and man's fleeting, shadowy life, are his themes. The former has led him to think of the latter. The first effect of his sorrow was to close his lips in a silence that was not altogether submission. "I held my peace, even from good, and my sorrow was stirred." As in his sin, when he kept silence, his "bones waxed old," so now in his sorrow and sickness the pain that could not find expression raged the more violently. The tearless eyes were hot and aching; but he conquered the dumb spirit, and could carry his heavy thoughts to God. They are very heavy at first. He only desires that the sad truth may be driven deeper into his soul. With the engrossment so characteristic of melancholy, he asks, what might have been thought the thing he needed least, "Make me to know mine end;" and then he dilates on the gloomy reflections which he had been cherishing in silence. Not only he himself, with his handbreadth of days, that shrink into absolute nothingness when brought into contrast with the life of God, but "every man," even when apparently "standing" most "firm, is only a breath." As a shadow every man moves spectral among shadows. The tumult that fills their lives is madness; "only for a breath are they disquieted." So bitterly, with an anticipation of the sad, clear-eyed pity and scorn of "The Preacher," does the sick and wearied king speak, in tones very unlike the joyous music of his earlier utterances.

But, true and wholesome as such thoughts are, they are not all the truth. So the prayer changes in tone, even while its substance is the same. He rises from the shows of earth to his true home, driven thither by their hollowness. "My hope is in Thee." The conviction of earth's vanity is all different when it has "tossed him to Thy breast." The pardoned sinner, who never thereafter forgot his grievous fall, asks for deliverance "from all his transgressions." The sullen silence has changed into full acquiescence: "I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it,"--a silence differing from the other as the calm after the storm, when all the winds sleep and the sun shines out on a freshened world, differs from the boding stillness while the slow thunder-clouds grow lurid on the horizon. He cries for healing, for he knows his sickness to be the buffet and assault of God's hand; and its bitterness is assuaged, even while its force continues, by the conviction that it is God's fatherly chastisement for sin which gnaws away his manly vigour as the moth frets his kingly robe.

The very thought which had been so bitter--that every man is vanity--reappears in a new connection as the basis of the prayer that God would hear, and is modified so as to become infinitely blessed and hopeful. "I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were." A wanderer indeed, and a transient guest on earth; but what of that, if he be God's guest? All that is sorrowful is drawn off from the thought when we realise our connection with God. We are in God's house; the host, not the guest, is responsible for the housekeeping. We need not feel life lonely if He be with us, nor its shortness sad. It is not a shadow, a dream, a breath, if it be rooted in Him. And thus the sick man has conquered his gloomy thoughts, even though he sees little before him but the end; and he is not cast down even though his desires are all summed up in one for a little respite and healing, ere the brief trouble of earth be done with: "O spare me, that I may recover strength before I go hence, and be no more."

It may be observed that this supposition of a protracted illness, which is based upon these psalms, throws light upon the singular passiveness of David during the maturing of Absalom's conspiracy, and may naturally be supposed to have favoured his schemes, an essential part of which was to ingratiate himself with suitors who came to the king for judgment by affecting great regret that no man was deputed of the king to hear them. The accumulation of untried causes, and the apparent disorganization of the judicial machinery, are well accounted for by David's sickness. The fifty-fifth psalm gives some very pathetic additional particulars. It is in three parts--a plaintive prayer and portraiture of the psalmist's mental distress (Psalms 55:1-8); a vehement supplication against his foes, and indignant recounting of their treachery (Psalms 55:9-16); and, finally, a prophecy of the retribution that is to fall upon them (Psalms 55:17-23). In the first and second portions we have some points which help to complete our picture of the man. For instance, his heart "writhe" within him, the "terrors of death" are on him, "fear and trembling" are come on him, and "horror" has covered him. All this points, like subsequent verses, to his knowledge of the conspiracy before it came to a head. The state of the city, which is practically in the hands of Absalom and his tools, is described with bold imagery. Violence and Strife in possession of it, spies prowling about the walls day and night, Evil and Trouble in its midst, and Destruction, Oppression, and Deceit--a goodly company--flaunting in its open spaces. And the spirit, the brain of the whole, is the trusted friend whom he had made his own equal, who had shared his secretest thoughts in private, who had walked next him in solemn processions to the temple. Seeing all this, what does the king do, who was once so fertile in resource, so decisive in counsel, so prompt in action? Nothing. His only weapon is prayer. "As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord will save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and He shall hear my voice." He lets it all grow as it list, and only longs to be out of all the weary coil of troubles. "Oh that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest. Lo, I would flee far off, I would lodge in the wilderness. I would swiftly fly to my refuge from the raging wind, from the tempest." The langour of his disease, love for his worthless son, consciousness of sin, and submission to the chastisement through "one of his own house," which Nathan had foretold, kept him quiet, though he saw the plot winding its meshes round him. And in this submission patient confidence is not wanting, though subdued and saddened, which finds expression in the last words of this psalm of the heavy laden, "Cast thy burden upon Jehovah. He, He will sustain thee.... I will trust in Thee." When the blow at last fell, the same passive acquiescence in what he felt to be God's chastisement is very noticeable. Absalom escapes to Hebron, and sets up the standard of revolt. When the news comes to Jerusalem the king's only thought is immediate flight. He is almost cowardly in his eagerness to

escape, and is prepared to give up everything without a blow. It seems as if only a touch was needed to overthrow his throne. He hurries on the preparations for flight with nervous haste. He forms no plans beyond those of his earlier wish to fly away and be at rest. He tries to denude himself of followers. When the six hundred men of Gath--who had been with him ever since his early days in Philistia, and had grown grey in his service--make themselves the van of his little army, he urges the heroic Ittai, their leader, to leave him a fugitive, and to worship the rising sun, "Return to thy place, and abide with the king"--so thoroughly does he regard the crown as passed already from his brows. The priests with the ark are sent back; he is not worthy to have the symbol of the Divine presence identified with his doubtful cause, and is prepared to submit without a murmur if God "thus say, I have no delight in thee." With covered head and naked feet he goes up the slope of Olivet, and turning perhaps at that same bend in the rocky mountain path where the true King, coming to the city, wept as he saw its shining walls and soaring pinnacles across the narrow valley, the discrowned king and all his followers broke into passionate weeping as they gazed their last on the lost capital, and then with choking sobs rounded the shoulder of the hill and set their faces to their forlorn flight. Passing through the territory of Saul's tribe--dangerous ground for him to tread--the rank hatred of Shimei's heart blossoms into speech. With Eastern vehemence, he curses and flings stones and dust in the transports of his fury, stumbling along among the rocks high up on the side of the glen, as he keeps abreast of the little band below. Did David remember how the husband from whom he had torn Michal had followed her to this very place, and there had turned back weeping to his lonely home? The remembrance, at any rate, of later and more evil deeds prompted his meek answer, "Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him." The first force of the disaster spent itself, and by the time he was safe across Jordan, on the free uplands of Bashan, his spirit rises. He makes a stand at Mahanaim, the place where his great ancestor, in circumstances somewhat analogous to his own, had seen the vision of "bright-harnessed angels" ranked in battle array for the defence of himself and his own little band, and called the name of the place the "two camps." Perhaps that old story helped to hearten him, as the defection of Ahithophel from the conspiracy certainly would do. As the time went on, too, it became increasingly obvious that the leaders of the rebellion were "infirm of purpose," and that every day of respite from actual fighting diminished their chances of success, as that politic adviser saw so plainly. Whatever may have been the reason, it is clear that by the time David had reached Mahanaim he had resolved not to yield without a struggle. He girds on his sword once more with some of the animation of early days, and the light of trustful valour blazes again in his old eyes.

02.15-XV. THE SONGS OF THE FUGITIVE.

XV. THE SONGS OF THE FUGITIVE. The psalms which probably belong to the period of Absalom's rebellion correspond well with the impression of his spirit gathered from the historical books. Confidence in God, submission to His will, are strongly expressed in them, and we may almost discern a progress in the former respect as the rebellion grows. They flame brighter and brighter in the deepening darkness. From the lowest abyss the stars are seen most clearly. He is far more buoyant when he is an exile once more in the wilderness, and when the masks of plot and trickery are fallen, and the danger stands clear before him. Like some good ship issuing from the shelter of the pier heads, the first blow of the waves throws her over on her side and makes her quiver like a living thing recoiling from a terror, but she rises above the tossing surges and keeps her course. We may allocate with a fair amount of likelihood the following psalms to this period-- Psalms 3:1-8; Psalms 4:1-8; Psalms 25:1-22; Psalms 28:1-9; Psalms 58:1-11; Psalms 61:1-8; Psalms 62:1-12; Psalms 63:1-11; Psalms 109:1-31; Psalms 143:1-12. The first two of these form a pair; they are a morning and an evening hymn. The little band are encamped on their road to Mahanaim, with no roof but the stars, and no walls but the arm of God. In the former the discrowned king sings, as he rises from his nightly bivouac. He pours out first his plaint of the foes, who are described as "many," and as saying that, "There is no help for him in God," words which fully correspond to the formidable dimensions of the revolt, and to the belief which actuated the conspirators, and had appeared as possible even to himself, that his sin had turned away the aid of heaven from his cause. To such utterances of malice and confident hatred he opposes the conviction which had again filled his soul, that even in the midst of real peril and the shock of battle Jehovah is his "shield." With bowed and covered head he had fled from Jerusalem, but "Thou art the lifter up of mine head." He was an exile from the tabernacle on Zion, and he had sent back the ark to its rest; but though he has to cry to God from beyond Jordan, He answers "from His holy hill." He and his men camped amidst dangers, but one unslumbering Helper mounted guard over their undefended slumbers. "I laid me down and slept" there among the echoes of the hills. "I awaked, for Jehovah sustained me;" and another night has passed without the sudden shout of the rebels breaking the silence, or the gleam of their swords in the starlight. The experience of protection thus far heartens him to front even the threatening circle of his foes around him, whom it is his pain to think of as "the people" of God, and yet as his foes. And then he betakes himself in renewed energy of faith to his one weapon of prayer, and even before the battle sees the victory, and the Divine power fracturing the jaws and breaking the teeth of the wild beasts who hunt him. But his last thought is not of retribution nor of fear; for himself he rises to the height of serene trust, "Salvation is of the Lord;" and for his foes and for all the nation that had risen against him his thoughts are worthy of a true king, freed from all personal animosity, and his words are a prayer conceived in the spirit of Him whose dying breath was intercession for His rebellious subjects who crucified their King, "Thy blessing be upon Thy people."

Psalms 4:1-8 is the companion evening hymn. Its former portion (Psalms 4:2-4) seems to be a remonstrance addressed as if to the leaders of the revolt ("sons of men" being equivalent to

"persons of rank and dignity"). It is the expression in vivid form, most natural to such a nature, of his painful feeling under their slanders; and also of his hopes and desires for them, that calm thought in these still evening hours which are falling on the world may lead them to purer service and to reliance on God. So forgivingly, so lovingly does he think of them, ere he lays himself down to rest, wishing that "on their beds," as on his, the peace of meditative contemplation may rest, and the day of war's alarms be shut in by holy "communion with their own hearts" and with God. The second portion turns to himself and his followers, among whom we may suppose some faint hearts were beginning to despond; and to them, as to the very enemy, David would fain be the bringer of a better mind. "Many say, Who will show us good?" He will turn them from their vain search round the horizon on a level with their own eyes for the appearance of succour. They must look upwards, not round about. They must turn their question, which only expects a negative answer, into a prayer, fashioned like that triple priestly benediction of old (Numbers 6:24-26). His own experience bursts forth irrepressible. He had prayed in his hour of penitence, "Make me to hear joy and gladness" (Psalm 51); and the prayer had been answered, if not before, yet now when peril had brought him nearer to God, and trust had drawn God nearer to him. In his calamity, as is ever the case with devout souls, his joy increased, as Greek fire burns more brightly under water. Therefore this pauper sovereign, discrowned and fed by the charity of the Gileadite pastoral chief, sings, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased." And how tranquilly the psalm closes, and seems to lull itself to rest, "In peace I will at once lie down and sleep, for Thou, O Jehovah, only makest me dwell safely." The growing security which experience of God's care should ever bring, is beautifully marked by the variation on the similar phrase in the previous psalm. There he gratefully recorded that he had laid himself down and slept; here he promises himself that he will lie down "in peace;" and not only so, but that at once on his lying down he will sleep--kept awake by no anxieties, by no bitter thoughts, but, homeless and in danger as he is, will close his eyes, like a tired child, without a care or a fear, and forthwith sleep, with the pressure and the protection of his Father's arm about him. This psalm sounds again the glad trustful strain which has slumbered in his harp-strings ever since the happy old days of his early trials, and is re-awakened as the rude blast of calamity sweeps through them once more. The sixty-third psalm is by the superscription referred to the time when David was "in the wilderness of Judah," which has led many readers to think of his long stay there during Saul's persecution. But the psalm certainly belongs to the period of his reign, as is obvious from its words, "The king shall rejoice in God." It must therefore belong to his brief sojourn in the same wilderness on his flight to Mahanaim, when, as we read in 2 Samuel, "The people were weary and hungry and thirsty in the wilderness." There is a beautiful progress of thought in it, which is very obvious if we notice the triple occurrence of the words "my soul," and their various connections--"my soul thirsteth," "my soul is satisfied," "my soul followeth hard after Thee;" or, in other words, the psalm is a transcript of the passage of a believing soul from longing through fruition to firm trust, in which it is sustained by the right hand of God. The first of these emotions, which is so natural to the fugitive in his sorrows, is expressed with singular poetic beauty in language borrowed from the ashen grey monotony of the waterless land in which he was. One of our most accurate and least imaginative travellers describes it thus: "There were no signs of vegetation, with the exception of a few reeds and rushes, and here and there a tamarisk." This lonely land, cracked with drought, as if gaping with chapped lips for the rain that comes not, is the image of his painful yearning for the Fountain of living waters. As his men plodded along over the

burning marl, fainting for thirst and finding nothing in the dry torrent beds, so he longed for the refreshment of that gracious presence. Then he remembers how in happier days he had had the same desires, and they had been satisfied in the tabernacle. Probably the words should read, "Thus in the sanctuary have I gazed upon Thee, to see Thy power and Thy glory." In the desert and in the sanctuary his longing had been the same, but then he had been able to behold the symbol which bore the name, "the glory,"--and now he wanders far from it. How beautifully this regretful sense of absence from and pining after the ark is illustrated by those inimitably pathetic words of the fugitive's answer to the priests who desired to share his exile. "And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city. If I find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation." The fulfilment is contemporaneous with the desire. The swiftness of the answer is beautifully indicated in the quick turn with which the psalm passes from plaintive longing to exuberant rapture of fruition. In the one breath "my soul thirsteth;" in the next, "my soul is satisfied"--as when in tropical lands the rain comes, and in a day or two what had been baked earth is rich meadow, and the dry torrent-beds, where the white stones glistened in the sunshine, foam with rushing waters and are edged with budding willows. The fulness of satisfaction when God fills the soul is vividly expressed in the familiar image of the feast of "marrow and fatness," on which he banquets even while hungry in the desert. The abundant delights of fellowship with God make him insensible to external privations, are drink for him thirsty, food for his hunger, a home in his wanderings, a source of joy and music in the midst of much that is depressing: "My mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips." The little camp had to keep keen look-out for nightly attacks; and it is a slight link of connection, very natural under the circumstances, between the psalms of this period, that they all have some references to the perilous hours of darkness. We have found him laying himself down to sleep in peace; here he wakes, not to guard from hostile surprises, but in the silence there below the stars to think of God and feel again the fulness of His all-sufficiency. Happy thoughts, not fears, hold his eyes waking. "I remember Thee upon my bed." The fruition heartens for renewed exercise of confidence, in which David feels himself upheld by God, and foresees his enemies' defeat and his own triumph. "My soul cleaveth after Thee"--a remarkable phrase, in which the two metaphors of tenacious adherence and eager following are mingled to express the two "phases of faith," which are really one--of union with and quest after God, the possession which pursues, the pursuit which possesses Him who is at once grasped and felt after by the finite creature whose straitest narrowness is not too narrow to be blessed by some indwelling of God, but whose widest expansion of capacity and desire can but contain a fragment of His fulness. From such elevation of high communion he looks down and onward into the dim future, his enemies sunken, like Korah and his rebels, into the gaping earth, or scattered in fight, and the jackals that were snuffing hungrily about his camp in the wilderness gorging themselves on corpses, while he himself, once more "king," shall rejoice in God, and with his faithful companions, whose lips and hearts were true to God and His anointed, shall glory in the deliverance that by the arbitrament of victory has flung back the slanders of the rebels in their teeth, and choked them with their own lies. Our space forbids more than a brief reference to Psalm 62, which seems also to belong to this time. It has several points of contact with those already considered, e.g., the phrase, "sons of men," in the sense of "nobles" (Psalms 62:9); "my soul," as equivalent to "myself," and yet as a kind of quasi-separate personality which he can study and exhort; the significant use of the term "people," and the double exhortations to his own devout followers and to the arrogant enemy. The whole

tone is that of patient resignation, which we have found characterising David now. The first words are the key-note of the whole, "Truly unto God my soul is silence"--is all one great stillness of submissive waiting upon Him. It was in the very crisis of his fate, in the suspense of the uncertain issue of the rebellion, that these words, the very sound of which has calmed many a heart since, welled to his lips. The expression of unwavering faith and unbroken peace is much heightened by the frequent recurrence of the word which is variously translated "truly," "surely," and "only." It carries the force of confident affirmation, like the "verily" of the New Testament, and is here most significantly prefixed to the assertions of his patient resignation (Psalms 62:1); of God's defence (Psalms 62:2); of the enemies' whispered counsels (Psalms 62:4); to his exhortation of his soul to the resignation which it already exercises (Psalms 62:5); and to the triumphant reiteration of God's all-sufficient protection. How beautifully, too, does that reiteration--almost verbal repetition--of the opening words strengthen the impression of his habitual trust. His soul in its silence murmurs to itself, as it were, the blessed thoughts over and over again. Their echoes haunt his spirit "lingering and wandering on, as loth to die;" and if for a moment the vision of his enemies disturbs their flow, one indignant question flung at them suffices, "How long will ye rush upon a man? (how long) will ye all of you thrust him down as (if he were) a bowing wall, a tottering fence?" and with a rapid glance at their plots and bitter words, he comes back again to his calm gaze on God. Lovingly he accumulates happy names for Him, which, in their imagery, as well as in their repetition, remind us of the former songs of the fugitive. "My rock," in whom I hide; "He is my salvation," which is even more than "from Him cometh my salvation;" my "fortress," my "glory," "the rock of my strength," "my refuge." So many phases of his need and of God's sufficiency thus gathered together, tell how familiar to the thoughts and real to the experience of the aged fugitive was his security in Jehovah. The thirty years since last he had wandered there have confirmed the faith of his earlier songs; and though the ruddy locks of the young chieftain are silvered with grey now, and sins and sorrows have saddened him, yet he can take up again with deeper meaning the tones of his old praise, and let the experience of age seal with its "verily" the hopes of youth. Exhortations to his people to unite themselves with him in his faith, and assurances that God is a refuge for them too, with solemn warnings to the rebels, close this psalm of glad submission. It is remarkable for the absence of all petitions. He needs nothing beyond what he has. As the companion psalm says, his soul "is satisfied." Communion with God has its moments of restful blessedness, when desire is stilled, and expires in peaceful fruition. The other psalms of this period must be left unnoticed. The same general tone pervades them all. In many particulars they closely resemble those of the Sauline period. But the resemblance fails very significantly at one point. The emphatic assertion of his innocence is gone for ever. Pardoned indeed he is, cleansed, conscious of God's favour, and able to rejoice in it; but carrying to the end the remembrance of his sore fall, and feeling it all the more penitently, the more he is sure of God's forgiveness. Let us remember that there are sins which, once done, leave their traces on memory and conscience, painting indelible forms on the walls of our "chambers of imagery," and transmitting results which remission and sanctifying do not, on earth at least, wholly obliterate. Let David's youthful prayer be ours, "Keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from much transgression."

It does not fall within the scope of this volume to deal with the suppression of Absalom's revolt, nor with the ten years of rule that remained to David after his restoration. The psalter does not appear to contain psalms which throw light upon the somewhat clouded closing years of his reign. One

psalm, indeed, there is attributed to him, which is, at any rate, the work of an old man--a sweet song into which mellow wisdom has condensed its final lessons--and a snatch of it may stand instead of any summing-up of the life by us:

"Trust in the Lord, and do good; Dwell in the land, and enjoy security; Delight thyself also in the Lord, And He shall give thee the desires of thy heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord. (Psalms 37:3-5) Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. (Psalms 37:7) I have been young and now am old, Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken. (Psalms 37:25)

I have seen the wicked in great power, And spreading himself like a green tree.... Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not." (Psalms 37:35) May we not apply the next words to the psalmist himself, and hear him calling us to look on him as he lies on his dying bed--disturbed though it were by ignoble intrigues of hungry heirs--after so many storms nearing the port; after so many vicissitudes, close to the unchanging home; after so many struggles, resting quietly on the breast of God: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace?" Into this opal calmness, as of the liquid light of sunset, all the flaming splendours of the hot day have melted. The music of his songs die away into "peace;" as when some master holds our ears captive with tones so faint that we scarce can tell sound from silence, until the jar of common noises, which that low sweetness had deadened, rushes in.

One strain of a higher mood is preserved for us in the historical books that prophesy of the true King, whom his own failures and sins, no less than his consecration and victories, had taught him to expect. The dying eyes see on the horizon of the far-off future the form of Him who is to be a just and perfect ruler; before the brightness of whose presence, and the refreshing of whose influence, verdure and beauty shall clothe the world. As the shades gather, that radiant glory to come brightens. He departs in peace, having seen the salvation from afar. It was fitting that this fullest of his prophecies should be the last of his strains, as if the rapture which thrilled the trembling strings had snapped them in twain. And then, for earth, the richest voice which God ever tuned for His praise was hushed, and the harp of Jesse's son hangs untouched above his grave. But for him death was God's last, best answer to his prayer, "O Lord, open Thou my lips;" and as that cold but most loving hand unclothes him from the weakness of flesh, and leads him in among the choirs of heaven, we can almost hear again his former thanksgiving breaking from his immortal lips, "Thou hast put a new song into my mouth," whose melodies, unsaddened by plaintive minors of penitence and pain, are yet nobler and sweeter than the psalms which he sang here, and left to be the solace and treasure of all generations!

S. A Confession and a Warning

A Confession and a Warning

THE FIRST WORDS OF these wonderful discourses were, "Let not your heart be troubled." They struck the key-note of the whole. The aim of all was to bring peace and confidence unto the disciples' spirits. And this joyful burst of confession which wells up so spontaneously and irrepressibly from their hearts, shows that the aim has been reached. For a moment sorrow, bewilderment dullness of apprehension, had all passed away, and the foolish questioners and non-receptive listeners had been lifted into a higher region, and possess insight, courage, confidence. The last sublime utterance of our Lord had gathered all the scattered rays into a beam so bright that the blindest could not but see, and the coldest could not but be warmed.

But yet the calm, clear eye of Christ sees something not wholly satisfactory in this outpouring of the disciples' confidence. He does not reject their imperfect faith, but He warns them, seeing the impending hour of denial which was so terribly to contradict the rapture of that moment. And then, with most pathetic suddenness, He passes from them to Himself; and in a singularly blended utterance lets us get a glimpse into His deep solitude and the companions that shared it.

My words this morning make no attempt at any further connection than is involved in following the course of thought in the words before us.

Note the disciples' joyful confession. Their words are permeated throughout with allusions to the previous promises and sayings of our Lord, and the very allusions show how shallow was their understanding of what they thought so plain. He had said to them that, in that coming day which was so near its dawn, He would speak to them no more in proverbs, but show them plainly of the Father; and they answer, with a kind of rapture of astonishment, that the promised day has come already, and that even now He is speaking to them plainly, and without mysterious sayings. Did they understand His words when they thought them so plain? "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world. Again I leave the world and go unto the Father." That summary statement of the central mysteries of Christianity, which the generations have found to be inexhaustible, and which to so many minds has been absolutely incredible, seemed to the shallow apprehension of these disciples to be sun-clear. If they had understood what He meant, could they have spoken thus, or have left Him so soon?

They begin with what they believed to be a fact His clear utterance. Then follows a conviction which they infer from the fact, and rightly infer, and which has allusion to His previous words. "Now," say they, "we know that Thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask Thee." He had said to them, "In that day ye shall ask Me nothing;" and from the fact that He had interpreted their unspoken words, and had anticipated their desire to ask what they durst not ask, they draw, and rightly draw, the conclusion of His Divine Omniscience. They think that therein, in His answer to their question before it is asked, is the fulfilment of that great promise. Was that all that He meant? Certainly not. Did He merely mean to say, "You will ask Me nothing, because I

shall know what you want to know, without your asking?" No! But He meant, "Ye shall ask Me nothing, because in that day you will have with you an illuminating Spirit who will solve all your difficulties." So, again, a shallow interpretation empties the words which they accept of their deepest and most precious meaning.

And then they take yet a further step. First, they begin with a fact; then from that they infer a conviction; and now, upon the basis of the inferred conviction, they rear a faith. "We believe that Thou camest forth from God." But what they meant by "coming forth from God" fell far short of the greatness what He meant by the declaration, and they stand, in this final, articulate confession of their faith, but a little in advance of Nicodemus the Rabbi, and behind Peter the Apostle when he said: "Thou art the Son of the living God."

So their confession is a strangely mingled warp and woof of insight and of ignorance. And they may stand for us both as examples to teach us what we ought to be, and as beacons teaching us what we should not be.

Let me note just one or two lessons drawn from the disciples' demeanour and confession.

The first remark that I would make is that here we learn what it is that gives life to a creed—Experience. These men had, over and over again, in our Lord's earlier utterances, heard the declaration that "He came forth from God"; and in a sort of fashion they believed it. But, as so many of our convictions do, it lay dormant and half dead in their souls. But now, rightly or wrongly, experience had brought them into contact, as they thought, with a manifest proof of His Divine Omniscience, and the torpid conviction flashes all up at once into vitality. The smouldering fire of a mere piece of abstract belief was kindled at once into a glow that shed warmth through their whole hearts; and although they had professed to believe long ago that He came from God, now, for the first time, they grasp it as a living reality. Why? Because experience had taught it to them. That is the only thing that teaches us the articles of our creed in a way worth learning them. Every one of us carries professed beliefs, which lie there inoperative, bedridden, in the hospital and dormitory of our souls, until some great necessity or sudden circumstance comes that flings a beam of light upon them, and then they start and waken. We do not know the use of the sword until we are in battle. Until the shipwreck comes, no man puts on the lifebelt in his cabin. Every one of us has large tracts of Christian truth which we think we most surely believe, but which need experience to quicken them, and need us to grow up into the possession of them. Of all our teachers who turn beliefs assented to into beliefs really believed none is so mighty as sorrow; for that makes a man lay a firm hold on the deep things of God's Word.

Then another lesson that I draw from this glad confession is—the bold avowal that always accompanies certitude. These men's stammering tongues are loosed. They have a fact to base themselves upon. They have a piece of assured knowledge inferred from the fact. They have a faith built upon the certitude of what they know. Having this, out it all comes in a gush. No man that believes with all his heart can help speaking. You silent Christians are so, because you do not more than half grasp the truth that you say you hold. "Thy word, when shut up in my bones, was like a fire"; and it ate its way through all the dead matter that enclosed it, until at last it flamed out heaven high. Can you say, "We know and we believe," with unfaltering confidence? Not "we argue;" not "we humbly venture to think that on the whole;" not "we are inclined rather to believe;" but "we know that Thou knowest all things and that Thou hast come from God." Seek for that

blessed certitude of knowledge, based upon the facts of individual experience, which makes the tongue of the dumb sing, and changes all the deadness of an outward profession of Christianity into a living, rejoicing power.

Then, further, I draw this lesson. Take care of indolently supposing that you understand the depths of God's truth.

These apostles fancied that they had grasped the whole meaning of the Master's words, and were glad in them. They fed on them, and got something out of them; but how far they were from the true perception of their meaning! This generation abhors mystery, and demands that the deepest truths of the highest subject, which is religion, shall be so broken down into mincemeat that the "man in the street" can understand them in the intervals of reading the newspaper. There are only too many of us who are disposed to grasp at the most superficial interpretation of Christian truth, and lazily to rest ourselves in that. A creed which has no depth in it is like a picture which has no distance. It is flat and unnatural, and self-condemned by the very fact. It is better that we should feel that the smallest word that comes from God is like some little leaf of a water plant on the surface of a pond; if you lift that you draw a whole trail after it, and nobody knows how far off and how deep down are the roots. It is better that we should feel how Infinity and Eternity press in upon us on all sides, and should take as ours the temper that recognizes that till the end we are but learners, seeing "in a glass, in a riddle," and therefore patiently waiting for light and strenuously striving to stretch our souls to the width of the infinite truth of God.

So, then, look, in the second place, at the sad questions and forebodings of the Master.

"Do you now believe?" That does not cast doubt on the reality of their faith so much as on its permanence and power. "Behold the hour cometh that you shall be scattered"—as He had told them a little while before in the upper room, like a flock when the shepherd is stricken down—"Every man to his own." He does not reject their imperfect homage, though He discerns so clearly its imperfection and its transience, but sadly warns them to beware of the fleeting nature of their present emotion; and would seek to prepare them, by the knowledge, for the terrible storm that is going to break upon them.

So let us learn two or three simple lessons. One is that the dear Lord accepts imperfect surrender, ignorant faith and love, of which He knows that it will soon turn to denial. Oh! if He did not, what would become of us all? We reject half hearts; we will not have a friendship on which we cannot rely. The sweetness of vows is all sucked out of them to our apprehension, if we have reason to believe that they will be falsified in an hour. But the patient Master was willing to put up with what you and I will not put up with; and to accept what we reject; and be pleased that they gave Him even that. His "charity suffereth long, and is kind." Let us not be afraid to bring even imperfect consecration to His merciful feet.

Then another lesson is the need for Christian men sedulously to search and make sure that their inward life corresponds with their words and professions. I wonder how many thousands of people will stand up this day and say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ His only Son," whose words would stick in their throats if that question of the Master's was put to them, "Do you now believe?" And I wonder how many of us are the fools of our own verbal acknowledgements of Christ. Self-examination is not altogether a wholesome exercise, and it may

easily be carried too far, to the destruction of the spontaneity and the gladness of the Christian life. A man may set his pulse going irregularly by simply concentrating his attention upon it, and there may be self-examination of the wrong sort, which does harm rather than good. But, on the other hand, we all need to verify our position, lest our outward life should fatally slip away from correspondence with our inward. Our words and acts of Christian profession and service are like bank notes. What will be the end if there is a whole ream of such going up and down the world, and no balance of bullion in the cellars to meet them? Nothing but bankruptcy. Do you see to it that your reserve of gold, deep down in your hearts, always leaves a margin beyond the notes in circulation issued by you. And in the midst of your professions hear the Master saying, "Do you now believe?"

Another lesson that I draw is, trust no emotions, no religious experiences, but only Him to whom they turn.

These men were perfectly sincere, and there was a glow of gladness in their hearts, and a real though imperfect faith when they spoke. In an hour's time where were they?

We often deal far too hard measure to these poor disciples, in our estimate of their conduct at that critical moment. We talk about them as cowards. Well, they were better and they were worse than cowards; for their courage failed second, but their faith had failed first. The Cross made them cowards because it destroyed their confidence in Jesus Christ.

"We trusted." Ah! what a world of sorrow there is in those two final letters of that word. "We trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel." But they do not trust it any more, and so why should they put themselves in peril for One on whom their faith can no longer build?

Would we have been any better if we had been there? Suppose you had stood afar off and seen Jesus die on the cross, would your faith have lived? Do we not know what it is to be a great deal more exuberant in our professions of faith—and real faith it is, no doubt—in some quiet hour when we are with Him by ourselves, than when swords are flashing and we are in the presence of His antagonists? Do we not know what it is to grasp conviction at one moment, and the next to find it gone like a handful of mist from our clutch? Is our Christian life always lived upon one high uniform level? Have we no experience of hours of exhaustion coming after deep religious emotion? "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone." There will not be many stones flung if that law be applied. Let us all, recognizing our own weakness, trust to nothing, either in our convictions or our emotions, but only to Him, and cry, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe."

Lastly, note the lonely Christ and His companion.

"You shall leave me alone." There is sadness, though it be calm, in that clause. And then, I suppose, there was a moment's pause before the quiet voice began again. "And yet I am not alone, for the Father is with Me." There are two currents there, both calm; but the one bright and the other dark.

Jesus was the loneliest man that ever lived. All other forms of human solitude were concentrated in His. He knew the pain of unappreciated aims, unaccepted love, unbelieving teachings, a heart thrown back upon itself. No man understood Him, no man knew Him, no man deeply and thoroughly loved Him or sympathized with Him, and He dwelt apart. He felt the pain of solitude

more sharply than sinful men do. Perfect purity is keenly susceptible; a heart fully charged with love is wounded sore when the love is thrown back, and all the more sorely the more unselfish it is.

Solitude was no small part of the pain of Christ's passion. Remember the pitiful appeal in Gethsemane, "Wait here and watch with Me." Remember the threefold vain returns to the sleepers in the hope of finding some sympathy from them. Remember the emphasis with which, more than once in His life, He foretold the loneliness of His death. And then let us understand how the bitterness of the cup that He drank had for not the least bitter of its ingredients the sense that He drank it all alone.

Now, dear friends, some of us, no doubt, have to live outwardly solitary lives. We all of us live alone after all fellowship and communion. Physicists tell us that in the most solid bodies the atoms do not touch. Hearts come closer than atoms, but yet, after all, we die alone, and in the depths of our souls we all live alone. So let us be thankful that the Master knows the bitterness of solitude, and has Himself trod that path.

Then we have the calm consciousness of unbroken communion. Jesus Christ's sense of union with the Father was deep, close, constant, in manner and measure altogether transcending any experience of ours. But still He sets before us a pattern of what we should aim at in these great words. They show the path of comfort for every lonely heart. "I am not alone, for the Father is with Me." If earth be dark, let us look to Heaven. If the world with its millions seems to have no friend in it for us, let us turn to Him who never leaves us. If dear ones are torn from our grasp, let us grasp God. Solitude is bitter; but, like other bitters, it is a tonic. It is not all loss if the trees which with their leafy beauty shut out the sky from us are felled, and so we see the blue.

Christ's company is to us what the Father's fellowship was to Christ. He has borne solitude that He might be the companion of all the lonely. And the same voice which said, "Ye shall leave Me alone," said also, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

But that communion of Christ with the Father was broken, in that awful hour when He cried: "My God why hast Thou forsaken Me?" We tread there on the verge of mysteries beyond our comprehension; but this we know—that it was our sin and the world's made His by His willing identifying of Himself with us, which built up that black wall of separation. That hour of utter desolation, forsaken by God, deserted by men, was the hour of the world's redemption. And Jesus Christ was forsaken by God and deserted by men, that you and I might never be either the one or the other, but might find in His sweet and constant companionship at once the fellowship of a man and the presence of a God.

S. A Pattern of Prayer

A Pattern of Prayer

WHEN YE PRAY, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do" —Matthew 6:7. But earnest reiteration is not vain repetition. The second is born of doubt; the first, of faith. The prayer that springs from a deep felt need, and will not cease till that need is supplied, may say the same things over a hundred times and yet they shall not be vain. Rather, as the same blood is repeatedly driven through the veins by the contraction and dilating of the heart, so all true prayer will flow forth over and over again as the spirit opens in yearning and closes itself in calm fruition on the grace it has received and then dilates again in longing and sense of need. So the Master, who warned us against empty repetitions, enjoined upon us the persistent prayer which prevails; and of Himself it is written, "And he left them and went away again the third time, saying the same words" (Matthew 26:44).

This faithful and prevailing reiteration remarkably characterizes the striking series of supplications in the text, Psalms 86:1-5. Substantially they are all one, but the varying phases of the one wish show how familiar it was in all its aspects to his mind, and the accumulation of them is the token of his earnest longing and profound sense of need. Like the great ancestor of his nation, Jacob, he wrestles with God and prevails.

The psalm has quotations from earlier songs-especially David's. In all probability, then, we have here a devout man in later ages, breathing out his cries to God and using, as we do, consecrated words of earlier Scripture, which he freely reproduces and blends with his own petitions. That is no sign of cold artificial prayer, any more than our petitions are to be so regarded because they often flow naturally in Bible words which are hallowed by many associations. Rather, in using them, we unite our poor lives with those of the saints of old who "cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses" (Psalms 107:13).

The fulness and variety of these petitions deserve careful consideration. My object now is mainly to bring out the richness of meaning which lies in them. Note the invocations, the petitions, and the pleas.

Calling on God is any part of our prayers, more formal, mechanical, unmeaning than our repetition of the name of Him to whom we speak? We round off sentences with it. We make beginnings of our prayers with it; we finish them conventionally, and properly, as we think, with it; but if we rightly understand the meaning of that element of the prayer which the old divines in their catechisms called an invocation, we shall understand that it is the foundation of all and that it professes very distinctly a faith which is anything but formal.

For when we call upon the name of God, if we do it correctly and come not under the condemnation of that commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain"- what do we mean? What do we do thereby? Three things. We summon up before our thoughts that aspect of the divine character which lies in the name that we utter. We do not pronounce a

mere syllable. We utter a significant word that tells us something concerning God, and when we use it, unless the majestic image which it is intended to flash into our mind does indeed sparkle and glow there, it would be better for us to be speaking in an unknown tongue than to have an unfruitful understanding.

Further, we profess that we are exercising an act of faith in the character as revealed in that name. We say in effect: "This aspect of thy divine all-sufficiency, this fragment of shine ineffable perfection, on this I build, and to this I make my appeal." Further, we bring before God His own character as a motive with Him. We say in effect: "I bring thee myself, and in that mighty name, for the sake of what it declares, I ask that these goods may be bestowed upon me." So, to call on God is to contemplate His character, to trust in that character which we contemplate, and to believe that He responds to the obligations that are involved therein.

If the foregoing then is the general idea of calling on God, we may now advance to notice how comprehensive and various are the names by which the psalmist calls upon his helper, God, and steadies his own confidence.

In general, this Psalm is remarkable for its frequent use of the divine names. In almost every verse they recur, and their frequency gives us a vivid impression of earnestness, of consciousness of need, and of faith so sore pressed that it could only sustain itself by perpetual renewal of its grasp of God. Five times in these verses of our text does he call on Him, and that by three different names—Jehovah, My God, Lord. These three sacred names have each a distinct meaning when used in prayer; they bring up aspects of the character of God as the basis of our confidence and the ground of our petitions.

He calls on Jehovah. As to that first name, let me remind you in the briefest possible way that it has a double force in Scripture—one derived from its literal, philological meaning, the other derived from its historical use and development. As concerns the former of these two, as we all know, I suppose, the word substantially implies eternal, timeless being, underived self-existence. His name is, "I am that I am," He who is and was and shall be, the one fontal source of all transitory and creatural life, who "himself unmoved moveth all things."

And, then, the name derives a force from the history of its origin in and use. It was given as the seal of the covenant, as the ground of the great deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The national existence rested upon it. The vitality of Israel was guaranteed by the eternity of Israel's God. The bush that burned and was not consumed was the emblem of Him who gives and is none the poorer, who works unwearied, who pours forth life and light through all ages to all creatures and diminishes no whit the fulness of the fountain of life which is with Him. And that undecaying, inexhausted being is the pledge of Israel's security, the guarantee that "He will not alter the thing that is gone out of His lips." It was the pledge and the basis of the great deliverance which made Israel a nation—it was a name that expressed God's purpose to form that people into His people, who should show forth His praise.

When we use it in our prayers, we contemplate and trust in and plead with Him with all these grand thoughts of eternal subsistence: inexhaustible power, unwearied strength, resources that never fail, purposes that never alter, a being that never fails, a nature lifted high above the mutations of time, who dwells in a region above all tenses and moods and is, and was, and is to come in one

ineffable and mysterious present. Nor only so, but we likewise say, "and this rock of ages, the basis of all that is, has spoken and entered into the bonds of love and covenant with men, so that they can plead with Him His revealed character and appeal to Him on the ground of His ancient promise and begin all their believing petitions with that cry, 'O Jehovah, who livest for evermore; O Jehovah, the God of the covenant and the deliverer of thy people!'"

And, further, note the other name on which the psalmist rests both petitions and pleas, "O thou my God." I need only remark that, so far as its own proper meaning is concerned, this name contains only what one might call the natural conception of divinity, as distinguished from the former, which is emphatically the name of the God of revelation. The word implies the abundance and fulness of power and so may be found, and often is found, on the lips of heathens. It contemplates the Almightyness rather than the moral attributes or covenant relations of God, as the ground of our hopes.

But then note how this general conception, which in itself does not travel beyond the idea common to all men of an unseen might throned in the heavens, becomes special on the psalmist's lips by the little word which he prefixes to it, "my God."

So far as we can judge from the Scriptures, it was David who first ventured to claim by that name the might of the God of Israel for his. "My God" is the token stamped upon David's psalms. The warmth of personal affection which throbs through them and the firmness of personal confidence are wonderfully expressed by that one word, which appropriates the strength and grace of the covenant for the solace of the single soul, "my".

Whether this psalm be his, or, as seems most probable, the work of a later lover of God, it is moulded after the type of his psalms. This second invocation of God derives its force from that one word which contemplates the unlimited strength and divine loftiness as completely possessed by and enlisted on the side of the poor soul that cries to Him. His bold and reverent hand stretches out to grasp the whole fulness of God. Thou art the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the whole earth-but thou art my God, mine for my faith, mine for my help.

Then, the final name which the psalmist here employs-"Lord"-is not, as a mere English reader might suppose, the same word as that which is rendered "Lord" in the first verse. That, as we have said, is Jehovah. This means just what our English word lord means; it conveys the general idea of authority and dominion. If you will observe, it is the most frequent name in this psalm. Its force on the psalmist's lips, and the thoughts which he associated with it, may be gathered from succeeding verses. "Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord, neither are there any works like unto thy works," where incomparable elevation and supreme dominion are ascribed to Him. So, the psalmist goes on, "All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord, and shall glorify thy name, for thou art great," where the thoughts of universal sovereignty and exaltation above all are deduced from that name.

So, then, when we blend all these together, it is as if the psalmist had said, "The ever living, the covenant Jehovah, my God in whom I claim a personal interest, who loves me with an individualizing love, and cares for me with a specific care, the absolute monarch and sovereign of the whole universe is He to whom I come with my supplication. I think of His names, I trust in them, I present them to Him whom they all but partially declare; and I ask Him-for His own name's sake,

because of what He is and bath declared Himself to be-to hear my poor cry, to answer my imperfect faith, to show Himself yet once again that which His name has from of old proclaimed Him to be."

For us to know and trust that name is the highest exercise of all faith. To utter it believing is the very essence of all true prayer. Not as a formal beginning and as a formal close, but as the only ground of acceptance, do we connect it with our petitions. It should begin our prayers as their foundation; it should end them as their seal.

The bare utterance of a name may be the purest formalism, or it may be the most intense faith. The deepest love often finds that all language fails and that to breathe the beloved name is enough. All tenderness may be put in it- all rapture, all praise. Do you remember the wonderful story of the resurrection morning: "Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She . . . saith unto him Rabboni?" (John 21:16). Her name on His lips was enough for unveiling His heart and revealing His person; His name on her lips was enough to express the confession of her faith, the eager rush of her spirit to Him, the outpouring of her heart, the ecstasy of her gladness that had died with Him and lived now, raised again from the dead.

Did any of you, parents, ever hear your child wake from sleep with some panic and shriek the mother's name through the darkness? Was not that a more powerful appeal than all words? And, depend upon it, that the soul which cries aloud to God, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," though it have "no language but a cry," will never call in vain.

Petitions

We have examined our calling on God, and now we turn to the petitions which these verses give us.

As I have said, they are all substantially the same, and yet they so vary as to suggest how familiar all the aspects of the deliverance that the psalmist desired were to him. We may discern, I think, a progress of thought through them, upon which I touch for a moment. The petitions are: "Bow shine ear," "hear me," "preserve me," "save thy servant," "be merciful unto me," "rejoice the soul of thy servant." There is, first, the cry that God would hear, the basis of all that follows. There is then a three-fold description of the process of deliverance: "preserve," "save," "be merciful." Then there is a longing for that which comes after the help, a consequence of the hearing: "Make the soul of thy servant glad."

It is very significant, and may teach us some lessons worth learning, that the psalmist, prior to all special supplication, begins with that cry-"Incline shine ear; hear me." "What!" you say, "does not God know everything?" Oh, yes, no doubt. And do you think that what I may call the cold, passionless, natural knowledge of omniscience is enough for our hearts? Something more goes to the "hearing" of prayer than the necessary omniscience of an infinite divine nature. There is an act of loving will, which is most clearly conveyed by that strong, and yet plain and intelligible, metaphor, "Bow down shine ear," as an eager listener puts his hand to his ear and bends the lobe of it in the direction of the sound.

He prays, too, in that petition, for what we may call hearing embedied fed in an act of deliverance. With God, to hear is to answer. As soon as we desire, He knows our longing; as soon as He

knows our longing, He meets it with His gift. No appreciable time is occupied in the passage of the imploring message from earth to heaven, none in the return message of blessing from heaven to earth. As David says, in the grand psalm which recounts his deliverances, "My cry came before him, even into his ears. Then the earth shook and trembled" (Psalms 18:6-7). He hears when He lovingly regards our prayers; He hears when he mightily answers our cry- and these two are one.

The psalmist further prays for acts of help and deliverance: "Preserve my soul;" "save thy servant;" "be merciful unto me." These petitions are all substantially the same, but yet there are shades of difference between them which deserve notice. The first of them might be rendered, "guard" or "watch" my soul, and that rendering helps us to distinguish it from the others. Looking at all three, we see that the first prays for protection, the second goes a step further and prays for happy issue of that protection in safety, and the third digs deeper and prays for that mercy which is the sole foundation of both the protection and the safety which it ensures. God's guardianship achieves our salvation, and His saving guardianship is the fruit of His mercy.

While these three petitions then differ thus, in that they contemplate the process of our deliverance in its deepest root, in its patient, sedulous method, and in its happy end, they also differ in that they embody varying thoughts of the need and weakness of the suppliant. In the first two petitions he regards himself as defenseless and in peril. He needs a great hand to be cast around him, in the hollow of which he may be safe. His soul lies open to the assaults of foes like some little unwallied village in the plains, and he craves the garrison and guardianship of God's presence, the watchfulness of His unslumbering, omnipresent eye.

In the last petition, he thinks of himself as lowly and unworthy-for "mercy" is love shown to inferiors or to those who deserve something else. The consciousness of helplessness has become a consciousness of sin. Protection is not all that we need; there must be pardon too. That hand which is to be outstretched to guard and save might justly have been outstretched to smite. The sole ground of our confidence that God will be "our guard while troubles last" and will save us with a full salvation at the last is our trust that He will not refuse mercy to those who own their sin and seek forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

It is worth notice, too, that in all this variety of petitions for deliverance there is not a word about the exact manner of it. The way in which God's mercy is to guard and save is left, with meek patience, to God's decision. Let us not prescribe to Him the path which He shall take, but commit that to His own loving wisdom. There are two methods of lightening a burden-one is to diminish the load, the other is to strengthen the shoulders that carry it. The latter is often the more blessed-and often the shape in which God answers our prayer. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).

Then, in the final petition, the Psalm rises still higher and-not satisfied with imploring that God would hear, guard, and save-asks for gladness, too, "Rejoice the soul of thy servant."

We may venture to ask for and expect gladness if we are God's servants. All His creatures have a claim on Him for blessedness according to their capacity, so long as they stand where He has set them. And we who have departed from that obedience which is joy may yet, in penitent abasement, return to Him and ask that He would rejoice the soul of His servant. David's deepest repentance dared to ask, "Make me to hear joy and gladness that the bones which thou hath

broken may rejoice" (Psalms 51:8). Our most troubled utterances of sore need, our sighs and groans, should be accompanied with faith which feels the summer's sun of joy even in the midwinter of our pain and sees vineyards in the desert.

We should believe in and hope and ask for more than bare deliverance-hard though it may be to think that gladness is any more possible. Blossoms and flowers will come again, even though untimely frosts have burned the young leaves into brown powder. No sorrow is so crushing and hopeless, but that happiness may again visit the heart where trust and love abide. Only let us remember that this psalm seeks for joy where it seeks to help, not from earthly sources but from God.

They who find their deliverance in God are often tempted to find their pleasure somewhere else. It is often easier to pray with tears, "Preserve me and save me," than with undistracted love to choose Him as our only delight. But the true devout heart turns equally to God for all its needs, and its prayer ever is, "Judge me, O God, and plead my cause . . . O deliver me . . . Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy (Psalms 43:1, Psalms 43:4).

Pleas

Finally, we have to consider the pleas on which these petitions are based.

The logic of prayer here is so remarkable and beautiful. Every feature of the psalmist's condition and character, as well as all that he knows of God, becomes on his lips a reason with God for granting his prayer. The same ingenuity of faith-if one might use such a phrase, which that Syro-Phoenician woman showed when she laid hold of the apparent rejection of her plea and gave back to Christ His own parable as a reason for His compliance comes out here.

These pleas part into three. He pleads his necessities. He is "poor and needy," or rather, perhaps-giving a distinct meaning to each word-"afflicted and poor," borne down by the pressure of outward calamity and destitute of inward resources. So the one phase of our need is the evils that oppress us from without, and the other is the lack of power from within to bear up against these. Circumstances and character both constitute an appeal to God. Or, more simply, we are weighed upon with sore distress, and we are likewise deprived of all means either outside of us or within us.

Yes, Christian friends, by God's mercy we are emboldened to take our weakness, our helplessness, as pleas with Him. We know how often the sight of misery touched the heart of Christ and how He was "moved with compassion," and we believe that the compassion of Christ is our truest image of the pity of our God. The yawning emptiness of our parched hearts, thirsting for God like the cracked ground during a drought, is a plea with Him.

And when we draw near to His throne, we do not need to present our merits but our necessities in order to receive the answer. "Lord save, we perish" is our best cry to awaken to energy the hand that never sleeps. Let no consciousness of evil drive us from Him, but rather let it impel us close to Him. The devil's lie is that we are too bad to go to Him. The truth is that our necessities-yes and our sins too-may be made pleas with Him. "Pardon mine iniquity; for it is great" (Psalms 25:11).

He pleads his relation to God and his longing for communion with Him. "I am holy." That sounds strange. There seems to be flavor of self-righteousness about it which startles one. But there is no

such thought in the word, and the "holy" of the English version completely obscures the psalmist's thought. It will be enough here to say that the word of the original simply means "one who is a recipient or object of mercy." It is passive, not active, in signification. Of course the mercy meant is God's mercy, so that the meaning is as our Bible has it in the margin, "One whom thou favorest."

The plea then here is drawn, not from the righteousness of the man, but from the mercy of God. It sets forth the relation between God and His suppliant from the divine side, and pleads God's gracious bestowal of mercy upon him in the past as a reason for its continuance and perfecting. "Thou hast been pleased to love and favor me, to enrich me with thy grace. Be what thou hast been: do what thou hast done: forsake not the work of mine own hands." And God, who begins no buildings which He is not able to finish, recognizes the strength of the plea and will perfect that which concerneth us.

There follows the same relation contemplated from the human side, and that, too, is a plea with God. "Thy servant that trusteth in thee." I am knit to Thee, as a servant I belong to Thy household, and the Master's honour is concerned in His dependent's safety. The slave is cared for by His Lord. I belong to Thee-do thou watch over what is mine own. I trust in Thee. We do not plead our faith as constituting a claim of merit with God, but as constituting a plea with Him. It is not that it deserves deliverance-else we might well hesitate to urge it, when we think of its weakness and often interruptions-but that it is sure to bring deliverance. For anything is possible rather than that the most tremulous trust should go unblessed and unanswered.

The human side of the relation between God and His servant is further urged in the subsequent clauses which refer to the Psalmist's longings and efforts after fellowship with God. "I cry unto thee daily" - he does not think that his cry deserves an answer, but he knows that in God's great mercy He has bound Himself to "hear our cry and save us", and he appeals to the faithful promise. He has put in practice the condition, and he expects the answer. It can only happen that he who calls on God will be answered. Anything is credible rather than that our prayer ascending should be flung back unanswered, as if it had struck against heavens which were brass. Let our faith clasp His promise, and then the fact of our prayer is with God a plea, and with us a pledge of His answer. Let us not doubt that we do wield power with God when we pray - and we shall prevail.

Again he pleads, "Unto thee do I lift up my soul." Such a plea expresses the conscious effort to raise his whole being above earth, to lift the heavy grossness of his nature, bound in the fetters of sense to this low world, up and up to the Most High, who is his home. And can it be that that yearning and striving after communion shall go unsatisfied? Is it possible that I shall stretch out feeling hands and grope in vain for God? Is it possible that He shall not take note of me, that my poor faith shall be disappointed, that my prayer shall be lost in empty space, that my soul shall not find its rest? Never. "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? . . . How much more shall your father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:9, Matthew 7:11).

And, finally, because our necessities and our desires derive their force as pleas from God's own character, he urges that as his last and mightiest appeal. He began with invocation, and he ends as he began. The name of God is the ground of all our hope and the motive for all His mercy. Turn away, Christian friends, from all thoughts of self, of your own needs, of your own trust, and prayer, and aspiration. Forsaking all other confidence, flee to that "name of the Lord" into which, as "a

strong tower," we may "run and be safe." The one prevalent plea with God is the faithful recounting of all that grace and pity which He is exercising and has exercised. All others are subordinate and possess only a power bestowed by this. "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee." Our need is the occasion; faith and desire, the channel; but God is the reason and the source of all our deliverance and all our salvation. "Because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself" (Hebrews 6:13)-and because we can pray by none other, we implore Him by Himself, for the sake of His own Holy Name, because He is that He is, to have mercy upon us who cry to Him.

And, friends, when we call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and ask that our prayers may be heard "for the sake of Christ," we are taking no other plea into our lips than that ancient and all prevalent one of this psalm. It is His own mercy in Christ which we present. It is the work of His own love which we bring as our plea. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren" (Psalms 22:22). Christ is the Revealer of the Father's name, and they who pray in the name of Christ have for their confidence this promise, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13) - and this, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you" (John 16:23).

S. Anxious Care

Anxious Care

FORESIGHT AND FOREBODING ARE two very different things. It is not that the one is the exaggeration of the other, but the one is opposed to the other. The more a man looks forward, in the exercise of foresight, the less he does so in the exercise of foreboding. And the more he is tortured by anxious thoughts about a possible future, the less clear vision has he of a likely future, and the less power to influence it. When Christ here, therefore, enjoins the abstinence from thought for our life and for the future, it is not for the sake of getting away from the pressure of a very unpleasant command that we say, He does not mean to prevent the exercise of wise and provident foresight and preparation for what is to come. When this English version of the Bible was made, the phrase "taking thought" meant solicitous anxiety, and that is the true rendering and proper meaning of the original. The idea is, therefore, that here there is forbidden for a Christian, not the careful preparation for what is likely to come, not the foresight of the storm, and taking in sail while yet there is time, but the constant occupation and distraction of the heart with gazing forward, and fearing, and being weakened thereby; or, to come back to words already used, foresight is commanded, and, therefore, foreboding is forbidden. My only object now, is to endeavor to gather together by their link of connection, the whole of those precepts which follow my text to the close of the chapter; and to try to set before you, in the order in which they stand, and in their organic connection with each other, the reasons which Christ gives for the absence of anxious care from our minds.

I mass them all into three. If you notice, the whole section, to the end of the chapter, is divided into three parts, by the threefold repetition of the injunction, "Take no thought." "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on." The reason for the command as given in this first section follows:—Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? The expansion of that runs on to the close of the thirtieth verse.

Then there follows another division or section of the whole, marked by the repetition of the command, "Take no thought, " saying, " What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink: or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" The reason given for the command in this second section is 'for after all these things do the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God. " (Matthew 6:31-33).

And then follows a third section marked by the third repetition of the command, "Take no thought for the morrow." The reason given for the command in this third section is 'for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself "

Now if we try to generalize the lessons that lie in these three great divisions of the Sermon on the Mount, we get these: anxious thought is contrary to all the lessons of nature, which show it to be unnecessary. That is the first, the longest section. Then, secondly, anxious thought is contrary to all the lessons of revelation or religion, which show it to be heathenish. And lastly, anxious thought

is contrary to the whole scheme of Providence, which shows it to be futile. You do not need to be anxious. It is wicked to be anxious. It is of no use to be anxious. These are the three things, contrary to the lessons of Nature; contrary to the great principles of the Gospel; and contrary to the scheme of Providence. Let us try now simply to follow the course of thought in our Lord's illustration of these three principles.

Anxiety Is Contrary to Nature The first is the consideration of the teaching of nature.

"Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" (Matthew 6:25). And then comes the illustration of the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field.

The whole of these four or five verses fall into these general thoughts: You are obliged to trust God for your body, for its structure, for its form, for its habitudes, and for the length of your being; you are obliged to trust Him for the foundation—trust Him for the superstructure. You are obliged to trust Him, whether you will or not, for the greater—trust Him gladly for the less. You cannot help being dependent. After all your anxiety, it is only directed to the providing of the things that are needful for life. Life itself, though it be a natural thing, comes direct from God's hand, and all that you can do, with all your carking cares, and laborious days, and sleepless nights, is but to adorn a little more beautifully or a little less beautifully, the allotted span, and to feed a little more delicately or a little less delicately, the body which God has given you! What is the use of being careful for food and raiment, when down below these necessities there lies the awful question—for the answer to which you have to hang helpless, in implicit, powerless dependence upon God— Shall I live, or shall I die? Shall I have a body instinct with vitality, or a body crumbling amidst the clods of the valley?

After all your work, your anxiety gets but such a little way down; like some passing shower of rain, that only softens the hard-baked surface of the soil, and has nothing to do with fructifying the seed that lies inches below the reach of its useless moisture. Anxious care is foolish; for far beyond the region within which your anxieties move, there is the greater region in which there must be entire dependence upon God. "Is not the life more than meat? Is not the body more than raiment?" You must trust Him for that; you may as well trust Him for all the rest.

Then, again, there comes up this other thought: Not only are you compelled to exercise un-anxious dependence in regard to a matter which you cannot influence—the life of the body—and that is the greater; but, still further, God gives you that. Very well, God gives you the greater; and God's great gifts are always inclusive of God's little gifts. When He bestows the thing, He bestows all the consequences of the thing as well. When He gives a life, He swears by the gift that He will give what is needful to sustain it. God does not stop halfway in any of His bestowments. He gives royally and liberally, honestly and sincerely, logically and completely. When He bestows a life, therefore, you may be quite sure that He is not going to stultify His own gift by retaining unbestowed anything that is wanted for its blessing and its power. You have had to trust Him for the greater; trust Him for the less. He has given you the greater; no doubt He will give you the less. "The life is more than meat, and the body than raiment." "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment?"

Then there is another thought. Look at God's ways of doing with all His creatures. The animate and the inanimate creation are appealed to, the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field, the one in reference to food and the other in reference to clothing, which are the two great wants already spoken of by Christ in the previous verses. I am not going to linger on the exquisite beauty of these illustrations. Every sensitive heart and pure eye dwells upon them with delight. The "fowls of the air," "the lilies of the field," "they toil not, neither do they spin;" and then, with what an eye for the beauty of God's universe—"Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these !" Now, what is the force of this consideration? It is this: There is a specimen, in an inferior creation, of the same principles which you can trust, you men who are "better than they." And not only that: There is an instance, not only of God's giving things that are necessary, but of God's giving more, lavishing beauty upon the flowers of the field. I do not think that we sufficiently dwell upon the moral and spiritual uses of beauty in God's universe. That everywhere His loving, wooing hand should touch the flower into grace, and deck all barren places with glory and with fairness—what does that reveal to us about Him? It says to us, He does not give scantily: it is not the mere measure of what is wanted, absolutely needed, to support a bare existence, that God bestows. He taketh pleasure in the prosperity of His servants.

Joy, love, and beauty belong to Him; and the smile upon His face that comes from the contemplation of His own fairness flung out into His glorious creation, is a prophecy of the gladness that comes into His heart from His own holiness and more ethereal beauty adorning the spiritual creatures whom He has made to flash back His likeness. The flowers of the field are so clothed that we may learn the lesson, that it is a fair Spirit, a loving Spirit, a bountiful Spirit, and a royal heart that presides over the bestowments of creation, and allots gifts to men.

But notice, further, how much of the force of what Christ says here, depends on the consideration of the inferiority of these creatures who are thus blessed; and also notice what are the particulars of that inferiority. We read that verse, "They sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns," as if it marked out a particular in which their free and untoilsome lives were superior to ours. It is the very opposite. It is part of the thing that marks them as lower than we, that they have not to work for the future. They reap not, they sow not, they gather not; are ye not much better than they? Better in this, among other things, that God has given us the privilege of influencing the future by our faithful toil, by the sweat of our brow, and by the labor of our hands. These creatures labor not, and yet they are fed. The lesson for us is how much more may we, whom God has blessed with the power of work and gifted with force to mold the future, be sure that He will bless the exercise of the prerogative by which He exalts us above inferior creatures, and makes us capable of toil.

You can influence tomorrow. What you can influence by work, fret not about, for you can work. What you cannot influence by work, fret not about, for it is vain. "They toil not, neither do they spin." You are lifted above them because God has given you hands, that can grasp the tool or the pen. Man's crown of glory, as well as man's curse and punishment, is "in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." So learn what you have to do with that great power of anticipation! It is meant to be the guide of wise work. It is meant to be the support for far-reaching, strenuous action. It is meant to elevate us above mere living from hand to mouth; to ennoble the whole being by leading to and directing toil that is blessed, because there is no anxiety in it, labor that will be successful, since it is according to the will of that God who has endowed us with the power of putting it forth.

Then there comes another inferiority. "Your heavenly Father feedeth them." They cannot say "Father!" and yet they are fed. You are above them by the prerogative of toil. You are above them by the nearer relation which you sustain to your Father in heaven. He is their Maker, and lavishes His goodness upon them, He is your Father, and He will not forget His child. They cannot trust, you can. They might be anxious, if they could look forward, for they know not the hand that feeds them; but you can turn around, and recognize the source of all blessings. So doubly ought you to be guarded from care by the lesson of that free joyful nature that lies around about you, and say, No fear of famine, nor of poverty, nor of want; for He feedeth the ravens when they cry. No reason for distrust! Shame on me if I am anxious! For every lily of the field blows its beauty, and every bird of the air carols its song without sorrowful foreboding, and yet there is no Father in the heaven to them!

And the last inferiority is this: "Today it is, and tomorrow it is cast into the oven." Their little life is thus blessed and brightened. Oh, how much greater will be the mercies that belong to them who have a longer life upon earth, and who never die! The lesson is not—these are the plebeians in God's universe, and you are the aristocracy, and you may trust Him; but it is—they, by their inferior place, have lesser and lower wants, wants but for a bounded being, wants that stretch not beyond earthly existence, and that for a brief span. They are blessed in the present, for the oven tomorrow saddens not the blossoming today. You have nobler necessities and higher longings, wants that belong to a soul that never dies, to a nature which may glow with the consciousness that God is your Father, wants which "look before and after," therefore, you are "better than they;" and "shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

Anxiety Is Contrary to Revelation And now, in the second place, there is here another general line of considerations tending to dispel all anxious care—the thought that it is contrary to all the lessons of Religion, or Revelation, which show it to be heathenish. There are three clauses devoted to the illustration of this thought: "After all these things do the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:32-33).

The first contains the principle, that solicitude for the future is at heart heathen worldly-mindedness. The heathen tendency in us all leads to an over-estimate of material good, and it is a question of circumstances whether that shall show itself in heaping up earthly treasures or in anxious care. They are the same plant, only the one is growing in the tropics of sunny prosperity, and the other in the arctic zone of chill penury. The one is the sin of the worldly-minded rich man, the other is the sin of the worldly-minded poor man. The character is the same turned inside out! And, therefore, the words "ye cannot serve God and mammon," stand in this chapter in the center between our Lord's warning against laying up treasures on earth, and His warnings against being full of cares for earth. He would show us thereby that these two apparently opposite states of mind in reality spring from that one root, and are equally, though differently, "serving mammon." We do not sufficiently reflect upon that. We say, perhaps, this intense solicitude of ours is a matter of temperament, or of circumstances. So it may be; but the Gospel was sent to help us to cure worldly temperaments, and to master circumstances. But the reason why we are troubled and careful about the things of this life, lies here, that our hearts have got an earthly direction, that we are at heart heathenish in our lives, and in our desires. It is the very characteristic of the Gentile (that is to say, of the heathen) that earth should bound his horizon. It is the very

characteristic of the worldly man that all his anxieties on the one hand, and all his joys on the other, should be "cribbed, cabined, and confined" within the narrow sphere of the Visible. When a Christian is living in the foreboding of some earthly sorrow to come down upon him, and is feeling as if there would be nothing left if some earthly treasure were swept away, is it not, in the very root of it, idolatry, worldly-mindedness? Is it not clean contrary to all our profession that for us "there is none upon earth that we desire besides Thee"? Anxious care rests upon a basis of heathen worldly-mindedness.

Anxious care rests upon a basis, too, of heathen misunderstanding of the character of God. "Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things." The heathen thought of God is that He is far removed from our perplexities, either ignorant of our struggles, or unsympathizing with them. The Christian has the double armor against anxiety: the name of the Father, and the conviction that the Father's knowledge is co-extensive with the Father's love. He who calls us His children thoroughly understands what His children want. And so, anxiety is contrary to the very name by which we have learned to call God, and to the pledge of pitying care and perfect knowledge of our frame which lies in the words "our Father." Our Father is the name of God, and our Father intensely cares for us, and lovingly does all things for us.

And then, still further, Christ points out here, not only what is the real root of this solicitous care—something very like worldly-mindedness—heathen worldly mindedness; but He points out what is the one counterpoise of it—seek first the kingdom of God. It is of no use only to tell men that they ought to trust, that the birds of the air might teach them to trust, that the flowers of the field might preach resignation and confidence to them. It is of no use to attempt to scold them into trust, by telling them that distrust is heathenish! You must fill the heart with a supreme and transcendent desire after the one supreme object; and then there will be no room and leisure left for the anxious care after the lesser. Have in wrought into your being, Christian man, the opposite of that heathen over regard for earthly things. "Seek first the kingdom of God." Let all your spirit be stretching itself out towards that Divine and blessed reality, longing to be a subject of that kingdom, and a possessor of that righteousness; and "the cares that infest the day" shall steal away from out of the sacred pavilion of your believing spirit. Fill your heart with desires after what is worthy of desire; and the greater having entered in, all lesser objects will rank themselves in the right place, and the "glory that excelleth" will outshine the seducing brightness of the paltry present. Oh, it is want of love, it is want of earnest desire, it is want of firm conviction that God, God only, God by Himself, is enough for me, that make me careful and troubled. And, therefore, if I could only attain unto that sublime and calm height of perfect conviction, that He is sufficient for me, that He is with me forever—the satisfying object of my desires and the glorious reward of my searchings, let life and death come as they may; let riches, poverty, health, sickness, all the antitheses of human circumstances storm down upon me in quick alternation, yet in them all I shall be content and peaceful. God is beside me! And His presence brings in its train whatsoever things I need. You cannot cast out the sin of foreboding thoughts by any power short of the entrance of Christ and His love. The blessings of faith and felt communion leave no room nor leisure for anxiety.

Anxiety Is Contrary to Providence

Finally, Christ here tells us, that thought for the morrow is contrary to all the scheme of Providence, which shows it to be vain. "The morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matthew 6:34).

I interpret these two clauses as meaning this: Tomorrow has anxieties enough of its own, after and in spite of all the anxieties about it today by which you try to free it from care when it comes. Every day, every day will have its evil, have it to the end. And every day will have evil enough for all the strength that a man has to cope with it. Thus it just comes to this: Anxiety, it is all vain. After all your careful watching for the corner of the heaven where the cloud is to come from, there will be a cloud, and it will rise somewhere, but you never know in what quarter. The morrow shall have its own anxieties. After all your fortifying of the castle of your life, there will be some little postern left unguarded, some little weak place in the wall left uncommanded by a battery; and there, where you never looked for him, the inevitable invader will come in! After all the plunging of the hero in the fabled waters that made him invulnerable, there was the little spot on the heel, and the arrow found its way there! There is nothing certain to happen, says the proverb, but the unforeseen. Tomorrow will have its cares, spite of anything that anxiety and foreboding can do. It is God's law of Providence that a man shall be disciplined by sorrow; and to try to escape from that law by any forecasting prudence, is utterly hopeless, and madness.

And what does your anxiety do? It does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows; but, oh, it empties today of its strength. It does not make you escape the evil, it makes you unfit to cope with it when it comes. It does not bless tomorrow, and it robs today. For every day has its own burden. Sufficient for each day is the evil which properly belongs to it. Do not add tomorrow's to today's. Do not drag the future into the present. The present has enough to do with its own proper concerns. We have always strength to bear the evil when it comes. We have not strength to bear the foreboding of it. As thy day, so thy strength shall be. In strict proportion to the existing exigencies will be the God-given power; but if you cram and condense today's sorrows by experience, and tomorrow's sorrows by anticipation, into the narrow round of the one twenty-four hours, there is no promise that as that day thy strength shall be! God gives us power to bear all the sorrows of His making; but He does not give us power to bear the sorrows of our own making, which the anticipation of sorrow most assuredly is.

Then, contrary to the lessons of nature, contrary to the teachings of religion, contrary to the scheme of Providence—weakening your strength, distracting your mind, sucking the sunshine out of every landscape, and casting a shadow over all the beauty—the curse of our lives is that heathenish, blind, useless, faithless, needless anxiety in which we do indulge. Look forward, for God has given you that royal and wonderful gift of dwelling in the future, and bringing all its glories around your present. Look forward, not for life, but for heaven; not for food and raiment, but for the righteousness after which it is blessed to hunger and thirst, and wherewith it is blessed to be clothed. Not for earth, but for heaven, let your forecasting gift of prophecy come into play. Fill the present with quiet faith, with patient waiting, with honest work, with wise reading of God's lessons of nature, of providence, and of grace, all of which say to us, Live in God's future, that the present may be bright; and work in the present, that the future may be certain! They may well look around in expectation, sunny and unclouded, of a blessed time to come, whose hearts are already "fixed, trusting in the Lord." He to whom there is a present Christ, and a present Spirit, and a present Father, and a present forgiveness, and a present redemption, may well live expiating in all the

glorious distance of the unknown to come, sending out from his placid heart over all the weltering waters of this lower world, the peaceful seeking dove, his meek Hope, that shall come back again from its flight with some palm branch broken from the trees of Paradise between its bill. And he that has no such present, has a future, dark, chaotic, heaving with its destructive ocean; and over it there goes forever—black-pinioned, winging its solitary and hopeless flight, the raven of his anxious thoughts, and finds no place to rest, and comes back again to the desolate ark with its foreboding croak of evil in the present and evil in the future. Live in Christ, "the same yesterday, and today, and forever," and His presence shall make all your past, present, and future—memory, enjoyment, and hope—to be bright and beautiful, because all are centered in Him!

S. Christ "Must" Die

Christ "Must" Die The work of Jesus Christ could not be done unless He died. He could not be the Savior of the world unless He was the sacrifice for the sins of the world.

. . . It was because of the requirements of the divine righteousness, and because of the necessities of sinful men. And so Christ's was no martyr's death, who had to die as the penalty of the faithful discharge of His duty. It was not the penalty that He paid for doing His work, but it was the work itself. . . He "came to give His life a ransom for many."

. . . He must die because He would save, and He would save because He did love. His filial obedience to God coincided with His pity for men. . .

Oh, brethren! nothing held Christ to the Cross but His own desire to save us. Neither priests nor Romans carried Him tither. What fastened Him to it was not the nails driven by rude hands. And the reason why He did not, as the taunters bade Him do, come down from it, was neither a physical nor a moral necessity unwelcome to Himself, but the yielding of His own will to do all which was needed for man's salvation.

This sacrifice was bound to the altar by the cords of love. . . Jesus Christ fastened Himself to the Cross and died because He would. . . His purpose never faltered, think that each of us may say, "He must die because He would save me."

. . . It is guaranteed by the power of the Cross; it is certain, by the eternal life of the crucified Savior, that He will one day be the King of humanity, and must bring His wandering sheep to couch in peace, one flock round one Shepherd.

Glad obedience is true obedience. . . . Obedience is obedience, whether in large things or in small.

Joy and liberty and power and peace will fill our hearts when this is the law of our being: "All that the Lord has spoken, that must I do" (Expositions of Holy Scripture, St. John, I-VIII, pp. 174-180).

The Philippian jailer cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:30-31).

S. God's Peacemakers

God's Peacemakers "Blessed are the Peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). This is the last Beatitude descriptive of the character of the Christian. There follows one more, which describes his reception by the world. But this one sets, the top stone, the shining apex, upon the whole temple structure which the previous Beatitudes had been gradually building up. You may remember that I have pointed out in previous sermons how all these various traits of the Christian life are deduced from the root of poverty of spirit. You may also remember how I have had occasion to show that if we consider that first Beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," as the root and mother of all the rest, the remainder are so arranged as that we have alternately a Grace which regards mainly the man himself and his relations to God, and one which also includes his relations to man.

Now there are three of these which look out into the world, and these three are consummated by this one of my text. These are "the meek," which describes a man's attitude to opposition and hatred; "the merciful," which describes his indulgence in judgment and his pitifulness in action; and "the peacemakers." For Christian people are not merely to bear injuries and to recompense them with pity and with love, but they are actively to try to bring about a wholesome and purer state of humanity, and to breath the Peace of God, which passes understanding, over all the janglings and struggles of this world.

So, I think, if we give a due depth of significance to that name "Peacemaker," we shall find that this Grace worthily completes the whole linked series, and is the very jewel which clasps the whole chain of Christian and Christ like characteristics.

I. How Are Christ's Peacemakers Made?

Now there are certain people whose natural disposition has in it a fine element, which diffuses soothing and concord all around them. I dare say we all have known such - perhaps some good woman, without any very shining gifts of intellect, who yet dwelt in such Peace of heart herself that conflict and jangling were rebuked in her presence. And there are other people who love Peace, and seek after it in the cowardly fashion of letting things alone; whose "Peacemaking" has no nobler source than hatred of trouble, and a wish to let sleeping dogs lie. These, instead of being Peacemakers, are war makers, for they are laying up materials for a tremendous explosion some day. But it is a very different temper that Jesus Christ has in view here, and I need only ask you to do again what we have had occasion to do in the previous sermons of this series - to link this characteristic with those that go before it, of which it is regarded as being the bright and consummate flower and final outcome. No man can bring to others that which he does not possess. Vainly will he whose own heart is torn by contending passions, whose own life is full of animosities and unreconciled outstanding causes of alienation and divergence between him and God, between him and duty, between him and himself, ever seek to shed any deep or real Peace amongst men. He may superficially solder some external quarrels, but that is not all that Jesus Christ means. His Peacemakers are created by having passed through all the previous

experiences which the preceding verses bring out. They have learned the poverty of their own spirits. They have wept tears, if not real and literal, yet those which are far more agonizing -tears of spirit and conscience - when they have thought of their own demerits and foulness. They have bowed in humble submission to the will of God, and even to that will as expressed by the antagonisms of man. They have yearned after the possession of a fuller and nobler righteousness than they have attained. They have learned to judge others with a gentle judgment because they know how much they themselves need it, and to extend to others a helping hand because they are aware of their own impotence and need of succor. They have been led through all these, often painful, experiences into a purity of heart which has been blessed by some measure of vision of God; and, having thus been equipped and prepared, they are fit to go out into the world and say, in the presence of all its tempests, "Peace! Be still." Something of the miracle working energy of the Master whom they serve will be shed upon those who serve Him.

Brethren, the Peacemaker who is worthy of the name must have gone through these deep spiritual experiences. I do not say that they are to come in regular stages, separable from each other. That is not the way in which a character mounts towards God. It does so not by a flight of steps, at distinctly different elevations, but rather by an ascending slope. And, although these various Christian Graces which precede that of my text are separable in thought, and are linked in the fashion that our Lord sets forth in experience, they may be, and often are, contemporaneous. But whether separated from one another in time or not, this life preparation, of which the previous verses give us the outline in some fashion or other it must precede our being the sort of Peacemakers that Christ desires and blesses.

There is only one more point that I would make here before I go on, and that is that it is well to notice that the climax of Christian character, according to Jesus Christ Himself, is found in our relations to men, and not in our relation to God. Worship of heart and spirit, devout emotions of the sacredest, sweetest, most hallowed and hallowing sort, are absolutely indispensable, as I have tried to show you. But equally, if not more, important is it for us to remember that the purest communion with God, and the selectest emotional experiences of the Christian life, are meant to be the bases of active service - and that, if such service does not follow these, there is good reason for supposing that these are spurious, and worth very little. The service of man is the outcome of the love of God. He who begins with poverty of spirit is perfected when, forgetting himself, and coming down from the, mountain top, where the Shekinah cloud of the Glory and the audible voice are, he plunges into the struggles of the multitude below, and frees the devil ridden boy from the demon that possesses him. Begin by all means with poverty of spirit, or you will never get to this -"Blessed are the Peacemakers." But see to it that poverty of spirit leads to the meekness, the mercifulness, the Peace bringing influence which Christ has pronounced blessed.

II. What Is The Peace? This is a very favorite text with people that know very little of the depths of Christianity. They fancy that it appeals to common sense and men's natural consciences, apart altogether from minuteness of doctrine or of Christian experience. They are very much mistaken. No doubt there is a surface of truth, but only a surface, in the application that is generally given to these words of our text, as if it meant nothing more than "he is a good man that goes about and tries to make contending people give up their quarrels, and produces a healing atmosphere of tranquillity wherever he goes." That is perfectly true, but there is a great deal more in the text than that. If we consider the Scriptural usage of this great word "Peace" and all the ground that it covers

in human experience, if we remember that it enters as an element into Christ's own name, the "Peace Bringer," the "Prince of Peace"; and if we notice, as I have already done, the place which this Beatitude occupies in the series, we shall be obliged to look for some far deeper meaning before we can understand the sweep of our Lord's intention here.

I do not think that I am going one inch too far, or forcing meanings into His words which they are not intended to bear, when I say that the first characteristic of the Peace, which His disciples have been passed through their apprenticeship in order to fit them to bring, is the Peace of reconciliation with God. The cause of all the other fightings in the world is that men's relation to the Father in Heaven is disturbed, and that, whilst there flow out from Him only amity and love, with antagonism often, with opposition of will these are met by us, and with indifference and for often, with alienation of heart or forgetfulness almost uniformly. So the first thing to be done to make men at Peace with one another and with themselves is to rectify their relation to God, and bring Peace there.

We often hear in these days complaints of Christian Churches and Christian people because they do not fling themselves with sufficient energy to please the censors, into movements which are intended to bring about happier relations in society. The longest way round is sometimes the shortest way home. It does not belong to all of us Christians, and I doubt whether it belongs to the Christian Church as such at all, to fling itself into the movements to which I have referred. But if a man go and carry to men the great message of a reconciled and a reconciling God manifest in Jesus Christ, and bringing Peace between men and God, he will have done more to sweeten society and put an end to hostility than I think he will be likely to do by any other method. Christian men and women, whatever else you and I are here for, we are here mainly that we may preach, by lip and life, the great message that in Christ is our Peace, and that God "was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

We are not to leave out, of course, that which is so often taken as being the sole meaning of the great word of my text. There is much that we are all bound to do to carry the tranquilizing and soothing influences of Gospel principles and of Christ's example into the littlenesses of daily life. Any fool can stick a lucifer match into a haystack and make a blaze. It is easy to promote strife. There is a malicious love of it in us all and ill natured gossip has a great deal to do in bringing it about. But it takes something more to put the fire out than it did to light it, and there is no nobler office for Christians than to seek to damp down all these devil's flames of envy and jealousy and mutual animosity. We have to do it, first, by making very sure that we do not answer scorn with scorn, gibes with gibes, hate with hate, but "seek to overcome evil with good." It takes two to make a quarrel, and your most hostile antagonist cannot break the Peace unless you help him. If you are resolved to keep it, kept it will be. May I say another word? I think that our text, though it goes a good deal deeper, does also very plainly tell us Christian folk what is our duty in relation to literal warfare. There is no need for me to discuss here the question as to whether actual fighting with armies and swords is ever legitimate or not. It is a curious kind of Christian duty certainly, if it ever gets to be one. And when one thinks of the militarism that is crushing Europe and driving her ignorant classes to wild schemes of revolution; and when one thinks of the hell of battle fields, of the miseries of the wounded, of mourning widows, of ruined peaceful peasants, of the devil's passions that war sets loose, some of us find it extremely hard to believe that all that is ever in accordance with the mind of Christ. But whether you agree with me in that or no, surely my text

points to the duty of the Christian Church to take up a very much more decisive position in reference to the military spirit than, alas! It ever has done. Certainly it does seem to be not very obviously in accordance with Christ's teachings that men of war should be launched with a religious service, or that Te Deums should be sung because thousands have been killed. It certainly does seem to be something like a satire on European Christianity that one of the chief lessons we have taught the East is that we have instructed the Japanese how to use Western weapons to fight their enemies. Surely, surely, if Christian Churches laid to heart as they ought these plain words of the Master, they would bring their united influence to bear against that demon of war, and that pinchbeck, spurious glory which is connected with it. "Blessed are the peacemakers"; let us try to earn the benediction.

III. The Reward Of Peacemakers

"They shall be called the sons of God." Called? By whom? Christ does not say, but it should not be difficult to ascertain. It seems to me that to suppose that it is by men degrades this promise, instead of making it the climax of the whole series. Besides, it is not true that if a Christian man lives as I have been trying to describe, protesting against certain evils, trying to diffuse an atmosphere of Peace round about him; and, above all, seeking to make known the Name of the great Peacemaker, men will generally call him a "son of God." The next verse but one tells us what they will call him. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." They are a great deal more likely to have stones and rotten eggs flung at them than to be pelted with bouquets of scented roses of popular approval. No! No! It is not man's judgment that is meant here. It matters very little what men call us. It matters everything what God calls us. It is He who will call them "sons of God." So the Apostle John thought that Christ meant, for he very beautifully and touchingly quotes this passage when he says, "Beloved! Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."

God's calling is a recognition of men for what they are. God owns the man that lives in the fashion that we have been trying to outline. God owns him for His child; manifestly a son, because he has the child likeness - the Father's likeness. "Be ye therefore imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love." God in Christ is the first Peacemaker, and they who go about the world proclaiming His Peace and making Peace, bear the image of the Heavenly, and are owned by God as His sons. What does that owning mean? Well, it means a great deal which has yet to be disclosed, but it means this, too, that the whisper of the Voice which owns us for children will be heard by ourselves. The Spirit which cries, "Abba, Father!" will open our ears to hear Him say, "Thou art My beloved son". Or, to put it into plain English, there is no surer way by which we can come to the calm, happy, continual consciousness of being the children of God than by this living like Him, to spread the Peace of God over all hearts.

I have said in former sermons that all these promises, which are but the natural outcome of the characteristics to which they are attached, have a double reference, being fulfilled here, and in maturity hereafter. Like the rest, this one has that double reference. For the consciousness, here and now, that we are the children of God is but, as it were, the morning twilight of what shall hereafter be an unsetting meridian sunshine. What depths of Divine assimilation, what mysteries of calm, peaceful, filial fellowship, what riches beyond count of Divine inheritance, He in the name

of His Son, the possession of these alone can tell. For the same Apostle, whose comment upon these words we have already quoted, goes on to say, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

Only we have one assurance, wide enough for all anticipation, and firm enough for solid hope: "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." He must make us sons before we can be called sons of God. He must give us Peace with God, with ourselves, with men, with circumstances, before we can go forth effectually to bring Peace to others. If He has given us these good things, He has bound us to spread them. Let us do so. And if our Peace ever is spoken in vain as regards others, it will come back to us again; and we shall be kept in perfect Peace, even in the midst of strife, until we enter at last into the city of Peace and serve the King of Peace forever.

S. Grace, Mercy, and Peace

Grace, Mercy, and Peace

"Grace be with you, Mercy, and Peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love" (2 John 1:3).

We have here a very unusual form of the Apostolic salutation. "Grace, Mercy, and Peace" are put together in this fashion only in Paul's two Epistles to Timothy, and in this the present instance; and all reference to the Holy Spirit as an agent in the benediction is, as there, omitted. The three main words, "Grace, Mercy, and Peace," stand related to each other in a very interesting manner. If you will think for a moment you will see, I presume, that the Apostle starts, as it were, from the fountain head, and slowly traces the course of the blessing down to its lodgment in the heart of man. There is the fountain, and the stream, and, if I may so say, the great still lake in the soul, into which its waters flow, and which the flowing waters make. There is the sun, and the beam, and the brightness grows deep in the heart of man. Grace, referring solely to the Divine attitude and thought: Mercy, the manifestation of grace in act, referring to the workings of that great Godhead in its relation to humanity: and Peace, which is the issue in the soul of the fluttering down upon it of the Mercy which is the activity of the Grace. So these three come down, as it were, a great, solemn, marble staircase from the heights of the Divine Mind, one step at a time, down to the level of earth; and the blessings which are shed along the earth. Such is the order. All begins with Grace; and the end and purpose of Grace, when it flashes into deed, and becomes Mercy, is to fill my soul with quiet repose, and shed across all the turbulent sea of human love a great calm, a beam of sunshine that gilds, and miraculously stills while it gilds, the waves.

If that be, then, the account of the relation of these three to one another, let me just dwell for a moment upon their respective characteristics, that we may get more fully the large significance and wide scope of this blessing. Let us begin at what may be regarded either as the highest point from which all the stream descends, or as the foundation upon which all the structure rests. "Grace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father." These two, blended and yet separate, to either of whom a Christian man has a distinct relation, these Two are the Sources, equally, of the whole of the Grace. The Scriptural idea of Grace is love that stoops, and that pardons, and that communicates. I say nothing about that last characteristic, but I would like to dwell for a moment or two upon the other phases of this great word, a key word to the understanding of so much of Scripture. The first thing then that strikes me in it is how it exults in that great thought that there is no reason whatsoever for God's love except God's will. The very foundation and notion of the word "Grace" is a free, undeserved, unsolicited, self prompted, and altogether gratuitous bestowment, a love that is its own reason, as indeed the whole of the Divine acts are, just as we say of Him that He draws His being from Himself, so the whole motive for His action and the whole reason for His heart of tenderness to us lies in Himself. We have no power. We love one another because we apprehend something deserving of love, or fancy that we do. We love one another because there is something in the object on which our love falls, which,

either by kindred or by character, or by visible form, draws it out. We are influenced so, and love a thing because the thing or the person is perceived by us as being worthy, for some reason or other, of the love. God loves because He cannot help it; God loves because He is God. Our love is drawn out - I was going to say pumped out - by an application of external causes. God's love is like an artesian well, whensoever you strike, up comes, self impelled, gushing into light because there is such a central store of it beneath everything, the bright and flashing waters. Grace is love that is not drawn out, but that bursts out, self originated, undeserved. "Not for your sakes, be it known unto you, O house of Israel, but for Mine Own Name's sake, do I this." The Grace of God is above that, comes spontaneously, driven by its own fulness, and welling up unasked, unprompted, undeserved, and therefore never to be turned away by our evil, never to be wearied by our indifference, never to be brushed aside by our negligence, never to be provoked by our transgression, the fixed, eternal, unalterable center of the Divine Nature. His love is Grace. And then, in like manner, let me remind you that there lies in this great word, which in itself is a Gospel, the preaching that God's love, though it be not turned away by, is made tender by our sin. Grace is love extended to a person that might reasonably expect, because he deserves something very different, and when there is laid, as the foundation of everything, "the Grace of our Father and of the Son of the Father," it is but packing into one word that great truth which we all of us, Saints and sinners, need - a sign that God's love is love that deals with our transgressions and shortcomings, flows forth perfectly conscious of them, and manifests itself in taking them away, both in their guilt, punishment, and peril. "The Grace of our Father" is a love to which sin convinced consciences may certainly appeal; a love to which all sin tyrannized souls may turn for emancipation and deliverance. Then, if we turn for a moment from that deep fountain, "Love's ever springing well," as one of our old hymns has it, to the stream, we get other blessed thoughts. The love, the Grace, breaks into Mercy. The fountain gathers itself into a river, the infinite, Divine love concentrates itself in act, and that act is described by this one word, Mercy. As Grace is love which forgives, so Mercy is love which pities and helps. Mercy regards men, its object, as full of sorrows and miseries, and so robes itself in garb of compassion, and takes wine and oil into its hands to pour into the wound, and lays often a healing hand, very carefully and very gently, upon the creature, lest, like a clumsy surgeon, it should pain instead of heal, and hurt where it desires to console. God's Grace softens itself into Mercy, and all His dealings with us men must be on the footing that we are not only sinful, but that we are weak and wretched, and so fit subjects for a compassion which is the strangest paradox of a perfect and Divine heart. As the Mercy of God is the fountain and the outcome of His Grace the stream, so is Peace the great lake which spreads itself when it is received into a human heart. Peace comes, the all sufficient summing up of everything that God can give, and from His loving kindness, and from their needs that men man can need. The world is too wide to be narrowed to any single discords and disharmonies which trouble men. Peace with God; Peace in this anarchic kingdom within me, where conscience and will, hopes and fears, duty and passion, sorrows and joys, cares and confidence, are ever fighting one another; where we are torn asunder by conflicting aims and rival claims, and wherever any part of our nature asserting itself against another leads to intestine warfare, and troubles the poor soul. All that is harmonized and quieted down, and made concordant and cooperative to one great end, when the Grace and the Mercy have flowed silently into our spirits and harmonized aims and desires.

There is Peace that comes from submission; tranquillity of spirit, which is the crown and reward of obedience; repose, which is the very smile upon the face of faith, and all these things are given

unto us along with the Grace and Mercy of our God. And is the man that possesses this is at Peace with God, and at Peace with himself, so he may bear in his heart that singular blessing of a perfect tranquillity and quiet amidst the distractions of duty, of sorrows, of losses, and of cares. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known unto God; and the Peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." And he who is thus at friendship with God, and in harmony with himself, and at rest from sorrows and cares, will surely find no enemies amongst men with whom he must needs be at war, but will be a son of Peace, and walk the world, meeting in them all a friend and a brother. So all discords may be quieted; even though still we have to fight the good fight of faith, we may do, like Gideon of old, build an altar to "Jehovah Shalom," the God of Peace. And now one word, as to what this great text tells us are the conditions for a Christian man, of preserving, vivid and full, these great gifts, "Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you," or, as the Revised Version more accurately reads, "shall be with us in truth; and love." Truth and love are, as it were, the space within which the river flows, if I may so say, the banks of the stream. Or, to get away from the metaphor, these are set forth as being the conditions abiding in which for our parts we shall receive this benediction "In truth and in love."

I have no time to enlarge upon the great thoughts that these two words, thus looked at, suggest; let me put it into a sentence. To "abide in the truth" is to keep ourselves conscientiously and habitually under the influence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and of the Christ who is Himself the Truth. They who, keeping in Him, realizing His presence, believing His Word, founding their thinking about the unseen, about their relations to God, about sin and forgiveness, about righteousness and duty, and about a thousand other things, upon Christ and the revelation that He makes, these are those who shall receive "Grace, Mercy, and Peace." Keep yourselves in Christ, and Christ coming to you, bringing in His hands, and is, the "Grace and the Mercy and the Peace" of which my text speaks. And in love, if we want these blessings, we must keep ourselves consciously in the possession of, and in the grateful response of our hearts to the great love, the Incarnate Love, which is given in Jesus Christ.

Here is, so to speak, the line of direction which these great mercies take. The man who stands in their path, they will come to him and fill his heart; the man that steps aside, they will run past him and not touch him. You keep yourselves in the love of God, by communion, by the exercise of mind and heart and faith upon Him; and then be sure - for my text is not only a wish, but a confident affirmation - be sure that the fountain of all blessing itself, and the stream of petty benedictions which flow from it, will open themselves out in your hearts into a quiet, deep sea, on whose calm surface no tempests shall ever rave, and on whose unruffled bosom God Himself will manifest and mirror His face.

S. Growth

Growth "But grow in Grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

These are the last words of an old man, written down as his legacy to us. He was himself a striking example of his own precept. It would be interesting study to examine these two letters of the Apostle Peter in order to construct from them a picture of what he became, and to contrast it with his own earlier self when full of self confidence, rashness, and instability. It took a life time for Simon, the son of Jonas, to grow into Peter; but it was done. And the very faults of the character became strength. What he had proved possible in his own case he commands and commends to us, and from the height to which he has reached, he looks upwards to the infinite ascent which he knows he will attain when he puts off this tabernacle; and then downwards to his brethren, bidding them, too, climb and aspire. His last word is like that of the great Roman Catholic Apostle to the East Indies: "Forward!" He is like some trumpeter on the battlefield who spends his last breath in sounding an advance. Immortal hope animates his dying injunction: "Grow! Grow in Grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior." So I think we may take these words, dear friends, as the starting point for some very plain remarks about what I am afraid is a neglected duty of growth in Christian character.

I. I begin first, with a word or two about the direction which Christian growth ought to take.

Now those of you who use the Revised Version will see in it a very slight, but very valuable alteration. It reads there: "Grow in the Grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior." The effect of that alteration being to bring out more clearly that whilst the direction of the growth is twofold, the process is one. And to bring out more clearly, also, that both the Grace and the knowledge have connection with Jesus Christ. He is the Giver and the Author of the Grace. He is the Object of the knowledge. The one is more moral and spiritual; the other, if we may so say, more intellectual; but both are realized by one act of progress, and both inherent, and refer to, and are occupied with, and are derived from, Jesus Christ Himself.

Let us look a little more closely at this double direction, this bifurcation, as it were, of Christian growth. The tree, like some of our forest trees, in its normal progress, diverges into two main branches at a short distance upwards from the root.

First, we have growth in the "Grace" of Christ. Grace, of course, means, first, the undeserved love and favor which God in Jesus Christ bears to us sinful and inferior creatures; and then it means the consequence of that love and favor in the manifold spiritual endowments which in us become "graces," beauties, and excellencies of Christian character. So then, if you are a Christian, you ought to be continually realizing a deeper and more blessed consciousness of Christ's love and favor as yours. You ought to be, if I may so say, resting every day nearer and nearer to His heart, and getting more and more sure, and more and more happily sure, of more and more of His Mercy and love to you. And if you are a Christian you ought not only thus to be realizing daily, with

increasing certitude and power, the fact of His love, but you ought to be drinking in and deriving more and more every day of the consequences of that love, of the spiritual gifts of which His hands are full. There is open for each of us in Him an inexhaustible store of abundance. And if our Christian life is real and vigorous there ought to be in us a daily increasing capacity, and therefore a daily increasing possession of the gifts of His Grace. There ought to be, in other words, also a daily progressive transformation into His likeness. It is "the Grace of our Lord Jesus," not only in the sense that He is the Author and the Bestower of it to each of us, but also in the sense that He Himself possesses and exemplifies it. So that there is nothing mystical and remote from the experience of daily life in this exhortation: "Grow in Grace", and it is not growth in some occult theological virtue, or transcendent experience, but a very plain, practical thing, a daily transformation, with growing completeness and precision of resemblance, into the likeness of Jesus Christ; the Grace that was in Him being transferred to me, and my character being growingly irradiated and refined, softened and ennobled by the reflection of the luster of His. This it is to "grow into the Grace of our Lord and Savior"; a deeper consciousness of His love creeping round the roots of my heart every day, and fuller possession of His gifts placed in my opening hand every day; and a continual approximation to the beauty of His likeness, which never halts nor ceases.

"Grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior." The knowledge of a person is not the same as the knowledge of a creed or of a thought or of a book. We are to grow in the knowledge of Christ, which includes but is more than the intellectual apprehension of the truths concerning Him. He might turn the injunction into - "Increase your acquaintance with your Savior." Many Christians never get to be any more intimate with Him than they were when they were first introduced to Him. They are on a kind of bowing acquaintance with their Master, and have little more than that. We sometimes begin an acquaintance which we think promises to ripen into a friendship, but are disappointed. Circumstances or some want of congeniality which is discovered prevents its growth. So with not a few professing Christians. They have got no nearer to Jesus Christ than when they first knew Him. Their friendship has not grown. It has never reached the stage where all restraints are laid aside and there is perfect confidence. "Grow in the knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Get more and more intimate with Him, nearer to Him, and franker and more cordial with Him day by day. But there is another side to the injunction besides that. We are to grow in the grasp, the intellectual grasp and realization of the truths which lie wrapped up and enfolded in Him. The first truths that a man learns when he becomes a Christian are the most important. The lesson that the little child learns contains the Omega as well as the Alpha of all truth. There is no word in all the Gospel that is an advance on that initial word, the faith of which saves the most ignorant who trusts to it. We begin with the end, if I may say so, and the highest truth is the first truth that we learn. But the aspect which that truth bears to the man when, first of all, it dawns upon him, and he sees in it the end of his fears, the cleansing of his heart, the pardoning of his sins, his acceptance with God, is a very different thing from the aspect that it ought to wear to him, after, say forty years of pondering, of growing up to it, after years of experience have taught him. Life is the best commentary upon the truths of the Gospel, and the experience teaches their depths and their power, their far reaching applications and harmonies. So our growth in the knowledge of Jesus Christ is not a growing away from the earliest lessons, or a leaving them behind, but a growing up to and into them. So as to learn more fully and clearly all their infinite contents of Grace and truth. The treasure put into our hands at first is discovered in its

true preciousness as life and trial test its metal and its inexhaustibleness. The child's lesson is the man's lesson. All our Christian progress in knowledge consists in bringing to light the deep meaning, the far reaching consequences of the fact of Christ's incarnation, death, and glory. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The same truth which shone at first a star in a far off sky, through a sinful man's night of fear and agony, grows in brilliance as we draw nearer to it, until at last it blazes, the central Sun of the Universe, the hearth for all vital warmth, the fountain of all guiding light, the center of all energy. Christ in His manhood, in His divinity. Christ in His Cross, resurrection, and glory, is the object of all knowledge, and we grow in the knowledge of Him by penetrating more deeply into the truths which we have long ago learned, as well as by following them as they lead us into new fields, and disclose unsuspected issues in creed and practice. That growth will not be one sided; for Grace and knowledge will advance side by side - the moral and spiritual keeping step with the intellectual, the practical with the theoretical. And that growth will have no term. It is growth towards an infinite object of our aspiration, imitation, and affection. So we shall ever approach and never surpass Jesus Christ. Such endless progress is the very salt of life. It keeps us young when physical strength decays. It flames, an immortal hope, to light the darkness of the grave when all other hopes are quenched in night.

II. Now, for a moment, look at another thought, viz., the obligation.

It is a command, that is to say, the will is involved. Growth is to be done by effort, and the fact that it is a command teaches us this, that we are not to take this one metaphor as if it exhausted the whole of the facts of the case in reference to Christian progress.

You would never think of telling a child to grow any more than you would think of telling a plant to grow, but Peter does tell Christian men and women to grow. Why? Because they are not plants, but men with wills, which can resist, and can either further or hinder their progress.

Lo! In the middle of the wood,

The folded leaf is wooed from out the bud,

And there Grows green and broad,

And takes no care. But that is not how we grow. "In the sweat of thy brow," with pain and peril, with effort and toil, and not otherwise, do men grow in everything but stature. And especially is it so in the Christian character. There are other metaphors that need to be taken into consideration as well as this of growth, with all its sweet suggestions of continuous, effortless, spontaneous advance. The Christian progress is not only growth, it is warfare. The Christian progress is not only growth, it is a race. The Christian progress is not only growth, it is mortifying the old man. The Christian progress is not only growth, it is putting off the old man with his deeds and putting on the new! "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear," was never meant for a complete account of how the Christian life is perfected.

We are bidden to grow, and that command points to hindrances and resistance, to the need for effort and the governing action of our own wills. The command is one sorely needed in the present state of our average Christianity. Our Churches are full of monsters, specimens of arrested growth, dwarfs, who have scarcely grown since they were babes, infants all their lives. I come to

you with a very plain question: Have you any more of Christ's beauty in your characters, any more of His Grace in your hearts, any more of His truth in your minds than you had a year ago, ten years ago, or at that far off period when some of you gray headed men first professed to be Christians? Have you experienced so many things in vain? Have the years taught you nothing? Ah, brethren! For how many of us is it true: "When for the time ye ought to be teachers ye have need that one teach you which be the first principles of the oracles of God"? "Grow in Grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior." And we need the command because all about us there are hindrances. There is the hindrance of an abuse of the Evangelical doctrine of conversion, and the idea that springs up in many hearts that if once a man has "passed from death unto life," and has managed to get inside the door of the banqueting hall, that is enough. And there are numbers of people in our Nonconformist communities especially, where that doctrine of conversion is most distinctly preached, whose growth is stopped by the abuse that they make of it in fancying if they have once exercised faith in Jesus Christ they may safely and sinlessly stand still. "Conversion" is turning round. What do we turn round for? Surely, in order that we may travel on in the new direction, not that we may stay where we are. There is also the hindrance of mere indolence, and there is the hindrance arising from absorption in the world and its concerns.

If all your strength is going thither, there is none left to grow with. Many professing Christians take such deep draughts of the intoxicating cup of this world's pleasures that it stunts their growth. People sometimes give children gin in order to keep them from growing. Some of you do that for your Christian character by the deep draughts that you take of the Circean cup of this world's pleasures and cares. And not infrequently, some one favorite evil, some lust or passion, or weakness, or desire, which you have not the strength to cast out, will kill all aspirations and destroy all possibilities of growth; and will be like an iron band round a little sapling, which will confine it and utterly prevent all expansion. Is that the case with any of us? We all need - and I pray you suffer - the word of exhortation.

III. Now, again, consider the method of growth.

There are two things essential to the growth of animal life. One is food, the other is exercise; and your Christian character will grow by no other means.

Now as to the first. The true means by which we shall grow in Christian Grace is by holding continual intercourse and communion with Jesus Christ. It is from Him that all come. He is the Fountain of Life; He gives the life, He nourishes the life, He increases the life. And whilst I have been saying, in an earlier part of this discourse, that we are not to expect an effortless growth, I must here say that we shall very much mistake what Christian progress requires if we suppose that the effort is most profitably directed to the cultivation of specific and single acts of goodness and purity. Our efforts are best when directed to keeping ourselves in union with our Lord. The heart united to Him will certainly be advancing in all things fair and lovely and of good report. Keep yourselves in touch with Christ; and Christ will make you grow. That is to say, occupy heart and mind with Him, let your thoughts go to Him. Do you ever, from morning to night, on a week day, think about your Master, about His truth, about the principles of His Gospel, about His great love to you? Keep your heart in union with Him, in the midst of the rush and hurry of your daily life. Are your desires turning to Him? Do they go out towards Him and feel after Him? It will take an effort to keep up the union with Him, but without the effort there will be no contact, and without the contact

there will be no growth. As soon may you expect a plant, wrenched from the soil and shut out from the sunshine to grow, as expect any Christian progress in the hearts which are disjoined from Jesus Christ. But rooted in that soil, smiled upon by that sun, watered by the perpetual dew from His Heaven, we shall "grow like the lily, and cast forth our roots like Lebanon." The secret of real Christian progress and the direction in which the effort of Christian progress can most profitably and effectually be made, is simply in keeping close to our Lord and Master. He is the Food of the Spirit. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

Communion with Christ includes prayer. Desire to grow will help our growth. We tend to become what we long to be. Desire which impels to effort will not be in vain if it likewise impels to prayer. We may have the answer to our petition for growth in set ways; we may be but partially conscious of the answer, nor know that our faces shine when we go among men. But certainly if we pray for what is in such accordance with His will as "growth in Grace", we shall have the petition that we desire. That longing to know Him better and to possess more of His Grace, like the tendrils of some climbing plant, will always find the support round which it may twine, and by which it may ascend. The other condition of growth is exercise. Use the Grace which you have, and it increases. Practice the truth which you know, and many things will become clearer. The blacksmith's muscles are strengthened by wielding the forge hammer, but unused they waste. The child grows by exercise. To him that hath - truly possesses with the possession which only use secures - shall be given.

Communion with Christ, including prayer, and exercise are the means of growth.

IV. Lastly, observe the solemn alternative to growth.

It is not a question of either growing or not growing, and there an end; but if you will look at the context you will see that the exhortation of my text comes in in a very significant connection. "Behold! Beware, lest being led away ... ye fall from your own steadfastness." "But grow in Grace." That is to say, the only preventive of falling away from steadfastness is continual progress. The alternative of advance is retrogression. There is no standing still upon the inclined plane. If you are not going up gravity begins to act, and down you go. There must either be continual advance or there will be certain decay and corruption. As soon as growth ceases in this physiology disintegration commences. Just as the graces exercised are strengthened, so the graces unexercised decay. The slothful servant wraps his talent in a napkin, and buries it in the ground. He may try to persuade his Master and himself with "There Thou hast that is Thine"; but He will not take up what you buried. Rust and verdigris will have done their work upon the coin - the inscription will be obliterated and the image will be marred.

You cannot bury your Christian Grace in indolence without diminishing it. It will be like a bit of ice wrapped in a cloth and left in the sun, it will all have gone into water when you come to take it out. And the truth that you do not live by, whose relations and large harmonies and controlling power are not being increasingly realized in your lives; that truth is becoming less and less real, more and more shadowy and ghostlike to you. Truth which is not growing is becoming fossilized. "The things most surely believed" are often the things which have least power. Unquestioned truth too often lies "bedridden in the dormitory of the soul side by side with exploded error." The sure way to reduce your knowledge of Jesus Christ to that inert condition is to neglect increasing it and applying it to your daily life. There are men in all Churches, and there are some whole

communions whose creeds are the most orthodox, and also utterly useless, and as near as possible nonentities, simply because the creed is accepted and shelved. If your belief is to be of any use to you, or to be held by you in the face of temptations to abandon it, you must keep it fresh, and oxygenated, so to say, by continual fresh apprehension of it and closer application of it to conduct. As soon as the stream stands, it stagnates; and the very manna from God will breed worms and stink. And Christian truth unpracticed by those who hold it, corrupts itself and corrupts them. So Peter tells us that the alternative is growth or apostasy. This decay may be most real and unsuspected. There are many, many professing Christians all ignorant that, like the Jewish giant of old, their strength is gone from them, and the Spirit of God departed. My brother, I beseech you, rouse yourself from your contented slothfulness. Do not be satisfied with merely having come within the Temple. Count nothing as won whilst anything remains to be won. There is a whole ocean of boundless Grace and truth rolling shoreless there before you. Do not content yourselves with picking up a few shells on the beach, but launch out into the deep, and learn to know more and more of the Grace and truth and beauty of your Savior and your God. But remember dead things do not grow. You cannot grow unless you are alive, and you are not alive unless you have Jesus Christ. Have you given yourselves to Him? Have you taken Him as yours? Given yourselves to Him as His servants, subjects, soldiers? Taken Him for yours as your Savior, Sacrifice, Pattern, Inspirer, Friend? If you have, then you have life which will grow if you keep it in union with Him. Joined to Him, men are like a "tree that is planted by the rivers of water," which spreads its foliage and bears its fruit, and year after year flings a wider shadow upon the grass, and lifts a sturdier bole to the Heavens. Separated from Him they are like the chaff, which has neither root nor life, and which cannot grow.

Which, my friend, are you?

S. Hope Perfectly

Hope Perfectly

Christianity has transformed hope and given it a new importance by opening to it a new world to move in and supplying to it new guarantees to rest on. There is something very remarkable in the prominence given to hope in the New Testament and in the power ascribed to it to order a noble life. Paul goes so far as to say that we are saved by it. To a Christian it is no longer a pleasant dream which may be all an illusion, indulgence in which is pretty sure to sap a man's force, but it is a certain anticipation of certainties, the effect of which will be increased energy and purity. So our Apostle, having in the preceding context in effect summed up the whole Gospel, bases upon that summary a series of exhortations, the transition to which is marked by the "wherefore" at the beginning of my text. The application of that word is to be extended so as to include all that has preceded in the letter, and there follows a series of practical advises, the first of which, the grace or virtue which he puts in the forefront of everything, is not what you might have expected, but it is "hope perfectly."

I may just remark before going further in reference to the language of my text, that, accurately translated, the two exhortations which precede that to hope are subsidiary to it, for we ought to read, "Wherefore, girding up the loins of your mind, and being sober, hope." That is to say, these two are preliminaries or conditions or means by which the desired perfecting of the Christian hope is to be sought and attained.

Another preliminary remark which I must make is that what is enjoined here has not reference to the duration but to the quality of the Christian hope. It is not "to the end," but as the Margin of the Authorized and the Revised Version concurs in saying, it is "hope perfectly."

So, then, there are three things here?the object, the duty, and the cultivation of Christian hope. Let us take these three things in order.

I. The Object of Christian Hope

Now that is stated in somewhat remarkable language as "the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." We generally use that word "grace" with a restricted signification to the gifts of God to men here on earth. It is the earnest of the inheritance, rather than its fullness. But here it is quite obvious that by the expression the Apostle means the very same thing as he has previously designated in the preceding context by three different phrases "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled," "praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ," and "the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." The "grace" is not contrasted with the "glory" but is another name for the glory. It is not the earnest of the inheritance, but it is the inheritance itself. It is not the means toward attaining the progressive and finally complete "salvation of your souls," but it is that complete salvation in all its fullness.

Now, that is an unusual use of the word, but that it should be employed here, as describing the future great object of the Christian hope, suggests two or three thoughts. One is that that ultimate blessedness with all its dim, nebulous glories which can only be resolved into their separate stars when we are millions of leagues nearer to its luster is like the faintest glimmer of a new and better life in a soul here on earth, purely and solely the result of the undeserved, condescending love of God that stoops to sinful men and instead of retribution bestows upon them a heaven.

The grace that saved us at first, the grace that comes to us filtered in drops during our earthly experience is poured upon us in a flood at last. And the brightest glory of heaven is as much a manifestation of the divine grace as the first rudimentary germs of a better life now and here. The foundation, the courses of the building, the glittering pinnacle on the summit with its golden spire reaching still higher into the blue is all the work of the same unmerited, stooping, pardoning love. Glory is grace, and heaven is the result of God's pardoning mercy.

There is another suggestion here to be made, springing from this eloquent use of this term, and that is not merely the identity of the source of the Christian experience upon earth and in the future, but the identity of that Christian experience itself in regard of its essential character. If I may say so, it is all of a piece, homogeneous, and of one web. The robe is without seam, woven throughout of the same thread. The life of the humblest Christian, the most imperfect Christian, the most infantile Christian, the most ignorant Christian here on earth has for its essential characteristics the very same things as the lives of the strong spirits that move in light around the throne and receive into their expanding nature the ever-increasing fullness of the glory of the Lord. Grace here is glory in the bud; glory yonder is grace in the fruit.

But there is still further to be noticed another great thought that comes out of this remarkable language. The words of my text, literally rendered, are 'the grace that is being brought unto you.' Now, there have been many explanations of that remarkable phrase which I think is not altogether exhausted by nor quite equivalent to that which represents it in our version—namely, "to be brought unto you." That relegates it all into the future; but in Peter's conception it is in some sense in the present. It is "being brought."

What does that mean? There are far-off stars in the sky, the beams from which have set out from their home of light millenniums since and have been rushing through the waste places of the universe since long before men were, and they have not reached our eyes yet. But they are on the road. And so in Peter's conception, the apocalypse of glory which is the crowning manifestation of grace is rushing toward us through the ages, through the spheres, and it will be here some day, and the beams will strike upon our faces and make them glow with its light. So certain is the arrival of the grace that the Apostle deals with it as already on its way. The great thing on which the Christian hope fastens is no "peradventure" but a good which has already begun to journey toward us.

Again, there is another thought still to be suggested, and that is, the revelation of Jesus Christ is the coming to His children of this grace which is glory, of this glory which is grace. For mark how the Apostle says, "the grace which is being brought to you in the revelation of Jesus Christ." And that revelation to which he here refers is not the past one in His incarnate life upon earth, but it is the future one to which the hope of the faithful church ought ever to be steadfastly turned, the correlated truth to that other one on which its faith rests. On these two great pillars rising like

columns on either side of the gulf of time, "He has come," "He will come," the bridge is suspended by which we may safely pass over the foaming torrent that else would swallow us up. The revelation in the past cries out for the revelation in the future. The Cross demands the throne. That He has come once, a sacrifice for sin, stands incomplete, like some building left unfinished with tugged stones protruding which prophesy an addition at a future day, unless you can add "unto them that look for Him will He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." In that revelation of Jesus Christ His children shall find the glory-grace which is the object of their hope.

So say all the New Testament writers. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory," says Paul. "The grace that is to be brought unto you in the revelation of Jesus Christ," chimes in Peter. And John completes the trio with his "We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him." These three things, brethren?with Christ, glory with Him, likeness to Him??are all that we know, and blessed be God! all that we need to know of that dim future. And the more we confine ourselves to these triple great certainties and sweep aside all subordinate matters which are concealed partly because they could not be revealed and partly because they would not help us if we knew them, the better for the simplicity and the power and the certainty of our hope. The object of Christian hope is Christ in His revelation, in His presence, in His communication to us for glory, in His assimilating of us to Himself.

It is enough that Christ knows all, And we shall be with Him.

"The grace that is being brought unto you in the revelation of Jesus Christ."

II. The Duty of the Christian Hope And now notice the duty of the Christian hope. Hope a duty? That strikes one as somewhat strange. I very much doubt whether the ordinary run of good people do recognize it as being as imperative a duty for them to cultivate hope as to cultivate any other Christian excellence or virtue. For one man who sets himself deliberately and consciously to brighten up and to make more operative in his daily life the hope of future blessedness, you will find a hundred that set themselves to other kinds of perfecting of their Christian character. And yet, surely, there do not need any words to enforce the fact that this hope full of immortality is no mere luxury which a Christian may add to the plain fare of daily duty or leave untasted according as he likes, but that it is an indispensable element in all vigorous and life?dominating Christian experience.

I do not need to dwell upon that, except just to suggest that such a vividness and continuity of calm anticipation of a certain good beyond the grave is one of the strongest of all motives to the general robustness and efficacy of a Christian life. People used to say a few years ago a great deal more than they do now that the Christian expectation of heaven was apt to weaken energy upon earth, and they used to sneer at us and talk about our "other worldliness" as if it were a kind of weakness and defect attached to the Christian experience. They have pretty well given that up now. Anti?Christian sarcasm like everything else has its fashions, and other words of reproach and contumely have now taken the place of that.

The plain fact is that no one sees the greatness of the present unless he regards it as being the vestibule of the future and that this present life is unintelligible and insignificant unless beyond it and led up to by it and shaped through it there lies the eternal life beyond. The low, flat plain is dreary and desolate, featureless and melancholy when the sky above it is filled with clouds. But

sweep away the cloud?rack and let the blue arch itself above the brown moorland, and all glows into luster, and every undulation is brought out, and tiny shy forms of beauty are found in every corner.

And so if you drape heaven with the clouds and mists born of indifference and worldliness, the world becomes mean, but if you dissipate the cloud and unveil heaven, earth is greatedened. If the hope of the grave that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ shines out above all the flatness of earth, then life becomes solemn, noble, worthy of, demanding, and rewarding our most strenuous efforts. No man can and no man will strike such effectual blows on things present as the man, the strength of whose arm is derived from the conviction that every stroke of the hammer on things present is shaping that which will abide with him forever.

My text not only enjoins this hope as a duty but also enjoins the perfection of it as being a thing to be aimed at by all Christian people. What is the perfection of hope? Two qualities, certainty and continuity, Certainty; the definition of earthly hope is an anticipation of good less than certain, and so in all the operations of this great faculty which are limited within the range of earth, you get blended as an indistinguishable throng, "hopes and fears that kindle hope," and that too often kill it. But the Christian has a certain anticipation of certain good, and to him memory may be no more fixed than hope, and the past no more unalterable and uncertain than the future.

The motto of our hope is not the "perhaps" which is the most that it can say when it speaks the tongue of earth, but the "verily! verily!" which comes to its enfranchised lips when it speaks the tongue of heaven. Your hope, oh Christian, should not be the tremulous thing that it often is which expresses itself in phrases like "Well! I do not know, but I tremblingly hope," but it should say, "I know and am sure of the rest that remaineth, not because of what I am but because of what He is."

Another element in the perfection of hope is its continuity. That hits home to us all, does it not? Sometimes in calm weather we catch a sight of the gleaming battlements of "the City which hath foundations," away across the sea, and then mists and driving storms come up and hide it.

There is a great mountain in Central Africa which if a man wishes to see, he must seize a fortunate hour in the early morning, for all the rest of the day it is swathed in clouds, invisible. Is that like your hope, Christian man and woman, gleaming out now and then and then again swallowed up in the darkness? Brethren! these two things, certainty and continuity, are possible for us. Alas! that they are so seldom enjoyed by us.

III. Cultivation of This Christian Hope And now one last word. My text speaks about the discipline or cultivation of this Christian hope. It prescribes two things as auxiliary thereto. The way to cultivate the perfect hope which alone corresponds to the gift of God is "girding up the loins of your mind, and being sober." Of course, there is here one of the very few reminiscences that we have in the Epistles of the ipsissima verba of our Lord. Peter is evidently referring to our Lord's commandment to have "the loins girt and the lamps burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord." I do not need to remind you of the Eastern dress that makes the metaphor remarkably significant, the loose robes that tangle a man's feet when he runs, that need to be girded up and belted tight around his waist as preliminary to all travel or toil of any kind. The metaphor is the same as that in our colloquial speech when we talk about a man "pulling himself

together."

Just as an English workman will draw his belt a hole tighter when he has some special task to do, so Peter says to us, make a definite effort with resolute bracing up and concentration of all your powers, or you will never see the grace that is hurrying toward you through the centuries. There are abundance of loose, slack-braced people up and down the world in all departments, and they never come to any good.

It is a shame that any one should have his thoughts so loosely girt and vagrant as that any briar by the roadside can catch them and hinder his advance. But it is a tenfold shame for Christian people, with such an object to gaze upon, that they should let their minds be dissipated all over the trivialities of time and not gather them together and project them, as I may say, with all their force toward the sovereign realities of Eternity. A sixpence held close to your eye will blot out the sun, and the trifles of earth close to us will prevent us from realizing the things which neither sight, nor experience, nor testimony reveal to us, unless with clenched teeth, so to speak, we make dogged effort to keep them in mind.

The other preliminary and condition is "being sober" which, of course, you have to extend to its widest possible signification, implying not merely abstinence from or moderate use of intoxicants or material good for the appetites, but also the withdrawing of one's self sometimes wholly from and always restraining one's self in the use of the present and the material. A man has only a given definite quantity of emotion and interest to expend, and if he flings it all away on the world, he has none left for heaven. He will be like the miner who spoils some fair liver by diverting its waters into his own sluice in order that he may grind some corn. If you have the faintest film of dust on the glass of the telescope or on its mirror, if it is a reflecting one, you will not see the constellations in the heavens; and if we have drawn over our spirits the film of earthly absorption, all these bright glories above will, so far as we are concerned, cease to be.

So, beloved, there is a solemn responsibility laid upon us by the gift of that great faculty of looking before and after. What did God make you and me capable of anticipating the future for? That we might let our hopes run along the low levels or that we might elevate them and twine them round the very pillars of God's Throne; which? I do not find fault with you because you hope but because you hope so meanly and about such trivial and transitory things.

I remember I once saw a seabird kept in a garden, confined within high walls and with clipped wings, set to pick up grubs and insects. It ought to have been away out, hovering over the free ocean, or soaring with sunlit wing to a height where earth became a speck and all its noises were hushed. That is what some of you are doing with your hope, degrading it to earth instead of letting it rise to God; enter within the veil and gaze upon the glory of the "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled."

S. Jehovah Jireh

Jehovah Jireh

AS THESE Two, Abraham and Isaac, were traveling up the hill, the son bearing the wood and the father with the sad burden of the fire and the knife, the boy said: "Where is the lamb?" and Abraham, thrusting down his emotion and steadying his voice, said: 'My son, God will provide Himself a lamb.'" When the wonderful issue of the trial was plain before him and he looked back upon it, the one thought that rose to his mind was of how, beyond his meaning, his words had been true. So he named that place by a name that spoke nothing of his trial but everything of God's provision—"The Lord will see," or "The Lord will provide."

What the Words Mean

The words have become proverbial and threadbare as a commonplace of Christian feeling. But it may be worth our while to ask for a moment what it was exactly that Abraham expected the Lord to provide. We generally use the expression in reference to outward things and see in it the assurance that we shall not be left without the supply of the necessities for which, because God has made us to feel them, He has bound Himself to make provision. And most blessedly true is that application of them, and many a Christian heart in days of famine has been satisfied with the promise when the bread that was given has been scant.

But there is a meaning deeper than that in the words. It is true, thank God! that we may cast all our anxiety about all outward things upon Him in the assurance that He who feeds the ravens will feed us, and that if lilies can blossom into beauty without care, we shall be held by our Father of more value than these. But there is a deeper meaning in the provision spoken of here. What was it that God provided for Abraham? What is it that God provides for us? A way to discharge the arduous duties which, when they are commanded, seem all but impossible for us and which, the nearer we come to them, look the more dreadful and seem the more impossible. And yet, when the heart has yielded itself in obedience and we are ready to do the thing that is enjoined, there opens up before us a possibility provided by God, and strength comes to us equal to our day, and some unexpected gift is put into our hand which enables us to do the thing of which Nature said: 'My heart will break before I can do it'; and in regard to which even Grace doubted whether it was possible for us to carry it through. If our hearts are set in obedience to the command, the farther we go on the path of obedience, the easier the command will appear, and to try to do it is to ensure that God will help us to do it.

This is the main provision that God makes, and it is the highest provision that He can make for there is nothing in this life that we need so much as to do the will of our Father in heaven. All outward wants are poor compared with that. The one thing worth living for, the one thing which in being secured we are blessed and being missed we are miserable, is compliance in heart with the commandment of our Father, and the compliance wrought out in life. So, of all gifts that He bestows upon us and of all the abundant provision out of His rich storehouses is not this the best,

that we are made ready for any required service? When we get to the place we shall find some lamb "caught in the thicket by its horns"; and heaven itself will supply what is needful for our burnt offering.

And then there is another thought here which, though we cannot certainly say it was in the speaker's mind, is distinctly in the historian's intention, "The Lord will provide." Provide what? The lamb for the burnt offering which He has commanded. It seems probable that that bare mountaintop which Abraham saw from afar and named Jehovah Jireh, was the mountain-top on which afterward the Temple was built. And perhaps the wood was piled for the altar on that very piece of primitive rock which still stands visible, though Temple and altar have long since gone, and which for many a day was the place of the altar on which the sacrifices of Israel were offered. It is no mere forcing of Christian meanings on to old stories but the discerning of that prophetic and spiritual element which God has impressed upon these histories of the past, especially in all their climaxes and crises, when we see in the fact that God provided the ram which became the appointed sacrifice, through which Isaac's life was preserved, a dim adumbration of the great truth that the only Sacrifice which God accepts for the world's sin is the Sacrifice which He Himself has provided.

This is the deepest meaning of all the sacrificial worship, as of Israel so of heathen nations—God Himself will provide a Lamb. The world had built altars, and Israel, by divine appointment, had its altar too. All these express the want which none of them can satisfy. They show that man needed a Sacrifice and that Sacrifice God has provided. He asked from Abraham less than He gives to us. Abraham's devotion was sealed and certified because he did not withhold his son, his only son, from God. And God's love is sealed because He has not withheld His only-begotten Son from us.

So this name that came from Abraham's grateful and wondering lips contains a truth which holds true in all regions of our wants. On the lowest level, the outward supply of outward needs; on a higher, the means of discharging hard duties and a path through sharp trials; and, on the highest of all, the spotless sacrifice which alone avails for the world's sins—these are the things which God provides.

The Conditions in the Case

So, note again on what conditions He provides them.

The incident and the name became the occasion of a proverb, as the historian tells us, which survived down to the period of his writing, and probably long after, when men were accustomed to say, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." The provision of all sorts that we need has certain conditions as to the when and the where of the persons to whom it shall be granted. "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." If we wish to have our outward needs supplied, our outward weaknesses strengthened, power and energy sufficient for duty, wisdom for perplexity, a share in the Sacrifice which takes away the sins of the world, we receive them all on the condition that we are found in the place where all God's provision is treasured. If a man chooses to sit outside the baker's shop, he may starve on its threshold. If a man will not go into the bank, his pockets will be empty though there may be bursting coffers there to which he has a right. And if we will not ascend to the hill of the Lord, and stand in His holy place by simple faith, and by true communion of heart and life, God's amplest provision is nought to us; and we are empty in the

midst of affluence. Get near to God if you would partake of what He has prepared. Live in fellowship with Him by simple love and often meditate on Him if you would drink in of His fullness. And be sure of this, that howsoever within His house the stores are heaped and the treasury full, you will have neither part nor lot in the matter unless you are children of the house. "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." And round it there is a waste wilderness of famine and of death.

When the Provision Comes

Further, note when the provision is realized.

When the man is standing with the knife in his hand and the next minute it will be red with the son's blood then the call comes: "Abraham!" and then he sees the ram caught in the thicket. There had been a long weary journey from their home away down in the dry, sunny south, a long tramp over the rough hills, a toilsome climb with a breaking heart in the father's bosom, and a dim foreboding gradually stealing on the child's spirit. But there was no sign of respite or of deliverance. Slowly he piles together the wood, and yet no sign. Slowly he binds his boy and lays him on it, and still no sign. Slowly, reluctantly, and yet resolvedly, he unsheathes the knife, and yet no sign. He lifts his hand, and then it comes.

That is God's way always. Up to the very edge we are driven before His hand is put out to help us. Such is the law, not only because the next moment is always necessarily dark nor because God will deal with us in any arbitrary fashion and play with our fears, but because it is best for us that we should be forced to desperation and out of desperation should "pluck the flower, safety." It is best for us that we should be brought to say, "My foot slippeth!" and then, just as our toes are sliding upon the glacier, the help comes and "Thy mercy held me up." "The Lord is our helper, and that right early." When He delays, it is not to trifle with us but to do us good by the sense of need as well as by the experience of deliverance. At the last moment, never before it, never until we have found out how much we need it, and never too late, comes the Helper.

So "it is provided" for the people that quietly and persistently tread the path of duty and go wherever His hand leads them without asking anything about where it does lead. The condition of the provision is our obedience of heart and will. To Abraham doing what he was commanded, though his heart was breaking as he did it, the help was granted-as it always will be.

What to Do with the Provision

And so, lastly, note what we are to do with the provision when we get it.

Abraham christened the anonymous mountaintop, not by a name that reminded him or others of his trial, but by a name that proclaimed God's deliverance. He did not say anything about his agony or about his obedience. God spoke about that, not Abraham. He did not want these to be remembered, but what he desired to hand on to later generations was what God had done for him. Oh! dear friends, is that the way in which we look back upon life? Many a bare, bald mountaintop in your career and mine we have names for. Are they names that commemorate our sufferings or God's blessings? When we look back on the past, what do we see? Times of trial or times of deliverance? Which side of the wave do we choose to look at, the one that is smitten by the sunshine or the one that is all black and purple in the shadow? The sea looked at from the one side will be all a sunny path, and from the other, dark as chaos. Let us name the heights that he

behind us, visible to memory, by names that commemorate, not the troubles that we had on them, but the deliverances that on them we received from God.

This name enshrines the duty of commemoration-yes! and the duty of expectation. "The Lord will provide." How do you know that, Abraham? And his answer is, "Because the Lord did provide." That is a shaky kind of argument if we use it about one another. Our resources may give out, our patience may weary. If it is a storehouse that we have to go to, all the corn that is treasured in it will be eaten up some day; but if it is to some boundless plain that grows it that we go, then we can be sure that there will be a harvest next year as there has been a harvest last.

And so we have to think of God not as a storehouse but as the soil from which there comes forth, year by year and generation after generation, the same crop of rich blessings for the needs and the hungers of every soul. If we have to draw from reservoirs we cannot say, "I have gone with my pitcher to the well six times, and I shall get it filled at the seventh." It is more probable that we shall have to say, "I have gone so often that I durst not go any more"; but if we have to go not to a well but to a fountain, then the oftener we go, the surer we become that its crystal cool waters will always be ready for us. "Thou. hast been with me in six troubles; and in seven thou wilt not forsake me," is a bad conclusion to draw about one another; but it is the right conclusion to draw about God.

And so, as we look back upon our past lives and see many a peak gleaming in the magic light of memory, let us name them all by names that will throw a radiance of hope on the unknown and unclimbed difficulties before us and say, as the patriarch did when he went down from the mount of his trial and deliverance, "The Lord will provide."

S. Love And Fear

Love And Fear

JOHN HAS BEEN SPEAKING of boldness, and that naturally suggests its opposite-fear. He has been saying that perfect love produces courage in the day of judgment, because it produces likeness to Christ, who is the Judge. In my text he explains and enlarges that statement. For there is another way in which love produces boldness, and that is by casting out fear. These two are mutually exclusive. The entrance of the one is for the other a notice to quit. We cannot both love and fear the same person or thing, and where love comes in, the darker form slips out at the door; and where Love comes in, it brings hand in hand with itself Courage with her radiant face. But boldness is the companion of love, only when love is perfect. For, inconsistent as the two emotions are, love, in its earlier stages and lower degrees, is often perturbed and dashed by apprehension and dread.

Now John is speaking about the two emotions in themselves, irrespective, so far as his language goes, of the objects to which they are directed. What he is saying is true about love and fear, whatever or whosoever may be loved or dreaded. But the context suggests the application in his mind, for it is "boldness before him" about which he has been speaking; and so it is love and fear directed towards God which are meant in my text. The experience of hosts of professing Christians is only too forcible a comment upon the possibility of a partial Love lodging in the heart side by side with a fellow-lodger, Fear, whom it ought to have expelled. So there are three things here that I wish to notice-the empire of fear, the mission of fear, and the expulsion of fear.

The Empire of Fear

Fear is a shrinking apprehension of evil as befalling us, from the person or thing which we dread. My text brings us face to face with the solemn thought that there are conditions of human nature, in which the God who ought to be our dearest joy and most ardent desire becomes our ghastliest dread. The root of such an unnatural perversion of all that a creature ought to feel towards its loving Creator lies in the simple consciousness of discordance between God and man, which is the shadow cast over the heart by the fact of sin. God is righteous; God righteously administers His universe. God enters into relations of approval or disapproval with His responsible creature. Therefore there lies, dormant for the most part, but present in every heart, and active in the measure in which that heart is informed as to itself, the slumbering cold dread that between it and God things are not as they ought to be.

I believe, for my part, that such a dumb, dim consciousness of discord attaches to all men, though it is often smothered, often ignored, and often denied. But there it is; the snake hibernates, but it is coiled in the heart all the same; and warmth will awake it. Then it lifts its crested head, and shoots out its forked tongue, and venom passes into the veins. A dread of God is the ghastliest thing in the world, the most unnatural, but universal, unless expelled by perfect love.

Arising from that discomforting consciousness of discord there come, likewise, other forms and objects of dread. For if I am out of harmony with Him, what will be my fate in the midst of a universe administered by Him, and in which all are His servants? Oh! I sometimes wonder how it is that godless men front the facts of human life, and do not go mad. For here are we, naked, feeble, alone, plunged into a whirlpool, from the awful vortices of which we cannot extricate ourselves. There foam and swirl all manner of evils, some of them certain, some of them probable, any of them possible, since we are at discord with Him who wields all the forces of the universe, and wields them all with a righteous hand. "The stars in their courses fight against" the man who does not fight for God. Whilst all things serve the soul that serves Him, all are embattled against the man that is against, or not for, God and His will.

Then there arises up another object of dread, which, in like manner, derives all its power to terrify and to hurt from the fact of our discordance with God; and that is "the shadow feared of man," that stands shrouded by the path, and waits for each of us.

God; God's universe; God's messenger, Death—these are facts with which we stand in relation, and if our relations with Him are out of gear, then He and all of these are legitimate objects of dread to us.

But now there is something else that casts out fear than perfect love, and that is—perfect levity. For it is the explanation of the fact that so many of us know nothing of this fear of which I speak, and fancy that I am exaggerating, or putting forward false views. There is a type of man, and I have no doubt there are some of its representatives among my hearers, who are below both fear and love as directed towards God; for they never think about Him, or trouble their heads concerning either Him or their relations to Him or anything that flows therefrom. It is a strange faculty that we all have, of forgetting unwelcome thoughts and shutting our eyes to the things that we do not want to see, like Nelson when he put the telescope to his blind eye at Copenhagen, because he would not obey the signal of recall. But surely it is an ignoble thing that men should ignore or shuffle out of sight with inconsiderateness the real facts of their condition, like boys whistling in a churchyard to keep their spirits up, and saying "Who's afraid?" just because they are so very much afraid. Ah! dear friends, do not rest until you face the facts, and having faced them, have found the way to reverse them. Surely, surely it is not worthy of men, to turn away from anything so certain as that between a sin-loving man and God there must exist such a relation as will bring evil and sorrow to that man, as surely as God is and he is. I beseech you, take to heart these things, and do not turn away from them with a shake of your shoulders, and say, "He is preaching the narrow, old-fashioned doctrine of a religion of fear." No! I am not. But I am preaching this plain fact, that a man who is in discord with God has reason to be afraid, and I come to you with the old exhortation of the prophet, "Be troubled, ye careless ones." For there is nothing more ignoble or irrational than security which is only made possible by covering over unwelcome facts. "Be troubled"; and let the trouble lead you to the Refuge.

That brings me to the second point—viz.,

The Mission of Fear

John uses a rare word in my text when he says "fear hath torment." "Torment" does not convey the whole idea of the word. It means suffering, but suffering for a purpose; suffering which is

correction; suffering which is disciplinary; suffering which is intended to lead to something beyond itself. Fear, the apprehensions of personal evil, has the same function in the moral world as pain has in the physical. It is a symptom of disease, and is intended to bid us look for the remedy and the Physician. What is an alarm bell for, but to rouse the sleepers, and to hurry them to the refuge? And so this wholesome, manly dread of the certain issue of discord with God is meant to do for us what the angels did for Lot—to lay a mercifully violent hand on the shoulder of the sleeper, and shake him into aroused wakefulness, and hasten him out of Sodom, before the fire bursts through the ground, and is met by the fire from above. The intention of fear is to lead to that which shall annihilate it by taking away its cause.

There is nothing more ridiculous, nothing more likely to destroy a man, than the indulgence in an idle fear which does nothing to prevent its own fulfillment. Horses in a burning stable are so paralyzed by dread that they cannot stir, and get burnt to death. And for a man to be afraid—as everyone ought to be who is conscious of unforgiven sin—for a man to be afraid and there an end, is absolute insanity. I fear; then what do I do? Nothing. That is true about hosts of us.

What ought I to do? Let the dread direct me to its source, my own sinfulness. Let the discovery of my own sinfulness direct me to its remedy, the righteousness and the Cross of Jesus Christ. He, and He alone, can deal with the disturbing element in my relation to God. He can "deliver me from my enemies, for they are too strong for me." It is Christ and His work, Christ and His sacrifice, Christ and His indwelling Spirit that will grapple with and overcome sin and all its consequences, in any man and in every man—taking away its penalty, lightening the heart of the burden of its guilt, delivering from its love and dominion. All three of these things are the barbs of the arrows with which fear riddles heart and conscience. So my fear should proclaim to me the merciful "name that is above every name," and drive me as well as draw me to Christ, the Conqueror of sin, and the Antagonist of all dread.

Brethren, I said I was not preaching the religion of Fear. But I think we shall scarcely understand the religion of Love unless we recognize that dread is a legitimate part of an unforgiven man's attitude towards God. My fear should be to me like the misshapen guide that may lead me to the fortress where I shall be safe. Oh! do not tamper with the wholesome sense of dread. Do not let it lie, generally sleeping, and now and then waking in your hearts, and bringing about nothing. Sailors that crash on with all sails set, whilst the barometer is rapidly falling, and boding clouds are on the horizon, and the line of the approaching gale is ruffling the sea yonder, have themselves to blame if they founder. Look to the falling barometer, and make ready for the coming storm, and remember that the mission of fear is to lead you to the Christ who will take it away.

Lastly, let us look at ...

The Expulsion of Fear My text points out the natural antagonism, and mutual exclusiveness, of these two emotions. If I go to Jesus Christ as a sinful man, and get His love bestowed upon me, then, as the next verse to my text says, my love springs in response to I-Es to me, and in the measure in which that love rises in my heart will it frustrate its antagonistic dread.

As I said, you cannot love and fear the same person, unless the love is of a very rudimentary and imperfect character. But, just as when you pour pure water into a bladder, the poisonous gases that it may have contained will be driven out before it, so when love comes in, dread goes out. The

river, turned into the foulness of the heart, will sweep out all the filth and leave everything clean. The black, greasy smoke-wreath, touched by the fire of Christ's love, will flash out into ruddy flames, like that which has kindled them; and Christ's love will kindle in your hearts, if you accept it and apprehend it aright, a love which shall burn up and turn into fuel for itself the now useless dread.

But, brethren, remember that it is "perfect love" which "casts out fear."

Inconsistent as the two emotions are in themselves in practice, they may be united, by reason of the imperfection of the nobler. And in the Christian life they are united with terrible frequency. There are many professing Christians who live all their days with a burden of shivering dread upon their shoulders, and an icy cold fear in their hearts, just because they have not got close enough to Jesus Christ, nor kept their hearts with sufficient steadfastness under the quickening influences of His love, to have shaken off their dread as a sick man's distempered fancies.

A little love has not mass enough in it to drive out thick, clustering fears. There are hundreds of professing Christians who know very little indeed of that joyous love of God which swallows up and makes impossible all dread, who, because they have not a loving present consciousness of a loving Father's loving will, tremble when they confront in imagination, and still more when they meet in reality, the evils that must come. They cannot face the thought of death with anything but shrinking apprehension. There is far too much of the old leaven of selfish dread left in the experiences of many Christians. "I feared thee, because thou wert an austere man, and so, because I was afraid, I went and hid my talent, and did nothing for thee" is a transcript of the experience of far too many of us. The one way to get deliverance is to go to Jesus Christ and keep close by Him.

And my last word to you is, see that you resort only to the sane, sound way of getting rid of the wholesome, rational dread of which I have been speaking. You can ignore it; and buy immunity at the price of leaving in full operation the causes of your dread—and that is stupid. There is only one wise thing to do, and that is, to make sure work of getting rid of the occasion of dread, which is the fact of sin. Take all your sin to Jesus Christ; He will and He only can—deal with it. He will lay His hand on you, as He did of old, with the characteristic word that was so often upon His lips, and which He alone is competent to speak in its deepest meaning, "Fear not, it is I," and He will give you the courage that He commands.

"God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and of a sound mind." "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father," and cling to Him, as a child who knows his father's heart too well to be afraid of anything in his father, or of anything that his father's hand can send.

S. THE Disciple's Confession and the Master's Warning

THE DISCIPLE'S CONFESSION AND THE MASTER'S WARNING by Alexander MacLaren

"His disciples said to Him, 'See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God.' Jesus answered them, 'Do you now believe? Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.'" John 16:29-32. THE first words of these wonderful discourses were, "Let not your heart be troubled." They struck the key-note of the whole. The aim of all was to bring peace and confidence unto the disciples' spirits. And this joyful burst of confession which wells up so spontaneously and irrepressibly from their hearts, shows that the aim has been reached. For a moment sorrow, bewilderment dullness of apprehension, had all passed away, and the foolish questioners and non-receptive listeners had been lifted into a higher region, and possess insight, courage, confidence. The last sublime utterance of our Lord had gathered all the scattered rays into a beam so bright that the blindest could not but see, and the coldest could not but be warmed. But yet the calm, clear eye of Christ sees something not wholly satisfactory in this outpouring of the disciples' confidence. He does not reject their imperfect faith, but He warns them, seeing the impending hour of denial which was so terribly to contradict the rapture of that moment. And then, with most pathetic suddenness, He passes from them to Himself; and in a singularly blended utterance lets us get a glimpse into His deep solitude and the companions that shared it. My words this morning make no attempt at any further connection than is involved in following the course of thought in the words before us.

I.--Note the disciples' joyful confession. Their words are permeated throughout with allusions to the previous promises and sayings of our Lord, and the very allusions show how shallow was their understanding of what they thought so plain. He had said to them that, in that coming day which was so near its dawn, He would speak to them no more in proverbs, but show them plainly of the Father; and they answer, with a kind of rapture of astonishment, that the promised day has come already, and that even now He is speaking to them plainly, and without mysterious sayings. Did they understand His words when they thought them so plain? "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world. Again I leave the world and go unto the Father." That summary statement of the central mysteries of Christianity, which the generations have found to be inexhaustible, and which to so many minds has been absolutely incredible, seemed to the shallow apprehension of these disciples to be sun-clear. If they had understood what He meant, could they have spoken thus, or have left Him so soon?

They begin with what they believed to be a fact His clear utterance. Then follows a conviction which they infer from the fact, and rightly infer, and which has allusion to His previous words. "Now," say they, "we know that Thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask Thee." He had said to them, "In that day ye shall ask Me nothing;" and from the fact that He had interpreted their unspoken words, and had anticipated their desire to ask what they durst not ask,

they draw, and rightly draw, the conclusion of His Divine Omniscience. They think that therein, in His answer to their question before it is asked, is the fulfilment of that great promise. Was that all that He meant? Certainly not. Did He merely mean to say, "You will ask Me nothing, because I shall know what you want to know, without your asking?" No! But He meant, "Ye shall ask Me nothing, because in that day you will have with you an illuminating Spirit who will solve all your difficulties." So, again, a shallow interpretation empties the words which they accept of their deepest and most precious meaning. And then they take yet a further step. First, they begin with a fact; then from that they infer a conviction; and now, upon the basis of the inferred conviction, they rear a faith. "We believe that Thou camest forth from God." But what they meant by "coming forth from God" fell far short of the greatness what He meant by the declaration, and they stand, in this final, articulate confession of their faith, but a little in advance of Nicodemus the Rabbi, and behind Peter the Apostle when he said: "Thou art the Son of the living God." So their confession is a strangely mingled warp and woof of insight and of ignorance. And they may stand for us both as examples to teach us what we ought to be, and as beacons teaching us what we should not be.

Let me note just one or two lessons drawn from the disciples' demeanour and confession. The first remark that I would make is that here we learn what it is that gives life to a creed--Experience. These men had, over and over again, in our Lord's earlier utterances, heard the declaration that "He came forth from God"; and in a sort of fashion they believed it. But, as so many of our convictions do, it lay dormant and half dead in their souls. But now, rightly or wrongly, experience had brought them into contact, as they thought, with a manifest proof of His Divine Omniscience, and the torpid conviction flashes all up at once into vitality. The smouldering fire of a mere piece of abstract belief was kindled at once into a glow that shed warmth through their whole hearts; and although they had professed to believe long ago that He came from God, now, for the first time, they grasp it as a living reality. Why? Because experience had taught it to them. That is the only thing that teaches us the articles of our creed in a way worth learning them. Every one of us carries professed beliefs, which lie there inoperative, bedridden, in the hospital and dormitory of our souls, until some great necessity or sudden circumstance comes that flings a beam of light upon them, and then they start and waken. We do not know the use of the sword until we are in battle. Until the shipwreck comes, no man puts on the lifebelt in his cabin. Every one of us has large tracts of Christian truth which we think we most surely believe, but which need experience to quicken them, and need us to grow up into the possession of them. Of all our teachers who turn beliefs assented to into beliefs really believed none is so mighty as sorrow; for that makes a man lay a firm hold on the deep things of God's Word.

Then another lesson that I draw from this glad confession is--the bold avowal that always accompanies certitude. These men's stammering tongues are loosed. They have a fact to base themselves upon. They have a piece of assured knowledge inferred from the fact. They have a faith built upon the certitude of what they know. Having this, out it all comes in a gush. No man that believes with all his heart can help speaking. You silent Christians are so, because you do not more than half grasp the truth that you say you hold. "Thy word, when shut up in my bones, was like a fire"; and it ate its way through all the dead matter that enclosed it, until at last it flamed out heaven high. Can you say, "We know and we believe," with unfaltering confidence? Not "we argue;" not "we humbly venture to think that on the whole;" not "we are inclined rather to believe;" but "we know that Thou knowest all things and that Thou hast come from God." Seek for that

blessed certitude of knowledge, based upon the facts of individual experience, which makes the tongue of the dumb sing, and changes all the deadness of an outward profession of Christianity into a living, rejoicing power.

Then, further, I draw this lesson. Take care of indolently supposing that you understand the depths of God's truth.

These apostles fancied that they had grasped the whole meaning of the Master's words, and were glad in them. They fed on them, and got something out of them; but how far they were from the true perception of their meaning! This generation abhors mystery, and demands that the deepest truths of the highest subject, which is religion, shall be so broken down into mincemeat that the "man in the street" can understand them in the intervals of reading the newspaper. There are only too many of us who are disposed to grasp at the most superficial interpretation of Christian truth, and lazily to rest ourselves in that. A creed which has no depth in it is like a picture which has no distance. It is flat and unnatural, and self-condemned by the very fact. It is better that we should feel that the smallest word that comes from God is like some little leaf of a water plant on the surface of a pond; if you lift that you draw a whole trail after it, and nobody knows how far off and how deep down are the roots. It is better that we should feel how Infinity and Eternity press in upon us on all sides, and should take as ours the temper that recognizes that till the end we are but learners, seeing "in a glass, in a riddle," and therefore patiently waiting for light and strenuously striving to stretch our souls to the width of the infinite truth of God.

II.--So, then, look, in the second place, at the sad questions and forebodings of the Master.

"Do you now believe?" That does not cast doubt on the reality of their faith so much as on its permanence and power. "Behold the hour cometh that you shall be scattered"--as He had told them a little while before in the upper room, like a flock when the shepherd is stricken down--"Every man to his own." He does not reject their imperfect homage, though He discerns so clearly its imperfection and its transience, but sadly warns them to beware of the fleeting nature of their present emotion; and would seek to prepare them, by the knowledge, for the terrible storm that is going to break upon them. So let us learn two or three simple lessons. One is that the dear Lord accepts imperfect surrender, ignorant faith and love, of which He knows that it will soon turn to denial. Oh! if He did not, what would become of us all? We reject half hearts; we will not have a friendship on which we cannot rely. The sweetness of vows is all sucked out of them to our apprehension, if we have reason to believe that they will be falsified in an hour. But the patient Master was willing to put up with what you and I will not put up with; and to accept what we reject; and be pleased that they gave Him even that. His "charity suffereth long, and is kind." Let us not be afraid to bring even imperfect consecration to His merciful feet.

Then another lesson is the need for Christian men sedulously to search and make sure that their inward life corresponds with their words and professions. I wonder how many thousands of people will stand up this day and say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ His only Son," whose words would stick in their throats if that question of the Master's was put to them, "Do you now believe?" And I wonder how many of us are the fools of our own verbal acknowledgements of Christ. Self-examination is not altogether a wholesome exercise, and it may easily be carried too far, to the destruction of the spontaneity and the gladness of the Christian life. A man may set his pulse going irregularly by simply concentrating his attention upon it, and there

may be self-examination of the wrong sort, which does harm rather than good. But, on the other hand, we all need to verify our position, lest our outward life should fatally slip away from correspondence with our inward. Our words and acts of Christian profession and service are like bank notes. What will be the end if there is a whole ream of such going up and down the world, and no balance of bullion in the cellars to meet them? Nothing but bankruptcy. Do you see to it that your reserve of gold, deep down in your hearts, always leaves a margin beyond the notes in circulation issued by you. And in the midst of your professions hear the Master saying, "Do you now believe?"

Another lesson that I draw is, trust no emotions, no religious experiences, but only Him to whom they turn.

These men were perfectly sincere, and there was a glow of gladness in their hearts, and a real though imperfect faith when they spoke. In an hour's time where were they?

We often deal far too hard measure to these poor disciples, in our estimate of their conduct at that critical moment. We talk about them as cowards. Well, they were better and they were worse than cowards; for their courage failed second, but their faith had failed first. The Cross made them cowards because it destroyed their confidence in Jesus Christ.

"We trusted." Ah! what a world of sorrow there is in those two final letters of that word. "We trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel." But they do not trust it any more, and so why should they put themselves in peril for One on whom their faith can no longer build? Would we have been any better if we had been there? Suppose you had stood afar off and seen Jesus die on the cross, would your faith have lived? Do we not know what it is to be a great deal more exuberant in our professions of faith--and real faith it is, no doubt--in some quiet hour when we are with Him by ourselves, than when swords are flashing and we are in the presence of His antagonists? Do we not know what it is to grasp conviction at one moment, and the next to find it gone like a handful of mist from our clutch? Is our Christian life always lived upon one high uniform level? Have we no experience of hours of exhaustion coming after deep religious emotion? "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone." There will not be many stones flung if that law be applied. Let us all, recognizing our own weakness, trust to nothing, either in our convictions or our emotions, but only to Him, and cry, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe."

III.--Lastly, note the lonely Christ and His companion.

"You shall leave me alone." There is sadness, though it be calm, in that clause. And then, I suppose, there was a moment's pause before the quiet voice began again. "And yet I am not alone, for the Father is with Me." There are two currents there, both calm; but the one bright and the other dark.

Jesus was the loneliest man that ever lived. All other forms of human solitude were concentrated in His. He knew the pain of unappreciated aims, unaccepted love, unbelieving teachings, a heart thrown back upon itself. No man understood Him, no man knew Him, no man deeply and thoroughly loved Him or sympathized with Him, and He dwelt apart. He felt the pain of solitude more sharply than sinful men do. Perfect purity is keenly susceptible; a heart fully charged with love is wounded sore when the love is thrown back, and all the more sorely the more unselfish it is.

Solitude was no small part of the pain of Christ's passion. Remember the pitiful appeal in Gethsemane, "Wait here and watch with Me." Remember the threefold vain returns to the sleepers in the hope of finding some sympathy from them. Remember the emphasis with which, more than once in His life, He foretold the loneliness of His death. And then let us understand how the bitterness of the cup that He drank had for not the least bitter of its ingredients the sense that He drank it all alone.

Now, dear friends, some of us, no doubt, have to live outwardly solitary lives. We all of us live alone after all fellowship and communion. Physicists tell us that in the most solid bodies the atoms do not touch. Hearts come closer than atoms, but yet, after all, we die alone, and in the depths of our souls we all live alone. So let us be thankful that the Master knows the bitterness of solitude, and has Himself trod that path.

Then we have the calm consciousness of unbroken communion. Jesus Christ's sense of union with the Father was deep, close, constant, in manner and measure altogether transcending any experience of ours. But still He sets before us a pattern of what we should aim at in these great words. They show the path of comfort for every lonely heart. "I am not alone, for the Father is with Me." If earth be dark, let us look to Heaven. If the world with its millions seems to have no friend in it for us, let us turn to Him who never leaves us. If dear ones are torn from our grasp, let us grasp God. Solitude is bitter; but, like other bitters, it is a tonic. It is not all loss if the trees which with their leafy beauty shut out the sky from us are felled, and so we see the blue.

Christ's company is to us what the Father's fellowship was to Christ. He has borne solitude that He might be the companion of all the lonely. And the same voice which said, "Ye shall leave Me alone," said also, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world." But that communion of Christ with the Father was broken, in that awful hour when He cried: "My God why hast Thou forsaken Me?" We tread there on the verge of mysteries beyond our comprehension; but this we know--that it was our sin and the world's made His by His willing identifying of Himself with us, which built up that black wall of separation. That hour of utter desolation, forsaken by God, deserted by men, was the hour of the world's redemption. And Jesus Christ was forsaken by God and deserted by men, that you and I might never be either the one or the other, but might find in His sweet and constant companionship at once the fellowship of a man and the presence of a God.

S. Take Up the Challenge

Take Up the Challenge

ANOTHER PSALMIST PROMISES TO the man who dwells "in the secret place of the Most High" that "he shall not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh at noonday," but shall "tread upon the lion and adder." These promises divide the dangers that beset us into the same two classes as our psalmist does—the one secret; the other palpable and open. The former, which, as I explained in my last sermon, are sins hidden, not from others, but from the doer, may fairly be likened to the pestilence that stalks slaying in the dark, or to the stealthy, gliding serpent, which strikes and poisons before the naked foot is aware. The other resembles the "destruction that wasteth at noonday," or the lion with its roar and its spring, as, disclosed from its covert, it leaps upon the prey.

Our present text clears with the latter of these two classes. "Presumptuous sins" does not, perhaps, convey to an ordinary reader the whole significance of the phrase, for it may be taken to define a single class of sins—namely, those of pride or insolence. What is really meant is just the opposite of "secret sins"—all sorts of evil which, whatever may be their motives and other qualities, have this in common, that the doer, when he does them, knows them to be wrong.

The Psalmist gets this further glimpse into the terrible possibilities which attach even to a servant of God, and we have in our text these three things—a danger discerned; a help sought; and a daring hope cherished.

A Danger Discerned

Note, then, the first of these, the dreaded and discerned danger—"presumptuous sins" which may "have dominion over" us, and lead us at last to a "great transgression."

Now the word which is translated "presumptuous" literally means that which boils or bubbles; and it sets very picturesquely before us the movement of hot desires—the agitation of excited impulses or inclinations which hurry men into sin in spite of their consciences. It is also to be noticed that the prayer of my text, with singular pathos and lowly self-consciousness, is the prayer of "Thy servant," who knows himself to be a servant, and who therefore knows that these glaring transgressions, done in the teeth of conscience and consciousness, are all inconsistent with his standing and his profession, but yet are perfectly possible for him.

An old medieval mystic once said, "There is nothing weaker than the devil stripped naked." Would it were true! For there is one thing that is weaker than a discovered devil, and that is my own heart. For we all know that sometimes, with our eyes open, and the most unmistakable consciousness that what we are doing was wrong, we have set our teeth and done it, Christian men though we may profess to be, and may really be. All such conduct is inconsistent with Christianity but we are not to say, Therefore, that it is incompatible with Christianity. Thank God! that is a very different matter. But as long as you and I have two things—viz., strong and hot desires, and weak and

flabby wills—so long shall we, in this world full of combustibles, not be beyond the possibility of a dreadful conflagration being kindled by some devil-blown sparks. There are plenty of dry sticks lying about to put under the cauldron of our hearts, to make them boil and bubble over! And we have, alas! but weak wills, which do not always keep the reins in their hands as they ought to do, nor coerce these lower parts of our nature into their proper subordination. Fire is a good servant, but a bad master; and we are all of us too apt to let it become master, and then the whole "course of nature" is "set on fire of hell" The servant of God may yet, with open eyes and obstinate disregard of his better self, and of all its remonstrances, go straight into "presumptuous sin."

Another step is here taken by the Psalmist. He looks shrinkingly and shudderingly into a possible depth, and he sees, going down into the abyss, a ladder with three rungs on it. The topmost one is wilful, self-conscious transgression. But that is not the lowest stage; there is another step. Presumptuous sin tends to become despotic sin. "Let them not have dominion over me." A man may do a very bad thing once, and get so wholesomely frightened, and so keenly conscious of the disastrous issues, that he will never go near it again. The prodigal would not be in a hurry, you may depend upon it, to try the swine trough and the far country, and the rags, and the fever, and the famine any more. David got a lesson that he never forgot in that matter of Bathsheba. The bitter fruit of his sin kept growing up all his life, and he had to eat it, and that kept him right. They tell us that broken bones are stronger at the point of fracture than they were before. And it is possible for a man's sin—if I might use a paradox which you will not misunderstand—to become the instrument of his salvation.

But there is another possibility quite as probable, and very often recurring, and that is that the disease, like some other morbid states of the human frame, shall leave a tendency to recurrence. A pin-point hole in a dike will widen into a gap as big as a church-door in ten minutes, by the pressure of the flood behind it. And so every act which we do in contradiction of our standing as professing Christians, and in the face of the protests, all unavailing, of that conscience which is only a voice, and has no power to enforce its behests, will tend to recurrence once and again. The single acts become habits, with awful rapidity. Just as the separate gas jets from a multitude of minute apertures coalesce into a continuous ring of light, so deeds become habits, and get dominion over us. "He sold himself to do evil." He made himself a bond-slave of iniquity. It is an awful and a miserable thing to think that professing Christians do often come into that position of being, by their inflamed passions and enfeebled wills, servants of the evil that they do. Alas! how many of us, if we were honest with ourselves, would have to say, "I am carnal, sold unto sin."

That is not the lowest rung of the slippery ladder. Despotic sin ends in utter departure.

The word translated here, quite correctly, "transgression," and intensified by that strong adjective attached, "a great transgression," literally means rebellion, revolt, or some such idea; and expresses, as the ultimate issue of conscious transgression prolonged and perpetuated into habit, an entire casting off of allegiance to God. "No man can serve two masters." "His servants ye are whom ye obey," whomsoever you may call your master. The Psalmist feels that the end of indulged evil is going over altogether to the other camp. I suppose all of us have known instances of that sort. Men in my position, with a long life of ministry behind them, can naturally remember many such instances. And this is the outline history of the suicide of a Christian. First secret sin, unsuspected, because the conscience is torpid; then open sin, known to be such, but done

nevertheless; then dominant sin, with an enfeebled will and power of resistance; then the abandonment of all presence or profession of religion. The ladder goes down into the pit, but not to the bottom of the pit. And the man that is going down it has a descending impulse after he has reached the bottom step and he falls—Where? The first step down is tampering with conscience. It is neither safe nor wise to do anything, howsoever small, against that voice. All the rest will come afterward, unless God restrains—"first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear," and then the bitter harvest of the poisonous grain.

A Help Sought So, secondly, note the help sought. The Psalmist is like a man standing on the edge of some precipice, and peeping over the brink to the profound beneath, and feeling his head beginning to swim. He clutches at the strong, steady hand of his guide, knowing that, unless he is restrained, over he will go. "Keep Thou back Thy servant from presumptuous sins." So, then, the first lesson we have to take is, to cherish a lowly consciousness of our own tendency to light-headedness and giddiness. "Blessed is the man that feareth always." That fear has nothing cowardly about it. It will not abate in the least the buoyancy and bravery of our work. It will not tend to make us shirk duty because there is temptation in it, but it will make us go into all circumstances realizing that without that Divine help we cannot stand, and that with it we cannot fall. "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe." The same Peter that said, "Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I," was wiser and braver when he said, in later days, being taught by former presumption, "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

Let me remind you, too, that the attitude which we ought to cherish is that of a confident belief in the reality of a Divine support. The prayer of my text has no meaning at all, unless the actual supernatural communication by God's own Holy Spirit breathed into men's hearts be a simple truth. "Hold Thou me up," "keep Thou me back," means, if it means anything, Give me in my heart a mightier strength than mine own, which shall curb all this evil nature of mine, and bring it into conformity with Thy holy will.

How is that restraining influence to be exercised ? There are many ways by which God, in His providence, can fulfil the prayer. But the way above all others is by the actual operation upon heart and will and desires of a Divine Spirit, which uses for its weapon the Word of God, revealed by Jesus Christ, and in the Scriptures. "The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God" and God's answer to the prayer of my text is the gift to every man who seeks it of that indwelling power to sustain and to restrain.

That will keep our passions down. The bubbling water is lowered in its temperature, and ceases to bubble, when cold is added to it. When God's Spirit comes into a man's heart, that will deaden his desires after earth and forbidden ways. It will bring blessed higher objects for all our affections. He who has been fed on "the hidden manna" will not be likely to hanker after the leeks and onions, however strong their smell and pungent their taste, that grew in the Nile mud in Egypt. He who has tasted the higher sweetnesses of God will have his heart's desires after lower delights strangely deadened and cooled. Get near God, and open your hearts for the entrance of that Divine Spirit, and then it will not seem foolish to empty your hands of the trash that they carry in order to grasp the precious things that He gives. A bit of scrap iron magnetized aligns itself with a magnetic field. My heart, touched by the Spirit of God dwelling in me, will turn to Him, and I shall find little sweetness in the else tempting delicacies that earth can supply. "Keep Thy servant back from," by

depriving him of the taste for, "presumptuous sins."

That Spirit will strengthen our wills. For, when God comes into a heart, He restores the due subordination which has been broken into discord and anarchy by sin. He dismounts the servant riding on horseback, and carrying the horse to the devil, according to the proverb, and gives the reins into the right hands. Now, if the gift of God's Spirit, working through the Word of God, and the principles and the motives therein unfolded, and therefrom deducible, be the great means by which we are to be kept from open and conscious transgression, it follows very plainly that our task is twofold. One part of it is to see that we cultivate that spirit of lowly dependence, of self-conscious weakness, of triumphant confidence, which will issue in the perpetual prayer for God's restraint. When we enter upon tasks which may be dangerous, and into regions of temptation which cannot but be so, though they be duty, we should ever have the desire in our hearts and upon our lips that God would keep us from, and in, the evil.

The other part of our duty is to make it a matter of conscience and careful cultivation, to use honestly and faithfully the power which, in response to our desires, has been granted to us. All of you, Christian men and women, have access to an absolute security against every transgression; and the cause lies wholly at your own doors in each case of failure, deficiency, or transgression, for at every moment it was open to you to clasp the hand that holds you up, and at every moment, if you failed, it was because your careless fingers had relaxed their grasp.

The Challenge

Lastly, observe the daring hope here cherished.

"Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." That is the upshot of the Divine answer to both the petitions, which have been occupying us in these two successive sermons. It is connected with the former of them by the recurrence of the same word, which in the first petition was rendered "cleanse"—or, more accurately, "clear"—and in this final clause is to be rendered accurately, "I shall be clear from the great transgression." And it obviously connects in sense with both these petitions, because, in order to be upright and clear, there must, first of all, be the Divine cleansing and then Divine restraint.

So, then, nothing short of absolute deliverance from the power of sin in all its forms should content the servant of God. Nothing short of it contents the Master for the servant. Nothing short of it corresponds to the power which Christ puts in operation in every heart that believes in Him. And nothing else should be our aim in our daily conflict with evil and growth in grace. Ah! I fear me that, for an immense number of professing Christians in this generation, the hope of—and, still more, the aim towards—anything approximating to entire deliverance from sin, have faded from their consciences and their lives. Aim at the stars, brother, and, if you do not hit them, your arrow will go higher than if it were shot along the lower levels.

Note that an indefinite approximation to this condition is possible. I am not going to discuss, at this stage of my discourse, controversial questions which may be involved here. It will be time enough to discuss with you whether you can be absolutely free from sin in this world when you are a great deal freer from it than you are at present. At all events, you can get far nearer to the ideal, and the ideal must always be perfect. And I lay it on your hearts, dear friends, that you have in your possession, if you are Christian people, possibilities in the way of conformity to the Master's will,

and emancipation from all corruption, that you have not yet dreamed of, not to say applied to your lives. "I pray God that He would sanctify you wholly, and that your whole body, soul, and spirit be preserved blameless unto the coming."

That daring hope will be fulfilled one day; for nothing short of it will exhaust the possibilities of Christ's work or satisfy the desires of Christ's heart.

The Gospel knows nothing of irreclaimable outcasts. To it there is but one unpardonable sin, and that is the sin of refusing the cleansing of Christ's blood and the sanctifying of Christ's Spirit. Whoever you are, whatever you are, go to God with this prayer of our text, and realize that it is answered in Jesus Christ, and you will not ask in vain. If you will put yourselves into His hands, and let Him cleanse and restrain, He will give you new powers to detect the serpents in the flowers, and new resolution to shake off the vipers into the fire. For there is nothing that God wants half so much as that we, His wandering children, should come back to Him, and He will cleanse us from the filth of the swine trough and the rags of our exile, and clothe us in fine linen clean and white. We may each be sinless and guiltless. We can be so in one way only. If we look to Jesus Christ, and live near Him, He "will be made of God unto us wisdom," by which we shall detect our secret sins; "righteousness," whereby we shall be cleansed from guilt; "sanctification," which shall restrain us from open transgression; "and redemption," by which we shall be wholly delivered from evil and presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

S. The Absent Present Christ

The Absent Present Christ

THE SWEET AND GRACIOUS comforting with which Christ had been soothing the disciples' fears went very deep, but hitherto they had not gone deep enough. It was much that they should know the purpose of His going, whither He went, and that they had an interest in His departure. It was much that they should have before them the prospect of reunion; much that they should know that all through His absence He would be working in them, and that they should be assured that, absent, He would send them a great gift. But reunion, influence from afar, and gifts from the other side of the gulf were not all that their hearts needed. And so here our Lord gives yet more, in the paradoxes that, absent He will be present, unseen visible, and dying will be for them for ever, life and life-giving. These great thoughts go to the centre of their needs and of ours; and on them I now touch briefly.

There are in the words I have read, though they be but a fragment of a closely-linked together context, these three great thoughts then: the absent Christ the present Christ; the unseen Christ the seen Christ; the Christ who dies life and life-giving. Let us look at these as they stand.

First, then, the absent Christ is the present Christ.

"I will not leave you comfortless," or, as the Revised Version has it, "desolate-I come to you." Now, most of us know, I suppose, that the literal meaning of the word rendered "comfortless," or "desolate," is "orphans." But that is rather an unusual form in which to represent the relation between our Lord and His disciples. And so, possibly, our versions are accurate in giving the general idea of desolation rather than the specific idea conveyed directly by the word. But still it is to be remembered that this whole conversation begins with "Little children "; and there seems to be no strong reason for suppressing the literal meaning of the word, if only it be remembered that it is employed not so much to define Christ's relation to His brethren as to describe the comfortless and helpless condition of that little group when left by Him. They would be like fatherless and motherless children in a cold world. And what is to hinder that? One thing only. "I come to you." "Then, and only then, will you cease to be desolate and orphans. My presence will change everything and turn winter into glorious summer."

Now, what is this "coming?" It is to be observed that our Lord says, not "I will," as a future, but "I come," or "I am coming," as an immediately impending, and, we may almost say, present, thing. There can be no reference in the word to that final coming to judgment which lies so far ahead; because, if there were, then there would follow from the text, that, until that period, all that love Him here upon earth are to wander about as orphans, desolate and forsaken; and that certainly can never be. So that we have to recognize here the promise of a coming which is contemporaneous with His absence, and which is, in fact, but the reverse side of His bodily absence.

It is true about Him that He "departs from" His people in bodily form "for a season, that they may receive Him" in a better form "for ever." This, then, is the heart and centre of the consolation here, that howsoever the external presence may be withdrawn, and the "foolish senses" may have to speak of an absent Christ, we may rejoice in the certainty that He is with all those that love Him, and all the more with them because of the very withdrawal of the earthly manifestation which has served its purpose, and now is laid aside as an impediment rather than as a help to the full communion. We confuse bodily with real. The bodily presence is at an end; the real presence lasts for ever.

I do not need to insist, I suppose, upon the manifest implication of absolute Divinity which lies in such words as these. "I come." "Being absent, I am present in all generations. I am present with every single heart." That is equivalent to the Omnipresence of Deity; that is equivalent to or implies the undying existence of the Divine nature. And He that says, when He is leaving earth and withdrawing the sweetness of His visible form from the eyes of men, "I come," in the very act of going, "and I am with you always, with all of you to the end of the ages," can be no less than God, manifest in the flesh for a time, and present in the Spirit with His children for ever.

I cannot but think that the average Christian life of this day woefully fails in the simple, conscious realization of this great truth, and that we are all far too little living in the calm, happy, strengthening assurance that we are never alone, but have Jesus Christ with each of us more closely, more truly, in a more available fashion, and with more Omnipotence of influence than they had who were nearest Him during the days that He lived upon earth.

Oh, brethren, if we really believed, not as an article of our creed, which has become so familiar to us that it produces little impression upon us; but as a vital and ever-present conviction of our souls, that with us there was ever the real presence of the real Christ, how all burdens and cares would be lightened, how all perplexities would begin to smooth themselves out and be straightened, all the force would be sucked out of temptations, and how sorrows and joys and all things would be changed in their aspect by that one conviction intensely realized and constantly with us! A present Christ is the Strength, the Righteousness, the Peace, the Joy, and as we shall see, in the most literal sense, the Life of every Christian soul.

Then, note, further, that this coming of our Lord is identified with that of His Divine Spirit. He has been speaking of sending that "other Comforter," but though He be Another, He is yet so indissolubly united with Him who sends as that the coming of the Spirit is the coming of Jesus. He is no gift wafted to us as from the other side of a gulf, but by reason of the unity of the Godhead and the Divinity of the sent Spirit, Jesus Christ and the Spirit whom He sends are inseparable though separate, and so indissolubly united that where the Spirit is, there is Christ, and where Christ is, there is the Spirit. These are amongst the deep things which the disciples were "not able to carry" at that stage of their development, and they waited for a further explanation. Enough for them and enough for us, to know that we have Christ in the Spirit and the Spirit in Christ; and to remember "that if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

We stand here on the margin of a shoreless and fathomless sea; and for my part I venture to think that the men who talk about the incredibilities and the contradictions of the orthodox faith would show themselves a little wiser if they were more conscious of the limitation of human faculty, and remembered that to pronounce upon contradictions in the doctrine of the Divine Nature implies

that the pronouncer stands above and goes round about the whole of that Nature. So, for my part, abjuring omniscience and the comprehension of Deity, I accept the statement that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit come together and dwell in the heart.

Then, note, further, that this present Christ is the only Remedy for the orphanhood of the world. The words had a tender and pathetic reference to that little, bewildered group of followers, deprived of their Guide, their Teacher, and their Companion. He who had been as eyes to their weak vision, and Counsellor and Inspirer and everything for three blessed years, was going away to leave them unsheltered to the storm. And we can understand how forlorn and terrified they were, when they looked forward to fronting the things that must come to them, without His presence. Therefore He cheers them with the assurance that they will not be left without Him, but that, present still just because He is absent, He will be all that He ever had been to them.

And the promise was fulfilled. How did that dispirited group of cowardly men ever pluck up courage to hold together after the Crucifixion at all? Why was it that they did not follow the example of John's disciples, and dissolve and disappear; and say, "The game is up. It is no use holding together any longer?" The process of separation began on the very day of the Crucifixion. Only one thing could have stopped it, and that is the Resurrection and the presence with His Church of the risen Christ in His power and in all the fulness of His gifts. If it had not been that He came to them, they would have disappeared, and Christianity would have been one more of the abortive sects forgotten in Judaism. But, as it is, the whole of the New Testament after Pentecost is aflame with the consciousness of a present Christ, working amongst His people. And although it be true that, in one aspect, we are "absent from the Lord" when we are present with the body, in another aspect, and an infinitely higher one, it is true that the strength of the Christian life of apostles and martyrs was this, the assurance that Christ Himself-no mere rhetorical metaphor for His influence or His example, or His memory lingering in their imaginations, but the veritable Christ Himself-was present with them, to strengthen and to bless.

That same conviction you and I must have, if the world is not to be a desert and a dreary place for us. In a very profound sense it is true that if you take away Jesus Christ, the elder Brother, who alone reveals to men the Father, we are all orphans, fatherless children, who look up into an empty heaven and see nothing there. It is only Christ who reveals to us the Father and makes our happy hearts feel that we are of His children. And in the wider sense of the word "orphans," is not life a desolation without Him? Hollow joys, fleeting blessednesses, roses whose thorns last long after the petals have dropped, real sorrows, shows and shams, bitternesses and disappointments-are not these our life, in so far as Christ has been driven out of it? Oh! There is only one thing that saves us from being as desolate, fatherless children, groping in the dark for the lost Father's hand, and dying for want of it, and that is that the Christ Himself shall come to us and be with us.

The Unseen Christ Is A Seen Christ.

It is clear that the period referred to in the second clause of our text is the same as that referred to in the first, that "yet a little while" covers the whole space up to His ascension; and that if there be any reference at all to the forty days of His earthly life, during which, literally, the world "saw Him no more," but "the apostles saw Him," that reference is only secondary. These transitory appearances are not of sufficient moment or duration to bear the weight of so great a promise as this. The vision, which is the consequence of the coming, has the same extension in time as the

coming-that is to say, is continuous and permanent. We must read here the great promise of a perpetual vision of the present Christ. It is clear, too, that the word "see" is employed in these two clauses in two different senses. In the former it refers only to bodily sight, in the latter to spiritual perception. For a few short hours still, the ungodly mass of men were to have that outward vision which might have been so much to them, but which they had used so badly that "they seeing saw not." It was to cease, and they who loved Him would not miss it when it did; but the withdrawal which hid Him from sense and sense-bound souls would reveal Him more clearly to His friends. They, too, had but dimly seen Him while He stood by them; they would gaze on Him with truer insight when He was present though absent.

So this is what every Christian life may and should be-the continual sight of a continually-present Christ. It is His part to come. It is ours to see, to be conscious of Him who does come.

Faith is the sight of the soul, and it is far better than the sight of the senses. It is more direct. My eye does not touch what I look at. Gulfs of millions of miles may lie between me and it. But my faith is not only eye, but hand, and not only beholds, but grasps, and comes into contact with that to which it is directed. It is far more clear. Senses may deceive; my faith, built upon His Word, cannot deceive. Its information is far more certain, far more valid. I have better reason for believing in Jesus Christ than I have for believing in the things that I touch and handle. So that there is no need for men to say, "Oh, if we had only seen Him with our eyes!" You would very likely not have known Him if you had. There is no reason for thinking that the Church has retrograded in its privileges, because it has to love instead of beholding, and to believe instead of touching. That is advance, and we are better than they, inasmuch as the blessing of those who have not seen, and yet have believed, comes down upon our heads. The vision of Christ which is granted to the faithful soul is better and not worse, more and not less, other in kind indeed, but loftier in degree too, than that which was granted to the men who saw Him upon earth. Sense disturbs, faith alone beholds.

"The world seeth Me no more." Why? Because it is a world. "Ye see Me." Why? Because, and in the measure in which you have "turned away your eyes from seeing vanity." If you want the eye of the soul to be opened, you must shut the eye of sense. And the more we turn away from looking at the dazzling lies with which time and the material universe befool and bewilder us, the more shall we see Him whom to see is to live for ever.

Oh! Brethren, does that strong word "see" in any measure express the vividness, the directness, the certainty of our realization of our Master's presence? Is Jesus Christ as clear, as perceptible, as sure to us as the men round us are? Which are the shadows and which are the realities to us? The things which are seen, which the senses crown as "real," or the things which cannot be seen because they are so great, and tower above us, invisible in their eternity? Which world are our eyes most open to, the world where Christ is, or the world here? Our happy eyes may behold and our blessed hands may handle the Word of Life which was manifested to us. Let us beware that we turn not away from the one thing worthy to be looked at, to gaze upon a desolate and dreary world.

Lastly, the present and seen Christ is life and life-giving. The last words of my text may be connected with the preceding, as the marginal rendering of the Revised Version shows. But it is probably better to take them as standing independently, and presenting another and co-ordinate element of the blessedness arising from the coming of the Christ. Because He comes, His life

passes into the hearts of the men to whom He comes, and who gaze upon Him.

Time forbids me to dwell upon that majestic proclamation of His own absolute and Divine life, from lips that were so soon to be paled with death. Mark the grand "I live"-the timeless present tense, which expresses unbroken, underived, undying, and, as I believe, Divine life. It is all but a quotation of the great Old Testament name "Jehovah." The depth and sweep of its meaning are given to us in this apostle's Apocalypse, where Christ is called "the living One," who lived whilst He died, and having died "is alive for evermore."

And this Christ, coming to all His friends, possessor of the fulness of life in Himself, and proclaiming His absolute possession of that life, even whilst He stands within arm's length of Calvary, is life-giver to all that love Him and trust Him.

We live because He lives. In all senses of the word life, as I believe, the life of men is derived from the Christ who is the agent of creation, the channel from whom life passes from the Godhead into the creatures, and who is also the one means by whom any of us can ever hope to live the better life which is the only true one, and consists in fellowship with God and union to Him.

We shall live as long as He lives, and His being is the pledge and the guarantee of the immortal being of all who love Him. Anything is possible, rather than that it should be credible that a soul, which has drawn spiritual life from Jesus Christ here upon earth, should ever be rent apart from Him by such a miserable and external trifle as the mere dissolution of the bodily frame. As long as Christ lives your life is secure. If the Head has life, the members cannot see corruption. "Take me not away in the midst of my days: Thy years are throughout all generations" was the prayer of a saint of old, deeply feeling the contrast of the worshipper's transiency and God's eternity, and dimly hoping that the contrast might be changed into likeness. The great promise of our text answers the prayer, and assures us that the worshipper is to live as long as does He whom he adores.

We shall live as He lives, nor ever cease the appropriation of His being until all His life we know, and all its fulness has expanded our natures-and that will be never. Therefore we shall not die.

Men's lives have been prolonged by the transfusion of blood from vigorous frames. Jesus Christ passes His own blood into our veins, and makes us immortal. The Church chose for one of its ancient emblems of the Saviour the pelican, which fed its young, according to the fable, with the blood from its own breast. So Christ vitalizes us. He in us is our life.

Brethren, without Jesus Christ we are orphans in a fatherless world. Without Him our wearied and yet unsatisfied eyes have only trifles and trials and trash to look at. Without Him, we are dead whilst we live. He and He only can give us back a Father, and renew in us the spirit of sons. He and He only can satisfy our eyes with the sight which is purity and restfulness and joy. He and He only can breathe life into our death. Oh! Let Him do it for you. He comes to us with all these gifts in His hands, for He comes to give us himself. And in Himself, as "in a box where sweets compacted lie," are all that lonely hearts and wearied eyes and dead souls can ever need. All are yours if you are Christ's. All are yours if He is yours. And He is yours if by faith and love you make yourselves His and Him your own.

S. The Cross the Proof

The Cross the Proof

GOD COMMENDETH HIS LOVE. That is true and beautiful, but that is not all that the apostle means. We "commend" persons and things when we speak of them with praise and confidence. If that were the meaning of my text, it would represent the death of Christ as setting forth, in a manner to win our hearts, the greatness, the excellence, the transcendency, of God's love. But there is more than that in the words. The expression here employed strictly means "to set two things side by side," and it has two meanings in the New Testament, both derived from that original signification. It sometimes means to set two persons side by side, in the way of introducing and recommending the one to the other. It sometimes means to set two things side by side, in the way of confirming or proving the one by the other. It is used in the latter sense here. God not merely "commends," but "proves," His love by Christ's death. It is the one evidence which makes that often-doubted fact certain. Through it alone is it possible to hold the conviction that, in spite of all that seems to contradict the belief, God is Love. And so I wish to take the words in this sermon.

The Need for Proof That God Does Love To hear some men speak, you would suppose that one of the simplest, clearest, and most indisputable of all convictions was the love of God. People are found in plenty who reject the distinctive teaching of Christianity because they say that the sterner aspects of the evangelical faith seem to them to limit, or to contradict, the great fundamental truth of all religion, as they take it, that God is Love. My friends, such people are kicking away the ladder by which they climbed. I venture to say that instead of the love of God being a plain, self-evident axiom, there needs very B evidence to give it a secure lodging-place amongst our settled beliefs.

Do the world's religions bear out the contention that it is so easy and natural for a man to believe in a loving God? I think not. Comparative mythology has taught a great many lessons, and amongst others this, that, apart from the direct or indirect influences of Christianity, there is no creed to be found in which the belief in a God of love and in the love of God is unfalteringly proclaimed, to say nothing of being set as the very climax of the whole revelation. If this were the place, one could pass in review men's thoughts about God and ask you to look at all that assemblage of beings before whom mankind has bowed down. What would you find? Gods cruel, gods careless, gods capricious, gods lustful, gods mighty, gods mysterious, gods pitying-with a contempt mingled with the pity-their sorrows and follies of mankind. But in all the pantheons there is not a loving god.

Before Jesus Christ there was no such thought, or if it were there at all, it was there as a faint hope, a germ overlaid by other conceptions. Independent of Jesus Christ's influence, there is no such thought now.

Where you find the death of Christ as the proof rejected and the conviction retained, as is often the case, you have only a sign that "the river of the water of life" has percolated to the roots of many a tree that grows far from its banks. It is Christ who has brought the fire of this conviction, in the broken reed of His dying flesh, and lodged it in the heart of humanity. So I say the love of God, as

is proved by men's thoughts about Him, surely needs to be established on a basis of unmistakable evidence.

I add that all other evidences are insufficient. Do you appeal, in the fashion of Paley and the natural theologians, to the evidence of God in creation? Ah! you have invoked a very ambiguous oracle that seems to speak with two voices. I say nothing about the modification that argument has necessarily assumed if the theory of evolution is accepted. I do not think it is destroyed, but it is profoundly modified. For if God put into matter the promise and the potency of all these variations, He must lie back of the process, and be conceived of as forecasting, if not guiding, the evolution ' which ends in development. So the argument has only changed in its form and is unaffected in its substance.

But, putting aside all that, you speak of the goodness of God around us. What about storms, earthquakes, disasters, contrivances of producing pain, the law of destruction by which the creatures live by the slaying of one another-what about all these things? "Nature, red in tooth and claw with rapine, shrieks against the creed," that God is Love. And if we have nothing but the evidence of nature, it seems to me that there are two voices speaking there: One says, "There is a good God;" the other says, "Either His power is limited, or His goodness is partial."

The same ambiguous issue comes from the evidence of human life. Ah! brethren, we have only to look into our own lives and to look round upon the awful sights that fill the world to make the robustest faith in the goodness and love of God stagger, unless it can stay itself against the upright stem of the cross of Christ. Sentimentalists may talk, but the grim fact of human suffering, of wretched, hopeless lives, rises up to say that there is no evidence broad and deep and solid enough, outside of Christianity, to make it absolutely certain that God is Love.

There is another thing that makes necessary some irrefutable proof far firmer and better than any of these that I have been referring to. That is, that conscience rises up and protests, when it is awake, against such a notion, apart from the cross. Everybody who honestly takes stock of himself and conceives of God in any measure aright, must feel that sin has come in to disturb all the relations between God and man. And when once a man comes to say, "I feel that I am a sinful man, and that God is a righteous God; how can I expect that His love will distill in blessings upon my head?" there is only one answer-"Whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

So, for all these reasons I venture to lay it down as a principle, in spite of modern teaching of another sort, that the love of God is not a self-evident axiom, but needs to be proved.

The Death That Does Prove the Love

How do we know, in our own happy experiences, that love toward us exists in another heart? Surely, by act. Words are well (and words are acts, of a sort); but we want something more. Paul thinks that- mightier than all demonstrations of a verbal kind, in order to establish the fact of love in the Divine heart to men-there must be some conspicuous and unmistakable act that is the outcome of that love. So mark that, when he wants to enforce this great truth-the shining climax of all the gospel revelation of the love of God, he does not go back to Christ's gentle words, nor to His teaching of God as the Father. Paul does not point to anything that Christ says, but he points to one thing that He did, and he says, "There! that cross is the demonstration."

And, since it has a special bearing on my subject, I wish to emphasize that distinction and to beseech you to believe that you have not got within sight of the secret of Jesus, nor come near tapping the sources of His power if you confine yourselves to His words and His teaching, or even to the lower acts of His gentle life. You must go to the cross. It would have been much that Paul would have spoken with certitude and with sweetness else unparalleled of the love of God. But words, however eloquent, however true, are not enough for the soul to rest its weight upon. We must have deeds, and these are all summed in "Christ died for us."

Now, there are but two things that I wish to say about this great proof of the love of God in act.

First, Christ's death proves God's love, because Christ is Divine. How else do you account for that extraordinary shifting of the persons in my text? "God proves His love because Christ died?" How so? God proved His love because Socrates died? God proved His love because some self-sacrificing doctor went into a hospital and died in curing others? God proved His love because some man sprang into the sea and rescued a drowning woman, at the cost of his own life? Would such talk hold? Then I wish to know how it comes that Paul ventures to say that God proved His love because Jesus Christ died.

Unless we believe that Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son of the Father, whom the Father sent, and who willingly came for us men and for our redemption; unless we believe that, as He Himself said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9); unless we believe that His death was the act, the consequence, and the revelation of the love of God, who dwelt in Him as in none other of the sons of men, for one, venture to think that Paul is talking nonsense in my text, and that his argument is not worth a straw. You must come to the full-toned belief which, as I think, permeates and binds together every page of the New Testament--God so loved the world, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for sins; that Son who in the beginning was with God, and was God; and then a flood of light is poured on the words of my text, and we can adoringly bow the head and say, "Amen! God hath, to my understanding, and to my heart, proved and commended His love, in that Christ died for us!"

The second thought about this death that proves the love is, that it does so because it is a death for us. That "for us" implies two things: one, the voluntary act of God in Christ in giving Himself up to the death, the other the beneficial effect of that death. It was on our behalf. Therefore, it was the spontaneous outgush of an infinite love. It was for us in that it brought an infinite benefit. And so it was a token and a manifestation of the love of God such as nothing else could be.

Now, I wish to ask a question very earnestly: In what conceivable way can Christ's death be a real benefit to me? How can it do me any good? A sweet, a tender, an unexampled, beautiful story of innocence and meekness and martyrdom which will shine in the memory of the world, and on the pages of history, as long as the world shall last. It is all that; but what good does it do me? Where does the benefit to me individually come in? There is only one answer, and I urge you to ask yourselves if, in plain, sober, common sense, the death of Jesus Christ means anything at all to anybody, more than other martyrdoms and beautiful deaths, except upon one supposition, that He died for us, because He died instead of us. The two things are not necessarily identical, but, as I believe, and venture to press upon you, in this case they are identical. I do not know where you will find any justification for the rapturous language of the whole New Testament about the death of Christ and its benefits flowing to the whole world, unless you take the Master's own words, "The

Son of Man came to minister, and to give His life a ransom instead of many" (Mark 10:45).

Ah, dear friends, there we touch the bedrock. That is the truth that flashes up the cross into luster before which the sun's light is but darkness. He who bore it died for the whole world and was the eternal Son of the Father. If we believe that, then we can understand how Paul here blends together the heart of God and the heart of Christ, and sets high above nature and her ambiguous oracles, high above providence and its many perplexities, and in face of all the shrinkings and fears of a reasonably alarmed conscience, the one truth, "God hath proved His love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Is that your faith, your notion of Christ's death and of its relation to the love of God?

The Love Which Is Proved by the Death

There is much bearing upon that in my text, which I can barely spare time to draw out. But let us think for a moment of the fact which is thus the demonstration of the love of God and try to realize what it is that, that cross says to us as we gaze upon the silent Sufferer meekly hanging there. I know that my words must fall far beneath the theme, but I can only hope that you will listen to them charitably and try to better them for yourselves in your own thoughts.

I look, then, to the dying Christ, and I see there the revelation, because the consequence-of a love that is not called forth by any loveliness on the part of its objects. The apostle emphasizes the thought, if we render his words fully, because he says, "God proves His own love." It is a love which, like all that belongs to that timeless, self-determining Being, has its reason and its roots in Himself alone. We love because we discern the object to be lovable. God loves by what I may venture to call the very necessity of His nature. Like some artesian well that needs no pumps nor machinery to draw up the sparkling waters to flesh in the sunlight, there gushes up from the depths of His own heart the love that pours over every creature He has made. He loves because He is God.

In like manner, another word of my text bears upon this matter, for he says, "Whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Oh! brethren, it is only the gospel of a dying Christ that can calm the reasonable consciousness of discord and antagonism that springs in a man's heart when he lets his conscience speak. It is because He died for us that we are sure now that the black mountain-wall of our sin, which, to our own apprehension, rises separating between us and our God is, if I may so say, surged over by the rising flood of His love. The cross of Christ teaches me that, and so it is the gospel for men that know themselves to be sinners. Is there anything else that teaches it? I know not where it is, if there be.

That dying Christ, hanging there in the silence and the darkness of eclipse, speaks to me too, of a Divine love which, though not turned away by man's sin, is rigidly righteous.

I referred, at the beginning of my remarks, to the current, easy-going religion that says, "Oh! we do not want any of your evangelical contrivances for forgiveness. God is Love. That is enough for us." I venture to say that the thing which that form of thought calls love is not love at all, but pure weakness. Such in a king or in a father would be immoral. It is not otherwise in God. My brother! Unless you can find some means whereby the infinite love of God can get at and soothe the sinner's heart without periling God's righteousness, you have done nothing to the purpose. Such a one-eyed, lop-sided gospel will never work, has not worked, and it never will. But, when I think of

my Christ bearing the sins of the world, I say to myself, "Herein is love. By His stripes we are healed," and in Him love and righteousness are both crowned and wondrously brought into harmonious oneness. Is there anything else that will do that? If there be 1, for one, know not what it is.

Again, when I look on the dying Christ I see a divine love, which is bounded by no limits of time or place. Look at that majestic and significant, commendeth, not commended or proved, as if it were a past fact, sliding away rapidly into the oblivion that wraps all past events as the world gets older, and its memory gets more burdened. It is "commendeth" today, as it commended eighteen hundred years ago.

Remember to whom Paul was speaking-people that had never seen Jesus Christ-many of whom had not been in the world when He left it. Yet He says "that cross stands there for you of this second generation as the present proof of eternal love."

And, my friends, it stands for us men and women in Manchester as truly as for the men and women of Galilee or of Rome. There is no limit of time at all, either to the power of the proof or to the love that it establishes. But today, as long ago of old, and as it will be in the remotest future, the cross of Christ towers up like some great mountain beacon, when all beneath is lost to sight, as the one eternal demonstration of an everlasting love.

And now, dear brethren, proves is a cold word. It is addressed to the head. Commends is a warmer word. It is addressed to the heart. It is not enough to establish the fact that God loves. Arguments may be wrought in frost as well as in fire; and if I have erred in any measure in that regard this evening, I ask pardon of Him and of you. But it is your hearts I want to get at -- through your heads. I do not care to make you orthodox believers in a doctrine. That is all very well, but it is a very small part of our work. I want your hearts to be touched, and that Christ shall be not only the answer to your doubts, but the sovereign of your affections. Do you look on the death of Christ as a death for your sin? In the strength of the revelation that it makes the love of God, do you front the perplexities, the miseries of the world, and the raveled skeins of providence with calm, happy faces? And oh!-most important of all-do you meet that love with an answering love?

There are two passages of Scripture which contain the whole secret of a noble, blessed, human life. And here they are: "God so love the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). If that is your thought about God, you know enough about Him for time and eternity. 'We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). If you can say that about yourself, all is well.

Dear friend, do you believe the one? Do you affirm the other?

S. The Gradual Healing Of The Blind Man

The Gradual Healing Of The Blind Man

THIS MIRACLE, which is only recorded by the Evangelist Mark, has about it several very peculiar features. Some of these it shares with one other of our Lord's miracles, which also is found only in this gospel, and which occurred about the same time; that miracle of healing the deaf and dumb man recorded in the previous chapter. Both of them have these points in common: that our Lord takes the sufferer away and works His miracle in privacy; that in both there is an abundant use of the same singular means-our Lord's touch, and the saliva upon His finger; and that in both there is the urgent injunction of entire secrecy laid upon the recipient of the benefit.

But this miracle had another peculiarity, in which it stands absolutely alone, and that is that the work is done in stages; that the power which at other times has but to speak and it is done, here seems to labor, and the cure comes slowly; that in the middle Christ pauses, and like a physician trying the experiment of a drug, asks the patient if any effect is produced, and getting the answer that some mitigation is realized, repeats the application, and perfect recovery is the result.

Now, how unlike that is to all the rest of Christ's miraculous working we do not need to point out; but the question may arise, what is the meaning, and what the reason, and what the lessons of this unique and anomalous form of miraculous working? It is to that question that I wish to turn now: for I think that the answer will open up to us some very precious things in regard to that great Lord, the revelation of whose heart and character is the inmost and the loftiest meaning both of His words and of His works.

I take these three points of peculiarity to which I have referred: the privacy, the strange and abundant use of means veiling the miraculous power, and the gradual, slow nature of the cure. I see in them these three things: Christ isolating the man that He would heal; Christ stooping to the sense-bound nature by using outward means; and Christ making His power work slowly, to keep abreast of the man's slow faith.

Christ Isolates the Man Whom He Wanted to Heal

First, then, here we have Christ isolating the man whom He wanted to heal. Now, there may have been something about our Lord's circumstances and purposes at the time of this miracle which accounted for the great urgency with which at this period He impresses secrecy upon all around Him. What that was it is not necessary for us to inquire here, but this is worth noticing, that in obedience to this wish, on His own part, for privacy at the time, He covers over with a veil His miraculous working, and does it quietly, as one might almost say, in a comer. He never sought to display His miraculous working; here He absolutely tries to hide it. That fact of Christ taking pains to conceal His miracle carries in it two great truths: first, about the purpose and nature of miracles in general, and second, about His character, as to each of which a few words may be said.

This fact, of a miracle done in intended secrecy, and shrouded in deep darkness, suggests to us the true point of view from which to look at the whole subject of miracles.

People say they were meant to be attestations of His Divine mission. Yes, no doubt that is true partially; but that was never the sole nor even the main purpose for which they were wrought; and when anybody asked Jesus Christ to work a miracle for that purpose only, He rebuked the desire and refused to gratify it. He wrought the miracle, not coldly, in order to witness to His mission, but every one of them was the token, because it was the outcome, of His own sympathetic heart, brought into contact with human need. And instead of the miracles of Jesus Christ being cold, logical proofs of His mission, they were all glowing with the earnestness of a loving sympathy, and came from Him at sight of sorrow as naturally as rays from the sun.

Then, on the other hand, the same fact carries with it, too, a lesson about His character. Is not He here doing what He tells us to do; "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth"? He dares not wrap His talent in a napkin, He would be unfaithful to His mission if He hid His light under a bushel. All goodness "does good by stealth," even if it does not "blush to find it farne"—and that universal mark of true benevolence marked His. He had to solve in His human life what we have to solve, the problem of keeping the narrow path between ostentation of powers and selfish concealment of faculty; and He solved it thus, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps.

But that is somewhat aside from the main purpose to which I wanted to turn in these first remarks. Christ did not invest the miracle with any of its peculiarities for His own sake only. All that is singular about it, will, I think, find its best explanation in the condition and character of the subject, the man on whom it was wrought. What sort of a man was he? Well, the narrative does not tell us much, but if we use our historical imagination and our eyes we may learn something about him. First he was a Gentile; the land in which the miracle was wrought was the half-heathen country on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. In the second place, it was other people that brought him; he does not come of his own accord. Then again, it is their prayer that is mentioned, not his—he asks nothing.

You see him standing there, hopeless, listless; not believing that this Jewish stranger is going to do anything for him; with his impassive blind face glowing with no entreaty to reinforce his companions' prayers. And suppose he is a man of that sort, with no expectation of anything from this rabbi, how is Christ to get at him? It is no use talking to him. His eyes are shut, so cannot see the sympathy beaming in His face. There is one thing possible—to lay hold of Him by the hand; and the touch, gentle, loving, firm, says this, at least: "Here is a man that has some interest in me, and whether He can do anything or not for me, He is going to try something." Would not that kindle an expectation in him? And is it not in parable just exactly what Jesus Christ does for the whole world? Is not that act of His by which He put out His hand and seized the unbelieving limp hand of the blind man that hung by his side, the very same in principle as that by which He "taketh hold of the seed of Abraham," and is made like to His brethren? Is not the mystery of the Incarnation and the meaning of it wrapped up as in a germ in that little simple incident, He put out His hand and touched him?

Is there not in it too a lesson for all you good-hearted Christian men and women, in all your work? If you want to do anything for your Master and for your brethren, there is only one way to do it—to

come down to their level and get hold of their hands, and then there is some chance of doing them good. We must be content to take the hands of beggars if we are to make the blind to see.

And then, having thus drawn near to the man, and established in his heart some dim expectation of something coming, He gently draws him away out of the little village. I wonder no painter has ever painted that, instead of repeating ad nauseam two or three scenes out of the Gospels. I wonder none of them has ever seen what a parable it is—the Christ leading the blind man out into solitude before He can say to him "Behold!" How as they went, step-by-step, the poor blind eyes not telling the man where they were going, or how far away he was being taken from his friends, his conscious dependence upon this Stranger would grow! How he would feel more and more at each step, "I am at His mercy! What is He going to do with me?" And how thus there would be kindled in his heart some beginnings of an expectation, as well as some surrendering of himself to Christ's guidance! These two things, the expectation and the surrender, have in them at all events some faint beginnings and rude germs of the highest faith, to lead up to which is the purpose of all that Christ here does.

And is not that what He does for us all? Sometimes by sorrows, sometimes by sickbeds, sometimes by shutting us out from chosen spheres of activity, sometimes by striking down the dear ones at our sides, and leaving us lonely in the desert—is He not saying to us in a thousand ways. "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place?" As Israel was led into the wilderness that God might "speak to her heart," so often Christ draws us aside, if not by outward providences such as these, yet by awaking in us that solemn sense of personal responsibility and making us feel our solitude, that He may lead us to feel His allsufficient companionship.

Ah! brethren, here is a lesson from all this—if you want Jesus Christ to give you His highest gifts and to reveal to you His fairest beauty, you must be alone with Him. He loves to deal with single souls. Our lives, many of them, can never be outwardly alone. We are jammed up against one another in such a fashion, and the hurry and pressure of city life is so great with us all that it is often impossible for us to find the outward secrecy and solitude. But a man may be alone in a crowd; the heart may be gathered up into itself, and there may be a still atmosphere round about us in the shop and in the market, and among the busy ways of men, in which we and Christ shall be alone together. Unless there be, I do not think any of us will see the King in His beauty or the far-off land. "I was left alone, and saw this great vision" is the law for all true beholding.

So, dear brethren, try to feel how awful this earthly life of ours is in its necessary solitude; that each of us by himself must shape out his own destiny, and make his own character; that every unit of the swarms upon our streets is a unit that has to face the solemn facts of life for and by itself that alone you live, that alone you will die; that alone you will have to give account of yourself before God, and in the solitude let the hand of your heart feel for His hand that is stretched out to grasp yours, and listen to Him saying "Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world." There was no dreariness in the solitude when it was Christ that "took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town."

Christ Stopping to a Sense-Bound Nature by the Use of Material Helps

Second, we have Christ stopping to a sense-bound nature by the use of material helps. No doubt there was something in the man, as I have said, which made it advisable that these methods

should be adopted. If he were the sort of person that I have described, slow of faith, not much caring about the possibility of cure, and not having much hope that anything would come of it then we can see the fitness of the means adopted; the hand laid upon the eyes, the finger possibly moistened with saliva touching the ball, the pausing to question, the repeated application. They make a ladder by which his hope and confidence might climb to the apprehension of the blessing. And that points to a general principle of the Divine dealings. God stoops to a feeble faith, and gives to it outward things by which it may rise to an apprehension of spiritual realities.

Is not that the meaning of the whole complicated system of Old Testament revelation? Is not that the meaning of the altars, and priests, and sacrifices, and the old cumbrous apparatus of the Mosaic law? Was it not all a picture book in which the infant eyes of the race might see in a material form deep spiritual realities? Was not that the meaning and explanation of our Lord's parabolic teaching? He veils spiritual truth in common things that He may reveal it by common things-taking fishermen's boats, their nets, a sower's basket, a baker's dough, and many another homely article, and finding in them the emblems of the loftiest truth.

Is not that the meaning of His own Incarnation? It is no use talking to men about God, let them see Him; no use preaching about principles, give them the facts of His life. Revelation does not consist in the setting forth of certain propositions about God, but in the exhibition of the acts of God in a human life.

And so the Word was flesh and wrought

With human hands the creed of creeds.

And still further, may we not say that this is the inmost meaning and purpose of the whole frame of the material universe? It exists in order that, as a parable and a symbol, it may proclaim the things that are unseen and eternal. Its depths and heights, its splendors, and its energies are all in order that through them spirits may climb to the apprehension of the "Ring eternal, immortal, invisible," and the realities of His spiritual kingdom.

So in regard of all the externals of Christianity, forms of worship, ordinances, and so on-all these, in like manner, are provided in condescension to our weakness, in order that by them we may be lifted above themselves; for the purpose of the temple is to prepare for the time and the place where the seer "saw no temple therein." They are but the cups that carry the wine, the flowers whose chalices bear the honey, the ladders by which the soul may climb to God Himself, the rafts upon which the precious treasure may be floated into our hearts.

If Christ's touch and Christ's saliva healed, it was not because of anything in them, but because He willed it so and He Himself is the source of all the healing energy. Therefore, let us keep these externals in their proper place of subordination, and remember that in Him, not in them, lies the healing power; and that even Christ's touch may become the object of superstitious regard, as it was when that poor woman that came through the crowd to lay her finger on the hem of His garment, thinking that she could bear away a surreptitious blessing without the conscious outgoing of His power. He healed her because there was a spark of faith in her superstition, but she had to learn that it was not the hem of the garment but the loving will of Christ that cured, in order that the dross of superstitious reliance on the outward vehicle might be melted away, and the pure gold of faith in His love and power might remain.

Christ Accommodating the Pace of His Power to the Slowness of the Man's Faith

Lastly, we have Christ accommodating the pace of His power to the slowness of the man's faith. The whole story, as I have said, is unique, and especially that part of it "He put his hands upon him, and asked him if he saw ought." One might have expected an answer with a little more gratitude in it, with a little more wonder in it, with a little more emotion in it. Instead of these it is almost surly, or at any rate strangely reticent—a matter-of-fact answer to the question, and there an end. As our Revised Version reads it better: "I see men, for I behold them as trees walking." Curiously accurate! A dim glimmer had come into the eye, but there is not yet distinctness of outline nor sense of magnitude, which must be acquired by practice. The eye has not yet been educated, and it was only because these blurred figures were in motion that he knew they were not trees. "After that he put his hands again upon his eyes and made him look up." Or as the Revised Version has it with a better reading, "and he looked stedfastly." An eager straining of the new faculty to make sure that he had got it, and to test its limits and its perfection. "And he was restored and saw all things clearly."

Now I take it that the worthiest view of that strangely protracted process, broken up into two halves by the question that is dropped into the middle, is this, that it was determined by the man's faith, and was meant to increase it. He was healed slowly because he believed slowly. His faith was a condition of his cure, and the measure of it determined the measure of the restoration and the rate of the growth of his faith settled the rate of the perfecting of Christ's work on him. As a rule, faith in His power to heal was a condition of Christ's healing, and that mainly because our Lord would rather have men believing than sound of body. They often wanted only the outward miracle, but He wanted to make it the means of insinuating a better healing into their spirits. And so, not that there was any necessary connection between their faith and the exercise of His miraculous power, but in order that He might bless them with His best gifts, He usually worked on the principle, "According to your faith be it unto you." And here, as a nurse or a mother with her child might do, He keeps step with the little steps, and goes slowly because the man goes slowly.

Now, both the gradual process of illumination and the rate of that process as determined by faith, are true for us. How dim and partial a glimmer of light comes to many a soul at the outset of the Christian life! How little a new convert knows about God and self and the starry truths of His great revelation! Christian progress does not consist in seeing new things, but in seeing the old thing more clearly: the same Christ, the same Cross, only more distinctly and deeply apprehended, and more closely incorporated into my very being. We do not grow away from Him, but we grow into knowledge of Him. The first lesson that we get is the last lesson that we shall learn, and He is the Alpha at the beginning, and the Omega at the end of the alphabet—the letters of which make up our knowledge for earth and heaven.

But then let me remind you that just in the measure in which you expect blessing of any kind, illumination and purifying and help of all sorts from Jesus Christ, just in that measure will you get it. You can limit the working of Almighty power, and can determine the rate at which it shall work on you. God fills the waterpots, to the brim, but not beyond the brim; and if, like the woman in the Old Testament story, we stop bringing vessels, the oil will stop flowing. It is an awful thing to think that we have the power, as it were, to turn a stopcock, and so increase or diminish, or cut off altogether the supply of God's mercy and Christ's healing and cleansing love in our hearts. You will get as

much of God as you want and no more. The measure of your desire is the measure of your capacity, and the measure of your capacity is the measure of God's gift. "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." And if your faith is heavily shod and steps slowly, His power and His grace will step slowly along with it; keeping rank and step. According to your faith shall it be unto you.

Ah, dear friends, desire Him to help and bless you, and He will do it. Expect Him to do it, and He will do it. Go to Him like the other blind man, and say to Him—"Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me ... that I might receive my sight," and He will lay His hand upon you, and at any rate a glimmer will come, which will grow in the measure of your humble, confident desire, until at last He takes you by the hand and leads you out of this poor little village of a world, and lays His finger for a brief moment of blindness upon your eyes and asks you if you see ought. Then you look up, and the first face that you behold shall be His, whom you saw as "through a glass, darkly" with your dim eyes in this twilight world.

May that be your experience and mine, through His mercy!

Amen

S. The Guiding Pillar

The Guiding Pillar

"So it was always; the cloud covered [the tabernacle] by day, and the appearance of fire by night" (Numbers 9:16). The children of Israel in the wilderness, surrounded by miracle, had nothing which we do not possess. They had some things in an inferior form; their sustenance came by Manna; ours comes by God's blessing on our daily work, which is better. Their guidance came by this supernatural pillar, ours comes by the reality of which that pillar was nothing but a picture. And so, instead of fancying that men thus led were in advance of us, we should learn that these, the supernatural manifestations, visible and palpable, of God's presence and guidance were the beggarly elements: "God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." With this explanation of the relation between the miracle and symbol of the old, and the reality and standing miracle of the new covenants, let us look at the eternal truths which are set before us in a transitory form, in this cloud by day and fiery pillar by night.

I. Note first, the double form of the guiding pillar. The fire was the center; the cloud was wrapped around it. The former was the symbol, making visible to a generation who had to be taught through their senses the inaccessible holiness, and flashing brightness, and purity of the Divine nature; the latter tempered and veiled the too great brightness for feeble eyes. The same double element is found in all God's manifestations of Himself to men. In every form of revelation are present both the heart and core of light, which no eye can look upon, and the merciful veil which, because it veils, unveils; because it hides, reveals; makes visible because it conceals; and shows God because it is the hiding of His power. So, through all the history of His dealings with men, there has ever been what is called in Scripture language the "face," or the "name of God"; the aspect of the Divine nature on which eye can look; and manifested through it there has always been the depth and inaccessible abyss of that Infinite Being. We have to be thankful that in the cloud is the fire, and that round the fire is the cloud. For only so can our eyes behold and our hands grasp the else invisible and remote central Sun of the universe. God hides to make better known the glories of His character. His revelation is the flashing of the uncreated and intolerable light of His infinite Being through the encircling clouds of human conceptions and words, or of deeds which each show forth, in forms fitted to our apprehension, some fragment of His luster. After all revelation He remains unrevealed. After ages of showing forth His glory He is still the King invisible, whom no man hath seen at any time nor can see. The revelation which He makes of Himself is "truth, and is no lie." The recognition of the presence in it of both the fire and the cloud does not cast any doubt on the reality of our imperfect knowledge, or the authentic participation in the nature of the central light, of the sparkles of it which reach us. We know with a real knowledge what we know of Him. What He shows us is Himself, though not His whole self. This double aspect of all possible revelation of God, which was symbolized in comparatively gross external form in the pillar that led Israel on its march, and lay stretched out and quiescent, a guarding covering above the Tabernacle when the weary march was still, recurs all through the history of Old Testament revelation by type, and prophecy, and ceremony, in which the encompassing cloud was

comparatively dense, and the light which pierced it relatively faint. It reappears in both elements, but combined in new proportions, so as that "the veil - that is to say, His flesh" is thinned to transparency and all aglow with the indwelling luster of manifest Deity, so a light, set in some fair alabaster vase, shines through its translucent walls, bringing out every delicate tint and meandering vein of color, while itself diffused and softened by the enwrapping medium which it beautifies by passing through its pure walls. Both are made visible and attractive to dull eyes by the conjunction. He that hath seen Christ hath seen the Father, and he that hath seen the Father in Christ hath seen the man Christ as none see Him who are blind to the incarnate Deity which illuminates the manhood in which it dwells. But we have to note also the varying appearance of the pillar according to need. There was a double change in the pillar according to the hour, and according as the congregation was on the march or encamped. By day it was a cloud; by night it glowed in the darkness. On the march it moved before them, an upright pillar, as gathered together for energetic movement; when the camp rested it "returned to the many thousands of Israel" and lay quietly stretched above the tabernacle like one of the long drawn motionless clouds above the setting summer's sun, glowing through all its substance with unflashing radiance reflected from unseen light, and "on all the glory" (shrined in the Holy Place beneath) was "a defense." But these changes of aspect symbolize for us the reality of the Protean capacity of change according to our ever varying needs, which for our blessing we may find in that ever changing, unchanging Divine Presence which will be our companion, if we will.

It was not only by a natural process that, as daylight declined, what had seemed but a column of smoke, in the fervid desert sunlight, brightened into a column of fire, blazing amid the clear stars. But we may well believe in an actual measurement of the degree of light correspondent to the darkness and to the need for certitude and cheering sense of God's protection which the defenseless camp would feel as they lay down to rest. When the deceitful brightness of earth glistens and dazzles around me, my vision of Him may be "a cloudy screen to temper the deceitful ray"; and when "there stoops on our path, in storm and shade, the frequent night," as earth grows darker, and life becomes grayer and more somber, and verges to its even, the pillar blazes brighter before the weeping eye, and draws near to the lonely heart. We have a God that manifests Himself in the pillar of cloud by day, and in the flaming fire by night.

II. Note the guidance of the pillar. When it lifts the camp marches; when it glides down and lies motionless the march is stopped and the tents are pitched. The main thing which is dwelt upon in this description of the God guided pilgrimage of the wandering people is the absolute uncertainty in which they were kept as to the duration of their encampment, and as to the time and circumstances of their march. Sometimes the cloud tarried upon the Tabernacle many days; sometimes for a night only; sometimes it lifted in the night. "Whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the Tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed." So never, from moment to moment, did they know when the moving cloud might settle, or the resting cloud might soar. Therefore, absolute uncertainty as to the next stage was visibly represented before them by that hovering guide which determined everything, and concerning whose next movement they knew absolutely nothing. Is not that all true about us? We have no guiding cloud like this. So much the better. Have we not a more real guide? God guides the circumstances; God guides us by His

Word; God guides us by His Spirit, speaking through our common sense and in our understanding; and, most of all, God guides us by that dear Son of His, in Whom is the fire and round Whom is the cloud. And perhaps we may even suppose that our Lord implies some allusion to this very symbol in His own great words, "I Am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the sight of life." For the conception of following the light seems to make it plain that our Lord's image is not that of the sun in the Heavens, or any such supernal light, but of some light that comes near enough to a man to move before him, and behind which he can march. So I think that Christ Himself laid His hand upon this ancient symbol, and in these great words said in effect, "I am that which it only shadowed and foretold." At all events, whether in them He was pointing to our text or no, we must feel that He is the reality which was expressed by this outward symbol. And no man who can say, "Jesus Christ is the Captain of my Salvation, and after His pattern I march; at the pointing of His guiding finger I move; and in His foot steps, He being my Helper, I want to tread," need feel or fancy that any possible pillar, floating before the dullest eye, was a better, surer, and Diviner guide than he possesses. They whom Christ guides want none other for leader, pattern, counselor, companion, reward. This Christ is our Christ forever and ever; He will be our guide, even unto death, and beyond it. The pillar that we follow, which will glow with the ruddy flame of love in the darkest hours of life - blessed be His name - will glide in front of us through the valley of the shadow of death, brightest then when the murky midnight is blackest. Nor will the pillar which guides us cease to blaze as did the guide of the desert march, when Jordan has been crossed. It will still move before us on paths of continuous and ever increasing approach to infinite perfection. They who follow Christ afar off and with faltering steps here shall there "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." In like manner, the same absolute uncertainty which was intended to keep the Israelites (though it failed often) in the attitude of constant dependence, is the condition in which we all have to live, though we mask it from ourselves. That we do not know what lies before us is a commonplace. The same long tracks of monotonous continuance in the same place and doing the same duties, befall us that befell these men. Years pass, and the pillar spreads itself out, a defense above the unmoving sanctuary. And then, all of a flash, when we are least thinking of change, it gathers itself together, is a pillar again, shoots upwards, and moves forwards; and it is for us to go after it. And so our lives are shuttle cocked between uniform sameness which may become mechanical monotony, and agitation by change which may make us lose our hold of fixed principles and calm faith, unless we recognize that the continuance and the change are alike the will of the guiding God whose will is signified by the stationary or moving pillar.

III. That leads me to the last thing that I would note, viz., the docile following of the Guide. In the context the writer does not seem to be able to get away from the thought that whatever the pillar did, that moment prompt obedience follows. He says it over and over and over again. "As long as the cloud abode ... they rested And when the cloud tarried long ... [they] journeyed not"; and "when the cloud was a few days on the Tabernacle ... they abode"; and "according to the commandment they journeyed"; and "when the cloud abode until the morning ... they journeyed"; and "whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried . . . [they] journeyed not, but abode in their tents." So after he has reiterated the thing half a dozen times or more, he finishes by putting it all again in one verse, as the last impression which he would leave from the whole narrative - "at the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed." Obedience was prompt; whensoever and for

whatsoever the signal was given the men were ready. In the night, after they had had their tents pitched for a long period, somewhere or other, in the night, when only the watchers' eyes were open, the pillar lifts, and in an instant the alarm is given, and all the camp is in a bustle. That is what we have to set before us as the type of our lives - that we shall be as ready for every indication of God's will as they were. The peace and blessedness of our lives largely depend on our being eager to obey, and therefore quick to perceive the slightest sign of motion in the resting or of rest in the moving pillar which regulates our march and our encamping.

What do we want in order to cultivate and keep such a disposition? We need perpetual watchfulness lest the pillar should lift unnoticed. When Nelson was second in command at Copenhagen, the Admiral in command of the fleet hoisted the signal for recall, and Nelson put his telescope to his blind eye and said, "I do not see it." That is very like what we are tempted to do - the signal for unpleasant duties that we want to get out of is hoisted; we are very apt to put the telescope to the blind eye and pretend to ourselves that we do not see the fluttering flags.

We need still more to keep our wills in absolute suspense, if His will has not declared itself. Do not let us be in a hurry to run before God. When the Israelites were crossing the Jordan they were told to leave a great space between themselves and the guiding Ark, that they might know how to go, because "they had not passed that way heretofore." Impatient hurrying at God's heels is apt to lead us astray. Let Him get well in front, that you may be quite sure which way He wants you to go, before you go. And if you are not sure which way He wants you to go, be sure that He does not at that moment want you to go anywhere.

We need to hold the present with a slack hand, so as to be ready to fold our tents and take to the road if God will. We must not reckon on continuance, nor strike our roots so deep that it needs a hurricane to remove us. To those who set their gaze on Christ, no present from which He wishes them to remove can be so good for them as the new conditions into which He would have them pass. It is hard to leave the spot, though it be in the desert, where we have so long encamped that it has come to look like home. We may look with regret on the circle of black ashes on the sand where our little fire glinted cheerily, and our feet may ache and our hearts ache more as we begin our tramp once again, but we must set ourselves to meet the God appointed change cheerfully, in the confidence that nothing will be left behind which it is not good to lose, nor anything met, which does not bring a blessing, however its first aspect may be harsh or sad.

We need, too, to cultivate the habit of prompt obedience. "I made haste and delayed not to keep Thy commandments" is the only safe motto. It is reluctance which usually puts the drag on. Slow obedience is often the germ of incipient disobedience. In matters of prudence and of intellect second thoughts are better than first, and third thoughts, which often come back to first ones, better than second; but, in matters of duty, first thoughts are generally best. They are the instructive response of conscience to the voice of God, while second thoughts are too often the objections of disinclination, or sloth, or cowardice. It is easiest to do our duty when we are first sure of it. It then comes with an impelling power which carries us over obstacles on the crest of a wave, while hesitation and delay leave us stranded in shoal water. If we would follow the pillar, we must follow it at once. A heart that waits and watches for God's direction, that uses common sense as well as faith to unravel small and great perplexities, and is willing to sit loose to the present, however pleasant, in order that it may not miss the indications which say "Arise! this is not your

rest" - fulfills the conditions on which, if we keep them, we may be sure that He will guide us by the right way, and bring us at last to the city of habitation.

S. The Measure Of Immeasurable Power

The Measure Of Immeasurable Power

THE RICHES OF THE GLORY OF the inheritance" will sometimes quench rather than stimulate hope. He can have little depth of religion who has not often felt that the transcendent glory of that promised future sharpens the doubt-- "and can I ever hope to reach it?" Our paths are strewn with battlefields where we were defeated; how should we expect the victor's wreath? And so Paul does not think that he has asked all which his friends: in Ephesus need when he has asked that they may know the hope and the inheritance. There is something more wanted, something more even for our knowledge of these, and that is the knowledge of the power which alone can fulfill the hope and bring the inheritance. His language swells and peals and becomes exuberant and noble with his theme. He catches fire, as it were, as he thinks about this power that works in us. It is "exceeding." Exceeding what? He does not tell us, but other words in this letter, in the other great prayer which it contains, may help us to supply the missing words. He speaks of the "love of Christ which passeth knowledge," and of God being "able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think." The power which is really at work in Christians today is in its nature properly transcendent and immeasurable and passes thought and desire and knowledge.

And yet it has a measure. "According to the working of the strength of the might which he wrought in Christ." Is that heaping together of synonyms, or all but synonyms, mere tautology? Surely not. Commentators tell us that they can distinguish differences of meaning between the words in that the first of them is the more active and outward and the last of them is the more inward. And so we liken them to fruit and branch and root. But we need simply say that the gathering together of words so nearly co-extensive in their meaning is witness to the effort to condense the infinite within the bounds of human tongue, to speak the unspeakable and that these reiterated expressions, like the blows of the billows that succeed one another on the beach, are hints of the force of the infinite ocean that lies behind.

And then the Apostle, when he has once come in sight of his risen Lord, as is His wont, is swept away by the ardor of his faith and the clearness of his vision and breaks from his purpose to dilate on the glories of his King. We do not need to follow him into that. I limit myself this morning to the words which I have read as my text with only such reference to the magnificent passage which succeeds as may be necessary for the exposition of this.

The Immeasurable Power

So, then, I ask you to look first at the measure and example of the immeasurable power that works in Christians.

"According to the working of the strength of the might which he wrought in Christ." The Resurrection, the Ascension, the session at the right hand of God, the rule over all creatures, and the exaltation above all things on earth or in the heavens-these are the things which the Apostle brings before us as the pattern-works, the chef d'oeuvre of the power that is operating in all

Christians. The present glories of the ascended Christ are glories possessed by a man; that being so, they are available as evidences and measures of the power which works in believing souls. In them we see the possibilities of humanity, the ideal for man which God had when He created and breathed His blessing upon him. It is one of ourselves who has strength enough to bear the burden of the glory, one of ourselves who can stand within the blaze of encircling and indwelling Divinity and be unconsumed. The possibilities of human nature are manifest there. If we want to know what the Divine power can make of us, let us turn to look with the eye of faith upon what it has made of Jesus Christ.

But such a thought, glorious as it is, still leaves room for doubt as to my personal attainment of such an ideal. Possibility is much, but we need solid certainty. And we find it in the truth that the bond between Christ and those who truly love and trust Him is such as that the possibility must become a reality and be consolidated into a certainty. The Vine and its branches, the members and their Head, the Christ and His church are knit together by such closeness of union as that wheresoever and whatsoever the one is, there and that must the others also be. Therefore, when doubts and fears and consciousness of my own weakness creep across me and all my hopes are dimmed, as some star in the heavens is when a light mist floats between us and it, let us turn away to Him our brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and think that He in His calm exaltation and regal authority and infinite blessedness is not only the pattern of what humanity may be but the pledge of what His church must be. "The glory that thou gavest me I have given them."

Nor is that all. Not only a possibility and a certainty for the future are for us the measure of the power that works in us. But as this same letter teaches us, we have as Christians a present scale by which we may estimate the greatness of the power. For in the next chapter, after that glorious burst as to the dignity of His Lord which we have not the heart to call a digression, the Apostle, recurring to the theme of my text, goes on to say, "And you hath he quickened." And then, catching it up a verse or two afterward, he reiterates, clause by clause, what had been done on Jesus as having been done on us Christians. If that Divine Spirit raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, it is as true that the same power has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." And so not only the far-off, though real and brilliant, and eye and heart-filling glories of the ascended Christ give us the measure of the power, but also the limited experience of the present Christian life, the fact of the resurrection from the true death, the death of sin, the fact of union with Jesus Christ so real and close as that they who truly experience it do live, as far as the roots of their lives are concerned, and the scope and the aim of them, "in the heavens," and "sit with him in heavenly places"--these things afford us the measure of the power that works in us.

Then, because a Man is King of kings and Lord of lords, because He who is our Life 'Is exalted high above all principalities and powers," and because from His throne He has quickened us from the death of sin and has drawn us so near to Himself that if we are His we truly live beside Him even while we stumble here in the darkness, we may know the exceeding greatness of His power according to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.

The Unknowable Power

Secondly, notice the knowledge of the unknowable power.

We have already come across the same apparent paradox covering a deep truth in the former sections of this series of petitions. I need only remind you, in reference to this matter, that the knowledge which is here in question is not the intellectual perception of a fact as revealed in Scripture but is that knowledge to which alone the New Testament gives the noble name, being knowledge verified by inward experience and the result of one's own personal acquaintance with its object. How do we know a power? By thrilling beneath its force.

How are we to know the greatness of the power but because it comes surging and rejoicing into our aching emptiness and lifts us buoyant above our temptations and weakness? Paul was not asking for these people theological conceptions. He was asking that their spirits might be so saturated with and immersed in that great ocean of force that pours from God as that they should never, henceforth, be able to doubt the greatness of that power which works in them. The knowledge that comes from experience is the knowledge that we all ought to seek. It is not merely to be desired that we should have right and just conceptions but that we should have the vital knowledge which is and which comes from life eternal.

And that power, which thus we may all know by feeling it working upon ourselves, though it be immeasurable, has its measure; though it be in its depth and fullness unknowable and inexhaustible, may yet be really and truly known. You do not need a thunderstorm to experience the electric shock; a battery that you can carry in your pocket will do that for you. You do not need to have traversed all the length and breadth and depth and height of some newly discovered country to be sure of its existence and to have a real, though it may be a vague, conception of the magnitude of its shores.

And so, really, though boundedly, we have the knowledge of God and can rely upon it as valid, though partial; and similarly, by experience, we have such a certified acquaintance with Him and His power as needs no enlargement to be trusted and become the source of blessings untold. We may see but a strip of the sky through the narrow chinks of our prison windows, and many a grating may further intercept the view. Much dust that might be cleared away may dim the glass, but yet it is the sky that we see, and we can think of the great horizon circling round and round and of the infinite depths above there which neither eye nor thought can travel unwearied. Though all that we see be but an inch in breadth and a foot or two in height, yet we do see. We know the unknowable power that passes knowledge.

And let me remind you of how large importance this knowledge of, and constant reference to, the measureless power manifested in Christ is for us. I believe there can be no vigorous, happy Christian life without it. It is our only refuge from pessimism and despair for the world. The old psalm said, 'Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, and hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands.' And hundreds of years afterward the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews commented on it thus, 'We see not yet all things put under him.' Was the old vision a dream, was it never intended to be fulfilled? Apparently so, if we take the history of the past into account, and the centuries that have passed since have done nothing to make it more probable, apart from Jesus Christ, that man will rise to the heights which the psalmist dreamed of. When we look at the exploded Utopias that fill the past; when we think of the strange and apparently fatal necessity by which evil is developed from every stage of what men call progress, and how improvement is perverted, almost as soon as effected, into another fortress of weakness and misery; when we

look on the world as it is today, I know not whence a man is to draw bright hopes, or what is to deliver him from pessimism as his last word about himself and his fellows, except the "working of the strength of the might which he wrought in Christ." "We see not yet all things put under him." Be it so, "but we see Jesus," and, looking to Him, hope is possible, reasonable, and imperative.

The same knowledge is our refuge from our own consciousness of weakness. We look up, as a climber may do in some Alpine ravine upon the smooth gleaming walls of the cliff that rises above him. It is marble; it is fair; there are lovely lands on the summit, but nothing that has not wings can get there. We try but slip backward almost as much as we rise. What is to be done? Are we to sit down at the foot of the cliff, and say, "We cannot climb, let us be content with the luscious herbage and sheltered ease below?" Yes! That is what we are tempted to say. But look! a mighty hand reaches over; an arm is stretched down; the hand grasps us and lifts us and sets us there.

"No man hath ascended up into heaven save he that came down from heaven," and having returned thither, stoops thence and will lift us to Himself. I am a poor, weak creature. Yes! I am all full of sin and corruption. Yes! I am ashamed of myself every day. Yes! I am too heavy to climb and have no wings to fly and am bound here by chains manifold. Yes! But we know the exceeding greatness of the power, and we triumph in Him.

That knowledge should shame us into contrition when we think of such force at our disposal and so poor results. That knowledge should widen our conceptions, enlarge our desires, breathe a brave confidence into our hopes, and should teach us to expect great things of God and to be intolerant of present attainments while anything remains unattained. It should stimulate our vigorous effort, for no man will long seek to be better if he is convinced that the effort is hopeless.

Learn to realize the exceeding greatness of the power that will clothe your weakness. "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, for that he is strong in might, not one faileth." That is wonderful, but here is a far nobler operation of the Divine power. It is great to preserve the ancient heavens fresh and strong by His might, but it is greater to come down to my weakness, to "give power to the faint," and to "increase strength to them that have no might." And that is what He will do with us.

The Power at Work

Lastly, notice the conditions for the operations of the power. "To us-ward who believe," says Paul. He has been talking to these Ephesians and saying "Ye," but now, by that "us," he places himself beside them, identifies himself with them, and declares that all his gifts and strength come to him on precisely the same conditions on which theirs do to them and that he, like them, is a waiter upon that grace which God bestows on them that trust Him.

"To us-ward who believe." Once more we are back at the old truth which we can never make too emphatic and plain that the one condition of the weakest among us being strong with the strength of the Lord is simple trust in Him, verified, of course, by continuance and by effort. How did the water go into the Ship Canal at Eastham last week? First of all they cut a trench, and then they severed the little strip of land between the hole and the sea, and the sea did the rest. The wider and deeper the opening that we make in our natures by our simple trust in God, the fuller will be the rejoicing flood that pours into us. There is an old story about a Christian father who, having been torturing himself with theological speculations about the nature of the Trinity, fell asleep and

dreamed that he was emptying the ocean with a thimble! Well, you cannot empty it with a thimble, but you can go to it with one. If you have only a thimble in your hand, you will only bring away a thimbleful. The measure of your faith is the measure of God's power given to you.

There are two measures of the immeasurable power; the one is that infinite limit of "the power which he wrought in Christ" and the other the practical limit. The working measure of our spiritual life is our faith. In plain English, we can have as much of God as we want. We do have as much as we want. And if, in touch with the power that can shatter a universe, we only get a little thrill that is scarcely perceptible ourselves and all unnoticed by others, whose fault is that? And if, coming to the fountain that laughs at drought and can fill a universe with its waters, we scarcely bear away a straitened drop or two that barely refreshes our parched lips and does nothing to stimulate the growth of the plants of holiness in our gardens, whose fault is that? The practical measure of the power is for us the measure of our belief and desire. And if we only go to Him, as I pray we all may, and continue there and ask from Him strength according to the riches that are treasured in Jesus Christ, we shall get the old answer, "According to your faith be it unto you."

Amen

S. The Shepherd - The Stone Of Israel

The Shepherd - The Stone Of Israel

A SLIGHT alteration in the rendering will probably bring out the meaning of these words more correctly. The last two clauses should perhaps not be read as a separate sentence. Striking out the supplement "is," and letting the previous sentence run on to the end of the verse, we get a series of names of God, in apposition with each other, as the sources of the strength promised to the arms of the hands of the warlike sons of Joseph. From the hands of the mighty God of Jacob-from thence, from the Shepherd, the stone of Israel-the power will come for conflict and for conquest. This exuberant heaping together of names of God is the mark of the flash of rapturous confidence which lit up the dying man's thoughts when he turned to God.

When he begins to think of Him he cannot stay his tongue. So many aspects of His character, so many remembrances of His deeds come crowding into his mind; so familiar and so dear are they that he must linger over the words and strive by this triple repetition to express the manifold preciousness of Him whom no name, nor crowd of names, can rightly praise. So earthly love ever does with its earthly objects, inventing and reiterating epithets which are caresses. Such repetitions are not tautologies for each utters some new aspect of the one subject and comes from a new gush of heart's love toward it. And something of the same rapture and unwearied recurrence to the Name that is above every name should mark the communion of devout souls with their heavenly Love.

What a wonderful burst of such praise flowed out from David's thankful heart in his day of deliverance like some strong current with its sevenfold wave, each crested with the Name! "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer: my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."

These three names which we find here are striking and beautiful in themselves, in their juxtaposition, in their use on Jacob's lips. They seem to have been all coined by him for, if we accept this song as a true prophecy uttered by him, we have here the earliest instance of their occurrence. They have all a history and appear again expanded and deepened in the subsequent Revelation. Let us look at them as they stand.

1. The Mighty God of Jacob

The meaning of such a name is clear enough. It is He who has shown Himself mighty and mine by His deeds for me all through my life. The dying man's thoughts are busy with all that past from the day when he went forth from the tent of Isaac and took of the stones of the field for his pillow when the sun went down. A perplexed history it had been with many a bitter sorrow and many a yet bitterer sin. Passionate grief and despairing murmurs he had felt and flung out while it slowly unfolded itself. When the Pharaoh had asked, "How old art thou?" he had answered in words which owe their somberness partly to obsequious assumption of insignificance in such a presence, but have a strong tinge of genuine sadness in them too: "Few and evil have the days of the years

of my life been." But lying dying there with it all well behind him, he has become wiser; and now it looks to him as one long showing forth of the might of his God who had been with him all his life long and had redeemed him from all evil. He has got far enough away to see the lie of the land as he could not do while he was toiling along the road. The barren rocks and white snow glow with purple as the setting sun touches them. The struggles with Laban; the fear of Esau; the weary work of toilsome years; the sad day when Rachel died and left him the "son of her sorrow "; the heart sickness of the long years of Joseph's loss—all have faded away or been changed into thankful wonder at God's guidance. The one thought which the dying man carries out of life with him is: God has shown Himself mighty, and He has shown Himself mine.

For each of us, our own experience should be a revelation of God. The things about Him which we read in the Bible are never living and real to us till we have verified them in the facts of our own history. Many a word lies on the page or in our memories, fully believed and utterly shadowy until in some soul's conflict we have had to grasp it and found it true. Only so much of our creed as we have proved in life is really ours. If we will only open our eyes and reflect upon our history as it passes before us, we shall find every corner of it filled with the manifestations to our hearts and to our minds of a present God. But our folly, our stupidity, our impatience, our absorption with the mere outsides of things, our self-will blind us to the Angel with the drawn sword who resists us as well as to the Angel, with the lily who would lead us. So we waste our days, are deaf to His voice speaking through all the clatter of tongues, and are blind to His bright presence shining through all the dimness of earth; and, for far too many of us, we never can see God in the present but only discern Him when He has passed by like Moses from his cleft. Like this same Jacob, we have to say: "Surely God was in this place, and I knew it not." Hence we miss the educational worth of our lives; are tortured with needless cares; are beaten by the poorest adversaries; and grope amid what seems to us a chaos of pathless perplexities when we might be marching on assured and strong with God for our guide and the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob for our defense.

Notice, too, how distinctly the thought comes out in this name—that the very vital center of a man's religion is his conviction that God is his. He will not be content with thinking of God as the God of his fathers; he will not even be content with associating himself with them in the common possession; but he must feel the full force of the intensely personal bond that knits him to God and God to him. Of course such a feeling does not ignore the blessed fellowship and family who also are held in this bond. The God of Jacob is to the patriarch also the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. But that comes second, and this comes first. Each man for himself must put forth the hand of his own faith and grasp that great hand for his own guide. "My Lord and my God" is the true form of the confession. "He loved me and gave Himself for me" is the shape in which the Gospel of Christ melts the soul. God is mine because His love individualizes me, and I have a distinct place in His heart, His purposes, and His deeds. God is mine because by my own individual act—the most personal which I can perform — I cast myself on Him; by my faith I appropriate the common salvation and open my being to the inflow of His power. God is mine, and I am His in that wonderful mutual possession with perpetual interchange of giving and receiving not only gifts but selves which makes the very life of love, whether it be love on earth or love in heaven.

Remember, too, the profound use which our Lord made of this name wherein the man claims to possess God. Because Moses at the bush called God the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of

Jacob, they cannot have ceased to be. The personal relations which subsist between God and the soul that clasps Him for its own demand an immortal life for their adequate expression and make it impossible that death's skeleton fingers should have power to untie such a bond. Anything is conceivable rather than that the soul which can say "God is mine" should perish. And that continued existence demands, too, a state of being which shall correspond to itself in which its powers shall all be exercised, its desires fulfilled, its possibilities made facts. Therefore there must be "the resurrection." "God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city."

The dying patriarch left to his descendants the legacy of this great name, and often, in later times, it was used to quicken faith by the remembrance of the great deeds of God in the past. One instance may serve as a sample of the whole. "The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." The first of these two names lays the foundation of our confidence in the thought of the boundless power of Him whom all the forces of the universe, personal and impersonal, angels and stars in their marshaled order, obey and serve. The second bids later generations claim as theirs all that the old history reveals as having belonged to the "world's gray fathers." They had no special prerogative of nearness or of possession. The arm that guided them is unwearied, and all the past is true still and will forevermore be true for all who love God. So the venerable name is full of promise and of hope for us: "the God of Jacob is our refuge."

2. The Shepherd

How that name sums up the lessons that Jacob had learned from the work of himself and of his sons! "Thy servants are shepherds," they said to Pharaoh; "both we, and also our sons." For fourteen long weary years he had toiled at that task. "In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes." And his own sleepless vigilance and patient endurance seem to him to be but shadows of the loving care, the watchful protection, the strong defense which "the God, who has been my Shepherd all my life long" had extended to him and his. Long before the shepherd king, who had been taken from the sheepcotes to rule over Israel, sang his immortal psalm, the same occupation had suggested the same thought to the shepherd patriarch. Happy they whose daily work may picture for them some aspect of God's care-or rather, happy they whose eyes are open to see the dim likeness of God's care which every man's earthly relations, and some part of his work, most certainly present.

There can be no need to draw out at length the thoughts which that sweet and familiar emblem has conveyed to so many generations. Loving care, wise guidance, fitting food are promised by it; and docile submission, close following at the Shepherd's heels, patience, innocence, meekness, trust are required. But I may emphasize for a moment the connection between the thought of "the mighty God of Jacob" and that of "the Shepherd." The occupation, as we see it, does not call for a strong arm or much courage except now and then to wade through snow-drifts and dig out the buried and half-dead creature. But the shepherds whom Jacob knew had to be hardy, bold fighters. There were marauders lurking ready to sweep away a weakly guarded flock. There were wild beasts in the gorges of the hills. There was danger in the sun by day on these burning plains, and in the night the wolves prowled around the flock.

We remember how David's earliest exploits were against the lion and the bear, and how he felt that even his duel with the Philistine bully was not more formidable than these had been. If we will

read into our English notions of a shepherd this element of danger and of daring, we shall feel that these two clauses are not to be taken as giving the contrasted ideas of strength and gentleness, but the connected ones of strength and therefore protection and security. We have the same connection in later echoes of this name. "Behold, the Lord God shall come with strong hand; He shall feed His flock like a shepherd,."

And our Lord's use of the figure brings into all but exclusive prominence the good shepherd's conflict with the ravaging wolves—a conflict in which he must not hesitate even "to lay down his life for the sheep." As long as the flock are here, amid dangers, and foes, and wild weather, the arm that guides must be an arm that guards; and none less mighty than the Mighty One of Jacob can be the Shepherd of men. But a higher fulfillment yet awaits this venerable emblem when in other pastures, where no lion nor any ravaging beast shall come, the "Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne," and is Shepherd as well as Lamb, "shall feed them, and lead them by living fountains of waters."

3. The Stone of Israel

Here, again, we have a name that after-ages have caught up and cherished used for the first time. I suppose the Stone of Israel means much the same thing as the Rock. If so, that symbol, too, which is full of such large meanings was coined by Jacob. It is, perhaps, not fanciful to suppose that it owes its origin to the scenery of Palestine. The wild cliffs of the eastern region where Peniel lay or the savage fastnesses in the southern wilderness, a day's march from Hebron, where he lived so long came back to his memory amid the flat, clay land of Egypt; and their towering height, their immovable firmness, their cool shade, their safe shelter spoke to him of the unalterable might and impregnable defense which he had found in God. So there is in this name the same devout, reflective laying-hold upon experience which we have observed in the preceding.

There is also the same individualizing grasp of God as his very own for "Israel" here is, of course, to be taken not as the name of the nation but as his own name, and the intention of the phrase is evidently to express what God had been to him personally.

The general idea of this symbol is perhaps firmness, solidity. And that general idea may be followed out in various details. God is a rock for a foundation. Build your lives, your thoughts, your efforts, your hopes there. The house founded on the rock will stand though wind and rain from above smite it, and floods from beneath beat on it like battering-rams. God is a rock for a fortress. Flee to Him to hide, and your defense shall be the "munitions of rocks" which shall laugh to scorn all assault and never be stormed by any foe. God is a rock for shade and refreshment. Come close to Him from out of the scorching heat, and you will find coolness and verdure and moisture in the clefts when all outside that grateful shadow is parched and dry.

The word of the dying Jacob was caught up by the great lawgiver in his dying song. "Ascribe ye greatness to our God. He is the Rock." It reappears in the last words of the shepherd king whose grand prophetic picture of the true King is heralded by "The Rock of Israel spoke to me." It is heard once more from the lips of the greatest of the prophets in his glowing prophecy of the song of the final days: "Trust ye in the Lord forever; for in the Lord Jehovah is the Rock of Ages," as well as in his solemn prophecy of the Stone which God would lay in Zion. We hear it again from the lips that cannot lie. "Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The Stone which the builders rejected, the same is

become the head-stone of the comer?" And for the last time the venerable metaphor which has cheered so many ages appears in the words of that Apostle who was "surnamed Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone." "To whom coming as unto a living stone, ye also as living stones are built up." As on some rocky site in Palestine where a thousand generations in succession have made their fortresses, one may see stones laid with the bevel that tells of early Jewish masonry, and above them Roman work, and higher still masonry of crusading times, and above it the building of today; so we, each age in our turn, build on this great rock foundation, dwell safe there for our little lives, and are laid to peaceful rest in a sepulcher in the rock On Christ we may build. In Him we may dwell and rest secure. We may die in Jesus and be gathered to our own people who, having died, live in Him. And though so many generations have reared their dwellings on that great rock, there is ample room for us, too, to build. We have not to content ourselves with an uncertain foundation among the shifting rubbish of perished dwellings but can get down to the firm virgin rock for ourselves. None that have ever built there have been confounded. We clasp hands with all who have gone before us. At one end of the long chain this dim figure of the dying Jacob, amid the strange vanished life of Egypt, stretches out his withered hands to God the stone of Israel; at the other end, we lift up ours to Jesus, and cry:

Rock of Ages! cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee.

The faith is one. One will be the answer and the reward. May it be yours and mine!

S. Water of Life

Water of Life The condition, the only condition, and the indispensable condition, of possessing that water of life--the summary expression for all the gifts of God in Jesus Christ, which at the last are essentially God Himself--is the desire to possess it turned to Jesus Christ. . .

But it is not enough that there should be the desire. It must be turned to Him. . . the great keyword of personal religion, faith in Jesus Christ. . .

. . . Another of the scriptural expressions for the act of trusting in Him is taking, not asking. You do not need to ask, as if for something that is not provided. What we all need to do is to open our eyes to see what is there, if we like to put out our hands and take it. Why should we be saying, "Give me to drink," when a pierced hand reaches out to us the cup of salvation, and says, Drink you all of it"? "Ho, everyone that thirsts come . . . and drink . . . without money and without price."

There is no other condition but desire turned to Christ, and that is the necessary condition. . .

Blind, blind, blind, are the men who grope as noontide as in the dark and turn away from Jesus. If you knew, not with the head only, but with the whole nature, if you knew the thirst of your soul, the sweetness of the water, the readiness of the Giver, and the dry and parched land to which you condemn yourselves by your refusal, surely you would bethink yourself and fall at His feet and ask, and get, the water of life.

. . . . The only rest of the soul is in God, and the only way to get it is through Christ, as any saint of God ever was. But the knowledge does not touch their will because they like the poison and they do not want the life.

Oh! dear friends, the instantaneousness of Christ's answer, and the certainty of it, are as true for each of us as they were for this woman. The offer is made to us all, just as it was to her. We can gather round that Rock like the Israelites in the wilderness, and slake every thirst of our souls from its outgushing streams. Jesus Christ says to each of us, as He did to her, tenderly, warningly, invitingly, and yet rebukingly, "If you knew . . . then you would ask, . . . and I would give" (Gospel of St. John, pp. 211-213).

S. Zion's Joy and God's

Zion's Joy and God's Zephaniah 3:14; Zephaniah 3:17.

WHAT A WONDERFUL RUSH of exuberant gladness there is in these words! The swift, short clauses, the triple invocation in the former verse, the triple promise in the latter, the heaped together synonyms, all help the impression. The very words seem to dance with joy. But more remarkable than this is the parallelism between the two verses. Zion is called to rejoice in God because God rejoices in her. She is to shout for joy and sing because God's joy too has a voice, and breaks out into singing. For every throb of joy in man's heart, there is a wave of gladness in God's. The notes of our praise are at once the echoes and the occasions of His. We are to be glad because He is glad: He is glad because we are so. We sing for joy, and He joys over us with singing because we do.

God's joy over Zion.

It is to be noticed that the former verse of our text is followed by the assurance: "The Lord is in the midst of thee"; and that the latter verse is preceded by the same assurance. So, then, intimate fellowship and communion between God and Israel lies at the root both of God's joy in man and man's joy in God.

We are solemnly warned by "profound thinkers" of letting the shadow of our emotions fall upon God. No doubt there is a real danger there; but there is a worse danger, that of conceiving of a God who has no life and heart; and it is better to hold fast by this - that in Him is that which corresponds to what in us is gladness. We are often told, too, that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is a stern and repellent God, and the religion of the Old Testament is gloomy and servile. But such a misconception is hard to maintain in the face of such words as these. Zephaniah, of whom we know little, and whose words are mainly forecasts of judgments and woes pronounced against Zion that was rebellious and polluted, ends his prophecy with these companion pictures, like a gleam of sunshine which often streams out at the close of a dark winter's day. To him the judgments which he prophesied were no contradiction of the love and gladness of God. The thought of a glad God might be a very awful thought; such an insight as this prophet had gives a blessed meaning to it. We may think of the joy that belongs to the divine nature as coming from the completeness of His being, which is raised far above all that makes of sorrow. But it is not in Himself alone that He is glad; but it is because He loves. The exercise of love is ever blessedness. His joy is in self-impartation; His delights are in the sons of men: "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." His gladness is in His children when they let Him love them, and do not throw back His love on itself. As in man's physical frame it is pain to have secretions dammed up, so when God's love is forced back upon itself and prevented from flowing out in blessing, some shadow of suffering cannot but pass across that calm sky. He is glad when His face is mirrored in ours, and the rays from Him are reflected from us.

But there is another wonderfully bold and beautiful thought in this representation of the gladness of God. Note the double form which it assumes: "He will rest"—literally, be silent—" in His love; He will joy over thee with singing." As to the former, loving hearts on earth know that the deepest love knows no utterance, and can find none. A heart full of love rests as having attained its desire and accomplished its purpose. It keeps a perpetual Sabbath, and is content to be silent.

But side by side with this picture of the repose of God's joy is set with great poetic insight the precisely opposite image of a love which delights in expression, and rejoices over its object with singing. The combination of the two helps to express the depth and intensity of the one love, which like a song-bird rises with quivering delight and pours out as it rises an ever louder and more joyous note, and then drops, composed and still, to its nest upon the dewy ground.

Zion's joy in God. To the Prophet, the fact that "the Lord is in the midst of thee" was the guarantee for the confident assurance "Thou shalt not fear any more"; and this assurance was to be the occasion of exuberant gladness, which ripples over in the very words of our first text. That great thought of "God dwelling in the midst" is rightly a pain and a terror to rebellious wills and alienated hearts. It needs some preparation of mind and spirit to be glad because God is near; and they who find their satisfaction in earthly sources, and those who seek for it in these, see no word of good news, but rather a "fearful looking for of judgment" in the thought that God is in their midst. The word rendered "rejoices" in the first verse of our text is not the same as that so translated in the second. The latter means literally, to move in a circle; while the former literally means, to leap for joy. Thus the gladness of God is thought of as expressing itself in dignified, calm movements, whilst Zion's joy is likened in its expression to the more violent movements of the dance. True human joy is like God's, in that He delights in us and we in Him, and in that both He and we delight in the exercise of love. But we are never to forget that the differences are real as the resemblances, and that it is reserved for the higher form of our experiences in a future life to "enter into the joy of the Lord."

It becomes us to see to it that our religion is a religion of joy. Our text is an authoritative command as well as a joyful exhortation, and we do not fairly represent the facts of Christian faith if we do not "rejoice in the Lord always." In all the sadness and troubles which necessarily accompany us, as they do all men, we ought by the effort of faith to set the Lord always before us that we be not moved. The secret of stable and perpetual joy still lies where Zephaniah found it—in the assurance that the Lord is with us, and in the vision of His love resting upon us, and rejoicing over us with singing. If thus our love clasps His, and His joy finds its way into our hearts, it will remain with us that our "joy may be full"; and being guarded by Him whilst still there is fear of stumbling, He will set us at last "before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy."

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