

WRITINGS OF H. M. H. AITKEN - VOLUME 1

by H. M. H. Aitken

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by H.M.H. Aitken (Volume 1), compiled for study and devotional reading.

100 Chapters

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Aitken, H. M. H. - Devotional Thoughts

Devotional Thoughts

By William Hay Macdowall Hunter Aitken

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Hiding Places

Genesis 3:9-12

And the LORD God called to Adam, and said to him, Where are you?...

I. Note here the anticipative sentence of the human conscience pronouncing doom on itself. The guilty rebel hides from the Divine Presence.

II. The inexorable call which brings him immediately into the Divine Presence.

III. The bringing to light of the hidden things of darkness. The soul has many hiding places. There are — (1) The hiding place of self-complacent propriety;

(2) the hiding place of the reasoner;

(3) the hiding place of theological dogmas. But the true hiding place for the soul is Jesus.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Walking with God

Genesis 5:24

And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.

Other notable men existed in that ancient time, to whom we are apparently more indebted than we are to Enoch; men who were the fathers of arts and sciences, and the founders of political institutions — pioneers in the onward march of civilization. But what are Jabal, and Jubal, and Tubal-Cain to us but so many cyphers associated in our minds with certain objects? We know something of these men's work; of themselves we know absolutely nothing. Here, on the contrary, nothing is told us of any outward work that the man did; we only have the brief and summarized story of an inner life. But more than this. Enoch was the first saint, in the full sense of the word, of whom we hear anything in human history, as Abel was the first "righteous for justified] man." He stands, perhaps, historically speaking, at the head of the great master roll of heaven's nobility; and it is the brotherhood of saints that makes the ages one. We are more indebted to the first pioneer upon the highway of holiness than to the earliest discoverers in science and in art. Holiness is, above everything else, the reproduction of the Divine. As I said a moment ago, very little has been told us about Enoch, where our curiosity would fain have heard a great deal; but the little that has been told us is suggestive, and every point seems to carry its own lesson. To begin with his name. Enoch has the double meaning of consecration and initiation, suggesting first the thought that he who bore that name was to be one of God's consecrated ones, "a priest unto God," and next that, as a priest, he was to be introduced into the spiritual temple, to be allowed to see and know what the outer world knows nothing of, and to be initiated into the deeper mysteries of the spiritual life. And in this name we have the clue not only to his career, but to that of every other saint who, like him, walks with God. The life of fellowship must needs be the product of a state of consecration. God consecrates us His spiritual priests that our whole manhood may be set apart and our whole lives dedicated to His service. We may be occupied, as Enoch was, in the ordinary duties of life; our hands and our heads may be busy, yet may we find God's temple everywhere, and His service in everything. For there is nothing secular, all is a sanctity, where all is given to God. Further, our attention is specially called by a New Testament writer to the fact that Enoch was the seventh from Adam. His was the Sabbath life in that genealogical record. As the Sabbath days to the other days of the week, so must his life have seemed as compared with the lives of others in those troublous and tumultuous days. And there is a rest even here for the people of God. We need not defer the Sabbath keeping of the soul to that glorious future which awaits God's faithful ones yonder. It may seem, perhaps, fanciful to call attention to another fact mentioned in this brief notice, but I cannot bring myself to pass it over. We read that "all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years." That is to say, he lived a perfect year of years; as many days as there are in the year, so many years there were in his life; he fulfilled his year. Perhaps when we reach the other side we shall make some strange discoveries with respect to the term of our existence here in the house of our discipline. Perhaps we may find that some lives have been lengthened out to extreme old age, just because life's lessons were being learned indeed, but learned wondrous slowly by very dull

scholars; and that some lives were cut short just because Divine Omniscience saw no probability of these lessons ever being learned at all by scholars who positively refused to learn. But to every man is appointed his own proper year; and blessed are they who so live that the year completes the life in every sense of the word! Blessed are they who so walk with God that when their appointed life period draws to a close their life lesson may be learnt, and they themselves be ready for the call to higher knowledge and more perfect service, while it is said of them, "He was not; for God took him." Enoch's life was not a long one as lives went in those days; he was only in what would be then regarded as early middle life when his call came, but had fulfilled his year. His life was complete in God's sight, his day's work done, and there was no necessity that he should tarry in the house of discipline through the long ages which measured the life of a Methuselah. But it is time that we looked more closely at this pregnant phrase, which tells us all that we historically know of the religious life of this ancient servant of God, "Enoch walked with God." What is it, let us ask, to walk with God? More than a single idea would seem to be suggested by this familiar expression. As the words stand in the original they suggest primarily the idea of walking with reference to God. It is the idea that the Psalmist expresses when he says, "I foresaw God always before mine eyes." In the practical issues of life, and in all its complete details, everything turns upon our choice of our centre of reference. He whose central idea in life is, How shall I please myself? can never walk with God, because God is not his centre of reference. Or again, this life of reference to God stands contrasted with the life of reference to the world, that conventional life which so many people condescend to lead. With such the question is, What is expected of me? or, What is the correct thing? or, What do others do? or, Will people like it? What will people say if I adopt this course, or do not adopt the other? Do not aim at singularity, but, on the other hand, do not shrink from it. You needs must be singular if you serve God in a world that serves Him not; you needs must be singular if you put the good before the fashionable in a world that puts the fashionable before the good; you needs must be singular if you put duty before worldly expediency, and the love of God and man before both in a selfish, shallow world, where all men seek their own. But there is nothing to be ashamed at in such singularity, and he who plays the poltroon, and is afraid to face reproach, would indeed be very singular in heaven if he were ever to get there. Better surely to be singular in this perishing world than hopelessly out of harmony with the spirit and genius of heaven. But this leads us to consider another thought suggested by the words of our text, closely connected with what we have just been considering, and yet distinct from it. To walk with God is not only to walk with reference to God, but to move, so to speak, on the same moral plane as belongs to God — seeing things from His point of view, entering into His designs, and drinking ever more and more deeply of His Spirit. There is a unity of heart and mind, of thought and feeling, that is usually a feature of close association amongst ourselves; and something of this kind would seem to be implied by the words, "Enoch walked with God," Listen to the words quoted by St. Jude, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." The man that uttered those words was clearly looking at things from the Divine standpoint. With him sinners are regarded specially as ungodly, and sins are ungodly deeds; the habit of life that induces them is an ungodly habit of life, and the very words that such sinners are wont to speak are ungodly words. And the reason of this way of viewing things is that the man is walking with God. He takes measure of evil and of good, according as it affects that

Divine Being with whom his life is hid. His standpoint is no longer merely ethical; he is conversant rather with the very heart of God than with moral principles. He is jealous for God's glory with a godly jealousy, and is fired with a holy indignation at all that militates against this. And oh, with what a heart full of yearning love does he who thus walks with God gaze upon a God-dishonouring world! God loved the world, and loves it, and he who is in fellowship with the mind of God must needs love it too. The more He hates sin, the more does He long for the salvation of the sinner. But let us take the words of our text in the meaning which they most naturally bear, and which suggests perhaps the most important lesson of all. "Enoch walked with God"; that is to say, he lived in the society of God. In all his life an invisible but ever-present Friend was his Companion. He lived in His society, he consulted Him about everything, he was in communion with Him everywhere. So he lived out his allotted life, his year of years, until he passed from the triumphs of the walk of faith to the glories of the Land of Vision; for there is no death for such. The presence of God makes earth heaven, and brings heaven down to earth. The presence of God turns the shadow of death into the morning, and invests him who enjoys it with immortality. "I am the resurrection, and the life," saith the Lord: "he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and he that liveth and believeth on Me shall never die." By-and-by, when the last of the three hundred and sixty five days of his year had arrived and was reaching its close, the call came, "Friend, come up higher": and "he was not; for God took him." For as to walk with God is the secret of perfection here on earth, so to walk with God will be the crowning glory of that higher world.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Eye of God

Genesis 16:13-14

And she called the name of the LORD that spoke to her, You God see me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that sees me?...

Does it not seem both strange and sad that these familiar words should suggest a feeling akin to terror in so many human hearts? How appalling does it seem to reflect that there is no possibility of escape from its relentless, inexorable vision! Yet there was a time when such a thought as this would have awakened only feelings of pleasure in the human mind and heart. When Adam came into the world fresh from the hand of God, nothing could have been further from his thoughts than to regard this consideration as suggestive of terror. On the contrary, he found true deep joy no doubt in just such a reflection as this. But the moment man sinned, and fell by sin, in nothing were the lamentable consequences of the fall so apparent as in this. The eye of God, that before seemed to cast rays of beneficent sunshine on his path, now seemed to shoot a hot and scorching thunderbolt into his soul. He felt that he must needs find a hiding place from that eye. Surely it would be simply impossible to do what many of us do if we really believed in our hearts, and were dwelling on the thought, "Thou God seest me." You never knew a thief that perpetrated a felony before the very eyes of the officer of justice, and knowing that he was being observed. And should we dare to break God's law, and defy His Majesty, if we really believed that God was looking at us? or would men indulge in the miserable hypocrisies with which they seem to succeed sometimes in stupefying their own consciences, if they really believed that God both saw them and saw through them? Men get into such a way of playing a part before their fellow man, that it would seem as if at last they grew to feel as if they could overreach and impose upon Almighty God. But they cannot! Always, and in all circumstances and conditions, in my best moments and in my worst, in public and in private, within, without, "Thou God seest me." What does He see? My brethren, let us in answer lay proper stress upon that little but, to each of us severally, important word me. It is the real "me," the actual self, that God sees. First there is the social self. The fine gentleman that moves in good society, with his company manners, endeavouring to make himself particularly agreeable to all around him. Well skilled is he to repress all that the world in which he moves — not less hypocritical than himself — would be disposed to frown on. He avoids what is coarse, abjures what is in bad taste, checks any display of the selfishness that may be natural to him, may even exhibit not a little self-control, should he be crossed by some petty annoyance. If he is proud, he has the sense not to show it; and strangers think him wondrously affable. This social paragon is so well venerated that you almost begin to think he is not venerated at all, and the superficial glance of society discerns only a charming exterior, and an amiable and estimable ornament for itself. But what does God see? Peradventure a whited sepulchre, a disguised savage, far less to be excused for the latent savagery of a selfish, passionate, licentious, and rapacious nature than the naked savage in the wild, who never wore any veneer except war-paint, is to be excused for his. And as for this conventional presentment of self God sees it not, or only sees it to see through it as the flimsiest of disguises. It is not this respectable sham that God sees,

but the real actual self, whatever he may be. "Thou God seest me." Yet again there is the commercial self — not quite such a paragon of perfection as the social self. There is much less veneer about him, and much more exposure of some inner substance, which, whatever its true nature, is not always very smooth or very pretty. Yet it passes muster, because there are so many more all around it that are its moral counterparts. A little greedy, a little avaricious, a little selfish and unscrupulous the man may be; but then, you know, that sort of thing is to some extent expected in business; and against these little failings how much of sterling merit is there to be set! First, there is the great merit of solvency! You are a substantial man, and can always pay twenty shillings in the pound; and in these days of rascally bankruptcy there is no small virtue in the eye of the commercial world. Then again you have never condescended to any vulgar form of swindling. You would scorn the idea of doing anything that could by any means expose you to the action of law, or induce commercial ostracism. A respectable man of business, that is what the world sees. Is that the real self, or only the self that has to do duty at the office? Is that the thing that God sees when He looks at you? or is it only another and less attractive counterfeit presentation of self that He sees through and through? Don't let us attempt to blind Him, for we cannot. "Thou God seest me." The secret things of dishonesty, the idolatry of Mammon, the indifference to others, the selfish eagerness to make capital out of their ruin, the readiness to lie without a blush, if only there is no particular chance of the lie being detected — all this, and a great deal more, may be included in the "me," without interfering much with my commercial reputation, provided I can make it pay. With Mammon once on my side, there is not much to be feared from unfriendly criticisms in most commercial circles; but what does God see? But we must come nearer home. There is the domestic self, whose faults and failings are perhaps even more apparent than those of his commercial presentment. Your wife knows more of your real moral character, probably, than do those with whom you transact business. Your children too — for children are always sharp observers — may have noticed many a little failing about you that you would not like published in the drawing room or in the counting house; but then domestic affection is very apt to be blind. So even here we don't get at the real self. We see perhaps the respected father, the idolized husband; but what does God see? Perhaps a father who slapped his child's hands for stealing a lump of sugar, when he had that very day put a hundred pounds into his pocket by "operating" ingeniously upon the market, or by perpetrating some other act of skilfully disguised fraud; or thrashed his boy for telling a lie, when he himself had told at least a dozen that day in his own counting house. Alas! we don't get at the real man even when we find him at home. But God sees more than either wife or child, or servant or friend. "Thou God seest me." But we, must go further still. There is the ideal self, which, like a familiar spirit, we ever carry about with us — a presentation of self to self, in which we are careful to ignore or excuse all that is evil or faulty, and to magnify all that is good. How rare a thing is it for any man to entertain a really poor opinion of himself, whatever mock-modest expressions we may use? Or I might put it thus: How many of us would be able to stand behind a hedge, and hear with anything like a feeling of equanimity our faults and failings described with accuracy by a neighbour? Yes, I believe that most of us have an ideal self that we confuse with the real, and for which we have always a kindly feeling; but it is not this that God looks at. His eye is fixed, not on the phantom, but on him who creates it; not on the ideal, but on the actual. "Thou God seest me." He sees our thoughts, detecting the secret springs of motive from which our actions flow. He discerns at a glance what our life purpose is, and which way it flows. He sees our religion, and knows whether or not it is more than skin-deep. And He sees our

actual irreligion; how, it may be, some of us in this church tonight have desecrated our nature by closing it against God. We have barred the door against the Divine Visitant, and He saw us doing it! The eye of God pierces through every barrier, and discerns it all. "Thou God seest me." What does He see? The past as well as the present; the series of years gone by, as well as the marks that they have left upon our character today. In the completeness of our history, as well as in the real character of our moral condition, it still remains true, "Thou God seest me." And yet, seeing all this as no one else can or does see it, the wonderful thing is He loves us still. Poor, wandering, desolate soul! What a sudden rush of joy must have possessed her as she thus learnt for the first time, not as a mere religious or theological theory, but as a blessed fact, that truth which lies behind all other truths — the Fatherhood of God! And He sees us too, and sees us, as He did her, with a Father's eye, and loves us, wanderers though we may be, with a Father's heart; and He who took an interest in Hagar, takes an interest in us. "Whence comest thou?" Ah! who shall answer that question, and trace the history of our being up to its hidden source? Yet do we know something of the answer to the question so far as regards the race. When comest thou, O fallen man, who hast lost all contact with God, and wanderest aimlessly on from day to day, having no hope, and without God in the world? Let us never forget it, however low thou mayest have fallen, however far thou mayest have wandered, thy first home was Eden, thy first experience the revealed love of thy Father — God. "Whence comest thou?" Let us turn from the race to the individual, let us apply the question to ourselves. Whence do we come? In early years we were baptized in the Triune Name, and were branded with the Cross of Christ in token of allegiance to Him; and can we doubt that He who called the little ones to Himself, and laid His hands upon them, and blessed them, met us with His blessing in those early days? Have we turned our back upon our birthright privileges? and are we, as it were, going away further and further from all that we had a right to enjoy? Do we come from the comparative innocence of childhood? from the purer associations, the holier aspirations, of our earlier days? from the better influences of Christian homes? from the favourable atmosphere of religious society? "Whence comest thou?" Have you left all that is best and purest in human life behind you? Has your progress been all in the wrong direction? And whither wilt thou go? Perhaps you have never paused to reflect where those wandering steps of yours are taking you. Like Hagar, you have wandered on without any definite idea as to where your wanderings were to end. Whither wilt thou go? The world, with all its fading pageants, its flimsy inanities, invites your steps. It offers pleasure, but not joy; excitement, but not happiness; intoxication and stupefaction that shall benumb your nobler faculties and check your aspirations, but no satisfaction; stagnation, but not peace. How little has it done for you in the past! and in the future it can do still less. Its capacities of gratification diminish with each passing year. Yes, whither? Is there no welcome for thee in thy Father's house? no greeting of love? no feast of joy? Is He thy foe, that thou shouldst fly from Him thus?

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Jacob's Struggle for a Blessing

Genesis 32:26

And he said, Let me go, for the day breaks. And he said, I will not let you go, except you bless me.

I. He was thoroughly in earnest; he wrestled till he got the blessing.

II. If we wish to gain a blessing like Jacob's, we must be alone with God. It is possible to be alone with God, even in the midst of a multitude.

III. Jacob's heart was hardened with a load of sin. It crushed his spirit, and was breaking his heart. He could bear it no more, and so he made supplication. He wanted to be lifted out of his weakness, and made a new man.

IV. in the moment of his weakness, Jacob made a great discovery. He found that when we cannot wrestle we can cling.

V. He received the blessing wrestled for as soon as he became content to accept it as God's free gift.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Separation Ending in Union

Genesis 45:4

And Joseph said to his brothers, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother...

It was by a strange and seemingly circuitous route that these brethren of Joseph were brought near to him. Between Joseph and his brethren there was an immeasurable distance — all the difference between a nature given over to God and one abandoned to the force of evil passion. We may see in this narrative a type of the ways and means God still employs for bringing the wandering brothers of Joseph's great Antitype near to Him.

I. In order that the brothers may be really drawn near to Joseph, they have first to be separated from him by their own sin.

II. The next step towards bringing them near is their own want.

III. When they get into Joseph's presence they are suddenly subjected to the most unlooked-for and crushing trials.

IV. They are smitten to the heart with the recollection of bygone sins; these are brought to their remembrance as sins against their brother.

V. They were alone with Joseph when he made himself known to them.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Three Great Truths Taught by the Passover

Exodus 12:21-23

Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said to them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families...

I. THE UNIVERSALITY OF CONDEMNATION. Israelite and Egyptian are brought under one common charge of guilt, and there they all stand, "condemned already."

II. The great truth of SUBSTITUTION. The lamb instead of the firstborn. "Behold the Lamb of God," etc.

III. The third truth taught is APPROPRIATION. The Israelite would not have been safe if he had merely killed the lamb; he had to sprinkle its blood on the lintel and on the two side posts. When we repose our confidence in the Person of Christ, we have taken the bunch of hyssop and dipped it in the blood, and from that moment we are safe.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Israel's Deliverance

Exodus 14:30-31

Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the sea shore....

I. THE STATE OF THE ISRAELITES WHEN MOSES CAME TO THEM.

1. They were in bondage.
2. They were so far conscious of the misery of their position that they had a strong desire for liberty.
3. They were by no means ready at first to accept the message of God's deliverance.
4. They had their comforts even in slavery. In all these things we have a picture of ourselves.

II. THE DELIVERANCE.

1. The moment the Passover is observed, that moment Pharaoh's power is broken. The moment that all is right between us and God, that moment Satan's power is broken, and he can no longer hold us in bondage.
2. The waters of judgment which saved the Israelites were the means of destroying the vast hosts of Egypt. The power of Satan is broken by the very means by which he intended to destroy.
3. It is our privilege to take our stand on the other side of the Red Sea, and see ourselves "raised up with christ" into a new life.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The World Afraid of God's People

Exodus 15:14-16

The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina....

What shall make these mighty men melt away? Seeing two or three millions of unwarlike folks marching towards them — an unarmed rabble, without military discipline, and without the appliances of war? Is it before such that the mighty men of Moab are to fall back, that the chivalrous sons of Edom are to be put to flight; that all the inhabitants of Palestine are to melt away? Nothing of the kind. Those Israelites were not going to terrify all these nations with any display of their own power or prowess. It was the story of the Exodus, the story of a divided sea, the story of a certain mysterious pillar of fire, the story of the wonderful overthrow of Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea; it was this that was to fill them with despair. Many of us are at the outset terribly afraid of these hostile forces; is it not a comfort to know that on account of redemption they are actually afraid of us? In a very memorable period in "our island story," when Admiral Howard and Drake had defeated the Spanish Armada after the first great battle, they continued to pursue them for a fortnight without having a single shot or a single charge of powder left in their ships. They had nothing left but air to fill their guns with. Yet thus without any ammunition our fleet went sailing on and sailing on, while the terrified strangers fled before them, until they were driven right into the Northern Sea. Then the Admiral thought they could not do much harm there, and so he left them and came back to get powder and shot for his own ships. Our fleet, with empty guns, chased their enemies because that enemy was afraid of them. They had had one terrible defeat, and that was enough. And even so may we deal with the forces of this world. Count upon your enemies being afraid of you. If instead of being afraid of them you will only carry the war into the enemy's camp, and seek to win them for Christ, instead of allowing them to draw you away from Him, you will find that redemption has already stripped them of their courage and paralyzed their power to do you any injury.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Anticipations of Faith

Exodus 15:17-18

You shall bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of your inheritance, in the place, O LORD...

We are, perhaps, hardly surprised at the tone of jubilant confidence which pervades this glorious psalm of thanksgiving. Very strong indeed is the language used; but perhaps not stronger than might naturally have been expected to spring from such circumstances; for what a wonderful event had just transpired! Here they were then, on the other side of the Red Sea, the vast wilderness stretching before them, their long weary march not yet commenced, and wholly destitute of any adequate supplies, and without either arms, or discipline, or any capacity for warfare. Surely the prospect might have seemed most discouraging. They must have known perfectly well — what they soon found out to be a fact — that the wilderness swarmed with wandering nomad hordes, Bedouins of the desert, men of war, who might at any moment come down upon them, cut off their stragglers, or even put the whole undisciplined rabble to rout and make a prey of them. And even supposing they should overcome these difficulties of the journey, what then? There lay Canaan before them, but how were they, who could hardly hold their own against the tribes of the desert, to undertake aggressive warfare against nations dwelling in cities with walls great and high, and equipped with all the appliances of ancient warfare? How chimerical their enterprise would seem on reflection! how improbable that they would ever succeed in taking possession of the land which God had promised to them! But faith looked on beyond all difficulties. Faith never stops for commissariat supplies! Faith does not ask, Where is my daily bread to come from? Faith does not wait to be clothed with armour, save such armour as the power of God supplies. Faith does not stop to weigh the adequacy of the means within our reach to induce the end. Children of God, it is time we endeavoured to apply the lessons suggested by all this to ourselves. We too have been the subjects of a great deliverance, a deliverance as supernatural in its character and as astonishing in its conditions as ever was the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. This deliverance is also the product of redemption. We are saved in order that we may rise to the prize of our high calling, and become inheritors of our true Land of Promise; and the first great deliverance is with us also surely an earnest and a pledge of all that is to follow. I suppose it is because we so imperfectly apprehend the miracle of our deliverance and its completeness, and the new relations which it establishes between ourselves and God, and between ourselves and sin, that our feelings at the outset of our new life are so often just the opposite of those depicted in this triumphant song. Instead of joyous anticipation, how common a thing it is to meet with gloomy forebodings on the part of the newborn children of God, fresh from the Cross of Christ, just rising, as we may say, spiritually out of the waters of the Red Sea. And many of us have scarcely been saved from our condition of condemnation and spiritual bondage before we begin to consider the difficulties that lie before us, the enemies that we shall have to encounter, the sacrifices that we may have to make, the trials that we may have to undergo. The wilderness seems so vast, the enemies so mighty, the supplies so inadequate or precarious; and while our eyes of unbelief are resting upon

all these adverse considerations, our heart seems to sink within us until we are ready to turn back again into Egypt. How common a thing it is to meet with young Christians who seem indeed to be on the right side of the Red Sea, but who appear to be more inclined to wring their hands in terror than to "sound the loud timbrel" in exultation!

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Solitary Sin-Bearer

Leviticus 16:20-22

And when he has made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar...

The solitude of the sin-bearer is something altogether distinct from the solitude of the Holy One. The solitude of holiness separated Him from sinners; but that separation, which made Him lead in His humanity a strange, lonesome life, yet brought Him into such full contact with all the glorious beings and the realities of the spirit-world, that such a solitude could hardly be looked upon with any considerable regret, or be the source of actual pain. The solitude of the sin-bearer is different from that of the representative of holiness and purity. Consider the causes of this solitude.

1. Wherever sin exists it is an isolating principle. Its tendency is to induce seclusion and separation, to shut the person who is possessed of it from all connection with that which is outside itself.

2. The scapegoat was to bear upon its head all the confessed iniquity of the children of Israel, and to bear it into a land of separation. Christ was the Scapegoat of the human family. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read that He, by the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself to God. The scapegoat finds the land of separation at last, all alone in the darkness. He bore our sins into the land not inhabited. No witnessing spirit can find them there; no denizen of those dreary regions can rediscover them. They are lost sight of by man; the angels find them obliterated from their view; and God Himself has turned His back upon them, and left them in the land of separation.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Crossing of the Jordan

Joshua 3:14-17

And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan...

Our subject brings before us a scene which in many of its features reminds us of that memorable night in which the Lord led Israel forth by that unexpected way, through the waters of the sea, from the house of bondage into liberty, from cruel slavery into the joy of a new national life. Now there is much to be learned from considering both the points of similarity and of contrast in those two memorable events. First we notice that in both cases there was a going down into the element of water, and a rising up out of it into an entirely new position — the mystical symbol of death, and burial, and of resurrection. In both cases by this passage through water a complete separation was effected between the old and the new state of things, and in both cases the passage indicated the commencement of a new and happy career. In each case the water, which naturally should have been an obstacle, became, we may say, an assistance, and that which naturally should have been a cause of danger became a means of safety. And in both cases this was caused by a distinct Divine intervention, and in each case that manifestation of supernatural power was associated with a symbol of the Divine presence, though the symbols in the two cases were different — in the first it was the fiery pillar, in the second it was the ark of the covenant. Nor are the points of contrast less striking than the points of agreement. The frenzied terror, the fearful excitement which pervaded that terrified multitude at the Red Sea is conspicuous by its absence on this occasion; they are no longer fleeing from destruction and death, but passing on to a higher and happier kind of life. There they were passing from a fertile land into a howling desert, where they would have to depend on a miracle for every meal. Here they were passing from a waste of desert into a fertile land — a land that flowed with milk and honey. There we hear an outburst of triumphant enthusiasm when the sea was crossed, and loud songs of triumph rang forth from the vast multitude as the returning wave submerged the Egyptians. Here all seems to have been calm and solemn; the only expression of strong feeling was the setting up of those memorial stones as if a deep and lasting recollection of this great fact were aimed at rather than an evanescent excitement. In both cases, observe, we are contemplating a scene of salvation, yet is there a great difference between the salvation effected in the one case and in the other. In both cases the salvation comes through a divinely-appointed Saviour; but even between these there is a contrast. Moses was the Saviour from, Joshua was the Saviour into. And all this may throw much light upon a question that seems greatly to exercise the minds of some, especially just at present. It is unquestionably a fact that long after their conversion some Christians pass through an experience so marked and definite in its character, and leading to such happy and unmistakable consequences in their subsequent lives, that some teachers give to this great inward change the name of A. second conversion. Others speak of it as entire sanctification, and urge upon all indiscriminately the necessity of passing through some such definite experience, Now two things are equally plain from this narrative. The first is, that the crossing of the Jordan did mark a very definite epoch in the history of the Israelites, and served to emphasise a crisis in their history, out

of which they passed into a new and far more satisfactory condition. The second is, that this crossing of the Jordan, nevertheless, would not have been necessary at all but for the backsliding and perversity and unbelief of the Israelites. The lesson of Divine power exercised over the very elements, and over that element which, but for the intervention of an omnipotent hand, must have destroyed those whom it now protected, and the pledge that such a miracle contained for the future — all this would have been fresh in the minds of the Israelites when they first reached Kadesh-Burned, and would have required no repetition. I was much struck with the remark of a dear friend of mine. Shortly after I had devoted myself entirely to mission work he said to me with great emphasis, "Now, my dear brother, you are going to give yourself up to the work of preaching the gospel, and I hope the Lord will give you many converts. But whatever you do, try and bring them in at Kadesh-Barnea; don't tell them that they've got to go wandering in the wilderness for forty years." I have never forgotten his words; and how I long for you young Christians who are just starting forwards from the Red Sea that you may be spared these forty years of weary wandering; that it should not be necessary for you to go on year after year murmuring over your doubts and fears, your disappointments and your barrenness, your dulness and deadness, your infirmities and failures. Oh, it is weary work this! I pray you avoid it. We have seen that both the passage of the Red Sea and the passage of the Jordan were miracles of salvation wrought for Israel by God. We have also to notice that they are both instances of salvation by water. It is by God's judgment upon sin that we are to be saved from sin; by His judgment upon the world we are to be saved from the world. And now here lies our practical lesson. Whether we have been baptized at the moment of our conversion, and actually expressed our faith in Christ for justification in submitting to the ordinance, as probably was the case with St. Paul, or whether we are baptized in unconscious infancy before our faith became operative, as is usually the case with us Church-people, or whether we are baptized long after justification, as in the case with modern Baptists, we cannot become truly justified without passing through that which the ordinance symbolises — death and resurrection. Rise from the regrets of the past into the acquisitions of the future. Dry your tears, and claim your heritage. And here is the first step, "Sanctify yourselves: for to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you." Sanctify yourselves. This is God's call to those of us who would fain cross over the Jordan. Put away every unclean thing — all that interferes with the Divine operation. And the next lesson is, expect! To-morrow the Lord will do wonders amongst you. Only by a miracle of grace can you be raised to your true level of Christian experience, and brought into the land that flows with milk and honey. Your heavenly Leader seems to ask, "Believest thou that I am able to do this?" Oh, let Him be answered from the bottom of your heart with a fervent "Yea, Lord; there is nothing too hard for Thee." Then comes the great fact, the pledge and presage of all coming victories: "Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you," &c. Go down again into the place of death and burial, but see your Lord there before you, a pledge that when you pass through the waters, because He is with thee, the floods shall not overflow thee. Go down into the place of judgment, and see thine old wilderness life, with all its waywardness and wilfulness, judged, condemned, and left behind thee for ever.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Attitude of Reuben

Judges 5:12-22

Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead your captivity captive, you son of Abinoam....

Could such a thing as actual neutrality have been possible under the circumstances, the men of Reuben would have represented such an attitude. But under the circumstances it was impossible. No member of the favoured race could be actually neutral when his brethren were struggling for liberty and life. Not to assist was to oppose. To look on coldly was to help the foe. They saw their brethren gathering on the opposite bank. They heard the sound of the trumpet and the noise of war. Would they not arise and join them? Could they be indifferent when the very existence of their nation was at stake? But against this higher impulse had to be set considerations of worldly profit and loss. "Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks?" It was this fatal sound that decided them. It was with them as it so often is with us — the nearer the temptation, the more powerful it becomes. Had they marshalled themselves for war, and left their homes, the bleatings of the sheepfold would never have reached their ears, and the higher impulse would have prevailed; but as they lingered vacillating by the sheepfolds, the nearer attractions of home and prosperity proved too strong. The great opportunity passed away, leaving an indelible stain on the history of the tribe. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." Were they happy? A double-minded man is never happy. Unstable in all his ways, he can neither enjoy the world nor God. They might escape danger, but they could not escape the "great searchings of heart." Their conscience smote them, even while their worldly prosperity continued. They lost the power to enjoy what they had sacrificed their character to retain. Ah, how many Reubens have we still in the Church of Christ! — men who make fair promises under the influence of a momentary excitement or a higher emotion, but whose hearts are not fully surrendered to God. They grasp after the good things of the world, and love them. They seek the good opinion of their fellow-men, and love it. If a Christianity can be discovered which shall cost them nothing, which shall not even lower them in the estimation in which men of the world hold them, such a Christianity they are ready to accept; but the Christianity of the manger and of the Cross, of Gethsemane and Calvary, they shirk from with ill-concealed aversion.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Why Did Dan Remain in Ships

Judges 5:12-22

Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead your captivity captive, you son of Abinoam....

I dare say Dan could have given what might have seemed to himself a very sensible answer. Surely it would never have done for Dan to lose his commerce. Surely it was most important that he should retain his mercantile position. To leave his ships and go to fight the Lord's battle in the field would have been to turn his back upon his most obvious interests. He had no men to spare; no time to spare; no money to spare. Far too busy were the Danites to think of their brethren in the field. It mattered not that national liberty and religion might be lost so long as Dan retained his ships. Go to the streets of one of our great towns, and you will see the same thing re-enacted. Men running to and fro as though life were at stake in every effort, toiling at their business all day long, and when night comes too wearied to think of spiritual things. They have too much to do — are far too busy to think of the business of life!... Why! does he not know that his ships are doomed sooner or later to fearful shipwreck? Dost thou not know, O lover of the world, that the day must come when thou and thy darling idols will have to part? What profit on thy dying bed to remember that thou hast laboured here for that which thou canst not carry with thee? Thou hast enlarged thy barns, increased thy merchandise, raised thy family in the world, and left thy children in prosperity; and now the sentence falls upon thy trembling soul, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." Poor consolation under the sentence of doom to remember that thy coffers are full while thy soul was starved.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Men of Keilah

1 Samuel 23:12

Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the LORD said, They will deliver you up.

When first; introduced to us here, David is represented as being reduced to great straits by the malignant hostility of Saul. But although David's condition seems so desperate, and Saul's power so great — when an emergency arises, and the men of Keilah find themselves in sore straits, it is not from Saul, the king after man's own heart, but from the despised David, that assistance comes. Let us try and picture to ourselves the scene. The country folk are crowding into the little town by hundredth. Their homesteads have been pillaged and burned, and they themselves have only escaped with their lives. The ruthless Philistines have already stripped some of them of everything they possess, and unless unlooked for help arrive there seems no escape from the superior forces of the foe. They have taken refuge for the moment in Keilah, but this temporary shelter affords them no real security. The town is quite unprepared to stand a siege, or even to resist a vigorous assault. On every face you can see sorrow and anxiety only too plainly printed. Suddenly breathless messengers appear approaching the walls of the little city, and it is easy to see that they are the bearers of good tidings. From lip to lip the good news spreads, and all is summed up in a single word, and that word is David. Yes, it is actually true; the conqueror of Goliath of Gath has once again put his life in his hands, and wrought a great deliverance. The Philistines are utterly routed, and Keilah is saved. Imagine if you can the feelings of the eager multitude at that moment, as his good news spreads like wildfire amongst them. See yonder the old men, the fathers of the city, are lifting up their hands to God, and pouring forth praise; mothers are weeping for joy, and strong men have tears in their eyes as they grasp each other's hands in heartfelt gratulation. And have not some of us known something of a similar feeling in the course of our own inner life? Was there not a time when we woke up to find ourselves in terrible danger, and indeed were driven to despair of helping ourselves, or escaping by our own futile strugglings out of the hand of the destroyer. Robbed and injured, and threatened with still graver evils, we found ourselves reduced to the sorest straits, and nothing that the world spirit could do for us could relieve us from our misery or our peril. Some of you have known something of all this in your own personal experience. And then there came the moment of deliverance, when you were able to say, "I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord." Not by a Miltonic conflict between winged combatants, not by any display of divine omnipotence crushing down all opposition, but none the less by the most sublime deed of heroism that ever was performed, deliverance came. Our wistful gaze turned at last towards the cross of Calvary, and there we saw our battle fought and won by Him whom man despised, whom the world crucified as a felon outside the gate. A new and not less alarming peril arose, and one they had neither foreseen nor even thought of in their first moments of joyous enthusiasm. It is heard with feelings of consternation that the infuriated king is preparing to march upon the ill-fated town, thus exposed to a new and not less terrible alarm. What was to be done? Their manner towards David becomes cold and restrained, and soon, no

doubt, the rulers and elders of the town gather together in secret conclave to discuss how they were to deal with their former benefactor and friend. Meanwhile David also is making the discovery of his new danger. He has received the information from the Urim and Thummim, "Saul will certainly come down." And the sacred historian lets us into the secret cause of this hostile movement. On hearing of David's entry into Keilah, Saul had exclaimed, "God hath delivered him into my hand," etc. There is something very suggestive and instructive in all this. The entrance of Christ into our nature offers Satan his opportunity, and you may depend upon it he will use it. So soon as Jesus Christ is received into our hearts, and when we have admitted His royal claim, or even begun to recognize Him as the anointed Heir of all, the world will begin to marshal its forces against us; and the great object of the prince of the world is to induce us to commit just such an act of perfidy as Saul expected or desired from the men of Keilah. This much is sure, Saul will certainly come down. This spirit of rancorous hatred which animated Saul against David has been reproduced over and over again in the history of the Christian Church. This moved the heathen of old in their persecution of the primitive Christians; and those who confessed Christ in those days, and were true to Him, knew well that in every city bonds and imprisonments, and perhaps even torture and death, awaited them. And when persecution is not thus public and open, it is often none the less cruel. I have known of fathers in affluent circumstances who have threatened to cut their sons off with a shilling if they did not give up their religion, and who have proved as good as their word. Amongst our friends in our home circle, in society, in the workshop, in the regiment, on sea or land, they who are true to their divine Master are exposed to the bitter animosity and relentless persecution of the world. And let us remember that the persecution that takes the form of ribald scorn or refined contempt is less easily tolerated by many natures than more violent measures of persecution. To return to the men of Keilah, whom we left in solemn conclave assembled to consider this new danger, and how it was to be met. I fancy I can see one shrewd and keen-looking old man rising up amongst his neighbours to give his view of the matter — a sort of moral anticipation of the counsel of Caiaphas. "It is a very simple and a very practical question that we are about to decide, my friends, and I will put it thus in a single sentence: Is one man to perish, or the city? That is the question in its naked simplicity. Some will, I dare say, talk very sentimentally of the brave thing David has done, and of the debt of gratitude we owe him. Well, that may be all very fine as a matter of sentiment; but this is a business meeting, and our wisdom will lie in taking a calm, dispassionate, business-like view of the matter. We have, of course, to consider our own interests. We are in a work-a-day sort of world, and we must regard everything from a business point of view. Three courses are open to us. Either to fight David's battle, and share David's fate, sacrificing our lives, or flying with him to the mountains of the wild goats, leaving our city to be spared by the conqueror. Our next course is to give David a word of warning, and tell him of our dilemma. That may seem a right thing to do; but if Saul knew that we have done it we shall bring down his indignation on our heads, and the probability is that he will vent his fury on the men of Keilah; so that our case will be just as bad as it would be if David were within our walls. The third course, and to my mind it is the only sensible one, is to make up our mind that when the time comes we will deliver David up to his master, and to intimate this our intention at once to Saul. Whatever may come of this, the responsibility will be with Saul, and not with us; we shall only have acted as our circumstances compelled us to do. Of course we are very sorry for David, and of course we all feel profound regret at having to treat a man so, who has been very useful to us. But then, you know, as I have said, we must consider ourselves. This is our

only chance of safety, and we must make the most of it. We may not like doing it, but we all have to do a great many things that we don't like. And while they are thus deliberating, there is David alone with God and his priest. The ephod is brought out, and the enquiry is made, "Will Saul come down?" and the answer is, "He will come down." David's heart sinks within him. "O Lord!" he asks a second time, "will the men of Keilah deliver me up and my men into the hands of Saul?" And from the mystic breastplate the inexorable answer is returned, "They will deliver thee up." I wonder if that was the moment when David said in his haste, "All men are liars." At any rate, I do not suppose he ever entertained a lower estimate of humanity than at that moment. These fervent thanks, expressed with so much emotion, were only empty breath after all. What a miserable world it is! Honour and manliness seem vanished from it, and truth has sped her flight. It must have been a sad moment; and which of us would not have felt for him? But stay. Have we no similar feelings for another "Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" another, to whom we ourselves owe far more than the men of Keilah ever owed to David? It comes to pass that not a few Christians who have once known something of the great deliverance, and rejoiced in God's salvation, prove false to their Master in the hour of trial, that they may escape the world's hostility. They throw open the gates of Mansoul to the world, and so betray their Master into the hands of His foe by betraying His cause. You may be sure that the first care of the world spirit when thus invited to enter and take possession of our nature will be, so to speak, to assassinate his rival, and Christ will desert the desecrated fane, and leave the soul to its new false friends.

(W. Aitken, M. A.)

The Atonement a Necessity

2 Samuel 14:14

For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither does God respect any person...

Now, observe, David did not cease to be a father because he was a king, and he did not cease to be a king because he was a father. Now, contemplate the everlasting God in the relationship in which He stands to His creature man. Observe, first, in a certain limited sense, God is the Father of us all. "We are all His offspring." But remember, this is only in a certain definite sense; that is to say, every one is a child of God, inasmuch as he is the offspring of man, who was created by, and received his life directly from, the Supreme Being, and inasmuch as each of us are called into existence by His sovereign will. Now, you will find that those who are indisposed to accept the Atonement will always lay great stress upon this view of the fatherhood of God. They will say, "Is not God a Father? and if He is our Father, is it not natural for Him to grieve for His children?" To which I reply by pointing to our story. Was not David a father, and had he not a father's heart? Yes. Why did not David forgive Absalom? Because he was more than a father: he was a king. You tell me that God is your Father. Yes, I am ready to admit that in the sense I have defined He is. Let me point out, however, that He is not the Father of us all in the full sense of that word. If you have not received "the Spirit of His Son" — that "spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father," you are not occupying the filial relationship towards Him to which you have a right, and hence you are not entitled to draw such inferences as you otherwise might from the analogy of the earthly relationship. Now let us look closely at this picture. I observe, first, that the heart of the old man David is yearning over his son Absalom. Though Absalom is a criminal, the father would fain forgive him; but justice and honour forbade his doing so. How eager was he to do it: but then, you know, he was a king. Another thought rises up against the ardent desire: "I am king, and if I forgive my own son, people will say I am guilty of favouritism." Well, what was to be done? It won't do for the king to become depressed and miserable about the matter. Somehow or another Absalom must be got back. So Joab felt, moved, no doubt, partly by sympathy, and partly by policy, hoping to make the best of his relations both with the present and with the future monarch. So he devises a plan. He gets hold of a wily woman, as crafty as himself, and sets her in the king's way; and as the king passes by, she gains his ear with a dolorous wail of distress — "Help, O king!" One was dead; she could not get him back, and the sacrifice of the life of her only remaining son would not recall him to life. He was dead; and now the representatives of the law were coming to take the last support, the only joy she had left her in the world. The widow gained the day, but what had happened? Mercy had triumphed over judgment. And what is the sequel of this victory of mercy over judgment? By-and-by, the crushing and overwhelming outburst of Divine indignation upon those guilty tribes and their guiltier leader. I see the forest of Mount Ephraim reeking with human gore, and twenty thousand corpses strewn upon the ground, and suspended on yonder oak — a spectacle for all time — I see the traitor-hearted parricide, with the javelins in his heart! That is the sequel. And, as I contemplate the blood-drenched battlefield; as I think of the tears of the widows

and the wail of fatherless children; as I think of the misery, the devastation that cursed the land; as I hear the wail of a stricken country ringing up into the ears of God, I discover what mere fancy does, when mercy is allowed to triumph over justice. I point to the vast holocaust, to the ghastly corpses piled one over another, and I ask, "Who slew all these?" The reply is, "Mercy slew them." Not least, I point to yonder fatal oak, where the body of Absalom hangs suspended, with the javelins thrust through his quivering body, and into his very heart, and I ask, "Who slew that miserable wretch?" and the answer is, "Mercy slew him." He never would have been present at that battlefield, or have been in a position to raise that standard of revolt, and so he would never have brought on his own head that terrible retribution, if he had not been the object of that royal mercy to which he had no claim. Mercy was the undoing of him; this is the solemn moral of this tragic tale. With such a lesson as that before our eyes, shall we turn to the Mighty Monarch of the Universe, and venture to say, "O God! why shouldst Thou require an atonement? Why shouldst Thou not forgive us without any atonement at all?" I wonder what sort of a world we should have if God were to act on such principles. I wonder what sort of a universe we should have if God were to act on such principles. God does not. God will not. Now, I proceed to ask, what would have been needed in order that Absalom might have been brought back from his banishment without danger to his king, his country, or himself? Two things, at least, would have been required. First, it would have been necessary that the moral dignity and majesty of law should be vindicated in an exemplary manner. Surely not less than this was demanded by the circumstances of the case. If Absalom is to be recalled to the king's court, it must somehow or other be so arranged as that the law shall not suffer by it — that the criminal shall not be able to point to that prince, and to say, "Ah! there is a premium upon sin." Second, and not less, it would have been necessary that a radical change should have been effected in Absalom's character, so that a repetition of such offences might have been rendered most improbable, if not impossible. But mere mercy did not, could not, produce this; on the contrary, it might be expected to breed callousness and indifference to the threats of the law, and to dispose the pardoned culprit to think lightly of an offence which could be so readily overlooked. He was the same man morally after receiving the king's pardon as before — as vindictive, ruthless, treacherous, cruel. Hence, his presence at David's court was a necessary danger to society, and the results that followed are not surprising. We conclude, then, that these two things are necessary before the prerogative of mercy can be exercised by a sovereign wisely and well, and without injury to his authority, to the state, or to the individual recipient of it. Keep these in mind, and then you will be better able to understand the necessity of the atonement. First, the vindication of the majesty of the law; and, second, the complete transformation of the character of the offender. David could not compass either in this case. No human ingenuity could solve the problem; so in justice and right there could be nothing for it but that Absalom should remain in bonds. Now we have observed that this wise woman of Tekoah, when she argues the matter with David, points to God's dealings with man as her justification of her plea; but it is worthy of notice that she does so in a very cautious and guarded way. The truth is, she knew a deal more theology than many of our modern professors. What does she say? If you examine her argument carefully you will see that, strictly speaking, it does not carry its own conclusion. There is a logical fallacy in it. Put it thus — "You should follow the example of God, David; you can't be wrong in doing what God does. God devises means whereby His 'banished' shall not be expelled from Him — therefore you may recall yours without devising any means at all, but by a mere arbitrary and despotic exercise of the prerogative of mercy. You may not be able

to do it as God does it, but, means or no means, get it done." You see the argument does not hold water. It was a sophistry; but it was a sophistry that carried the day, because it was addressed to the heart rather than to the head. Now she teaches us here a great truth. God indeed "devises means whereby His banished shall not be expelled from Him." What are the means? I point unhesitatingly to Calvary's Cross, and I say, "There are the means." You may be sure that if any other means would have answered the great purpose, God would have adopted them. If anything else would have met the requirements of the case, surely, surely, in some other way the mighty problem would have been solved. But there was only one means — I say it reverently — that even the wisdom of God could suggest. "We preach Christ crucified." The Jews called this a stumbling-block. They did not see their need of an atonement; they wanted a king. Do you believe that God can show mercy? I suppose we certainly all agree to that, at least. Those who repudiate the atonement admit that God can show mercy. Next, do you believe that God should show mercy? Surely here also we are all agreed — we are all of us poor, frail, fallible creatures, and under these circumstances it is very necessary that mercy should be extended to us. Very good; we start with two points in common. Is this as far as we can go together? Can we not find another point in common? Will you not agree with me that, in showing mercy, God has a right to condition the exercise of His sovereign prerogative in any way that seems most in accordance with wisdom and goodness? Surely you will not object to that position, will you? If I am giving away favours, free favours, unmerited favours, and I choose to attach any condition to those favours, surely I have a right to do so if I will. Is not that so? Certainly. Does mercy come of right or of grace? Surely you will agree with me that it comes of grace. No sinner has a claim on the Divine mercy. Well, if it comes of grace — that is, if it is a free gift — God has a right to qualify it according to His own mind, whatever that mind may be. "Well," you reply, "but God does not act on any such arbitrary and despotic fashion." Quite true. But what if God chooses to qualify His administration of mercy in such a fashion that mercy, instead of being a premium on crime, shall be a preventive of crime? What about that? Oh, if men who despise the Atonement could only see the wonderful wisdom, the true philosophy, that lurks underneath the Atonement, we should have an end to the supercilious criticism which so often stands between the soul and God. When God elected to extend mercy towards the fallen world, He also made up His mind that that mercy should be a double blessing; and in order that it might be a double blessing He took care that His mercy should not be bestowed promiscuously, so to speak, but that it should be bestowed in such a form that, on the one hand, the majesty of God's law and the eternal and changeless antipathy of God against sin should be clearly manifested to the eyes of all; while, on the other hand, the moral character of the sinner should be so completely changed and revolutionised that instead of mercy being a premium upon guilt, on the contrary, mercy should render sin impotent, and strip the tyrant powers of hell of all their dominion over man. That is the true meaning of atonement. How is it to be done? "God devises means whereby His banished shall not be expelled from him;" and the first means is that He vindicates His law, and makes it honourable. You say it was not lust that He should bear our sins. Stop a moment. It would not have been just if He had been anything less than God. It would not have been just if the everlasting God had laid the burden of one creature's guilt upon the head of another: but do you mean to tell me that God has not a right to do what He likes with Himself? Do you mean that God has not a right to vindicate His own law? And the second is that not only was the Sufferer Divine, but that He suffered in human form, and as a man, and that as such there was a "joy that was set before Him." What was that joy? The joy of pure

benevolence; the joy of being able to rescue the children of earth on their way to perdition; the joy of being able to restore a fallen race, and reconsecrate to His Father a desecrated world; the joy of triumphant love. The crown and the reward of the Man Christ Jesus is to be obtained by Him in His humanity according to the words of the prophet, "When He shall see His seed"; "When He shall see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied"; when a ransomed Church gathered in His presence, and clustering round His person, shall pour forth through a bright eternity the continuous offering of unwearied, grateful praise to Him who hath loved them and given Himself for them. Well now, there it is; God's wondrous means. Have you anything to say against it? Had not God a right to provide such a means if it seemed good to Him? Now let us consider its effects. First, we have a supreme vindication of God's attitude towards sin. What more is wanted? One thing more, or the Atonement may yet fail of its purpose. One thing more is demanded by the circumstances of the case. What is it? That the acceptance of the benefit shall necessarily involve a radical transformation of the sinner. How is it to be effected? By a man's trying to turn over a new leaf. No; that won't effect it. If I do turn over a new leaf, I am still the same man now as I was yesterday, with the same motives, the same impulses, the same temptations, the same infirmities. Do you mean to say that you can make a new man of yourself by a resolution? How silly of people when they talk in this way. Do they not know something about the force of habit? "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature." When the weary soul makes its way to the Cross of Calvary, what does it see? The first thing it sees is a dying man. You have seen that, all of you. You ask what His life has been. You read the record of it here, and you say, "Why, what evil has He done?" and even while you wait in vain for an answer, you look again, and this time you discover, under the form of a dying man, the august presence of the living God. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself." Then, bewildered and amazed, once again you turn your eyes on this strange spectacle. More inquiringly than ever, you fix your gaze upon the overwhelming sight. What does it mean? You have seen the dying man; you have seen the present God; what do you see now? The thing above all others that is opposed to God — sin. "He was made sin for us who knew no sin." But observe — it is sin crucified, not sin triumphant — sin nailed to the tree and executed, not sin doing its own deadly work. Once again you turn your gaze to the cross of Christ. Is there anything more to be seen? You strain your powers of vision to the utmost, with the eager concentrated gaze of faith. What do you see now? You have seen the dying man; you have seen the Son of God; you have seen crucified sin. What do you see there now? I will tell you what I see. I see my guilty self nailed to that cross — myself, the felon, represented in the person of Him, the Holy One, who has voluntarily consented to identify Himself with me; I see my corrupt "old man" obtaining what its sin has deserved. St. Paul saw this as he looked at the cross, and boldly exclaimed, "I am crucified with Christ." What then? If I be crucified with Christ, then, thanks be to God, between me and my old self, upon which the law of God has done its work, there is an actual separation. I have done with that old life of mine. The crucified old nature is left in Jesus' tomb; there the burden of my sins is cast. Henceforth the power of my sins is broken, and I enter into a new life, and rote novel and blessed relationships. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Do you not see that a man cannot claim the benefit of the Atonement without admitting first the justice of the sentence illustrated by the Atonement; and, in the second place, without seeing himself by faith as cut off by force of that sentence, thus undergone, from all connection with the former life of sin; nor, in the third place, without entering into a new and glorious relationship with the living God. He who is buried and raised again with Christ is already in possession of the power of an endless life, and thus enjoys a

new moral force, animated by new motives, and fired with new desires. Thus he goes forth from the cross a "new creature" in Christ Jesus. You cannot afford to dispense with the Atonement. Your heads need it, your hearts need it, your lives need it. Would to God we all understood its mystic power. Now, our text states that God has devised means whereby His banished should not be expelled from Him. At this moment we are banished, but, thank God, we are not yet expelled. Those of you who are not yet restored to the Divine favour are banished. The joyful light of God's mercy does not rest upon your lives or upon your hearts. You are banished: the terrible sentence of banishment has already been recorded against you. Young men, do you know what it is to be in anything like spiritual communion with God? Is God a reality to you — a present Friend? Does He dwell in your hearts? Nay: for you are banished — already banished — some of you. But remember, though you are banished, the heart of God is yearning over you. The message from the Cross to you — if you will but hear it — surely amounts to this: "Come home, come home, ye banished! Come home, come home, ye wandering souls! ye who have found your way out from the Divine presence, and have lost your way in a desolate world, come home!"

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Joy

Nehemiah 8:9-10

And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said to all the people...

The goodness of God in His providential dealings with us, and in the general economy of the world, is shown not so much by the supply of what is necessary as by the provision of what is in excess of the bare necessities of life. To call creatures into existence, and then to make no sort of provision for their existence, would argue not so much want of benevolence as despotic inconsistency and capricious ineptitude. In our Zoological Gardens, with their regulation allowances to the animals, there is just enough to meet the claims of necessity; but God makes that wonderful environment in which, when left to themselves, these animals find not only a bare sufficiency that makes life possible, but a profusion of favourable conditions and features that makes life worth living. The lark soaring heavenward; the herd of hippopotami disporting themselves in an African river; the school of whales shooting up their foam-fountains, or placidly basking on the sun-warmed surface of the bay — these and a thousand other objects all seem to bear the same witness that God has made provision, not only for the maintenance, but for the enjoyment, of His creatures. If He shows His goodness towards the lower animals by surrounding them with all that seems necessary for their enjoyment of life, it is only reasonable to suppose that He will make a similar provision for man. Such provision is made in the gospel revelation. Man asks for happiness, and God proposes to give him joy; he asks for security, and God proposes to give him peace; he asks for permanence, and God proposes to give him eternal life; he asks for satisfaction, and God offers him nothing less than Himself. If men could be persuaded that there is more real happiness to be found in serving God than in serving self, in doing right than in doing wrong, Satan would be robbed of his favourite weapon, and we should soon see the whole world transformed. But how is this to be brought about? Happy lives that are happy because they are holy are more likely to speak forcibly to the hearts of the children of this world than any amount of theological theorising. This was one of the mightiest arguments employed by primitive Christianity. Real joy in religion — a joy that followed men into their daily life, and lit up all their experiences; a joy that was unspeakable and full of glory — all this was entirely new in the history of the world, and it must have seemed just what the world wanted. What a weary world wants as much as anything to-day is the testimony of bright faces and bounding hearts as well as joyful tongues, to the fact that the kingdom of God is not only righteousness, but peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. The Church of Christ is weak to-day because there is so little joy in it. Joy, then, is designed to play an important part in Christian experience. We shall do well to consider — I. THE SOURCE FROM WHICH IT PROCEEDS.

1. Joy is mentioned next to love amongst the fruits of the Spirit, and this order is usually illustrated in spiritual experience. Joy is one of the earliest signs of the new life; if there is joy in heaven over the sinner saved, no wonder that there is joy on earth in the sinner's consciousness of salvation.

2. It is also the product of the new and wondrous influence which stirs the soul to its depth when we are restored to our proper relations to the Divine, the mighty impulse of renewed vitality. There is always something essentially joyous in the bursting forth of new life. As in nature, so it is in grace. The new life that is born is indeed an Isaac — a child of laughter. When the Divine Spirit enters and takes possession of our quickened nature He necessarily brings His own joy along with Him.

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS THAT BELONG TO IT.

1. As joy flows from a renewal of our proper relations with God, so it is dependent upon the maintenance of those relations. St. Peter tells us that it is in Him "whom having not seen we love" that we "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory," and Paul, "Rejoice in the Lord." Twice he speaks of joy in the Holy Ghost.

2. There is always something in God that we may rejoice in (Hab. 3:17, 18). It is this characteristic of true spiritual joy that raises those that possess it superior to the circumstances with which they may be surrounded, and which makes it possible for them to realise in their experience what may seem a paradox — "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

3. This joy is enhanced by all that is in accordance with the mind and will of God. What causes joy to Him, causes joy naturally enough to those whose joy is in Him. Thus we have — (1) The joy of calm acquiescence in the Divine will.

(2) The joy of co-operation in the Divine work.

4. The intensity of this joy will be in proportion to its purity. Conclusion: It may be asked, How are we to get this joy? I answer —

1. Cease to seek joy for its own sake. Self-abnegation is the condition of the higher joy, and when we are pursuing joy for its own sake, we are not complying with this condition.

2. Remember that joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and you can't make fruit grow. It is the life that produces the fruit; but you must see to it that the life has fair play. Beware of loss of communion. Guard against disobedience. Exercise yourself in contemplation, in praise, and in adoring worship. The tree needs to be bathed in sunshine if its fruit is to be ripe and perfect; and nothing must come between us and the light of His face if our joy is to be perfected. In heaven it will be all joy, because in that fair land God has His way.

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A. .)

The Story of a Great Deliverance

Esther 8:15-17

And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold...

Some of the most striking illustrations of Divine truth are afforded to us in the incidents of history. It might be too much to say that the Book of Esther is an allegory, but I believe that its spiritual purpose is, that it should furnish us with a most striking illustration of that greater deliverance which God hath wrought for the sons of men through Jesus Christ.

I. Now the first thing to be noticed in this story is, THE SECRET OF ISRAEL'S DANGER. It arose from the fact that Israel had an enemy at court — "that wicked Haman," who was, in the first place, moved by bitter hatred against the person of Mordecai, but who extended his antipathy to the whole nation to which the object of his hatred belonged. Observe, however, that the strength of the enemy's position rested upon a more valid basis than his own personal hatred. In urging this case against them, he was able to appeal to the laws of the king's realm, and that "it was not for the king's profit to suffer them." We need to point out where the analogy fails, as well as where it becomes instructive. There is no kind of moral resemblance between the Christian's God, and this half-barbarous monarch, Ahasuerus. This man was a capricious and licentious Oriental tyrant, utterly selfish; while righteousness and mercy are blended in wondrous harmony with the attributes of Him whom we acknowledge as King of kings, and who holds our lives and our destinies in His hands. Once again, these Jews were harmless folk, and the charge brought against them, though plausible, was destitute of any such foundation in fact as could have justified severe measures against them. We may despise the moral character of this Oriental despot, and yet the attitude which he, as a king, assumed towards the Jews may well serve to illustrate the attitude which the King of kings is constrained to assume towards those who disobey His laws. Further, though the Jewish people were innocent of any moral or serious political offence, yet at the same time, the fact that they had laws and institutions of their own and that these laws and institutions were diverse from those of other nations, and in particular did not wholly accord with the laws of the Medes and the Persians, placed them in a position of apparent sedition against the ruling power. Here, then, first we have a striking illustration of the relations between the King of kings and Lord of lords, and His rebel creature man. In virtue of the sovereign position which He occupies in His universe, He cannot tolerate anything like deviation from those eternal statutes of righteousness which He Himself has laid down for His creatures; and, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that the sinner does break the King's laws, and set His authority at defiance. We also have a determined and malignant foe, "the accuser of the brethren," who first lays himself out to induce us to sin against these eternal edicts, and to form habits of life which are altogether at variance with the Divine mind, and who then turns round upon his victims and next accuses us to the Divine Being as persons whose very existence in the universe is a source of danger, moral disorder, and general peril to the stability of the kingdom over which the King of kings holds sway.

He presses upon the notice of the Supreme Ruler the fact that it is not for His profit to allow us to go on as we are doing. Between the case of Haman against the Jews, however, and Satan's ease against us, there is this wide difference — that the charge brought by the enemy of the Jews was morally a plausible pretext, a trumped-up accusation; whereas in the case of the sinner the charge is only too true. If there is one single person whose heart has not been surrendered to God, and whose will is not yet wholly yielded to Him, then of such an one the accusation is true, terribly true, "It is not for the King's profit to suffer him." Let me ask you, then, Have you yielded yourself to God? For observe that if God were to allow men to go on from age to age, defying and disregarding His Divine will and law, He would be permitting His own rule to be overthrown, and would be virtually abdicating the throne of the universe, and giving all over to general anarchy and disorder. Nay, God can never lay aside His claims, and therefore it is not for the King's profit to suffer those who reject or ignore Him. "Has it been for the King's profit that thou hast lived?" If you were eliminated from human society to-day, would it be a gain instead of a loss to the world in which you have lived? You may reply, "I have affections as well as other people. There are many whom I love, and who love me, and whose hearts would bleed if I were taken away; how, then, could the world be anything but a loser by my removal?" Stay, let me ask you, What is the character of your influence and the effect of your example upon those very persons whose affections you have won? Are you doing them harm or good? What fruit does your life bear from day to day? Father, might it not be better for your sons' spiritual and eternal well-being if you were taken away from them? Mother, might it not be better for your daughters, better for your household, if your baneful influence were removed? And you, young man! who are the ringleader of a little band of friends, let me ask, Whither are you leading those young companions of yours? Is your fatal influence dragging them down to ever-deepening depths of moral degradation and sin? Ah! if that be thy case, if thy very friendship is a source of danger to those who are its objects, surely it is not for the King's profit to suffer you. Well, you say, or some one says, "Why does He suffer me, then?" Ah, here is a point to which we can find nothing to answer in the analogy. Let St. Paul explain why God suffers you, "Despisest thou the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Such is the secret of our danger; and now, turning again to our illustration, let us observe the sequel. There goes forth as the result of all this, a terrible edict against these unfortunate Jews, no less than an edict of utter destruction. Just let us picture to ourselves what effects must have been produced wherever the proclamation came. Yonder comes the royal herald into a large provincial town; he blows his trumpet and proceeds at once to nail up his proclamation at the gate of the city, or in the crowded marketplace. The news spreads like wildfire, and soon it reaches the Jewish quarter of a city. See the terrified inhabitants rushing about from house to house, and at last collecting in a crowd around the fatal parchment, eager to know the worst. One in a clear voice begins to read the dreadful paragraphs amidst a silence still as death. As he proceeds, strong men begin to weep like children, mothers clasp their children to their hearts in an agony of despair, till by and by, as with one voice, all break forth into a cry of lamentation; they rend their garments and grovel in the dust, utterly overwhelmed by a misfortune so unlooked-for and so inevitable. It is easy to account for their consternation, but it is much more difficult to explain the stolid equanimity with which sinners listen to the terrible threats against them of a proclamation more appalling than that which caused such terror to Israel of old. The dread and righteous decree which must expel the sinner from the Divine presence, and consign him to the darkness of death, may not be carried

into effect at once; no more was the decree of Ahasuerus; but, remember, the command has gone forth, the sword of judgment is drawn, and under that most dread edict the sinner is condemned already. "The wages of sin is death." Oh, if there was weeping and wailing throughout the provinces of Persia when that ancient proclamation was read, no less is there horror and fear in the heart of the sinner when, his conscience being roused, he at last becomes aware of his actual state, and of his terrible danger. Too many, indeed, are so absorbed with the passing nothings of this world, that they endeavour to evade all serious thought, and to forget the real perils of their present condition. But, thank God, it is not so with all. See that terrified jailer of Philippi. Why does he exclaim with such undisguised trepidation, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Surely it was because in his own conscience he had discovered the proclamation. Remember that nothing is gained by shutting our eyes to facts.

II. THE SECRET OF ISRAEL'S SAFETY; for saved, eventually, they were in spite of the foe and the terrible edict of the king. How were they saved? As their danger was due to the presence of an enemy at court, so their safety was due to the fact that they also had a faithful friend at court.

1. Let us consider their deliverer; and the first thing that strikes us about her is the fact that she was connected by a double relationship with each of the parties concerned. On the one hand she was related to the doomed race; she was one of them — a Jewess, bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh; while, on the other hand, she was also closely related to the monarch. She was his wife. Thus she stands, then, between the two — the monarch and the condemned race — and so in her own person effects a reconciliation.

2. Notice, again, that the motive which inspired her to risk her life was love for her people. One angry word, one look, and she and her people were alike lost; but for love of them she was content to risk her all!

3. She stood before King Ahasuerus, not for herself, but as the representative of her people. She approaches him, not in her royal dignity as queen, but as identified with her kindred. For us, too, there is a secret of safety, and blessed are they who are acquainted with it. Let us proceed to consider how this safety has been secured. We, too, have a Friend at Court, and, like Esther, He is possessed of a certain double relationship. On the one hand, He is bound to humanity, for He Himself is man. Voluntarily He took our nature upon Him, "He was made flesh, and tabernacled amongst us." He has identified Himself for ever with mankind; but, on the other hand, He is no less closely bound to the everlasting Father than to us. He is one with the Father from all eternity, the Son of His love

the express image of His Person. Further, observe that it was as the representative of His people that the Lord Jesus Christ undertook to perform the work that had to be done before man could be saved. Queen Esther took her life in her hand and presented herself before the king, in order to save; but our Deliverer has done much more than that — He has not risked, but given His life for the doomed race. Now observe, further, when Queen Esther entered into the presence of King Ahasuerus, we read that she found favour, or grace in his sight; but this favour was shown her on her own account, and not because she was a Jewess. Ahasuerus would scarcely, under the circumstances, have been disposed to listen to such a plea, even when advanced by his wife. What does she do? First she wins the king's favour for herself, and then she is in a position, so to speak, to transfer that favour to those whom she represents. Even so was it with our Great

Deliverer when He entered within the veil, with His own blood having perfected the work of filial obedience which He had undertaken on our behalf. He was then most of all the Beloved Son in whom the Father was well pleased, but the special favour with which He was then rewarded by the Divine Father was won on our behalf that it might be transferred to us. When the grace of Ahasuerus reached Esther, it reached through her the Jew; and even so when the grace of the Father reaches the Beloved Son as Representative of the human family, it reaches us also through Him. Thus indeed "the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men." You will notice that this grace thus assumes a definite form in a second proclamation made this time in favour of the Jews, whom the former proclamation had given over to death. This second proclamation, observe, does not override or conflict with the first. The law could not be abrogated, and yet its fatal operation had to be prevented, its condemning force was to be rendered nugatory. Here again we need to call attention to points of difference as well as points of agreement. The Gospel dispensation was not designed to abrogate but to fulfil the law. The law of God must remain unalterable, not in virtue of an arbitrary decree of Omnipotence, but because it is founded on moral principles of eternal obligation; it is only because Christ is "the end of the law to every one that believeth," that is to say, produces consequences greater and better even than the law was designed to effect, that the dread penalties of the law can be escaped under the new dispensation. Now let us observe more closely the nature of this second proclamation, for we shall find the illustration very suggestive. The first proclamation puts the whole of the Jews into the hands of their enemies, and arrays against them all representatives of the king's authority and of legal justice throughout the land. The second proclamation, on the other hand, has the opposite effect, for it puts the law on the side of the Israelites; it gives them the right to defend themselves. Thus it is that the story of this marvellous deliverance shadows forth ours with strange fidelity. For us, too, there has been issued from the throne of the Eternal Being a second proclamation. It has been nailed to the Cross of Calvary, it has been revealed in the broken body of the Son of God. First, it puts the sinner who avails himself of it right with his God; it arrays all the forces of justice on his side, and enables him find his surest protection in that which but for the work of Christ must have condemned him; and further, it puts him in a position to rise up against the tyrant sins by which he was previously enslaved, and to lead his captivity captive. From the condemnation of the law and from the cruel dominion of sin the believing sinner is equally delivered by the proclamation made from Calvary. The eternal justice of God, which apart from the Cross of Christ must have righteously demanded our punishment, now secures our safety; and we find now that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Many see that God is merciful to forgive us our sin; but how much stronger is our confidence when we see even His eternal justice, that attribute of His from which we needs must have most to fear, arrayed on our side! And here again I think we may notice, without pressing the illustration unduly, that this second proclamation demanded a certain believing response from the Jews before it could be of any practical utility to them. The favour of the king towards the race was conveyed by the proclamation; but unless the Jews had sufficient faith in the king's word to act upon it, and to arm themselves and issue forth against their enemies, they might still have fallen an easy prey. The proclamation from Calvary is described by St. Paul as "the grace of God which bringeth salvation to every man," but it is not every one that ventures forth upon it, claims justification, and, as it were, takes his spiritual enemies by the throat because that proclamation has delivered them into his hands. Alas I how many are there still who receive the

grace of God in vain! But to return to our story, let us follow the second proclamation in its journey forth from the court of King Ahasuerus. In hot haste the heralds speed on their way, for the business is urgent, and the tidings spread from city to city, until they reach the uttermost parts of the great king's dominions. Let us watch this royal messenger as he enters that same provincial town that we were visiting in our thoughts when I was describing the promulgation of that first terrible edict. See, he rides up the street in great haste, he blows his trumpet, and the people begin to gather in a crowd. What is going to happen now? Another proclamation! What is it all about? Some poor trembling Jews venture into the throng in deadly terror, lest it should prove but some fresh aggravation of their woes. "Oh, it's about these Jews again! What more about them? Are they to be given up to us at once instead of our having to wait three or four days longer?" It is in three or four different languages, amongst others in Hebrew, and signed with the king's seal. See, there is one of the doomed race. His eyes fall upon the Hebrew; eagerly he begins to read, the colour comes and goes. "God of my fathers!" I fancy I hear him exclaim, "what is this?" Another glance to make sure that his eyes don't deceive him, and then away he hies to the Jewish quarter of the town. "Deliverance!" he cries, "we are delivered, we are saved, God has saved us!" The Jews rush out of their houses, the whole multitude throng to the market-place. Eagerly they listen as one reads aloud; and as sentence after sentence falls from the lips of the reader, sobs of joy and gladness are heard. Ah, that was a day long to be remembered by all. What tears of joy were shed, what songs of rejoicing were raised, what feasts they held! But what shall we say of the joy of the ransomed sinner when the proclamation of life reaches his liberated heart? He has heard the sentence of doom from Sinai, he has felt his impotence to resist his terrible foes, and has wrung his hands in despair as the iron has entered into his soul. "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" It may be that his misery is so great that he can scarcely attend to his ordinary business, or even find an appetite for his necessary food; and if so, why should we wonder at it? Are you surprised, then, at his joy when first he reads the second proclamation, and discovers that it is really intended for him? Do you blame him for being excited? I'll answer for it, these Jews were excited enough. How could they help it? And how can he? The Jews, we read, had light and gladness, and joy and honour; and such are the blessed privileges still of him who hears the gospel "report," and believes it. The Sun of Righteousness has arisen upon him with healing in His wings — joy within, and gladness without; and honour, for are we not children of the Most High, "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together"? Honour! Yes, for all things are ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Well, now, that second proclamation has been made to us; the voice from Calvary has been spoken. On the Cross, favour has been secured for a guilty world. Have you received the report? But do you say, "I don't realise it; I am afraid it can't be for me, because I don't feel happy; I don't feel as if I were free from condemnation; I don't feel that I am saved"? Did these Jews of old know that they were delivered because they felt happy? Or did they feel happy because they knew that they were delivered? Which? Thy happiness is the effect, not the cause of thy safety. If thou wouldst be happy read the proclamation. Answer all thy inward misgivings by telling thy troubled heart that the good news is for thee. When we really believe a thing, we cease to look for evidence of our believing it in the effect produced in our own experience. Let me put it thus: Suppose we were to visit that Persian city shortly after the proclamation, and find there an aged Israelite of a sorrowful countenance. "Well, sir," we remark, "this, is a day of good tidings: it occurs to us that a more cheerful look might be more in keeping with the occasion." "Ah, sirs," he

replies, "this is a sad, sad time with me. I can get no comfort." "Why not, my good friend? Haven't you heard all about the king's decree, and how you Jews are to stand up against your enemies; and don't you know that the king's officers are all going to defend you, and that you are safe?" "Ah!" he replies, with a mournful shake of his head, "that may be all very true, but — but — I don't realise it!" "But what has your realising got to do with it: do tell us, is it true or false? If it is true, your realising won't make it any truer; and if it be false, your realising won't make it true; which is it?" "Oh, no doubt it's perfectly true; but still, how can you expect me to be happy when I don't realise it?" Really, if we could have found such a man, don't you think we should have felt something like irrepressible impatience with him?

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

Contenders with God

Job 9:4

He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who has hardened himself against him, and has prospered?

A gentleman came to me in the streets of Liverpool a few years ago, and told me of an incident in my father's ministry, of which he was an eyewitness, many years before. "Your father," he said, "was preaching on a then vacant spot of ground near where St. George's Hall now stands. Directly opposite the place where he was standing, an ungodly publican, finding his business interfered with, came out and endeavoured to interrupt the proceedings, mimicking the preacher's manner and gestures, and using very horrible language. I remember," said the gentleman, "how solemnly your father turned round upon him, and said, 'Take care, my friend, it is not me, but my Master that you are mocking, and remember you cannot mock God with impunity; take care lest you draw down upon your head His just vengeance.' He afterwards announced that he would preach in the same spot the next Sunday afternoon, which he did; and as he gave out his text, you may imagine the feeling of awe that settled down upon the crowd as they saw a hearse draw up to the door of the public house, to carry away the corpse of that very man who one short week before had been defying God, and insulting His messenger."

(W. Hay M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

The Two Ways

Psalms 16:11

You will show me the path of life: in your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand there are pleasures for ever more.

(Taken with Pro. 14:12.) There is such a thing in this dying world as a "path of life." This is represented as leading into fellowship with Him, in whose presence there is fulness of joy. "At Thy right hand," and thither the path leads, "there are pleasures for evermore." There are two distinct and contrasted ways or lines of life. The one is called "the way of life," the other is "the way that seemeth right unto a man." Set the two ways before you, and ask a deliberate choice. The first thing in journeying is to know where you are going. The one is the way of life, because it is a way which can only be traversed by those who live in the full sense of the word. The highest faculty of our nature is that spiritual capacity which enables us to hold communion with God. And also because it is the way in which alone life can be sustained. And further, because it leads to life. Look at the other way. It "seemeth right unto a man." Only "seemeth." But it is not what it seems. It is very popular. Everybody takes it. That does not make its character good, or its end desirable.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

A Strange Plea

Psalms 25:11

For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity; for it is great.

We should not expect a criminal before an earthly judge to advance such a plea as this. Yet before the highest Judge of all this is the argument, the wise argument, of the awakened soul. We should not value God's pardon when obtained if we thought lightly of our sin. When our eyes are opened to see the extent of our ruin we can turn this appalling discovery into the argument of the text. These words represent a real personal conviction of sin.. We are ready enough to accept such a statement about our sins, without the slightest degree of humility or penitential sorrow. Consider what it is that makes sin great.

I. IT IS GREAT ACCORDING TO THE POSITION IT OCCUPIES IN THE MORAL SCALE. There is a subjective as well as an objective measure of sin. Each sin may be judged in the abstract according to its heinousness; but when it is committed we have to consider the conditions under which it was committed. Its guilt must depend on a variety of considerations. Two offenders may commit precisely the same offence, and yet one may be morally much guiltier than the other.

II. SIN IS GREAT, IN PROPORTION TO THE ADVANTAGES AND PRIVILEGES OF THE SINNER. Many will not admit this. Respectable church-going people plume themselves on their privileges, as though the possession of these might be accepted as a proof that their own spiritual condition could not be otherwise than satisfactory.

III. SIN IS GREAT, IN CONSIDERATION OF THE CHARACTER OF THOSE AGAINST WHOM IT IS COMMITTED. The exceeding sinfulness of sin lies in its being an offence against infinite love revealed.

IV. SIN IS GREAT, IN PROPORTION TO ITS FREQUENCY. If a man is proved to be a confirmed criminal, then you may be sure that the heaviest sentence the law allows will be meted out to him. How often have we sinned against God!

V. SIN IS GREAT IN PROPORTION TO THE AMOUNT OF DELIBERATE INTENTION WITH WHICH IT IS COMMITTED. Some of our sins are the result of a momentary temptation, and may be attributed to a passing weakness. This may extenuate our guilt. But we cannot speak thus of the determined, deliberate, and resolute resistance that we have offered to the pleadings of the Holy Ghost in our souls. The text contains another plea, "For Thy name's sake." Our hope lies there. It is the glory of God to undertake our case when it is desperate, and He shows His almighty power most chiefly by showing mercy and pity. The moral glory of God shines out more, so far as we can judge, in pardoning a sinner than in making a world. And we honour His name most when we trust Him to do this.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Place of Feeling in Religion

Psalms 39:8

Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish.

David was one who felt, thought and acted strongly. There were no neutral tints about him. And he felt that he needed to restrain himself, lest his strong feeling should hurry him into sin. Hence he said, "I will take heed to nay ways that I sin not with my tongue," etc. But feeling is a thing to be desired. As with David, thinking often prompts it: the two should ever be in just proportion. But it is better to have too much than too little feeling. We cannot love an unfeeling man. Tim feeling heart is the most human as well as the most humane part of our humanity. But we admire it only when it leans upon a clear judgment, and is thereby controlled. But it is difficult to say which is the stronger force. Both should be found in religion. But we are to remember that some natures have small capacity for emotion, and we do wrong in that account to doubt their Christianity. It is a sad misconception to look upon emotion as salvation. Salvation rests upon our willing Lord. God forgives, although a man may never weep.

(J. B. Aitken.)

Worship

Psalms 45:11

So shall the king greatly desire your beauty: for he is your Lord; and worship you him.

Praise and thanksgiving are the two necessary elements in all worship. We praise God for what He is — love, mercy, patience, justice, power, these are but some of the attributes of the Deity, and the more we realize their extent the more unfeignedly shall we praise Him. We offer up our thanksgivings for all that He has given and is giving us; material and spiritual blessings have been given to us so abundantly that we must be amazingly blind or monstrosly ungrateful if our thanksgivings do not daily ascend to our loving Father. Worship is of immeasurable value to ourselves; it has a transforming power, in that it ever directs our thoughts away from ourselves outwards to our God. Besides this, the more our thoughts are uplifted in worship the more we shall grow like the God we worship. A Greek writer has told us of a temple at the entrance of which hung a magic mirror; every worshipper on entering the temple glanced into the mirror, and there saw himself in the very likeness of the God he worshipped. The legend but dimly veils "a great truth; why do we love to see our children true hero-worshippers? Is it not because we believe they will become more and more like the hero they respect so intensely? We ourselves delight in the companionship of a noble, heroic character. Or it may be we look back with thankfulness to the time we spent in such an one's company; and why is the memory so sweet? We found a new strength through that friendship; in some degree we became like our friend. So, with humble, adoring love, we worship the God who condescends to be our friend, in the glorious expectation of gradually attaining to His likeness. So worship is to transform the various chequered experiences of our daily life, and even while it does so it shall transform our whole characters, till we "come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." In our worship do we praise God because we daily prove what He is? Is our worship the outward expression of the faith and loyalty we show every day of our lives, or is it but the expression of virtues which should exist in us, but are never manifest? What does God see? Our worship should inspire us, should brighten the dark hours of our lives, nay, should even transform our lives by the "renewing of our minds." Have we to confess that our worship is not a power in our lives, doesn't cheer us when in sorrow, perplexity or temptation, doesn't draw us closer to our God? What does God see?

(A. Aitken.)

Conviction of Sin

Psalms 50:21

These things have you done, and I kept silence; you thought that I was altogether such an one as yourself: but I will reprove you...

It is possible to misinterpret the moral government of God, and many do so. It seems to some as if the world were so arranged as to offer facilities for sin. For sin is rampant everywhere, and yet God seems to take no notice, He does not interfere to prevent or to chastise. Now, if we let crime and wrong pass unreproved, our moral sensibilities become deadened, and we become culpably indifferent to the just principles of righteousness. On the other hand, if a man's sense of right is strong, and his moral sensibilities properly quick, he will not be able to control the expression of his resentment against what is an outrage on common decency or justice. But since God sees far worse things and more of them than any man can see, and yet does not intervene, we are apt practically to form some very false conclusions about His character, though few would have the temerity to state them. We feel as if God could not think so very seriously of sin when He contemplates it with such composure. Surely if sin were so very terrible an evil its consequences would be more apparent; it does not seem such a very appalling or abhorrent thing to us, and apparently neither does it seem so to God. And this is because men misunderstand and misinterpret the majestic silence of God. "I kept silence" — this has been God's rule, and upon it men presume. To guard against this let us seek to have a true view of this characteristic of the Divine government. Why does God keep silence, and show Himself patient as well as strong, although He be provoked every day? Not because He is indifferent to sin, and not because He does not intend to punish it, but because He has ordained certain conditions for our probation here, and He is not so inconsistent as to reverse them. Man was created by God in His own image, in this respect above all others, that he possessed from the first a power of independent volition, a capacity of free-will, by the right and dutiful exercise of which he was to be raised to his proper destiny, and fitted to share the glories of the Divine Being. Man, therefore, must not be forced to act rightly. If a highwayman demands your money with a pistol at your ear, you may exercise your will in handing him your purse, but it is hardly a free will. If an officer of justice catches you when you were just preparing to appropriate your neighbour's property, your will may decide in this instance to be honest, but it is hardly a free will. And so God keeps silence, lets men do as they like, not coercing them by prompt penalty every time they transgress. How solemn and impressive is this silence of God. Slight natures may easily be stirred and goaded into frenzy, but it takes much more to awaken those of a grave and resolute character. But when such are moved, then their indignation is terrible. A silent God is not to be despised and trifled with. And lest His silence should mislead us, He does on rare occasions break His rule of silence. And because this is so unusual it is all the more impressive. A gentleman came up to me in the streets of Liverpool a few years ago, and told me of an incident in my dear father's ministry, of which he was an eye-witness, many years before. "Your father," said he, "was preaching on a then vacant spot of ground near where St: George's Hall now stands. Directly opposite the place where he was

standing an ungodly publican, finding his business interfered with, came out, and endeavoured to interrupt the proceedings, mimicking the preacher's manner and gestures, and using very horrible language. I remember," said the gentleman, "how solemnly your dear father turned round upon him and said, 'Take care, my friend, it is not me, but my Master that you are mocking, and remember you cannot mock God with impunity; take care lest you draw down upon your head His just vengeance.' He afterwards announced that he would preach in the same spot the next Sunday afternoon, which he did; and as he gave out his text, you may imagine the feeling of awe that settled down upon the crowd as they saw a hearse draw up to the door of the public-house to carry away the corpse of that very man who one short week before had been defying God and insulting His messenger." Why are such things allowed from time to time to happen? Because God has made a mistake in keeping silence? Nay, verily; but because He sees it necessary from time to time to remind us that, though silent, He is not blind, and though self-controlled, He is not unconcerned. Now, the curse which came on the world when Adam sinned, and afterwards the flood, and chief of all the death of our Lord Jesus Christ — these are three stupendous facts in human history in which we may say, God has broken silence. The cross of Calvary is God's reproof to a world, and from that cross there sounds forth through all time the admonition, "Now consider this, ye that forget God." And God has sent His Holy Spirit especially to carry on this work of reproof, and when He lays hold upon us it soon comes to pass that there is nothing left in our past life that we can bear to look upon. We begin to see ourselves as God sees us, and therefore we abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes. In one way or other these solemn words of God will be fulfilled, "I will reprove thee, and set before thee in order the things that thou hast done." Ere yet that terrible reproof "break your heart," and the thunder of God's voice shake the ground from under your feet, and leave you sinking in despair, yield to the gentler tones of His convicting mercy. Confess yourself a guilty, ruined sinner, and claim that pardon which shall cancel the record that is against you, and "purge your mortal archives."

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

Truth in the Inward Parts

Psalms 51:6

Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part you shall make me to know wisdom.

Some of us may remember the interesting story with which the apocryphal Book of Esdras commences. The inquiry is started, "What is strongest?" and this is submitted to the judgment of three young men of the king's guard. Wine, and the king, and women, are severally mentioned; but the last, who is said to have been Zerubbabel, maintained that of all things "truth is the strongest, and liveth and conquereth for evermore." And having concluded his speech upon this subject, it is said that all who heard him broke forth with the shout, "Great is truth, and mighty above all things." Now, whether the narrative be fact or not, it would be well for us if we believed more fully in the power of truth, and realized how invincible it must be. Truth in Scripture often means objective truth, "the agreement of thought with thing," and we have the truth when what we believe is really what it is. But the word, also, and often, means truthfulness, moral honesty and sincerity. But it is this second sense of the term that our subject invites us to consider. God desires "truth in the inward parts" — truth, evidently, not in the sense of mental illumination, but rather in the sense of moral honesty and sincerity of purpose. As it is this that God desires, so it is the presence of this that gives the greatest joy to the spiritual Father who watches with tender solicitude the progress of the souls to whom His ministry has been made a blessing. Now let me point out the importance of this subject. We need to have our attention emphatically called to it, because, in the first place, we have hearts which the prophet describes as "deceitful above all things," and we each of us possess the strange and terrible faculty of deceiving ourselves. God we cannot deceive. Our neighbours in the long run are sure to find us out. But ourselves it is only too possible to deceive; and when we allow ourselves to fall into the habit of self-deception, the most dangerous feature of this habit is that it becomes almost unconscious. We scarcely know when we are true and when we are false. Or the importance of this subject may be argued from its position. For truthfulness lies at the root of everything else in Christian experience. Having this, we are in fair way to possess all; but without this, all must be lost. See the parable of the Sower. The seed yields good fruit only when sown in "an honest and good heart." In one sense we may say no heart is such, but in another and practical one we know that there are such, for they do truly desire to be other and better than they are. And this truthfulness is needed not only at the beginning, but all the way along in our spiritual career. The life of faith depends on it. I would bear witness that I thank God with a full heart that recently so much attention has been given to the importance of the great truth that, as we are justified, not by our own works, but by faith in the Son of God, so we are to be sanctified, not by the struggling efforts of our own will, but equally by our acceptance through faith of all that the power and love of God have brought within our reach. This truth required to be prominently brought forward and emphatically stated; and to how many believers has the message been one of liberation from bondage, from fruitless toil, from inward tumult! But in order that this sort of teaching may be of the service to us that it should, it is most important that we should bear

in mind the relation of faith to moral truthfulness and honesty of purpose. In a word, we cannot trust the Lord Jesus to deliver us from that which we know He hates, while all the time we are secretly clinging to it, or endeavouring to discover some cunningly devised compromise between our allegiance to Him and our indulgence in that which we know to be opposed to His will. Let me now point out some of the different ways in which this subtle form of evil may creep into our experience, and the different forms of truthfulness which we require sedulously to cultivate. Let us consider, first, truthfulness in the aim and purpose of life. This from first to last was the characteristic of our blessed Lord and Master. For contrast, see the history of Balaam. His ruin was due to latent dishonesty of heart, for in spite of all his religiousness he "loved the wages of unrighteousness." Solomon, also, and many more. "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways." And this is the besetment of us all. There is something also that we put side by side with the "one thing needful." We desire to be good Christians, and to make our fortunes. We must learn to seek first the Kingdom of God, and to live as those who have heard the Master's call, "Deny thyself: take up thy cross and follow me." Next let me point out to you the necessity of truthfulness in the adoption of means towards the end. It is possible for us to have a strong, clear perception of the fact that we are called to live for a definite purpose, and we may be preserved from any conscious acceptance of a lower end, and yet we may fail in our lives because we shrink from employing those means towards the attainment of the end which God has placed within our reach, and which we know to be of the utmost importance to us. It is thoroughly dishonest to offer such a prayer as we do every day — "Lead us not into temptation" — while we place ourselves in a position where we know that our special weakness will be needlessly exposed to the foe. Or again, vainly do we pray for purity of heart and thought, and cry to be delivered from our lower appetites, if we still allow our senses to be exposed to sights and sounds which may act as incentives to the very appetite which we profess our desire to curb. Take the sad example of Eli. He did desire to curb the iniquities of his sons; but he would not take the necessary means. He spoke strongly enough, but he did nothing. Though he might have inflicted death, he did not punish them at all. Once again let me speak of the necessity of truthfulness in our judgment upon ourselves. How little disposed we are to pass a severe sentence upon our own conduct! Saul had already returned a verdict in his own favour before the prophet Samuel met him. "Blessed be thou of the Lord," he exclaims, even before the prophet had made any accusation against him; "I have fulfilled the commandment of the Lord." Had he really fulfilled it? His conscience was uneasy. There had already been mock trial, so to speak, within Saul's own heart, and the verdict was one of acquittal passed by a too favourable jury. Oh, self-extenuation is dangerous work. You are in the hands of a loving God who knows whereof we are made. If extenuations can justly be made, He is certain to make them. But who of us is there that has not plenty to confess even where actual sins are not upon the conscience? "Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

The Visit of Salvation

Psalms 106:4-5

Remember me, O LORD, with the favor that you bore to your people: O visit me with your salvation;...

I. GOD HAS A CHOSEN PEOPLE. That God does choose men is beyond question. Why, how, and when He chooses them, are quite a different matter. It will be enough if we point out that the people of Israel were chosen of God, to enjoy as a nation such a good and happy lot as should serve to set forth in a figure the spiritual good of the spiritual Israel of the future. Similarly, even now, God has His chosen ones, who, like the ancient Israel, are brought into a very close relation with Himself; only that those relations with God are spiritual, where the relations of Israel with God were national and ecclesiastical. But who are these chosen ones, and how are they distinguished from others? If any of you to whom I speak imagine that you are in a position to enjoy the good of God's chosen, just because of your membership in the outward Church and your participation in the external ordinances of religion, this utterance alone is surely enough to undeceive you. Called you certainly have been, but do you wear the wedding garment? Are you clothed with that "righteousness which is of God by faith"? God dwells in hearts that are submitted — willingly and cheerfully submitted — to Him in the obedience of faith. These are God's peculiar treasures in a world that disowns and rejects Him; they are His "people of possession," and no wonder that He should reserve for them some special good, of which others can know nothing, until they too join this favoured company.

II. THESE CHOSEN ONES HAVE A SPECIAL GOOD OF THEIR OWN. It consists primarily in the possession of God. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Surely in a world where foes are strong, and we are only too conscious of our weakness, it is no small matter to enjoy the help of Omnipotence. And in a world where trials and troubles are so numerous, it is something to have a refuge open unto us whereunto we may always resort. Why should you condemn yourselves to perpetual restlessness, when you have God's own peace which passeth all understanding within your reach? Why should you prefer the evil of God's enemies, the cruel Nemesis which they bring upon their own heads, to the good which might be yours if you were His? Have you not had enough of weariness and restless toil? Why not listen to the voice to-night which proclaims, "Peace, peace to those that are far off, to those that are near"? Why not offer the prayer, "O visit me with Thy salvation, that I may see the good of Thy chosen"?

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A. .)

To-Morrow

Proverbs 27:1

Boast not yourself of to-morrow; for you know not what a day may bring forth.

Some are hindered by doubts, or blinded by definite unbelief; others are repelled from the gospel by prejudices of early education; others by worldly influences, others by the love of sin; and some by a coward fear of the possible consequences of decision. The chief hindrance, however, is the habit of procrastination. The fault is a common one even in worldly matters. There are things that must be done at once, and things which may be left. These latter have a very good chance of never being done at all. There are few who have not a lurking intention of thinking about religious matters sooner or later. Many are indisposed to prompt action, because they fear religion may interfere with their manner of life, their commercial prosperity, and their social enjoyments. By and by, when other matters are not so urgent, they may find a convenient season. This habit of procrastination grows upon us until it becomes a sort of second nature, and at last, even should we wish to act promptly, we seem almost to have lost the power. For one who doubts the Bible, there are a hundred who simply put off for the present. The Holy Ghost says, "To-day"; they still say, "To-morrow." How can we best counteract this disposition towards procrastination? The nominally Christian world is pervaded by the radically false notion that religion has mainly to do with the future rather than with the present. This notion is encouraged by the use of the word "salvation." Men do not see that they need to be saved now. True religion is a matter of present urgency. Religion is the one secret of true enjoyment in life. Another cause of procrastination is a false idea of the relative importance of things temporal and things spiritual. Religion is regarded as distinct from the practical purposes of life. This is an inverted estimate of the relative importance of things. Why should we say to-day rather than to-morrow? Because, of all our life, only to-day is really ours. Tomorrow belongs to God. Every to-morrow that God allots you, when it gets to you is a to-day. The to-morrow that we think will do so much for us never comes. To-day may ensure our best interests; to-morrow they may have passed from us, and be forfeited for ever. Moreover, we have a great work to do, and only a limited time to do it in. And we are living in a perishing world, and men and women are dying unprepared every day that passes. By religious decision, how much happiness we may confer upon others by our personal example and influence. In this world of changes and uncertainties, no man can be sure that he will have any to-morrow. Think, too, how you are treating your Lord when, from day to day, you still continue to say, "To-morrow." To-day again He proffers the unspeakable gift. His time is now. Another to-morrow, and He may be constrained reluctantly to depart, wearied out at last by your heartless indifference. Oh, take shame to yourself that, hitherto, He has had nothing from you but "to-morrow."

(W. H. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Little City and the Poor Wise Man

Ecclesiastes 9:14-18

There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it...

The little city, as first introduced to our notice, is in sore straits. The legion of the foe seem innumerable, while the garrison is reduced to a mere handful. They are fast being brought to extremities, and in a few short hours the unfortunate little city will be, in all human probability, subjected to all the horrors of capture by storm, and will be ultimately razed to the ground. At first sight it may seem rather paradoxical to compare this great world of ours, with its almost innumerable inhabitants, its vast area, its enormous resources, to the little city with few men within it. But do we not, comparatively speaking, take too exalted a view of this little world? For relatively little it is, after all — but an insignificant fraction of God's great universe. But further, inasmuch as the city spoken of here is represented as being ultimately delivered from its peril, we are hardly justified in applying the figure to humanity at large, for whom indeed deliverance has been provided, but has not by it been accepted. The little city joyfully accepting the benefit of deliverance is a much fitter type of the spiritual Church of Christ, viewed in the foreknowledge of God as a complete whole, redeemed and delivered by the wisdom and love of the poor wise man who has cast in his lot with her: and this is indeed "a little city, and few men within her." So that the parallelism thus limited is by no means strained or unintelligible. Now, we know nothing of the circumstances to which the little city owed its danger — it may or may not have been its own fault; but we do know the cause of the peril in which the human family has been involved, and that the blame rests entirely with ourselves. Man has rebelled against the sovereign will of God; the defiant cry of humanity through the long dark ages has still been, "We will not have this Man to reign over us." The result of all has been that we have forced God into the position of a foe, although He is in His heart our best and truest friend. God would be false to His own position in the universe were He to permit rebellion against His authority: He would be practically abdicating His throne, and this He will never do. Do you know what it is to have reached the point of self-despair? have you found yourself surrounded by the mighty bulwarks? have you felt what it is to have no escape? Not until then, believe me, will you be disposed to value the deliverance procured by "the poor wise man." To him we will now turn our attention. He was but a poor man; but he had a patriot's heart and a wise man's head; and, moved doubtless by love for his compatriots, by some extraordinary and unlooked-for effort of wisdom, he delivered the city. How did he do it? Here again we have no information, but it is suggestive to notice that an incident very similar to the one described here actually took place in the time of Solomon's father, and must in all probability have made so deep an impression on his own mind that it is scarcely possible that his mind did not recur to it as he wrote these words, though in this case the humble deliverer was a woman, not a man (2Sa. 20:15). The guilt of one man here had involved the whole town in peril, because his guilt was imputed to them; but at the suggestion of the wise woman, the guilt was laid on the head of one, himself the guilty party, and one man died for the people, and the whole city perished not. But our

Wise Man, Himself the Innocent, offered Himself, with a wisdom which was the child of love, that the guilt of our city might first be imputed to Him the Innocent, and that further His innocence might be imputed to our city, so that by His own voluntary self-sacrifice one man might die for the city, and the city itself might be safe. The wise woman saved the city at the cost of another's life; but our poor Wise Man has saved His Church at the cost of His own; and in the moment of our despair we see the hostile bulwark withdrawn, the engines of war removed. We too are saved by the interposition of One who, "though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich." He too was found in the city with no outward distinction of rank or title. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not." Born in a remote province, in an obscure town, brought up in retirement as a peasant's son, what was He to the Caesars and Herods of His day? But now I hasten on to the sequel, for I am speaking to the delivered ones to-day. What became of the poor wise man? Did they make him king or governor? Did he continue to be the most prominent figure in the little commonwealth which he had saved? Nay, but he disappears again into his old obscurity, he retires to the back street — to his cellar or his garret. "No man remembered that same poor man." Ah, blood-bought souls, ye ransomed from ruin by the death of the Deliverer, is this true of any of us? Having been delivered from impending ruin by the Christ, have we learned to forget the Deliverer, and to live very much as if we had delivered ourselves?

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

Who was the Speaker

Isaiah 5:1-7

Now will I sing to my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well beloved has a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:

It is an interesting question, and one to which the answer is not altogether obvious. And who is the well-beloved to whom these words are addressed? Only two answers seem possible. Either it must be the prophet who speaks, and his God that he is addressing; or else it must be the eternal Father that is addressing His co-eternal Son.

1. If we adopt, as most commentators seem to do, the former explanation, we have to face two very serious difficulties, neither of which can I meet.

(1) The prophet here uses a term of endearment which would be strangely inconsistent with his usual style of addressing God, and such a use of the Hebrew term here employed occurs nowhere else in Scripture. It is a term of endearment of the strongest kind, answering very closely to our English word "darling"; and it is easy to see that there is something very repugnant to our ideas of seemliness and reverence in the application of such a term to that God with whose majesty Isaiah was himself so profoundly impressed. In every other case in which this word is used as a term of endearment, it is addressed by the stronger to the weaker, by the superior to the inferior. Thus Benjamin is spoken of as the beloved of the Lord in the blessings of Deuteronomy, the thought suggested being, that as Benjamin himself was Jacob's favourite, the darling of his heart, so the tribe was to be specially dear to the great Father of the race. But obviously, while Benjamin might justly be called the darling of Jacob's heart, it would have been, to say the least, somewhat incongruous to speak of Jacob as Benjamin's darling. The term would have been wholly out of place here; and not less, but even more, out of place must it needs be in the lips of an Isaiah addressing his God.

(2) Yet another difficulty has to be faced if we make the prophet the singer; for in that case, his song clearly ends at the close of the second verse, whereas on this hypothesis it must be assumed that there is an abrupt transition from the speech of the prophet to the speech of God. But it seems clear that the whole passage, down to the end of the seventh verse, constitutes the song referred to in the first verse, and it is all spoken of as a song sung to the beloved.

2. Let us adopt the other explanation of the passage, and all at once becomes straightforward and self-consistent, the only difficulty involved being that we have here a marvellously explicit reference to a great theological verity, that was not fully revealed to the world till the Christian epoch — the doctrine of the distinction of Persons (as we are obliged to express it for lack of better terms) in the Divine Unity. This great truth is, however, implied in many other passages of Old Testament Scripture, and therefore its occurrence here need not trouble us. According to this second interpretation, it is the eternal Father that is here addressing His well-beloved Son, the Angel of the Covenant, to whose tutelage the ancient Theocracy was delivered, just as at a

subsequent period He became, in the flesh, the Founder and Head of the Christian Church. Here the expression used is just what might be expected, and we are reminded of the voice which fell from heaven in New Testament times: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In this exegesis the identity of the singer and the unity of the song is preserved throughout, There is no abrupt transition from the utterance of one person to that of another; for He who sings and He to whom the song is sung are one. The Father does Himself that which He does through the Divine Word, and hence the passage from the third person to the first in the third verse ceases to be embarrassing; nay, additional force is added to the Divine expostulation; for the Father is jealous with a holy jealousy for the Person and work of His Son. He knows how well that work has been done, and has all the more reason to complain of its having been denied its proper results and its merited reward. There is something infinitely pathetic in the idea of this song of lamentation, poured forth from the great Father's heart of love into the sympathetic ear of His well-beloved Son, and in this enumeration of all that He, the well-beloved of the Father, had wrought for favoured Israel. When man was created, he was created as the result of the decree of a Divine council: "Let us make man in our own image." And now when, after years of trial, man has proved himself a miserable failure, the Divine Father and the co-eternal Son are represented as conferring over the disastrous issue.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Divine Disappointment

Isaiah 5:4-6

What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? why, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes...

It may seem irreverent to speak of a Divine disappointment, but this is by no means the only passage of Scripture which in its obvious meaning conveys this idea, Perhaps we may have to leave the explanation of such words till we obtain fuller light in higher worlds upon the great mystery of the relation of Divine foreknowledge to human freedom; but clearly such words are spoken to us after the manner of men, in order that we may the better discern the intensity of desire and the warmth of loving interest with which the God from whom we all proceed seeks to raise us to our true functions and our proper place in His universe, and the sorrow and regret with which He witnesses the failure of His gracious purposes concerning us.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

God Employs Various Means in Dealing with Men

Isaiah 5:4-6

What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? why, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes...

He does not exhaust all the means that He is capable of employing without any inconsistency all at once. Just as He dealt in different ways with Israel of old, sometimes sending a miracle-working prophet like Elijah, and sometimes a man of mighty eloquence such as Isaiah; sometimes raising up a saintly hierarch like Samuel, and sometimes a philosophic moralist like Solomon; sometimes speaking in pestilence, defeat, disaster, and sometimes in prosperity and deliverance, even so He employs first one means and then another in dealing with us. But each of these, when it fails to bring about the end for which it was designed, represents the exhaustion of yet another resource; and when the last which the Holy Ghost can righteously and consistently have recourse to has been exhausted, the soul is lost.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Moral Limits of the Divine Resources

Isaiah 5:4-6

What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? why, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes...

1. Perhaps it may occur to you to object, this lamentation and apparent disappointment? Surely, this is a confession of impotence on the part of the Omnipotent. If God be really what we call Him — Almighty — why should He waste words in futile expostulations! Surely, He who makes the vine put forth her tender grapes and prepares the autumn vintage the wide world over, could, if He pleased, by the mere exercise of His superior power, constrain men to bring forth the fruit that He desires to see brought forth. Why did He not increase the pressure of His power on Israel until He had constrained the disobedient nation to become obedient, and had practically forced them to bring forth their fruit? Our answer to this very natural difficulty is simply this — that the suggestion involves a contradiction. This will be sufficiently obvious as soon as we begin to ask, What is the special fruit that God seeks at the hand of man? The proper fruit of humanity, the fruit that God seeks in human character and life, is the reproduction of the Divine nature. God's purpose in man is answered when He sees in man His own moral likeness formed. But now, inasmuch as God is a free agent, it is only by the possession of a similar moral faculty, and of the capacity of exercising it, and only by its exercise in the highest and best manner, that man can ever be conformed into the Divine image; for no two things are more essentially unlike than an automaton and a free agent. Indeed. I think we might venture to say that even a free agent who uses his freedom badly is morally more like God, just because he is free, than the most perfect automaton — perfect, I mean, in every other particular you can name — could ever hope to become, seeing that he is not, and can never hope to be, free. No doubt God could have arranged that man should be a very different being, and bring forth very different fruit; but then in doing so He would have had to abandon the specific purpose emphatically announced when man was just about to be called into existence — "Let us make man in our image, after our own likeness." St. Paul teaches us that the "gifts and calling of God are without repentance," and we see this illustrated all through the natural world. God does not alter the functions of particular organisms, and make them produce something totally distinct from their own proper type. Were He to do so He would be admitting failure and inconsistency. And as in the material so in the spiritual world. Man has been originally designed to occupy a certain unique position there, and to exercise certain definite functions, and to bring forth a particular kind of fruit to the glory of God, and therefore we may be quite sure that God will not transform him into a being of another order altogether, just to make him do and be what he in his free manhood wills not to do or to be.

2. But it might still be urged, Would not God be acting a kinder part if He withdrew this faculty of free will which has caused us so much trouble, and sin and sorrow — if He were so completely to override it by His own superior power, and so control it that it should be able to exercise no appreciable influence incur conduct, but that He Himself should always have His way? To this we

answer, God loves man too much to do anything of the kind. Man's capacity of rising to his proper destiny is involved in his possession and exercise of this faculty of volition. Take it away, and we must needs turn our backs forever upon the thought of rising to the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus; for it is by the use of these wills of ours, and by their voluntary subordination, that we are to be trained, and developed, and educated, and fitted for enjoying that wondrous relation to the Son of God which is spoken of as the spiritual Bridal and Union of Christ and His Church. No; man must remain free, or else his own proper fruit can never be brought forth; and hence there is really and actually moral limit to the Divine resources.

3. Bearing in mind, then, these necessary limitations of the Divine resources, let us each face the inquiry, What more would we have God do for us than He has actually done! I do not say that all are equally privileged, and I can believe that some, in answer to such a challenge, might demand the enjoyment of higher privileges such as others possess. But don't you see that, whatever privileges might thus be secured, the necessity for the action of the will would not and could not be evaded! And so long as this were so, what guarantee would you have that your increased privileges might not mean only enhanced condemnation! Others, who occupy the very position of privilege that you might demand, have only turned their privileges into a curse by sinning against them; and who shall say that it would not be the same with you? Nay, is it not even more than probable that it would be so; for does not our Lord Himself teach us that "he that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much: and he that is unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous also in much"! Here we have laid down one of the great laws of the moral world.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Circumstances of the Vision

Isaiah 6:1-13

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple....

Let us try, if we can, and present to our imaginations some idea of this extraordinary scene. The shades of evening are closing in, and all is still within the sacred precincts of the temple. The daily ritual has been duly observed, and priests and worshippers have withdrawn from the hallowed fane. The noise and stir of the great city, hard by is subsiding; a solemn hush and stillness pervades the place. One solitary worshipper still lingers within the sacred courts absorbed a reverie of prayer. He is a religious and devout man; probably a member of the school of the prophets, well instructed in the faith of his fathers, and familiar with the sacred ritual of the temple, and the lessons that it inculcated. There he is, looking forward possibly to a prophet's career, yet feeling keenly the responsibilities which it will involve, and perhaps pleading earnestly to be fitted for his mission. He cannot be blind to the unsatisfactory condition of his people. Amidst much outward profession of religiousness and readiness to comply with the ceremonial demands of the faith, he cannot but discern the presence of barren formalism and hypocrisy, and of a latent superstition that might at any moment, were the restraints of authority removed, blossom out into open idolatry. And who shall say what heart searchings may have occupied his own mind as he knelt there in the temple all alone with God. Was he more spiritual than those around him? Was he sufficiently pure and devout to stand up in protest against a nation's sins? One moment all is silence and stillness as he kneels in prayer; the next, and lo! a blaze of glory and a burst of song! Startled and awe-stricken, the lonely worshipper raises his head to find himself confronted with a sublime and dazzling spectacle. His bewildered vision travels up through ranks of light till it finds itself resting for a moment, but only for a moment, on an Object "too august for human gaze." I saw also, the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Around that dread Presence the forms of vast and wondrous intelligences of glory, the attendant ministers of the Majesty Divine, seem bending in adoration, and the voice of their worship falls like the roll of thunder on his ear, shaking the very pillars of the temple porch with its awe-inspiring resonance, as they echo and re-echo with answering acclamations the antiphon of heaven — "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory."

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

No Heaven Possible to the Uncleansed Man

Isaiah 6:5-8

Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the middle of a people of unclean lips...

Oh, you who think that you are sure to go to heaven, are you quite sure that you would be happy if you got there? Might not the vision of God produce a similar effect upon you to that which was produced upon one who was probably a better man than you, by this august display? And what would heaven be but a moral hell if you found yourself grovelling in the dust, crying out in anguish and terror, "Woe is me! for I am undone"?

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Holy One the Purifier

Isaiah 6:5-8

Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the middle of a people of unclean lips...

I. WHAT IS THERE IN THE VISION OF GOD THAT NEED A MAN, AND ESPECIALLY A RELIGIOUS MAN, WITH SUCH OVERWHELMING TERROR.

1. No doubt certain very impressive contrasts are suggested between God and man when the Divine Majesty comes into close contact with His frail and feeble creature; but these are not, at any rate, all of them, of such a kind as to cause alarm.

(1) There is the contrast between God's greatness and man's littleness and insignificance. This is, indeed, humiliating, and should lead us to abandon all foolish feelings of self-importance and self-sufficiency; but it need not induce overwhelming terror and alarm. So far from this, is there not something in our nature that seems to delight in the contemplation of greatness? Do we not go in search of greatness?

(2) Or, again, there is the contrast between man's weakness and God's omnipotence. Yet here, again, we can but notice that in the mere revelation and exhibition of power, as of greatness, there is nothing necessarily alarming. All that we need to know is, that the power is friendly, or, at least, not actually unfriendly.

(3) Or, just once more, there is something very humiliating in the contrast between God's eternal and ineffable wisdom and man's ignorance and blindness. Yet there is nothing alarming in superior wisdom; nay, there is something necessarily attractive in it.

2. What was the thought, then, that broke the prophet down, and what the contrast between God and himself that impressed him so powerfully and so painfully? For an answer we have but to listen to that song of the adoring seraphim that was sounding in his ear at the moment he was seized with this uncontrollable agony of terror. When he heard them cry, "Holy, holy, holy!" there rushed into his mind the thought of his own unfitness to stand before One to whom the intelligences of glory bore such witness. And it is to this that God brings us when we yield to the convicting influence of the Holy Spirit. There comes in most men's lives who yield to God — it is not equally marked in all — a moment of utter breakdown; a moment when all our self-respect seems to be humbled, and our self-confidence to melt away; a moment when the sense of sin seems indeed an intolerable load, that crushes the staggering conscience beneath its weight, and suggests the gloomiest anticipations of judgment, the forecast of despair. Some are led to God through Christ in very early days, and retain no recollection of any such experience, even if it ever occurred with them; though my personal observation leads me to conclude that it often does occur, even with very young children. Such an experience would doubtless occur in many more cases, were it not for our successful efforts at evasion. We endeavour to get away from reality, and take

refuge in what is superficial and conventional; we flatter ourselves into the deep stupor of self-complacency by the cry, "Peace, peace!" when there is no peace. "He speaks to us just as if we were a pack of sinners," said the indignant churchwarden of a church in which I once conducted a mission, and yet that man had probably joined in repeating the Litany that very morning!

II. But let us look again at this trembling man as he lies there in his terror and anguish. WHAT IS TO BECOME OF ONE WHO IS, BY HIS OWN CONFESSION, GUILTY AND CONDEMNED IN THE PRESENCE OF HIS JUDGE?

1. At the very moment when the man felt himself undone, at the moment when the contrast between God's dazzling purity and awful holiness and his own uncleanness and sin had taken possession of his moral consciousness, and he could think and speak of nothing else, then flew one of the seraphim, speeding on a congenial errand, to bring the provisions of Divine mercy to bear upon this trembling soul. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." No doubt the phrase represents a feature of God's providence that is, at any rate, frequently illustrated in the incidents of our natural life. But I think we may say the words represent a law of the spiritual world, a great principle from which God seldom, if ever, departs in His dealings with human souls. How often, when men think they are waiting for God, and wondering why He does not intervene on their behalf, is He waiting for them to reach the end of their own resources, in order that He may find His opportunity!

2. Let us notice, too, how Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are alike concerned in the provision of this Divine consolation. It is at the behest of the eternal Father, responsive to the voice of His child's bewildered terror, that the great seraph speeds on his mission. God so loved the world that He sent His Son, and God so loves still, that He is ever sending — sending fresh influences of grace, fresh messages of mercy, fresh flashes of spiritual light. But further, notice how the mission of mercy is performed through the Divinely-appointed means. There stands the sacrificial altar where the expiatory sacrifices had that day been offered. Cleansing must reach the guilty in God's own appointed way. And as we have the love of the Father, and the sacrifice of the Son, presented to us here as the conditions on God's side of the cleansing of the sinner, so have we also a symbolic presentation of the work of the Holy Ghost. The spirit of burning, the "refiner's fire," that alone can cleanse the heart, and consume the dross and filthiness of our sin, breathing health and infusing purity, approaches us through the sacrificial work of Christ. And thus the night of sorrow and of self-despair melts into the blessed dawn of pardon.

3. As we contemplate this marvellous transformation scene, it is as well to dwell upon the fact that these effects were produced, not only by forgiveness, but by the knowledge of forgiveness.

4. And, most of all, was it not the expression of forgiveness to the heart of the awakened sinner that drew him towards the heart of his God, and led him in grateful love to present himself to God for service?

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Peace

Isaiah 26:3-4

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you: because he trusts in you....

Let us ask, What is it that hinders peace? in order that we may better understand the things that belong to our peace. Here, I think, we shall discover three distinct sources of mental disturbance by which man is affected — three distinct and terrible discords that mar the harmony of human life until they are resolved by redemption. Man is, to begin with, out of peace with God; he is, in consequence, out of peace with nature, or the order of things with which he is surrounded; and, in the third place, he is out of peace with himself. These other discords which break in upon and destroy his peace are dependent upon and spring from the first. It is because man is not at peace with God that he finds himself at war with nature, and the victim of internal feuds. The conditions of his existence in this material world seem of a kind to militate against his peace; but this is only so when they are viewed apart from any higher and ultimate object to which they may be designed by infinite benevolence to contribute. Once let me see that the trials and uncertainties of life are intended to enforce upon my attention the true character of my present position and its relations to the future, and I no longer quarrel with them. I confess that I am a stranger and a sojourner, and I see wisdom and love in the very circumstances which impress this upon my mind. And even so is it with those moral discords that disturb my peace within. They spring from the controversy that exists between man and God. Here we see how the Gospel is adapted to the deepest needs of the human heart, and how skilfully it is designed to deal with cause and effect in their own proper order in the moral sphere. The Gospel is primarily a proclamation of peace between God and man, a revelation of a wondrous method of reconciliation.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Peace not from Nature, But from God

Isaiah 26:3-4

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you: because he trusts in you....

Man alone of all created beings of whom we know anything seems strangely out of harmony with the circumstances with which he is surrounded, and the conditions of his existence. Everything around us, and much within us, seems specially designed to militate against the possibility of peace.

1. If man is to be at peace, why does he hold his very life, and everything else that he values best, on the most precarious tenure? The lower animals are exposed to nothing like the same number of uncertainties; they, for the most part, live out their own appointed span of existence, while, on the other hand, their incapacity for reflection saves them those gloomy apprehensions of possible disaster, and that still sadder certain anticipation of ultimate dissolution, which cast so dark a shadow over the experience of man just because he can and must think, Man's affections are immeasurably more intense than theirs, and yet he knows what they do not, that at any moment he may be robbed of all he loves most; thus the very strength of his affections militates against his peace. They seem incapable of care, and what they need usually comes to them without any laborious provision. He has to exercise forethought and skill, and to expend much patient labour before he can hope to obtain so much as the bare necessities of life; and even then he cannot make sure of these, owing to the apparent caprices of nature.

2. And the worst of it is that these are not the only causes of our disquiet and unrest. There are disturbing influences within as well as without. Peace is broken by inward war, the conflict of one element of our nature with another.

3. All this shows us that either we are to be denied even such a peace as the animals apparently enjoy, and that their condition in this respect is to be vastly preferable to ours, or else that some higher provision must have been made for inducing this feature in our experience — some provision that they know nothing about, and that does not lie upon the surface of outward nature; some provision that has to be otherwise made known than by the ordinary phenomena of the outer world. And this is one of the most cogent amongst many proofs, that a supernatural revelation is absolutely necessary to supplement the phenomena of the world known to sense, unless nature is to be found guilty of strange and anomalous inconsistencies. The "God of peace" knows that we need peace, and He has provided it for us. He who has blessed His lower creatures with a restful uncarefulness, that renders existence not only tolerable, but pleasant to them, has not left His highest creature to be the victim of his own greatness, and to be tossed about aimlessly upon a sea of troubles, until at last the inevitable shipwreck comes upon the pitiless shoals of death. Our great Father, God, dwells Himself in an atmosphere of eternal calm, and His love makes Him desire to share His peace with us "the peace of God which passeth all understanding."

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Holiness, Under the Old Dispensation and Under the New

Isaiah 35:8-10

And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it...

We can hardly make a greater mistake in our theology than to suppose that the gospel dispensation has been designed by God in order to bring down the standard of the divine claims to the level of human infirmity: So far from this being the case the gospel dispensation has been inaugurated and designed specially in order that human infirmity may be raised to the level of the divine claims. The prophet was looking forward, as it would seem, to the glories of the Christian dispensation, and this was the characteristic of this new era that he contemplated with the most complete satisfaction: "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness." But it may occur to some to ask, "Had there been no knowledge of the 'way of holiness' under previous dispensations? Does holiness of life belong only to the gospel age?" I reply, Undoubtedly there were holy and humble men of heart before the Incarnation — men who lived in advance of their age. These were the bold pioneers of spiritual progress, who made their way through the pathless forest and the trackless wastes ere the King's great highway was opened for our feet. It was with them as with the pioneers of civilisation in our own days. Hardy travellers have made their way right across the continent of Central Africa, exploring in almost all directions the vast and unknown region; but there is no highway across the continent of Africa: and those, therefore, who have crossed it, or attempted to do so, have had to face great and untold difficulties, and endure a vast amount of hardship and privation. By and by, if the world lasts long enough, and civilisation progresses, there may be a grand trunk road right across that continent, and by and by perhaps railways may be laid, and easy communication established, with that remote and barbarous region. It is even so with regard to the highway of holiness. Before the Christian dispensation earnest and devoted men attained to various degrees of holiness, but the King's highway to holiness was not yet open. It was not yet revealed to the world what true and perfect holiness was, nor how we are to rise to it. "Righteousness" rather than holiness was set forth in the law. It needed the Incarnation of the Son of God to reveal it to man. And not until the Word of the Father was clothed in human form, and lived among His fellow-men in fashion as a man, did human eyes contemplate the true ideal of holiness, the standard and type of absolute perfection. In the life and conduct of Christ that standard was embodied and revealed; by the death and resurrection of Christ the spiritual power was secured to us by which it becomes possible for us to rise to the level of conduct so indicated. The highway of holiness was thus opened; and it now becomes possible for "the wayfaring men, though fools," to walk therein. There are two thoughts, then, specially suggested to our minds in this connection.

1. In order to open the high. way of holiness it was necessary that a perfect example should be given to mankind, so that men could understand what perfect holiness means; and that has been presented to us in the human life of Jesus.

2. Christ also imparts to us the secret of all true spiritual power by bringing us into close and blessed connection with God. The same power which rendered it possible for Jesus Christ as a man to be perfectly holy is thus brought within our reach by the Incarnation, and death and resurrection, of Jesus Christ. Thus we may say, not only have we the map and the chart of the highway of holiness placed in our hands, but also the highway itself opened up to us by the communication of a spiritual ability to tread therein. But if those advantages are real, they carry with them enhanced responsibilities.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Highway of Holiness

Isaiah 35:8-10

And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it...

Let us consider some of the characteristics of the life of holiness to which the prophet here calls our attention, and the conditions which are attached to the right of way.

I. It is the WAY OF THE PURIFIED. "The unclean shall not pass over it." Until we are cleansed from our "old sins" we are not in a position to pass over the King's highway of holiness. Some people who desire to live holy lives are no better than legalists. They cannot love much, because they have not had much forgiven them; thus they lose the true motive of a Christian life, while they are crippled in their efforts to attain to the proper standard of holiness, both by the weight of unforgiven sin and by absence of that spiritual power which flows to us through reconciliation. We must pass through the gate before we can pass along the way, and that gate is the Cross, where the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. Nor is it difficult to find a mason for this necessity. Indeed, this passage gives us a sufficient reason if we are to accept the marginal rendering — "For He shall be with them." It is quite true that Jesus Christ was the Friend of publicans and sinners; but He was their Friend because He saved them from their sins. And it is so now; those only who hate their sins, and who come to Christ to be delivered from their sins, can walk along the highway of holiness, because He is sojourning with those who sojourn there, and He cannot walk with the unclean. But having called attention to this statement as a reason for the necessity of cleansing, let us now dwell upon it as a characteristic of the way of holiness, and of the experience of those who pass along it.

II. The highway of holiness is THE PATH OF FELLOWSHIP WITH THE DIVINE. When Christ was here on earth He ever moved along this way, and He is still to be found there by those who pass along it. Indeed, so closely is His presence and our fellowship with Him connected with true spiritual holiness, that we can scarcely say whether the holiness is the fruit of the fellowship, or the fellowship the effect of the holiness. It is only while we walk in the light, as He is in the light, that we have fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. These two elements in our experience act and react upon each other.

III. It is THE WAY OF RIGHT DIRECTION. "Wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." Here is a promise that may well comfort us in the perplexities of life. The reason why we make such great mistakes as we sometimes do is surely that we get off the King's highway of holiness. We begin to pursue our own pleasure, or to gratify our ambition, or, we seek to please other people, and to avoid the cross. But when the wayfaring man is on the highway of holiness this promise will be fulfilled. He may seem to make mistakes, but God will overrule what appears to be a blunder to His own glory. There is yet another thought suggested by this clause which may serve to explain some of our errors. The prophet here speaks of those who are fools as being assured of

right doctrines. May not one cause of mistakes sometimes be that we are not content to take the place of fools? We feel too much confidence in our own sound judgment and commonsense, and so we scarcely regard it necessary to inquire of the Lord. I do not mean to say that we ought not to use our natural faculties. They are a trust from God, and we are bound to use them. But we are warned not to lean to our own understanding, and he who gives us this advice would have been a much happier man and made much fewer practical mistakes if he had only taken it himself. But there is yet another reason why we sometimes err, suggested to us by this clause. And this other reason brings before our minds the fourth characteristic of the way of holiness.

IV. It is only THE WAY OF RIGHT DIRECTION TO THOSE WHO ARE WAYFARING MEN. Do we not sometimes err because we have so little of the wayfaring man about us? Living as we do in a luxurious age, how many of us surround ourselves with luxury, and lay ourselves out for self-indulgence! We are called to use the world as not abusing it; surely it is the abuse of the world when we allow it to take the place of heaven. There is a quaint old Latin proverb which tells us, "The penniless travellers shall sing before the robbers." No wonder; for what can the robbers take from them? And many a Christian might sing defiance of all enemies — even of the great robber himself, if only we made over our all to its proper Owner, and regarded it as a sacred trust to be used for Him.

V. It is THE WAY OF SAFETY. "No lion shall be there," &c. Is Satan, then, really to lose his power to do us harm? He may come to the hedge which fences in the highway from the rest of the world; he may growl and roar, and do his best to terrify you, but so long as your eye is single, and you are moving on the King's great highway of holiness, the lion cannot lay a paw upon you or inflict a single wound.

VI. It is THE WAY OF JOY. VII. It is THE WAY THAT LEADS HOME.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

A Polished Shaft

Isaiah 49:2

And he has made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand has he hid me, and made me a polished shaft...

I. The prophet speaks of the servant of the Lord under the figure of A POLISHED SHAFT. There are not wanting some who, in their eagerness to deliver their souls, and to be faithful to their responsibilities, outstep the limits of Christian courtesy. They have their own blunt way of working for God, and they are disposed to flatter themselves that it is the best way, because it is most in accordance with their own natural dispositions; but the Lord seeks polished shafts for His quiver. No sword was ever so sharpened as were the words of Jesus; and yet how gentle He was, how considerate! But, you say, we have all our natural peculiarities, and we must continue to be what nature has made us. Not so, my dear brother. Thou art to be perfected by grace, not by nature. Cut a rough stick from a hedge: if it be tolerably straight, and a spike be stuck in the end of it, it may serve, on an emergency, in the place of an arrow at a short range. But every little notch, every distinguishing peculiarity, of that rough stick is an impediment to its flight. We need not fear for the skill of the Great Archer who keeps His saints in His quiver; but we must remember that when we assert our natural peculiarities of disposition, instead of surrendering ourselves to Him to be polished according to His will, the fault is ours, not His, if we miss the mark. We have no right to be content with doing the Lord's work in a "rough and ready," bungling, clumsy fashion, effecting perhaps a little good and a great deal of harm. "He that wins souls is wise"; he that seeks merely to relieve his own conscience can afford to do things in a blundering way. What does it matter to him, so long as it is done? But surely if the work is to produce its proper effect, we need much tact, much delicacy of feeling, much tenderness of sympathy; we need to learn when to hold our tongues, and when to speak. It is quite true that God may bless our very blunders when He sees they are committed with true sincerity of purpose, and arise rather from ignorance and bad taste than from wilful carelessness; but that does not warrant us in continuing to blunder, still less in regarding our blunders as almost meritorious, and reflecting self-complacently that it is "our way of working." We shrink from the polishing process; but He who desires to see us so polished that we shall reflect His own glory, not exhibit our own peculiarities, will take care that the means for our polishing are forthcoming. It is by friction that the arrow is polished, and it is by friction that our idiosyncrasies are to be worn away. This friction is provided in different ways. Perhaps it will be supplied by failures and disappointments, until, like Gideon of old, we are ready to say, "If the Lord be with us, why is it thus with us?" Perhaps it will be supplied by the violent and bitter antagonism which our inconsiderate roughness and unwisdom has stirred in the hearts of those whom we seek to benefit. Sometimes it is provided in our common intercourse with others, not unfrequently in our intercourse with fellow-Christians. Possibly He may subject us to the severest discipline of trial before the work of polishing is complete; but polished in one way or another the shafts must be which He is to use for His own glory.

II. THE SHAFT IS POLISHED ONLY TO BE HIDDEN. It might seem that when once the process of polishing had been completed, the arrow would be a proper object for display, and here is a peril which even polished shafts are exposed to. There is so much of the beauty of the Lord impressed upon some of His servants, that men cannot withhold their admiration. Christians are lavish of their love, and there are hidden perils concealed under this favourable esteem. Sharpened and polished, how apt are we to display ourselves, even as the Assyrian axe of old "boasted against him who hewed there with." "But," says the great apostle (himself a polished and sharpened arrow), "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." And so it is that the polished shaft has to be hidden. Your attention is not directed to the arrow while it is waiting to be used; it is concealed within the quiver. The eye is not caught by it when it is in the hand; it is hidden under the shadow of the hand. Another moment, it rests on the bow; another moment, and it speeds to the mark. Neither in the quiver, nor in the hand, nor on the bow, nor in its flight, is the arrow conspicuous. The more swiftly it flies, the more invisible it is. Thus the archer wins all the applause, and the arrow is nothing; yet it is by the arrow that he has done his work. And while man is not attracted to the arrow, the great Archer Himself is. It is upon it that He bends His eye. It is to it that He gives the credit of the victory: "Thou art My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." Yes, there is a special joy in His heart when He can truly say of us, "Thou art My servant." How near we are to His sacred Person when we are thus hidden in God's hand, concealed in His quiver! And how much truer and deeper the joy of such service than the momentary excitement of human applause! And then the thought that it is possible for God to be glorified in us as the archer is glorified in the arrow, that the intelligences of heaven shall gaze down and admire the work that God hath wrought by instruments once so unpromising, and shall praise Him for it; that men on earth shall be constrained to admit that this is the finger of God, and to take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus; that the devils in hell shall recognise in our lives the presence of Omnipotence, and tremble as they see the mighty Archer draw us from the hiding-place within the quiver! "Hidden in God's hand!" Hidden from the grasp of Satan. He fain would snatch us out of God's keeping; but his hostile hand can never touch those who are concealed in God's quiver. Hidden from the desecrating touch of the world to which we no longer belong. Hidden above all from ourselves — our morbid self-consciousness, our inflated self-esteem, our gloomy self-depression.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

A Sharp Sword

Isaiah 49:2

And he has made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand has he hid me, and made me a polished shaft...

1. God does not undo, in His relationship to us as Re-creator, the work which He has already performed as Creator. He does not strip us of our natural faculties, and endow us with others altogether distinct from these. Our natural faculties are in themselves neither good nor bad, but in every case are capable of development, either in the direction of good or of evil. When first the grace of God finds us, the powers of evil have more or less infected our nature, and most of our faculties (if not all of them) have exhibited a downward inclination; our members have become "instruments of unrighteousness," the weapons which Satan has used to do his own fell work. It is upon these dishonoured faculties that God lays His hand when He enters and takes possession of the new-created soul. What He demands on our part is, that these members should be surrendered to Him, as they formerly were to the powers of darkness.

2. The prophet here speaks of one important faculty which exercises an influence for good or evil second to none that affects society — the tongue. The faculty of speech is one of the noblest endowments of humanity, distinguishing us, as it does, from all the lower animals, rendering social life possible, and binding humanity into one. How much of evil originates with the tongue! And yet what a mighty engine for good language may be! Surely God has put no small honour on human speech when He permits His own Son to be described as "the Word" of God.

3. How many of us have endeavoured to use our tongues in the service of God, and yet our efforts have been singularly weak and unsuccessful. Let us not be discouraged, but listen to this word of power: "I have made thy mouth a sharp sword" — sharp no longer for sarcasm and cutting scorn. The withering scoff, the poisoned slander, the bitter reproach, are no longer to proceed, like a sharp two-edged sword, from those consecrated lips of thine; but, if thou wouldst but believe it, a new power has been communicated, in virtue of which that very member, which was of old so keen-edged a weapon in the hands of the destroyer, is now to be equally sharp and pointed in the grasp of its Divine Master. But have we yet begun to be discontented with our want of sharpness? Are we ready to be used by God as a sharp sword? Have we counted the cost? Are we prepared for the consequences? If we are, our weakness matters not. God can use us. "Fear not, thou worm Jacob; I will make thee a sharp threshing instrument, having teeth, and thou shalt break in pieces the mountains." How many of our well-meant efforts fail for want of teeth!

4. What is required in order to render us efficient instruments in the hands of God?

(1) Definiteness of purpose. The man whose mouth is a sharp sword will speak, not for speaking's sake, nor to ease his conscience, but to reach the heart.

(2) Incisiveness of language. Our words need not be ungentle nor severe, and yet they may be pointed.

(3) Earnestness.

(4) One other characteristic will be embodied in the word "now." The man who speaks for God will ever remember that "the King's business requires haste." "The Holy Ghost saith, To-day"; and he who speaks in the Spirit will speak as the Spirit.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

What Hast Thou Done?

Jeremiah 2:23-30

How can you say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? see your way in the valley, know what you have done...

Look at thy life in the light of — 1. God's Divine purpose.

2. Your social position, and the circumstances by which you have been surrounded.

3. The responsibilities of the domestic relationship.

4. Your relationship to the best and tenderest of fathers.

5. The tender dealings of the Holy Spirit.

6. Your relationship with Him who, because He loved you, was content to hang upon the Cross.

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

The Harvest Past

Jeremiah 8:20

The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.

I remember once passing by a bleak hillside in Scotland, when winter was already far advanced, and seeing a field of oats still green, though harvest had long since been closed. There was something most melancholy and almost weird in the aspect of that ill-starred crop, There it stood in the cold hillside, seeming as if nature and man had alike overlooked and forgotten it. You could almost have thought you heard those green ears, shrivelled with the early frost, but still unripe, sighing, as they swayed to and fro in the wintry gusts — "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." I wonder what became of that crop? Perhaps it may have been given to the dunghill; perhaps it may have been eaten down and trampled under foot by the cattle where it stood; but very sure I am the shout of harvest home was never heard in that field that season, as the laden cart passed to the granary with its golden freight. It had failed, for some reason or other, to answer its proper purpose; it had missed its season; and there it was, rubbish rather than treasure. Each of us has a season allotted to us in which we may bring forth "the peaceable fruits of righteousness," and with each of us this season is a period necessarily limited in extent, a period which it is possible to trifle away, so that when the time for the harvest comes there shall be nothing for God to gather, nothing that can be saved into the eternal garner and treasured among the precious things of heaven. Heaven's resources have been taxed to the uttermost to make earth spiritually fruitful; no expense has been spared, and He who is the Lord of the soil has a right to expect some adequate return. How is this living harvest to be produced, and from whence shall it spring? Christ Himself shall give us an answer, as we hear Him say, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." He was the spiritual "corn of wheat" from which the spiritual harvest is ordained to spring, and He fell to the ground and died in order that from Him, as from the true seed, we might spring up into newness of life, and grow up as the harvest crop of living souls in a world which He hath redeemed. And "He shall see His seed." In every age of the world's history the harvest will continue to be produced, until at last the great harvest day comes. Then, when a multitude that no man can number stands before the throne, with joyful acclamations ascribing "salvation unto our God and unto the Lamb," it will be seen at last how vast a product has sprung from that solitary corn of wheat which fell to the ground and died eighteen hundred years ago. What and if any of you should be found left behind in that great harvest day, like the bundles of tares that lie there waiting for the burning, while the wheat is carried into the barn? There is something strangely sad in these familiar words of our text, in whatever sense they are employed, but surely this will be the saddest sense of all. Oh, think of that moment, that terrible and tragic moment, when the gates of the heavenly granary shut, as the last sheaf passes in, and some of you, perhaps, find yourselves left behind! With what unspeakable anguish, with what dire despair, must this cry then be wrung from your sinking hearts, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!" And then to have to thank yourselves for it all! For think how inevitable, how righteously inevitable, is

this doom of exclusion! You have not answered the end of your existence; you have failed of the proper purpose and object of life. How can you hope to be stored amongst the precious things of eternity, and to add in your own persons to the treasures of heaven! You might as reasonably expect to see a sane farmer crowding his barn with thistles and darnel as to see Almighty God filling heaven with those who have never been "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God." But now I want to point out to you further, that with us, as with the Israelites of old, the harvest is a thing of the present as well as of the future. It is possible even now to be garnered in safety, by being brought into our proper relations with the Saviour. And just as from time to time God was pleased of old to give special seasons of visitation to His ancient people — times of religious revival, when many no doubt were gathered in, and when the nation as a whole might have been — even so now He sends from time to time a special call, and moves upon localities and individuals with special power. But, remember, no mission, no season of special visitation, can leave you as it found you. With each fresh opportunity wasted the heart necessarily becomes harder, and thus the harvest season of your life must needs at length be lost. The time in which God might have reaped a harvest in you will at last have passed away, and then, — What then? What then! Surely such a curse as fell upon the barren fig tree of old: "No man eat fruit of thee henceforth and forever." What then! Then the terrible sentence: "Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone." But why should this be so? "Is not the Lord in Zion? is not her King in her?" Here in our very midst He is today, willing to enter your heart, and bring His own salvation with Him. You need not be left behind; you need not continue unsaved. "Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no Physician there?" There is! There is! A thousand joyous voices can attest it — voices of those who once were wounded and stricken and dying. It seemed as if they were once like a blighted crop, too sorely diseased to be capable of any satisfactory harvest; but in their barrenness they found a Healer, and now they are themselves the harvest of the Lord. Why should not you be healed too? Ah, think of what it has cost Him to obtain the right and the power to heal such sin-stricken souls as we! Some physicians amongst ourselves risk their lives in attending their plague-stricken patients, and who can deny to such their meed of praise; but our good Physician actually laid down His life as the preliminary condition of His being able to exercise His healing skill. Only because He has taken our diseases upon Himself, was it possible for Him to cure them. Only because He died our death, is it possible for Him to bring life and immortality to light by His Gospel. But He has borne our sicknesses, and died our death, and now He has the right to heal and to save, and He is in our midst to do it today. I saw an interesting inscription on the wall of a country church, not long ago, on a stone erected in memory of God's preserving mercy shown to a man wile fell from half-way up the steeple in the year 1718, and yet escaped with his life, and actually lived to be seventy-three. But the inscription went on to state that he died in the year 1761, some forty-three years after the accident. As I stood there reading it, more than a hundred years after the man's death, what a small acquisition after all did it seem, those forty years added to the life that had been so nearly cut short — what were they now? Passed as a watch in the night. Yet we do not wonder at his being grateful for even such a prolongation. But here is a good Physician who offers to heal your dying soul and to impart the blessing of life for evermore — to do it freely, and to do it now. Why, then, oh why, in the name of reason, is not your health recovered?

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Valiant for the Truth

Jeremiah 9:3

And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth on the earth...

I. WHAT IS TRUTH, THAT FOR IT ONE CAN BE, SHOULD BE, VALIANT? Truth is real. Truth is accessible and may be known. Truth is precious. Truth imposes in every direction obligations that cannot be met except by the most genuine and resolute valour. The best philologists of our own generation refer the word to a root meaning "to believe," and draw upon the whole group of related languages and dialects to show that truth is "firm, strong, solid, reliable, anything that will hold." It should, seem, then, that we ought not to believe anything but what is firm, established, and that truth is what we rightly believe. For this our highest powers can be summoned into action, while nothing but a poor counterfeit of our best activity can be called forth in behalf of that which is known or seriously suspected to be unreal. The sophist may be adroit, dexterous in disposition and argument, and selfishly eager for victories. The pettifogging advocate in any profession may gain brief successes by natural powers and discipline, aided by sheer audacity. This is a result and proof of the world's disorder. Man is for truth and truth for man — both real. And truth is accessible and may be known. He who gave us reason and nature, Whose they are, and Whom they should ever serve, has come in pity to the relief of our impotence and bewilderment by the disclosures that His Spirit makes. In the Gospel "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men." Here is truth that is real. Here is truth that may be known. Of all precious truth, truth on which souls can be nourished, truth to which lives can be safely conformed, here is that which is most precious — truth that enters most deeply and permanently into character and takes hold of destiny. Of all truth worthy and suited to stimulate man's highest powers, to the most sustained, and most intense sufficiency, here is that which is worthiest and most stated. Of all truth that is of such kind and in such relations to us that it is not only worth our while, but in every way incumbent upon us to put forth our highest valour to gain it and to hold it, here is the most essential. We are bidden, "Buy the truth and sell it not." And this is not a mere appeal to our self-interest. Truth, especially this sacred truth, encompasses us with obligations. For this acquisition we do not merely do well to pay the price of toil and struggle; we fail grossly and widely in duty if we withhold the price. And what we have so dearly bought at the price of our humbled pride, at the price of our falling out with the fashion of this world "which passeth away," what we win by the surrender of our self-sufficiency and imaginary independence, by our resolute self-mastery, our vigorous effort, and whatever besides the attainment may cost, we are to hold against all seductions and all assaults, "valiant for the truth."

II. WHAT IS THE MANLY VALOUR THAT CAN FIND ANY FAIR AND PROPER FIELD FOR ITS EXERCISE — its fairest and most proper field in connection with truth? It is not mere boldness, bravery, courage, but moves in a higher plane, and is instinct with a loftier inspiration. These may have their source chiefly in the physical and animal, that which we share with the bulldog and the

gorilla; while valour is a knightly grace, and makes account mainly of the ideal. We shall esteem that the truest valour in which there is the fullest consciousness and manifestation of manhood, with the clearest conception and the most persistent adherence to worthy ends of manly endeavour. There can then be nothing forced or unnatural in the phrase of our text, "valiant for the truth." For what should a true man be valiant rather than for the acquisition, maintenance, and service of the truth — truth known as real, judged to be important, valued as precious? And what estimate must we put upon the manhood that can be "strong in the land, but not for truth" — energetic, daring, resolved, and persistent for lower and grosser interests, but not for the truth?

II. BY WHAT CALL FROM WITHOUT DOES TRUTH MOST AUTHORITATIVELY AND EFFECTIVELY SUMMON VALOUR TO ITS AID? Truth is imperial, not only in the quality of the authority which it asserts and the richness of the bounty which it dispenses, but also in the breadth of the dominion to which it lays claim. We have made our first obedience when we have yielded ourselves to the truth. We are to go on proclaiming truth's rights, and helping it to gain rule over others. We vindicate the rights of the truth, while we secure blessings to our fellow men through truth's ascendancy over them. And this obligation and opportunity subject our manhood to some of the most searching tests by which we are ever tried. Are we capable of taking larger views of truth than those which connect it with some prospect of advantage to ourselves? Do we esteem it for what it is, and not only for what it brings us? And what is the measure of our discernment of the rights and needs of others, and what is our response? The manly and Christian spirit has large conceptions of right and duty. And then truth, while imperial in its rights, is sometimes imperilled by denial and attack, and that at the hands of the very men whose allegiance it claims. Its rights are contested; its very credentials are challenged. It encounters not merely the negative resistance of ignorance and dulness, of low tastes and sensual and earthly preoccupations; it is met by a more positive impeachment. He who is valiant for truth will no more suffer it to fight its own battles than a true knight would have resorted to any such evasion in a cause to which he was committed. And the response which we make to the summons of assailed truth gives opportunity to display some of the finest qualities that belonged to the old knighthood — unswerving loyalty, courage, endurance, self-sacrifice. But there is another call for valour in behalf of Christian truth higher than that which comes from our fellow men and their claims upon it. What Christ is on the one side to the truth and on the other side to us, and what the truth is to Him, supply a new inspiration and strength, and add a new quality to Christian endeavour — a personal quality that was wanting before. He who is valiant for the truth because of what it is in its reality and reliableness shows his discernment. He who is valiant for the truth because of what it is to manhood shows a wise self-appreciation. He who is valiant for the truth because of the claim his fellow men have upon it, and upon him if he has it in his possession, shows that he knows his place, his obligation, his opportunity as a man among men. He who is valiant for the truth for Christ's sake shows that he knows and honours his Lord, and would make Him indeed Lord of all. Consider what Christ is to the substance of the truth; what He is to the authority and efficiency of the truth; and what the truth is to Him in the assertion and manifestation of His Lordship. The truth is not only Christ's as its great Revealer; the truth is Christ as its great Revelation. To him who asks, What is the way? we answer, The way is Christ. To him who would know, What is the life? we make reply, The life is Christ. And we proclaim, as that which is of the highest concern to man to know, the truth is Christ. He is the great embodiment of truth — truth incarnate. What He was, over and above all that He said, teaches us what we should seek in vain to learn elsewhere. He was the chief revelation of

the nature, the power, the love, the saving grace of God.

(C. A. Aitken, D. D.)

God Glorified in the Fall of Pride

Jeremiah 13:15-17

Hear you, and give ear; be not proud: for the LORD has spoken....

I. WHAT IS IT WHICH STOPS PEOPLE FROM HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD?

1. One form of pride is shame. Many kept from Christ because ashamed to come and give themselves up to Him. For fear of the paltry scorn, the momentary ridicule, the soul will risk eternity!
2. There is the pride of respectability and social position. Hold apart from religion, because in the one way all must go without distinction. Yet what can justify in a lost sinner any high and vain thoughts of self?
3. There is the pride that conceals a wound. God's Word has stricken the heart; healing and joy could be had if we humbly go to God, yet hide the grief and unrest within, from man and Heaven.
4. There is the pride of self-righteousness. What say when before the Throne — that you were too good to accept the Gospel?

II. HUMAN PRIDE MUST EFFECTUALLY BE BROKEN DOWN.

1. When pride humbled and man crushed, God speaks. What say? "Give glory to the Lord your God." "Your" God still, though turned back on Him and grieved Him.
2. The contrite soul cannot realise its inability to glorify God. Broken down, powerless, self-despairing, cast yourself on His salvation.
3. There is a desperate alternative: that you "will not hear." By and by your feet will "stumble on the dark mountains." The day of disease will come; life will grow dim; the thin grandeur of a fading world will begin to pass away; all around the gloom will thicken, and on a dying world "gross darkness" of unrelieved despair will cover you. Then the last moment arrives; one terrified "look for light," but in vain; the soul is "carried away into captivity."

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

The Blessing and the Curse

Jeremiah 17:5-8

Thus said the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the LORD....

Two contrasted types of experience, or laws of life, are brought before us — the one a life of trust in man, and the other a life of trust in God. These two types of experience are contrasted with each other — not primarily, with respect to their outward moral characteristics. The thought that our attention is first of all called to is, that these two lives stand in a contrasted relation to God. The man who lives the first of the two lives that are described here is represented as assuming and maintaining an attitude of independence of God; and the man who leads the second of these two lives is represented as living in a state of consciously recognised dependence upon God. The one finds his resources in self; the other finds his resources in Deity. Now these two lives are not only contrasted with each other, first of all, as to this their essential characteristic, but they are also contrasted as to their result in respect to the personal happiness and enjoyment which belongs to each. The one is represented as a life lived under a curse, and the other as a life lived under a blessing. Either your experience may be described, in the words of Paul, "The life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"; or else you are living a life of which nothing of the kind can be affirmed, and, therefore, a life in which you are practically cut off from all direct communication with your Maker by sin and unbelief. And if the latter be your condition, you are at this moment, in spite of all your privileges, actually under the ban of God's curse and the frown of His wrath: one or other of these two cases you may be sure is yours. You will observe that in the first sentence of our text the prophet utters a curse on the man that trusteth in man; and he says this before he goes on to speak of the heart departing from the living God. This trust in man renders it impossible for the man who entertains it to trust in the living God; and it is, I am persuaded, just because, before we can really and honestly trust in the Father through the Son, it is absolutely necessary for us to turn our back upon all other forms of confidence, that so many lose the enjoyment of this blissful life of faith, and make proof in their own miserable experience of the blight and desolation of a life of practical unbelief. We are not prepared to strip ourselves of our false supports and of our fatal self-confidence, and thus we are not in a position to trust ourselves to the living Father through the Son. Consider some of these various forms of false confidence which it is absolutely necessary for us to abandon before we can enter upon the enjoyment of this life of faith. First, if I am to live by faith in God, I must make up my mind to have done with living by faith in the world. If I am to trust God at all, my trust in God must be exclusive of all other confidence. Or, again, it is possible that our confidence is reposed upon human systems — perhaps it may even be religious systems — which, practically, are allowed to take the place that belongs to God in the heart. How many a man one meets with who will tell us that he has opinions of his own. That may be, my brother, but the point is whether those opinions of yours coincide with God's facts; for opinions of our own may be the cause of mortal injury to us, if it should so happen that those opinions of our own are in direct opposition to facts. Or perhaps it

is that we base our confidence on the opinions of other people. Some will tell you that they are earnest Church folks, others will state that they are conscientious Nonconformists; some that they are strong Catholics; some that they are decided Evangelicals. God calls upon us to trust to Himself, and to nothing but Himself; and when we substitute for personal trust in the living God confidence in any kind of system, whatever that system may be, or in any mere doctrine, whatever that doctrine may be, we are cut off by that attitude of heart from the possibilities of the life of faith. Perhaps you will ask, "Well, but why should my trust in doctrine, or my trust in ritual, or my trust in churchmanship, preclude me from trusting in God too?" Just because these things are not God; and, as I said a few moments ago, you cannot trust God and not-God at the same time. But we must consider yet another and still more frequent ease. There are a large number of persons who are strangers to the life of faith — not so much because they are wedded to any particular system on which they have based their confidence, as because they are reluctant to renounce their confidence in themselves. Now, we never really begin with God till we come to an end of ourselves. A considerable number of persons trust in their own quiet, even respectability. They really cannot see that they do anything to be distressed or alarmed about. What means all this hue and cry — this red-hot excitement or attempt to get up a red-hot excitement — these frequent services going on hour after hour all day long — these after meetings — these invitations to earnest inquirers? What does it all mean? The explanation of it all lies in the fact that you ask for an explanation. Let a man be dissatisfied with himself, let a man have a low opinion of himself, and then he will be ready to receive good from any kind of instrumentality, and a very commonplace sort of instrumentality will probably be used to bring that man to the attainment of that spiritual benefit which his ease requires. But let a man be sunk in the sleep of self-complacency — let a man be going on leading a calm, quiet, easy, regular life; but, observe, a life which is not a life of conscious, personal faith in God, but, on the contrary, a life of self-reliance, and therefore a life of self-complacency; and he is as much under the power of the great deceiver as it is possible for a man to be. And of all the undertakings which lie before the Divine Spirit, it seems to me that the very hardest undertaking which even God Himself can engage in is that of penetrating this impervious armour of self-complacency, and of bringing such an one to feel his need of salvation, and to seek and to find that salvation on God's own terms. If these, then, are some of the barriers to our leading a bright and happy life of faith, we shall perhaps, by God's blessing, be the more disposed to avoid or have done with them as we dwell for a little on the contrast offered between these two forms of life. Let us look at these pictures. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is; for he shall be like a tree planted by the waterside, that spreadeth out her roots by the river." Observe, the tree is dependent, not upon a chance shower, but upon a perennial supply. The river is always flowing, and the tree has stretched out its roots beside the river, and so is in a position continuously to draw for itself from the river all the sustenance and all the moisture which it requires. Christian, if thou art a real Christian, here is thy picture. Thy roots are struck down into God. Thou art dependent upon no mere casual visitation of Divine mercy. It may be very advisable, from time to time, that extraordinary efforts should be made to reach the careless and to awaken the unconcerned, but thou, true child of God, art not dependent upon these for thy life and health. Thou hast struck down thy roots into the river, and there thou standest — uninjured by prevalent drought, unscathed by the fiery rays of the sun, thy leaf green, thy fruit never failing. Is this your ease! Are you drawing your life supplies from God? There are two ways in which the Christian grows. He grows in personal holiness of life and conversation, but he only

grows in outward conduct, because he also grows in the knowledge and love of God. Upon the depth and reality of his relation with God, his moral and religious character will depend. As God becomes more and more to him "a living, bright reality," so his personal life and character become more fully developed, and the beauty of the Lord will be exhibited in his conduct. As the result of the establishment of these relations with God, the supply of all the necessary wants of the soul is insured, and it has nothing to fear from the trials and disappointments of life: the tree planted by the waters shall not see when heat cometh. Observe, the prophet does not say that it shall be exposed to no heat, but that it shall not be injured by it. Let us ask ourselves, Are we growing in the knowledge of God? Are we getting fresh revelations of His character and His ability to meet and satisfy our every spiritual need? Oh, how vast is our spiritual wealth in Him, and how many a fear and misgiving might not be saved, if we would only acquaint ourselves with Him and be at peace. And this leads us on to the second feature mentioned here, "it shall not be careful in the year of drought." Happy the Christian man who realises his full privileges in this respect, and lives in the enjoyment of them! Happy the man of business on our own Stock Exchange, who, in the midst of all the vicissitudes of a commercial life, can leave himself calmly in the hands of God, and while the year of drought which has so long been affecting our own and other lands fills others with despair, enjoy a blessed immunity from anxiety, because he knows that he is planted by the waterside. Happy the mother who can cast all the cares of her family upon Him who careth for her, and leave them there, not fretting and fuming when things do not go as she would wish them, not cankered by cares or worried by troubles, but trusting Him in whom she finds the true calm of life to draw her ever the nearer to Himself by all its changeful circumstances! But further, the leaf of such a tree is described as being always green. The leaf of the tree shows the nature of the tree, and just so the profession we make should show what our religious character is. Now, it is a grand thing to have a fresh and green profession, so to speak! Once again we read, "Neither shall cease from yielding fruit." The Christian will always be a fruitful tree, because he is planted by the water. There will be no lack of fruitfulness when living in full communion with God. Some of us, perhaps, have had an opportunity of looking at that wonderful and famous vine at Hampton Court. A more beautiful sight you can scarcely see in all England than that vine when it is covered all over with the rich, luscious clusters of the vintage. Report attributes its extraordinary fertility to the fact that the roots, extending for a very considerable distance, have made their way down to the Thames, from whence it draws continuous moisture and nourishment. Such a sight is presented to the eyes of God by the Christian who lives in God, planted by the riverside. The fruits of good works will manifest themselves, not one here and another there, but in a rich and lifelong vintage that will not fail. God Himself reaps a harvest from such a life which redounds to His own glory, and is productive of blessed consequences to mankind. Such is the one picture; now let us glance at the other. "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man." We have left the grapes of Eshcol behind us now — we have turned our backs upon the land that flows with milk and honey. We are making our way towards the bare stretch of arid, desert waste. The smile of God's favour rests no longer upon the miserable being, but the frown of His wrath broods over him; and the thunder of God's curse is sounding in his ear, "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Departeth from God! Ah, it all lies there! As the satisfaction of the saint arises from the closeness of his relations with God, so the want and wretchedness of the sinner arise from his separation from Him. The wilderness begins where conscious fellowship with God ceases. "He shall be like the heath in the desert." As you wander over the dreary waste of

barren sand, your eye falls upon a poor, miserable-looking, half-withered, half-dead thing, that still struggles to maintain its woe-begone and sickly existence. There it lingers on wretchedly, cut off from all surrounding vegetation, scarcely living and yet not finally dead, but devoid of all the freshness and luxuriance of life, shrivelled and parched and desolate looking in a salt land and not inhabited. Far away in the distance there you can see the green tree that is planted by the waterside only just in sight; but here there is no kindly river, no kindred forms of vegetation, in solitude and drought it measures out its dreary existence. In this miserable object, man of the world, see a picture of yourself. Solitude and thirst! in those two characteristics of this woeful picture, you have faithfully represented to you the characteristic elements of your own present experience, and the dread foreshadowing of what its end must be. Thirst and solitude, yes, thou knowest something of that even now, for is there not already within thee a desire that nothing earthly can satisfy — a sense of inanity and want? Verily thou dwellest in a parched and salt land. A mighty famine reigns within thy soul, and thou hast begun to be in want. An irrepressible, an urgent desire now goads thee on from one effort to another, if, haply, thou mayest escape from thy own miserable self-consciousness and lose the sense of thy own want amidst the excitements of thy life. But it is there all the time — this inward thirst, and thou canst not escape from it; and remember the salt land which thou now inhabitest is but the way to, and the dread anticipation of, that salt land of doom to which the sinner is to be banished; and the thirst which even now tortures thy agonised heart is but the prelude to the thirst of hell. Thirst and solitude! yes, and thou knowest something of this last also. How solitary and lonesome already is that poor heart of thine. The plain, simple truth is, that in his inner life the man of the world is always alone — the solitude which sin brings with it has already commenced, and already you are shut out from the true enjoyments of social intercourse; you are lonely, even in the very midst of numbers, and desolate even in the very heart of your family. And in that loneliness you have a prelude to the utter loneliness which lies beyond — the desolation, the solitude, the loss of all, when he who has wandered from the love of God is shut out from the world of love, and given over to that dark region where love cannot come; the loneliness of him who leaves the society of heaven behind him, and finds instead only the weeping and the wailing and the gnashing of teeth.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Cry of the Penitent

Jeremiah 31:18-21

I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; You have chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke...

Amidst all the confused and discordant sounds that are for ever rising from this fallen world of ours into the ears of the Most High God, there is one to which He can never be indifferent; and that is, the voice of a stricken and contrite sinner bemoaning himself. He finds that "from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot there is no soundness in him." He is out of heart with himself altogether, and despairs of being able to improve his position. "O wretched man that I am!" he exclaims, "who will deliver me from the body of this death?" And thus by his very perplexity and helplessness he is drawn to look out of himself for assistance. Oh, you who are bemoaning yourselves, here is comfort for you. You never would have come to that point, you would have been even now either excusing or endeavouring to amend yourselves, but for the blessed influence of the Divine Spirit, who has shown you your true condition and brought you to an end of yourself, and thus put you in a position to begin with Him. Oh, thank Him for it, and since He has brought you thus far, trust Him to bring you farther. "Come, let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up." But here I want you to observe one feature specially of the perplexity and distress which leads Ephraim so to bemoan himself. He makes the humiliating discovery that not only has his past life been full of sin, but that his very efforts to repent and turn to God have also been characterised by a strange and fatal perversity. His repentance itself has to be repented of. This attitude of moral perversity is illustrated in our text by a remarkable and suggestive metaphor. "Thou hast chastised me," exclaims Ephraim, bemoaning himself, "and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke" — a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke — an unbroken bullock! Of all the perverse things to be found in the world, where will you find anything more unmanageable than this? Here Ephraim sees a picture of himself, and here also too many an awakened sinner finds himself represented. How often does such a one adopt a course exactly the reverse of that which God would have him take! How often does he insist on adopting the course of action least appropriate to his spiritual condition, and as a result he has to feel the chastening goad, and only by stern discipline of sorrow has he to be brought to the obedience of faith and the submission of the will, to see and acknowledge his own folly, and to yield himself to God. At last, Ephraim does the wisest thing that he could do, and what he should have done long before. Having reached the point of self-despair; having seen the folly of his own attempts to better himself, and having repented of his own perversity, he just puts the whole thing into the hands of God. "O Lord, I have tried my best, and my best has failed me: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised; but still, like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, I have continued to make mistakes and to do the wrong thing; now in my helplessness I must make the whole matter over to Thee. Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned: for Thou art the Lord my God." Ah, that is the only true solution of the difficulty. Here is the turning-point in our experience, here is the moment of victory for the helpless. Let a man once put himself thus unreservedly into the

hands of his God, and all the devils of hell cannot keep him from the blessing. His present salvation is at once secure, because the honour and truth of the everlasting God are pledged for the safety of the man who trusts himself to God. O God, cries the penitent and self-despairing sinner, I cannot turn myself, I cannot change my own nature, but I believe that Thou canst, so I put myself completely in Thy hands to do it for me. How often have I hindered Thy work by endeavouring to do for myself what only Thou canst do; how often in my very efforts to turn myself have I, as it were, turned the wrong way. Lord, if I am to be saved at all, Thou must save me, for I cannot save myself. "Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned: for Thou art the Lord my God!" And who is there that God cannot turn when he is thus submitted to Him — who so far gone, so deeply sunk, that God cannot change him? The things impossible with men are possible with God; and often when the change has been beyond all human hope, God has done it to the glory of His own great name.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Burning the Roll

Jeremiah 36:20-26

And they went in to the king into the court, but they laid up the roll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe...

I remember, when on a mission, coming down from a pulpit where I had been pleading with souls, and going up to a respectably dressed man, one on whom my eye had rested more than once while preaching. I saw the tear was in his eye; I knew that the Word had gone home to his heart. I entreated him then and there to give himself up to the Lord. I daresay I talked with him for a quarter of an hour, till at last I found he too seemed to burn the roll. He began by listening to me politely and civilly, but as I went on earnestly pleading with him, pressing him to surrender himself to God, I saw he was resisting and hardening his heart, till at last he said something to the effect that he wished I would not talk to him any more. So after offering a short prayer I had to withdraw. A few weeks after, that man was struck on the head in a drunken broil, and never had time to say, "God save my soul." His day of grace ended in that church, he too had burned the roll.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Lord is There

Ezekiel 48:1-35

Now these are the names of the tribes. From the north end to the coast of the way of Hethlon, as one goes to Hamath, Hazarenan...

Between the fruits of natural and of spiritual religion there will always be considerable apparent resemblance. The amiability and generosity of the natural man will not be distinguished by the superficial observer from the charity of the Christian; nor are we called upon to disparage that which is beautiful and excellent in natural morality. At the same time, while there may be much in the unrenewed heart that is lovely and attractive, we must not shut our eyes to its true state before God, or refuse to recognise the radical deficiency which runs through all systems of natural religion or morality. We may love, we may even admire, but if the heart be really unrenewed, we must own the melancholy fact — the Lord is not there. Again and again, throughout the Word of God, we have it directly asserted, or incidentally implied, that God dwells, by His Holy Spirit, in the hearts of true believers, and that He dwells in them to form within them the New Adam, to develop the nature and spirit of Christ. "Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost," and "Christ is in us, except we be reprobate," and the mystery of our calling is "Christ in us the hope of glory." Do these words mean anything? Can they mean what their natural sense implies? or are they simply high-sounding flights of Eastern rhetoric? I must press on you the question, Can it be truly said of your heart, "The Lord is there"? Does your religion consist only of doctrines and observances, or has a new power entered your soul? and are you conscious of a reverent and sacred intimacy with your Divine Guest? What is religion without this? Take away my Lord, and earth becomes a dreary desert, time a cruel taskmaster, and eternity an abysmal gulf of horrible gloom. But, as it is true of every real Christian that the Lord is there, so it is the law of the life of the unrenewed that the Lord is not there. The man of the world awakes in the morning with no sense of the presence of his God: he may hurry through some form of devotion, but the Lord is not there. The world rushes in with all its thronging cares and busy excitements, and the battle of the day is fought, but the Lord is not there; and when he lays his head on his pillow at night, while he forms his schemes for the future, or congratulates himself on the past, it still remains true the Lord is not there. Years roll on, and the life without God draws towards its close; human nature loses its charms, the affections become paralysed, the genial enthusiasm of youth is a dream of the past, the barren routine of habit has fossilised all the higher faculties of the soul; but while the transient loveliness of humanity fades away, the sad truth still remains, "the Lord is not there." When the last scene comes, there may be weeping friends around the bedside of the dying sinner, and some may speak of the kindness of his disposition, and some may tell how he ever did his duty to wife, and child, and friend; but the curtain falls upon the last scene in the sad drama of a wasted life, inscribed with the melancholy sentence, "The Lord is not there!" Follow his receding form, if your inward sight can penetrate so far into the dreary regions of eternal hopelessness, and as you gaze with horror into the blank solitude into which he plunges, can you not catch that distant cry, of agony which wanders like an everlasting echo through the deep night of hell, "The Lord is not

here!" "The Lord is not here!" Gladly I turn to the other side of the picture. The prophet Ezekiel had been gazing at a wondrous revelation of future glory, and doubtless the mystic temple and city in every point of their elaborate details had been full of interest and instruction for his delighted soul; but as we raise the cornerstone only when the rest of the entire building is completed, so it was reserved for the last word of the Divine Interpreter to touch the deepest chord of joy within the prophet's heart, and, as it were, to put the crown of glory upon the entire description in those marvellous words which I have read to you. We cannot doubt but that, in a further sense than we at present experience, those words will one day be fulfilled; at the same time, the blessed privileges to which we are heirs under this dispensation justify us in applying the description, and above all the crowning words, to the Christian Church. It, too, is a new Jerusalem that has come down to earth out of heaven, and its greatest glory is that "the Lord is there."

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

The Spiritual Kingdom

Daniel 2:44-45

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed...

As in the symbolical language of the prophetic writers, we have an earthquake for a revolution, a mountain for a kingdom, a star for a prince, a forest for a great city, the treading of the wine-press for desolation and slaughter, and a censer with incense for the offering of prayer; so, in our text, we have the four great empires of the world, like the four ages of the poets of ancient Greece and Rome, represented by the precious and useful metals — gold, silver, brass, and iron; while the enduring empire of the Messiah is expressed by the mountain-stone — that stone which the builders of worldly empires, and of worldly policy, despise. The empire of the Messiah differs from all the others in its nature, origin, extent, and duration. Its spiritual nature our Lord himself signifies, when He says that "His Kingdom is not of this world." This empire "shall never be destroyed." Corruption, it is true, in the west, and delusion in the east, have marred both the beauty and extent of the present visible kingdom of the Messiah. But notwithstanding these, we must not falsely estimate either the extent or purity of the Kingdom of Christ. Wherever, therefore, our varied lot of life may be placed by the disposal of providence, whether under our native skies, or in lands the most distant from our own; let us all so live as it becomes the subjects of that empire which shall survive in glory when all earthly empires shall have passed away.

(T. Aitken, M. D.)

The Man Who Failed of His Life's Purpose

Daniel 5:23

But have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before you, and you...

Such, in one single sentence, brief, pregnant and inexorable, is the summing up of the case against a doomed man. There were a great many other things that might have been said; this in itself was enough. There is nothing said about his licentiousness; there is no mention of his cruelty; but the case against him is summed up in this single charge, "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified." This is an offence that is taken cognisance of by no human tribunal, or else which of us should escape the judge? It is a sin that society itself by no means condemns severely, or else society would have to pronounce sentence neon itself. It is the distinguishing sin of the man who may justly and truthfully be called a man of the world; for when a man becomes a man of the world, he puts something else in the place of God. Again, it is perhaps the most frequent sin that is ever committed, a sin committed by a larger number of persons than any other sin. There are comparatively few murderers in the world; there are a large number of those who have committed other acts of immorality. Other things may be charged against each cue of us, but if this point can be proven, it is enough. It is all that will be required in the court of Heaven to seal the doom of the most soil-righteous and self-complacent Pharisee that ever walked on the face of this earth. Man exists for the glory of God. There is no professing Christian who would be disposed to deny that this is the final cause of man's existence; and yet while we are all ready to make the theological admission how few comparatively there are who have any adequate apprehension of the truth that is contained in these words. In what sense may it be affirmed that man exists for the glory of God? Now it strikes us, on first contemplating the subject, that whatever else man can do or cannot do, surely there is one thing that must be beyond his power. It is impossible that any of us can add to the infinite glories of the Divine Being. I mean to say we can neither diminish the lustre of His eternal glory on the one hand, nor can we add to it on the other. The character of God is and must be beyond our reach. How can we glorify Him if He is so far beyond our reach? You cannot increase the light of the sun. Do as you may, get up an illumination, accumulate all the light that this world can possibly give forth; let all the gas lamps, and all the electric lights, and all the other appliances of modern science be employed for the purpose, yet the sun is just as bright as it was before, and no brighter. All your efforts cannot make it brighter; but at the same time it is possible for you, in a certain sense, to extend the power of the sun. On the Continent of America, and even in our own land, there are vast subterranean caverns which the rays of the sun's light have never reached. Now, if by some gigantic effort of engineering skill we can remove the superincumbent mass of earth and permit the rays of the sun to strike down into those vast recesses of the world, what should we thus be doing? Why, obviously, relatively to this world in which we live, we should be increasing the supremacy of the sun, so to speak; we should be extending its power to a portion of territory which had not hitherto been affected by it. Is it not even so with regard to God? We cannot increase God's own absolute

glory. But it is possible for us to pass that glory on into regions where its presence has not yet, at any rate, been realised. There may be hearts in this very congregation which are like those subterranean caves. Light has long been streaming down upon the fallen world. Saints have seen it in their generation, and that glorious light has illumined their whole life, and again and again there has proceeded from their lips the invitation to their fellow sinners, "Come ye, and let us walk in the light of God." Now, just in proportion as this invitation is complied with, and one heart after another is opened up to the saving influence of the Divine grace, we may say that God's glory is increased in this round world. Summing the thing up, we may say briefly that it is the blessed privilege of man, first of all, to glorify God by witnessing to the power of His grace to sustain, to defend and to exalt the soul that by faith commits itself to Him. What a marvellous thing it is that the power of the Everlasting God can lift the poor, frail Christian out of his weakness and place him above his temptation, make him a conqueror in the strife, even when he is striving against the fearful powers of hell! This is just what God's saints have been testifying to in every age, and by this testimony the glow of God is continually being advanced. It is possible for man to glorify God by the voluntary acceptance of the Divine law as the law of human will. The character of God has been aspersed, and the authority of God has been challenged by fallen intelligences of evil. The child of God that accepts the will of God' as the law of his conduct is a standing testimony to the perfection of that will. It is his own voluntary choice, and he chooses it because he discovers in it all that his own human nature most requires, all that is most necessary for the full development of that which is truest and noblest and best within him, and further, for the full and sufficient gratification of his creature-like nature. This leads us on to a further point; God is to be glorified by man in the ultimate and final destiny which He is preparing for man. Triumphant man shall bear witness for all eternity to the perfection of that Divine will, in submission to which he has attained to his own highest well-being. And thus, in the fourth place, man shall witness to the glow of God by bearing an indirect, though a most eloquent testimony to the perfections of the Divine character. It has always been the work of Satan, ever since he began to perform the part of the tempter, to endeavour to present to the human mind false views of God. What a triumphant answer will be returned to those slanders of the great enemy of God and man, by the fact that in the voluntary acceptance of the will of God, as the law of human conduct, man pays the very highest tribute that can possibly be paid by an intelligent being to the perfections of the moral character of that God from whom he originated. How is it possible for us to dishonour God, or at any rate, how is it possible for us to rob God of His glory? Obviously, we cannot dishonour Him more than by ignoring Him altogether. If I wanted to dishonour any one of you, that is probably the very first course I should adopt. If anyone wants to insult another with whom he is acquainted, the common way of doing it is to pass the man, to "cut him dead," as we call it, in the street. How many persons there are who, throughout the whole course of their past lives, have been dishonouring God by ignoring Him! I want to ask you a question, a very plain one, that you will all be able to answer one way or another. I want to ask you how far your lives would have been different if from your early infancy you had been persuaded that there was no God at all? I can fancy some of you making answer, "Well, of course, if I had not believed in God, I should never have attended a place of worship, I should never have said my prayers, I should never have attempted to study the Bible." Well, we are ready to make those admissions; but are they considerable? You attend church once a week; of course, that in itself is merely a mechanical performance that has exercised no considerable influence upon your life. I am not asking about the outward movements of your

bodies, but of the effect produced upon your moral nature by your religious profession. Let us look at it again. Would you have been a very different person from what you are if you had actually believed that there was no God? You have lived so many years in the world; ask yourself, with a determination to get a truthful answer, "How many of those years have I consciously spent for God's glory? How many days in those years? How many hours in one single day? Have I ever recognised God's glory as the end of my being at all? Have I ever definitely put it before me as the thing for which I live?" Where has God been in your conversation? How many of you are there who would have to confess, if you told the truth — "Nowhere!" Have you ever talked about Him in your life? In your daily conduct, in your dealings with your fellow-men, how much of your labour has been consciously undertaken with a view to advancing the glory of God? Now the very first thing needed is that we should be convicted of our sin in dishonouring and ignoring God who now calls us back to Himself. Yet again, we dishonour God when, even if we do not ignore Him, we repudiate the means of salvation which He, at an infinite cost, has provided for us. In other words, we dishonour God when we act as though we could dispense with His assistance. Now, then, we come to enquire how many of us have accepted that which has been purchased for us at such a price? Are you saying in your heart, "My life has been one of such earnest religion, that I really do not require this provision of Divine love; I can get on tolerably well without it; though my life may not have been absolutely perfect, yet it has been such a good sort of life that I do not think that God can have anything considerable against it; therefore I am content to take my chance." Now, if any of you in your hearts are talking in that way, I just want to ask you what you are doing? Is there any way in which you can more effectually dishonour the wisdom, and love, and mercy of God than by turning your back on His "unspeakable gift?" Practically, you are pointing to the Cross of Calvary, and saying, "There is something altogether ridiculous in that display of Divine love; it was never needed; why should God have given His Son? Would it not be quite enough if God had sent His Son to preach righteousness to us? If He had been content with delivering the sermon on the mount, and a few other moral precepts, and there had left the matter, it would have been all right. It is quite possible for us to mend ourselves, to improve our own way, and gradually to become fit for the Kingdom of Heaven. Why should He have given His Son to die?" In other words, you are doing all that in you lies to stultify the wisdom and the love of the Most High God. Again, we dishonour God (and this point finds a special illustration from the narrative with which our text is connected) when we appropriate to some other use that which has been designed for Himself. "Know ye not," says the apostle, "that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost?" This ought to be the case with every one of you. Our manhood has been given to us in order that we might render it back to God, and in order that it may be inhabited by God. Now, let us gauge ourselves by this. Are those bodies of yours temples of the Holy Ghost? Whether you will or whether you will not, you do belong to God. You may ignore His claim, you may sin against His right, you may defraud Him of His due, you may profane His sanctuary, you may take His sacred things and dedicate them to the service of His great rival, you may become a devout worshipper at the shrine of the god of this world — your whole life may be sacrilegious in the truest and deepest sense of the word — yet you cannot get away from the awful responsibility which rests upon you in virtue of the fact that whether you will, or win not, you do belong to God. Even at this moment, while I speak, that which was true of Belshazzar is true of you. God holds your breath in His hand; all your ways belong to Him; at any moment He may open His hand, and your breath is gone; at any moment He may lay claim to those ways of yours, and because they have been ways of perversity

instead of ways of obedience, He may be and will be justified in calling you to account for them. Every moment of your time is His; every possibility of influence that you possess is His; every affection of your heart is His; every operation of your understanding is His; your position and rank is His. Wherever you look you are surrounded by God's claim, and you cannot get away from it. Those golden vessels of the sanctuary are, as it were, within your hand, but instead of the consecrated wine, instead of the sacred offering, instead of the holy use, ah! what do we see? One life-long profanation. And now I come to the awful and overwhelming thought of what lies before you if you continue in your present career. Will God be baffled? Will His purposes be defeated? Having created you for His glory, shall you exist only for His shame? Not so. The everlasting God will have His need of glory out of every one of us. He desires to have it in your voluntary offering of yourself to Him. But if He may not have it so, He will have it otherwise.

(W. Hay Aitken M. A.)

The Valley of Achor

Hosea 2:14-15

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her....

The history of the nation is the history of the individual magnified. The records of God's dealings with the nation represent to us, on a larger scale, God's dealings with the individual. The dealings of God with the individual human heart are generally of so delicate a character, and are so frequently concealed in the secret experiences of our inner life, that it is extremely difficult for even a careful observer to follow them in detail, and apprehend them with any degree of completeness. We are helped, however, by having the history of God's dealings with the nation, and knowing that these are His dealings with the individual magnified. In this chapter we have the record of God's dealings with Israel at a period of national apostasy and backsliding. It is evident that God does not think slightly of sin. The first consequence of national sin is national judgment, inflicted by a rejected God. At last judgments begin to produce the designed effect, and Israel begins to discover that the God who seemed to be her enemy is her real and only faithful friend. In all this we have a picture of God's dealing with the wayward heart, by which His Divine love designs to win it back from its apostasy and forgetfulness of Him. Observe the first step that Divine love and pity takes. God finds us in our pride and wilfulness, and endeavouring to obtain that satisfaction in the creature which is only to be found in the Creator; and He begins by opening our eyes to the emptiness of all these things in which we have sought our satisfaction; and however slow we are to learn the lesson, He waits His opportunity to allure us into the wilderness. And a dreary wilderness it is. It is a painful process, this opening of the eyes. We shrink from being undeceived; we are reluctant to believe that the world is a grand imposture. We try to persuade ourselves that we shall find in it all we want, and shrink from the dissipation of our fondly cherished anticipations. Sometimes it is by sorrow and bereavement that we are allured into the wilderness. Sometimes God deals with His wandering ones by an inward impression, by the direct and indescribable influences of His Holy Spirit, by outward circumstances, by unlooked-for relief and deliverance. Thus He allures us into the wilderness, to draw us away from our love for, and our confidence in earthly things, and then, when we are thus prepared, to speak to our hearts as He only can. "Speak comfortably," should be, "speak to her heart." The world can speak to our fancy, and to our intellect, God can speak to our heart; that heart whose wants you have ignored, or to which you have denied what it most needed. He brings to our mind all His wondrous dealings with us in the past. As we look back a flood of recognition rolls over the soul, and a burden of contrition begins to weigh upon our heart, such as it never felt before. Yet from the wilderness where God's voice has spoken to the heart, the new era of true fruitfulness is to begin. "I will give her her vineyards from thence." The firstfruits of the new life are to be gathered in the vintage of joy — the wine that maketh glad the heart of man. Other fruits may follow, but this generally comes first. But how are we to enter upon this new life of fruitful joy and of joyful fruit? If we are to get into the vineyards, we must enter them through God's appointed door — the "valley of Achor." God makes it a "door of

hope." What we need above everything is a "door of hope," a way out of the hideous desolation of our despair. But where shall it be found? None but God knows of a door of hope for perishing man, and He must give it, or our hope is vain. The valley of Achor recalls a national repentance for a national sin: an act of solemn repudiation of sin; it was the place of a great and tragic national expiation. We, too, have a door of hope, strangely similar, and yet strangely different from this. There was One found among the sons of men, who was able and willing to make expiation for man's sins.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Israel and King Jareb

Hosea 5:13

When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb...

So Ephraim and Judah went to the wrong person, and did not gain much by their application. It seemed to them an excellent policy. Israel could not choose to be independent. Neither can we be independent. Where is there a man that seriously reflects upon our earthly lot that does not feel there is a secret sickness, a hidden wound, somewhere? Man is the great sufferer the wide world over. Either man has been unduly and abnormally elevated, or else he must needs be fallen. Man's distresses and disappointments spring from his fall. He is not what God intended him to be, and therefore he does not enjoy what God intended him to enjoy. He is out of harmony with God, and therefore out of harmony with nature. Besides outward evils, there is the prevalence of moral evil, which in many cases proves the very worst evil of all. When Ephraim and Judah saw that things were not all right with them, they fell back upon the Assyrian, instead of throwing themselves upon God. And even so when men begin to be conscious of the disappointments of life, and feel an inward discontent, like a disease preying upon their hearts, how often do they follow the example of Israel, and seek in the creature what can only be found in the Creator! Some take refuge in the pre-occupations of business. Others fly to more intoxicating excitements. There is the distinct attempt of human perversity to get away from its inward sense of want, and emptiness, and helpless misery, by falling back upon the world, instead of turning to God. How shall God deal with us when we show ourselves so perverse and froward? What course do we force upon Him by our folly? The appearance that God bears to us will ever be determined by the attitude that we assume towards Him. It was a terrible and startling part that the God of Israel undertook to maintain in dealing with His ancient people. It would have been no true kindness on God's part if He had granted them prosperity when they were apostate from Him. This must have led them to feel the more satisfied with their apostasy, and the less disposed to repent. As it was, the prophets could point to each fresh disaster as a proof that the nation was under the judgment of God, and that their sin was proving their ruin. It is no less His love to us that makes Him deal with us in a similar manner. He has to thwart us just that He may show us how little King Jareb can do for us.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Self-Destruction, -- God Salvation

Hosea 13:9

O Israel, you have destroyed yourself; but in me is your help.

There is no more mournful spectacle in history than that of a nation concerning which thins has to be said, "Thou hast destroyed thyself." It is bad enough when a nation is destroyed by other powers. But there is something sadder, if our eyes were only opened to see it. The sadder spectacle is that of the human soul of whom it can be truthfully said, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." It is bad enough to be destroyed by Satan; but it is worst of all to feel that we ourselves are the instruments of our own ruin. There is a whole multitude of different kinds of powers which are brought to bear upon the ungodly man for his ruin. But no existing force can ruin the human soul unless it is false to its own interests. As long as man is true to himself, and therefore true to his God, so long is he invincible. But let that man. once turn his back upon that Being from whom he has derived his origin, and on whom he is wholly dependent, then the man is paralysed and stripped of all moral power. Why do I desire to bring the accusation of the text home? Because there is a tendency in the human heart to lay the blame of its own sins on somebody else, and pre-eminently on God Himself. Do not let us try and throw off the blame from our own shoulders on to God. The blame must ever be ours, and because the blame is ours, therefore the pain is ours. Some shift the blame on to God by misrepresenting application of His foreknowledge. Because God foresees a thing, He does not make us perform it. The fact that God foreknows arises from the fact that God inhabits eternity, and that we live in time. The vaster region in which God lives and moves encloses that smaller and more restricted region in which we live. As soon as you think God interferes with your own moral freedom, you may turn round and lay the blame of your sin upon God; but so long as God constitutes you a free, responsible agent, do not add to your other sins the sin of blasphemy, by making the everlasting God the source of the sin which has disgraced your life. How does Christ "help" us? He stoops to the very sepulchre where we are lying, and lifts the poor corpse right up from the very jaws of destruction by the power of His own resurrection. He infuses into our lifeless nature a new vitality, which comes from Himself; and triumphing over our foe, He exclaims: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death."

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

God's Call to the Fallen

Hosea 14:1

O Israel, return to the LORD your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity.

God seems to find an argument in the very fact of our fall. He is moved with compassion at the spectacle. He sees from what a height to what a depth man has fallen.

1. The call to return implies that we had wandered away. Our fall has indeed been occasioned by our wandering. All sin originates in the apostasy of the human heart from God. Sin would never have entered human hearts, and defiled the lives of men, if man had been true to his primal relations with God. As with the race, so with the individual. Moral deterioration and corruption naturally and necessarily ensue from the apostasy of the soul from God. Evil works naturally flow from the corrupt condition. The fallen soul not only loses contact and fellowship with God, but comes under the influence of a certain feeling of aversion, and almost of antipathy, towards God which leads him to shrink from the very thought of God. The apostate man is fallen not only in position, but in character. Innocence has been forfeited instead of being developed, and sin reigns where moral beauty should be crowned. Man needs no revelation to convince him of his fall. He alone of all the animals fails to live up to his own proper ideal, and violates in many cases systematically the laws of his own nature. Fallen in position and character, he is fallen in conduct also. Then the first thing needful for the fallen and falling is to return to God. He who invites us wants us to come back to Him.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

How to Return to God

Hosea 14:2

Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say to him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously...

God not only invites us to return, but He tells us how to do it. He puts the very words in our mouth. The first act of the awakened is usually an act of prayer. The very act of expressing our need has a tendency both to bring about clearer views of what it is that we need, and to intensify our desire. A true conversion involves, above everything else, personal transactions between the penitent, on the one hand, and his wronged and injured God on the other. Now the very act of prayer tends to bring to the front and impress upon our consciousness this personal aspect of the case. It is, however, of the utmost importance that the awakened soul should abstain from anything that might be called making a prayer. I would to God that men were more simple and definite in their prayers. God knows our needs before we utter them. But do we know them? Indefinite notions as to what we require at the hands of God must paralyse our faith and rob our approach of all reality. Notice the urgency of the prayer which God's love puts into the mouth of the penitent. It is also the expression of a distinct change in our moral attitude towards God. It seems asking a great deal to say, "Take away all iniquity." Can it all be taken away?

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Valley of Decision

Joel 3:14

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

There is a day coming when all the uncertainties of life will be at an end, when every mask will drop off, when every hidden thing will be exposed to view, and the secrets of every life will be told. The prophet is here looking forward to an occasion of judgment, and every occasion of judgment must of necessity be an occasion of decision. But the work of judgment is by no means confined to the future. Wherever the Gospel message goes, wherever the truth of God is revealed to the understanding of man, there the work of judgment necessarily commences. Our Lord taught that it was in virtue of the relation in which men stood to the Son of Man that their position before God was to be decided. So it is still. The presence of Christ in His Spirit among us still must needs cause judgment. The first work of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. The word "convict" is a judicial term. It may be said of redemption itself, that the Divine mercy is ordained to flow into the human heart through judgment. Unconditioned mercy — mercy that does not come to me through the forms of judgment, and with the sanction of justice — might have a demoralising effect upon me. Ours is a Gospel of merely flowing through judgment. So then, not only does the Holy Ghost judge us when He first brings our sins to remembrance and pronounces us guilty, but in the very act of justifying us He still exhibits, in the most impressive manner, God's righteous judgment against sin; for it is through the Cross that grace flows forth to us, and the Cross is, above everything else, the place of judgment — the most amazing and impressive vindication that God could give of the majesty of law. We may say that every day of visitation from God to the soul of man is in some sense a lesser judgment day. On the last august occasion, the decision will lie simply and solely with the Judge. There will be no appealing from His judgment. Now, the decision lies with ourselves. It is the work of God the Holy Spirit to bring .all with whom He strives, into the valley of decision, the place of judgment. There are two ways out of this valley. Through the gate of life and through the gate of death.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Can Two Walk Together, Except They be Agreed?

Amos 3:3

Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

This points to an essential condition of union between the Lord Jesus Christ, and those who really are His. Fellowship with the Lord is obviously the highest privilege of the creature. In every age this has been regarded as the highest favour that could possibly be given to man. All the most distinguished worthies of ancient Scripture history have this, above everything else, as their distinguishing glory and their privilege — to live in the society of the invisible God. And it is the privilege of every true Christian to receive the Lord Jesus Christ into his heart, and to live in constant fellowship, through Him, with the unseen God. They that live most in the society of the everlasting God must, more or less, be partakers of His own Divine attributes. And what joy belongs to such a life as this! Before we can really know Him there must be a substantial agreement between ourselves and Him. There are only too many Christians who are living out of fellowship with God. And it is only too possible to fail from fellowship with Him. Then the highest privilege in our life is gone. We must have permitted some cause of disagreement to arise between ourselves and Him. The relationship in which we stand is of such a character that the superior Being must be supreme. God's way being the way of absolute perfection, any attempt on our part to assert our own desire, as in opposition to the Divine will, must be an offence against our own nature and our own interest, just as surely as it is an offence against His Divine pleasure. There must be a complete and continual yielding up, a concession of our natural inclinations to His Divine will, if we are to rise to that which He desires we should attain to, and possess the blessedness which we may, even here, experience. This is our life-work — to bring our human wills into conformity with Him; to watch every little cause of disagreement, and to eliminate it as fast as it makes its appearance. Our blessed Lord is our example in this respect. Our Lord had a human will, though it was not a Sinful will. Contemplate Adam unfallen, and put beside him the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will find that they both have the same tastes and proclivities, naturally, because they are both specimens of genuine humanity. What was our Lord's course of conduct, starting from this point? He lays it down as the first law of His human life, that He has come into the world, not to do His own will, but the will of Him who had sent Him." Having accepted this as the great law of His conduct, lower considerations, considerations connected with pleasure and pain, take a completely subordinate position. There was the complete devotion of the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Divine will. The result was that God and He were walking together in holy union. No doubt at times our Lord felt strangely solitary. But there was one thing that stayed Him in the midst of all His trials, and cheered Him in the midst of all His sorrows, — "He that hath sent Me is with Me." The life of Jesus was a constant rendering up of pleasure to God. It was lived out, not as under an iron law, but with a feeling of filial delight in doing what pleased the Father; and the result of this was an unbroken harmony between the two wills, and the continuous presence within His own nature of the Father, for whom, and by whom He lived. The will of man, yielding to the will of God, became the will of God. That will always be the effect of the

surrender of our will to Him. The more our human will is yielded over to Him, the more complete does the fellowship of our nature with His become, and the two are able so closely to "walk together" that they become united in an indissoluble union. It is our highest privilege, and our deepest and truest wisdom, to follow the example of our blessed Lord and Master in the maintenance of the continuous attitude of agreement towards God, who claims the lordship of our nature. Agree with Him in little things. Anything like a life of fellowship with God is altogether impossible until the first act of agreement has taken place. There are many who are always trying to rise into a life of fellowship with God without taking the primary step towards it. If you have not come into fellowship with God, you are disagreed with respect to your nature. There is a property quarrel between you. He lays His hand upon that nature of yours, and says, "It is Mine." God is a Sovereign, He has laid down certain laws. Where is the man or woman who has kept them? Moreover, God and the unrenewed sinner are in a state of disagreement with respect to the position which the sinner has to take. It is one of helplessness. Let me come closer. The disagreement is a personal one. There is something that has slipped in between thee and thy God. And the disagreement has arisen with thee, rebellious sinner.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Lying Vanities

Jonah 2:8

They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

It is not enough to show that Christ's claims are not opposed to our interests, and that therefore we do not sacrifice our true well-being when we submit ourselves to Him; we must further show that Christ definitely proposes to advance our present as well as our future interests, and that these cannot be otherwise safely assured; and hence that we sacrifice our personal interests, and sin against our true well-being when we turn our backs on Him. The prophet only expresses what we may all, if we will, see for our selves. Even in this world the suffering and misery that men bring upon them selves by their own conduct far exceeds all that they would otherwise be called upon to endure. How much of all our sufferings springs directly or indirectly from sin! And all this we might escape if only we yielded ourselves to God instead of flying away from Him. And such suffering is the cruellest of all, because we have to reproach ourselves for it, and because of the painful memories it leaves behind. And we must not dwell only upon the actual miseries that we entail upon ourselves, but also upon the comfort and consolation which we deny our selves amidst the trials which are the common lot of all. "Our own mercy." Think of what that means. No petition is more common on human lips than the cry for mercy. We feel that we need mercy. Surely man is not only nature's greatest work; but also nature's greatest victim, unless there be mercy within our reach, mercy from some Grander Power than nature, who can feel for us. And the great Father is rich in mercy. He brings within our reach such a provision of mercy as He sees to be perfectly adapted to our complex needs, and represents it to us in the Gospel of His Son. It is this provision that men turn their backs upon when they turn their backs on Christ. Verily, it is true, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy." How comes it to pass that men are so blind to their own interests? Why do men forsake their own mercies? A certain class of persons is here dealt with those who "observe lying vanities." Satan wins influence over men, and maintains and extends it, by falsehood. And falsehood is a power. The process of blinding is carried on by the great deceiver in such a manner as to induce a false and misleading estimate of the relative value of things, and even of their relations to our happiness and well-being. The objects which Satan exhibits to man's imagination through a distorted and deceptive medium are described here as "lying vanities." The phrase suggests specious falsehood, and pretentious inanity. Illustrate by the desert mirage. Who has not at one time or another been bewildered and misled by the vast mirage of life? When we yield ourselves to the great deceiver we become his helpless dupes. "Observe" signifies diligent watching, — the giving up of our mind and attention to a specific object. Compare the sentence, "Who mind earthly things." All earthly things, viewed apart from their connection with things eternal, are in themselves vanities, — they leave the heart still unsatisfied. When we attempt to find our portion in these things of this world they become not only vanities, but lying vanities, — promising to do what they never can do, and ever leading their votaries, as on a fool's errand, in quest of that which they are foredoomed never to discover. When once man has surrendered his sense to the solicitations of the flesh, you can almost predict with certainty how he

will act under certain circumstances. We have but little freedom left when once we have begun to observe — to give our minds to — lying vanities. Our freedom consists rather in our power to decide whether of the two classes of objects we will observe, whether we will yield our hearts to the Spirit of truth, who reveals to us the things that are above — the things of God; or whether we will yield our hearts to the spirit .of lies, who spreads out before us earthly things, and endeavours to invest them in our eyes with fictitious qualities and characteristics.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Goodly Price of Jesus

Zechariah 11:10-14

And I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people....

Satan's dealings with the human family may be truthfully described as one gigantic system of bribery and corruption. He has bribes of all sorts, and of different kinds and characters, and he knows how to apply them. He takes care to suit his bribe to the person who is being bribed. With some of us wealth is no particular object. But even while we spurn that bribe we are open to others. Before one man Satan puts the possibility of revelling in pleasure, before another a dream of ambition, before another literary distinction, before another domestic happiness. This system of bribery and corruption was fully shown when Satan entered the lists against the Saviour of the world. When the Son of God, made man, stood before the tempter in the wilderness, it was after this fashion that he dared to proceed. On that occasion Satan presented to the view of our blessed Master the very highest bribe that was ever offered. Of all the assaults which he made on our blessed Lord, this seems to have been the least successful. On other occasions he was very subtle; he approached our Lord very cautiously, but he made no headway; on each occasion he was met with wisdom and firmness. Satan is very frugal with his bribes. What is all his bribery and corruption for? How comes it to pass that Satan thus exerts his malignant skill in endeavouring to gain an influence over us? Satan's prime object is, to carry out his rebellious purposes in the very face of the everlasting purposes of Jehovah. We, Christians, believe that in the end God will manifest His own wisdom by triumphing completely over Satan's malignant skill, but that for the time being appearances are otherwise. There is no class of persons in human history for whom we feel a greater contempt than for traitors. We all despise a traitor. Who is there that can have any respect for a man like Judas Iscariot? And yet the sin that Judas committed is the sin that is being committed by the slaves of Satan still. We have not, indeed, the power of doing what Judas did. But as it is possible for us to "crucify" our Lord afresh, so it is possible to betray Him afresh into the hands of His enemies. How can this be done? This nature of ours, what is it? It is a citadel of the living God; it should be an abode of the Eternal Spirit. Every one of you belongs to God. If we refuse to recognise His right it is simply because we are already in our own hearts traitors against His love. The Lord is aware of his enticements. So He says to us: "If it seem good unto you, give Me My price." If you are going to barter My rights for that which Satan offers you; if you are going to play the part of a base and perfidious traitor, make up your mind what your bargain is to be; look your own act in the face. If men and women were to sit down and ask themselves the question: "What price have I accepted for Jesus; for how great a consideration have I agreed with Satan to make over my soul to his influences, and to live the life that he would have me lead?" they would soon repent of their bribe. Little do you think that when you are selling the rights of Jesus you are actually selling your own interests. The man that sells Jesus sells his own soul, and there is no man that makes so bad a bargain as the man who accepts the devil's bribes for the betrayal of Jesus. Look at this miserable man Judas. Can you fancy how he crept down that dark street? He

felt already as if he were standing on the very verge of hell. The bargain was struck. And what a bargain it was! It did not seem much to get for Jesus — thirty pieces of silver. Then the end for Judas. It is the way the devil's bribe will always end. He makes you fair promises; he takes you by the hand; he pleads with you; he lays all tempting things before you; but behind them all he has got the hangman's rope ready, and the scaffold is prepared, and the awful moment of doom is drawing nearer and nearer. By and by come the agonies of remorse, the terrors of despair, and the awful horrors of a lost eternity.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Watchfulness

Mark 14:38

Watch you and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.

Watching is never pleasant work; no soldier really likes it. Men prefer even the excitement and danger of the battlefield to the long weeks of patient vigilance, which nevertheless may do quite as much as a victorious battle to decide the issues of a campaign. Now it is just so in the spiritual war. The forces of civilization rendered our soldiers more than a match for all the barbarous courage of their swarthy foes, provided only by constant vigilance they were in a position to use those forces; and even so the omnipotence of God renders the true Christian more than a match for all the forces of hell, provided only he too is sufficiently vigilant to detect the approach of the foe, and sufficiently wise to confront him with the courage of faith when his approach is detected; but if he walks carelessly, or fails to exercise proper vigilance, the battle will be lost almost before the danger is realized, and Faith will forfeit her victory just because she was not ready to put forth all the supernatural powers that she may command. It is, alas! not an uncommon thing to meet with Christian souls that seem to know something of the life of faith, and yet, to their great surprise, find themselves overcome when they least expect it. We observe sometimes a certain tone of petulance in these admissions of failure, as if in their heart of hearts some sort of implication were cast upon the faithfulness of God, although they would shrink from expressing this in so many words. Now, clearly the cause of all such failures must lie with us, and it will be our wisdom to endeavour to discover it; while it is the worst of folly to charge God with unfaithfulness. What are we placed in this world for? Obviously that we may be trained and developed for our future position by exposure to the forces of evil. Were we so sheltered from evil as that there should be no need for constant watchfulness, we should lose the moral benefit which a habit of constant watchfulness induces. We know that it is a law of nature, that faculties which are never employed perish from disuse; and, on the other hand, faculties which are fully and frequently employed acquire a wonderful capacity. Is not this equally true in the spiritual world? We are being trained probably for high and holy service by-and-by, in which we shall need all those faculties that are now being quickened and trained by our contact with danger, and our exposure to apparently hostile conditions of existence. We are to be trained, by learning quickness of perception of danger here, to exercise quickness of perception in ministry and willing service yonder. Besides, Watchfulness continually provides opportunities for faith, and tends to draw us the closer, and keep us the closer, to Him by whom alone we stand. Were we to be so saved from evil by a single act, as that we should have no further need of Watchfulness, should we not lose much that now makes us feel our dependence on Him who is our constant safety? Have we not to thank God for the very daggers that constrain us to keep so near Him if we are to be safe at all? Let us point out what Watchfulness is not before we go on to consider what it is. And

I. WATCHFULNESS IS SOMETHING QUITE DISTINCT FROM NERVOUS TIMIDITY AND MORBID APPREHENSIVENESS — the condition of a man who sees an enemy in every bush,

and is tortured by a thousand alarms and all the misgivings of unbelief. David did not show himself watchful, but faithless, when he exclaimed, "I shall now one day perish by the hands of Saul;" and we do not show ourselves watchful when we go on our way trembling, depressed with all sorts of forebodings of disaster. Let me offer a homely illustration of what I mean. I was amused the other day at hearing a soldier's account of a terrible fright that he had during the time of the Fenian scare a few years ago. It fell to his lot one dark night to act as sentinel in the precincts of an important arsenal, which it was commonly supposed might be the scene of a great explosion any night. The fortress was surrounded by a common, and was therefore easy to be approached by evil-disposed persons. The night, as I have said, was as dark as a night could be, and he was all alone, and full of apprehensions of danger. He stood still for a moment fancying he heard something moving near him, and then stepped backwards for a few paces, when he suddenly felt himself come into violent contact with something, which he incontinently concluded must be a crouching Fenian. "I was never so frightened," he said, "before or since in my life, and to tell you the truth, I fell sprawling on my back. Imagine my feelings when I found that the thing that had terrified me beyond all description was only a harmless sheep that had fallen asleep a little too near my beat." Now, dear friends, I think that this soldier's ridiculous, but very excusable, panic may serve to illustrate the experience of many timid, apprehensive Christians. They live in a state of chronic panic, always expecting to be assailed by some hostile influence, which they shall prove wholly incompetent to resist. If they foresee the approach of any circumstances that are likely to put their religion to a test, they at once make up their mind that fiasco and overthrow are inevitable; and when they are suddenly confronted by what seems an adverse influence, or promises to be a severe temptation, they are ready to give all up in despair. They forget that our Lord has taught us to take no anxious thought for the morrow, and has assured us that sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.

II. NOR AGAIN DOES WATCHFULNESS CONSIST IN MORBID INTROSPECTIVENESS, OR IN A DISPOSITION TO CHARGE OURSELVES WITH ALL SORTS OF IMAGINED FORMS OF EVIL. To their morbid sensibility everything has depravity in it; good and generous actions only spring from self-seeking; every natural affection is inordinate; every commonplace gratification a loving of pleasure rather than God. It is surely possible, believe me, dear Christian friends, to emulate the exploits of a Don Quixote in our religious life, and to run a tilt at any number of spiritual windmills, but this is not watchfulness. A clerical brother of mine, alarmed from his slumbers by a policeman who reported his church open, imagined that he had captured a burglar by the hair of his head in the tower of his church, when he had only laid violent hands in the darkness upon the church mop! It is quite possible to convert a mop into a burglar in our own spiritual experiences. Just once more let me ask you to bear in mind that Watchfulness does not consist in, and is not identical with, a severe affectation of solemnity, add a pious aversion to any thing like natural mirth or cheerful hilarity. I have before my eyes at this moment the recollection of a dear and honoured brother, who, when something amusing had been related at his table, suddenly drew himself up when he was just beginning to join in the hearty laugh, and observed to me with much seriousness, "I am always afraid of losing communion by giving way to levity." I confess I admired the good man's conscientiousness, which I am sure was perfectly sincere, but I could not help thinking that he was confusing between sombreness and sobriety.

III. But having pointed out certain forms or habits of conduct which are not to be mistaken for Watchfulness, though they often are, LET US PROCEED TO INQUIRE WHAT WATCHFULNESS

IS; we have seen what it is not. And here it may be well to notice that two distinct words, or perhaps I should say sets of words, in the Greek, are translated in our version by the one word — watch. The one set of terms indicates the necessity of guarding against sleep, and the other the necessity of guarding against any form of moral intoxication and insobriety. Both these ideas are presented to us together in a single passage in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians: "Let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they who sleep sleep in the night: and they that be drunken are drunken in the night." Here the two dangers arising — the one from sleep, and the other from drunkenness — are brought before us at once; and the two words, which are each of them usually translated by the English word — watch, are employed to guard us against these dangers. "Let us watch and be sober." These dangers seem to be in some respects the opposites of each other — the one springs from heaviness and dullness of disposition, and the other from undue excitability. The one is the special danger incidental to monotonous routine and a dead level of quiet regularity, the other is the danger incidental to a life full of stir and bustle — a life where cares and pleasures, successes and failures, important enterprises and stunning disappointments, bringing with them alternating experiences of elation or depression, are only too apt to prove all-engrossing, and to exclude the vivid sense of eternal realities. The one danger will naturally specially threaten the man of phlegmatic temperament and equable disposition, the other will more readily assault the man whose nervous system is highly strung, whether he be of sanguine or melancholic habit. In the present passage the call to watch is coupled with the exhortation to pray, and similarly St. Peter warns us "to be sober and watch unto prayer." This suggests to us that Watchfulness needs first of all to be exorcised in the maintenance of our proper relations with God. If only these be preserved inviolate, everything else is sure to go well with us; but where anything like coldness settles down upon our relations with God, backsliding has already commenced, and unless it be checked we lie at the mercy of our foe. Oh, Christian soul, guard with jealous care against the first beginnings of listlessness and coldness and unreality in thine intercourse with God! Not less, perhaps even more, do we need to watch in the other sense which, as I have pointed out, the word bears in New Testament Scripture. Let us not only keep awake, but let us be sober. We need to remember that we are in an enemy's land, and that unless we are constantly breathing the atmosphere of heaven, the atmosphere of earth, which is all that we have left, soon becomes poisonous, and must produce a sort of moral intoxication. How often have I seen a Christian man completely forget himself under the influence of social excitement! But I hasten to say, Do not let us fall into the mistake of supposing that it is only the light-hearted and the pleasure loving that need to be warned against the danger of becoming intoxicated by worldly influences. The cares and even the occupations of life may have just as deleterious an effect upon us in this respect as the pleasures. Many a man of business is just as much intoxicated with the daily excitements arising from the fluctuations of the market or of the Stock Exchange, and just as much blinded to higher things by the absorbing interests connected with money making or money losing as the votary of pleasure can be at the racecourse or in the ballroom. Yet again, Watchfulness is to be shown not only in maintaining our relations with God, in resisting any disposition to be drowsy, and in guarding against the intoxicating influence of worldly excitement; it is also to be shown in detecting the first approach of temptation, or the first uprisings of an unholy desire. The careful general feels his enemy by his scouts, and thus is prepared to deal with him when the attack takes place. Even so temptation may often be resisted with ease when its first approach is discerned; but it acquires sometimes an almost irresistible power, if it be

allowed to draw too near. But I spoke a few moments ago of the importance of watching, not only against the beginning of temptation without, but also against any disposition to make terms with temptation within. Here, I am persuaded, lies, in most instances, the secret cause of failure. Balaam was inwardly hankering after the house full of silver and gold at the very moment when he affected to despise it. But there is a danger on the other side, against which we have to guard with equal watchfulness. And it is the danger of incipient self-complacency.

(W. H. Aitken.)

The Heroism of the Crucified

Mark 15:31-32

Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save....

The testimony of an enemy is always valuable. What is it that they testify? First, that "He saved others:" and second, that in order to save others — nay, they testify not that, yet it is implied in the assertion they make — in order to save others He was content not to save Himself. Perhaps there never was a sentence, that was in one sense so radically false, and in another sense so sublimely true, as this particular sentence. Take it in the abstract, and it contains a most outrageous and glaring falsehood. There was not a moment from beginning to end of His human career in which our blessed Lord might not have turned back from shame and suffering. Yet while these words are false absolutely, they are none the less true relatively. Relatively to the work which our blessed Lord had undertaken, it was necessary that He Himself should not be saved. Because He was the Son, there was a certain blessed, constraining influence which rendered it, in one sense, necessary that He should go forward: but the necessity was not imposed upon Him from without, but accepted from within. It was the necessity of love; love, first and foremost to His Father, and then love to thee and to me. When you look over His history, how much there was to lead Him to exercise this power which all along He possessed. How natural it would have been if He had done so. He has scarcely come into the world before He begins to meet with the world's bad treatment. When He was born, they had no room for Him in the inn. Would it not have been most natural if our blessed Lord had even then thought better of it. "These rebel sinners, these thoughtless beings, I have come into the world to save — they have not even a place whereon to lay My infant form." As He grew up to be a young man, "He came unto His own:" His very brethren did not believe in Him. When He found that there was cold incredulity, an absence of sympathy in His own family circle, might He not reasonably have been expected to say, "Ah, well! this is not what I expected: I thought I should have been received with open arms; that every heart would have been full of sympathizing tenderness towards Me: but they have nothing but hard thoughts to think, and hard sayings to say of Me. Let them alone: from this time I give up the task: it is a hopeless one." We read "that He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not." How wonderful a thing it was that Jesus Christ should have stood all this, and yet continued true to His purpose still. They laid the cross upon Him, and He faints on the way to Calvary. O, Son of God! Thy body has fainted! Weakness has done its work! Surely Thou wouldest be justified in giving in now! He might reasonably have said, "Flesh and blood will bear no more; My physical strength has absolutely yielded under the terrible shock; I can carry it no further." But no, no. He may faint; but He will not yield. Is it not wonderful? What made Him stand to His purpose? What gave Him that strange stability? Well, I can only say, "He loved us." Why He loved us, I do not know; but He loved us, and He loves us still; and it is because He loved us that "He saved others; Himself He could not save." But we are only skimming the surface. We must endeavour, if we can, to go deeper than this. There is a mystery of sorrow here. If we are to understand what is

transpiring on yonder cross, we must endeavour to look within the veil; we must try to see things as God saw them. Yet it is an awful thing to think of that world descending in that gradually lowering scale into the very jaws of darkness and death. Where are we to find the hero of humanity? Who shall fight our battle for us? Who shall avail to lift that sinking world from the very depth of doom into which it is disappearing? No angel in heaven can do it. There is only One who can do it, and there is only one way in which He can do it. By a sovereign effort of His own will, Christ might have called a new world into existence; He might have blasted this world with judgment, and caused it to disappear altogether; but in doing so He would have been stultifying — shall I say? — His own designs; He would have been withdrawing from His own eternal purposes of mercy and love. Nay, nay; the ruinous world must be saved — How is it to be done? The Son of the Father's bosom steps into that ascending scale. Now look! He does it voluntarily. "I lay down My life," He says; "no man taketh it from Me; I give it; for it was His own free gift for man, for you, for me. What means this strange sense of desolation! Through all His human life, there was one thing that had sustained Him, one joy that had ever been present to Him. It was the joy of His Father's presence. He had lived in the light of His countenance. He had refreshed Himself with His fellowship. "He had drank of the brook by the way, and therefore He lifted up His head." But lo! the brook by the way seems to be dried up. It was no mere natural thirst that parched Emmanuel. That outward thirst was but the indication, the type, the symbol, of the inward thirst which burned within His soul. What means this strange sense of desolation? What is it? Is it the loss of human friends? No; something more than that. That is bad enough to bear; but it is something more than that. What is it? For the first time in His human life He finds Himself alone. The light is eclipsed; the sun has disappeared from His heaven, and the joy of existence is gone. He gazes round and round — east, and west, and north, and south. What is it? It is but a little matter that the outward sun was eclipsed; but there was a dread eclipse had taken place within the soul of Emmanuel, of which that outward darkness was but the type. What was it? Wherever sin goes it brings its own deadly shame of everlasting night along with it. And because He had taken the burden of the world's sin upon Him, therefore the shadows of night were resting upon Him now. One shrinks from following out these words, yet one can fancy — and it is no mere fancy — what must have passed through His heart. "I could have borne that My own people should treat Me thus: I could have borne that My own disciple should betray Me for thirty pence: I might have borne that Simon Peter should deny me with oaths and curses: I might have borne the outward pain, the bodily anguish: but O, My God, My God, Thy smile has been my light: Thy presence has been My joy. What have I done? How comes it to pass that instead of fellowship I have desolation; instead of Thy joyful company, Thy blessed society, I have this awful sense of loneliness? What is it? What means it?" "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" What did it all mean? It meant that "He saved others:" and because "He saved others, Himself He could not save:" and so the scale that bore the Christ descended into the deepest darkness, and the scale that bore a ruined world began to rise, and to rise. Lo! the gloom is settled on that, and the sunlight on this: that, is sinking down into the darkness of death; this, is rising into the glories of life. The angels are veiling their faces in horror as they behold the Son of God disappear beneath the cloud: the sons of God are shouting in triumph as they behold a ransomed world rising into the very sunlight of the Divine smile, the curse revoked, the doom recalled, the gates of everlasting life opened to a ruined world. So He carried it through, — that wonderful enterprise — through to the bitter end: and so He drank the cup to the last drop, and He paid the ransom to the last penny, sinner, for thee, and for me. I want to ask you, Have you

accepted that which He has purchased at such a price? What is it that renders sin inexcusable? Just this glorious fact we are gazing at. Your condemnation, my friend, lies in this: that at the cost of such indescribable agony as we shall never know, until we get to the other side: and not even then, Christ has bought everlasting life for you, and you have refused to accept it. Tonight, that pierced hand seems to hold it out for you. It seems as though He pleaded with you; as if He were saying, "Now, my dear brother, I have saved, not Myself, that I might save thee: I turned not my face from shame and spitting, that thy face might be irradiated with Divine glory: I wore that crown of thorns that thou mightest wear the crown of glory: I carried that cross that thou mightest sway the sceptre: I hung in agony that thou mightest sit in triumph: I fathomed the depth that thou mightest rise to the height. Men! do you think there is anything manly in trampling such love as that under your feet? Women! do you think there is anything womanlike in turning your back upon such love as that? Oh, let us be ashamed of ourselves tonight, that we have sinned against that love so long!

(W. H. Aitken, M. A.)

Glad News

Luke 2:10

And the angel said to them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

The days of life are not lived on one level range. There are days that are lifted, and days that are depressed; days which stand out radiant with opportunity, as summits of mountains stand forth to the eye when the sun shines upon them. Now and then you come to a day so auspicious, so prophetic of good, that it sings through all its hours, and is as a hymn and a psalm. Not only do men come to such days, not only do individuals find themselves lifted by God's mercy to such summits of feeling and expression, but nations and cities, governments and institutions, come to the same happy fortune. There are days in national life linked with such victorious memories, full with such present triumphs, that at the rising of the sun every patriotic citizen flings out to the morning air the national banner. Institutions, too, have their glorious days. Popular movements that represent great causes and grand effects roll up like waves to their cresting, and the power of the forces which moved them on culminates in popular gladness. Religion shares in the action of this law. And it is because Christianity helps men that it is properly named "glad news"; and it may be well for us who are in worship assembled to ask ourselves and to consider wherein Christianity is glad news, and why, being accepted, it brings joy to the human heart. In the first place, it is glad news because it is a revelation of God — both as to what He is in Himself, and what His feelings are toward man. The highest conception the human mind can form is that of Deity. It is too great in itself to go on without conceiving of a greater. The human constitution is of so noble a sort, is so majestic in its vision, so profound in its necessities, that it must have a God. The greatness of man is seen in the fact that in him is an actual graving to bow down to some one or to something that symbolises some one. Look, then, at and consider the state of the world before Christianity was born. Here and there an old sage, by sixty years of studentship, had groped his way up until his fingers had felt out a knowledge of the alphabet of truth which taught him the rudiments of righteousness. But of God they knew little. Of the life beyond the grave they knew nothing. The consolation which comes from knowledge they had not amid their trials. They died blindly submissive; they died wretchedly patient; they died stoically indifferent. And those that were left to mourn above their graves mourned without hope. But when Christianity was born, a sun rose into the darkness of the world. Men saw what they had felt must be, but what they had never before seen. And chiefest among all sights revealed stood God. It told them of His affection, of His patience, of His mercy. It told them that He was mindful of them, that His ears were open to their cries, and His eyes noted the falling of their tears. What a revelation was this! How satisfactory in its nature! How sublime in its significance! How far-reaching in its influence! How could piety ever become intelligent? How could devotion ever be ardent and sincere until, in the person of God, the source and pattern of all purity, of all justice, of all affection, should be revealed unto man? Let it be known, then, and profoundly felt by us all here to-day, that Christianity was "glad news" unto man, first and foremost, because it revealed God. We do not realize, so familiar are we with the

thought, what a gap would be made in our lives if from our minds the knowledge we have of God were stricken. Such a removal would be like taking one's heart from his bosom. As in the one case physically we could not survive, so in the other case spiritually we could not survive. And the second great and emphatic reason is, as it seems to me, because it revealed man to himself. Never till Jesus was born — never till He had lived and passed away — did man know the nobility of his species. Never until God dwelt in the flesh could any man know what flesh might become. For natures are measured, not by what they can impart primarily, but by what they can receive. The ox can receive but little. The sweetness of the grass, the pungency of the budding shrubbery he crops, the coolness of the water that he drinks when athirst — these measure his being. They minister to his structure, and its wants being supplied his life is satisfied. The dog can receive yet more. He craves food, but he also craves affection. A life higher than his own is needed for his happiness. He looks at the hand of his master as the inferior looks at the superior when itself is great-enough to discover greatness. The dog finds deity in his master. From him he learns law and love both. From him he receives joy so intense that even his master marvels at it, and wonders that so slight a motion of his hand, so brief an utterance from his lips, can make any being so happy. It is because the dog can receive so much that thought ranks him so high. And the capacity of receptiveness gives accurate measurement and gradation to animals and to men. I say to men; for the same law holds good in the human species. There are some who receive little. On the other hand, there are those who are as a house when its windows are all open, and the sun and the wind play through its chambers. There is no form of beauty; there is no shade of loveliness; there is no odour or perfume, nor any melodious sound, that appeals to them in vain. And when we view them on the higher levels of receptiveness — the levels of mind and soul — we find that their intellect and their spirits alike are as pools that stand waiting for the streams to flow into them. From history and poetry, from science and art, from past and present, they are ministered unto ceaselessly. Nor is there anything religious, anything sacred and devout, anything spiritual and Divine, which does not find ready entrance into their natures. So freely do they receive of these, that by them at last they are possessed. Renewed in mind, transformed in spirit, sanctified in soul, they become like Him of whom they have received. So that their walk and conversation is with God. Never, as we have said, until Christ came was the greatness of this capacity to receive demonstrated. Christ showed what man might be, and thereby fixed his value. Heaven paid such a price for man that man himself was astonished. God's acts are based on knowledge. The second reason, then, why Christianity is glad news is seen in the fact that beyond any mere religion, beyond all philosophies, it tells me what man is. We who are here can rise up and say, "We know what man is!" The world, from east to west, from north to south, can say, speaking through all her myriad mouths, "We know what man is!" The great continents, the islands of the sea, the far shores and the far climes, through all their industries, through all their commerce, through their intelligence, through the glory of their bloom and the pendent wealth of their harvests, can say, "We know what man is!" Ay, and the spirits of the redeemed in heaven and the great angels that wait before God, mighty in their power and intelligence, can bow down before Him who made the revelation in His Son, and murmur, in the hush of holy awe, "We know what man is!" We have said that the first reason why Christianity was glad news was found in the fact that it revealed God; and the second great reason that it was glad news was found in the fact that it revealed man; and now we say, lastly, that the third great reason why Christianity is glad news is found in the fact that it reveals God in man. Theodore Parker, of pleasant memory to many, to whom this city owes much,

and to whom humanity owes more, had a splendid conception of God. No nobler Deity was ever preached than he proclaimed. Many who deride him, but have never read him, would be richer spiritually than they are if in their minds and souls they had his conception of Divinity. In addition to his splendid conception of God, he had the noblest possible conception of man — of his nature, of his possibilities, of his rights, and of his destiny. But of God in man he seems to have had little, if any, conception. On his right hand stood God, like a hewn pillar, massive and polished to the finest gleam; on the left stood man, a companion pillar, of which in way of description it is enough to say that it was the reflection of the other. But God in man, or the God-man — that white arch that should connect and span the space between the two — he did not discern. And that the object of this incarnation of Deity was the salvation of men from their sins we know. The mighty and benevolent uses of incarnation are patent. Only so could God be revealed, in such a way that the human mind might apprehend Him clearly, and the human soul in Him find courage. Only by such an incarnation could the requisite authority be given to human utterance, and the requisite wisdom be imparted to human understanding. Only by such an incarnation could the holy example, whose presence was needed, be given unto the world, and the adequate inspiration be imparted to humanity. And only by such an incarnation, only through the lips of His own Son, could the Divine Fatherhood be properly declared, the Divine life properly lived, and the victorious sacrifice, required both for the justice of heaven and the moral necessities of men, be made. We rejoice, therefore, in the incarnation of God in Christ as those who apprehend the high spiritual uses it subserves, the profound spiritual necessities it meets, and the otherwise incomprehensible truths that it makes familiar unto us.

(W. H. Aitken.)

Out of Company with Jesus

Luke 2:44-45

But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance....

It seems scarcely credible that that fond mother — that model of what a mother ought to be — could have gone a whole day's journey without Jesus; but she did. And one can understand too how she fell into this error. She had a great many things to think about. She had been meeting a good many friends at the feast. Those were stirring times. People had been coming up from all parts of Judaea and Galilee with tidings of an upheaving in the minds of the people and a general expectation was pervading the whole population; a hope of approaching liberty; a desire to break the tyrant thrall of Rome. So, doubtless, there was a good deal to talk about, and no doubt the Virgin Mary was deeply interested in what she heard. Joseph, too, would have a good deal to communicate to those with whom he came in contact. So they were very busy, and very interested; and in their business and in their thronging interest they forgot the absence of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they went for a whole day's journey concluding that He was with them when He was not. Let us ask ourselves, "How is it that Christians lose the sense of the fellowship of Jesus?" What are the dangers we have most to guard against in this respect?

I. The danger arising from INTERCOURSE WITH OUR FELLOW-MEN.

II. The danger arising from GOSSIPING CONVERSATION. I do not for a moment mean to charge this against the blessed mother of our Lord. At the same time, the circumstances of the case suggest such a possibility, and the possibility suggests a lesson to ourselves.

III. The danger of losing the consciousness of the presence of Christ IN RELIGIOUS INTERCOURSE, is a danger, I believe, that specially belongs to this day.

IV. The danger OF LOSING CHRIST IN HIS SERVICE. Work for Christ has its own peculiar dangers.

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

The Centurion's Faith

Luke 7:1-10

Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum....

Faith and humility, my brethren, may be described as two sister virtues, so closely are they connected together, that the one cannot flourish without the other. We are taught that we may possibly have something like a vague hope that, through God's mercy, our sin may, ultimately, be forgiven, and our souls rescued from ruin: but for a man to say that he knows that salvation is his, that he is in a state of acceptance, that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ has been applied to his soul, and that now he is the child of God, is presumption, and that no real, humble-minded Christian will speak in this way. Thus we find, that while, on the one hand, faith is, by one class of persons represented as presumption, on the other hand, it is exaggerated into presumption just because people fail to exercise the virtue of humility. There is no humility in my doubting the Word of God. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." Let us take the narrative as it stands, and learn a few practical lessons from it.

I. The first thing I notice about this centurion is, that although he was a man in a considerable social position, HE WAS ALTOGETHER FREE FROM THAT PETTY FORM OF CONVENTIONAL PRIDE, WHICH IS IN TOO MANY INSTANCES THE CURSE OF MODERN SOCIETY. Here is a very practical lesson with respect to humility. My friends, I do not believe much in the humility of man towards his God where his conduct is characterized by pride towards his fellow men. Yet, again, the centurion was free from that miserable form of pride which exhibits itself in national prejudice. The man that really wants to get a blessing from the Lord Jesus Christ must be content to take the lowest place, to think everybody better than himself, to see himself as God sees him, and to be willing to accept from any man whatever reasonable help that man seems likely to offer to him.

II. Well, listen to THE WORDS OF COMMENDATION OF THE MASTER. "When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith: no, not in Israel." I want to ask you, before concluding my sermon this morning, Are you prepared to receive a blessing, dear friends, on those terms? If the Lord Jesus Christ were to stand in this pulpit, looking every one of you in the face, and were to say, " Go thy way; as thou hast believed, so be it unto thee," would you reply by a fervent exclamation of grateful joy? Should we be able to say so? or should we not, in common honesty, have to look up, and say. "Not so, Lord; I have not believed, or trusted my case into Thy hand; on the contrary, I feel in my own heart, that I have been constantly taking it out of Thy hand, and transferring it from Thee to myself? I have had my own feelings and thoughts; I have been reasoning about possibilities; and, so far as I have been taking it out of Thy hand, I cannot claim Thy blessing." Oh, dear friends, remember that God cannot alter His conditions. They are fixed in the very nature of things.

(W. H. Aitken, M. A.)

Young Man, Arise

Luke 7:11-17

And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people....

I. I notice first THAT THIS YOUNG MAN IS FOLLOWED BY A BROKENHEARTED MOTHER, A POOR SORROWFUL CREATURE. He was her only son, and she was a widow. Do you know I cannot help thinking that one often sees the same sort of thing now. How many a young man there is who is being borne along towards that fearful interment to which I have already referred, who is followed, as it were, by the tears and expostulations — I may say the anguish, the heart-breaking anguish — of one who loves him as her own soul, and who would readily offer a thousand times over her own life, if only his soul might be saved. Young man, there are a good many fellows who think it a manly thing to slight a mother's love, to go far to break a mother's heart. Believe me, there is scarcely a more unmanly sin possible for anybody to commit. Amongst the saddest incidents in my experience as a mission preacher are cases of this character, where I am addressed by mournful-looking women, who come to me with a terrible burden on their hearts. I ask what it is. It is not about themselves. No! no! so far as they themselves are concerned, they have a good hope through grace. "Well, what is the matter?" "Oh, it is my boy," says the poor stricken creature, "my boy." How many are ready to say, as David said about Absalom, "Would God I had died for thee." Some little time ago, I had a conversation after one of my services with a minister of the gospel, in the North of England, who said to me, "I want to tell you about my son, who is just going to offer himself for the Christian ministry. He had a remarkable conversion, and I should like to tell you about it. Two years ago my dear wife died, and as she was dying, she called her children around her. As they approached her bed one by one, she stretched out her hand and took theirs in hers, and very solemnly, for she was on the brink of eternity, she said to them, 'I charge ye before God, meet me at God's right hand.' When it came to the turn of my eldest son, I saw that she was greatly moved, for up to that time he had shown no disposition to give his heart to God. She grasped his hand in hers and said, with tears in her eyes, 'My boy, ere I die, I want you to make me a promise; I want you solemnly to promise me that you will seek for the salvation of your soul.' He hesitated, and stood silent for a few moments, hanging down his head. When he lifted up his eyes he met his mother's gaze. That deep, tender, earnest gaze seemed to plead with his inmost heart. 'I charge you,' she said, 'meet me at God's right hand.' 'Mother,' he said, 'I will; I will.' Her face brightened up; a heavenly smile stole over her features; she lifted up her hands and said, 'Thank God, I am ready to go now.' Well, she died. My son remembered his promise. He began to read his Bible and to pray, and the Lord was pleased to send him a very deep conviction of sin. He became intensely wretched. Weeks passed away. Still he could get no comfort. Weeks became months. He could not shake the subject from his mind. The weight of his sin was continually resting upon his soul, and seemed almost to drive him wild, till on one occasion he found himself in such a state of frenzied agony, that he felt 'I really can stand this no longer," and suddenly grasping his hat, he dashed out with a determination to drown his sorrows in drink at the

nearest gin-house. Down the street he went, and up to the door of the public-house. Just as he stood at the door and was stretching out his hand to open it, it seemed to him as though his mother stood before him. There was the same look upon her countenance that it wore when she took leave of him on her dying bed, and he seemed to see those tears glistening in her eyes. It was no vision, but the thing was so powerfully brought before his imagination, that it was like a vision, and he seemed to hear her saying, 'My son, your promise!' 'I turned,' he said, 'and fled from the public-house as though I were pursued: I dashed into my own room. 'Great God! I cried, 'Thou hast saved me by my mother's prayer; Thou hast saved me from the depths of hell! There and then I cast myself in utter weariness and helplessness and self-despair at Jesus' feet, and there and then the pardoning love of Christ reached my heart.'"

II. Well, there was something more that the eye of Christ rested upon besides this poor broken-hearted woman to whom He said, "Weep not." THERE WERE THE BEARERS. NOW this also, as it seems to me, is wonderfully true to life. Wherever I go I find that young men are mostly under the influence of bearers. I know what your strong points are, young men, yes, and I know your weak points too. You are wonderfully gregarious animals. One man goes in one particular direction, and the rest must follow if he happens to be a leader. There is a strange fatuous influence which man exercises over his fellow-man. Ah, my brother, how many a man is as it were held spell-bound by the influence of false friendship. Get him away from his friends and you can do something with him; but so long as he is in their society he is a helpless slave to adverse influences. Yes, I may be speaking to some to-night who, although only young, are already saying, "I have gone too far; the chains are bound too tightly round me." I tell you no, in God's name, No! One touch of almighty power from the finger of Christ, and those chains shall break; one glance from those eyes so full of beneficence, and the shadows of death shall flee away. I remember, some time ago, hearing a remarkable circumstance related by a public speaker to whom I was listening. It happened that a ship was being towed across the Niagara River, in America, some little distance above the well-known falls. Just as she got into the middle of the stream the hawser parted, and the unfortunate ship began to drift down the river stern foremost. Efforts were made to save her from impending ruin, but every effort failed, and the unfortunate ship kept drifting farther and farther down the stream towards the terrible abyss below. The news of the disaster spread along the banks of the river, and in a very short time there were hundreds of people, and they soon swelled to thousands, looking on in breathless anxiety to see what was to become of this unfortunate ship and crew. There is a point that stretches into the river which bears the name of Past Redemption Point, and it is believed in the neighbourhood that nothing that passes that point can escape destruction. The current there becomes so strong, the influence so fatal, that whatever goes by Past Redemption Point is inevitably lost. The excited multitude upon the banks of the river watched the helpless ship drifting down farther and farther till she was within a few hundred yards of the fatal point. One effort after another was made, one effort after another failed; still she drifted. Only a few moments, and she passed the point. There was a kind of sigh of horror from the vast multitude as they saw her swing round, for they knew she was lost. But just as she rounded the point the captain felt a strong breeze smite upon his cheek. Quick as thought he shouted at the top of his voice, "All sails set!" and in almost less time than it takes me to tell it every stitch of canvas on board the ship was stretched to catch the favouring gale. A cheer broke from the multitude on the shore as they witnessed this last effort for salvation. But would it succeed? The ship was still drifting, though the wind was blowing against it, and she was still

moving downwards, stern fore. most, though the wind was bellying out all her sails. It was a battle between the wind and the current. With breathless anxiety they watched the result. She slacks! Another moment — they scarcely dare whisper it — she stands! Yes, that terrible downward course was actually stopped. There she was, still as a log upon the water. Another moment, and inch by inch she began to forge her way up the stream until the motion was perceptible to those on shore, and one great shout of victory burst forth from a thousand voices: "Thank God, she is saved! Thank God, she is saved!" In a few moments more, with considerable headway upon her, she swept right up the stream, by Past Redemption Point, right into the still water, saved from what appeared to be inevitable destruction, just because, in the very moment of moments, she caught the favouring breeze. Young man, in that ship behold a picture of yourself. There is many a young man who, like that ship, has been drifting. You know it; ah! and your friends know it; your mother, praying for you to-night, knows it; your Christian friend that brought you here knows it. You are drifting, drifting, and you know what the end must be. It may lie far on in your life's voyage, or it may be very near at hand, but before you lies the terrible fall, and the abyss and depth of doom. If you say, "How shall I arise?" I reply, there is only one way of arising. Fix your gaze to-night upon Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. When I was a young man of eighteen, I was preaching in the open air in the streets of Inverness, when there happened to pass by a young medical student — I think, from Glasgow University. He was like many of you, and had been living an aimless, self-pleasing sort of life. As he passed by in the crowd he heard a young man's voice, and caught the words of Christ, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." The message went home like an arrow to the man's heart; he got away into his own chamber, and there he cast himself by his bedside and exclaimed, "O God, that is what I want. Up to this moment my life has been a wasted life; I have nothing to show for it; I have lived for myself; I have lived in vain. I see it all now. There is one power, and only one, that can raise me up and make me really what I ought to be." There and then he gave himself to Christ, and he went forth from that room a new man. He had just received a commission as a surgeon in the army, and soon afterwards he went to India, where, for five or six years, he was a burning and a shining light. Many a poor heathen native heard the truth of the gospel first from his lips; many a godless English soldier was led to the Cross of Christ by that young man's influence; many a brother officer first heard from him the glad tidings of great joy, or, at any rate, first had them pressed home upon his mind. After five or six years' service, the Lord called him home. I never met him, never shook his hand. I hope to meet him up yonder, some day.

(W. Hay Aitken.)

The Rejection of the Counsel of God by the Pharisees

Luke 7:30

But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.

There they stood on the banks of Jordan, self-complacency written on their countenances, the calm peace of death upon their hearts; whispering to one another as they heard the fervid words of the preacher, "Never mind; you and I know better than that; we are not to allow ourselves to be carried away by this hot-headed enthusiast; we are too intelligent people for that; we are educated people; we have a certain refinement which, of itself, precludes our being so influenced. That is not the man for us; we will go back to our synagogue. I like to hear the calm, quiet exposition which Rabbi So-and-so gives of the Book of the Law; it is very interesting to listen to him, but this enthusiastic fanatic does us no good: come away, come away; we have had enough. He calls us 'a generation of vipers.' You cannot listen to a man that insults you." "But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected," &c. Yes, and that very moment "the axe was laid at the root of the tree." Yet another moment, and that axe should be lifted up by the hand of Divine judgment; a few short moments more, and that stroke should fall; only a few years were to pass over their heads, and the city they gloried in, and the temple they prided themselves about, were to lie strewn along the dust. Their name was to be obliterated from the roll of the nations of the earth; their national existence was to be trampled upon; their streets were to be drenched with blood; they themselves, as a den of robbers or a gang of murderers, were to be crucified round the wall of their own city, or dragged into captivity to adorn the triumphs of a foreign conqueror. All this was already in store; the edge of the axe was already sharp, and the hand of justice was already grasping it; and, all the while, these poor self-complacent men were flattering themselves that the message was not for them. "We have Abraham to our father; we are the children of privilege; what have we to fear?" And so they slept their sleep; and so they "rejected the counsel of God against their own souls." There are plenty of Pharisees in our own day, and they are just as true to the instincts of their own life as were the Pharisees of eighteen hundred years ago. What was the characteristic of these Pharisees? Self-complacency. They were satisfied with themselves. They had not yet found out "the plague of their own hearts."

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

Free Forgiveness

Luke 7:42-43

And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?...

There is one thing that is needful in all true religion — there is no religion without it — and that is love towards God. It is quite true that some Christians love God more than others. Cannot you fancy what those two men went through? They would not each go through the same experience. There was a great difference between their cases. Take the first man. You can fancy his saying to himself: "Well, it is a nasty thing, this little debt of mine; I wish I had not got so much behindhand; I do not quite know how I am going to clear it off, but I must try: perhaps my creditor will be content with a few instalments; if I pay him half a crown a week for such a time I shall begin to make a hole in the debt, and, ultimately, he may get it all: I must cast myself on his forbearance." The other can indulge in no such hope. Let one of you — a poor, labouring man, earning fifteen or eighteen shillings a week — put himself in that man's position. Just imagine yourself encumbered with a debt of a hundred pounds. How hopeless a thing it would seem to you; all your efforts to clear it off must fail; you might work almost to death, and yet the debt would be there still. We can fancy what took place in that man's house as the reckoning day drew near. The debt laws in those countries, you know, were terribly severe. His feeling is one of hopelessness. The prison looms up in view; he will be sold, and all that he hath, his children will be torn from him; his little home will be broken up. How desolate the man feels! Try to make him happy if you can. Go and talk cheerfully to him. Tell him to have good hope, to keep up his courage, and that sort of thing. You cannot bring a smile to the man's face; he looks as miserable as he can be. On his way he meets the other man, and he asks him what his business is. "Well," says he, "I have got an awkward affair — not very serious, but still awkward; I have a nasty little debt that I cannot settle; I am sure I don't know how the creditor will treat me; there are those fifty pence that I owe him; I know he has a right to exact them to the very last farthing, and I have 'nothing to pay'; I do not know how he will deal with me." "Well, what are you going to do?" "Oh, I am going to make a few proposals to him, and see if I cannot get him to take a few instalments, so that I may pay him off by degrees. What is your case, my poor fellow? You look very sad." "Oh, mine is a far more serious case than yours." At last the great man stands before them. "Well," he says, "have you got your money?" They both hang down their heads. Turning to one he says, "Have you got your fifty pence?" "No, sir, I have not got it." "Why have you not got it?" "Well, sir, the truth is, I have got no money — I am a bankrupt — I have nothing to pay." Then, turning to the other, he says, "What have you got to say for yourself? Have you got your five hundred pence?" His head hangs down; tears come into the strong man's eyes; his body quivers with emotion; he can hardly control himself. The next moment the mystery is solved. "He frankly forgave them both." The one man rises to his feet, and says, "Sir, I thank you." "The other drops on his knees, and buries his head in his hands. He cannot thank his benefactor, he is too much overpowered. The one man feels, "Well, he is very kind in his dealing with me." The other feels, "He has saved me from ruin; I should have been utterly lost if this man had not acted

such a generous part towards me." The one man goes out of the house with a kind of respectful feeling towards his benefactor. The other goes away with the feeling that he has been bought over, so to speak, by the benefactor's goodness: that all that he has, and all that he is, belongs to that man who has stretched out his hand of forgiveness, and done him so unexpected a favour. Now, my dear friends, among the many figures which bring before us some idea of our sin, there are very few more suggestive than this figure of debt. Now, is there any difference between us in this respect? Yes, doubtless, there are shades of difference. Some owe more than others. Some have been more prodigal in wasting the Master's substance than others; but there are none of us who can say that they owe an inconsiderable debt. Friends, have you come to the point which these debtors reached? Have you discovered, that all your life, you have been heaping up debt, and that you have "nothing to pay?" What! will you tell me that these debtors did not know that they were forgiven? There are plenty of nominal Christians in our day who say, "Ah! but then we cannot know that we are forgiven; we may have a faint idea about it, but we cannot know it." Did not these debtors know it?

(W. Hay Aitken.)

Various Touches

Luke 8:43-48

And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living on physicians, neither could be healed of any,...

1. There is the unbeliever's touch, like the impious touch of the unhallowed hands of the soldiers who nailed the Saviour to the cross of Calvary. How many there are that rudely and profanely handle the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ: they cannot leave Him alone: yet even while they "touch" Him, they only so "touch" Him as to bring judgment and condemnation upon their own souls, because the "touch" is the sacrilegious touch of unbelief. The Philistines were bold enough to touch the ark, but they found there was death in the touch.
2. Then again, there is the cold "touch" of the critic. He is not profane: he is not irreverent: he is simply critical. The character of Christ is the object in which they are performing their experiments.
3. Then again, there is the fashionable "touch," which is much more common. Those who give this "touch" to our Lord are to be found in all our churches and places of worship, not unfrequently, probably once in a week; they have got their tribute to pay, and they pay it. Society expects it of them.
4. Then there is the formalists' "touch," where the "touch" is everything, but the Touched nothing! What is the most proper way of saluting Him whom you recognize as your Saviour? How are you best to arrest His attention? Form, form, form, from beginning to end.
5. There is one way in which a larger number of persons seem to "touch" Him Without receiving any help than in any other. It is the "touch" of indifference. There are many people who are no critics: they won't give themselves the trouble for that. They will not be unbelievers: they will not be at the pains to be infidels. These, then, my dear friends, are some of the different ways in which we may "touch" Christ, and yet get no healing benefit. We should ask ourselves, How are we to "touch" with good effect? Again, there may be difficulties in our way: but few of us have such difficulties as that poor woman. The very nature of her disease was one which made her shrink back from anything like publicity. She might have waited until He was not surrounded by a crowd — waited for a more favourable opportunity. She says to herself, "I am going to be healed;" she does not say, "I am going to try." How often do we hear that word "try." There are two little words beginning with "TR" the one is "TRUST," and the other is "TRY." I wish we were a little tender of the first, and less of the second. So, through the crowd she makes her way, draws near, stretches out her hand, and "she touched Him." And now we have a blessed opening up of the inner life of Christ, which seems to bring Him wondrously near to us. It is this: amidst all the subjects that occupied His mind, there cannot proceed from Him the very slenderest favour to any of the creatures whom He has made, but He is sensible of it. The reception of grace shall be a mutual thing — a thing involving reciprocal consciousness, consciousness on our part of our approach; consciousness on His part that we are approaching: consciousness on our part of our stretching

out the hand of faith; consciousness on His part of the flowing of the current of His own Divine healing. There shall be no blessing stolen from an unconscious God. We shall not get it from Him when He is asleep. We will not get it from Him when His attention is fixed upon anything else. It is when His own blessed God-consciousness comes into contact with our human sense of need that the miracle of grace shall be performed. Is it not a wonderful thing He can think of us! — that, while He is giving us blessings every moment, He nevertheless gives every blessing consciously? How near this brings God to us!

(W. H. Aitken, M. A.)

Self-Denial

Luke 9:23

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

What is self-denial? A very interesting and very important inquiry to us who are already the subjects of Divine grace. Perhaps we have not got too much of it in modern Christianity. I cannot help thinking that our Christianity in these days would be considerably improved if we had a little more of it infused into our daily lives. What is it? It is just when we begin to yearn for the likeness of Christ, and long to be conformed to His image — when we begin to see clearly that the path which the Master trod was one of humiliation and reproach, and that there are plenty of sorrows to be borne, and plenty of difficulties to be battled with — it is just then that Satan will, if he can, prevent even this new-born light arising within our soul, and endeavour to turn that very light into darkness. And he has succeeded only too well in former ages in diverting these religious instincts into a wrong and a mischievous channel. There are two false theories about self-denial which I want to guard you against. First, there have been some who have fallen into the error of thinking that, in some way or another, self-denial has to do with the expiation of our guilt; that the offering of a life of self-denial is a kind of satisfaction to be made to God for all the sins and all the imperfections of human nature. You cannot accept a theory of this kind without its producing at once its natural effect upon your own experience, which will become then and there intensely legal. For your very self-denial will be submitted to in the spirit of bondage; it will be the sufferings of a slave, and of a felon, and not the willing undergoing of hardship on the part of a reconciled and rejoicing child. Yet again; there is another false form of self-denial which is based upon a misconception of our relation to the pleasurable. It is assumed that we are not intended to enjoy pleasure here. Now observe, this is simply a new edition of the ancient lie which was suggested by the great tempter to our first parents in Paradise. "Hath God indeed said that ye shall not eat of the trees of the garden? He has placed you in Eden, surrounded you with delights, amid all these varied trees, and all these delicious and charming fruits: and does that God whom you call "your Father" exhibit any fatherly tenderness towards you in precluding you from the natural gratification of an appetite He has Himself created. How hard must that Father be! How little sympathy there can he in His nature! Can you serve, love, confide in such a God?" This was the venom which was first of all infused into the soul of our first parents. And when such a conception is received, even though it may seem to produce the effect of an austere or self-denying life, it will necessarily have the effect of interfering with our relationships with God. When our views of the character of God are in any way interfered with, and we begin to entertain a false ideal of Him, our whole religious life must suffer from it, because the knowledge of God is the great source both of power and of enjoyment throughout the whole course of our spiritual experience. There is nothing wrong in pleasure in itself; on the contrary. God has "given us all things richly to enjoy"; and yet there may be a great deal of harm in the indulgence of pleasure; and unquestionably a large proportion — perhaps far the largest proportion — of the sins that are committed in human history are

committed because men deliberately make up their minds to pursue the pleasurable. Having indicated to you these two false forms of self-denial, let us endeavour to consider, if we really can, what it is that our blessed Lord does teach. First of all, let us take hold of the word, and see if we can learn a lesson from it. The meaning would be more accurately conveyed to our minds, as English people, if we use the word "ignore" instead of "deny." The word used in the original indicates such a process all would take place where a man would refuse to admit his own identity. Supposing one of us had a property left to us, and we were brought before the magistrate in order that our personal identity might be ascertained; and supposing that we swore before competent authority that we were not the persons we were supposed to be, and that we actually were; such a process would be a denying of ourselves, and in the act of denial we should be ignoring our own natural right, and thus precluding ourselves from the enjoyment of it. The first step, then, in a really Christian life, or rather, shall I say, in the life of a disciple — for I am not speaking now of first principles — of what takes place, for the most part, at conversion: I am speaking of what takes place in point of time subsequently to conversion: at any rate it comes second in order — if we are really willing to be disciples, Jesus says to every one of us, "If any man will come after Me." Before we go any further, let us ask ourselves, "Is that what we wish to do?" How many a believer, if he were just to speak the honest truth, would say, "Well, my wish is to go to heaven." Well, that is a right wish; but it is not the highest wish. "My wish is to escape condemnation." Well, it is a right wish; but it is not the highest wish. Is your heart set upon going after Christ? If our minds are really made up to follow Him, then He points out to us the condition of such a relation: and the first is, "Let him deny himself." You cannot follow Jesus unless you deny yourself. Why? Because He took the way of self-denial. How did He do it? Was He an ascetic? No. "John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking: the Son of Man came eating and drinking." Did He ever fast? Yes. And when, and why? When He had a very definite object in doing so: when He did so in pursuance of the Divine direction. Did He ever exclude Himself from society. Yes: but why? Sometimes to spend a short season in prayer: sometimes a whole night, so that He might prepare for some serious conflict with the forces of hell, or that He might fit Himself for doing some special work, as when He named His twelve disciples. There was an object in these outward acts of self-denial. He presented to the view of all a body that was under the control of the mind, and a mind that was under the control of God. Had He no sufferings? A great many. Had He no pain? Greater than ever was borne. How was this? He bore pain with an object. He suffered because He had a purpose in view. How was it inflicted? Did He bring it upon Himself? Nay, verily: as I have already said, He never courted pain. How did it come? It came in the fulfilment of the Father's will. It came because He would cleave to the path which the Father had laid down for Him. The cross lay in His way, and He took it up: He didn't go to look for one: He did not manufacture one for Himself: but there it lay in His way, and He raised it. It was a heavier cross than ever you or I will be called upon to bear — a cross so heavy, that His frail, human nature sank beneath its load: even the tender-hearted women who saw Him toiling up to Golgotha with that terrible burden, burst into tears as they saw the Man of Sorrows pass by, as they watched His tottering steps, and beheld Him sinking under the fearful burden. But although the load may not be so heavy, there is a cross for every one of us. We shall not escape it if we follow Him. Have you made up your minds to escape the cross, dear friends? If that is the determination with which you set out on your spiritual pilgrimage, then you must also make up your mind to lose the society of Jesus. He does not say, "If any man will go to heaven, let him take up his cross": but He says, "If any man will

come after Me. I am going forth on My journey: before Me lie the shadows of Gethsemane, and My vision finds its horizon crowned with the Cross of Calvary. There it stands before Me in all its grim horror. I am going on step by step towards it. Every pulsation of My blood brings Me nearer to it; and I have made up My mind; My will is fixed, My face is set like a flint; the will which reigns within My bosom is the will of the Everlasting God Himself. I am content, My God, to do Thy will. And now this is the course I take: and if any of you want to follow Me, you must go the same road. You can only maintain fellowship with Me by placing your steps where Mine have fallen. 'If any man,' — whether he be the highest saint, or whether he be only a newborn babe in Christ — 'if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'"

(W. H. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Self-Seeking Involves a Cross Equally with Self-Abnegation

Luke 9:24

For whoever will save his life shall lose it: but whoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.

Does the cross terrify you by its dark shadow? Do those nails seem so sharp — that thorny crown so terrible — that spear so pointed — that darkness so heavy? Stay for a moment, while you listen to these solemn words: "What is a man profited if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" You are running away from the cross; but there is a cross being prepared for you. Remember that the cross was the instrument of a felon's execution; and while you are flying away from the unfriendly shadow, behind the veil there is a ghastlier cross being erected for you. You are asserting your own will, you are loving your own life. You shall "lose it"; and lose it by your own irrational self-love. You have elected to live for yourself; you are running after what you conceive, in your own blindness and deception, to be your own self-interest. Do you not find, even now, O child of the world I that your self-interest is deluding you? The bubbles you grasp burst in your hand; the flowers you gather fade at your touch; as you go along life's journey you are conscious of the approach — ever becoming more and more terrible — of a cloud of darker sorrow, while the present sense of blank disappointment becomes more and more appalling! Years creep on upon you; the effect of age is felt: the body is shattered as you near the end of your journey; the human strength decays; the joys of life are withered, and, one by one, as your earthly possessions slip from your grasp — then, what then? "Say ye to the wicked, It shall be ill with him, for the rewards of his hands shall be given unto him." You have fled from suffering into the arms of suffering; you have endeavoured to escape from the cross, you find your portion in the cross for all eternity. Thus it is that the man prepares his own doom, and is himself the creator of his own misery.

(W. H. H. Aitken, M. A.)

Rescue the Perishing

Luke 10:29-37

But he, willing to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor?...

A venerable servant of Christ said to me just at the time that I was accepting my first living, "If you would really wish to be useful to those with whom you are brought into contact, remember there is only one way of doing it: like the blessed Master of old, you must yourself be moved with compassion, or else you never can help them." The man who has been himself much in the society of the good Samaritan will partake of his feelings, and, like his Master, will be "moved with compassion." "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him." He might naturally have turned aside and said, "Oh, it is only one of those miserable Jews; the fewer we have of them the better; let him be." The first thing he had to overcome was natural prejudice, and it is rather a strong one with some people. But he did not stop to inquire whether he was a Jew or a Samaritan; he was a man — a brother; and the Samaritan acted accordingly. I remember hearing the story of a little incident that occurred in the streets of Edinburgh some years ago. A coach was driving rapidly down the narrow streets of the town. A poor little child of some two years of age crept into the middle of the road, and there it was in utter helplessness standing by itself, while the galloping horses were drawing nearer and nearer every moment. Just as they approached the spot where the poor little helpless infant was standing, a woman, who had just happened to come to the door of her house, darted forth like a flash of lightning, grasped the child in her arms, and, at the peril of her own life, saved it from imminent destruction. A passer-by remarked to the poor terrified woman when she reached the other side, "Well, woman, is that your child?" "Na, ha," she said, "it's nae my bairn." "Well, woman," he said, "what for did you risk your life for a child when it was not yours?" With a beaming eye and a flushed face, the noble woman replied, "Aye, but it's somebody's bairn." That was real humanity! The true spirit of a woman asserted itself within her nature. And if that be humanity, dear friends, what ought to be Christian humanity? What would have become of us if the Lord Jesus Christ had asked the question, "Who is My neighbour?" He might have pointed to where Gabriel, Michael, and the other ministering spirits stand before the throne, and say, "Behold My neighbour." What daring intelligence of heaven or hell would ever have suggested that the Lord Jesus Christ could find His "neighbour" in a fallen world, amid the children of sorrow and the slaves of hell? Who would have ever thought that God would have chosen us to be His "neighbours?" that He should have come where we are, that He should bend over us with a heart glowing with love, and pour into our wounds the sweet solace of His own anointing oil, or breathe into our lifeless being the supernatural energy of His own eternal life — who would so much as have suggested this? Not less than this Divine love has actually effected. Here is a call for each of us, children of God. Go to your own home as "a saviour." Go to the crowded streets, and courts, and lanes of this town as "a saviour."

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:29-37

But he, willing to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor?...

The first object that arrests our attention is a man lying by the wayside robbed, stripped, wounded, half dead. Now, all that we know about this man was that he had been taking a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho; and even this is full of suggestion. He had his back turned upon the "city of the vision of peace" and his face turned towards the city of the curse. Cursed was Jericho — cursed in the moment of its first destruction, and cursed in the moment of its restoration. He was turning his back upon the place which had been built for God's glory, for the especial abode, so to speak, of the Divine presence, and his face towards the place which had been built in distinct defiance of the Divine will, the very existence of which was a monument of human rebellion. Such is the ill-omened character of the journey which the traveller has undertaken. Is it not just such a journey that man has undertaken? If we look at human history, what is it but a continuous going down from Jerusalem to Jericho? Dear friends, as it has been with human history in the abstract, so has it been with each of us individually. As we look upon our own history, what has it been? One continual going away farther and farther from God, wandering from "the city of peace," and voluntarily exiling ourselves into the region which is blighted with God's curse. First, there is "the robbing." Satan is the great master robber. How much has he robbed us of? First, he has robbed us of all the blessedness of Paradise. Further, this man was not only robbed, he was also "stripped." They were not content with taking his money, they must needs take his garments. That is just what Satan has done with us. He has stripped us of all with which we cover our shame. There are some of us who have endeavoured to put on a garb of respectability, and to cover ourselves with that, just as our first parents sewed fig-leaves together to cover themselves. And that is not all. He is not content with robbing and stripping you; he goes even further; with ruthless hands he "wounds" those whom he has already robbed. How many of us are there here who do not know what it is to be wounded, inwardly wounded? Ah! he knows how to wound. Wounded! How are you "wounded?" not only by the malice of Satan, but by the accusations of conscience. How are you "wounded?" Not only wounded by Satan, not only wounded by conscience, but also wounded by your truest and best Friend. For there is One who wounds that He may heal. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend!" But that was not all. The man was not only wounded, but he was "left half dead." In what sense is the sinner half dead? So far as his spiritual condition is concerned he is quite dead, but so far as his moral nature is concerned he is half dead; that is to say, he is rapidly losing all his moral powers, but he is not altogether lost. The man is not only half dead; he is fast dying; his life is ebbing out in that flowing blood. Every moment that he lies there he grows weaker. Now let us look at it again. The first that passes that way is the priest. The priest cannot do anything for him, or does not do anything for him. And, dear friends, all the ordinances in the world, however precious and however valuable they are in themselves, will not restore lost vitality. The Levite passes by — he can do nothing. "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." This is just where the law fails. But the next

to come along that road is one of a different race. He was the very last man that this poor dying Jew had a claim upon. "He was a Samaritan." And Jesus passes by, not on the wings of His sovereign power, not in the majesty of His eternal sway, but He passes by in human form, a traveller amongst the sons of men. He passes by along life's dreary, dusty journey; He threads the mazes of life's wilderness, and on His way He "hears the groanings of such as are in captivity, and the sorrowful sighing of those who are appointed to die."

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

Martha; Or, Thoughts on the Active Life

Luke 10:38-42

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village...

The name of Martha suggests to the minds of most of us, I fancy, the thought of an anxious, troubled, and perhaps a somewhat fussy woman, with a short temper and a hasty tongue. That I think is the picture that many of us have drawn of Martha in our own minds. But you must remember that there is something to be said on the other side, something to be said on Martha's behalf; and while we do not shut our eyes to Martha's faults, we may learn something from that which is recorded to her credit. Martha, herself, the managing spirit of the household, is the person who invites the Lord Jesus Christ to come and take His abode for a season in her house. And here let me say that it is a happy thing when a strong mind and a vigorous will are turned in the right direction, and employed for the right purpose. It is something to be thankful for if we have such qualities as a strong mind and a vigorous will to present to the Lord for His service; and although these are not unfrequently coupled with an ungentleness and hastiness which are not altogether lovely, nay, may sometimes be repulsive and painful, yet let us acknowledge the fact that God can utilize that element in our temperament which Satan seeks to abuse, and that where a strong will and a vigorous determination may be employed by the devil with the worst possible results, such natural characteristics, dedicated to the service and glory of God, may prove of priceless value. Now we must remember that Martha had to face a good deal in inviting Jesus Christ into her household. The test was a severe one to her, because it was to try her in her weakest point. There were thirteen hungry men to be provided for, and then no doubt some of the neighbours would also be expecting an invitation to meet this Jesus, who had come among them, and about whom there was so much talk. Perhaps, too, there may have been other unpleasant consequences that she may have had to think about. Jesus Christ not unfrequently may have seemed a troublesome guest, in other ways besides those that I have referred to. His presence may sometimes have exposed people to an amount of hostile criticism and censure which they would fain have avoided. One thing is clear, she was a brave woman, whatever faults she may have had. It required a good deal of moral courage to invite this much-maligned and much-abused Man into her house, and to treat Him as a loved and honoured guest. But Martha's courage was equal to the occasion. And, my dear friends, we too shall find it no light matter to receive Jesus into our hearts and into our homes. And it is as well that we should clearly understand what the consequences may be if we take so important a step. The question will have to be asked over and over again, "Is this and that in accordance with the mind of Him whom we have received and welcomed as our guest?" for we must bear in mind that wherever Christ goes He declines to occupy a subordinate position. It is possible for some of you to do what Martha did. You may be the means of introducing Jesus Christ into your household; and although His presence may cause a disturbance, just think what an honour it is to be the means of introducing the King of kings and Lord of lords into the household which belongs to Him, but which has not previously recognized His claims. Think of the beneficent results that may flow from your action — how the purifying and elevating influences of the Divine

Presence may reach one person after another, until at last you can look around with holy joy, and exclaim, "As for me and my house we now serve the Lord." Not long since, at the close of a mission that I had conducted in the North of England, a gentleman, a man of property, returned to his country house, from the large I own where I was working, a changed man. On his arrival he summoned into his dining-room all his household, servants and all; and standing up before them all, he addressed them to this effect: "My dear friends, I have to confess with shame and sorrow that this has not been hitherto a Christian household. it has not been regulated upon Christian principles. I, as your master, have not been setting you a Christian example; but, on the contrary, all my influence has been thrown into the wrong scale. I cannot express the amount of sorrow I feel as I look back over the past. But I have called you all together to tell you that, through God's mercy, a great change has taken place in me, and now my supreme desire is that this household should be a Christian household, and that all that is done in it should be done just as the Lord would have it done." Turning to the butler, he said, "We have never hitherto had family prayers; but now understand that at such an hour in the morning, and such an hour in the evening, you ring the bell, and we will all gather together and acknowledge God in our family." And he added, "Be sure you make no difference; whoever may be in the house, whether they be worldly or whether they be religious people, make no distinction. From this time forth Jesus Christ must be Master in this household; we have ignored and dishonoured Him too long." It must have needed some courage, no doubt, to make such a declaration as that. But oh! do you not think he had his reward in the joy and satisfaction he must have felt as he knelt for the first time, surrounded by his family," at the feet of a reconciled God, and thus publicly received Jesus into his house? And remember you may be the means of introducing Christ into your household, even if you be not at its head. The humblest member of the family, or even one of the servants, may be the means of bringing Christ in, and by and by the influence and effect of His presence may be recognized and felt by all. Dear friends, do you think Martha ever regretted receiving Jesus Christ into her house? Martha received Jesus, but little did she know, when she did so, how soon she was to stand in terrible need of His sympathy and comfort and help! Ah, dear friends, sweet are such uses of such adversity as this I blessed are the sorrows that bring out such new and fresh revelations of our wealth in Christi It is only this that can make our sorrows fruitful of good. But it is time that we should look at the other side. So far we have been saying all we could in Martha's favour, but we must not shut our eyes upon her faults; for there is much to be learned from considering the faults and failings even of those whose hearts are in the right place, if we approach the consideration of these in the spirit of charity and humility. It is evident that Martha got some harm as well as some good out of Jesus' visit; for she seems here to be sadly flustered and flurried, and even somewhat peevish and irritable. She seems indeed to have been out of temper with the Master as well as with her sister, and to have implied some little reproach on Him as well as on Mary. But why all this disturbance and irritation? Surely it all came of this, that she was thinking more of serving Christ than of pleasing Him. If she had paused to reflect, she must have seen that a sharp, half-reproachful word, and the obvious loss of composure and temper, would cause the Master a good deal more pain than the best-served meal in the world could give Him pleasure. She was busy about Christ, but she failed to enter into sympathy with Christ. Here we have a very important lesson taught us, and one that we need to have impressed upon our minds as Christians and as Christian workers. Our object in life should not be so much to get through a great deal of work, as to give perfect satisfaction to Him for whom we are doing the work. If Martha had looked at things from His point

of view she would have felt differently about Mary, differently about those household cares that were troubling her. But Martha in her attempts to serve Christ, though scarcely conscious of it, was really serving herself. Her great desire was, that everything should pass off well. Everything was to be clean and tidy, and well served and well managed, so that nobody should make any unfavourable criticism upon the whole entertainment. We are bound to offer Christ our very best, and nothing done for Him should be done in a slovenly, slipshod, negligent way, as if anything were good enough for God. She was right in her principle, and yet she failed in carrying it out, and in that failure denied her Guest the very thing that pleased Him best. Martha is quite indignant, and doesn't care to conceal it. And you know people of her class, while they are very useful in a Church, and do a great deal of work, are very frequently indeed, like Martha, somewhat short-tempered. They have a great deal of energy, and a great deal of enthusiasm; but when things do not go exactly as they wish, the hasty word soon slips out, and the unpleasant thought is harboured, and that soon takes all the joy and all the blessing out of Christian work. How often is the work of the Church marred by this hasty spirit, and the Master is grieved in our very attempts to honour Him! And the same spirit, still, I fear, not unfrequently mars a useful life, and desecrates our sanctities. Yes, there is something better than service; there is something grander than doing. It is well to serve; but better still to offer acceptable service. It is well to do; but it is better still to do things in the right way. Martha had her own idea of what the right way was, and it was a worldly idea. What Martha needed was sympathy with Jesus Christ's spirit, to come within the charmed circle of His inner life — to understand His object and aims, to appreciate His longing desire, not to feed Himself with outward food, but to feed a famishing world with the revelation of God in His human form; to reciprocate His spiritual desires for those He sought to lift to a high and heavenly level of experience. This was where Martha went wrong, and this where Mary went right. As it was, Mary chose the good part which could not be taken from her, and Martha missed it, and by her very conduct showed that the Master was right in describing that good part as the one thing needful. Christian workers, let us learn our lesson. It is not enough to receive Jesus into our homes and into our lives — this we must do before anything else — but we need to sit at His feet, to gaze on His spiritual beauty, to hear His words, to yield ourselves wholly to His spiritual influence. Thus, and only thus, shall we find ourselves possessed of the one thing needful; and while hands or feet or brain are busy — or while all are busy together — there shall be a great calm within; there will be speed without feverish haste, and activity without bustle, and our work shall become sabbatic, and our lives an unbroken sanctity. Whatever happens let us not be too busy to sit at Jesus' feet.

(W. H. Aitken, M. A.)

Mary; Or, the Contemplative Life

Luke 10:38-42

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village...

These two sisters have been regarded, and rightly regarded, it seems to me, as illustrating to us, in their character, two contrasted elements of spiritual experience. Martha represents the active life, and Mary represents the contemplative life. For we know, and do let us bear in mind, that Christian work in itself is intensely interesting; indeed, there is nothing more likely to become engrossing. We all know how absorbed men may become in their own special pursuits. For instance, we have read about Sir Isaac Newton, and how absorbed he used to be in his mathematical and astronomical researches until he was scarcely able to give a thought to the common duties and circumstances of life, but used frequently to make the most ridiculous blunders about commonplace things, because he took so profound an interest in, and was so fully occupied with, his own great discoveries. And so it is with other branches of knowledge. When men devote their attention to a particular branch of knowledge or science, it becomes a sort of passion, and they no longer find it necessary to stimulate themselves to exertion in that particular; rather they have to check or curb themselves, in order to prevent their minds from becoming too deeply absorbed in their favourite studies. And it sometimes happens that when the mind is given over to some special pursuit, interest in their work becomes so keen that men seem to lose all power of checking themselves, and their brains go on working, as it were, automatically, when they don't intend them to be working at all. I well remember some years ago hearing a touching story of a late Cambridge professor, who was one of the greatest Greek scholars of our time. For some few months before he died he was advised by his friends to shut up his books, give up his studies, and go as much as possible into social life, in order that he might be drawn away from those subjects in which his mind had become so absorbed that his constitution was impaired; indeed, he was threatened with softening of the brain. On one occasion he was in a drawing-room, surrounded by cheerful company, when a half-sad smile passed over his countenance as he observed to a friend, "What is the use of you shutting up my books and not allowing me to work? While I have been here I have traced the derivations of three distinct Greek words, and detected their connection with certain Sanscrit roots." Such was the force of his ruling passion. Now if we can become so absorbed in intellectual researches, is it a wonder that we should become even more absorbed in those higher pursuits in which it is the privilege of Christian people to engage? To be doing God's work; to be endeavouring to make people happy; to be the means of regenerating human hearts and lives, and of reforming the homes of the vicious and degraded; to be restoring those that are fallen, and rescuing those that are tempted — is not this necessarily a most engrossing work, and one that should employ all our energies? It is well, my friends, indeed it is necessary, that we should be interested; for no man ever yet did anything well until he threw his whole heart into it and felt an interest in it. Yet in this very interest lies the danger; for may not the work become everything to us, and He for whom we work be allowed to fall into the background, and eventually be almost forgotten? Nor is it only our work that suffers. We suffer ourselves; for

our very work has practically clipped in between us and the Lord for whom we are working, and thus becomes to us, instead of a means of grace, drawing us nearer to God, on the contrary, rather a barrier between ourselves and God. How shall we guard against this error? Yon medieval monastic would reply, " Give up your work, tear yourself away from the activity of life, seclude yourself in the desert; and then you will be able to enjoy the fellowship of Christ and to enter upon the life of vision, the mystical blessedness of apprehension of the Divine." That is one answer; but it is not such as is given here, and we know what it has brought about in bygone ages. Let us look for an answer to all such misapprehensions to the scene that lies before us. On the one side, there is busy Martha; on the other, quiet, contemplative Mary. We are not told to be imitators of either Martha or Mary, but we are told to be imitators of the Lord Jesus Christ. Was there ever such a busy life as Christ's? Was there ever such a contemplative life as Christ's? He moved forward in the quietness of assured power. He was a true Quietist; for His life was very still, and yet its very stillness told. We may learn a good deal in this respect from observing outward objects. The mightiest things are not always the noisiest things. You go down to one of your own quays, and there you will see the little donkey-engine, on the deck of one of your ships, that is being employed in loading or unloading its freight. What a fuss it makes! Your ear is at once painfully arrested by its clatter and noise; but when you come to examine it, you find it is only a small and insignificant thing, in spite of the noise it makes. It is very useful, no doubt, and does its own work; but it does it very fussily, and that work is not a very great one. You descend into the vessel, and there you see the colossal engine which is to take the ship, donkey-engine and all, across the ocean; and it does all that work without making half as much noise as the little insignificant piece of mechanism that you have been listening to. Or take a picture from Nature. Look at yonder little bubbling rill flowing down the mountain side, dashing in and out between the rocks, and making a noise which can be heard a considerable distance away. You follow the stream until eventually it is absorbed in a great river, which flows smoothly, calmly, and quietly along in all the majesty of its strength. Perhaps it is strong enough to bear up the navy of a great nation, and yet it does not make the noise that the little stream did. Do let us endeavour, dear friends, in this somewhat noisy age, to distinguish between noise and power. We sometimes think that noise is power, and that if we can create a certain amount of bustle we are doing a large amount of work. I think our work is done well just in proportion to the absence of bustle from it. Now to correct this noisy fussiness we need to learn to imitate Mary and to sit at Jesus' feet, and in silence and stillness of soul to hear His words. No amount of service will make up for the loss of this inward and secret fellowship of the soul with Christ — this hidden life of love, in which Christ and the consecrated heart are bound together in a certain holy intimacy and familiarity. This it is that sanctifies even the most commonplace toil, and the loss of this robs even the holiest things of their sanctity. Notice then, first, Mary sat at Jesus' feet as a learner; and if we desire to learn, here it is that we must receive our lessons. Several thoughts suggest themselves to our minds as we see her sitting there. Let us dwell upon them for a few moments. First, sitting at His feet, she is taking the place of the lowly; and only those who wish to be such can learn of Jesus. The proud and self-confident, whether they be intellectually proud, or morally proud, or spiritually proud, will ever have to go empty away; but "such as are gentle, them shall He learn His way." Next, observe, it is the place of true honour and dignity; for it is better to be a junior scholar in the school of Christ than to be a distinguished philosopher untaught by Him. Next, let me point out to you that while she was sitting here she was in a position, not only to learn by Him, but to learn of Him. It was not merely that she heard the

truth from Him; it was rather that she found the truth in Him. He was Himself to her the Truth. And we, too, dear brethren, need to discern the difference between learning about Christ or learning by Christ and learning Christ. We may be good theologians and yet bad Christians. We cannot sit with Mary now before a visible Christ, but we can contemplate His moral features even as she gazed upon His outward countenance, and we can hear His spiritual teaching even as she heard His outward voice. And there is a sense in which we may be said to know more of Christ than at this time Mary did or could know; for she had never gazed upon the cross, and read the more perfect revelation of the Divine character as it is written there. Come, let us look at Mary, that we may learn to be a learner. How impressed she is with His superior wisdom; how little confidence has she in her own. Nay, the more she learns, I doubt not, the more she feels her ignorance. Oh, blessed is the ignorance that brings us so near to infinite wisdom, and blessed the child-like simplicity that enables us to understand what to the world may seem inexplicable! Then see how absorbed she is. I can never believe that Mary was selfish and inconsiderate. If she had been, I feel sure Jesus would have gently reprov'd and not commended her. When Mary is next introduced to our notice she is again at Jesus' feet, and this time she is at His feet as a mourner. Blessed are those mourners whom sorrow drives to Jesus' feet; for they shall indeed be comforted! I refer for a moment to the passage (John. 11:32): "Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Oh, blessed are the trials that bring us to Jesus' feet! The sorrows of this world harden and embitter some people. They grow sour and selfish. I dare say she felt as if she had never loved Him so much before, as she loved Him then when she saw those tears of His. When we feel crushed with sorrow, do let us try to remember that Jesus Christ Himself was the Man of sorrows. Now, dear friends, let us look at Mary once again. We have seen her at the Lord's feet as a learner, and we have seen her there as a mourner: and now, in John 12., we shall see her at the Lord's feet as a worshipper. Turn for a moment to the beginning of that chapter: "Then Jesus, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom He raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served." Dear Martha! how I love her for it! Always true to her character; never weary of waiting on such a Guest, and this time not even in her own house. Even in the house of Simon Martha must wait upon her Lord; no mere hireling or slave shall be allowed to minister to Him while Martha's willing hands and heart are near. The truest form of worship is, first of all, the presentation to God of all that is most precious, all that is most costly, that we have or that we are.

(W. H. Aitken, M. A.)

The Poor Invited to a Feast

Luke 14:12-14

Then said he also to him that bade him, When you make a dinner or a supper, call not your friends, nor your brothers...

When I was quite a little boy, there lived in my father's house a man whom, as I look back, I, in common with most who knew him, cannot help regarding as, perhaps, the holiest man we were acquainted with. He lived a life of singular devotion and self-denial, and seemed to walk constantly in the presence of God. Some little time ago, when in Liverpool, I accidentally came across the person in whose house he had lodged in the days when he had first devoted himself to God, when he was quite a young man, before his connection with my own beloved father was as close as it afterwards became. This good man, who kept the house in which this gentleman lodged, told me a few anecdotes about him, and, amongst others, I remember the following: "Ah, Mr. Aitken!" said the man, "I shall never forget Mr. C's Christmas dinner." I said, "I wish you would tell me about it;" and he replied, "I will." "Christmas Day came near, and Mr. C called up my wife, and said to her, 'Now, I want you to make the very best dinner you possibly can; I am going to give a dinner-party.' 'Well, Mr. C,' she said, 'you have been a long time in my house, and I never heard you talk of giving a dinner-party yet; but I will see to it that it is a right good dinner, and there shall be no mistake about it.' 'Do your best,' he said; 'I am going to invite my friends, and I want everything to be done properly.' My wife set to work and got a very good dinner indeed. Christmas Day came. Towards evening we were expecting the gentlemen to turn up who had been invited by our lodger; we did not know who they were, but we made sure they would be people worthy of the occasion. After a time, there came a knock at the door. I opened the door, and there stood before me a man clothed in rags. He had evidently washed his face, and got himself up a little for the occasion; at the same time he was a beggar, pure and simple. He said, 'Does Mr. C live here?' 'Yes,' I replied; 'he lodges here, but you cannot see him; he is just going to sit down to dinner.' 'But,' said the man, 'I was invited to come here to dinner this evening.' You may imagine my horror and astonishment; I could scarcely contain myself. 'What!' I said; 'you invited to come here this evening, a man like you?' I had scarcely got the words out of my mouth before I saw another poor, miserable specimen of humanity crawling round the corner; he was another of Mr. C's guests. By-and-by, there was a round dozen of them, or something like a score; and in they came, the most haggard, miserable, woe-begone objects you could possibly conceive. They went into my wife's nice, smart-looking dining-room, with that grand white cloth, and all the good things which had been so carefully prepared. It almost took one's breath away to see them. But when we saw the good man himself, setting to work, like the Master of old (who girded Himself to serve His disciples) — setting to work to make these men happy, and help them to spend a pleasant evening, without stiffness or formality, we thought, 'After all, he is right. This is the best sort of dinner-party;' and we did not grudge the labour we had bestowed." Now, I have told that little anecdote in order to illustrate the fact that our Lord's teaching on such subjects is eminently practical, and that when He gives a suggestion, you may be sure that it is a very sensible and sound one.

(W. H. Aitken, M. A.)

The Excuses

Luke 14:16-24

Then said he to him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:...

"I pray thee, have me excused." I do not think you can offer a worse prayer than that. Of all the prayers that ever left human lips, and of all the desires that ever formed themselves within human hearts, I think this is the most fatal. Must I not go as far as to say that such a reception of the offer of God's mercy constitutes the grand crowning sin of man? One might have expected there would have been quite a demand for invitations, that everybody would have been besieging the house and asking the chamberlain, or the secretary, or the great person, whoever he might be, "Can you give us an invitation to the feast?" When one of our princes is married, only a certain number of invitations are issued; and only a certain number of people can be present on the occasion. Supposing the tickets for such a ceremony could be sold, I wonder what they would fetch. I should not be surprised if some gentlemen in London would be ready to pay down a hundred or five hundred pounds, just for the privilege of being present and being able to say, "I saw Prince So-and-so married." But the honour cannot be bought for money; you must occupy a high social position before you can get such an invitation. Whoever heard of a man in such circumstances making an excuse? Now about these excuses. I want you to observe, my friends, how these men received the message. In Matthew's Gospel we read of some who "entreated the servants spitefully, and slew them." And there has been always a class of that kind — I mean to say, that there is always a certain number of persons bitterly hostile to religion. They hate it. If they could, they would kindle the fires of Smithfield again. There was another class of persons to whom the invitation came; and who are they? The man whom he now addresses is a most polite and civil person, a perfect gentleman. Oh, dear me, no! Say a rough word! Never thought of such a thing. "My good sir, now I hope you will understand that the very last thing I wish is, to convey to the mind of that admirable person who sent you on your errand anything like a feeling of contempt for the kind invitation which he has been good enough to offer me. On the contrary, I have the greatest possible respect for him. I should be very sorry indeed if anything I said hurt his feelings in the least degree; but the real plain truth of it is, that you know, sir, I am in a very awkward position. I should be very glad to go to the feast; I have no doubt it is an excellent feast. It is a great honour to be asked to go to such a place; at the same time, it so happens very unfortunately that I have got something else on hand. I have just bought an estate over there; I am just going to start to see it. That is the way it was done — civilly, respectfully, I may almost say, reverently: but it was done all the same. And that is just the way it is done by many still. When I ask the question, How is the Lord Jesus Christ rejected in our England in the nineteenth century? I find my answer, not merely in the open blasphemy, not merely in the atheism and unbelief. I find the terrible answer coming back to me, "He is rejected by the people who go to church, who hear the message of salvation sounded in their ears from Sunday to Sunday, who have had great privileges, and who will tell you they have great respect for religion." They subscribe to the Church Missionary Society, or to any other society they think will do good. Now observe the excuses that these men made did

not refer to things evil in themselves. Then, observe, once again — and this seems to me to be a very interesting and instructive point — it was not, after all, the pressure of necessary engagements that kept these people back from the feast. That is a very remarkable thing. The man does not say, "I am just on the point of transacting a bargain for a piece of land; but the deeds are waiting to be signed; and I cannot sign the deeds before I see the piece of land." It is not an ease of necessity of that kind. Observe the lesson. It is not the necessary occupations of life that keep men back from Christ. What is it? What did the man want to go and see his land for? In order that he might gloat over his acquisition. He might look round and round and say, "Dear me it is a nice snug place after all — as sweet a little house as ever I saw — nicely situated; the land, too, is the best in the country side. I have made a very good bargain; I think I shall make myself very comfortable here." The man's mind is given over to the thing, and he has no time to accept the invitation to the feast. So it is with many a man still. It is true to life, as God's Word always is. There is no harm in domestic happiness; but how many a man there is that allows the pleasures of his home to take the place that belongs to God; that puts those home comforts before his soul as a kind of substitute for the presence and power of God in his heart? Whenever a man does that, he turns the pure and holy relationships of life into the devil's own snare, and the things which were for his peace become to him an occasion of falling. So they made their decision; and that decision was — "I pray thee have me excused." What I said at the start of my sermon, I say again; it is the worst prayer ever offered, and, like many a bad prayer, my friends, it was a prayer that was answered. And I am persuaded that whenever men offer such a prayer, they will get an answer. "Yes, not one of them shall taste of My supper." So they were excused; and by-and-by the table was spread, and the guests were gathered together: and the minstrels tuned their harps, and the song commenced, and the feast, and the joy, and the pleasure; and the King came in to see the guests. Yes, and all the while these men were excused. That man over there is walking round and round his land, until at last I think I can hear him saying to himself, "Well, after all, there isn't much to be got out of a field." Ah, he is beginning to tire of it already! And the other man feels it, too. After all, you cannot make a heaven out of five yoke of oxen. And my eye follows the man that had married his wife — where is he now? Look! he and his wife are bending over the corpse of their firstborn child; and the hot, scalding tears are falling. He has found it out now; after all, domestic happiness is a very different thing from heaven. My brothers, are there any of you that are saying in your hearts, "I pray Thee have me excused"? Well, let me ask you, what are you asking the Lord to excuse you from? "O Lord, I pray Thee have me excused from being happy. I want to go on in my misery; let me alone. O Lord! I have got a load of unforgiven sin in my heart; I don't want to part with it just yet. 'I pray Thee have me excused.'" My young friend there went to the meeting, last night, at Exeter Hall, and cast his burden on his Saviour. I met him in the street; I scarcely knew him. "Have you heard the news, old fellow? I am a new man." He was evidently very happy; I never saw a man so happy. Lord, I pray Thee have me excused from such happiness.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Invitation

Luke 14:16-24

Then said he to him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:...

Now we come to our Lord's description of what a really religious life is. He gives it to us under the figure of a feast. Let us try and get some lessons from this; for when our Lord employs a figure, we may be sure He has a meaning in it. What are the thoughts connected with the figure? In the first place, A FEAST IS DESIGNED FOR THE SATISFACTION OF OUR NATURAL APPETITES, is it not? We go to a feast, not that we may be hungry, but that we may be fed. Wherever Christ goes, the first thing He proposes to do, my dear friends, is to satisfy the wants of our souls. He knows better than we what those wants are, and how incapable we are of satisfying them; and you know it too, if you will but reflect. Is there not in your daily occupations, and pleasures, and cares a certain secret sense of something wanting? When you succeed in life, do not you feel strangely disappointed with the results of success? How little pleased you are with that which you thought might be expected to give the most exquisite pleasure! Oh, my young friends, how strange it is that we all fall into the fallacy, or, at any rate, so many of us do, of supposing that we can make up in quantity for that which is radically deficient in quality. You understand what I mean. Here is a boat-load of shipwrecked mariners, tossing about on the wide waste of waters. We will suppose that one of them, burning with thirst, dips his fingers into the briny ocean, and just puts two drops of the water on his tongue; does that satisfy him? Not a whit; on the contrary, it increases his thirst. Suppose the man thinks, "What I want is increased quantity; two drops will satisfy no man's thirst; if I can only get enough I shall surely be satisfied." And suppose he were to lean his head over the gunwale of the boat, and take a deep draught of the brine, would that satisfy him any more than the two drops? Some time ago a friend of mine was coming home from Australia in a ship that took fire. Those on board were saved in two boats one a large and the other a small one. On board the smaller boat was this gentle man and his wife, and into it had been cast, in the conclusion and hurry of the moment, several cases containing solid gold to the value of many thousand pounds in each. In the large boat there was a considerable quantity of provisions, but in the smaller boat there was a very slender supply of provisions, but a large amount of gold. The men pulled away from the burning ship; there was a stiff breeze rising, and they knew that in all probability they should not see each other in the morning dawn; so just before they separated for the night, they began to overhaul their provisions. The men on board the smaller boat found that they had only a meagre supply. My friend remarked that he should never forget the moment when three or four stalwart sailors lifted up a huge case of gold, held it before the eyes of the men in the other boat, and shouted across the water, "Ten thousand pounds for one cask of bacon!" A big price, was it not? The men would not look at it! That one cask of bacon was worth all the gold in the world to them. Why? Because the meat was congruous to their natural appetite, and the gold was not; they could feed themselves with the one, but not with the other. Now, young man, the world is whispering in your ear: What you want is, not to change your mode of satisfying your appetite, but to have a little more. You are not very rich, you cannot indulge yourself in going to the theatre

every night? perhaps you can only go once a fortnight or once a month; make a little money; get on in life; set up in business for yourself, and then you will be able to go every night in the week if you like.

2. Then again, a feast is not only an occasion for satisfying our wants; IT IS ALSO USUALLY AN OCCASION FOR MERRIMENT, HILARITY, ENJOYMENT, IS IT NOT? We do not go to a feast to wear very long faces, to look very mournful and miserable. It is true, men sometimes do look very grave at feasts, because they are so unlike what feasts ought to be; there is so much form and ceremony, and so little social enjoyment in them. Everything is real that God gives. Blessed are they who are permitted to sit down at the board which has been spread by the hands of Jesus. But you say, "Do you really believe it? Is it true? Do you mean that it is all a lie that the devil has been telling us — that if you become a real Christian, you will grow so gloomy, and look so sad, and that life will lose all its charm? Is that really false? Surely it never can be." Why do so many people say this? I will tell you. Look yonder. There is a man who is a Christian — at any rate, he calls himself so; and, dear me, what a miserable sort of being he is! Yes, with shame and sorrow I admit it; there we discover the foundation of the devil's lie. The truth is, there are so many of us who name the name of Christ, but do not give ourselves wholly up to God. There are many people who call themselves Christians, but who give occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme. There is many a Christian, for instance, who does not walk by faith, but by unbelief. Look at a man like Paul; there you find one who has committed himself to God's will. At first sight the man of the world might say, "Well, he gets a rough life of it. I should not like to lead such a life, tossing about to and fro over the wide world like a waif and stray in human society, with nobody to say a kind word to him, sometimes shipwrecked, sometimes exposed to perils of robbers, sometimes thrust outside the city. Dear me, I should not like to lead such a life!" Would you not? Look a little closer, my dear man. Look at the man's face; listen to some of the openings of his heart. Amid all his outward trials, difficulties, and persecutions, he says he is always rejoicing. Are you always rejoicing? Where is the worldly man in London who is always rejoicing? Ah, who are so happy as real Christians? Young man, when you form your idea of a Christian, take care that you get hold of the genuine article. Suppose I were to say, "Have you ever seen a rose?" "Well, no," you might reply; "I have heard a good deal about the rose, but I have never seen one." And suppose I were to say, "I will show you one; come along with me," and then were to take you down to one of the purlieus of London, to some miserable, sodden-looking, uncultivated little garden, and show you a poor, half-dead, struggling plant, just trying to put out a few little crimson leaves, which were already being mercilessly nipped and shrivelled up by the chemical compounds which make up the air of this city of London. The thing is already decaying; there is no fragrance about it, no beauty, no perfection or symmetry of form. Suppose I say, "There is a rose I did you ever see such a beautiful thing in your life?" And suppose there was a friend from the country beside us; would he not say, "Don't call that a rose. The man will turn back, saying, 'I have seen a rose; but I wouldn't go a couple of yards to see another.' Take him clown to my garden in the country, and show him the standard rose-bush outside my door; he will remember that if he has never seen one before. Come with me, my lad, and I will show you what a rose is like." Now, when you form an idea about a Christian, don't get hold of some poor, blighted Christian, shrivelled up by the east wind of worldliness; don't get hold of a Christian who tries to serve two masters — God and the world too; don't get hold of a Christian who leads a life of chronic unbelief, a sort of asthmatic Christian, who cannot get his breath at all. No, no; get hold of a Christian in good, sound health, who can honestly

say, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Then compare his life with your own; and if you do not come to the conclusion that that man is, all round, a hundredfold happier than you are, or ever can hope to be, so long as you remain a child of the world, then I will say that my gospel is no longer worth preaching, and the Word of God no longer worth trusting. But you will be constrained to make the admission.

3. Again, what is a feast? It is a time for feeding the body, a time for enjoying ourselves; IT IS ALSO A TIME FOR PLEASANT SOCIAL INTERCOURSE. I find that a great many people are kept back from Christ, especially young men, because they think they would have so much to give up in the way of friends. Not very long ago a gentleman said to me, "One of the things that struck me most after my conversion was the effect on my relations with other people. I always passed for an affectionate husband, and loving father; but really, really, as I looked at my wife and my children, it seemed as if I loved them with an entirely new affection, as though I had never really loved them before. I loved them with such a new and mighty love, that it just seemed as if I had become their father or husband over again. But that was not all. When I came into contact with other Christians, I found out that I got to know more of, and to be really more attached to, men whom I had only known ten days or a fortnight — real Christians — than I was to men whom I had been meeting day after day in business, or social life, and coming constantly in contact with, long, long years before. I seemed to know more of a man in a week than I had been able to know of a man of the world in a twelvemonth before. So wonderful was the change in my own personal feelings towards others, that I felt that the number of my brothers was indefinitely multiplied." My friends, it will be so. Believe me, where the grace of God gets into the human heart it makes us brothers.

(W. H. Aitken.)

A Sinner Brought to His Right Mind

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons:...

1. This young man first "came to himself" with regard to the past. He had thought previously that he was acting "sensibly": now he sees that he has been playing the fool. He has been trying all along to persuade himself that he has really been enjoying himself; now he suddenly comes to the conclusion that all the while he has been a stranger to real happiness. He looks at those four, or five, or six years: before, he had plumed himself upon the life he had been leading; now, he scarcely dares to think about it; he hides his face with shame; he buries it in his hands, as he sits there in the field, the hot tears streaming through his fingers. "What a fool I have been! What a wretch I have been! What a base ingrate I have been! Good God! wert Thou to strike me down with a thunderbolt of displeasure to the very depths of hell, it is only what I deserve."

2. And he "comes to himself" with regard to the present. He finds himself face to face with death. Nearer and nearer the grim spectre draws; the bow seems already bent, and the arrow seems already fixed, and in a moment the fatal shaft may fly, and his mortal career may end in doom. Face to face with death — it is an awful thing! He feels it in his own body. That strange numbness that is creeping over him, that sense of mortal weakness, that stupor which has already been paralyzing the senses — what is it? Incipient death. His strength has passed into weakness; he can scarcely totter across the field; his haggard form seems more fit for a sepulchre than for human society. What can he do? Whatever he can do he must do quickly. The tide of life is ebbing fast; a few more hours, and his opportunity will be gone. It is a long way to the country he has left — a long way to his father's house; if anything is to be done, not so much as a moment is to be lost.

3. And thus it is that he also "comes to himself" with regard to the future. The future! What can he do? What hope is there for him? Has he not lost every chance, and thrown away every possibility? Nay, it strikes him that there is just one faint ray of hope: it seems a very faint one. Is there a possibility that he may get some relief from his friends in this distant land? No, he has given that up altogether. Can he not find a better master somewhere. No, he has tried all through the famine-stricken country, and this man that has "sent him into the fields to feed swine" is the best that he can find. What can he do? Can he work any harder? No, he has no strength left to work. Where is hope to be found? Where is that ray of dim, uncertain light coming from? There rises up within his recollection the memory of a peaceful home, of calm, happy days. The bright sunlight of his childhood returns to his memory like a pleasant dream amidst the frightful horrors of his present experience. Could he regain it; could he retrace his steps, and get one more look at that dear old place; could he but sit down amongst the "hired servants" of his father's house!

4. My friends, he not only "comes to himself" with regard to himself, but also with regard to his father: he had taken a wrong view of his father — a distorted view: he had painted him in the most

repulsive colours; now he takes a different view of the case, and comes to the conclusion that, after all, he was wrong. He had wronged those hoary hairs. The thought rises in his mind, "He loved me; yes, he loved me after all; I saw the tear start into his eye when I left home; he wrung my hand when I went away from him, and his lip was quivering; though I have given him so much trouble, I know he loved me; he was never hard on me: when, as a child, I wanted anything reasonable, it was always within my reach; if I had childish troubles, those kind, fatherly hands were laid upon my brow, and fatherly words of tenderness were spoken in my ear — yes, he did love me; I have wronged him, I had no right to think him hard; he was not hard: I wonder if he is changed; years have passed over him, years have passed over me; I left him with a smiting countenance; I put on my best appearance, and tried to seem as though I did not care a straw for leaving him: perhaps he has hardened his heart against me, and will never look at me again; yet, perhaps — perhaps there is something like love in his heart towards me still; surely he cannot have altogether ceased to love his poor wandering boy." So he starts to his feet, and in another moment the word of resolution has sped forth from his lips, "I will arise and go to my father." It is even so with thee, dear awakened sinner. So soon as God begins to awaken thee, He awakens thee first of all with regard to the past. Are there not some of you that are awakened with regard to the past? You used to look upon it with complacency, now you look upon it with horror. You used to think well of yourself, now you cannot speak of yourself too hardly. There was a time when you flattered yourself that, at any rate, you were no worse than other people; now it seems as if you could not invent any epithet sufficiently strong to indicate your horror and disgust at your past life. How is it? You are beginning to "come to yourself," too, with regard to your present. You find yourself face to face with death. Spiritual death has already grasped you; its iron clutch is on you; that dread spectre is looking you in the face; you are beginning to realize, in your own terrible experience, the force of those words, "Dying, thou shalt die!" Do what you will, you cannot writhe out of the grasp of that terrible spiritual arrest. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And you come to yourself with respect to the future. "Is there a possibility that I can be otherwise? May I turn my back upon the past? Is it possible that a sinner like me can lead a new life? May even I become a new creature?" Then it is that the soul begins to "come to itself" with respect to the character of the Father. Ah, my dear friends, you may have maligned Him, you may have slandered Him, you may have allowed Satan to misrepresent Him to your own fancy; you may have conceived of Him "as an austere man, reaping where He had not sown, and gathering where He had not strayed." It seemed as though you could not speak too harshly of Him. But all that has changed, and you are beginning to come to the conclusion that after all He is your Father, that He has a Father's tenderness, pity and love; that although you have misrepresented Him so long, and sinned against Him so grossly, yet there must be something in that heart of His that goes out towards your misery. Ah! my friend, you are only just beginning to "come to yourself" about that Father: but if you will go a little nearer to that Father's house, bare your bosom to that Father's influence — if you will expose yourself to that Father's eye, it will not be long before you will have a different estimate from what you have even at this moment of what that Father's love really is. Think not of God the Father as if He were unsympathetic. Believe what Christ Himself has taught of His Father's love (Oh that I could write it on your heart of hearts at this moment!): "God so loved the world that He gave His Son."

(W. M. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Father

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons:...

Remove the word Father from this sentence, and you rob it at once of all the wondrous pathos that lies in it, and that has so often brought tears to the eye of the penitent and contrition to his heart. Let us say, "Oh, Sovereign King, I have sinned against Thee!" and we may tremble, but we do not weep. "Oh, Judge of all, I have sinned against Thee!" and perhaps we tremble still more, but our heart doesn't melt. But let us say and feel, "Father, I have sinned against Thee and Thy Fatherly love," and, lo! our hard heart begins to break, and the unbidden tears most likely begin to rise. What a doubly damnable sin to sin against a Father, and such a Father! A young man at one of our meetings to whom I had spoken on the previous evening said to me, "When I went home last night I took up my Bible and began to read. I had not read very long when I came to these words, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son;' and, I can tell you, they pretty well broke my heart. I lay awake just sobbing, for I don't know how long, repeating over these words, 'Father, I have sinned.'"

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Give Me My Portion

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons:...

"Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." The young man seems to say, "My youth is my own, and all that it brings within my reach. Why should you fetter me with restraints, or impose upon me an unfriendly yoke? It is enjoyment that makes life worth having, and self-gratification means enjoyment. Let me have my liberty, and do exactly what I please. Why have to weigh each particular action, and turn away from pleasures that attract me because they are supposed to be wrong? Religion means giving up everything I like, and submitting to things that I don't like; it means all that is tedious and irksome. I prefer to be my own. Give me my portion of goods — the sunny hours of youth; they are mine, and I will do with them as I please." "Give me my portion of goods," says that child of fashion. "Youth and beauty, and attractive manners, and wit and popularity, and the faculty of winning admiration and even affection — they are all alike mine, and I intend to get all I can out of them. Why shouldn't I? If I were to listen to the claims of religion, I should have to stop and think before I allowed myself to enjoy anything; and conscience might be troublesome, and I might be checked and worried by all sorts of straight-laced notions, and thus I might leave the flowers of life unplucked and the fruit of the garden ungathered. Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." And it is not only the young and the heedless that urge the request. Would that we grew wiser as we grow older! "Give me my portion," the man of the world seems to say. "Money, and all that it will buy — power and popularity, and success and social position, the excitements of commerce, the gratification of political or social ambition — these are my portion. If I were to become religious, who knows how my course of life might have to be changed and modified? Indeed, I might have to alter its whole aim and purpose, and impose upon myself all sorts of obligations which I pay no heed to now. My money is mine; why shouldn't I use it as I please? My time is mine; why should I not spend it as I like? My faculties and talents are my own; why should I not employ them for my own gratification?" "Give me my portion of goods," exclaims the woman of the world. "My children are my own, and I will train them up in the way wherein I wish they should go. I will, if I please, educate them in vanity, and train them to 'shine in society,' so that my motherly pride may be gratified. My house is my own; it shall be the home of luxury and the temple of domestic pleasure. I will order it as I will, but there shall be no place there for Him who was welcomed of old at Bethany. Jesus Christ might prove a troublesome guest, and dispute my supreme authority, if He once were welcomed there. It is my own home, and I will do with it as I please." Thus it is that men and women still claim their portion of goods. And God looks on, and sees them take His gifts without even the word of thanks which no doubt fell from the lips of the prodigal, and find in these His gifts a reason for turning their backs upon the Giver; and yet He does not interfere any more than this father did. Wilful man must have his own way, until at last, in bitter grief and anguish, either here or hereafter, he reaps the fruit of it, and finds that "there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

(W. M. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

God Allows Man to Use His Independence

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons:...

"Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." The young man seems to say, "My youth is my own, and all that it brings within my reach. Why should you fetter me with restraints, or impose upon me an unfriendly yoke? It is enjoyment that makes life worth having, and self-gratification means enjoyment. Let me have my liberty, and do exactly what I please. Why have to weigh each particular action, and turn away from pleasures that attract me because they are supposed to be wrong? Religion means giving up everything I like, and submitting to things that I don't like; it means all that is tedious and irksome. I prefer to be my own. Give me my portion of goods — the sunny hours of youth; they are mine, and I will do with them as I please." "Give me my portion of goods," says that child of fashion. "Youth and beauty, and attractive manners, and wit and popularity, and the faculty of winning admiration and even affection — they are all alike mine, and I intend to get all I can out of them. Why shouldn't I? If I were to listen to the claims of religion, I should have to stop and think before I allowed myself to enjoy anything; and conscience might be troublesome, and I might be checked and worried by all sorts of straight-laced notions, and thus I might leave the flowers of life unplucked and the fruit of the garden ungathered. Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." And it is not only the young and the heedless that urge the request. Would that we grew wiser as we grow older! "Give me my portion," the man of the world seems to say. "Money, and all that it will buy — power and popularity, and success and social position, the excitements of commerce, the gratification of political or social ambition — these are my portion. If I were to become religious, who knows how my course of life might have to be changed and modified? Indeed, I might have to alter its whole aim and purpose, and impose upon myself all sorts of obligations which I pay no heed to now. My money is mine; why shouldn't I use it as I please? My time is mine; why should I not spend it as I like? My faculties and talents are my own; why should I not employ them for my own gratification?" "Give me my portion of goods," exclaims the woman of the world. "My children are my own, and I will train them up in the way wherein I wish they should go. I will, if I please, educate them in vanity, and train them to 'shine in society,' so that my motherly pride may be gratified. My house is my own; it shall be the home of luxury and the temple of domestic pleasure. I will order it as I will, but there shall be no place there for Him who was welcomed of old at Bethany. Jesus Christ might prove a troublesome guest, and dispute my supreme authority, if He once were welcomed there. It is my own home, and I will do with it as I please." Thus it is that men and women still claim their portion of goods. And God looks on, and sees them take His gifts without even the word of thanks which no doubt fell from the lips of the prodigal, and find in these His gifts a reason for turning their backs upon the Giver; and yet He does not interfere any more than this father did. Wilful man must have his own way, until at last, in bitter grief and anguish, either here or hereafter, he reaps the fruit of it, and finds that "there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

(W. M. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Beginning Starvation

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons:...

It is surely worthy of notice that the father makes no sort of difficulty of compliance with his request. We do not even hear of a word of expostulation on his part. And this may teach us that when we elect to break away from our proper relations with God, and to assert our own independence, or fancied independence, of Him, we are free to do so. God does not constrain our will by the assertion of His superior power. If we are determined to turn our backs on Him, and break away from His control, we can do it, and He won't hinder us, however much it may cut Him to the heart that we should wish to adopt such a course. I see a look of sadness pass over that venerable face, but that is the only outward sign of the sorrow and disappointment that fill the father's heart. He calls both his sons into his presence, and there and then he divides his whole fortune between them, and the discontented boy finds himself possessed of all he desired, and of more than all that he had dared to hope for. At last he is his own master, and can take his own course, and do just as he pleases. His eyes glisten, his heart bounds; but in the midst of his wild, hilarious excitement that sorrowful look on his father's face must ever and again, methinks, have risen on his memory. Do you think, after all, he was really happy? Was there not already a bitter drop in his cup? He had gained his fortune, but how much had it cost!

(W. M. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Far Country

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons:...

A far country! Yes, indeed, it is a long and weary journey that the soul takes when it turns its back upon God. Shall we compare it to an ill-starred voyage from the tropics to the Polar Sea? I see yon gallant bark, as she pursues her northward course, gaily gliding over summer seas. She coasts along the shores of a vast continent, rich in tropical luxuriance and bathed in perennial sunshine; but still as she passes on the gorgeous vision keeps fading from her view. She is northward bound. By and by things begin to wear a different aspect. She is sailing past lands of the Temperate Zone; vegetation is less luxurious, the sun is ever and again obscured, and when it shines lacks its old power. A few weeks more and there is another change; sombre pine forests clothe the mountain-shoulder now, and snowy summits begin to appear above them, and the air grows chill, and the sun seems wan and powerless. A little further, and soon the pine woods are left behind, and ever and again huge, towering icebergs begin to appear. But still the cry is "Northward!" and the day grows shorter and the long nights colder, and the pitiless blast whistles through the frosted shrouds, end in the next scene there is the ship in "thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice," hemmed in by frozen seas, and far as the eye can reach, one weary waste of desolation, a region of perpetual winter, bereft of almost every sign of life, a place of the shadow of death. Such, as it seems to me, is a picture of the fatal progress of the human soul along the way of Cain, as he drifts further and further from the Divine influence, and his nobler impulses are checked, and his warmer affections chilled, and his holier energies paralyzed, while the heart is hardened with the deceitfulness of sin. Thus it is that men turn their backs on the true summer land, of the soul in God, and drift into the perpetual winter of godlessness. Yes, there is the chill of a perpetual winter in that tragic word godless. A godless heart! a heart whose highest honour it should have been to be the very dwelling-place of God; a heart that might have been warmed and brightened with the sunshine of His love, but now cold and indifferent to all His influences; a lonesome, desolate, orphaned heart, robbed of its highest honour and denied its holiest privileges; a desecrated shrine, a deserted temple, and yet an empty, weary, disappointed heart, that nothing else can satisfy. A godless home! where human love is never sanctified by the higher love of heaven, where all the purest and truest earthly pleasures that the great Father gives are received as mere matters of course without any recognition of the Giver, where His smile never adds lustre to human joys, and His sympathizing comfort is never sought in moments of anxiety and sorrow; a home where cares weigh heavily because there is no heavenly Friend to bear them, where strifes and dissensions are never stilled by the Prince of Peace, where "the daily round, the common task," carry no blessing along with them because God is not recognized there. A godless life-work! "It is but lost labour that ye haste to rise up early, and so late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness." "Labour not for the bread that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto eternal life"; but this perishing bread is all that we have left to labour for when once we have broken away from God. And so men scheme, and plan, and speculate, and toil, and fret, and hurry, and push and

sacrifice much of ease and comfort that they might enjoy; and all for what? .What does commercial success mean but sooner or later the loss of all that we have been spending our lives in trying to gain, just because God is excluded from our busy lives? Worst of all, a godless religion! for religion may be adopted and its observances respected, not as a means of bringing us nearer to God, but rather as a means of making us the better contented to dispense with Him. Oar conscience is deadened by the thought that we come up to the conventional standard in religion, and we may be less likely to be alarmed at the thought of our spiritual danger than if we had no religion at all; and yet our religion may never have brought us into any actual personal and spiritual contact with God. Oh, my brethren, with whatever other curse we may be cursed, God save us from the curse of a godless religion! A godless end! Ah! this seems too terrible to contemplate, and yet we must contemplate it; for it is set before us that we may take warning by contemplating it. My friends, I would have you remember that this far country of which I have been speaking is but the frontier, so to speak, of the far realms of death. This going forth from the presence of God, what is it but incipient death? Already the wandering soul is drifting away from the one life-centre of the universe — the heart of God; and every day's journey he takes is a journey deathward, until at length the terrible word "Depart," falling from the Judge's lips, sets the seal of doom upon the inexorable Nemesis of a lifelong sin.

(W. M. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Madness of Sinners

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons:...

A few months ago, I was conducting a Mission in the north of England, and the clergyman in whose church I was preaching, receiving from an anonymous correspondent one of the handbills which had been circulated in preparation for the Mission, with two words added after the words "A Mission" — viz., "for lunatics"; so that it read, "A Mission for lunatics!" I do not suppose that the man who wrote those words had any particular intention of telling the truth, but it is startling to think how near the truth he came. Perhaps, if we could see things as those bright intelligences see them, who are permitted to hover round this world of ours, and to be witnesses of human action, we should be disposed to regard (is it not possible that they do regard?) this world of ours as one great lunatic asylum. It must seem strange to them that to men and women there should be made such glorious offers, that before their eyes there should be spread such magnificent possibilities, and that, in the folly of their unbelief, they should turn their back upon their own truest interest, and sin against their own souls. Lunatics indeed! There are dangerous lunatics, frenzied by passion or goaded by ambition, so dangerous that sometimes their fellow lunatics have to put a kind of restraint upon them, for fear that the paroxysms of their mortal disease should carry them too far. Then there are harmless lunatics, men and women whose lives are simply insipid, who seem to be just as void of any object in life as the butterfly that flits from flower to flower, drifted about by every influence that happens to be for the moment affecting them, without any stability of purpose, without any recognition of the dignity of their own being. Then, again, there are the self-complacent lunatics, the men and women who are so particularly self-satisfied that they can afford to look down upon everybody else, and persuade themselves that they are models of good sense, and that those who are possessed of that spiritual wisdom which comes from above, are themselves in a state of insanity. Is it not so? Is not that just the way in which self-complacent men of the world speak about those who know something of the realities of eternity? Have we not heard it again and again, till we are almost tired of hearing it, ever since the days when Festus charged Paul with being "beside himself"? Indeed, this is one of the features of lunacy. You go into a lunatic asylum, and you will always find a large number of patients who regard themselves as injured persons, who are suffering not from their own disease of insanity, hut from the insanity of other people. There are some who fancy themselves kings upon their throne, and their subjects too insane to render them the honour which is their due. Others, who imagine themselves men of vast wealth and possessions, and those who ought to be their servants, too insane to render them the service they have a rightful claim to. So, while they persuade themselves that they, indeed are in the full possession of their senses, they also contrive to please themselves by thinking that other persons who are actually sane are afflicted with the very disease from which they are suffering. Friends, it is even so in the spiritual world. The men and women whom Satan has deluded most completely are just those who are the least conscious of their own insanity. The disease has taken so firm a hold upon their moral system that they believe that they are much more sane than those

who are living in the light of Divine wisdom. Their view of the case is an exact inversion of the truth; and as long as this moral stupor continues, the efforts which are made by those (who see things as they are), to awaken them from their fatal slumber, are regarded by these spiritual lunatics as simply the indication of moral infatuation, and they themselves, in their profound stupor, flatter themselves that they indeed alone are reasonable beings.

(W. M. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Pain of Self-Awakening

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons:...

The process of awakening and coming to ourselves is usually painful, sometimes appalling, always humiliating, and hence men shrink from it, choosing rather to sleep on, even if it be in the sleep of death, than to face all the pain, and distress, and trouble, and conflict which must accompany an awakening. I remember when I was a boy a poor waggoner in our parish met with an accident that came within a little of costing him his life. He was bringing a load up a very steep incline when the horse jibed, and man and cart and horse all went over into a reservoir. The unfortunate man was held under water by the shaft of the cart, which had fallen on the top of him, and when at last he was extricated it was supposed that life was extinct. Happily there was a doctor within call-restoratives were applied, and the poor man's life was saved; but when, after he had been under treatment for about an hour, he began to give signs of returning animation, the first exclamation that he uttered was, "Oh, let me die! let me die! Do, do, do let me die!" So cruel was the pain of awakening to one who was half dead. I have often thought that the cry of that poor man at pain of his physical restoration illustrates and explains the apparent perversity of some who seem to run away from conviction, and so endeavour to escape from the blessing they so sorely need. They shrink from coming to themselves because of the pain and anguish that this must need induce. The cry of their coward spirit seems to be not unlike that of that poor half-drowned wretch — "Oh, let me die! Do, do let me die!" But surely, brethren, life is worth having even at such a cost. Surely these sorrows and humiliations of returning vitality, these birth-throes of a new and higher life, are better than "the bitter pains of eternal death," where the anguish and distress are only part of a process of destruction.

(W. M. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Younger Son and His Demand

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons:...

The young man brought before us in this story is just the sort of person whom the world would describe as a thoroughly sensible fellow. I feel sure that such a man in our own day would be thus described by his companions. He showed his sense just in the way in which men of the world show theirs now. Let us regard him for a few moments from this point of view. The first thing that this sensible man does is to feel dissatisfied within himself at the condition of dependence in which he is introduced to us. The father seems to have been in comfortable circumstances—perhaps in affluence. The young man has never been begrudged anything; all his wants have been supplied as fast as they have arisen. But then his position was one of dependence, and it was that that made things so far from agreeable. It was not his father's way to bestow his wealth upon his children, so that they might possess an independent property, but to supply their reasonable wants as fast as they occurred, and it was against this state of things that the young man's will began to rebel. "Why should not I be like other fellows? What a humiliating thing it is that I should be treated like a grown up child! If I had my own fortune to do what I liked with, I should very soon be able to show this father of mine what the use of money is, and how it should be spent." The father does not refuse: he will not keep his son in a state of compulsory dependence upon him. There and then "he divides unto them his living." Observe, he "divides his living" between both his sons. It does not say that he gave half to the younger son and kept the other half himself, but "he divided unto them his living." What became of the elder son's portion? Where did he invest it? How did he employ it? We find that long years afterwards his elder son, says, "Thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends." Ah! the elder brother had the wisdom to give back what was his. No sooner was his portion of goods assigned to him than he put it back again in safekeeping. I can fancy him saying to his father, "I do not want my portion, I am quite happy, I have all I want." In a moment of discontent, at a later period, he allows himself to speak hardly of his father's treatment, but this eldest son understood his father on the whole, although for a moment he might be unfaithful to the consciousness of the benefits of his position: and so he had the wisdom to give back what his father had given to him. But the younger son was a far more sensible fellow than that. So soon as he gets his money, he makes up his mind to spend it according to his own heart's desire. So the second thing this particularly sensible young man does is to make up his mind that the restraints of home are positively intolerable. He cannot go on in this droning way any longer; he must see something of the world; life is hardly worth having under such conditions; he must break away from the restraints of the paternal roof, turn his back upon old associations, and go forth and enjoy himself: he has had enough of this hum-drum, tedious life; so, like a very sensible young man, he leaves his father's home, and goes forth into a distant land. I can fancy it cost him something at the moment. Nobody ever goes to hell without meeting with difficulties in the way. As he looked into his father's face and saw the tear rising in the old man's eye — as he took a long last look at the dear old home where he had spent so many happy and innocent years, I can fancy

it cost him something. A better instinct would sometimes assert itself within his nature. "Have you not been happy? Those sunny hours of childhood, what could have been more pleasant? If you have been unhappy it has been your own fault. Your brother is a happy man; why should not you have been?" But the lower instinct prevailed; his downright good common-sense was stronger than anything else: so that this thoroughly sensible man makes up his mind to turn his back upon his father's house, and into a distant land he goes. Now what was the next step that this "sensible fellow" took? When he had asserted his independence and had got away from his father, and the restraints of home, he began to enjoy himself. Surely he showed his sense in that! How does he enjoy himself? He "wasted his substance in riotous living." That does not sound very sensible just at first; but there are plenty of young men who show their good sense by pursuing the same course. "Oh," you say, "we do not approve of fellows being spendthrifts:" yet you approve of men spending something that is far more precious than money. How have you been spending your time? What have you to show for it? How have you been spending your influence? Every one of you might have been using it for eternity, and already there might have been a crown of glory laid up as the result of well-used influence. What has become of it? How have you been spending your money? for we may as well speak of that too. Some of you have been scattering it to the winds; others hoarding it up in the bank; some, laying it out in business speculations, and the very gold which you might have so used as to "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" has become the curse of your life. How does it appear in God's sight? Wasted! — that substance of yours squandered, because it has never been turned to any really good purpose. What was the next thing that this "sensible" young man did? He formed a great ninny gay acquaintances. I do not think there is a young man in this congregation that lives for the world, but will agree that he was on the whole a "sensible man" in doing that. It is just what you do. How many a young man there is who is kept back from doing what he knows is right because he has formed so many acquaintances, and is surrounded by the influence of his companions. He would like to be different, but then he cannot shake off their influence; they keep him spell-bound. How sensible you are to let those friends of yours do the very worst that your worst enemy could desire to do for you! Do you think that is "sensible"? What was the next thing that this "sensible" young man did? When his pleasures had all failed him, when his roses had become thorns, then he began to be sober, and like many sober people, he began to look about for employment. He finds it rather difficult to obtain any employment that suits him, but employment he must have. Oh! how like many of our worldly prodigals! When they have spent their youth in following one wild excitement after another — in poor, empty, idle hilarity and futile mirth — when manhood comes on with all its grave cares, they begin to occupy their minds with business. The mighty famine has begun to assert itself; the man is beginning to find the emptiness of the pleasures which he has lived for; he can no longer enjoy them; the capacity of enjoyment is beginning to pass away from him; and now he plunges into business; he becomes a slave of daily routine, it may be; his mind is taken up with a thousand occupations; he begins to work hard, and all to satisfy the moral hunger of his nature. He gives himself up to money-making, yet that does not satisfy, but he thinks it will. He flies to speculation: that excites, but does not satisfy — he hopes it will. He betakes himself to domestic occupation, the joys or the cares of family life, and he hopes to find satisfaction there, yet he does not. Is not the man a sensible being? The mighty famine becomes more and more insupportable, and the want becomes more and more appalling. Our young friend sits solitary in the field; cannot you see him? His clothes are torn into rags, his eyes are sunken in their sockets, his cheeks are

hollow, his lips are parched and cracked; he looks like the very effigy of famine itself. The swine are feeding around him; he is gnawing at the very husks which the swine eat. "And no man gave unto him." What, no man? No man. Of all his former friends, of those who had stood by him so faithfully as long as he had money to spend and luxuries to offer, what! no man? Not that boon companion, not that friend who only a few weeks ago swore that he would stand by him through thick and thin? No man? Nay, the last crust has been devoured. There he sits famine-stricken, solitary, the preying of hunger in his body, far more the prey of remorse in his scull There he sits. Poor "sensible" man! That is what his common-sense has brought him to. At this moment a change takes place. Holy Scripture describes it as a change from insanity to sanity. He ceases to be a lunatic, and he begins to be himself. "He came to himself." It passes from him like a horrible dream, that strange delirium of the life which he had been leading since he left his father's home, with all its transient circumstances, its fleeting joys, its gaudy decorations, the poor, empty bubbles that have broken in his grasp — it has all passed from him like a horrible dream. He starts, as from a night-mare. Cannot you see him as he springs from the ground, with a sudden light beaming upon his countenance, his face turned toward the home of his infancy? "What a fool I have been! My whole life has been one great mistake. From beginning to end, I have just been adding error to error as well as sin to sin. I have thrown away health, and affluence, and comfort, and respectability, and peace of mind, and innocency, and reputation, everything worth having — I have lost it all! And here I am, a wreck of a man; all real pleasure gone out of my life; stricken down by the fatal pestilence of sin, shrivelled up by the miserable famine which reigns within my nature. What a fool I am!" Oh, happy they who come to this conclusion before it is too late!

(W. M. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Unsatisfied Desires

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons:...

Who will give to the hungry heart of man, whose appetite will not, cannot, be put off with husks, whose desires are so infinite, whose yearning is so unutterable? Where shall we look to satisfy the craving of that spirit made to be filled with all the fulness of God? Who will give to him? Shall we appeal to the gaudy, painted world, with its brief pageant, its short-lived joys, its aimless tumult and hubbub? What has Fashion to give her votaries and her victims? A delirious dream, a momentary intoxication, a giddy whirl of social and animal excitement, and then the bitterness and the heartache as this unsubstantial feast of Tantalus passes from us, and leaves us as empty as ever. But the heart wants something more than a masquerade, something more than toys and gewgaws, with which for a little season grown-up children may disport themselves — something more than the sights and sounds that please the eye and ear for the moment, only to leave the real man still unpleased, as he asks impatiently, "Is this all? Is this all?" And still the dismal record remains, "And no man gave unto him." To whom shall we appeal? Can Mammon do nothing for us? Surely never was deity served with greater devotion by his devotees than day by day is lavished on him. Will he do nothing for our spiritual hunger? Ah, my brethren, the value of money is what it will fetch, and if it won't fetch us true satisfaction, or peace, or hope, or moral dignity, what the richer are we? Can the human spirit digest gold, or assimilate it to its mysterious substance? The rich fool in the parable seemed to indulge some such delusion, but he only proved his folly by doing so. So little can Mammon do for our real happiness, that we are in the habit of distinguishing the most devoted of his worshippers, the very high priests of his shrine, with the title of "misers," implying that they are of all men the most miserable. The indignant heart declines this mockery of its desire, and still the mournful sentence remains true, "And no man gave unto him." Where shall we look? Shall we fall back upon the charms of literature and art, and satiate our senses in the hope of ministering to our spirits? Here we meet with some encouragement from some of our modern teachers, who will have us believe in no heaven save a picture-gallery or a concert-room, and in no Deity save high art. And some would have us think that Nature is our true foster-mother, and that the satisfaction denied elsewhere is to be found in prying into her secrets and examining her hidden mysteries. These are noble dreamers, these hierophants of art and science; and perhaps they come the nearest of answering our demands. Yet even here we only find disappointment. The wise man was right when he said, "All things are full of weariness; man cannot utter it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing." These things please us most in early days, when first with youthful enthusiasm we begin to worship the beautiful or to investigate the curious; but there is something in man more divine than taste and more profound than curiosity, and this higher element in man neither art nor science can reach. "I don't know how it is," said a distinguished art critic, a man of the highest culture and refinement, and one who had possessed for the greater part of his life every facility for aesthetic enjoyment in his circumstances and training — "I don't know how it is, but now, in middle life, art no longer affects me as it once

did. There was once a keen joy that I would be conscious of in perusing a beautiful poem, or in looking at a really good picture, which I can't get up now, however much I may try. I can't work myself by any effort of my will into anything at all like the enthusiasm that once seemed quite spontaneous. I can't say I get much enjoyment out of art now; it's more a business than a pleasure." Still even in these higher regions, visited only by the few, and where we might expect that the mighty famine would be less keenly felt, it remains true, "And no man gave unto him."

(W. M. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Waste

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons:...

One tragic word seems to describe this young man's career of fatuous folly and sin in that far country, and oh, my brethren, it describes the lives of many more besides him! and that word is waste. "He wasted his substance in riotous living." Yes, I say it describes the lives of many more beside him. Shall I be wrong in saying it describes the lives of all who do not according to the measure of their light and knowledge live to God? The man who has turned his back on God, and who regards himself as his own, has already entered upon a course of waste, even though he do not, like the prodigal, waste his substance in riotous living. In the case of those who emulate the prodigal in leading dissipated and profligate lives, the waste is as obvious as it was in his case, and unhappily such cases are by no means rare. It is astonishing how some men will waste things that we all value, and none, you would think, would willingly be stripped of. Take, for example, money, or social position, or health, or natural affection. No sane man doubts that each of these has a value of its own; indeed the general tendency of men is perhaps to value them too highly; yet what multitudes of men ruthlessly waste these precious possessions, as if they were not of the slightest value, and as if it were an object with them to get rid of them. And if you notice carefully, it is just the spirit of independence that leads them to do this. They conceive that liberty consists in doing whatever passing impulse may dispose them to do; but they feel that were they under the Divine control they would be continually subjected to checks and restraints which would interfere with their impulses, and prevent them from doing what at the moment they might wish. So the language of their hearts is, "Let us break His bands asunder, and cast away His cords from us." And they do exactly as they please, and the result is — waste. It is indeed surprising what exploits of waste some men contrive to perform under the influence of this habit of wilful self-pleasing. I heard of a Russian nobleman not long ago who was heir to a fortune of some £400, 000 a year, yet it had not been in his hands very long before he was actually a bankrupt. It surely requires some ingenuity to get through such a fortune, and yet somehow he managed it, A friend of mine was called to the bedside of a poor miserable wretch who was dying of delirium tremens. I used the word bedside, but, strictly, bed there was none in the room where the dying man lay in his last lucid interval before the terrible end. There he lay, bloated, poverty-stricken, filthy, scarcely covered with the rags which were his only apology for a bed; there he lay dying in stony despair; yet he told my friend that he had once been a prosperous London man of business, and had been worth his fifty thousand pounds. I visited a large seaside town a few years ago, and it was thought desirable, as multitudes thronged the esplanade, to send men with boards along it. I was told that one of the men, who carried the boards for a slender pittance of a few pence a day, was the son and heir of a man who had been once, and I believe continued to be up to his death, one of the richest shopkeepers in that large town; yet here was his son in absolute destitution, and he had brought it all upon himself by waste. But why should I multiply instances? Alas I there are few of us that have not had cases brought under our notice of the almost incredible folly exhibited by those

who think themselves sensible men in this respect. I want to lay stress upon the fact that the folly arises from our taking a false view of what money is, and of what our relations to it are. If a man locks upon money as simply a means of purchasing self-gratification in whatever form it seems most attractive, it is not surprising that he should squander it lightly under the influence of a passing impulse. Considerations of prudence and forecast do not weigh against the claims of self-indulgence. The object of money seems to the spendthrift to be to procure enjoyment, and this is to be gained, it seems to him, rather by spending it than by keeping it, and therefore he proceeds to spend it. And so he wastes his substance, not because he spends, but because he regards that which he spends as his own to do exactly what he likes with. Oh, how many men are all the poorer for their fortunes! But money is not the only thing we waste when we turn our backs upon God, and we can trace the operation of the same law in every case. God has given to all of us faculties, and to some of us special gifts and talents. If we put these in His hands, as the elder brother gave back to the father his portion of goods, they must all contribute to our true wealth. If, on the other hand, we claim them for ourselves, and, regarding them as our own, turn our backs upon the Father, that which should have been our gain begins to be moral loss, and we are all the poorer for our natural endowments. Well used wealth contributes to the formation of a generous and godlike character, it helps to enrich your moral nature; and thus it is actually true that the hand of the liberal maketh rich. The material substance, which we can under no circumstances keep, passes from us, but it leaves us morally and spiritually the richer for its use. On the other hand, when we regard our substance merely as a means for self-gratification, our gain becomes positive moral loss. The abuse or unholy use of our substance means selfishness increased and developed, self-control weakened, the love of luxury, the passion for self-indulgence rendered more insatiable than ever; while our benevolence is diminished, and our sympathies are curtailed, the heart hardened, and the gain in the capacity to help and enlighten others; gain in the enjoyment of ever-enlarging visions of truth; gain in the acquisition of that spiritual knowledge which in the moral world must always as truly be power as is secular knowledge in the physical world. A consecrated intellect is wealth to the Church, wealth to the world, wealth to its possessor. But if you take your intellect out of God's hands and regard it as your own, the process of waste at once begins. Your very gifts become snares. Intellectual pride breeds doubt, and doubt develops into crude, hasty unbelief. Or intellectual success induces self-conceit, which is one of the worst moral diseases that man's nature can be afflicted with. Or intellectual gratification becomes the object for which the man lives, only to find, with Solomon, that in much knowledge is much sorrow; and that, while the head may be filled, the heart remains empty. For we cannot live for knowledge without finding out more and more how little we know, and how little we can know. And this tends to render life one long, bitter disappointment; while, as the swiftly-flying years bring the end nearer, we have the melancholy conviction forcing itself upon us, that even that little can only be retained for a short time. "Whether there be knowledge," says St. Paul, "it shall vanish away." It is only waste after all. Or has God given you personal influence, springing either from your natural character and gifts, or from your social position? More or less, I believe, He has given this to each of us; a great deal to some. What are you doing with it? Consecrate it to God, and use it for the good of man, and then your portion of goods in the Father's hands shall ever go on increasing, and your satisfaction shall ever become deeper and truer as you use this gift for its proper object. Who shall describe the blessedness which flows back, to him who so exercises it, from a well-used influence? and who shall say where its effects will end, in time and in eternity? But if this influence

is used merely for self-gratification, to minister to our love of popularity or of power, once again our gift becomes our bane, and exercises a most injurious effect upon our moral nature, ministering to our pride, and promoting our selfishness, and thus defeating the very purpose for the sake of which the gift was originally bestowed. So here again we have nothing but waste — the good that might have been done left undone for ever, and actual harm done both to ourselves and others through that very gift which should have been for the benefit of all — and, as a result, instead of a heart full of true gratification and satisfaction, the terrible awakening by and by to find that all this influence has been cast into the wrong scale. Oh, think of the anguish of remorse that must fill the heart at the discovery that we have helped to drag others down by the abuse of the very gift that should have raised them, and that we are perishing not alone in our iniquity!

(W. M. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Where is the Heavenly Kingdom

Luke 17:20-21

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said...

If you ask me what my definition of the kingdom of heaven is, if you ask me where I place it, I will tell you. Show me a man who is just, who is honest, who is benevolent, who is charitable, who loves his God, who loves his fellow-men; show me such a man; yea, bring him here, stand him by my side, and I care not what be the colour of skin, nor what be his name, or the name of his nation, or what his social standing, or what his financial position, or what be the degree of his intellectual development; I will point my finger at that man's breast, and say: "There, within this man's breast is the kingdom of heaven." If you ask me again to show you the kingdom of heaven, I will say: "Bring me a woman that is pure, that is affectionate, that is loyal to her sense of duty, that is sympathetic and charitable of speech, that is patient, whose bosom is full of love for the Divine Being and for those of her race with whom she is brought in contact; yea, bring that woman here, stand her by my side; and I care not whether she be Caucasian or African, whether she be of this nation or of that, care nothing about her intellectual development; and I will tell you that the kingdom of heaven is within that woman's soul." Aye, within such a man and such a woman is a kingdom boundless in extent, perpetual in its expression of power, majestic in its appearance, indefatigable in its energy, Divine in its quality — a kingdom of which there can be but one king, and that is God; a kingdom for the sovereignty of which there is but one being fitted — the Infinite Spirit. And this, as I understand it, is the glory of man and the glory of woman: that within them there is a realm of capacity, of faculty, of sense, of aspiration, of sentiment, of feeling, so fine, so pure, so noble, so majestic and holy, that its natural king is Infinite Love. It was to introduce Himself to this realm, to establish His throne and possess it in this kingdom, that Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Man, alike conjoining in Himself the Divine and the human in harmonious conjunction, representing the sympathy of the lower and the majesty of the higher world, descended to this earth, and is today seeking through the operation of His Spirit, entrance to possession. It is over this kingdom within, He reigns, if He reign at all. It is within this kingdom that He energizes. It is out of this kingdom that His glory has to proceed. Not in that which is nominal and technical; not in that which is verbal and formal; not in that which is in accordance with custom and tradition, is the Saviour present. And they who look for Him in these things shall not find Him; but they who search to discern Him in spirit and life, in holy expression of consecrated faculty in the energy of capacities dedicated to God, shall find Him, and they shall find that in these He is all in all.

(W. M. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Enthusiasm Rebuked

Luke 18:35-43

And it came to pass, that as he was come near to Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging:...

Blind Bartimeus has to encounter obstructionists; the unsympathizing crowd interfered to silence the man. "Hold thy peace, Bartimeus; have done with all this frenzied excitement; Christ has other things to do than listen to thee!" So long ago was it a settled matter that a man may get excited about anything in the wide world except about Christ! You are quite at liberty to get excited about the latest war news, about politics, about the race-course, about the money-market, about anything you like, save the interests of your soul. Yes; these highly respect. able people of eighteen hundred years ago have left a numerous progeny. There are always plenty of persons ready to give good advice to seeking souls, or to young Christians, after this fashion: "Keep quiet, my friend; don't get excited; hush! don't make a noise about such things; whatever you do, keep calm, and don't make a fuss." I observe that the devil has his own fire-brigade, who are always ready with their hose — waiting to throw cold water on any little flame that the Holy Spirit kindles, and to offer sedatives to any startled sinner who is beginning to be in earnest about his soul. These excellent people will tell you that it is all right and proper to be religious, to be earnest up to a certain point, but you must be careful not to go beyond this. When you come to inquire what this point is, you make the astonishing discovery that it is just the point at which religion begins to do one any real good! Be earnest, so long as your earnestness does not bring you salvation; be pious, so long as your piety fails to reveal the living God to your heart; but be sure and stop short of receiving God's gift of everlasting life, or you will be going too far!

(W. M. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

The Agony of Sin

John 3:14-15

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:...

I. IT WAS TO BE MADE IN THE LIKENESS OF THAT WHICH WAS DESTROYING THEM. Around are serpents victorious: here the serpent conquered and exhibited as a trophy, and the people who see it live. Around us the powers of darkness and death are victorious, and sinning souls are dead in trespasses and sins. Behold on the cross sin, but sin judged, condemned, executed, held up as a spectacle. "He was made sin," etc.

II. When the wounded Israelite looked on the brazen serpent, he found a PROOF OF GOD'S ABILITY AND A PLEDGE OF GOD'S WILLINGNESS TO SAVE HIM. As we turn to the cross, the old man is crucified that the body of sin might be destroyed.

III. THE NEW LIFE WAS MIRACULOUS IN ITS CHARACTER: it was not by any natural process of improvement or gradual restoration.

IV. How may we APPROPRIATE THE BENEFITS OF CHRIST'S REDEMPTION? Let us take a walk round the camp.

1. In one tent is a man who declines to look because he has tried every remedy that science can provide, and who says, "How can I be saved by looking at a mere bit of brass?" and dies because he is too proud to be saved in God's way. And so people plead that they cannot understand the doctrine of the atonement, and seem to regard themselves as under no obligation to trust Him who has made that atonement. Will not a general trust in the mercy of God suffice? But the Israelites were not told to discover the mode of the Divine operation.

2. There is another very far gone who says, "Not for me — too late," and dies. So many now regard their case as hopeless, but Christ came to save the chief of sinners.

3. We meet with another who says, "I am all right, but I had a narrow escape. The serpent didn't bite; it was only a scratch." "But a scratch is fatal; go at once and look." "Oh, no! there's no danger; but if anything should come of it I will act on your suggestion. At present I am in a hurry; I have some business." By and by the poison works. Oh for a look at the serpent now! So many perish now by making light of their danger.

4. Here is a man suffering acute agony, who listens with eagerness but obstinate incredulity. "If God wished to save, He would speak. Besides, the middle of the camp is a long way, and how can healing influence extend so far? Well, to oblige you, I will look; but I don't expect anything will come of it. There; I have looked, and am no better." So, too, many amongst us try a series of experiments. "I'm trying to believe, but I feel no better."

5. We turn aside into a home of sorrow. A broken-hearted mother is bending over her little girl. But lamentation will not arrest the malady. "Mother, your child may live." The mother listens with the

incredulity of joy, but the little one cries, "Mother, I want to look at Moses' serpent." Instantly the mother's arms are around her, and the child is borne to the door. She lifts her deep blue eyes, while the mother, in an agony of hope and fear, stands waiting. "Mother I I am healed." There is life for a look at the crucified One. Look and live.

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

The Brazen Serpent

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(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

Human Curiosity and Divine Mystery

John 4:20-29

Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and you say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship....

1. According to the Grecian sage, all knowledge commences with wonder or curiosity. Without this knowledge would never have taken the strides it has. But it is not always those objects which most excite our curiosity that we are most capable of becoming acquainted with. This is true with the objects of nature, the sun, e. g., but much more with that sublimest of all objects, the unseen God. And because He shrouds Himself round with a veil of mystery, all the more our hearts desire to know something about Him. And yet "who can by searching find out God?" And then we have to reflect upon the errors into which men have fallen in their attempt to make the discovery, their attempt to satisfy their desire by a substitute of their own imagination, which ended in leaving the desire unsatisfied and the object still unknown.

2. But just as the art of optics was required to enable men of science to make progress in their knowledge of the sun, so it was necessary, before men could be acquainted with God, that He should be brought within the region of human observation. "Lord, show us the Father!" was the cry of humanity. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" was the response.

3. This woman was a subject of spiritual curiosity, and desired to know something of God. She identified herself with a religion which, however, instead of leading her to God, only supplied a substitute for Him. "Ye worship ye know not what." She knew what many a man of the nineteenth century knows to his cost, that this was true. As at Athens so at Gerizim there was an altar to the unknown God.

4. What was wanting at Gerizim? Two elements conspicuous in the creed of the Jew — a system of ritual in the temple worship, with all its symbolic teaching, and the utterances of the prophets. These two elements were closely connected with the promise as to the "seed of the woman," with the person and work of the Messiah, with God's attitude towards guilt in laying the iniquity of us all on the head of His guiltless Son. Thus the Jew was able to form such an ideal of the character of God as was impossible to the Samaritans. So the former "knew what He worshipped." Is not agnosticism the inevitable result of not receiving or of rejecting the revelation of God through Christ in the present day?

5. This agnosticism is not to be wondered at even with our clearer light. God is defined as an infinite Spirit — two splendid negations. When the woman heard Christ's declaration of the nature of God, she immediately fell back on another thought — the Messiah. Trace the progress of this spiritual growth — the awakening of a vague thirst; the definite conviction of sin; the desire to worship truly; the conviction of the coming of a perfect teacher; Christ's disclosure of His Messiahship; His glad communication; the conviction on her word and by personal experience, of the Samaritans that Christ was the Saviour of the world.

(W. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

Bible Study

John 5:31-40

If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true....

The Bible should be studied —

I. CRITICALLY. We are all possessed of judgment and reason, and God intends us to employ them. A large number of passages have come to be used in a conventional sense, which is not their real sense. It is the latter we ought to find. Make, then, the Greek Testament an object of study; or, if not, a good commentary.

II. CONSECUTIVELY. We do not do the Bible justice if we read a scrap here and a scrap there. The Epistle to the Romans, e. g., as all letters, should be read straight on. If you can only master a few verses keep to them, but do not let the chain be broken.

III. OCCASIONALLY. Carry a little Testament about with you to refresh you as you take a glass of water when you are thirsty between meals..

IV. TOPICALLY. Take the subject of justification and see what Paul says, and then James, and then John. Don't be afraid of controverted subjects. Work them out for yourself, not from treatises or sermons, but God's Word.

V. EXPERIMENTALLY. When you read a passage ask yourself. With what lesson am I impressed? Don't be content with being interested, try and get something for edification.

VI. DEVOTIONALLY. If we want a real feast let us go down upon our knees, spread the Bible open before us, and realize that God is speaking to us. This is where the Jews failed in spite of all their critical care and reverence, "Ye have not His word abiding in you." Many people use their Bibles as superstitiously as any Chinaman uses his praying machine. "I have read my chapter this morning, and my conscience is satisfied." But how much good has it done you? Just as much as counting the beads of a rosary; i. e., none, unless you have found in it a living Saviour.

(W. H. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)

The Imperilled Condition of the Impenitent Sinner

John 7:31-36

And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ comes, will he do more miracles than these which this man has done?...

Two friends were in the Highlands recently, shooting, and one of them observed an animal on a jutting rock. He inquired, "Is that a sheep?" and looking through his field-glass he saw that it was. In search of herbage the sheep had descended from one grass-covered ledge to another, and found it impossible to return. No shepherd in Scotland dare risk his life by going down the declivity. The sheep must remain there till an eagle observed it, when in eddying circles it would hover over the poor animal, drawing nearer and nearer, until at last the affrighted sheep would take a dreadful leap into space, to be dashed to pieces on the rocks below, and then become the eagle's prey.

(W. Hay Aitken.)The dispersed among the Gentiles, or simply the Dispersion was the general title applied to those Jews who remained settled in foreign countries after the return from Babylon, and during the period of the second Temple. The Hebrew word applied to these foreign settlers (see Jer. 24:5; Jer. 28:4; Ezz. 6:16) conveys the notion of spoliation and bereavement, as of men removed from the Temple and home of their fathers; but in the LXX. the ideas of "sojourning," and of a "colony," were combined with that of a "captivity," while the term "dispersion" (Deu. 28:25; cf. Jer. 34:17), which finally prevailed, seemed to imply that the people thus scattered (Deu. 30:4) in bondage (2 Macc. 1:27), and shut out from the privileges of the human race (text), should yet be as a seed sown for a future harvest (cf. Isa. 49:6; Hebrews) in the strange lands where they found a temporary resting-place (1Pe. 1:1). The schism which had divided the first kingdom was forgotten in the results of the general calamity. The Dispersion was not limited to the exiles of Judah, but included "the twelve tribes" (Jam. 1:1), which expressed the completeness of the whole Jewish nation (Acts. 26:7). The Dispersion really dates from the Babylonish exile. Uncertain legends point to earlier settlements in Arabia, Ethiopia, and Abyssinia, but these must have been isolated and casual, while the Dispersion was the outward proof that a faith had succeeded to a kingdom. Apart from the necessary influence which Jewish communities, bound by common laws, ennobled by the possession of the same truths, and animated by kindred hopes must have exercised on the nations among whom they were scattered, the difficulties which set aside the literal observance of the Mosaic ritual led to a wider view of the scope of the law, and a stronger sense of its spiritual significance. Outwardly and inwardly, by its effects, both on the Gentiles and on Israel, the Dispersion was the clearest providential preparation for Christianity. But while the fact of a recognized Dispersion must have weakened the local and ceremonial influences which were essential to the first training of the people of God, the Dispersion was still bound together in itself and to its mother country by religious ties. The Temple was the acknowledged centre of Judaism, and the faithful Jew everywhere contributed the half-shekel towards its maintenance (Mat. 17:24; Jos. Ant. 16:06). The tribute was indeed the simplest and most striking outward proof of the religious unity of the nation. Treasuries were established to receive the payments of different

districts, and the collected sums were forwarded to Jerusalem, as in later times the Mohammedan offerings were sent to Mecca. At the beginning of the Christian era the Dispersion was divided into three great sections, the Babylonian, the Syrian, and the Egyptian. Precedence was yielded to the first. The jealousy which had originally existed between the poor who remained in Jerusalem and their wealthier countrymen at Babylon had passed away. From Babylon the Jews spread throughout Persia, Media, and Parthia; but the settlements in China belong to a modern date. The Greek conquests in Asia extended the limits of the Dispersion. Selencus Nicator transplanted large bodies of Jewish colonists from Baby. Ionia to the capitals of his western provinces. His policy was followed by his successor, Antiochus the Great, and the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes only served to push forward the Jewish emigration to the remoter districts of the empire. In Armenia the Jews arrived at the greatest dignities, and Nisibis became a new centre of colonization. The Jews of Cappadocia (1Pe. 1:1) are mentioned in the Mishna; and a prince and princess of Adiabene adopted the Jewish faith only thirty years before the destruction of the Temple. Large settlements were established in Cyprus, in the islands of the AEgean, and on the western coast of Asia Minor. The Romans confirmed to them the privileges obtained from the Syrian kings; and though they were exposed to sudden outbursts of popular violence, the Jews of the Syrian provinces gradually formed a closer connection with their new homes, and, together with the Greek language, adopted in many respects Greek ideas. This Hellenizing tendency, however, found its most free development at Alexandria. The Jewish settlements established there by Alexander and Ptolemy I. became the source of the African Dispersion, which spread over the north coast of Africa, and perhaps inland to Abyssinia. At Cyrene and Berenice (Tripoli) the Jewish inhabitants formed a considerable portion of the population. But the distinction in language led to wider differences, which were averted in Babylon by the currency of an Aramaic dialect. The Scriptures were no longer read on the Sabbath, and no fire signals conveyed the dates of the new moons to Egypt. Still, the spirit of the African Jews was not destroyed. After the destruction of the Temple the zealots found a reception in Cyrene, and in A. D. 115 the Jewish population in Africa rose with terrible ferocity, and were put down by a war of extermination, and the remnant who escaped established themselves on the opposite coast of Europe, as the beginning of a new Dispersion. The Jewish settlements in Rome were consequent on the occupation of Jerusalem by Pompey B. C. 63. The captives and emigrants whom he brought with him were located in the Trans-Tiberine quarter, and by degrees rose in station and importance. They were favoured by Augustus and Tiberius after the fall of Sejanus, and a Jewish school was founded at Rome. In the reign of Claudius the Jews became objects of suspicion from their immense numbers; and the internal disputes, consequent, perhaps, upon the preaching of Christianity, led to their banishment from the city (Acts. 18:2). But this was only temporary, for in a few years the Jews at Rome were numerous (Acts. 28:17), and continued to be sufficiently conspicuous to attract the attention of the satirists. The influence of the Dispersion on the rapid growth of Christianity can scarcely be overrated. The course of apostolic preaching followed in a regular progress the line of Jewish settlements. The mixed assembly from which the first converts were gathered on the day of Pentecost represented each division of the Dispersion, and these converts naturally prepared the way for the apostles. The names of the seven deacons are all Greek, and one was a proselyte. The Church at Antioch, by which St. Paul was entrusted with his great work among the heathen (Acts. 13:1), included Barnabus of Cyprus, Lucius of Cyrene, and Simeon, surnamed Niger; and among his fellow labourers at a later time are found Apollos of Alexandria, Urbanus, and Clement,

whose names, at least, are Roman. Antioch itself became a centre of the Christian Church, as it had been of the Jewish Dispersion; and throughout the apostolic journeys the Jews were the class to whom "it was necessary that the Word of God should be first spoken" (Acts. 13:46), and they in turn were united with the mass of the population by the intermediate body of "the devout " who had recognized in various degrees "the faith of the God of Israel."

(Bp. Westcott.)

No Place for the Word

John 8:31-59

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed;...

Only a short time ago a friend of mine was preaching in one of our cathedral churches. As he was going to select for his text a prominent passage in one of the portions for the day, he thought it expedient to inquire of the clerk, "What did the Canon preach from this morning?" The clerk became very pensive, seemed quite disposed to cudgel his brains for the proper answer; but, somehow or other, he really could not think of it just then. All the men of the choir were robing in the adjacent vestry, so he said that he would go and ask them. Accordingly, the question was passed round the choir, and produced the same perplexity. At length the sagacious clerk returned, with the highly explicit answer, "It was upon the Christian religion, sir!" I think those good people must have needed a reminder as to how we should hear; don't you?

(W. M. H. Aitken, M. A.)The only reason why so many are against the Bible is because they know the Bible is against them.

(G. S. Bowes.)

Faith in Christ

John 16:9

Of sin, because they believe not on me;

I believe on a physician when I put my case into that physician's hands, and trust him to cure me. I believe on a lawyer when I leave my case in his hands, and trust him to plead for me. I believe on a banker when I put money into his hand, and allow him to keep it on my behalf. I believe on my Saviour when I take Him to be my Saviour, when I put my helpless case into His hands, and trust Him to do what I cannot do for myself — save me from my sin. Have you done so? You believe there is such a Person as Jesus, and that He is the sinner's Saviour. You do well; but that is only a partial and incomplete faith. To believe that a certain doctor exists and has a large practice is not personally to believe in that doctor. True faith contains a moral as well as an intellectual element, and when the former is wanting the latter can avail but little. Do you repose your moral confidence in Him, as being to you the Saviour that you need, as one whose character and office are congruous to the wants of your nature? You are a sinner, He represents Himself as Saviour. You are a lost one, He has died to find you? You are dead, He presents Himself as the Resurrection and the Life. The point is, Do you take Him by faith to be what He reveals Himself to be? That is believing on Him. If you can say in your heart, "Yes, I believe in Him," then the Holy Spirit of God can no longer convict you of sin. All your sins were laid on the Lamb of God, who bore the sin of the world. There is no longer a case against you; the summons is dismissed. There is no condemnation; you are pronounced acquitted, and accepted in the Beloved.

(W. H. H. Aitken, M. A.)

Conversion

Acts 3:19-21

Repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...

1. All through the New Testament one great saving change, involving entirely new relations with God on the one hand, and with sin on the other, is represented as indispensably necessary, and one only, and it is to this great change that we give the name of "conversion." The word, particularly in the original, seems to be a suitable one to indicate it, looking at it from man's point of view, because it connotes a turning round and a turning towards, with a view to resting in. The word too, in common use, suggests just such a radical change. We speak of "converters" that change iron into steel; of converting a sailing ship into a steamer, or an old-fashioned gun into a breechloader.

2. This great saving change is represented as the true starting-point of the spiritual life. It is therefore not a life-long work, for if all our days be consumed in making the start, what time is there left to that journey? The locomotive requires to be placed upon the turntable, and to have its position reversed, before it can proceed on its return journey. But if the whole four-and-twenty hours are consumed in getting the engine turned, what is to become of that journey? And where is the station-master that would be content to go on all day asking, "Is that engine being turned?" or would feel content on hearing that the process was going forward?

I. CONVERSION IS CLOSELY CONNECTED WITH, BUT DISTINCT FROM, REPENTANCE. Repentance represents the negative, conversion the positive, element. Repentance consists in the honest repudiation of the old, with the accompanying feelings of regret and humiliation; but conversion consists in the acceptance of the new, with all natural, spiritual exultation in God. Repentance is the discovery of the fatal disease and the mournful confession of it. Conversion is the appropriation of the remedy, the believing touching of the hem of His garment, with the firm persuasion, "If I may but touch I shall be whole." Repentance brings us down to the dust; conversion sets us amongst the princes and makes us inherit a crown of glory.

II. CONVERSION IMPLIES AN ORIGINAL ATTITUDE OF AVERSION. "An evil heart of unbelief departing from the living God." And it is the presence of this attitude, more or less fully developed, that makes conversion necessary. Now this attitude is inherited from our first parents. Hence our position differs from theirs in this, that they had to fall beneath their created nature in order to turn from God, whereas we have to rise above our inherited nature to turn to God. Then, again, as it was by a definite moral act, an act of the will, that man turned away from God, so it is only by a definite moral act that man can be converted to God. And hence it is evident that no ordinance can render the conversion to God superfluous or unnecessary. This is surely a sufficient answer to those who allege that conversion cannot be necessary in the case of those who have been baptized as infants, unless they have lapsed into open sin. On the other hand, however, it must frankly be admitted that there are many of whose conversion there can be no reasonable doubt,

who yet cannot remember in the past any aversion, and hence cannot point to any distinct conversion. They seem to have loved and trusted their Saviour so long as they could remember anything. Again, there are others who, although they can recall a condition of aversion, cannot point to the hour of conversion. This seeming indefiniteness with some, no doubt, arise from temperament, or perhaps to defective teaching. Anxious souls, who wish to come to Christ instead of being directed at once to the Cross, are told that they must wait for certain experiences. But whatever be the true explanation we shall do wisely in thinking less of the accidents and more of the essence of this great change. The question is not when and how did your conversion take place? but, Has it taken place?

III. Must CONVERSIONS ALWAYS BE SUDDEN? You hear not few affirm with sufficient dogmatism that they don't believe in sudden conversions except those on a death-bed. I must say, for my own part, that these are the only kind of sudden conversions that I am sceptical about. But my answer is not that all conversions are in their outward appearances necessarily sudden, but that there is no reason why they should not be so. If this matter of turning back again from sin and self to God can be settled promptly, none would wish to see it protracted; for it is only after this point has been passed that real religious experience begins. If conversion can be immediate, there is surely no sense in desiring that the process should be protracted. "Behold, now is the accepted time," etc. If conversion were one and the same thing as reformation, this might well require time; but if it be a mighty spiritual revolution wrought in man by the Holy Ghost, then it is by no means surprising that it should be completed as rapidly as Naaman's cure. Let us turn to our text.

IV. CONVERSION IS AN IMPERATIVE DUTY. The text is a direction couched in the form of a command. "Be converted." It may occur to you to object, Who can convert himself? If I am to be converted, it is God that must convert me. Now there is a certain sense in which this is quite true. The regenerating power can only come from God; but, on the other hand, man as well as God has his part in producing this great change, and it is to man's part in it that the word conversion almost invariably refers. Only once is the word used in the Passive Voice, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children," etc. In that passage the actual moral change is referred to. And it is well that the word should thus be used once lest we should lose sight altogether of the necessarily close connection that must exist between the turning on our part and the change wrought by God on His part. But in the present passage the word is active, "turn again." Many awakened souls are kept back from Christ because they cannot make themselves feel the great change that they think they ought to experience. They wait and hope and pray that they may be converted, instead of turning right round so as to face the God from whom they have turned away. Now to all such the voice of God through similar passages would seem to say, "Turn ye even unto Me, saith the Lord."

V. CONVERSION IS THE CORRELATIVE OF AVERSION. Now in this aversion three distinct steps may be discerned. The first is taken in the aversion of the inner eye, the looking away from God; the next in the aversion of the will when we say, "We will not have this man to reign over us." We prefer to assert our independence; and then follows the aversion of the desires and affections. Now there are three corresponding steps in conversion. We begin to turn Godwards when we allow ourselves to recognise our inward needs, and turn from the empty cisterns that can hold no water, and confess, "My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God." That may be called the conversion of the desires. We take our second step in the submission of our wills and our decision to yield ourselves to God, and here usually the struggle is the most severe, and when this

point is gained the hardest part of the battle is won. But there is a third step, the conversion of our inner vision. For even when our desires are fixed on God and our wills yielded to God, seeking souls are still not unfrequently kept in darkness just because they will turn their eyes to anything else rather than God. They will look at themselves, at their feelings, at their ill deserts, at their own faith, or rather at their want of it, at other people, and their experiences rather than at God. Now when St. Peter calls upon us to turn right round and face towards God, it is in order that we may so fix our gaze upon God as to discover what there is in God for us, and rest at peace in the joy of that discovery. But it would be of little use to call upon us to turn unless such an object were presented to us as should attract and retain our gaze when once we direct our vision towards it. The thought of God and of His holiness repels and even appals the awakened soul. But here it is that we learn the value of the gospel. It was not enough that Christ should bid us return to our Father; it was necessary that He should constitute Himself the way.

VI. Thus we see the connection between the atoning work of Christ and conversion. The result of that work is, that the sinner finds in God the very thing he has despaired to find in himself. Gazing on the Cross, he makes the astonishing discovery, "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid." Indeed, we may say that in the wondrous vision we find that which converts all our thoughts of God. He who gave His Son for me must needs be worthy of my confidence and love. "Look unto Me," I hear Him say, "and be ye saved," and unto Him I look and find that there is indeed "life for a look at the Crucified One." And this look is conversion; for everything about that Cross seems of a kind to produce a change of thought and feeling that might be called a conversion. I love my sins, but I look at that Cross, and I see in the agony and death of the Sin-bearer what sin really is, and what it must bring me to if I cling to it; and thus my view of sin is changed. I looked upon many of my sins as mere trifles; now I see how exceeding sinful sin must be in the sight of Him who is its Judge, and thus my estimate of the gravity of sin is changed. I once thought of God as though He were hard, austere, and unsympathetic; now I see how tender, as well as infinite, is His love. Thus my judgment of God is changed. I used to love to think of myself as my Own master, but now I see what man is without God, and so my views of myself and of my relations to God are changed. Thus in turning myself to God I turn my back upon my old self. The old is passed away, left crucified on yonder Cross, and all things are become new. But more than even this. Not only am I changed in all my views and feelings, but I am converted to God; that is to say, I am restored to my proper relations with God. Between Him and me there is now nothing but love, and so I am now in a position to enjoy His fellowship and to be strong in His power.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

Repentance not Mere Sorrow for Sin

Acts 3:19-21

Repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...

It is a common thing to find people confusing between repentance and sorrow for sin, and this leads sometimes to most distressing results. I remember once insisting very strongly upon the importance of making this distinction. The next day an intelligent Christian man said, "Ah, Mr. Aitken, if I had heard that sermon of yours last night when I was seeking salvation, I believe it might have saved me long weary years of misery, during which I was really and earnestly desirous to give myself to God, and yet fancied I had no right to come to Christ, because I could not feel the sorrow for sin that I thought I ought to feel." Now it is quite possible to experience a good deal of sorrow for sin without any real repentance, and it is equally possible to have a sincere repentance, and yet to be ready to cry out against ourselves because we don't feel as much sorrow for sin as we think we should. Indeed this impatience at our own hardness of heart and lack of true spiritual sensibility is often a feature of true repentance. But observe that on no less than ten occasions men are directed to repent, the word being for the most part employed in the imperative mood. Now it is obviously absurd to suppose that we should be thus commanded to produce within ourselves a certain state of feelings; for obviously our feelings constitute just that element in our nature over which we have least control. We cannot command our feelings at will, and therefore it is simply ridiculous to command persons to do so. It would be folly were I to say to you, "Feel very happy," or "Feel very sorrowful." Again, we find repentance expressly distinguished from godly sorrow. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance... not to be repented of." Now, if it may be the cause of repentance, it must be distinct from repentance, for an effect must always be distinct from its cause. It does not, however, always stand in this relation. Godly sorrow may sometimes flow from a real repentance, just as in another case it may proceed and lead up to it. Of this we see an instance in David, who poured forth his soul in the sorrowful language of the fifty-first Psalm long after he had both repented and had been forgiven.

(W. Hay Aitken.)

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