WRITINGS OF MARCUS DODS

by Marcus Dods

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

54 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 01.01. How to become like Christ
2. 01.03. HOW TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST.
3. 01.04. THE TRANSFIGURATION.
4. 01.05. INDISCREET IMPORTUNITY
5. 01.06. SHAME ON ACCOUNT OF GOD'S DISPLEASURE
6. 01.07. NAAMAN CURED
7. 01.08. THE LAME MAN AT THE TEMPLE GATE.
8. 02.00. ISAAC, JACOB AND JOSEPH
9. 02.01. LECTURE I: ISHMAELL AND ISAAC
10. 02.02. LECTURE II: ISAAC’S MARRIAGE
11. 02.03. LECTURE III: ESAU AND JACOB
12. 02.04. LECTURE IV: JACOB’S FRAUD
13. 02.05. LECTURE V: JACOB’S FLIGHT AND DREAM
14. 02.06. LECTURE VI: JACOB AT PENIEL
15. 02.07. LECTURE VII: JACOB’S RETURN
16. 02.08. LECTURE VIII: JOSEPH’S DREAMS
17. 02.09. LECTURE IX: JOSEPH IN PRISON
18. 02.10. LECTURE X: PHARAOH’S DREAMS
19. 02.11. LECTURE XI: JOSEPH’S ADMINISTRATION
20. 02.12. LECTURE XII: VISITS OF JOSEPH’S BRETHREN
21. 02.13. LECTURE XIII: THE RECONCILIATION
22. 03.00. THE PARABLES OF OUR LORD
23. 03.01. THE SOWER
24. 03.02. THE TARES
25. 03.03. THE MUSTARD SEED
26. 03.04. THE LEAVEN
27. 03.05. THE HID TREASURE AND THE PEARL OF PRICE
28. 03.06. THE NET
29. 03.07. THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT OR THE UNFORGIVING DEBTOR
30. 03.08. LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD. FIRST LAST AND LAST FIRST
31. 03.09. THE TWO SONS
32. 03.10. THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN
33. 03.11. THE MARRIAGE OF THE KING'S SON
34. 03.12. THE TEN VIRGINS
35. 03.13. THE TALENTS
36. 03.14. PARABLE OF THE TWO DEBTORS
37. 03.15. THE GOOD SAMARITAN
38. 03.16. THE RICH FOOL
39. 03.17. THE BARREN FIG-TREE

40. 03.18. THE GREAT SUPPER
41. 03.19. THE LOST SHEEP AND THE LOST PIECE OF MONEY
42. 03.20. THE PRODIGAL SON AND HIS ELDER BROTHER
43. 03.21. THE UNJUST STEWARD
44. 03.22. DIVES AND LAZARUS
45. 03.23. THE UNJUST JUDGE
46. 03.24. THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN
47. 04.00. The Prayer That Teaches us To Pray
48. 04.01. After manner therefore pray ye: Our Father
49. 04.02. Hallowed be thy name
50. 04.03. Thy Kingdom come
51. 04.04. Thy Will be done in Earth, in heaven
52. 04.05. Give us this day our daily bread
53. 04.06. And Forgive our debts, forgive debtors
54. 04.07. And Lead into temptation, but deliver evil

Chapter 1

01.01. How to become like Christ

How to become like Christ by

Marcus Dods

Chapter 2

01.03. HOW TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST.

HOW TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST.

"But we all, with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."-- 2 Corinthians 3:18 (Revised Version).

I suppose there is almost no one who would deny, if it were put to him, that the greatest possible attainment a man can make in this world is likeness to The Lord Jesus Christ. Certainly no one would deny that there is nothing but character that we can carry out of life with us, and that our prospect of good in any future life will certainly vary with the resemblance of our character to that of Jesus Christ, which is to rule the whole future. We all admit that; but almost every one of us offers to himself some apology for not being like Christ, and has scarcely any clear reality of aim of becoming like Him. Why, we say to ourselves, or we say in our practice, it is really impossible in a world such as ours is to become perfectly holy. One or two men in a century may become great saints; given a certain natural disposition and given exceptionally favouring circumstances, men may become saintly; but surely the ordinary run of men, men such as we know ourselves to be, with secular disposition and with many strong, vigorous passions--surely we can really not be expected to become like Christ, or, if it is expected of us, we know that it is impossible. On the contrary, Paul says, "We all," "we all." Every Christian has that for a destiny: to be changed into the image of his Lord. And he not only says so, but in this one verse he reveals to us the mode of becoming like Christ, and a mode, as we shall find, so simple and so infallible in its working that a man cannot understand it without renewing his hope that even he may one day become like Christ. In order to understand this simplest mode of sanctification we must look back at the incident that we read in the Book of Exodus (Exodus 34:29-35). Paul had been reading how when Moses came down from the mount where he had been speaking with God his face shone, so as to dazzle and alarm those who were near him.

They at once recognised that that was the glory of God reflected from him; and just as it is almost as difficult for us to look at the sun reflected from a mirror as to look directly at the sun, so these men felt it almost as difficult to look straight at the face of Moses as to look straight at the face of God. But Moses was a wise man, and he showed his wisdom in this instance as well as elsewhere. He knew that that glory was only on the skin of his face, and that of course it would pass away. It was a superficial shining. And accordingly he put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel might not see it dying out from minute to minute and from hour to hour, because he knew these Israelites thoroughly, and he knew that when they saw the glory dying out they would say, "God has forsaken Moses. We need not attend to him any more. His authority is gone, and the glory of God’s presence has passed from him." So Moses wore the veil that they might not see the glory dying out. But whenever he was called back to the presence of God he took off the veil and received a new access of glory on his face, and thus went "from glory to glory."

"That," says Paul, "is precisely the process through which we Christian men become like Christ." We go back to the presence of Christ with unveiled face; and as often as we stand in His presence, as often as we deal in our spirit with the living Christ, so often do we take on a little of His glory. The glory of Christ is His character; and as often as we stand before Christ, and think of Him, and realise what He was, our heart goes out and reflects some of His character. And that reflection, that glory, is not any longer merely on the skin of the face; as Paul wishes us to recognise, it is a spiritual glory, it is wrought by the spirit of Christ upon our spirit, and it is we ourselves that are changed from glory to glory into the very image of the Lord.

Now obviously this mode of sanctification has extraordinary recommendations. In the first place, it is absolutely simple. If you go to some priest or spiritual director, or minister of the Gospel, or friend, and ask what you are to do if you wish to become a holy man, why, even the best of them will almost certainly tell you to read certain books, to spend so much time in prayer and reading your Bible, to go regularly to church, to engage in this and that good work. If you had applied to a spiritual director of the middle ages of this world's history and of the history of Christianity, he would have told you that you must retire from the world altogether in order to become holy. Paul says, "Away with all that nonsense!" We are living in a real world; Christ lived in a real world: Christ did not retire from men. And He says all that you have to do in order to be like Christ is to carry His image with you in your heart. That is all. To be with Him, to let Him stand before you and command your love, that will infallibly change you into His image. I do not know that we sufficiently recognise the simplicity of Christian methods. We do not understand what Paul meant by proclaiming it as the religion of the spirit, as a religion superior to everything mechanical and external. Think of the deliverance it was for him who had grown up under a religion which commanded him to go a journey three times a year, to take the best of his goods and offer them in the Temple, to comply with a multitude of oppressive observances and ordinances. Think of the emancipation when he found a spiritual religion. Why, in those times a man must have despaired of becoming a holy man; But now Paul says you will infallibly become holy if you learn this easy lesson of carrying the Lord Jesus with you in your heart.

Another recommendation of this method is that it is so obviously grounded on our own nature. No sooner are we told by Paul that we must act as mirrors of Christ than we recognise that nature has made us to be mirrors, that we cannot but reflect what is passing before us. You are walking along the street, and, a little child runs before a carriage; you shrink back as if you were in danger. You see a man fall from a scaffolding, crushed; your face takes on an expression of pain, reflecting what is passing in him. You go and spend an evening with a man much stronger, much purer, much saner, than yourself, and you come away knowing yourself a stronger and a better man. Why? Because you are a mirror, because in your inmost nature you have responded to and reflected the good that was in him.

Look into any family, and what do you see? You see the boy, not imitating consciously, but taking on, his father's looks and attitudes and ways; and as the boy grows up these become his own looks and attitudes and ways. He has reflected his father from one degree of proficiency unto another, from one intimacy, from one day's observation of his father to another, until he is the image of the old man over again.

"Similarly," says Paul, "live with Christ; learn to carry His image with you, learn to adore Him, learn to love Him, and infallibly, whether you will or not, by this simple method you will become, Christ over again; you will become conformed, as God means you to become conformed, to the image of His Son." This has been tested by the experience of thousands; and it has been found to be a true method. Every one who spends but two minutes in the morning in the observation of Christ, every one who will be at the pains to let the image of Christ rise before him and to remember the purity, the unworldliness, the heavenliness, the godliness of Jesus Christ, that man is the better for this exercise. And how utterly useless is it to offer any other method of sanctification to thousands of our fellow-citizens. How can many of our fellow-citizens secrete themselves for prayer? If you ask them to go and pray as you pray in your comfortable home, if you ask them to read the Bible before they go out at five or six o'clock in the morning, do you expect that your word will be followed? Why, the thing is impossible. But ask a man to carry Christ with him in his mind, that is a thing he can do; and if he does it once, if only once the man sees Christ before him, realises that this living Person is with him, and remembers the character of Christ as it is written for us in the Gospels, that man knows that he has made a step in advance, knows that he is the better for it, knows that he does reflect, for a little, even though it be but for a little, the very image of the Lord Jesus Christ; and other people know it also.

Now, if that is so, there are obviously three things that we must do. We must in the first place, learn to associate with Christ. I say that even one reflection does something, but we need to reflect Christ constantly, continually, if we are to become like Him. When you pass away from before a mirror the reflection also .goes. In the case of Moses the reflection stayed for a little, and that is perhaps a truer figure of what happens to the Christian who sets Christ before him and reflects him. But very often as soon as Christ is not consciously remembered you fall back to other remembrances and reflect other things. You go out in the morning with your associates, and they carry you away; you have not as yet sufficiently impressed upon yourself the image of Christ. Therefore we must learn to carry Christ with us always, as a constant Companion. Some one may say that is impossible. No one will say it is impossible who is living in absence from anyone he loves. What happens when we are living separated from some one we love? This happens: that his image is continually in our minds. At the most unexpected times that image rises, and especially, if we are proposing to ourselves to do what that person would not approve. At once his image rises to rebuke us and to hold us back. So that it is not only possible to carry with us the image of Christ: it is absolutely certain that we shall carry that image with us if only we give Him that love and reverence which is due from every human being. Who has done for us what Christ has done? Who commands our reverence as He does? If once He gets hold of our affection, it is impossible that He should not live constantly in our hearts. And if we say that persons deeply immersed in business cannot carry Christ with them thus, remember what He Himself says: "If any man love Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him." So that He is most present with the busiest and with those who strive as best they can to keep His commandments. But we must not only associate with Christ and make Him our constant company: we must, in the second place, set ourselves square with Christ. You know that if you look into a mirror obliquely, if a mirror is not set square with you, you do not see yourself, but what is at the opposite angle, something that is pleasant or something that is disagreeable to you; it matters not--you cannot see yourself. And unless we as mirrors set ourselves perfectly square with Christ, we do not reflect Him, but perhaps things that are in His sight monstrous. And, in point of fact, that

is what happens with most of us, because it is here that we are chiefly tried. All persons brought up within the Christian Church pay some attention to Christ. We too well understand His excellence and we too well understand the advantages of being Christian men not to pay some attention to Christ. But that will not make us conform to His image. In order to be conformed to the image of Christ we must be wholly His. Suppose you enter a studio where a sculptor is working, will he hand you his hammer and chisel to finish the most difficult piece of his work or to do any part of it? Assuredly not. It is his own idea that he is working out, and none but his own hand can work it out. So with us who are to be moulded by Christ. Christ cannot mould us into His image unless we are wholly His. Every stroke that is made upon us by the chisel and mallet of the world is lost to His ideal. As often as we reflect what is not purely Christian, so often do we mar the I image of Christ.

Now how is it with us? Need we ask? When we go along the street, what is it that we reflect? Do we not reflect a thousand things that Christ disapproves? What is it that our heart responds to when we are engaged in business? Is it to appeals that this world makes to us? Is it the appeal that a prospect of gain makes to us that we respond to eagerly? That is what is making us; that is what is moulding and making us the men that we are destined to be. We are moulded into the character that we are destined to live with for ever and ever, by our likings and dislikings, by the actual response that we are now giving day by day to the things that we have to do with in this world. We may loathe the character of the sensualist; no language is too strong for us when we speak of him: but if we, in point of fact, respond to appeals made to the flesh rather than appeals made to the spirit, we are becoming sensual. We may loathe and despise the character of the avaricious worldly man; we may see its littleness, and pettiness, and greed, and selfishness: but do our own hearts go out in response to any offer of gain more eagerly than they go out to Christian work or to the interests of Christ’s kingdom? Then we are becoming worldly and avaricious; we are becoming the very kind of men that we despise. Of course we know this. We Know that we are being made by what we respond to, and the older we grow we know it the more clearly; we see it written on our own character that we have become the kind of men that we little thought one day we should become, and we know that we have become such men by responding to certain things which are not the things of the Spirit. Never was a truer word said than that he that Soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, and he only that soweth to the Spirit shall reap life. That is what in other terms Paul here says. He says, "If you set yourselves square with Christ, you will become like Him; that is to say, if you find your all in Him, if you can be absolutely frank and honest with Him, if you can say, ’Mould and fashion me according to Thy will; lead me according to Thy will; make me in this world what Thou wilt; do with me what Thou wilt: I put myself wholly at Thy disposal; I do not wish to crane to see past Christ’s figure to some better thing beyond; I give myself wholly and freely to him’--the man that says this, the man that does this, he will certainly become like to Him. But the man who even when he prays knows that he has desires in his heart that Christ cannot gratify, the man that never goes out from his own home or never goes into his own home without knowing that he has responded to things that Christ disapproves--how can that man hope to be like Him?"

We must then associate with Christ, and we must set ourselves squarely; we must. be absolutely true in our entire and absolute devotion. Surely no man thinks that this is a hardship; that his nature and life will be restricted by giving himself wholly to Christ? It is only, as every Christian will tell you--it is only when you give yourself entirely to Christ that you know what freedom means;

that you know what it is to live in this world afraid of nothing. Superior to things that before you were afraid of and anxious about, you at length learn what it is to be a child of God. Let no man think that he lames his nature and makes his life poorer by becoming entirely the possession of Christ.

But, thirdly, we must set Christ before us and live before Him with unveiled face. "We all _with unveiled face_ reflecting as a mirror." Throw a napkin over a mirror, and it reflects nothing. Perfect beauty may stand before it, but the mirror gives no sign. And this is why in a dispensation like ours, the Christian dispensation, with everything contrived to reflect Christ, to exhibit Christ, the whole thing set a-going for this purpose of exhibiting Christ, we so little see Him. How is it that two men can sit at a Communion table together, and the one be lifted to the seventh heaven and see the King in His beauty, while the other only envies his neighbour his vision? Why is it that in the same household two persons will pass through identically the same domestic circumstances, the same events, from year to year, and the one see Christ everywhere, while the other grows sullen, sour, indifferent? Why is it? Because the one wears a veil that prevents him from seeing Christ; the other lives with unveiled face. How was it that the Psalmist, in the changes of the seasons even, in the mountain, in the sea, in everything that he had to do, found God? How was it that he knew that even though he made his bed in hell he would find God? Because he had an unveiled face; he was prepared to find God. How is it that many of us can come into church and be much more taken up with the presence of some friend than with the presence of Christ? The same reason still: we wear a veil; we do not come with unveiled face prepared to see Him. And When we ask ourselves, "What, in point of fact, is the veil that I wear? What is it that has kept me from responding to the perfect beauty of Christ’s character? I know that that character is perfect; I know that I ought to respond to it; I know that I ought to go out eagerly towards Christ and strive to become like Him; why do I not do it?" we find that the veil that keeps us from responding thus to Christ and reflecting Him is not like the mere dimness on a mirror which the bright and warm presence of Christ Himself would dry off; it is like an incrustation that has been growing out from our hearts all our life long, and that now is impervious, so far as we can see, to the image of Christ. How can hearts steeped in worldliness reflect this absolutely unworldly, this heavenly Person? When we look into our hearts, what do we find in point of fact? We find a thousand ,things that we know have no right there; that we know to be wrong. How can such hearts reflect this perfect purity of Christ? Well, we must see to it that these hearts be cleansed; we must hold ourselves before Christ until from very shame these passions of ours are subdued, until His purity works its way into our hearts through all obstructions; and we must keep our hearts, we must keep the mirror free from dust, free from incrustations, once we have cleansed it. In some circumstances you might be tempted to say that really it is not so much that there is a veil on the mirror as that there is no quicksilver at all behind. You meet in life characters so thin, so shallow, that every good thought seems to go through and out of them at the other side; they hear with one ear, and it goes out at the other. You can make no impression upon them. There is nothing to impress, no character there to work upon. They are utterly indifferent to spiritual things, and never give a thought to their own character. What is to be done with such persons? God is the great Teacher of us all; God, in His providence, has made many a man who has begun life as shallow and superficial as man can be, deep enough before He has done with him.

Two particulars in which the perfectness of this method appears may be pointed out. First of all, it is perfect in this: that anyone who begins it is bound to go on to the end. The very nature of the case leads him to go on and on from glory to glory, back and back to Christ, until the process is, actually completed, and he is like Christ. The reason is this: that the Christian conscience is never much taken up with attainment made, but always with attainment that is yet to be made. It is the difference not the likeness that touches the conscience. A friend has been away in Australia for ten years, and he sends you his likeness, and you take it out eagerly, and you say, "Yes, the eyes are the very eyes; the brow, the hair are exactly like," but there is something about the mouth that you do not like, and you thrust it away in a drawer and never look at it again. Why? Because the one point of unlikeness destroys the whole to you. Just so when any Christian presents himself before Christ it is not the points of likeness, supposing there are any, which strike his conscience--it is the remaining points of difference that inevitably strike him, and so he is urged on and on from one degree of proficiency to another until the process is completed, because there is no point at which a man has made a sufficient attainment in the likeness of Christ. There is no point at which Christ draws a line and says, "You will do well if you reach this height, and you need not strive further." Why, we should be dissatisfied, we should throw up our allegiance to Christ if He treated us so. He is our ideal, and it is resemblance to Him that draws us and makes us strive forward; and so a man is bound, to go on, and on, and on, still drawn on to his ideal, still rebuked by his shortcomings until he perfectly resembles Christ. And this character of Christ that is our ideal is not assumed by Him for the nonce. He did not change His nature when He came to this earth; He did not put on this character to set us an example. The things that He did, He did because it was His nature to do them. He came to this world because His love would not let Him stay away from us. It was His nature that brought Him here, and it is His nature to be what He is, and so his character is to become our nature; it is to be so wrought in us that we cannot give it up. It is our eternal character, and therefore any amount of pains is worth spending on the achievement of it. The second point of perfectness lies here. You know that in painting a likeness or cutting out a bust one feature often may be almost finished while the rest are scarcely touched, but in standing before a mirror the whole comes out at once. Now we often in the Christian life deal with ourselves as if we were painters and sculptors, not as if we were mirrors: we hammer and chisel away at ourselves to bring out some resemblance to Christ in some particulars, thinking that we can do it piecemeal; we might as well try to feed up our body piecemeal; we might as well try to make our eye bright without giving our cheek colour and our hands strength. The body is a whole, and we must feed the whole and nourish the whole if any one part of it is to be vigorous. So it is with character. The character is a whole, and you can only deal with your character as a whole. What has resulted when we have tried the other process? Sometimes we set ourselves to subdue a sin or cultivate a grace. Well, candidly say what has come of this. Judging from my own experience, I would say that this comes of it: that in three or four days you forget what sin it was that you were trying to subdue. The temptation is away, and the sin is not there, and you forget all about it. That is the very snare of sin. Or you become a little better in a point that you were trying to cultivate. In that grace you are a shade improved. But that only brings out more astoundingly your frightful shortcoming in other particulars. Now, adopting Paul’s method, this happens: Christ acts on our character just as a person acts upon a mirror. The whole image is reflected at once. How is it that society moulds a man? How can you tell in what class in society a man has been brought up? Not by one thing, not by his accent, not by his bearing, not by his conduct, but the whole man. And

why? Because a man does not consciously imitate this or that feature of the society in which he is brought up, does not do it consciously at all; he is merely reflecting it as a mirror, and society acts on him as a whole, and makes him the man he is. "Just so," says Paul. "Live with Christ, and He will make you the man that you are destined to be."

One word in conclusion. I suppose there is no one who at one time or other has not earnestly desired to be of some use in the world. Perhaps there are few who have not even definitely desired to be of some use in the kingdom of Christ. As soon as we recognise the uniqueness of Christ's purpose and the uniqueness of His power in the world, as soon as we recognise that all good influence and all superlatively dominant influence proceeds from Him, and that really the hope of our race lies in Jesus Christ--as soon as we realise that, as soon as we see that with our reason, and not as a thing that we have been taught to believe, as soon as we lay hold on it for ourselves, we cannot but wish to do something to forward His purposes in the world. But as soon as we form the wish we say, "What can we do? We have not been born with great gifts; we have not been born in superior positions; we have not wealth; we are shut off from the common ways of doing good; we cannot teach in the Sabbath school; we cannot go and preach; we cannot go and speak to the sick; we cannot speak even to our fellow at the desk. What can we do?" We can do the best thing of all, as of course all the best things are open to every man. Love, faith, joy, hope, all these things, all the best things, are open to all men; and so here it is open to all of us to forward the cause of Christ in the most influential way possible, if not in the most prominent way. What happens when a person is looking into a shop window where there is a mirror, and some one comes up behind--some one he knows? He does not look any longer at the image; he turns to look at the person whose image is reflected. Or if he sees reflected on the mirror something very striking: he does not content himself with looking at the image; he turns and looks at the thing itself. So it is always with the persons that you have to do with. If you become a mirror to Christ your friends will detect it in a very few days; they will see appearing in you, the mirror, an image which they know has not been originated in you, and they will turn to look straight at the Person that you are reflecting. It is in that way that Christianity passes from man to man.

01.04. THE TRANSFIGURATION.

THE TRANSFIGURATION.

"And it came to pass about eight days after these sayings, He took Peter and John and James and went up into the mountain to pray."-- Luke 9:28-36. The public life or our Lord falls into two parts; and the incident here recorded is the turning point between them. In order that He might leave behind Him when He died a sure foundation for His Church, it was necessary that His intimate companions should at all events know that He was the Christ, and that the Christ must enter into glory by suffering death. Only then, when they understood . this, could He die and leave them on earth behind. Now it is just at this point in His life that it has become quite clear that the first article of the Christian creed--that Jesus is the Christ--had been at last definitely accepted by the disciples. Very solemnly our Lord has put it to them: "Who say ye that I am ?" No doubt it was a trying moment for Him as for them. What was He to do if it had not now become plain at least to a few steadfast souls that He was the Christ--the Messenger of God to men? Happily the impulsiveness of Peter gives Him little space for anxiety; for he, with that generous outburst of affectionate trust which should ring through every creed, said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." You see the intensified relief which this brought to our Lord, the keen satisfaction He felt as He heard it distinctly and solemnly uttered as the creed of the Twelve; as He heard what hitherto He could only have gathered from casual expressions, from wistful awe-struck looks, from overheard questionings and debatings with one another. You see how at once, He steps on to a new footing with them, as He cordially, and with intense gratitude, says to Peter, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona." In this Divinely-wrought confession of Peter’s, He finds at last the foundation stone of the earthly building the beginning of that intelligent and hearty reception of Himself which was to make earth the recipient of all heaven’s fulness. But as yet only half the work is done. Men believe that He is the King, but as yet they have very little idea of what the kingdom is to consist. They think Him worthy of all glory, but the kind of glory, and the way to it they are ignorant of. From, that time forth, therefore, began Jesus to show unto them how He must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things, even of the men who ought chiefly to have recognised Him, and to be raised again the third day.

Once before our Lord had been tempted in another way to the throne of the universal dominion of men; again this temptation is pressed upon Him by the very men who should have helped Him to resist it; His closest, His warmest, His most enlightened friends, those who stand on quite a different plane from the world at large, are His tempters. Satan found in them an adequate mouthpiece. They, who should have cheered and heartened Him to face the terrible prospect, were hindrances, were an additional burden and anxiety to Him.

Now, it is to this conversation that the incident known as the transfiguration is linked by all the evangelists who relate it--the first three. It was six days after (or, as Luke says, eight days after) this conversation that Jesus went up Mount Hermon for the sake of retirement and prayer. Plainly He was aware that the great crisis of His life had come. The time had come when He must cease

teaching, and face His destiny. He had made upon His disciples an impression which would be indelible. With deliberation they had accepted Him as the Messiah; the Church was founded; His work, so far as His teaching went, was accomplished. It remained that He should die. To consecrate Himself to this hard necessity, He retired to the solitude of Mount Hermon. We start, then, from the wrong point of view, if we suppose that Jesus climbed Hermon in order to enjoy spiritual ecstasy, or exhibit His glory to those three men. Ecstasy of this kind must come unsought; and the way to it lies through conflict, humiliation, self-mastery. It was not simply to pray that Jesus retired; it was to engage in the great conflict of His life. And because He felt, Himself so much in need of kindness and support, He took with Him the three companions He could most depend upon. They were loyal friends; and their very presence was a strength to Him. So human was Jesus, and now so heavily burdened, that the devotedness of these three plain men--the sound of their voices, the touch of their hands as they clambered the hill together, gave Him strength and courage. Let no one be ashamed to lean upon the affection of his fellow-men. Let us, also, reverently, and with sympathy, accompany our Lord and witness, and endeavour to understand, the conflict in which He now engaged. It has been suggested that the transfiguration may best be understood as a temptation. Undoubtedly there must have been temptation in the experience of Jesus at this crisis. It was for the purpose of finally consecrating Himself to death, with all its painful accompaniments, that He now retired. But the very difficulty of this act of consecration consisted just in this: that He might, if He pleased, avoid death. It was because Peter’s words, "This be far from Thee," touched a deep chord in His own spirit, and strengthened that within Himself which made Him tremble and wish that God’s will could in any other wise be accomplished--it was this which caused Him so sharply and suddenly to rebuke Peter. Peter’s words penetrated to what was lurking near at hand as His normal temptation. We may very readily underrate the trial and temptation of Christ, and thus have only a formal, not a real, esteem for His manhood. We always underrate it when we do not fully apprehend His human nature, and believe that He was tempted in all points as we are. But, on the other hand, we underrate it if we forget that His position was wholly different from ours. That Jesus had abundant nerve and courage no reader of the Gospels can, of course, doubt. He was calm in the midst of a storm which terrified experienced boat-men; in riots that threatened His life, in the hands of soldiers striving to torment Him and break Him down, in the presence of judges and enemies, He maintained a dignity which only the highest courage could maintain. That such a Person should have quailed at the prospect of physical suffering, which thousands of men and women have voluntarily and calmly faced, is simply impossible to believe. Neither was it entirely His perception of the spiritual significance of death which made it to Him a far more painful prospect than to any other. Certainly this clear perception of the meaning of death did add immensely to its terrors; but if we are even to begin to understand His trial, and begin is all we can do--we must bear in mind what Peter had just confessed, and what Jesus Himself knew--that He was the Christ. It was this which made the difference. Socrates could toss off the poison as unmoved as if it had been a sleeping-draught, because he was dying for himself alone. Jesus could only with trembling take into His hand the fatal cup, because He knew that He was standing for all men. If He failed, all failed. Everything hung upon Him. The general who spends the whole night pacing his tent, debating the chances of battle on the morrow, is not tormented with the thought of his own private fate, but with the possibilities of disaster to his men and to his country, if his design or his skill should at any moment of the battle fail. Jesus was human; and we deny His humanity, and fail to give Him the honour due

to it, if we do not recognise the difficulty which He must always have felt in believing that His single act could save the world, and the burden of responsibility which must have weighed upon Him when He realised that it was by the Spirit He maintained in life and in death, that God meant to bless all men. It was because He knew Himself to be the Christ, and because every man depended upon Him as the Christ, and because, therefore, the whole blessing God meant for the world depended upon His maintaining faith in God through the most trying circumstances--it was because of this that He trembled lest all should end in failure. It was this which drove Him, again, and again, and again to the hills to spend all night in prayer, in laying His burden upon the only Strength that could bear it. But in retiring in order, with deliberation, finally to dedicate Himself to death, this temptation must of necessity appear in all its strength. It is only in presence of all that can induce Him to another course that He can resolve upon the God-appointed way. As He prays two figures necessarily rise before Him, and intensify the temptation. Moses and Elias were God’s greatest servants in the past, and neither of them had passed to glory through so severe an ordeal. Moses, with eye undimmed and strength unabated, was taken from earth by a departure so easy that it was said to be "by the kiss of God." Elijah, instead of removal by death, ascended to his rest in a chariot of fire. Was it not possible that as easy an exodus might befit Him? Might not this ignominious death He looked forward to make it impossible for the people to believe in Him? How could they rank Him with those old prophets whom God had dealt with so differently and so plainly honoured? Would people not almost necessarily accept the death of the cross as proof that He was abandoned? Nay, did not their sacred books justify them in considering Him accursed of God? Was He correct in His interpretation of the Scriptures--an interpretation which led Him to believe that the Messiah must suffer and die, but which none of His friends admitted, and none of the authorities and skilled interpreters in His country admitted? Was it not, after all, possible that His kingdom might be established by other means? We can see but a small part of the force of these temptations, but If the presence of those august figures intensified the normal temptation of this period, their presence was also a very effectual aid against this temptation. In their presence His anticipated end could no longer be called death; rather the departure, or, as the narrative says, the Exodus. The eternal will and mighty hand which had guided and upheld Moses when he bore the responsibility and toil of emancipating a host of slaves from the most powerful of rulers would uphold Jesus in the infinitely weightier responsibilities which now lay upon Him. Elijah, also, at a crisis of his people’s history, had stood alone against all the might and malignity of Jezebel and the priests of Baal; alone, and with death staring him in the face, he confessed God, and, by his single-handed victory, wrought deliverance for the whole people. Their combined voice, therefore, says to Jesus, "Banish all fear; look forward to your decease at Jerusalem as about to effect an immeasurably grander deliverance than that which gave freedom to your people. Do not shrink from trusting that the sacrifice of One can open up a source of blessing to all. Steadfast submission to God’s will is ever the path to glory." But not only must our Lord have been encouraged and heartened by recalling the individual experiences of these men, but their presence reminds Him of His relation to them in God’s purposes; for Moses and Elijah represent the whole Old Testament Church. By the Law and the Prophets had God up to this time dealt with men; through these He had revealed Himself. But Jesus had long since recognised that neither Moses nor Elias, neither Law nor Prophets, were sufficient. The Christ must come to effect a real mediation between God and man; and Jesus knew that He Himself was the Christ. On Him lay the task of making the salvation of the Jews the salvation of the whole world; of bringing all men to

Jehovah. It was under pressure of this responsibility that He had searched the Scriptures, and found in the Scriptures what those had not found--that it was necessary that Christ should suffer and so enter into glory.

Probably it was not so much any one passage of Scripture which had carried home to the mind of Jesus that the Christ must die. We may seek for that in vain; it was His perception of the real needs of men, and of what the Law and the Prophets had done to satisfy these needs, that showed Him what remained for the final Revealer and Mediator to accomplish. The Law and the Prophets had told men that God is holy, and men's blessedness, even as God's blessedness, lies in holiness. But this very teaching seemed to widen the breach between men and God, and to make union between them truly hopeless. By the law came not union with God, but the knowledge of sin. To put it shortly, fellowship or union with God, which is the beginning and end of all religion, is but another name for holiness. Holiness is union with God, and holiness can better be secured by revealing the holy God as a God of love than by law or by prophets. It is this holy love and lovingness that the cross of Christ brings home to every heart. This revelation of the Father, no document and no officials could possibly make; only the Beloved Son, only one who stood in a personal relation to the Father, and was of the same nature, as truly divine as human. Therefore the voice goes forth annulling all previous utterances, and turning all eyes to Jesus--"Hear Him!" Therefore, as often as the mind of Christ was employed on this subject, so often did He see the necessity of death. It was only by dying that men's sins could be expiated, and only by dying the fulness of God's love could be exhibited. The Law and the Prophets spoke to Him always, and now once more of the decease He must accomplish at Jerusalem. They spoke of His death, because it was His death that was presupposed by every sacrifice of the Law; by every prophecy that foretold good to man. The Law found its highest fulfilment in the most lawless of transgressions; prophecy found its richest in that which seemed to crush out hope itself.

Nothing, then, could have been more opportune than this for the encouragement of our Lord. On earth He had found incredulity among His best friends; incapacity to see why He should die; indifference to His object here. He now meets with those who, with breathless interest, await His death as if it were the one only future event. In their persons He sees, at one view, all who had put their trust in God from the foundation of the world; all who had put faith in a sacrifice for sin, knowing it was God's appointment, and that He would vindicate His own wisdom and truth by finding a real propitiation; all who, through dark and troublous times, had strained to see the consolation of Israel; all who, in the misery of their own thought, had still believed that there was a true glory for men somewhere to be attained; all who through the darkness and storm and fear of earth had trusted in God, scarcely daring to think what would become of their trust, but assured that God had spoken, nay, had covenanted with His people, and finding true rest in Him. When all these now stand before our Lord in the persons of Moses and Elias, the hitherto mediators between God and man, must not their waiting eyes, their longing, trustful expectation, have confirmed His resolve that their hope should not be put to shame? The whole anxiety of guilty consciences, the whole hope of men awakened, the whole longing sigh for a God revealed, that had breathed from the ancient Church, at once became audible to His ear. At once He felt the dependence of all who had died in faith in the promise. He meets the eager, questioning gaze of all who had hoped for salvation concentrated on Himself. Is this He who can save the lost, He who can bear the weight of a world's dependence? What an appeal there is here to His compassion!

How steadfastly now does He set His face towards Jerusalem, feeling straitened till the world's salvation is secured, and all possibility of failure for ever at an end.

This, then, was for Jesus an appeal that was irresistible. As the full meaning of all that God had done for His people through Law and Prophets was borne in upon Him, He saw that He must die. Now, for the last time, He put aside all His hesitations, and as He prays, He yields Himself to the will of the Father. Those are the supreme moments in human life when man, through sore conflict and at great cost, gives himself up to the will of God. Never was there so sore a conflict, and never so much joy as here. His face was transfigured; it beamed with the light and peace of heaven that shone from within. The eyes of the disciples closed on a face, every line of which they knew and loved--a face full of wisdom and resolve and deep-founded peace, showing marks of trouble, of trial, of endurance, of premature age; their eyes opened upon a face that shines with a preternatural radiance--a face expressing, more than ever face had done, the dignity and glory and joy of perfect harmony with God. He was God-possessed, and the Divine glory shone from His face. It was at the moment of his yielding all to God that Jesus attained His highest glory. Man's life is transformed when he allows God's will to fill it and shine through it; his person is transformed when he divests himself of self-will, and allows God wholly to possess it.

How easy was it for the disciples at that hour to hear Him; to listen now when He spoke of the cross, which, for Him and for all His disciples, is the path leading from earth to heaven, from what is selfishly human to true human glory! It is on the cross that Jesus is truly enthroned. It is because He became the Servant of all that He is greatest of all. If anyone could rival Him in the service he would rival Him in the glory. It is because He gave Himself for us, willing to do all to save us in our direst need, that He takes a place in our confidence and in our heart that belongs to no other. He becomes the one absolute need of every man, because He is that which brings us to God, and gives God to us.

Hear Him, therefore, when, through His Providence, He preaches to you this difficult lesson. If your difficulties and distresses are real; if you cannot labour without thinking of them; if you cannot rest from labour through fear of their possessing you; if your troubles have assumed so hard a form, so real a place in your life, that all else has come to seem unreal and empty, then remember that He whose end was to be eternal glory chose sorrow, that He might break a way to glory through human suffering. If there is nothing in your lot in life which crosses and humbles you; if there is nothing in your circumstances which compels you to see that this life is not for self-indulgence and self-gratification, then still you must win participation in your Lord's glory by accepting His lowliness and heavenliness of mind. It is not to outward success that you are called in His kingdom, it is to inward victory. You are called to meekness, and lowliness, and mercy; to the losing of your life in this world, that you may have life everlasting.

Notice, in conclusion, the impression made on the disciples, as disclosed in Peter's words, "It is good to be here." Peter knew when he was in good company. He was not very wise himself, but he had sense enough to recognise wisdom in others. He was not himself a finished saint, but he had a hearty appreciation of those who had attained saintliness. He had reverence, power to recognise, and ungrudgingly to worship, what was good. He had an honest delight in seeing his Master honoured, a delight which, perhaps, some of us envy. It was not a forced expression, it was not a feigned delight. He was a man who always felt that something should be said, and so

here what was uppermost came out. Why did Peter feel it was good for him to be there? Possibly it was in part because here was glory without shame; recognition and homage without suffering; but no doubt partly because he felt that in such company he was a better man than elsewhere. Christ kept him right; seemed to understand him better than others; to consider him more. There was no resentment on Peter's part on account of the severe answers he received from Christ. He knew these were just, and he had learned to trust his Lord; and it suddenly flashes upon him that, if only he could live quietly with Jesus in such retirement as they then enjoyed, he would be a better man. We have the same consciousness as Peter, that if ever we are right-minded and disposed for good, and able to make sacrifices and become a little heavenly; if ever we hate sin cordially--it is when we are in the presence of Christ. If we find it as impossible as Peter did to live retired from all conflict and intercourse with all kinds of men; if, like Peter, we have to descend into a valley ringing with demoniacs cries; if we are called upon to deal with the world as it actually is--deformed, dehumanised by sin; is it nothing that we can assure ourselves of the society and friendship of One who means to remove all suffering and all sin, and who does so, not by a violent act of authority, but by sympathy and patient love, so that we can be His proper instruments, and in healing and helping others, help and heal ourselves!

01.05. INDISCREET IMPORTUNITY

INDISCREET IMPORTUNITY.

"I gave thee a king in mine anger." Hosea 13:11.

"Ye know not what ye ask." Matthew 20:22.

Psalms 78:27-31. That God sometimes suffers men to destroy themselves, giving them their own way, although He knows it is ruinous, and even putting into their hands the scorpion they have mistaken for a fish, is an indubitable and alarming fact.

Perhaps no form of ruin covers a man with such shame or sinks him to such hopelessness as when he finds that what he has persistently clamoured for and refused to be content without, has proved the bitterest and most disastrous element in his life. This particular form of ruin is nowhere described with more careful, and significant detail than in the narrative of Israel's determination to have a king over them like other nations. Samuel, forseeing the evils which would result from their choice, remonstrated with them and reminded them of their past success, and pointed out the advantageous elements in their present condition. But there is a point at which desire becomes deaf and blind, and the evil of it can be recognised only after it is gratified. God therefore gave them a king in His anger." The truth, then, which is embodied in this incident, and which is liable to reappear in the experience of any individual, is this, that sometimes God yields to importunity, and grants to men what He knows will be no blessing to them. "It is a thing," says South, "partly worth our wonder, partly our compassion, that what the greatest part of men most passionately desire, that they are generally most unfit for; so that at a distance they court that as an enjoyment, which upon experience they find a plague and a great calamity." It is astonishing how many things we desire for the same reason as the Israelites sought a king, merely that we may have what other people have. We may not definitely covet our neighbour's house or his wife or his position or anything that is his; but deep within us remains the scarcely-conscious conviction that we have not all we might and ought to have until our condition more resembles his. We take our ideas of happiness from what we see in other people, and have little originality to devise any special and more appropriate enjoyment or success. Fashion or tradition or the necessity of one class in society has promoted certain possessions and conditions to the rank of extremely desirable or even necessary elements of happiness, and forthwith we desire them, without duly considering our own individuality and what it is that must always constitute happiness for us, or what it is that fits us for present usefulness. Health, position, fame, a certain settlement in life, income, marriage; such things are eagerly sought by thousands, and they are sought without sufficient discrimination, or at any rate without a well-informed weighing of consequences. We refuse, too, to see that already without those things our condition has much advantage, and that we are actually happy. We may be dimly conscious that our tastes are not precisely those of other men, and that if the ordinary ways of society are the best men can devise for spending life satisfactorily, these are scarcely the ways that will suit us. Yet, like petted children, we continue persistently to cry for the thing we have not. Sometimes it is a mere question of waiting. The thing we sigh for will come in

time, but not yet. To wait is the test of many persons; and if they are impatient, they fail in the one point that determines the whole. Many young persons seem to think life will all be gone before they taste any of its sweets. They must have everything at once, and cannot postpone any of its enjoyments or advantages. No quality is more fatal to success and lasting happiness than impatience. This being a common attitude of mind towards fancied blessings, how does God deal with it? For a long time He may in compassion withhold the fatal gift. He may in pity disregard our petulant clamour. And He may in many ways bring home to our minds that the thing we crave is in several respects unsuitable. We may become conscious under His discipline that without it we are less entangled with the world and with temptation; that we can live more holily and more freely as we are, and that to quench the desire we have would be to choose the better part. God may make it plain to us that it is childish to look upon this one thing as the supreme and only good. Providential obstacles are thrown in our way, difficulties amounting almost to impossibilities absolutely prevent us for a while from attaining our object, and give us time to collect ourselves and take thought. And not only are we prevented from attaining this one object, but in other respects our life is enriched and gladdened, so that we might be expected to be content. If we cannot have a king like other nations, we have the best of Judges in abundance. And experience of this kind will convince the subject of it that a Providence shapes our ends, even although the lesson it teaches may remain unlearnt. For man’s will is never forced: and therefore if we continue to pin our happiness to this one object, and refuse to find satisfaction and fruit in life without it, God gives in anger what we have resolved to obtain. He gives it in its bare earthly form, so that as soon as we receive it our soul sinks in shame. Instead of expanding our nature and bringing us into a finished and satisfactory condition, and setting our life in right relations with other men, we find the new gift to be a curse to us, hampering us, cutting us off in unexpected ways from our usefulness, thwarting and blighting our life round its whole circumference. For a man is never very long in discovering the mischief he has done by setting his own wisdom above God’s, by underrating God’s goodness and overriding God’s will. When Samuel remonstrated with Israel and warned them that their king would tyrannise over them, all the answer he got was: "Nay, but we will have a king to rule over us." But, not many days after, they came to Samuel with a very different petition: "Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not; for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king." So it is always; we speedily recognise the difference between God’s wisdom and our own. What seemed neglect on His part is now seen to be care, and what we murmured at as niggardliness and needless harshness we now admire as tenderness. Those at least are our second and wiser thoughts, even although at first we may be tempted with Manoah when he saw his son blind and fettered in the Philistine dungeon, to exclaim,

What thing good Pray’d for, but often proves our woe, our bane?

I prayed for children and thought barrenness In wedlock a reproach;

I gain’d a son And such a son as all men hail’d me happy. Who would be now a father in my stead?

Oh, wherefore did God grant me my request, And as a blessing with such pomp adorn’d Why are His gifts desirable, to tempt Our earnest prayers, then giv’n with solemn hand As graces, draw a scorpion’s tail behind?

Such, I say, may be our first thoughts; but when the first bitterness and bewilderment of disappointment are over, when reason and right feeling begin to dominate, we own that the whole history of our prayer and its answer has been most humiliating to us, indeed, but most honouring to God. We see as never before how accurately our character has been understood, how patiently our evil propensities have been resisted, how truly our life has been guided towards the highest ends. The obvious lessons are:-

1. Be discreet in your importunity. Two parables are devoted to the inculcation of importunity. And it is a duty to which our own intolerable cravings drive us. But there is an importunity which offends God. There is a spiritual instinct which warns us when we are transgressing the bounds of propriety; a perception whereby Paul discerned, when he had prayed thrice for the removal of the thorn in his flesh, that it would not be removed. There are things, about which a heavenly-minded person feels it to be unbecoming to be over-solicitous; and there are things regarding which it is somehow borne in upon us that we are not to attain them. There are natural disabilities, physical or mental or social weaknesses and embarrassments, regarding which we sometimes cannot but cry out to God for relief, and yet as we cry we feel that they will not be removed, and that we must learn to bear the burden cheerfully.

2. On the other hand, we must not be false in prayer. We must utter to God our real desires in their actual intensity; while at the same time we must learn to moderate desires which we see to be unpleasing to God. We must learn to say with truth: Not what we wish but what we want Thy favouring grace supply; The good unasked, in mercy grant, The ill, though asked, deny.

Learn why God does not make the coveted blessing accessible to you, and you will learn to pray freely and wisely. Try to discover whether there is not some peculiar advantage attaching to your present state--some more wholesome example you can furnish, some more helpful attitude towards others; some healthier exercise of the manlier graces of Christianity, which could not be maintained were your request granted.

3. If your life is marred by the gift you have wrung by your importunity from a reluctant God, be wise and humble in your dealing with that gift. If you have suddenly and painfully learned that in the ordinary-looking circumstances of your life God is touching you at every point, and if you clearly see that in giving you the fruit of your desires He is punishing you, there is one only way by which you can advance to a favourable settlement, and that is by a real submission to God. Perhaps in no circumstances is a man more tempted to break with God. At first he cannot reconcile himself to the idea that ruin should be the result of prayer, and he is inclined to say, If this be the result of waiting on God, the better course is to refuse His guidance. In his heart he knows he is wrong, but there is an appearance of justice in what he says, and it is so painful to have the heart broken, to admit we have been foolish and wrong, and humbly to beseech God to repair the disasters our own self-will has wrought.

Chapter 5

01.06. SHAME ON ACCOUNT OF GOD'S DISPLEASURE

SHAME ON ACCOUNT OF GOD’S DISPLEASURE.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again."-- Numbers 12:14. The incident recorded in this chapter is of a painful character. Petty jealousies discovered themselves in the most distinguished family of Israel. Through the robes of the anointed and sacred High Priest the throbbings of a heart stirred with evil passion were discernible. Aaron and Miriam could not bear that even their own brother should occupy a Position of exceptional dignity, and with ignorant pretentiousness aspired to equality with him. It is to the punishment of this sin that our attention is here called. This punishment fell directly on Miriam, possibly because the person of the High Priest was sacred, and had he been incapacitated all Israel would have suffered in their representative; possibly because the sin, as it shows traces of a peculiarly feminine jealousy, was primarily the sin of Miriam; and partly because, in her punishment, Aaron suffered a sympathetic shame, as is apparent from his, impassioned appeal to Moses in her behalf. The noteworthy feature of the incident and its most impressive lesson are found in the fact that, although the healing and forgiveness sought for Miriam were not refused, God is represented as resenting the speedy oblivion of the offence on account of which the leprosy had been sent and of the Divine displeasure incurred. There was cause to apprehend that the whole matter might be too quickly wiped out and forgotten, and that the sinners, reinstated in their old positions, should think too lightly of their offence. This detrimental suddenness God takes measures to prevent. Had an earthly father manifested his displeasure as emphatically as God had now shown His, Miriam could not for a time have held up her head. God desires that the shame which results from a sense of His displeasure should last at least as long. He therefore enjoins something like a penance; He removes His stroke, but provides for the moral effects of it being sufficiently impressed on the spirit to be permanent.

Three points are involved in the words:

1. Our keener sense of man’s displeasure than of God’s.

2. The consequent possibility of accepting pardon with too light a heart.

3. The means of preventing such acceptance of pardon.

1. _We are much more sensitive to the displeasure of man than to that of God._ Men have several methods of expressing their opinion of us and their feeling toward us; and these methods are quite effectual for their purpose. There is an instinctive and exact correspondence between our feelings and every slightest hint of disapprobation on the part of our acquaintances; and so readily and completely does the mere carriage of any person convey to us his estimate of our conduct that explicit denunciation is seldom required. The mode of expressing opinion which is cited in the text is the most forcible Eastern mode of expressing contempt. When one man spits in the face of another, no one, and least of all the suffering party, can have the slightest doubt of the esteem in

which the one holds the other. If an insolent enemy were to spit in the face of a slain foe, the dead man might almost be expected to blush or to rise and avenge the insult. But comparing His methods with such a method as this, God awards the palm to His own for explicitness and emphasis. He speaks of the most emphatic and unambiguous of human methods with a "but," as if it could scarcely be compared with His expressions of displeasure. "If her father had _but_ spit in her face"--if that were all--but something immensely more expressive than that has happened to her.

God, therefore, would have us ponder the punishments of sin, and find in them the emphatic expressions of His judgment of our conduct and of ourselves. He resents our shamelessness, and desires that we consider His judgments till our callousness is removed. The case stands thus: God. is long-suffering, slow to anger, not of a fault-finding, everchiding nature, but most loving and most just; and this God has recorded against us the strongest possible condemnation. This God, who cannot do what is not most just, and who cannot make mistakes, this unfurious and holy God, whose opinion of us represents the very truth, has pronounced us to be wicked and worthless; and we seem scarcely at all impressed by the declaration. God’s judgment of us is not only absolutely true, but it must also take effect; so that what He has pronounced against us will be seen written in the facts bearing upon and entering into our life. But, although we know this, we are for the most part as unmoved as if in hearing God’s judgment pronounced against us we had heard but the sighing of the wind or any other inarticulate, unintelligible sound. There is a climax of ignominy in having excited in the Divine mind feelings of displeasure against us. One might suppose a man would die of shame, and could not bear to live conscious of having merited the condemnation and punishment of such a Being; one might suppose that the breath of God’s disapproval would blast every blessing to us, and that so long as we know ourselves displeasing to Him His sweetest gifts must be bitter to us; but the coldness of a friend gives us more thought, and the contempt of men as contemptible as ourselves affects us with a more genuine confusion.

God’s demand, then, is reasonable. He would have us feel before Him as much shame as we feel before men, the same kind of shame--shame with the same blush and burning in it, not shame of any sublimated, fictitious kind. He desires us individually to take thought, and to say to ourselves: "Suppose a man had proved against me even a small part of what is proved against me by God: Suppose some wise, just, and honourable man had said of me and believed such things as God has said: suppose he had said, and said truly, that I had robbed him, betrayed trust, and was unworthy of his friendship, would the shame be no more poignant than that which I feel when God denounces me?" How trifling are the causes which make us blush before our fellows: a little awkwardness, the slightest accident which makes us appear blundering, some scarcely perceptible incongruity of dress, an infinitesimal error in manner or in accent--anything is enough to make us uneasy in the company of those we esteem. It is God’s reasonable demand that for those gross iniquities and bold transgressions of which we are conscious we should manifest some heartfelt shame--a shame that does not wholly lack the poignancy and agitation of the confusion we feel in presence of human judgment.

2. _The consequent possibility of accepting the pardon of sin with too light a heart._ To ask for pardon Without real shame is to treat sin lightly; and to treat sin lightly is to treat God lightly. Nothing more effectually deadens the moral sense than: the habit of asking pardon without a due sense of the evil of sin. We ask God to forgive us our debts, and we do so in so inconsiderate a

spirit that we go straightway and contract heavier debts. The friend who repays the ten pounds we had lent him and asks for a new loan of twenty, does not commend himself to our approval. He is no better who accepts pardon as if it cost God nothing.

3. _The means of preventing a too light-hearted acceptance of pardon._ Under the ceremonial prescriptions enjoined on Miriam lay some moral efficacy. A person left for a full week without the camp must, in separation from accustomed companionship, intercourse, and occupations, have been thrown upon his or her own thoughts. No doubt it is often while engaged in our ordinary occupations that the strongest light is flashed upon our true spiritual condition. It is while in the company of other people that we catch hints which seem to interpret to us our past and reveal to us our present state. But these glimpses and hints often pass without result, because we do not find leisure to follow them up. There must be some kind of separation from the camp if we are to know ourselves, some leisure gained for quiet reflection. It is due to God that we be at some pains to ascertain with precision our actual relation to His will. The very feeling of being outcast, unworthy to mingle with former associates and friends, must have been humbling and instructive. Miriam had been the foremost woman in Israel; now she would gladly have changed places with the least known and be lost among the throng from the eye of wonder, pity, contempt or cruel triumph. All sin makes us unworthy of fellowship with the people of God. And the feeling that we are thus unworthy, instead of being lightly and callously dismissed, should be allowed to penetrate and stir the conscience.

If the leprosy departed from Miriam as soon as Moses prayed, yet the shock to her physical system, and the revulsion of feeling consequent on being afflicted with so loathsome a disease, would tell upon her throughout the week. All consequences of sin, which are prolonged after pardon, have their proper effect and use in begetting shame. We are not to evade what conscience tells us of the connection between our sin and many of the difficulties of our life. We are not to turn away from this as a morbid view of providence; still less are we to turn away because in this light sin seems so real and so hideous. Miriam must have thought, "If this disgusting condition of my body, this lassitude and nervous trembling, this fear and shame to face my fellows, be the just consequence of my envy and pride, how abominable must these sins be." And we are summoned to similar thoughts. If this pursuing evil, this heavy clog that drags me down, this insuperable difficulty, this disease, or this spiritual and moral weakness be the fair natural consequence of my sin, if these things are in the natural world what my sin is in the spiritual, then my sin must be a much greater evil than I was taking it to be. But especially are we rebuked for all light-heartedness in our estimate of sin by remembering Him who went without the camp bearing our reproach. It is when we see Christ rejected of men, and outcast for us and for our sin, that we feel true shame. To find one who so loves me and enters into my position that He feels more keenly than myself the shame I have incurred; to find one who so understands God’s holiness and is Himself so pure that my sin affects Him with the profoundest shame--this is what pierces my heart with an altogether new compunction, with an arrow that cannot be shaken out. And this connection of Christ with our sin is actual. If Paul felt himself so bound up with his fellow-Christians that he blushed for them when they erred, and could say with truth, "Who is weak and I am not weak, who is offended and I turn not?" much more truly may Christ say, Who sins and I am not ashamed? And if He thus enters into a living sympathy with us, shall not we enter into sympathy with Him, and go without the camp bearing His reproach, which, indeed, is ours; striving,

though it cost us much shame and self-denial, to enter heartily into His feelings at our sins, and not letting our union to Him be a mere name or an inoperative tie which effects no real assimilation in spirit between us and Him.

01.07. NAAMAN CURED

NAAMAN CURED.

There is no Scripture story better known than that of Naaman, the Syrian. It is memorable not only because artistically told, but because it is so full of human feeling and rapid incident, and so fertile in significant ideas. The little maid, whose touch set in motion this drama, is an instance of the adaptability of the Jew. Nothing seemed less likely than that this captive girl should carry with her into Syria anything of much value to anyone. Possessions she had none. Friends she might have, only if she could make them. As a captive in a foreign land she might reasonably have put aside all hope of obtaining any influence, and might naturally have sought only to benefit herself. But she was a girl with a heart. She at once took an interest in her new home, and saw with sorrowful surprise that wealth could not purchase immunity from participation in the ordinary human distresses, nor guarded gates forbid disease to pass in. Brooding from day to day over the stories she had heard of Elisha’s power, and listening to her mistress’s account of the failure of still another attempted cure, she exclaims with childlike confidence and earnestness, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! then would he recover him of his leprosy." And thus her natural interest in the troubles of other people, her cheerful and spirited acceptance of her position, and the sense that taught her to make the most of it, brought her this great opportunity of doing an important service. No one can lay the blame of his uselessness and lack of good influence on his lack of opportunity, if he is in contact with men at all, for wherever there are human beings there are sorrows to be sympathised with, wants to be relieved, characters to be fashioned. And while this Jewish maid was utilising her captivity, her parents, if alive, would be eating their hearts out with anxiety and anguish, imagining for their daughter the worst of destinies. Instead of the horrors which usually follow such a captivity, she is cared for in a comfortable home. Little did the parents, think that there was any work to be done in Syria, which none could so well do as their little girl. The Lord had need of her, and knew that when the parents heard all they would not resent that their daughter had been thus employed. None of us see much further into the ways of Providence than those parents saw. Now, as then, those who are bound up in one another are separated, in order that ends even more important than the growth and gratification of natural affections may be attained.

Significant, also, is the dismay of Joram, King of Israel, when he received the letter bidding him find healing for Naaman. So little did he believe in Elisha’s power that he concluded the King of Syria sought to pick a quarrel with him by asking him for a favour he knew he could not grant. But while the king is helplessly tearing his clothes in a passion of despair, Elisha sends him a message which, at least for the present, gives him some calmness: "Why hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." Elisha is ashamed that the King of Israel should have exhibited such weakness before a foreign potentate. He feels that the honour of Israel’s God is implicated, and boldly takes upon himself the responsibility of the cure. Bold it certainly was, and tells of a confident faith that God will be faithful to His servants. The king had no such faith. There was a power resident in Israel of which he took no account. Like many

other governments, this Israelitish monarchy was unaware of its own resources, because it did not condescend to reckon what was spiritual. Frequently in civil history you find governments brought face to face with matters for which they are, with all their resources, incompetent. In modern Europe, and as much in our own country as in others, everything gives place to politics. Nothing stirs so much excitement. Differences in religion do not sever men as differences in politics do. We should, therefore, recognise what is here suggested, and should counter-balance an undue regard for political movements and political power by the remembrance that the hardest tasks of all are accomplished by quite another power, and by a power which the politician often overlooks. What have we seen time after time in our own Parliament, but the civil power rending its garments over evils which it cannot cure? Are not the remedies which have been proposed for prevalent vices absurdly incompetent? And it is the Church's shame if she cannot step forward and confidently say, You cannot deal with such things; hand them over to me. There must always be "distempers of society" which rot the very life out of a nation, and for which legislation and criminal law are wholly inadequate. Honest-minded men who will not trifle with alarming abuses, who will not pretend they have found a remedy, must simply rend their garments in their presence. And it is well that in our day, as in others, there are men who, trusting in personal effort and Divine aid, practically say to Government, "leave these things to us." Christian charity and practical wisdom have, in our day effected a good deal more than the healing of one leprous grandee, even if as yet the spiritual force that resides in the community is only spasmodically and partially applied to existing evil.

Elisha's treatment of Naaman was intended to bring him into direct and conscious dependence on God; or, in other words, to produce humility and faith. Some persons are crushed and mastered by pain and sickness, and some gain in spiritual worth what they lose in physical strength. But Naaman's disease had as yet done little to instruct him. He came as a great man, with his servants, and chariots, and piles of money, to purchase a cure from a skilled man. He did not see what Elisha plainly saw, that if this blessing came at all, it must come from Israel's God, and that with Jehovah no man Could barter or be on bargaining terms, but must accept freely what was freely given. Therefore Elisha refuses even to see him, that Naaman might understand it was with God he had to do; and by refusing a single penny of payment he compelled the Syrian to humble himself and accept his cure as a gift. And probably the incident finds a place in the sacred history because it marked an important step in the knowledge of God. It was an early instance of the Conquests which the God of Israel was to make among the heathen, a distinct and legible proof that whoever from among the outlying nations appealed to Him for help would receive the blessing he sought. But it was more than this, it emphasized the freeness of all God's gifts. Nothing could be purchased from Jehovah; everything must be received as a gift. This was a new idea to the heathen, and probably to many of the Israelites also. Certainly it is an idea that is only dimly apprehended by ourselves. Our dealing with one another is to so large an extent governed by the idea that nothing can be had for nothing, that we carry this idea into our dealings with God, and expect only what we can earn and claim. It is a wholesome pride that prompts us to work at anything rather than be dependent on other men, but it is a most unwholesome and ignorant pride that forbids us to acknowledge our dependence on God, and to accept freely what He freely gives. Until we learn to live in God, to own Him as alone having life in Himself, and to accept from Him life and all that sustains it, both physical and spiritual, we are not recognising the truth and living in it. Our good deeds and good feelings, our repentances and righteous intentions and endeavours, are

as much out of place as a means of procuring God's favour and help as Naaman's talents of silver and pieces of gold. We have God's favour irrespective of our merit, and we must humble ourselves to accept it as His free gift, which we could not earn and have not earned.

Naaman no sooner saw that Jehovah was a living and true God than he perceived that certain practical difficulties would result from this belief. Sometimes men do not connect their belief with their practice; they do not let their left hand know what their right hand is doing. But Naaman . foresaw that, as hitherto, he would still be expected to enter the temple of the god Rimmon when his master went to worship. And he wished Elisha's authority for this measure of conformity. In our own country men have been severely tested by acts of conformity. And nothing gives the conscience of the whole people so decided a lift as when men prefer disgrace or death to a conformity which they believe to be wrong. Had Naaman been as uncompromising as Daniel, who would not conform even so far as to pray in a different corner of his room, or as the Christian soldiers who suffered death rather than throw a pinch of incense on the altar before the Emperor's image, possibly Elisha would have given him greater commendation than the mere acquiescence pronounced in the words, "Go in peace." But in exculpation of Naaman it is to be said that he did not hide his new conviction, but built an altar to Jehovah in Damascus. And especially it is to be remarked that in his case these acts of conformity were not proposed as a test of his adherence to the religion of the country; and this makes all the difference. Had Naaman's master commanded him to bow in the house of Rimmon as a test of his acknowledgment of the Syrian god, Naaman would have refused; but so long as it was a mere act or courtesy to his master, the formal act of a courtier, from which no inferences could be drawn, he might reasonably continue it. To receive the communion kneeling is customary in some churches, and so long as one is allowed to put his own interpretation on the attitude, no harm can come of it. But at one time this attitude was the test by which two great and antagonistic parties in England were distinguished from one another; a meaning was put upon the act which made it impossible to every man who could not accept that meaning. Conformity then was sin, unless conviction went with the outward act. In many points of conduct this is a distinction of importance. There are many things which we may do so far as the thing itself is concerned, but which we may not do when the public mind is agitated upon that point and will draw certain inferences from our conduct. There are many things which to us have no moral significance at all, any more than sitting at one side or other of our table; but if a moral significance is attached to such things by other people, and if they invite us to do them or to leave them undone as a test of our attitude towards God or Christianity or of our moral bent, then we must beware of misleading other people and defiling our own conscience. Bowing in the house of Rimmon meant nothing new to Naaman; it was not worship; it was no more than turning round a street corner when the king had hold of his arm. To him the idol was now, as to Paul, "nothing in the world." But if the king had said, "You must bow to show the people that you worship Syria's god," then plainly the bowing would have been unjustifiable. And similarly, if a matter which to us is of no moral significance becomes a test of our disposition or attitude towards truth, we must be guided in our conduct not solely by our own view of the indifference of the matter, but also by the significance attached to it by other people. There are other points of conduct regarding which we have no need to consult any prophet; points in which we are asked to conform to a custom we know to be bad, or to follow and countenance other men in what we know to be unwholesome for us. To conform in such cases is to train ourselves in hypocrisy; it is to say Lord, Lord, while we allow the world actually to rule our life.

Chapter 7

01.08. THE LAME MAN AT THE TEMPLE GATE.

THE LAME MAN AT THE TEMPLE GATE.

Acts 3:1-8.

Although this miracle was followed by consequences so serious as to make it a landmark in the history of those early days of the Church, it was not itself the result of deliberation or contrivance. Peter and John were, as usual, on their way to evening prayer in the Temple. These two men had much to gain from one another, and they kept much together. In study, in business, in Christian work, in life generally everyone is the better of the friend who supplements his own character. Happy he whose closest friend of all provokes only to love and good works, and calls out only what is best in him. It is, if not essential to the growth and health of the spiritual life, most desirable to have a friend with whom intercourse is absolutely free and frank; one to whom it is the natural thing to explain the actual state of the spirit, and utter our most sceptical or our most devout thoughts, and who can be trusted to respond charitably, confidentially, and wisely to all communications. The Church owes much to the friendship of Peter and John, as well as to each individually. On how small a contingency did this miracle hinge. Had Peter happened to have had a penny he would have dropped it in the beggar's palm and passed on, leaving him content with the alms and unconscious of all he had missed. And it is sometimes well for us, as for Peter, that we are baulked in our first intentions towards our friends and our first attempts at being of use. It is well, for example, that we cannot at once rescue every one out of sickness and poverty, for thereby our love is compelled to a deeper consideration and to a thousand kindnesses which find their way to the heart and leave for ever a treasure of happy memory. Our inability to gratify the obvious and clamant want of our friend keeps our thought hovering around him until, at last, we discern how we can confer a better and more enduring, because a more difficult and thoughtful, gift.

Probably Peter had often passed this lame man before. To-day the two Apostles have not together as much as the poor widow with her two mites, and they are passing and thinking as little as we sometimes think of leaving the needy to the charity of others, when suddenly it occurs to Peter that, after all, he has what may be of more service to the beggar than silver or gold. "What I have, that give I thee." The best help we can give is not that which we can give with the hand, and which is current coin, which anyone else may give, and which is of the same value, whoever gives it; but rather that which we communicate from our own heart and soul, and which is our own peculiar treasure--the accumulation of a life's experience. To add a little to anyone's outward comfort is always worth doing; but to impart to another what becomes life and strength and encouragement perennially within himself is surely better. Frequently the help we chiefly need is nothing outward and material, but that which one bare human spirit can render to another. But alas! when thrown back upon our inward resources, we are so conscious of our poverty that we think sixpence or a shilling is probably of greater value than anything which can come straight from our spirit. Of the lame man little is told us which may give us a clue to his state of mind. He was one of those who

had been left unhealed by Christ. Often must Christ have passed him, and yet He had never spoken nor laid healing hand upon him. Perhaps during the long hours the lame man sometimes thought of this, and bewailed his own negligence in not using opportunities now for ever gone. He could only look with envy and self-reproach on those who had once been blind, or, like himself, lame, and whom he now saw in perfect health. His feelings were akin to the remorse of those who imagine that their day of grace is gone, and exclaim :

Thy saints are comforted, I know, And love Thy house of prayer;

I therefore go where others go, But find no comfort there.

There is no despair worth calling despair but despair of salvation. But what Christ has not done, an Apostle may do. The lesser instrument may effect what the more powerful has not effected. A feebler ministry may in some cases produce results which the abler ministry has not produced.

Another feature of the beggar's state of mind appears in listless, mechanical way in which he asks an alms. He had not even troubled to look up. Too commonly human prayer is the monotonous whine of the beggar that scarcely troubles to consider to whom the petition is addressed. Had this man taken the trouble to scan the appearance of those fishermen he would have seen that silver or gold could not be expected. But he had fallen into one chant, uttered as soon as the shadow of the passer-by fell upon him. It is a picture of the unreal and indifferent spirit in which much prayer is offered. There is no harm in asking for certain benefits every day of our life, and no harm in using the same words, if we have chosen these words as the fittest. But there is harm in allowing a form of words to engender monotony and lifelessness in the spirit, so that we never consider carefully the object of our worship and what it is fit that He should give. This cripple had come to be content with the few coppers which would furnish his supper and bed; all the great world with its pleasures, its enterprise, its high places lay quite beyond his hope; and thus does one find his own soul dying to all that lies beyond daily needs, and forgetful of the great and glorious things that are written of the heirs of God. It is surely a great art to know "who it is that speaks to us, and what is the gift of God."

Peter's first care was to arouse the man. "Look on us!" The man's attention was commanded. All his life he had been training to know faces, to know who would give and who would not give, who would not give if others were looking, and who would give at the gate of the Temple, dropping the coin as into an alms box, without any regard to the want of the beggar. One glance at the frank face of Peter tells him he is about to receive something. That is a man to be trusted. This is a good beginning. Trust in Peter maybe the first step to trust in Christ. But many rest at the earliest stage, believing the messenger, but not coming into personal relations with Christ. Many persons wish to be better than they are, and are prepared to do much and sacrifice much in order to attain to a satisfactory spiritual state. What is lacking is personal appeal to Christ. They must recognise, with a conviction wrought in their own mind, that Jesus Christ is the source of spiritual power, and they must for themselves, appeal directly to Him. The boldness with which Peter forms or, it might almost be said, forces this personal relation to Christ in the case of this man is surprising. Without a moment's hesitation or inquiry as to whether the man's faith is quickened, Peter cries, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk," taking him by the right hand and lifting him up. Peter could not confer health upon the man in spite of his state of mind. If the man had so chosen he might have continued to lie where he was, a cripple. But simultaneously with Peter's

faith and authoritative command, the man’s own faith was quickened. He believed that in this name, that is, at the command and in the strength of Christ, he could get up; and he arose. It was the contagious confidence of Peter which begat faith in the lame beggar’s spirit. And there could not be a more instructive instance of the suddenness with which a human being can be brought into saving relation to Christ. When Peter began his sentence the lame man had no faith, yet he boldly said to him, "In the name of Jesus Christ arise and walk." Men may always thus be summoned to believe on the spot and to act out the commands of Christ. But in order that such a summons be effectual, two qualities in the apostle are needful. He must not fear failure or rebuff. He must have that humility which seeks the good of others regardless of its own reputation. So long as we fear to expose our own feelings, and to show that we are deeply concerned about the welfare of another person, we shall do little in the way of inspiring faith. Our mouth is kept shut by the fear of fruitlessly exposing our feelings. We are not sure how our advances will be received. We have not, the loving humility which braves risks to self.

We must also ourselves have lively faith if we are to communicate faith to others. It was Peter’s own faith which carried this man’s unbelief by storm. In presence of Peter’s confidence he could not but believe. Most men are far more moved by the contagion of others strong feeling and example than by arguments or verbal appeals. For the diffusion of faith it is a man like Peter that is wanted, who overleaps the obstacles which other men would stop to examine; a man like Luther, erring perhaps in fine points of doctrine, but giving impetus and force to the whole movement in Christ’s kingdom, and sweeping along with him a host of weaker and dependent spirits. If we are not propagating faith in Christ, it is mainly because our our faith is meagre and timorous. If we are not producing Christians it is because we are not ourselves in the present experience of His mighty power. And while this is so, our conduct betrays the weakness of our faith, and we chill the kindling warmth in other souls instead of fanning it into flame, and all that proceeds from us is as the frosty wind of an untoward spring-time, that unseasonably marks every springing thing with death.

Possessed of those qualities, any one may communicate that best of all gifts, faith in Christ. The joy of Peter, in discovering that he could impart health and brightness to those who were oppressed by various human ills, is a joy which may be repeated, and was meant to be repeated, in the experience of every Christian. We are not to look hopelessly on the world at large or on our own friends.

We are not to think that the pleasure we have in being of substantial service to a friend, we cannot have in the case of that which is most substantial. We are to believe that Christ now has all power in heaven and on earth, and that those who have experienced this power are expected to be the channel of its communication to others. The faith which strengthens and elevates our own spirit may be communicated, upon our effort and prayer, to the heart of others.

Chapter 8

02.00. ISAAC, JACOB AND JOSEPH

ISAAC, JACOB AND JOSEPH BY MARCUS DODS, D.D.

AUTHOR OF “THE PRAYER THAT TEACHES US TO PRAY,”

“ISRAEL’S IRON AGE,”

“THE PRAYER THAT TEACHES US TO PRAY,” etc.

LONDON HODDER AND STOUGHTON 27 PATERNOSTER ROW

Chapter 9

02.01. LECTURE I: ISHMAELL AND ISAAC

LECTURE I ISHMAEL AND ISAAC Genesis 21:1-34; Genesis 22:1-24 “My masters, there’s an old book, you should con, For strange adventures, applicable yet.

Tis stuffed with.” (Browning)

“Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman …Which things are an allegory.” Galatians 4:22 “Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.” Genesis 22:10

IN the birth of Isaac, Abraham at length sees the long-delayed fulfilment of the promise. But his trials are by no means over. He has himself introduced into his family the seeds of discord and disturbance, and speedily the fruit is borne. Ishmael, at the birth of Isaac, was a lad of fourteen years, and, reckoning from Eastern customs, he must have been over sixteen when the feast was made in honour of the weaned child. Certainly he was quite old enough to understand the important and not very welcome alteration in his prospects which the birth of this new son effected. He had been brought up to count himself the heir of all the wealth and influence of Abraham. There was no alienation of feeling between father and son: no shadow had flitted over the bright prospect of the boy as he grew up; when suddenly and unexpectedly there was interposed between him and his expectation the effectual barrier of this child of Sarah’s. The importance of this child to the family was in due course indicated in many ways offensive to Ishmael; and when the feast was made, his spleen could no longer be repressed. This weaning was the first step in the direction of an independent existence, and this would be the point of the feast in celebration. The child was no longer a mere part of the mother, but an individual, a member of the family. The hopes of the parents were carried forward to the time when he should be quite independent of them. But in all this there was great food for the ridicule of a thoughtless lad. It was precisely the kind of thing which could easily be mocked without any great expenditure of wit by a boy of Ishmael’s age. The too visible pride of the aged mother, the incongruity of maternal duties with ninety years, the concentration of attention and honours on so small an object, all this was, doubtless, a temptation to a boy who had probably at no time too much reverence. But the words and gestures which others might have disregarded as childish frolic, or, at worst, as the unseemly and ill-natured impertinence of a boy who knew no better, stung Sarah, and left a poison in her blood that infuriated her. “Cast out that bondwoman and her son,” she demanded of Abraham. Evidently she feared the rivalry of this second household of Abraham, and was resolved it should come to an end. The mocking of Ishmael is but the violent concussion that at last produces the explosion, for which material has long been laid in train. She had seen on Abraham’s part a clinging to Ishmael, which she was unable to appreciate. And though her harsh decision was nothing more than the dictate of maternal jealousy, it did prevent things from running on as they were until even a more painful family quarrel must have been the issue. The act of expulsion was itself unaccountably harsh. There was nothing to prevent Abraham sending his son and his mother under an escort to some safe place; nothing to prevent him from giving the lad some share of his

possessions sufficient to provide for him. Nothing of this kind was done. The woman and the boy were simply put to the door; and this, although Ishmael had for years been counted Abraham's heir, and though he was a member of the covenant made with Abraham. There may have been some law giving Sarah absolute power over her maid; but if any law gave her power to do what was now done, it was a thoroughly barbarous one, and she was a barbarous woman who used it. It is one of those painful cases in which one poor creature, clothed with a little brief authority, stretches it to the utmost in vindictive maltreatment of another. Sarah happened to be mistress, and, instead of using her position to make those under her happy, she used it for her own convenience, for the gratification of her own spite, and to make those beneath her conscious of her power by their suffering. She happened to be a mother, and instead of bringing her into sympathy with all women and their children, this concentrated her affection with a fierce jealousy on her own child. She breathed freely when Hagar and Ishmael were fairly out of sight. A smile of satisfied malice betrayed her bitter spirit. No thought of the sufferings to which she had committed a woman who had served her well for years, who had yielded everything to her will, and who had no other natural protector but her, no glimpses of Abraham's saddened face, visited her with any relentings. It mattered not to her what came of the woman and the boy to whom she really owed a more loving and careful regard than to any except Abraham and Isaac. It is a story often repeated. One who has been a member of the household for many years is at last dismissed at the dictate of some petty pique or spite as remorselessly and inhumanly as a piece of old furniture might be parted with. Some thoroughly good servant, who has made sacrifices to forward his employer's interest, is at last, through no offence of his own, found to be in his employer's way, and at once all old services are forgotten, all old ties broken, and the authority of the employer, legal but inhuman, is exercised. It is often those who can least defend themselves who are thus treated; no resistance is possible, and also, alas! the party is too weak to face the wilderness on which she is thrown out, and if any cares to follow her history, we may find her at the last gasp under a bush. Still, both for Abraham and for Ishmael it was better this severance should take place. It was grievous to Abraham; and Sarah saw that for this very reason it was necessary. Ishmael was his first-born, and for many years had received the whole of his parental affection: and, looking on the little Isaac, he might feel the desirableness of keeping another son in reserve, lest this strangely-given child might as strangely pass away. Coming to him in a way so unusual, and having perhaps in his appearance some indication of his peculiar birth, he might seem scarcely fit for the rough life Abraham himself had led. On the other hand, it was plain that in Ishmael were the very qualities which Isaac was already showing that he lacked. Already Abraham was observing that with all his insolence and turbulence there was a natural force and independence of character which might come to be most useful in the patriarchal household. The man who had pursued and routed the allied kings could not but be drawn to a youth who already gave promise of capacity for similar enterprises – and this youth his own son. But can Abraham have failed to let his fancy picture the deeds this lad might one day do at the head of his armed slaves? And may he not have dreamt of a glory in the land not altogether such as the promise of God encouraged him to look for, but such as the tribes around would acknowledge and fear? All the hopes Abraham had of Ishmael had gained firm hold of his mind before Isaac was born; and before Isaac grew up, Ishmael must have taken the most influential place in the house and plans of Abraham. His mind would thus have received a strong bias towards conquest and forcible modes of advance. He might have been led to neglect, and, perhaps, finally despise, the unostentatious blessings of heaven. If, then,

Abraham was to become the founder, not of one new warlike power in addition to the already too numerous warlike powers of the East, but of a religion which should finally develop into the most elevating and purifying influence among men, it is obvious that Ishmael was not at all a desirable heir. Whatever pain it gave to Abraham to part with him, separation in some form had become necessary. It was impossible that the father should continue to enjoy the filial affection of Ishmael, his lively talk, and warm enthusiasm, and adventurous exploits, and at the same time concentrate his hope and his care on Isaac. He had, therefore, to give up, with something of the sorrow and self-control he afterwards underwent in connection with the sacrifice of Isaac, the lad whose bright face had for so many years shone in all his paths. And in some such way are we often called to part with prospects which have wrought themselves very deep into our spirit, and which, indeed, just because they are very promising and seductive, have become dangerous to us, upsetting the balance of our life, and throwing into the shade objects and purposes which ought to be as outstanding. And when we are thus required to give up what we were looking to for comfort, for applause, and for profit, the voice of God in its first admonition sometimes seems to us little better than the jealousy of a woman. Like Sarah's demand, that none should share with her son, does the requirement seem which indicates to us that we must set nothing on a level with God's direct gifts to us. We refuse to see why we may not have all the pleasures and enjoyments, all the display and brilliance, that the world can give. We feel as if we were needlessly restricted. But this instance shows us that, when circumstances compel us to give up something of this kind which we have been cherishing, room is given for a better thing than itself to grow. For Ishmael himself, too, wronged as he was in the mode of his expulsion, it was yet far better that he should go. Isaac was the true heir. No jeering allusions to his late birth or to his appearance could alter that fact. And to a temper like Ishmael's it was impossible to occupy a subordinate, dependent position. All he required to call out his latent powers was to be thrown thus on his own resources. The daring, and high spirit, and quickness to take offence and use violence, which would have wrought untold mischief in a pastoral camp, were the very qualities which found fit exercise in the desert, and seemed there only in keeping with the life he had to lead. And his hard experience at first would at his age do him no harm, but good only. To be compelled to face life single-handed at the age of sixteen is by no means a fate to be pitied. It was the making of Ishmael, and is the making of many a lad in every generation. But the two fugitives are soon reminded that, though expelled from Abraham's tents and protection, they are not expelled from his God. Ishmael finds it true that when father and mother forsake him, the Lord takes him up. At the very outset of his desert life he is made conscious that God is still his God, mindful of his wants, responsive to his cry of distress. It was not through Ishmael the promised seed was to come, but the descendants of Ishmael had every inducement to retain faith in the God of Abraham, who listened to their father's cry. The fact of being excluded from certain privileges did not involve that they were to be excluded from all privileges. God still "heard the voice of the lad, and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven." It is this voice of God to Hagar that so speedily, and apparently once for all, lifts her out of despair to cheerful hope. It would appear as if her despair had been needless; at least from the words addressed to her, "What aileth thee, Hagar?" it would appear as if she might herself have found the water that was close at hand, if only she had been disposed to look for it. But she had lost heart, and perhaps with her despair was mingled some resentment, not only at Sarah, but at the whole Hebrew connection, including the God of the Hebrews, who had before encouraged her. Here was the end of the magnificent promise which that God had made her before her child was

born – a helpless human form gasping its life away without a drop of water to moisten the parched tongue and bring light to the glazing eyes, and with no easier couch than the burning sand. Was it for this, the bitterest drop that, apart from sin, can be given to any parent to drink, she had been brought from Egypt and led through all her past? Had her hopes been nursed by means so extraordinary only that they might be so bitterly blighted? Thus she leapt to her conclusions, and judged that because her skin of water had failed God had failed her too. No one can blame her, with her boy dying before her, and herself helpless to relieve one pang of his suffering. Hitherto in the well-furnished tents of Abraham she had been able to respond to his slightest desire. Thirst he had never known, save as the relish to some boyish adventure. But now, when his eyes appeal to her in dying anguish, she can but turn away in helpless despair. She cannot relieve his simplest want. Not for her own fate has she any tears, but to see her pride, her life and joy, perishing thus miserably, is more than she can bear. No one can blame, but every one may learn from her. When angry resentment and unbelieving despair fill the mind, we may perish of thirst in the midst of springs. When God's promises produce no faith, but seem to us so much waste paper, we are necessarily in danger of missing their fulfilment. When we ascribe to God the harshness and wickedness of those who represent Him in the world, we commit moral suicide. So far from the promises given to Hagar being now at the point of extinction, this the first considerable step towards their fulfilment. When Ishmael turned his back on the familiar tents, and flung his last gibe at Sarah, he was really setting out to a far richer inheritance, so far as this world goes, than ever fell to Isaac and his sons. But the chief use Paul makes of this entire episode in the history is to see in it an allegory, a kind of picture made up of real persons and events, representing the impossibility of law and gospel living harmoniously together, the incompatibility of a spirit of service with a spirit of sonship. Hagar, he says, is in this picture the likeness of the law given from Sinai, which gendereth to bondage. Hagar and her son, that is to say, stand for the law and the kind of righteousness produced by the law, – not superficially a bad kind; on the contrary, a righteousness with much dash and brilliance and strong manly force about it, but at the root defective, faulty in its origin, springing from the slavish spirit. And first Paul bids us notice how the free-born is persecuted and mocked by the slave-born, that is, how the children of God who are trying to live by love and faith in Christ are put to shame and made uneasy by the law. They believe they are God's dear children, that they are loved by Him, and may go out and in freely in His house as their own home, using all that is His with the freedom of His heirs; but the law mocks them, frightens them, tells them it is God's first-born, law lying far back in the dimness of eternity, coeval with God Himself. It tells them they are puny and weak, scarcely out of their mother's arms, tottering, lisping creatures, doing much mischief, but none of the house work, at best only getting some little thing to pretend to work at. In contrast to their feeble, soft, unskilled weakness, it sets before them a finely-moulded, athletic form, becoming disciplined to all work, and able to take a place among the serviceable and able-bodied. But with all this there is in that puny babe a life begun which will grow and make it the true heir, dwelling in the house and possessing what it has not toiled for, while the vigorous, likely-looking lad must go into the wilderness and make a possession for himself with his own bow and spear. Now, of course, righteousness of life and character, or perfect manhood, is the end at which all that we call salvation aims, and that which can give us the purest, ripest character is salvation for us; that which can make us, for all purposes, most serviceable and strong. And when we are confronted with persons who might speak of service we cannot render, of an upright, unfaltering carriage we cannot assume, of a general human worthiness we can

make no pretension to, we are justly perturbed, and should regain our equanimity only under the influence of the most undoubted truth and fact. If we can honestly say in our hearts, “Although we can show no such work done, and no such masculine growth, yet we have a life in us which is of God, and will grow;” if we are sure that we have the spirit of God’s children, a spirit of love and dutifulness, we may take comfort from this incident. We may remind ourselves that it is not he who has at the present moment the best appearance who always abides in the father’s home, but he who is by birth the heir. Have we or have we not the spirit of the Son? not feeling that we must every evening make good our claim to another night’s lodging by showing the task we have accomplished, but being conscious that the interests in which we are called to work are our own interests, that we are heirs in the father’s house, so that all we do for the house is really done for ourselves. Do we go out and in with God, feeling no need of His commands, our own eye seeing where help is required, and our own desires being wholly directed towards that which engages all His attention and work? For Paul would have each of us apply, allegorically, the words, Cast out the bondwoman and her son, that is, cast out the legal mode of earning a standing in God’s house, and with this legal mode cast out all the self-seeking, the servile fear of God, the self-righteousness, and the hard-heartedness it engenders. Cast out wholly from yourself the spirit of the slave, and cherish the spirit of the son and heir. The slave-born may seem for a while to have a firm footing in the father’s house, but it cannot last. The temper and tastes of Ishmael are radically different from those of Abraham, and when the slave-born becomes mature, the wild Egyptian strain will appear in his character. Moreover, he looks upon the goods of Abraham as plunder; he cannot rid himself of the feeling of an alien, and this would, at length, show itself in a want of frankness with Abraham – slowly, but surely, the confidence between them would be worn out. Nothing but being a child of God, being born of the Spirit, can give the feeling of intimacy, confidence, unity of interest, which constitutes true religion. All we do as slaves goes for nothing; that is to say, all we do, not because we see the good of it, but because we are commanded; not because we have any liking for the thing done, but because we wish to be paid for it. The day is coming when we shall attain our majority, when it will be said to us by God, Now, do whatever you like, whatever you have a mind to; no surveillance, no commands are now needed; I put all into your own hand. What, in these circumstances, should we straightway do? Should we, for the love of the thing, carry on the same work to which God’s commands had driven us; should we, if left absolutely in charge, find nothing more attractive than just to prosecute that idea of life and the world set before us by Christ? Or, should we see that we had merely been keeping ourselves in check for a while, biding our time, untamed as Ishmael, craving the rewards but not the life of the children of God? The most serious of all questions these – questions that determine the issues of our whole life, that determine whether our home is to be where all the best interests of men and the highest blessings of God have their seat, or in the pathless desert where life is an aimless wandering, dissociated from all the forward movements men. The distinction between the servile spirit and the spirit of sonship being thus radical, it could be by no mere formality, or exhibition of his legal title, that Isaac became the heir of God’s heritage. His sacrifice on Moriah was the requisite condition of his succession to Abraham’s place; it was the only suitable celebration of his majority. Abraham himself had been able to enter into covenant with God only by sacrifice; and sacrifice not of a dead and external kind, but vivified by an actual surrender of himself to God, and by so true a perception of God’s holiness and requirements, that he was in a horror of great darkness. By no other process can any of his heirs succeed to the inheritance. A true resignation

of self, in whatever outward form this resignation may appear, is required that we may become one with God in His holy purposes and in His eternal blessedness. There could be no doubt that Abraham had found a true heir, when Isaac laid himself on the altar and steadied his heart to receive the knife. Dearer to God, and of immeasurably greater value than any service, was this surrender of himself into the hand of his Father and his God. In this was promise of all service and all loving fellowship. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant, the son of Thine handmaid: Thou hast loosed my bonds.” So incomparable with the most distinguished service did this sacrifice of Isaac’s self appear, that the record of his active life seems to have had no interest to his contemporaries or successors. There was but this one tiling to say of him. No more seemed needful. The sacrifice was indeed great, and worthy of commemoration. No act could so conclusively have shown that Isaac was thoroughly at one with God. lie had much to live for; from his birth there hovered around him interests and hopes of the most exciting and flattering nature; a new kind of glory such as had not yet been attained on earth was to be attained, or, at any rate, approached in him. This glory was certain to be realized, being guaranteed by God’s promise, so that his hopes might launch out in the boldest confidence and give him the aspect and bearing of a king; while it was uncertain in the time and manner of its realization, so that the most attractive mystery hung around his future. Plainly his was a life worth entering on and living through; a life fit to engage and absorb a man’s whole desire, interest, and effort; a life such as might well make a man gird himself and resolve to play the man throughout, that so each part of it might reveal its secret to him, and that none of its wonder might be lost. It was a life which, above all others, seemed worth protecting from all injury and risk, and for which, no doubt, not a few of the home-born servants in the patriarchal encampment would have gladly ventured their own. There have, indeed, been few, if any, lives of which it could so truly be said, The world cannot do without this – at all hazards and costs this must be cherished. And all this must have been even more obvious to its owner than to any one else, and must have begotten in him an unquestioning assurance, that he at least had a charmed life, and would live and see good days. Yet with whatever shock the command of God came upon him, there is no word of doubt or remonstrance or rebellion. He gave his life to Him who had first given it to him. And thus yielding himself to God, he entered into the inheritance, and became worthy to stand to all time the representative heir of God, as Abraham by his faith had become the father of the faithful.

02.02. LECTURE II: ISAAC'S MARRIAGE

LECTURE II ISAAC'S MARRIAGE

Genesis 24:1-67 "Many birds fly hither and thither under the sun, but not all are indications of the Divine will."

"Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." Proverbs 31:30

"WHEN a son has attained the age of twenty years, his father, if able, should marry him, and then take his hand and say, I have disciplined thee, and taught thee, and married thee; I now seek refuge with God from thy mischief in the present world and the next." This Mohammedan tradition expresses with tolerable accuracy the idea of the Eastern world, that a father has not discharged his responsibilities towards his son until he finds a wife for him. Abraham no doubt fully recognised his duty in this respect, but he had allowed Isaac to pass the usual age. He was thirty-seven at his mother's death, forty when the events of this chapter occurred. This delay was occasioned by two causes. The bond between Isaac and his mother was an unusually strong one; and alongside of that imperious woman a young wife would have found it even more difficult than usual to take a becoming place. Besides, where was a wife to be found? No doubt some of Abraham's Hittite friends would have considered any daughter of theirs exceptionally fortunate who should secure so good an alliance. The heir of Abraham was no inconsiderable person even when measured by Hittite expectations. And it may have taxed Abraham's sagacity to find excuses for not forming an alliance which seemed so natural, and which would have secured to him and his heirs a settled place in the country. This was so obvious, common, easily accomplished a means of gaining a footing for Isaac among somewhat dangerous neighbours, that it stands to reason Abraham must often have weighed its advantages. But as often as he weighed the advantages of this solution of his difficulty, so often did he reject them. He was resolved that the race should be of pure Hebrew blood. His own experience in connection with Hagar had given this idea a settled prominence in his mind. And, accordingly, in his instructions to the servant whom he sent to find a wife for Isaac, two things were insisted on 1st, that she should not be a Canaanite; and, 2nd, that on no pretext should Isaac be allowed to leave the land of promise and visit Mesopotamia. The steward, knowing something of men and women, foresaw that it was most unlikely that a young woman would forsake her own land and preconceived hopes and go away with a stranger to a foreign country. Abraham believes she will be persuaded. But in any case, he says, one thing must be seen to; Isaac must on no account be induced to leave the promised land even to visit Mesopotamia. God will furnish Isaac with a wife without putting him into circumstances of great temptation, without requiring him to go into societies in the slightest degree injurious to his faith. In fact, Abraham refused to do what countless Christian mothers of marriageable sons and daughters do without compunction. He had an insight into the real influences that form action and determine careers which many of us sadly lack. And his faith was rewarded. The tidings from his brother's family arrived in the nick of time. Light, he found, was sown for the upright. It happened

with him as it has doubtless often happened with yourselves, that though you have been looking forward to a certain time with much anxiety, unable even to form a plan of action, yet when the time actually came, things seemed to arrange themselves, and the thing to do became quite obvious. Abraham was persuaded God would send His angel to bring the affair to a happy issue. And when we seem drifting towards some great upturning of our life, or when things seem to come all of a sudden and in crowds upon us, so that we cannot judge what we should do, it is an animating thought that another eye than ours is penetrating the darkness, finding for us a way through all entanglement and making crooked things straight for us. But the patience of Isaac was quite as remarkable as the faith of Abraham. He was now forty years old, and if, as he had been told, the great aim of his life, the great service he was to render to the world, was bound up with the rearing of a family, he might with some reason be wondering why circumstances were so adverse to the fulfilment of this vocation. Must he not have been tempted, as his father had been, to take matters into his own hand? Fathers are perhaps too scrupulous about telling their sons instructive passages from their own experience; but when Abraham saw Isaac exercised and discomposed about this matter, he can scarcely have failed to strengthen his spirit by telling him something of his own mistakes in life. Abraham must have seen that everything depended on Isaac's conduct, and that he had a very difficult part to play. He himself had been supernaturally encouraged to leave his own land and sojourn in Canaan; on the other hand, by the time Jacob grew up, the idea of the promised land had become traditional and fixed; though even Jacob, had he found Laban a better master, might have permanently renounced his expectations in Canaan. But Isaac enjoyed the advantages neither of the first nor of the third generation. The coming into Canaan was not his doing, and he saw how little of the land Abraham had gained. He was under strong temptation to disbelieve. And when he measured his condition with that of other young men, he. certainly required unusual self-control. And to every one who would urge, Youth is passing, and I am not getting what I expected at God's hand; I have not received that providential leading I was led to expect, nor do I find that my life is made simpler; it is very well to tell me to wait, but life is slipping away, and we may wait too long – to every one whose heart urges such murmurs. Abraham through Isaac would say: But if you wait for God you get something, some positive good, and not some mere appearance of good; you at last do get begun, you get into life at the right door; whereas if you follow some other way than that which you believe God wishes to lead you in, you get nothing. Isaac's continence had its reward. In the suitableness of Rebekah to a man of his nature, you see the suitableness of all such gifts of God as are really waited for at His hand. God may keep you longer waiting than the world does, but He gives you never the wrong thing. Isaac had no idea of Rebekah's character; he could only yield himself to God's knowledge of what he needed; and so there came to him, from a country he had never seen, a help-meet singularly adapted to his own character. One cannot read of her lively, bustling, almost forward, but obliging and generous conduct at the well, nor of her prompt, impulsive departure to an unknown land, without seeing, as no doubt Eliezer very quickly saw, that this was exactly the woman for Isaac. In this eager, ardent, active, enterprising spirit, his own retiring and contemplative, if not sombre disposition found its appropriate relief and stimulus. Hers was a spirit which might indeed, with so mild a lord, take more of the management of affairs than was befitting; and when the wear and tear of life had tamed down the girlish vivacity with which she spoke to Eliezer at the well, and leapt from the camel to meet her lord, her active-mindedness does appear in the disagreeable shape of the clever scheming of the mother of a family. In her sons you see

her qualities exaggerated: from her, Esau derived his activity and open-handedness; and in Jacob, you find that her self-reliant and unscrupulous management has become a self-asserting craft which leads him into much trouble, if it also sometimes gets him out of difficulties. But such as Rebekah was, she was quite the woman to attract Isaac and supplement his character. So in other cases where you find you must leave yourself very much in God's hand, what He sends you will be found more precisely adapted to your character than if you chose it for yourself. You find your whole nature has been considered, – your aims, your hopes, your wants, your position, whatever in you waits for something unattained. And as in giving to Isaac the intended mother of the promised seed, God gave him a woman who fitted in to all the peculiarities of his nature, and was a comfort and a joy to him in his own life; so you will always find that God, in satisfying His own requirements, satisfies at the same time your wants – that God carries forward His work in the world by the satisfaction of the best and happiest feelings of our nature, so that it is not only the result that is blessedness, but blessing is created along its whole course. Abraham's servant, though not very sanguine of success, does all in his power to earn it. He sets out with an equipment fitted to inspire respect and confidence. But as he draws nearer and nearer to the city of Nahor, revolving the delicate nature of his errand, and feeling that definite action must now be taken, he sees so much room for making an irreparable mistake that he resolves to share his responsibility with the God of his master. And the manner in which he avails himself of God's guidance is remarkable. He does not ask God to guide him to the house of Bethuel; indeed, there was no occasion to do so, for any child could have pointed out the house to him. But he was a cautious person, and he wished to make his own observations on the appearance and conduct of the younger women of the household, before in any way committing himself to them. He was free to make these observations at the well; while he felt it must be very awkward to enter Laban's house with the possibility of leaving it dissatisfied. At the same time, he felt it was for God rather than for him to choose a wife for Isaac. So he made an arrangement by which the interposition of God was provided for. He meant to make his own selection, guided necessarily by the comparative attractiveness of the women who came for water, possibly also by some family likeness to Sarah or Isaac he might expect to see in any women of Bethuel's house; but knowing the deceitfulness of appearances, he asked God to confirm and determine his own choice by moving the girl he should address to give him a certain answer. Having arranged this, "Behold! Rebekah came out with her pitcher upon her shoulder, and the damsel was very fair to look upon." In the Bible the beauty of women is frankly spoken of without prudery or mawkishness as an influence in human affairs. The beauty of Rebekah at once disposed Eliezer to address her, and his first impression in her favour was confirmed by the obliging, cheerful alacrity with which she did very much more than she was asked, and, indeed, took upon herself, through her kindness of disposition, a task of some trouble and fatigue. It is important to observe then in what sense and to what extent this capable servant asked a sign. He did not ask for a bare, intrinsically insignificant sign. He might have done so. He might have proposed as a test, Let her who stumbles on the first step of the well be the designed wife of Isaac; or, Let her who comes with a certain-coloured flower in her hand – or so forth. But the sign he chose was significant, because dependent on the character of the girl herself; a sign which must reveal her good heartedness and readiness to oblige and courteous activity in the entertainment of strangers – in fact, the outstanding Eastern virtue. So that he really acted very much as Isaac himself must have done. He would make no approach to any one whose appearance repelled him; and when satisfied in this particular, he

would test her disposition. And of course it was these qualities of Rebekah which afterwards caused Isaac to feel that this was the wife God had designed for him. It was not by any arbitrary sign that he or any man could come to know who was the suitable wife for him, but only by the love she aroused within him. God has given this feeling to direct choice in marriage; and where this is wanting, nothing else whatever, no matter how astoundingly providential it seems, ought to persuade a man that such and such a person is designed to be his wife. There are turning points in life at once so momentous in their consequence, and affording so little material for choice, that one is much tempted to ask for more than providential leading. Not only among savages and heathen have omens been sought. Among Christians there has been manifest a constant disposition to appeal to the lot, or to accept some arbitrary way of determining which course we should follow. In very many predicaments we should be greatly relieved were there someone who could at once deliver us from all hesitation and mental conflict by one authoritative word. There are, perhaps, few things more frequently and determinedly wished for, nor regarding which we are so much tempted to feel that such a thing should be, as some infallible guide before whom we could lay every difficulty; who would tell us at once what ought to be done in each case, and whether we ought to continue as we are or make some change. But only consider for a moment what would be the consequence of having such a guide. At every important step of your progress you would, of course, instantly turn to him; as soon as doubt entered your mind regarding the moral quality of an action, or the propriety of a course you think of adopting, you would be at your counsellor. And what would be the consequence? The consequence would be, that instead of the various circumstances, experiences, and temptations of this life being a training to you, your conscience would every day become less able to guide you, and your will less able to decide, until instead of being a mature son of God, who has learned to conform his conscience and will to the will of God, you would be quite imbecile as a moral creature. What God desires by our training here is, that we become like to Him; that there be nurtured in us a power to discern between good and evil; that by giving our own voluntary consent to His appointments, and that by discovering in various and perplexing circumstances what is the right thing to do, we may have our own moral natures as enlightened, strengthened, and fully developed every way as possible. The object of God in declaring His will to us is not to point out particular steps, but to bring our wills into conformity with His, so that whether we err in any particular step or no, we shall still be near to Him in intention. He does with us as we with children. We do not always at once relieve them from their little difficulties, but watch with interest the working of their own conscience regarding the matter, and will give them no sign till they themselves have decided. Evidently, therefore, before we may dare to ask a sign from God, the case must be a very special one. If you are at present engaged in something that is to your own conscience doubtful, and if you are not hiding this from God, but would very willingly, so far as you know your own mind, do in the matter what He pleases – if no further light is coming to you, and you feel a growing inclination to put it to God in this way: “Grant, O Lord, that something may happen by which I may know Thy mind in this matter” – this is asking from God a kind of help which He is very ready to give, often leading men to clearer views of duty by events which happen within their knowledge, and which having no special significance to persons whose minds are differently occupied, are yet most instructive to those who are waiting for light on some particular point. The danger is not here, but in fixing God down to the special thing which shall happen as a sign between Him and you; which, when it happens, gives no fresh light on the subject, leaves your mind still morally undecided, but only binds you, by an arbitrary bargain

of your own, to follow one course rather than another. This matter that you would so summarily dispose of may be the very thread of your life which God means to test you by; this state of indecision which you would evade, God may mean to continue until your moral character grows strong enough to rise above it to the right decision. No one will suppose that Rebekah's readiness to leave her home was due to mere light-mindedness. Her motives were, no doubt, mixed. The worldly position offered to her was good, and there was an attractive spice of romance about the whole affair which would have its charm. She may also be credited with some apprehension of the great future of Isaac's family. In after life she certainly showed a very keen sense of the value of the blessings peculiar to that household. And, probably above all, she had an irresistible feeling that this was her destiny. She saw the hand of God in her selection, and with a more or less conscious faith in God she passed to her new life. Her first meeting with her future husband is not the least picturesque passage in this most picturesque narrative. Isaac had gone out on that side of the encampment by which he knew his father's messenger was most likely to approach. He had gone out "to meditate at even-tide;" his meditation being necessarily directed and intensified by his attitude of critical expectancy. The evening light, in our country hanging dubiously between the glare of noon and the darkness of midnight, invites to that condition of mind which lies between the intense alertness of day and the deep oblivion of sleep, and which seems the most favourable for the meditation of divine things. The dusk of evening seems interposed between day and night to invite us to that reflection which should intervene betwixt our labour and our rest from labour, that we may leave our work behind us satisfied that we have done what we could, or, seeing its faultiness, may still lay us down to sleep with God's forgiveness. It is when the bright sunlight has gone, and no more reproaches our inactivity, that friends can enjoy prolonged intercourse, and can best unbosom to one another, as if the darkness gave opportunity for a tenderness which would be ashamed to show itself during the twelve hours in which a man shall work. And all that makes this hour so beloved by the family circle, and so conducive to friendly intercourse, makes it suitable also for such intercourse with God as each human soul can attempt. Most of us suppose we have some little plot of time railed off for God morning and evening, but how often does it get trodden down by the profane multitude of this world's cares, and quite occupied by encroaching secular engagements. But evening is the time when many men are, and when all men ought to be, least hurried; when the mind is placid, but not yet prostrate; when the body requires rest from its ordinary labour, but is not yet so oppressed with fatigue as to make devotion a mockery; when the din of this world's business is silenced, and as a sleeper wakes to consciousness when some accustomed noise is checked, so the soul now wakes up to the thought of itself and of God. I know not whether those of us who have the opportunity have also the resolution to sequester ourselves evening by evening, as Isaac did; but this I do know, that he who does so will not fail of his reward but will very speedily find that his Father who seeth in secret is manifestly rewarding him. What we all need above all things is to let the mind dwell on divine things – to be able to sit down knowing we have so much clear time in which we shall not be disturbed, and during which we shall think directly under God's eye – to get quite rid of the feeling of getting through with something, so that without distraction the soul may take a deliberate survey of its own matters. And so shall often God's gifts appear on our horizon when we lift up our eyes, as Isaac "lifted up his eyes and saw the camels coming" with his bride. Twilight, "nature's vesper-bell," of the light shaded at evening by the hills of Palestine, seems, then, to have called Isaac to a familiar occupation. This long-continued mourning for his mother, and his lonely meditation in the fields, are both in

harmony with what we know of his character, and of his experience on Mount Moriah. Retiring and contemplative, willing to conciliate by concession rather than to assert and maintain his rights against opposition, glad to yield his own affairs to the strong guidance of some other hand, tender and deep in his affections, to him this lonely meditation seems singularly appropriate. His dwelling, too, was remote, on the edge of the wilderness, by the well which Hagar had named Lahai-roi. Here he dwelt as one consecrated to God, feeling little desire to enter deeper into the world, and preferring the place where the presence of God was least disturbed by the society of men. But at this time he had come from the south, and was awaiting at his father's encampment the result of Eliezer's mission. And one can conceive the thrill of keen expectancy that shot through him as he saw the female figure alighting from the camel, the first eager exchange of greetings, and the gladness with which he brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent and was comforted after his mother's death. The readiness with which he loved her seems to be referred in the narrative to the grief he still felt for his mother; for as a candle is never so easily lit as just after it has been put out, so the affection of Isaac, still emitting the sad memorial of a past love, more quickly caught at the new object presented. And thus was consummated a marriage which shows us how thoroughly interwrought are the plans of God and the life of man, each fulfilling the other. So that as the salvation God introduces into the world is a practical, every-day salvation to deliver us from the sins which this life tempts us to, so God introduced this salvation by means of the natural affections and ordinary arrangements of human life. God would have us recognise in our lives what He shows us in this chapter, that He has made provision for our wants, and that if we wait upon Him He will bring us into the enjoyment of all we really need. So that if we are to make any advance in appropriating to ourselves God's salvation, it can only be by submitting ourselves implicitly to His providence, and taking care that in the commonest and most secular actions of our lives we are having respect to His will with us, and that in those actions in which our own feelings and desires seem sufficient to guide us, we are having regard to His controlling wisdom and goodness. We are to find room for God everywhere in our lives, not feeling embarrassed by the thought of His claims even in our least constrained hours, but subordinating to His highest and holiest ends everything that our life contains, and acknowledging as His gift what may seem to be our own most proper conquest or earning.

02.03. LECTURE III: ESAU AND JACOB

LECTURE III

ESAU AND JACOB

“We cannot learn too soon that to give away some things is to lose them for ever, and that there are some things that a man and a woman have no more right to surrender than they have to commit suicide.”

“He goeth as an ox goeth to the slaughter, till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.” Proverbs 7:22-23

THE character and career of Isaac would seem to tell us that it is possible to have too great a father. Isaac was dwarfed and weakened by growing up under the shadow of Abraham. Of his life there was little to record, and what was recorded was very much a reproduction of some of the least glorious passages of his father’s career. The digging of wells for his flocks was among the most notable events in his common place life, and even in this he only re-opened the wells his father had dug. In him we see the result of growing up under too strong and dominant an external influence. The free and healthy play of his own capacities and will was curbed. The sons of outstanding fathers are much tempted to follow in the wake of their success, and be too much controlled and limited by the example therein set to them. There is a great deal to induce a son to do so; this calling has been successful in his father’s case, what better can he do than follow? Also he may get the use of his wells those sources his father has opened for the easier or more abundant maintenance of those dependent on him, the business he has established, the practice he has made, the connections lie has formed – these are useful if he follows in his father’s line of life. But all this tends, as in Isaac’s case, to the stunting of the man himself. Life is made too easy for him. Isaac has been called “the Wordsworth of the Old Testament,” but his meditative disposition seems to have degenerated into mere dreamy apathy, which, at last, made him the tool of the more active-minded members of his family, and was also attended by its common accompaniment of sensuality. It seems also to have brought him to a condition of almost entire bodily prostration, for a comparison of dates shows that he must have spent forty or fifty years in blindness and incapacity for all active duty. Neither can this greatly surprise us, for it is abundantly open to our own observation that men of the finest spiritual discernment, and of whose godliness in the main one cannot doubt, are also frequently the prey of the most childish tastes, and most useless even to the extent of doing harm in practical matters. They do not see the evil that is growing in their own family; or, if they see it, they cannot rouse themselves to check it. Isaac’s marriage, though so promising in the outset, brought new trial into his life. Rebekah had to repeat the experience of Sarah. The intended mother of the promised seed was left for twenty years childless – to contend with the doubts, surmises, evil proposals, proud challengings of God, and murmurings, which must undoubtedly have arisen even in so bright and spirited a heart as Rebekah’s. It was thus she was taught the seriousness of the position she had chosen for herself, and gradually led to the implicit faith requisite for the discharge of its responsibilities. Many young

persons have a similar experience. They seem to themselves to have chosen a wrong position, to have made a thorough mistake in life, and to have brought themselves into circumstances in which they only retard, or quite prevent, the prosperity of those with whom they are connected. In proportion as Rebekah loved Isaac, and entered into his prospects, must she have been tempted to think she had far better have remained in Padan-aram. It is a humbling thing to stand in some other person's way; but if it is by no fault of ours, but in obedience to affection or conscience we are in this position, we must, in humility and patience, wait upon Providence as Rebekah did, and resist all morbid despondency. This second barrenness in the prospective mother of the promised seed was as needful to all concerned as the first was; for the people of God, no more than any others, can learn in one lesson. They must again be brought to a real dependence on God as the Giver of the heir. The prayer with which Isaac "intreated" the Lord for his wife "because she was barren" was a prayer of deeper intensity than he could have uttered had he merely remembered the story that had been told him of his own birth. God must be recognised again and again and throughout as the Giver of life to the promised line. We are all apt to suppose that when once we have got a thing in train and working we can get on without God. How often do we pray for the bestowal of a blessing, and forget to pray for its continuance? How often do we count it enough that God has conferred some gift, and, not inviting Him to continue His agency, but trusting to ourselves, we mar His gift in the use? Learn, therefore, that although God has given you means of working out His salvation, your Rebekah will be barren without His continued activity. On His own means you must re-invite His blessing, for without the continuance of His aid you will make nothing of the most beautiful and appropriate helps He has given you. It was by pain, anxiety, and almost dismay, that Rebekah received intimation that her prayer was answered. In this she is the type of many whom God hears. Inward strife, miserable forebodings, deep dejection, are often the first intimations that God is listening to our prayer and is beginning to work within us. You have prayed that God would make you more a blessing to those about you, more useful in your place, more answerable to His ends; and when your prayer has risen to its highest point of confidence and expectation, you are thrown into what seems a worse state than ever, your heart is broken within you, you say, Is this the answer to my prayer, is this God's blessing; if it be so, why am I thus? For things that make a man serious, happen when God takes him in hand, and they that yield themselves to His service will not find that that service is all honour and enjoyment. Its first steps will often land us in a position we can make nothing of, and our attempts to aid others will get us into difficulties with them; and especially will our desire that Christ be formed in us, bring into such lively action the evil nature that is in us, that we are torn by the conflict, and our heart lies like the ground of a fierce struggle, seamed and furrowed, tossed and confused. As soon as there is a movement within us in one direction, immediately there is an opposing movement: as soon as one of the natures says, Do this; the other says, Do it not. The better nature is gaining slightly the upper hand, and by a long, steady strain, seems to be wearying out the other, when suddenly there is one quick stroke and the evil nature conquers. And every movement of the parties is with pain to ourselves; either conscience is wronged, and gives out its cry of shame, or our natural desires are trodden clown, and that also is pain. And so disconnected and connected are we, so entirely one with both parties, and yet so able to contemplate both as they were, that Rebekah's distress seems aptly enough to symbolize our own. And whether the symbol be apt or no, there can be no question that he who enquires of the Lord as she did, will receive a similar assurance, that there are two natures within him, and that "the elder shall serve the younger," the nature last

formed, and that seems to give least promise of life, shall master the original, eldest born child of the flesh. The children whose birth and destinies were thus predicted, at once gave evidence of a difference even greater than that which will often strike one as existing between two brothers, though rarely between twins. The first was born, all over like a hairy garment, presenting the appearance of being rolled up in a fur cloak or the skin of an animal – an appearance which did not pass away in childhood, but so obstinately adhered to him through life, that an imitation of his hands could be produced with the hairy skin of a kid. This was by his parents considered ominous. The want of the hairy covering which the lower animals have, is one of the signs marking out man as destined for a higher and more refined life than they; and when their son appeared in this guise, they could not but fear it prognosticated his sensual, animal career. So they called him Esau. And so did the younger son from the first show his nature, catching the heel of his brother, as if he were striving to be first born; and so they called him Jacob, the heel-catcher or supplanter – as Esau afterwards bitterly observed, a name which precisely suited his crafty, plotting nature, shown in his twice over tripping up and over-throwing his elder brother. The name which Esau handed down to his people was, however, not his original name, but one derived from the colour of that for which he sold his birthright. It was in that exclamation of his, “Feed me with that same red” that he disclosed his character. So different in appearance at birth, they grew up of very different character; and as was natural, he who had the quiet nature of his father was beloved by the mother, and he who had the bold, practical skill of the mother, was clung to by the father. It seems unlikely that Rebekah was influenced in her affection by anything but natural motives, though the fact that Jacob was to be the heir must have been much on her mind, and may have produced the partiality which maternal pride sometimes begets. But before we condemn Isaac, or think the historian has not given a full account of his love for Esau, let us ask what we have noticed about the growth and decay of our own affections. We are ashamed of Isaac; but have we not also been sometimes ashamed of ourselves on seeing that our affections are powerfully influenced by the gratification of tastes almost or quite as low as this of Isaac’s? He who cunningly panders to our taste for applause, he who purveys for us some sweet morsel of scandal, he who flatters or amuses us, straightway takes a place in our affections which we do not accord to men of much finer parts, but who do not so minister to our sordid appetites. The character of Jacob is easily understood. It has frequently been remarked of him that he is thoroughly a Jew, that in him you find the good and bad features of the Jewish character very prominent and conspicuous. He has that mingling of craft and endurance which has enabled his descendants to use for their own ends those who have wronged and persecuted them. The Jew has, with some justice and some in justice, been credited with an obstinate and unscrupulous resolution to forward his own interests, and there can be no question that in this respect Jacob is the typical Jew – ruthlessly taking advantage of his brother, watching and waiting till he was sure of his victim; deceiving his blind father, and robbing him of what he had intended for his favourite son; outwitting the grasping Laban, and making at least his own out of all attempts to rob him; unable to meet his brother without stratagem; not forgetting prudence even when the honour of his family is stained; and not thrown off his guard even by his true and deep affection for Joseph. Yet, while one recoils from this craftiness and management, one cannot but admire the quiet force of character, the indomitable tenacity, and, above all, the capacity for warm affection and lasting attachments, that he showed throughout. But the quality which chiefly distinguished Jacob from his hunting and marauding brother, was his desire for the friendship of God and sensibility to spiritual influences. It

may have been Jacob's consciousness of his own meanness that led him to crave connection with some Being or with some prospect that might ennoble his nature and lift him above his innate disposition. It is an old, old truth that not many noble are called; and, seeing quite as plainly as others see their feebleness and meanness, the ignoble conceive a self-loathing which is sometimes the beginning of an unquenchable thirst for the high and holy God. The consciousness of your bad, poor nature may revive within you day by day, as the remembrance of physical weakness returns to the invalid with every morning's light; but to what else can God so effectively appeal when He offers you present fellowship with Himself and eventual conformity to His own nature? It has been pointed out that the weakness in Esau's character which makes him so striking a contrast to his brother is his inconstancy.

"That one error Fills him with faults; makes him run through all the sins."

Constancy, persistence, dogged tenacity, is certainly the striking feature of Jacob's character. He could wait and bide his time; he could retain one purpose year after year till it was accomplished. The very motto of his life was, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." He watched for Esau's weak moment, and took advantage of it. He served fourteen years for the woman he loved, and no hardship quenched his love. Nay, when a whole life-time intervened, and he lay dying in Egypt, his constant heart still turned to Rachel, as if he had parted with her but yesterday. In contrast with this tenacious, constant character stands Esau, led by impulse, betrayed by appetite, everything by turns and nothing long. To-day despising his birthright, to-morrow breaking his heart for its loss; to-day vowing he will murder his brother, to-morrow falling on his neck and kissing him; a man you cannot reckon upon, and of too shallow a nature for anything to root itself deeply in. The event in which the contrasted characters of the twin brothers were most decisively shown, so decisively shown that their destinies were fixed by it, was an incident which, in its external circumstances, was of the most ordinary and trivial kind. Esau came in hungry from hunting; from dawn to dusk he had been taxing his strength to the utmost, too eagerly absorbed to notice either his distance from home or his hunger; it is only when he begins to return depressed by the ill-luck of the day, and with nothing now to stimulate him, that he feels faint; and when at last he reaches his father's tents, and the savoury smell of Jacob's lentiles greets him, his ravenous appetite becomes an intolerable craving, and he begs Jacob to give him some of his food. Had Jacob done so with brotherly feeling, there would have been nothing to record. But Jacob had long been watching for an opportunity to win his brother's birthright, and though no one could have supposed that an heir to even a little property would sell it in order to get a meal five minutes sooner than he could otherwise get it, Jacob had taken his brother's measure to a nicety, and was confident that present appetite would in Esau completely extinguish every other thought. It is perhaps worth noticing that the birthright in Ishmael's line, the guardianship of the temple at Mecca, passed from one branch of the family to another in a precisely similar way. We read that when the guardianship of the temple and the governorship of the town "fell into the hands of Abu Gabshan, a weak and silly man, Cosa, one of Mohammed's ancestors, circumvented him while in a drunken humour, and bought of him the keys of the temple, and with them the presidency of it, for a bottle of wine. But Abu Gabshan being gotten out of his drunken fit, sufficiently repented of his foolish bargain; from whence grew these proverbs among the Arabs: More vexed with late repentance than Abu Gabshan; and, More silly than Abu Gabshan – which are usually said of those who part with a thing of great moment for a small matter." Which brother presents the more repulsive spectacle of

the two in this selling of the birth right it is hard to say. Who does not feel contempt for the great, strong man declaring he will die if he is required to wait five minutes till his own supper is prepared; forgetting, in the craving of his appetite, every consideration of a worthy kind; oblivious of everything but his hunger and his food; crying, like a great baby, Feed me with that red? So it is always with the man who has fallen under the power of sensual appetite. He is always going to die if it is not immediately gratified. He must have his appetite satisfied. No consideration of consequences can be listened to or thought of; the man is helpless in the hands of his appetite – it rules and drives him on, and he is utterly without self-control; nothing but physical compulsion can restrain him. But the treacherous and self-seeking craft of the other brother is as repulsive: the coldblooded, calculating spirit that can hold every appetite in check, that can cleave to one purpose for a life-time, and, without scruple, take advantage of a twin-brother's weakness. Jacob knows his brother thoroughly, and all his knowledge he uses to betray him. He knows he will speedily repent of his bargain, so he makes him swear he will abide by it. It is a relentless purpose he carries out – he deliberately and unhesitatingly sacrifices his brother to himself. Still, in two respects, Jacob is the superior man. He can appreciate the birthright in his father's family, and he has constancy. Esau might be a pleasant companion, far brighter and more vivacious than Jacob on a day's hunting; free and open-handed, and not implacable; and yet such people are not satisfactory friends. Often the most attractive people have similar inconstancy; they have a superficial vivacity, and brilliance, and charm, and good-nature, which invites a friendship they do not deserve. Parents frequently make the mistake of Isaac, and think more highly of the gay, sparkling, but shallow child, than of the child who cannot be always smiling, but broods over what he conceives to be his wrongs. Sulkiness is itself not a pleasing feature in a child's character, but it may only be the childish expression of constancy, and of a depth of character which is slow to let go any impression made upon it. On the other hand, frankness and a quick throwing aside of passion and resentment, are pleasing features in a child, but often these are only the expressions of a fickle character, rapidly changing from sun to shower like an April day, and not to be trusted for retaining affection or good impressions any longer than it retains resentment. But Esau's despising of his birthright is that which stamps the man and makes him interesting to each generation. No one can read the simple account of his reckless act without feeling how justly we are called upon to "look diligently lest there be among us any profane person as Esau, who, for one morsel of meat, sold his birthright." Had the birthright been something to eat, Esau would not have sold it. What an exhibition of human nature! What an exposure of our childish folly and the infatuation of appetite! For Esau has company in his fall. We are all stricken by his shame. We are conscious that if God had made provision for the flesh we should have listened to Him more readily. "But what will this birthright profit us?" We don't see the good it does: were it something to keep us from disease, to give us long unsated days of pleasure, to bring us the fruits of labour without the weariness of it, to make money for us, where is the man who would not value it – where is the man who would lightly give it up? But because it is only the favour of God that is offered, His endless love, His holiness made ours, this we will imperil or resign for every idle desire, for every lust that bids us serve it a little longer. Born the sons of God, made in His image, introduced to a birthright angels might covet, we yet prefer to rank with the beasts of the field, and let our souls starve if only our bodies be well tended and cared for. There is in Esau's conduct and after-experience so much to stir serious thought, that one always feels reluctant to pass from it, and as if much more ought to be made of it. It reflects so many features of our own conduct, and

so clearly shows us what we are from day to day liable to, that we would wish to take it with us through life as a perpetual admonition. Who does not know of those moments of weakness, when we are fagged with work, and with our physical energy our moral tone has become relaxed? Who does not know how, in hours of reaction from keen and exciting engagements, sensual appetite asserts itself, and with what petulance we inwardly cry, We shall die if we do not get this or that paltry gratification? We are, for the most part, inconstant as Esau, full of good resolves to-day, and to-morrow throwing them to the winds – to-day proud of the arduousness of our calling, and girding ourselves to self-control and self-denial, to-morrow sinking back to softness and self-indulgence. Not once, as Esau, but again and again we barter peace of conscience and fellowship with God and the hope of holiness, for what is, in simple fact, no more than a bowl of pottage. Even after recognising our weakness and the lowness of our tastes, and after repenting with self-loathing and misery, some slight pleasure is enough to upset our steadfast mind, and make us as plastic as clay in the hand of circumstances. It is with positive dismay one considers the weakness and blindness of our hours of appetite and passion; how one goes then like an ox to the slaughter, all unconscious of the pitfalls that betray and destroy men, and how at any moment we ourselves may truly sell our birthright.

02.04. LECTURE IV: JACOB'S FRAUD

LECTURE IV JACOB'S FRAUD

Genesis 27:1-46

"Truly, I have been tempted sometimes to say that Jacob was of a mean spirit. But that is our trial: – we must learn to see the good in the midst of much that is unlovely."

"The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever." Psalms 33:11

THERE are some families whose miserable existence is almost entirely made up of malicious plottings and counter-plottings, little mischievous designs, and spiteful triumphs of one member or party in the family over the other. It is not pleasant to have the veil withdrawn, and to see that where love and eager self-sacrifice might be expected, their places are occupied by an eager assertion of rights, and a cold, proud, and always petty and stupid, nursing of some supposed injury. In the story told us so graphically in this page, we see the family whom God has blessed sunk to this low level, and betrayed by family jealousies into unseemly strife on the most sacred ground. Each member of the family plans his own wicked device, and God by the evil of one defeats the evil of another, and saves His own purpose to bless the race from being frittered away and lost. And it is told us in order that, amidst all this mess of human craft and selfishness, the righteousness and stability of God's word of promise may be more vividly seen. Let us look at the sin of each of the parties in order, and the punishment of each. In the Epistle to the Hebrews Isaac is commended for his faith in blessing his sons. It was commendable in him that, in great bodily weakness, he still believed himself to be the guardian of God's blessing, and recognised that he had a great inheritance to bequeath to his sons. But, in unaccountable and inconsistent contempt of God's expressed purpose, he proposes to hand over this blessing to Esau. Many things had occurred to fix his attention upon the fact that Esau was not to be his heir. Esau had sold his birthright, and had married Hittite women, and his whole conduct was, no doubt, of a piece with this, and showed that, in his hands, any spiritual inheritance would be both unsafe and unappreciated. That Isaac had some notion he was doing wrong in giving to Esau what belonged to God, and what God meant to give to Jacob, is shown from his precipitation in bestowing the blessing. He has no feeling that he is authorized by God, and therefore he cannot wait calmly till God should intimate, by unmistakable signs, that he is near his end; but, seized with a panic, lest his favourite should somehow be left unblessed, he feels, in his nervous alarm, as if he were at the point of death, and, though destined to live for forty-three years longer, he calls Esau that he may hand over to him his dying testament. How different is the nerve of a man when he knows he is doing God's will, and when he is but fulfilling his own device. For the same reason, he has to stimulate his spirit by artificial means. The prophetic ecstasy is not felt by him; he must be exhilarated by venison and wine, that, strengthened and revived in body, and having his gratitude aroused afresh towards Esau, he may bless him with all the greater vigour. The final stimulus is given when he smells the garments of Esau on Jacob, and when that fresh earthy smell which so revives us in spring, as if our life were renewed with the year, and which hangs about one who has

been in the open air, entered into Isaac's blood, and lent him fresh vigour. It is a strange and, in some respects, perplexing spectacle that is here presented to us – the organ of the Divine blessing represented by a blind old man, laid on a "couch of skins," stimulated by meat and wine, and trying to cheat God by bestowing the family blessing on the son of his own choice to the exclusion of the divinely appointed heir. Out of such beginnings had God to educate a people worthy of Himself, and through such hazards had He to guide the spiritual blessing He designed to convey to us all. Isaac laid a net for his own feet. By his unrighteous and timorous haste he secured the defeat of his own long-cherished scheme. It was his hasting to bless Esau which drove Rebekah to checkmate him by winning the blessing for her favourite. The shock which Isaac felt when Esau came in and the fraud was discovered is easily understood. The mortification of the old man must have been extreme when he found that he had so completely taken himself in. He was reclining in the satisfied reflection that for once he had overreached his astute Rebekah and her astute son, and in the comfortable feeling that, at last, he had accomplished his one remaining desire, when he learns from the exceeding bitter cry of Esau that he has himself been duped. It was enough to rouse the anger of the mildest and godliest of men, but Isaac does not storm and protest – "he trembles exceedingly." He recognises, by a spiritual insight quite unknown to Esau, that this is God's hand, and deliberately confirms, with his eyes open, what he had done in blindness: "I have blessed him: Yea, and he shall be blessed." Had he wished to deny the validity of the blessing, he had ground enough for doing so. He had not really given it: it had been stolen from him. An act must be judged by its intention, and he had been far from intending to bless Jacob. Was he to consider himself bound by what he had done under a misapprehension? He had given a blessing to one person under the impression that he was a different person; must not the blessing go to him for whom it was designed? But Isaac unhesitatingly yielded. This clear recognition of God's hand in the matter, and quick submission to Him, reveals a habit of reflection, and a spiritual thoughtfulness, which are the good qualities in Isaac's otherwise unsatisfactory character. Before he finished his answer to Esau, he felt he was a poor feeble creature in the hand of a true and just God, who had used even his infirmity and sin to forward righteous and gracious ends. It was his sudden recognition of the frightful way in which he had been tampering with God's will, and of the grace with which God had prevented him from accomplishing a wrong destination of the inheritance, that made Isaac tremble very exceedingly. In this humble acceptance of the disappointment of his life's love and hope, Isaac shows us the manner in which we ought to bear the consequences of our wrong-doing. The punishment of our sin often comes through the persons with whom we have to do, unintentionally on their part, and yet we are tempted to hate them because they pain and punish us, father, mother, wife, child, or whoever else. Isaac and Esau were alike disappointed. Esau only saw the supplanter, and vowed to be revenged. Isaac saw God in the matter, and trembled. So when Shimei cursed David, and his loyal retainers would have cut off his head for so doing, David said, "Let him alone, and let him curse: it may be that the Lord hath bidden him." We can bear the pain inflicted on us by men when we see that they are merely the instruments of a divine chastisement. The persons who thwart us and make our life bitter, the persons who stand between us and our dearest hopes, the persons whom we are most disposed to speak angrily and bitterly to, are often thorns planted in our path by God to keep us on the right way. Isaac's sin propagated itself with the rapid multiplication of all sin. Rebekah overheard what passed between Isaac and Esau, and although she might have been able to wait until by fair means Jacob received the blessing, yet when she sees Isaac actually preparing to

pass Jacob by and bless Esau, her fears are so excited that she cannot any longer quietly leave the matter in God's hand, but must lend her own more skilful management. It may have crossed her mind that she was justified in forwarding what she knew to be God's purpose. She saw no other way of saving God's purpose and Jacob's rights than by her interference. The emergency might have unnerved many a woman, but Rebekah is equal to the occasion She makes the threatened exclusion of Jacob the very means for at last finally settling the inheritance upon him. She braves the indignation of Isaac and the rage of Esau, and fearless herself, and confident of success, she soon quiets the timorous and cautious objections of Jacob. She knows that for straightforward lying and acting a part she was sure of good support in Jacob. Luther says, "Had it been me, I'd have dropped the dish." But Jacob had no such tremors – could submit his hands and face to the touch of Isaac, and repeat his lie as often as needful. An old man bedridden like Isaac becomes the subject of a number of little deceptions which may seem, and which may be, very unimportant in themselves, but which are seen to wear down the reverence due to the father of a family, and which imperceptibly sap the guile less sincerity and truthfulness of those who practise them. This overreaching of Isaac by dressing Jacob in Esau's clothes, might come in naturally as one of those daily deceptions which Rebekah was accustomed to practise on the old man whom she kept quite in her own hand, giving him as much or as little insight into the doings of the family as seemed advisable to her. It would never occur to her that she was taking God in hand; it would seem only as if she were making such use of Isaac's infirmity as she was in the daily practice of doing. But to account for an act is not to excuse it. Underlying the conduct of Rebekah and Jacob was the conviction that they would come better speed by a little deceit of their own than by suffering God to further them in His own way – that though God would certainly not practise deception Himself, He might not object to others doing so that in this emergency holiness was a hampering thing which might just for a little be laid aside that they might be more holy afterwards – that though no doubt in ordinary circumstances, and as a normal habit, deceit is not to be commended, yet in cases of difficulty, which call for ready wit, a prompt seizure, and delicate handling, men must be allowed to secure their ends in their own way. Their unbelief thus directly produced immorality – immorality of a very revolting kind, the defrauding of their relatives, and repulsive also because practised as if on God's side, or, as we would now say, "in the interests of religion." To this day the method of Rebekah and Jacob is largely adopted by religious persons. It is notorious that persons whose ends are good frequently become thoroughly unscrupulous about the means they use to accomplish them. They dare not say in so many words that they may do evil that good may come, nor do they think it a tenable position in morals that the end sanctifies the means; and yet their consciousness of a justifiable and desirable end undoubtedly does blunt their sensitiveness regarding the legitimacy of the means they employ. For example, Protestant controversialists, persuaded that vehement opposition to Popery is good, and filled with the idea of accomplishing its downfall, are often guilty of gross misrepresentation, because they do not sufficiently inform themselves of the actual tenets and practices of the Church of Rome. In all controversy, religious and political, it is the same. It is always dishonest to circulate reports that you have no means of authenticating: yet how freely are such reports circulated to blacken the character of an opponent, and to prove his opinions to be dangerous. It is always dishonest to condemn opinions we have not inquired into, merely because of some fancied consequence which these opinions carry in them: yet how freely are opinions condemned by men who have never been at the trouble carefully to inquire into their truth. They do not feel the dishonesty of their

position, because they have a general consciousness that they are on the side of religion, and of what has generally passed for truth. All keeping back of facts which are supposed to have an unsettling effect, is but a repetition of this sin. There is no sin more hateful. Under the appearance of serving God, and maintaining His cause in the world, it insults Him by assuming that if the whole bare, undisguised truth were spoken, His cause would suffer. The fate of all such attempts to manage God's matters by keeping things dark, and misrepresenting fact, is written for all who care to understand in the results of this scheme of Rebekah's and Jacob's. They gained nothing, and they lost a great deal by their wicked interference. They gained nothing; for God had promised that the birthright would be Jacob's, and would have given it him in some way redounding to his credit and not to his shame. And they lost a great deal. The mother lost her son; Jacob had to flee for his life, and, for all we know, Rebekah never saw him more. And Jacob lost all the comforts of home, and all those possessions his father had accumulated. He had to flee with nothing but his staff, an outcast to begin the world for himself. From this first false step onwards to his death, he was pursued by misfortune, until his own verdict on his life was, "Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life." Thus severely was the sin of Rebekah and Jacob punished. It coloured their whole after life with a dark, sombre hue. It was marked thus, because it was a sin by all means to be avoided. It was virtually the sin of blaming God for forgetting His promise, or of accusing Him of being unable to perform it: so that they, Rebekah and Jacob, had, forsooth, to take God's work out of His hands, and show Him how it ought to be done. The announcement of God's purpose, instead of enabling them quietly to wait for a blessing they knew to be certain, became in their unrighteous and impatient hearts actually an inducement to sin. Abraham was so bold and confident in his faith, at least latterly, that again and again he refused to take as a gift from men, and on the most honourable terms, what God had promised to give him: his grandson is so little sure of God's truth, that he will rather trust his own falsehood; and what he thinks God may forget to give him, he will steal from his own father. Some persons have especial need to consider this sin – they are tempted to play the part of Providence, to intermeddle where they ought to refrain. Sometimes just a little thing is needed to make everything go to our liking – the keeping back of one small fact, a slight variation in the way of stating the matter, is enough – things want just a little push in the right direction; it is wrong, but very slightly so. And so they are encouraged to close for a moment their eyes and put to their hand. Of all the parties in this transaction none is more to blame than Esau. He shows now how selfish and untruthful the sensual man really is, and how worthless is the generosity which is merely of impulse and not bottomed on principle. While he so furiously and bitterly blamed Jacob for supplanting him, it might surely have occurred to him that it was really he who was supplanting Jacob. He had no right, divine or human, to the inheritance. God had never said that his possession should go to the oldest, and had in this case said the express opposite. Besides, inconstant as Esau was, he could scarcely have forgotten the bargain that so pleased him at the time, and by which he had sold to his younger brother all title to his father's blessings. Jacob was to blame for seeking to win his own by craft, but Esau was more to blame for endeavouring furtively to recover what he knew to be no longer his. His bitter cry was the cry of a disappointed and enraged child, what Hosea calls the "howl" of those who seem to seek the Lord, but are really merely crying out, like animals, for corn and wine. Many that care very little for God's love will seek His favours; and every wicked wretch who has in his prosperity spurned God's offers, will, when he sees how he has cheated himself, turn to God's gifts, though not to God, with a cry. Esau would now very gladly have given a mess of pottage for the blessing

that secured to its receiver “the dew of heaven, the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine.” Like many another sinner, he wanted both to eat his cake and have it. He wanted to spend his youth sowing to the flesh, and have the harvest which those only can have who have sown to the spirit. He wished both of two irreconcilable things – both the red pottage and the birthright. He is a type of those who think very lightly of spiritual blessings while their appetites are strong, but afterwards bitterly complain that their whole life is filled with the results of sowing to the flesh and not to the spirit.

“We barter life for pottage; sell true bliss For wealth or power, for pleasure or renown;

Thus, Esau-like, our Father’s blessing miss, Then wash with fruitless tears our faded crown.”

The words of the New Testament, in which it is said that Esau “found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears,” are sometimes misunderstood. They do not mean that he sought what we ordinarily call repentance, a change of mind about the value of the birthright. He had that; it was this that made him weep. What he sought now was some means of undoing what he had done, of cancelling the deed of which he repented. His experience does not tell us that a man once sinning as Esau sinned becomes a hardened reprobate whom no good influence can impress or bring to repentance, but it says that the sin so committed leaves irreparable consequences – that no man can live a youth of folly and yet find as much in manhood and maturer years as if he had lived a careful and God-fearing youth. Esau had irrecoverably lost that which he would now have given all he had to possess; and in this, I suppose, he represents half the men who pass through this world. He warns us that it is very possible, by careless yielding to appetite and passing whim, to entangle ourselves irrecoverably for this life, if not to weaken and maim ourselves for eternity. At the time, your act may seem a very small and secular one, a mere bargain in the ordinary course, a little transaction such as one would enter into carelessly after the day’s work is over, in the quiet of a summer evening or in the midst of the family circle; or it may seem so necessary that you never think of its moral qualities, as little as you question whether you are justified in breathing; but you are warned that if there be in that act a crushing out of spiritual hopes to make way for the free enjoyment of the pleasures of sense – if there be a deliberate preference of the good things of this life to the love of God – if, knowingly, you make light of spiritual blessings, and count them unreal when weighed against obvious worldly advantages – then the consequences of that act will in this life bring to you great discomfort and uneasiness, great loss and vexation, an agony of remorse, and a life-long repentance. You are warned of this, and most touchingly, by the moving entreaties, the bitter cries and tears of Esau. But even when our life is spoiled irreparably, a hope remains for our character and ourselves – not certainly if our misfortunes embitter us, not if resentment is the chief result of our suffering; but if, subduing resentment, and taking blame to ourselves instead of trying to fix it on others, we take revenge upon the real source of our undoing, and extirpate from our own character the root of bitterness. Painful and difficult is such schooling. It calls for simplicity, and humility, and truthfulness – qualities not of frequent occurrence. It calls for abiding patience; for he who begins thus to sow to the spirit late in life, must be content with inward fruits, with peace of conscience, increase of righteousness and humility, and must learn to live without much of what all men naturally desire. While each member of Isaac’s family has thus his own plan, and is striving to fulfil his private intention, the result is, that God’s purpose is fulfilled. In the human agency, such faith in God as existed was overlaid with misunderstanding and distrust of God. But notwithstanding the petty and

mean devices, the short-sighted slyness, the blundering unbelief, the profane worldliness of the human parties in the transaction, the truth and mercy of God still find a way for themselves. Were matters left in our hands, we should make shipwreck even of the salvation with which we are provided. We carry into our dealings with it the same selfishness, and inconstancy, and worldliness which made it necessary: and had not God patience to bear with, as well as mercy to invite us; had He not wisdom to govern us in the use of His grace, as well as wisdom to contrive its first bestowal, we should perish with the water of life at our lips.

02.05. LECTURE V: JACOB'S FLIGHT AND DREAM

LECTURE V JACOB'S FLIGHT AND DREAM Genesis 27:41-46, Genesis 28:1-22 "Consequences are unpitying"

"So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before Thee. Nevertheless I am continually with Thee." Psalms 73:22

IT is so commonly observed as to be scarcely worth again remarking, that persons who employ a great deal of craft in the management of their affairs are invariably entrapped in their own net. Life is so complicated, and every matter of conduct has so many issues, that no human brain can possibly foresee every contingency. Rebekah was a clever woman, and quite competent to outwit men like Isaac and Esau, but she had in her scheming neglected to take account of Laban, a man true brother to herself in cunning. She had calculated on Esau's resentment, and knew it would last only a few days, and this brief period she was prepared to utilize by sending Jacob out of Esau's reach to her own kith and kin, from among whom he might get a suitable wife. But she did not reckon on Laban's making her son serve fourteen years for his wife, nor upon Jacob's falling so deeply in love with Rachel as to make him apparently forget his mother. In the first part of her scheme she feels herself at home. She is a woman who knows exactly how much of her mind to disclose, so as effectually to lead her husband to adopt her view and plan. She did not bluntly advise Isaac to send Jacob to Padan-aram, but she sowed in his apprehensive mind fears which she knew would make him send Jacob there; she suggested the possibility of Isaac's taking a wife of the daughters of Heth. She felt sure that Isaac, did not need to be told where to send his son to find a suitable wife. So Isaac called Jacob, and said, Go to Padan-aram, to the house of thy mother's father, and take thee a wife thence. And he gave him the family blessing: God Almighty give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee – so constituting him his heir, the representative of Abraham. The effect this had on Esau is very noticeable. He sees, as the narrative tells us, a great many things, and his dull mind tries to make some meaning out of all that is passing before him. The historian seems intentionally to satirize Esau's attempt at reasoning, and the foolish simplicity of the device he fell upon. He had an idea that Jacob's obedience, in going to seek a wife of another stock than he had connected himself with, would be pleasing to his parents; and, perhaps, he had an idea that it would be possible to steal a march upon Jacob in his absence, and by a more speedily effected obedience to his parents' desire, win their preference, and perhaps move Isaac to alter his will and reverse the blessing. Though living in the chosen family, he seems to have had not the slightest idea that there was any higher will than his father's being fulfilled in their doings. He does not yet see why he himself should not be as blessed as Jacob; he cannot grasp at all the distinction that grace makes; cannot take in the idea that God has chosen a people to Himself, and that no natural advantage or force or endowment can set a man among that people but only God's choice. Accordingly, he does not see any difference between Ishmael's family and the chosen family; they are both sprung from Abraham, both are naturally the same, and the fact that God expressly gave His in heritance past Ishmael is nothing to Esau – an act of God has no meaning to him. He merely sees that he has not pleased his

parents as well as he might by his marriage, and his easy and yielding disposition prompts him to remedy this. This is a fine specimen of the hazy views men have of what will bring them to a level with God's chosen. Through their crass insensibility to the high righteousness of God, there still does penetrate a perception that if they are to please Him there are certain means to be used for doing so. There are, they see, certain occupations and ways pursued by Christians, and if by themselves adopting these they can please God, they are quite willing to humour Him in this. Like Esau, they do not see their way to drop their old connections, but if by making some little additions to their habits, or forming some new connection, they can quiet this controversy that has somehow grown up between God and His children, – though, so far as they see, it is a very unmeaning controversy, – they will very gladly enter into any little arrangement for the purpose. We won't, of course, divorce the world, won't dismiss from our homes and hearts what God hates and means to destroy, won't accept God's will as our sole and absolute law, but we will so far meet God's wishes as to add to what we have adopted something that is almost as good as what God enjoins: we will make any little alterations which will not quite upset our present ways. Much commoner than hypocrisy is this dim-sighted, blundering stupidity of the really profane worldly man, who thinks he can take rank with men whose natures God has changed, by the mere imitation of some of their ways; who thinks, that as he cannot without great labour, and without too seriously endangering his hold on the world, do precisely what God requires, God may be expected to be satisfied with a something like it. Are we not aware of endeavouring at times to cloak a sin with some easy virtue, to adopt some new and apparently good habit, instead of destroying the sin we know God hates; or to offer to God, and palm upon our own conscience, a mere imitation of what God is pleased with? Do you attend church, do you come and decorously submit to a service? That is not at all what God enjoins, though it is like it. What He means is, that you worship Him, which is a quite different employment. Do you render to God some outward respect, have you adopted some habits in deference to Him, do you even attempt some private devotion and discipline of the spirit? Still what He requires is something that goes much deeper than all that; namely, that you love Him. To conform to one or two habits of godly people is not what is required of us; but to be at heart godly. As Jacob journeyed northwards, he came, on the second or third evening of his flight, to the hills of Bethel. As the sun was sinking he found himself toiling up the rough path which Abraham may have described to him as looking like a great staircase of rock and crag reaching from earth to sky. Slabs of rock, piled one upon another, form the whole hill-side, and to Jacob's eye, accustomed to the rolling pastures of Beersheba, they would appear almost like a structure built for superhuman uses, well founded in the valley below, and intended to reach to unknown heights. Overtaken by darkness on this rugged path, he readily finds as soft a bed and as good shelter as his shepherd-habits require, and with his head on a stone and a corner of his dress thrown over his face to preserve him from the moon, he is soon fast asleep. But in his dreams the massive staircase is still before his eyes, and it is no longer himself that is toiling up it as it leads to an unexplored hill top above him, but the angels of God are ascending and descending upon it, and at its top is Jehovah Himself. Thus simply does God meet the thoughts of Jacob, and lead him to the encouragement he needed. What was probably Jacob's state of mind when he lay down on that hill-side? In the first place, and as he would have said to any man he chanced to meet, he wondered what he would see when he got to the top of this hill; and still more, as he may have said to Rebekah, he wondered what reception he would meet with from Laban, and whether he would ever again see his father's tents. This vision shows him that his path leads to God, that it is

He who occupies the future; and, in his dream, a voice comes to him: “I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land.” He had, no doubt, wondered much whether the blessing of his father was, after all, so valuable a possession, whether it might not have been wiser to take a share with Esau than to be driven out homeless thus. God has never spoken to him; he has heard his father speak of assurances coming to him from God, but as for him, through all the long years of his life he has never heard what he could speak of as a voice of God. But this night these doubts were silenced – there came to his soul an assurance that never departed from it. He could have affirmed he heard God saying to him: “I am the Lord God of thy father Abraham, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it.” And lastly, all these thoughts probably centred in one deep feeling that he was an outcast, a fugitive from justice. He was glad he was in so solitary a place, he was glad he was so far from Esau and from every human eye; and yet – what desolation of spirit accompanied this feeling: there was no one he could bid good-night to, no one he could spend the evening hour with in quiet talk; he was a banished man, whatever fine gloss Rebekah might put upon it, and deep down in his conscience there was that which told him he was not banished without cause. Might not God also forsake him – might not God banish him, and might he not find a curse pursuing him, preventing man or woman from ever again looking in his face with pleasure? Such fears are met by the vision. This desolate spot, unvisited by sheep or bird, has become busy with life, angels thronging the ample staircase. Here, where he thought himself lonely and outcast, he finds he has come to the very gate of heaven. His fond mother might, at that hour, have been visiting his silent tent, and shedding ineffectual tears on his abandoned bed, but he finds himself in the very house of God, cared for by angels. As the darkness had revealed to him the stars shining overhead, so when the deceptive glare of waking life was dulled by sleep, he saw the actual realities which before were hidden. No wonder that a vision which so graphically showed the open communication between earth and heaven should have deeply impressed itself on Jacob’s descendants. What more effectual consolation could any poor outcast, who felt he had spoiled his life, require, than the memory of this staircase reaching from the pillow of the lonely fugitive from justice up into the very heart of heaven? How could any most desolate soul feel quite abandoned so long as the memory retained the vision of the angels thronging up and down with swift service to the needy? How could it be even in the darkest hour believed that all hope was gone, and that men might but curse God and die, when the mind turned to this bridging of the interval between earth and heaven? In the New Testament we meet with an instance of the familiarity with this vision which true Israelites enjoyed. Our Lord, in addressing Nathanael, makes use of it in a way that proves this familiarity. Under his fig-tree, whose broad leaves were used in every Jewish garden as a screen from observation, and whose branches were trained down so as to form an open-air oratory, where secret prayer might be indulged in undisturbed, Nathanael had been declaring to the Father his ways, his weaknesses, his hopes. And scarcely more astonished was Jacob when he found himself the object of this angelic ministry on the lonely hill side, than was Nathanael when he found how one eye had penetrated the leafy screen, and had read his thoughts and wishes. Apparently he had been encouraging himself with this vision, for our Lord, reading his thoughts, says: “Because I said unto thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these – thou shalt see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man.” This, then, is a vision for us even more than for Jacob. It has its fulfilment in the times after the Incarnation more manifestly

than in previous times. The true staircase by which heavenly messengers ascend and descend is the Son of man. It is He who really bridges the interval between heaven and earth, God and man. In His person these two are united. You cannot tell whether Christ is more divine or human, more God or man – solidly based on earth, as this massive staircase, by His real humanity, by His thirty-three years engagement in all human functions and all experiences of this life, He is yet familiar with eternity, His name is “He that came down from heaven,” and if your eye follow step by step to the heights of His person, it rests at last on what you recognise as Divine. His love it is that is wide enough to embrace God on the one hand, and the lowest sinner on the other. Truly He is the way, the stair, leading from the lowest depth of earth to the highest height of heaven. In Him you find a love that embraces you as you are, in whatever condition, however cast down and defeated, however embittered and polluted – a love that stoops tenderly to you and hopefully, and gives you once more a hold upon holiness and life, and in that very love unfolds to you the highest glory of heaven and of God. When this comes home to a man in the hour of his need, it becomes the most arousing revelation. He springs from the troubled slumber we call life, and all earth wears a new glory and awe to him. He exclaims with Jacob, “How dreadful is this place. Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.” The world that had been so bleak and empty to him, is filled with a majestic vital presence. Jacob is no longer a mere fugitive from the results of his own sin, a shepherd in search of employment, a man setting out in the world to try his fortune; he is the partner with God in the fulfilment of a Divine purpose. And such is the change that passes on every man who believes in the Incarnation, who feels himself to be connected with God by Jesus Christ; he recognises the Divine intention, to uplift his life, and to fill it with new hopes and purposes. He feels that humanity is consecrated by the entrance of the Son of God into it: he feels that all human life is holy ground since the Lord Himself has passed through it. Having once had this vision of God and man united in Christ, life cannot any more be to him the poor, dreary, commonplace, wretched round of secular duties and short-lived joys and terribly punished sins, it was before: but it truly be comes the very gate of heaven; from each part of it he knows there is a staircase rising to the presence of God, and that out of the region of pure holiness and justice there flow to him heavenly aids, tender guidance, and encouragement. Do you think the idea of the Incarnation too aerial and speculative to carry with you for help in rough, practical matters? The Incarnation is not a mere idea, but a fact as substantial and solidly rooted in life as anything you have to do with. Even the shadow of it Jacob saw carried in it so much of what was real that when he was broad awake he trusted it and acted on it. It was not scattered by the chill of the morning air, nor by that fixed staring reality which external nature assumes in the gray dawn as one object after another shows itself in the same spot and form in which night had fallen upon it. There were no angels visible when he opened his eyes; the staircase was there, but it was of no heavenly substance, and if it had any secret to tell, it coldly and darkly kept it. There was no retreat for the runaway from the poor common facts of yesterday. The sky seemed as far from earth as it did yesterday, his track over the hill as lonely, his brother’s wrath as real; – but other things also had become real; and as he looked back from the top of the hill on the stone he had set up, he felt the words, “I am with thee in all places whither thou goest,” graven on his heart, and giving him new courage; and he knew that every footfall of his was making a Bethel, and that as he went he was carrying God through the world. The bleakest rains that swept across the hills of Bethel could never wash out of his mind the vision of bright-winged angels, as little as they could wash off the oil or wear down the stone he had set up. The brightest glare of this world’s heyday of real life

could not outshine and cause them to disappear; and the vision on which we hope is not one that vanishes at cock-crow, nor is He who connects us with God shy of human handling, but substantial as ourselves He offered Himself to every kind of test, so that those who knew Him for years could say, with the most absolute confidence, “That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life ... declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ.” Jacob obeyed a good instinct when he set up as a monumental stone that which had served as his pillow while he dreamt and saw this inspiring vision. He felt that vivid as the impression on his mind then was, it would tend to fade, and he erected this stone that in after days he might have a witness that would testify to his present assurance. One great secret in the growth of character is the art of prolonging the quickening power of right ideas, of perpetuating just and inspiring impressions. And he who despises the aid of all external helps for the accomplishment of this object is not likely to succeed. Religion, some men say, is an inward thing: it does not consist of public worship, ordinances, and so forth, but it is a state of spirit. Very true; but he knows little of human nature who fancies a state of spirit can be maintained without the aid of external reminders, presentations to eye and ear of central religious truths and facts. We have all of us had such views of truth, and such corresponding desires and purposes, as would transform us were they only permanent. But what a night has settled on our past, how little have we found skill to prolong the benefit arising from particular events or occasions. Some parts of our life, indeed, require no monument, there is nothing there we would ever again think of, if possible; but, alas! these, for the most part, have erected monuments of their own, to which, as with a sad fascination, our eyes are ever turning – persons we have injured, or who, somehow, so remind us of sin, that we shrink from meeting them – places to which sins of ours have attached a reproachful meaning. And these natural monuments must be imitated in the life of grace. By fixed hours of worship, by rules and habits of devotion, by public worship, and especially by the monumental ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, must we cherish the memory of known truth, and deepen former impressions. To the monument Jacob attached a vow, so that when he returned to that spot the stone might remind him of the dependence on God he now felt, of the precarious situation he was in when this vision appeared, and of all the help God had afterwards given him. He seems to have taken up the meaning of that endless chain of angels ceaselessly coming down full of blessing, and going up empty of all but desires, requests, aspirations. And if we are to live with clean conscience and with heart open to God, we must so live that the messengers who bring God’s blessings to us shall not have an evil report to take back of the manner in which we have received and spent His bounty. This whole incident makes a special appeal to those who are starting in life. Jacob was no longer a young man, but he was unmarried, and he was going to seek employment with nothing to begin the world with but his shepherd’s staff, the symbol of his knowledge of a profession. Many must see in him a very exact reproduction of their own position. They have left home, and it may be they have left it not altogether with pleasant memories, and they are now launched on the world for themselves, with nothing but their staff, their knowledge of some business. The spot they have reached may seem as desolate as the rock where Jacob lay, their prospects as doubtful as his. For such an one there is absolutely no security but that which is given in the vision of Jacob – in the belief that God will be with you in all places, and that even now on that life which you are perhaps already wishing to seclude from all holy influences, the angels of God are descending to bless and restrain you from

sin. Happy the man who, at the outset, can heartily welcome such a connection of his life with God: unhappy he who welcomes whatever blots out the thought of heaven, and who separates himself from all that reminds him of the good influences that throng his path. The desire of the young heart to see life and know the world is natural and innocent, but how many fancy that in seeing the lowest and poorest perversions of life they see life – how many forget that unless they keep their hearts pure they can never enter into the best and richest and most enduring of the uses and joys of human life. Even from a selfish motive and the mere desire to succeed in the world, every one starting in life would do well to consider whether he really has Jacob's blessing and is making his vow. And certainly every one who has any honour, who is governed by any of those sentiments that lead men to noble and worthy actions, will frankly meet God's offers and joyfully accept a heavenly guidance and a permanent connection with God. Before we dismiss this vision, it may be well to look at one instance of its fulfilment, that we may understand the manner in which God fulfils His promises. Jacob's experience in Haran was not so brilliant and unexceptionable as he might perhaps expect. He did, indeed, at once find a woman he could love, but he had to purchase her with seven years toil, which ultimately became fourteen years. He did not grudge this; because it was customary, because his affections were strong, and because he was too independent to send to his father for money to buy a wife. But the bitterest disappointment awaited him. With the burning humiliation of one who has been cheated in so cruel a way, he finds himself married to Leah. He protests, but he cannot insist on his protest, nor divorce Leah; for, in point of fact, he is conscious that he is only being paid in his own coin, foiled with his own weapons. In this veiled bride brought in to him on false pretences, he sees the just retribution of his own disguise when with the hands of Esau he went in and received his father's blessing. His mouth is shut by the remembrance of his own past. But submitting to this chastisement, and recognising in it not only the craft of his uncle, but the stroke of God, that which he at first thought of as a cruel curse became a blessing. It was Leah much more than Rachel that built up the house of Israel. To this despised wife six of the tribes traced their origin, and among these was the tribe of Judah. Thus he learned the fruitfulness of God's retribution – that to be humbled by God is really to be built up, and to be punished by Him the richest blessing. Through such an experience are many persons led: when we would embrace the fruit of years of toil God thrusts into our arms something quite different from our expectation – something that not only disappoints, but that at first repels us, reminding us of acts of our own we had striven to forget. Is it with resentment you still look back on some such experience, when the reward of years of toil evaded your grasp, and you found yourself bound to what you would not have worked a day to obtain? – do you find yourself disheartened and discouraged by the way in which you seem regularly to miss the fruit of your labour? If so, no doubt it were useless to assure you that the disappointment may be more fruitful than the hope fulfilled, but it can scarcely be useless to ask you to consider whether it is not the fact that in Jacob's case what was thrust upon him was more fruitful than what he strove to win.

02.06. LECTURE VI: JACOB AT PENIEL

LECTURE VI

JACOB AT PENIEL

Genesis 32:1-32 “Why, thou fool and blind It is the mercy-stroke that stops thy fate, Hamstrings and holds thee to thy hurt, but how? On the edge o’ the precipice.”

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.” James 4:10

JACOB had a double reason for wishing to leave Padan-aram. He believed in the promise of God to give him Canaan; and he saw that Laban was a man with whom he could never be on a thoroughly good understanding. He saw plainly that Laban was resolved to make what he could out of his skill at as cheap a rate as possible – the characteristic of a selfish, greedy, ungrateful, and therefore, in the end, ill-served master. Laban and Esau were the two men who had hitherto chiefly influenced Jacob’s life. But they were very different in character. Esau could never see that there was any important difference between himself and Jacob – except that his brother was trickier. Esau was the type of those who honestly think that there is not much in religion, and that saints are but white-washed sinners. Laban, on the contrary, is almost superstitiously impressed by the distinction between God’s people and others. But the chief practical issue of this impression is, not that he seeks God’s friendship for himself, but that he tries to make a profitable use of God’s friends. He seeks to get God’s blessing, as it were, at second-hand. If men could be related to God indirectly, as if in law and not by blood, that would suit Laban. If God would admit men to His inheritance on any other terms than being sons in the direct line, if there were some relationship once removed, a kind of sons-in-law, so that mere connection with the godly, though not with God, would win His blessing, this would suit Laban. Laban is the man who appreciates the social value of virtue, truthfulness, fidelity, temperance, godliness, but wishes to enjoy their fruits without the pain of cultivating the qualities themselves. He is scrupulous as to the character of those he takes into his employment, and seeks to connect himself in business with good men. In his domestic life, he acts on the idea which his experience has suggested to him, that persons really godly will make his home more peaceful, better regulated, safer than otherwise it might be. If he holds a position of authority, he knows how to make use, for the preservation of order and for the promotion of his own ends, of the voluntary efforts of Christian societies, of the trustworthiness of Christian officials, and of the support of the Christian community. But with all this recognition of the reality and influence of godliness, he never for one moment entertains the idea of himself becoming a godly man. In all ages there are Labans, who clearly recognise the utility and worth of a connection with God, who have been much mixed up with persons in whom that worth was very conspicuous, and who yet, at the last, “depart and return unto their place,” like Jacob’s father-in-law, without having themselves entered into any affectionate relations with God. From Laban, then, Jacob was resolved to escape. And though to escape with large droves of slow-moving sheep and cattle, as well as with many women and children, seemed hopeless, the cleverness of Jacob did not fail him here. lie did not get beyond reach of pursuit; he could never have expected to do so. But he stole

away to such a distance from Haran as made it much easier for him to come to terms with Laban, and much more difficult for Laban to try any further device for detaining him. But, delivered as he was from Laban, he had an even more formidable person to deal with. As soon as Laban's company disappear on the northern horizon, Jacob sends messengers south to sound Esau. His message is so contrived as to beget the idea in Esau's mind that his younger brother is a person of some importance and yet is prepared to show greater deference to himself than formerly. But the answer brought back by the messengers is the curt and haughty despatch of the man of war to the man of peace. No notice is taken of Jacob's vaunted wealth. No proposal of terms as if Esau had an equal to deal with, is carried back. There is only the startling announcement: "Esau cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him." Jacob at once recognises the significance of this armed advance on Esau's part. Esau has not forgotten the wrong he suffered at Jacob's hands, and he means to show him that he is entirely in his power. Therefore was Jacob "greatly afraid and distressed." The joy with which, a few days ago, he had greeted the host of God, was quite over cast by the tidings brought him regarding the host of Esau. Things heavenly do always look so like a mere show; visits of angels seem so delusive and fleeting; the exhibition of the powers of heaven seems so often but as a tournament painted on the sky, and so unavailable for the stern encounters that await us on earth, that one seems, even after the most impressive of such displays, to be left to fight on alone. No wonder Jacob is disturbed. His wives and dependents gather round him in dismay; the children, catching the infectious panic, cower with cries and weeping about their mothers; the whole camp is rudely shaken out of its brief truce by the news of this rough Esau, whose impetuosity and warlike ways they had all heard of and were now to experience. The accounts of the messengers would no doubt grow in alarming descriptive detail as they saw how much importance was attached to their words. Their accounts would also be exaggerated by their own unwarlike natures, and by the indistinctness with which they had made out the temper of Esau's followers, and the novelty of the equipments of war they had seen in his camp. Could we have been surprised had Jacob turned and fled when thus he was made to picture the troops of Esau sweeping from his grasp all he had so laboriously earned, and snatching the promised inheritance from him when in the very act of entering on possession? But though in fancy he already hears their rude shouts of triumph as they fall upon his defenceless band, and already sees the merciless horde dividing the spoil with shouts of derision and coarse triumph, and though all around him are clamouring to be led into a safe retreat, Jacob sees stretched before him the land that is his, and resolves that, by God's help, he shall win it. What he does is not the act of a man rendered incompetent through fear, but of one who has recovered from the first shock of alarm and has all his wits about him. He disposes his household and followers in two companies, so that each might advance with the hope that it might be the one which should not meet Esau; and having done all that his circumstances permit, he commends himself to God in prayer. After Jacob had prayed to God, a happy thought strikes him, which he at once puts in execution. Anticipating the experience of Solomon, that "a brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city," he, in the style of a skilled tactician, lays siege to Esau's wrath, and directs against it train after train of gifts, which, like successive battalions pouring into a breach, might at length quite win his brother. This disposition of his peaceful battering trains having occupied him till sunset, he retires to the short rest of a general on the eve of battle. As soon as he judges that the weaker members of the camp are refreshed enough to begin their eventful march, he rises and goes from tent to tent awaking the sleepers, and quickly forming them into their usual

line of march, sends them over the brook in the darkness, and himself is left alone, not with the depression of a man who waits for the inevitable, but with the high spirits of intense activity, and with the return of the old complacent confidence of his own superiority to his powerful but sluggish-minded brother – a confidence retrained now by the certainty he felt, at least for the time, that Esau's rage could not blaze through all the relays of gifts he had sent forward. Having in this spirit seen all his camp across the brook, he himself pauses for a moment, and looks with interest at the stream before him, and at the promised land on its southern bank. This stream, too, has an interest for him as bearing a name like his own – a name that signifies the "straggler," and was given to the mountain torrent from the pain and difficulty with which it seemed to find its way through the hills. Sitting on the bank of the stream, he sees gleaming through the darkness the foam that it churned as it writhed through the obstructing rocks, or heard through the night the roar of its torrent as it leapt downwards, tortuously finding its way towards Jordan; and Jacob says, So will I, opposed though I be, win my way, by the circuitous routes of craft or by the impetuous rush of courage, into the land whither that stream is going. With compressed lips, and step as firm as when, twenty years before, he left the land, – he rises to cross the brook and enter the land – he rises, and is seized in a grasp that he at once owns as formidable. But surely this silent close, as of two combatants who at once recognise one another's strength, this protracted strife, does not look like the act of a depressed man, but of one whose energies have been strung to the highest pitch, and who would have borne down the champion of Esau's host had he at that hour opposed his entrance into the land which Jacob claimed as his own, and into which, as his glove, pledging himself to follow, he had thrown all that was dear to him in the world. It was no common wrestler that would have been safe to meet him in that mood. Why, then, was Jacob thus mysteriously held back while his household were quietly moving forward in the darkness? What is the meaning, purpose, and use of this opposition to his entrance? These are obvious from the state of mind Jacob was in. He was going forward to meet Esau under the impression that there was no other reason why he should not inherit the land but only his wrath, and pretty confident that by his superior talent, his mother-wit, he could make a tool of this stupid, generous brother of his. And the danger was, that if Jacob's device had succeeded, he would have been confirmed in these impressions, and have believed that he had won the land from Esau, with God's help certainly, but still by his own indomitable pertinacity of purpose and skill in dealing with men. Now, this was not the state of the case at all. Jacob had, by his own deceit, become an exile from the land, had been, in fact, banished for fraud, and though God had confirmed to him the covenant, and promised to him the land, yet Jacob had apparently never come to any such thorough sense of his sin, and own entire incompetency to win the birth-right for himself, as would have made it possible for him to receive simply as God's gift this land which as God's gift was alone valuable. Jacob does not yet seem to have taken up the difference between inheriting a thing as God's gift, and inheriting it as the meed of his own prowess. To such a man God cannot give the land; Jacob cannot receive it. He is thinking only of winning it, which is not at all what God means, and which would, in fact, have annulled all the covenant, and lowered Jacob and his people to the level simply of other nations who had to win and keep their territories at their risk, and not as the blessed of God. If Jacob then is to get the land, he must take it as a gift, which he is not prepared to do. During the last twenty years he has got many a lesson which might have taught him to distrust his own management, and he had, to a certain extent, acknowledged God; but his Jacob-nature, his subtle, scheming nature, was not so easily made to stand erect, and still he is for

wriggling himself into the promised land. He is coming back to the land under the impression that God needs to be managed, that even though we have His promises it requires dexterity to get them fulfilled, that a man will get into the inheritance all the readier for knowing what to veil from God and what to exhibit, when to cleave to His word with great profession of most humble and absolute reliance on Him, and when to take matters into one's own hand. Jacob, in short, was about to enter the land as Jacob, the supplanter, and that would never do; he was going to win the land from Esau by guile, or as he might; and not to receive it from God. And, therefore, just as he is going to step into it, there lays hold of him, not an armed emissary of his brother, but a far more formidable antagonist if Jacob will win the land, if it is to be a mere trial of skill, a wrestling match, it must at least be with the right person. Jacob is met with his own weapons. He has not chosen war, so no armed opposition is made; but with the naked force of his own nature, he is prepared for any man who will hold the land against him; with such tenacity, toughness, quick presence of mind, elasticity, as nature has given him, he is confident he can win and hold his own. So the real proprietor of the land strips himself for the contest, and lets him feel, by the first hold he takes of him, that if the question be one of mere strength he shall never enter the land. This wrestling therefore was by no means actually or symbolically prayer. Jacob was not aggressive, nor did he stay behind his company to spend the night in praying for them. It was God who came and laid hold on Jacob to prevent him from entering the land in the temper he was in, and as Jacob. He was to be taught that it was not only Esau's appeased wrath, or his own skilful smoothing down of his brother's ruffled temper, that gave him entrance; but that a nameless Being, who came out upon him from the darkness, guarded the land, and that by His passport only could he find entrance. And henceforth, as to every reader of this history so much more to Jacob's self, the meeting with Esau and the overcoming of his opposition were quite secondary to, and eclipsed by his meeting and prevailing with this unknown combatant. This struggle had, therefore, immense significance for the history of Jacob. It is, in fact, a concrete representation of the attitude he had maintained towards God throughout his previous history; and it constitutes the turning point at which he assumes a new and satisfactory attitude. Year after year Jacob had still retained confidence in himself; he had never been thoroughly humbled, but had always felt himself able to regain the land he had lost by his sin. And in this struggle he shows this same determination and self-confidence. He wrestles on indomitably. As Kurtz, whom I follow in his interpretation of this incident, says, "All along Jacob's life had been the struggle of a clever and strong, a pertinacious and enduring, a self-confident and self-sufficient person, who was sure of the result only when he helped himself – a contest with God, who wished to break his strength and wisdom, in order to bestow upon him real strength in divine weakness, and real wisdom in divine folly." All this self-confidence culminates now, and in one final and sensible struggle, his Jacob-nature, his natural propensity to wrest what he desires and win what he aims at, from the most unwilling opponent, does its very utmost and does it in vain. His steady straining, his dexterous feints, his quick gusts of vehement assault, make no impression on this combatant and move him not one foot off his ground. Time after time his crafty nature puts out all its various resources, now letting his grasp relax and feigning defeat, and then with gathered strength hurling himself on the stranger, but all in vain. What Jacob had often surmised during the last twenty years, what had flashed through him like a sudden gleam of light when he found himself married to Leah, that he was in the hands of one against whom it is quite useless to struggle, he now again begins to suspect. And as the first faint dawn appears, and he begins dimly to make out the face, the quiet

breathing of which he had felt on his own during the contest, the man with whom he wrestles touches the strongest sinew in Jacob's body, and the muscle on which the wrestler most depends shrivels at the touch and reveals to the falling Jacob how utterly futile had been all his skill and obstinacy and how quickly the stranger might have thrown and mastered him. All in a moment, as he falls, Jacob sees how it is with him, and Who it is that has met him thus. As the hard, stiff, corded muscle shrivelled, so shrivelled his obdurate, persistent self-confidence. And as he is thrown, yet cleaves with the natural tenacity of a wrestler to his conqueror; so, utterly humbled before this Mighty One whom now he recognises and owns, he yet cleaves to Him and entreats His blessing. It is at this touch, which discovers the Almighty power of Him with whom he has been contending, that the whole nature of Jacob goes down before God. He sees how foolish and vain has been his obstinate persistence in striving to trick God out of his blessing, or wrest it from Him, and now he owns his utter incapacity to advance one step in this way, he admits to himself that he is stopped, weakened in the way, thrown on his back, and can effect nothing, simply nothing, by what he thought would effect all; and, therefore, he passes from wrestling to praying, and with tears, as Hosea says, sobs out from the broken heart of the strong man, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." In making this transition from the boldness and persistence of self-confidence to the boldness of faith and humility, Jacob becomes Israel the supplanter, being baffled by his conqueror, rises a Prince. Disarmed of all other weapons, he at last finds and uses the weapons wherewith God is conquered, and with the simplicity and guilelessness now of an Israelite indeed, face to face with God, hanging helpless with his arms around Him, he supplicates the blessing he could not win. Thus, as Abraham had to become God's heir in the simplicity of humble dependence on God; as Isaac had to lay himself on God's altar with absolute resignation, and so become the heir of God, so Jacob enters on the inheritance through the most thorough humbling. Abraham had to give up all possessions and live on God's promise; Isaac had to give up life itself; Jacob had to yield his very self, and abandon all dependence on his own ability. The new name he receives signalizes and interprets this crisis in his life. He enters his land not as Jacob, but as Israel. The man who crossed the Jabbok was not the same as he who had cheated Esau and outwitted Laban and determinedly striven this morning with the angel. He was Israel, God's prince, entering on the land freely bestowed on him by an authority none could resist; a man who had learned that in order to receive from God, one must ask. Very significant to Jacob in his after life must have been the lameness consequent on this night's struggle. He, the wrestler, had to go halting all his days. He who had carried all his weapons in his own person, in his intelligent watchful eye and tough right arm, he who had felt sufficient for all emergencies and a match for all men, had now to limp along as one who had been worsted and baffled and could not hide his shame from men. So it sometimes happens that a man never recovers the severe handling he has received at some turning point in his life. Often there is never again the same elastic step, the same free and confident bearing, the same apparent power, the same appearance to our fellow-men of completeness in our life; but, instead of this, there is a humble decision which, if it does not walk with so free a gait, yet knows better what ground it is treading and by what right. To the end some men bear the marks of the heavy stroke by which God first humbled them. It came in a sudden shock that broke their health, or in a disappointment which nothing now given can ever quite obliterate the trace of, or in circumstances painfully and permanently altered. And the man has to say with Jacob, I shall never now be what I might have been; I was resolved to have my own way, and though God in His mercy did not suffer me to destroy myself, yet to drive me from

my purpose He was forced to use a violence, under the effects of which I go halting all my days, saved and whole, yet maimed to the end of time. I am not ashamed of the mark, at least when I think of it as God's signature I am able to glory in it, but it never fails to remind me of a perverse wilfulness I am ashamed of. With many men God is forced to such treatment; if any of us are under it, God forbid we should mistake its meaning and lie prostrate and despairing in the darkness instead of clinging to Him who has smitten and will heal us. For the treatment which Jacob received at Peniel must not be set aside as singular or exceptional. Sometimes God interposes between us and a greatly-desired possession which we have been counting upon as our right and as the fair and natural consequence of our past efforts and ways. The expectation of this possession has indeed determined our movements and shaped our life for some time past, and it would not only be assigned to us by men as fairly ours, but God also has Himself seemed to encourage us to win it. Yet when it is now within sight and when we are rising to pass the little stream which seems alone to separate us from it, we are arrested by a strong, an irresistible hand. The reason is, that God wishes us to be in such a state of mind that we shall receive it as His gift, so that it becomes ours by an indefeasible title. Similarly, when advancing to a spiritual possession, such checks are not without their use. Many men look with longing to what is eternal and spiritual, and they resolve to win this in heritance. And this resolve they often make as if its accomplishment depended solely on their own endurance. They leave almost wholly out of account that the possibility of their entering the state they long for is not decided by their readiness to pass through any ordeal, spiritual or physical, which may be required of them, but by God's willingness to give it. They act as if by taking advantage of God's promises, and by passing through certain states of mind and prescribed duties, they could, irrespective of God's present attitude towards them and constant love, win eternal happiness. In the life of such persons there must therefore come a time when their own spiritual energy seems all to collapse in that painful, utter way in which, when the body is exhausted, the muscles are suddenly found to be cramped and heavy and no longer responsive to the will. They are made to feel that a spiritual dislocation has taken place, and that their eagerness to enter life everlasting no longer stirs the active energies of the soul. In that hour the man learns the most valuable truth he can learn, that it is God who is wishing to save him, not he who must wrest a blessing from an unwilling God. Instead of any longer looking on himself as against the world, he takes his place as one who has the whole energy of God's will at his back, to give him rightful entrance into all blessedness. So long as Jacob was in doubt whether it was not some kind of man that was opposing him, he wrestled on; and our foolish ways of dealing with God terminate, when we recognise that He is not such an one as ourselves. We naturally act as if God had some pleasure in thwarting us – as if we could, and even ought to, maintain a kind of contest with God. We deal with Him as if He were opposed to our best purposes and grudged to advance us in all good, and as if He needed to be propitiated by penitence and cajoled by forced feelings and sanctimonious demeanour. We act as if we could make more way were God not in our way, as if our best prospects began in our own conception and we had to win God over to our views. If God is unwilling, then there is an end: no device nor force will get us past Him. If He is willing, why all this unworthy dealing with Him, as if the whole idea and accomplishment of salvation did not proceed from Him?

02.07. LECTURE VII: JACOB'S RETURN

LECTURE VII JACOB'S RETURN

Genesis 35:1-29

"When Death, the great Reconciler, has come, it is never our tenderness that we repent of, but our severity."

"Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my heart Thy hopes are gone before: from all things here They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!"

"As for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way." Genesis 48:7

THE words of the Wrestler at the brook Jabbok, "Let me go, for the day breaketh," express the truth that spiritual things will not submit themselves to sensible tests. When we seek to let the full day-light, by which we discern other objects, stream upon them, they elude our grasp. When we fancy we are on the verge of having our doubts for ever scattered, and our suppositions changed into certainties, the very approach of clear knowledge and demonstration seems to drive those sensitive spiritual presences into darkness. As Pascal remarked, and remarked as the mouth-piece of all souls that have earnestly sought for God, The world only gives us indications of the presence of a God who conceals Himself. It is, indeed, one of the most mysterious characteristics of our life in this world, that the great Existence which originates and embraces all other Beings, should Himself be so silent and concealed; that there should be need of subtle arguments to prove His existence, and that no argument ever conceived has been found sufficiently cogent to convince all men. One is always tempted to say, How easy to end all doubt, how easy for God, so to reveal Himself as to make unbelief impossible, and give to all men the glad consciousness that they have a God. The reason of this "reserve" of God must lie in the nature of things. The greatest forces in nature are silent and unobtrusive and incomprehensible. Without the law of gravitation the universe would rush into ruin, but who has ever seen this force? Its effects are everywhere visible, but itself is shrouded in darkness and cannot be comprehended. So much more must the Infinite Spirit remain unseen and baffling all comprehension. "No man hath seen God at any time" must ever remain true. To ask for God's name, therefore, as Jacob did, is a mistake. For almost every one supposes that when he knows the name of a thing he knows also its nature. The giving of a name, therefore, tends to discourage inquiry, and to beget an unfounded satisfaction as if, when we know what a thing is called, we know what it is. The craving, therefore, which we all feel in common with Jacob – to have all mystery swept from between us and God, and to see Him face to face, so that we may know Him as we know our friends – is a craving which cannot be satisfied. You cannot ever know God as He is. Your mind cannot comprehend a Being who is pure Spirit, inhabiting no body, present with you here but present also hundreds of millions of miles away, related to time and to space and to matter in ways utterly impossible for you to comprehend. What is possible, God has done. He has made Himself

known in Christ. We are assured, on testimony that stands every kind of test, that in Him, if nowhere else, we find God. And yet even by Christ this same law of reserve if not concealment was observed. Not only did He forbid men and devils to proclaim who He was, but when men, weary of their own doubts and debatings, impatiently challenged him, “If Thou be the Christ tell us plainly,” He declined to do so. For really men must grow to the knowledge of Him. Even a human face cannot be known by once or twice seeing it; the practised artist often misses the expression best loved by the intimate friend, or by the relative whose own nature interprets to him the face in which he sees himself reflected. Much more can the child of God only attain to the knowledge of His Father’s face, by first of all being a child of God, and then by gradually growing up into His likeness. But though God’s operation is in darkness the results of it are in the light. “As Jacob passed over Peniel, the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.” As Jacob’s company halted when they missed him, and as many anxious eyes were turned back into the darkness, they were unable still to see him; and even when the darkness began to scatter, and they saw dimly and far off a human figure, the sharpest eyes among them declare it cannot be Jacob, for the gait and walk; which alone they can judge by at that distance and in that light, are not his. But when at last the first ray of sunlight streams on him from over the hills of Gilead, all doubt is at an end; it is Jacob, but halting on his thigh. And he himself finds it is not a strain which the walking of a few paces will ease, nor a night cramp which will pass off, nor a mere dream which would vanish in broad day, but a real permanent lameness which he must explain to his company. Has he missed a step on the bank in the darkness, or stumbled or slipped on the slippery stones of the ford? It is a far more real thing to him than any such accident. So, however others may discredit the results of a work on the soul which they have not seen – however they may say of the first and most obvious results, “this is but a sickness of soul which the rising sun will dispel; a feigned peculiarity of walk which will be for gotten in the bustle of the day’s work” – it is not so, but every contact with real life makes it more obvious that when God touches a man the result is real. And as Jacob’s household and children in all generations counted that sinew which shrank sacred, and would not eat of it, so surely should we be reverential towards God’s work in the soul of our neighbour, and respect even those peculiarities which are often the most obvious first-fruits of conversion, and which make it difficult for us to walk in the same comfort with these persons, and keep step with them as easily as once we did. A reluctance to live like other good people, an inability to share their innocent amusements, a distaste for the very duties of this life, a harsh or reserved bearing towards unconverted persons, an awkwardness in speaking of their religious experience, as well as an awkwardness in applying it to the ordinary circumstances of their life, – these and many other of the results of God’s work on the soul should not be rudely dealt with, but respected; for though not in themselves either seemly or beneficial, they are evidence of God’s touch. After this contest with the angel, the meeting of Jacob with Esau has no separate significance. Jacob succeeds with his brother because already he has prevailed with God. He is on a satisfactory footing now with the Sovereign who alone can bestow the land and judge betwixt him and his brother. Jacob can no longer suppose that the chief obstacle to his advance, is the resentment of Esau. He has felt and submitted to a stronger hand than Esau’s. Such schooling we all need; and get, if we will take it. Like Jacob, we have to make our way to our end through numberless human interferences and worldly obstacles. Some of these we have to flee from, as Jacob from Laban; others we must meet and overcome, as our Esaus. Our own sin or mistake has put us under the power of some whose influence is disastrous; others, though we are not under their power at all, yet, consciously or

unconsciously to themselves, continually cross our path and thwart us, keep us back and prevent us from effecting what we desire, and from shaping things about us according to our own ideas. And there will, from time to time, be present to our minds obvious ways in which we could defeat the opposition of these persons, and by which we fancy we could triumph over them. And what we are here taught is, that we need look for no triumph, and it is a pity for us if we win a triumph over any human opposition, however purely secular and unchristian, without first having prevailed with God in the matter. He comes in between us and all men and things, and, laying His hand on us, arrests us from further progress till we have to the very bottom and in every part adjusted the affair with Him – and then, standing right with Him, we can very easily, or at least we can, get right with all things. And it should be a suggestive and fruitful thought to the most of us that, in all cases in which we sin against our brother, God presents Himself as the champion of the wronged party. One day or other we must meet not the strongest putting of all those cases in which we have erred as the offended party could himself put them, but we must meet them as put by the Eternal Advocate of justice and right, who saw our spirit, our merely selfish calculating, our base motive, our impure desire, our unrighteous deed. Gladly would Jacob have met the mightiest of Esau's host in place of this invincible opponent, and it is this same Mighty One, this same watchful guardian of right who threw Himself in Jacob's way, who has His eye on us, who has tracked us through all our years, and who will certainly one time appear in our path as the champion of every one we have wronged, of every one whose soul we have put in jeopardy, of every one to whom we have not done what God intended we should do, of every one whom we have attempted merely to make use of; and in stating their case and showing us what justice and duty would have required of us, He will make us feel, what we cannot feel till He Himself convinces us, that, in all our dealings with men, wherein we have wronged them we have wronged Him. The narrative now prepares to leave Jacob and make room for Joseph. It brings him back to Bethel, thereby completing the history of his triumph over the difficulties with which his life had been so thickly studded. The interest and much of the significance of a man's life come to an end when position and success are achieved. The remaining notices of Jacob's experience are of a sorrowful kind; he lives under a cloud until at the close the sun shines out again. We have seen him in his youth making experiments in life; in his prime founding a family and winning his way by slow and painful steps to his own place in the world; and now he enters on the last stage of his life, a stage in which signs of breaking up appear almost as soon as he attains his aim and place in life. After all that had happened to Jacob, we should have expected him to make for Bethel as rapidly as his unwieldy company could be moved forwards. But the pastures that had charmed the eye of his grandfather captivated Jacob as well. He bought land at Shechem, and appeared willing to settle there. The vows which he had uttered with such fervour when his future was precarious are apparently quite forgotten, or more probably neglected, now that danger seems past. To go to Bethel involved the abandonment of admirable pastures, and the introduction of new religious views and habits into his family life. A man who has large possessions, difficult and precarious relations to sustain with the world, and a household unmanageable from its size, and from the variety of dispositions included in it, requires great independence and determination to carry out domestic reform on religious grounds. Even a slight change in our habits is often delayed because we are shy of exposing to observation fresh and deep convictions on religious subjects. Besides, we forget our fears and our vows when the time of hardship passes away; and that which, as young men, we considered almost hopeless, we at length accept as our right, and omit all

remembrance and gratitude. A spiritual experience that is separated from your present by twenty years of active life, by a foreign residence, by marriage, by the growing up of a family around you, by other and fresher spiritual experiences, is apt to be very indistinctly remembered. The obligations you then felt and owned have been overlaid and buried in the lapse of years. And so it comes that a low tone is introduced into your life, and your homes cease to be model homes. Out of this condition Jacob was roughly awakened. Sinning by unfaithfulness and softness towards his family, he is, according to the usual law, punished by family-disaster of the most painful kind. The conduct of Simeon and Levi was apparently due quite as much to family pride and religious fanaticism as to brotherly love or any high moral view. In them first we see how the true religion, when held by coarse and ungodly men, becomes the root of all evil. We see the first instance of that fanaticism which so often made the Jews a curse rather than a blessing to other nations. Indeed, it is but an instance of the injustice, cruelty, and violence that at all times result where men suppose that they themselves are raised to quite peculiar privileges and to a position superior to their fellows, without recognising also that this position is held by the grace of a holy God and for the good of their fellows. Jacob is now compelled to make a virtue of necessity. He flees to Bethel to escape the vengeance of the Shechemites. To such serious calamities do men expose themselves by arguing with conscience and by refusing to live up to their engagements. How can men be saved from living merely for sheep-feeding and cattle-breeding and trade and enjoyment? how can they be saved from gradually expelling from their character all principle and all high sentiment that conflicts with immediate advantage and present pleasure, save by such irresistible blows as here compelled Jacob to shift his camp? He has spiritual perception enough left to see what is meant. The order is at once issued: “Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.” Thus frankly does he acknowledge his error, and repair, so far as he can, the evil he has done. Thus decidedly does he press God’s command on those whom he had hitherto encouraged or connived at. Even from his favourite Rachel he takes her gods and buries them. The fierce Simeon and Levi, proud of the blood with which they had washed out their sister’s stain, are ordered to cleanse their garments and show some seemly sorrow, if they can. If years go by without any such incident occurring in our life as drives us to a recognition of our moral laxity and deterioration, and to a frank and humble return to a closer walk with God, we had need to strive to awaken ourselves and ascertain whether we are living up to old vows and are really animated by thoroughly worthy motives. It was when Jacob came back to the very spot where he had lain on the open hill-side and pointed out to his wives and children the stone he had set up to mark the spot, that he felt humbled as he cast his eye over the flocks and tents he now owned. And if you can, like Jacob, go back to spots in your life which were very woful and perplexed, years even when all continued dreary, dark, and hopeless, when friendlessness and poverty, bereavement or disease, laid their chilling, crushing hands upon you, times when you could not see what possible good there was for you in the world; and if now all this is solved, and your condition is in the most striking contrast to what you can remember, it becomes you to make acknowledgment to God such as you may have made to your friends, such acknowledgment as makes it plain that you are touched by His kindness. The acknowledgment Jacob made was sensible and honest. He put away the gods which had divided the worship of his family. In our life there is probably that which constantly tends to usurp an undue place in our regard; something which gives us more pleasure

than the thought of God, or from which we really expect a more palpable benefit than we expect from God, and which, therefore, we cultivate with far greater assiduity. How easily, if we really wish to be on a clear footing with God, can we discover what things should be cast revengefully from us, buried and stamped upon and numbered with the things of the past. Are there not in your life any objects for the sake of which you sacrifice that nearness to God, and that sure hold of Him you once enjoyed? Are you not conscious of any pursuits, or hopes, or pleasures, or employments which practically have the effect of making you indifferent to spiritual advancement, and which make you shy of Bethel – shy of all that sets clear before you your indebtedness to God, and your own past vows and resolves? “But,” continues the narrative, “but Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died;” that is, although Jacob and his house were now living in the fear of God, that did not exempt them from the ordinary distresses of family life. And among these, one that falls on us with a chastening and mild sadness all its own, occurs when there passes from the family one of its oldest members, and one who has by the delicate tact of love gained influence over all, and has by the common consent become the arbiter and mediator, the confidant and counsellor of the family. They, indeed, are the true salt of the earth whose own peace is so deep and abiding, and whose purity is so thorough and energetic, that into their car we can disburden the troubled heart or the guilty conscience, as the wildest brook disturbs not and the most polluted fouls not the settled depths of the all-cleansing ocean. Such must Deborah have been, for the oak under which she was buried was afterwards known as “the oak of weeping.” Specially must Jacob himself have mourned the death of her whose face was the oldest in his remembrance, and with whom his mother and his happy early days were associated. Very dear to Jacob. as to most men, were those who had been connected with and could tell him of his parents, and remind him of his early years. Deborah, by treating him still as a little boy, perhaps the only one who now called him by the pet name of childhood, gave him the pleasantest relief from the cares of manhood and the obsequious deportment of the other members of his household towards him. So that when she went a great blank was made to him: no longer was the wise and happy old face seen in her tent door to greet him of an evening; no longer could he take refuge in the peacefulness of her old age from the troubles of his lot: she being gone, a whole generation was gone, and a new stage of life was entered on. But a heavier blow, the heaviest that death could inflict, soon fell upon him. She who had been as God’s gift and smile to him since ever he had left Bethel at the first is taken from him now that he is restored to God’s house. The number of his sons is completed, and the mother is removed. Suddenly and unexpectedly the blow fell, as they were journeying and fearing no ill. Notwithstanding the confident and cheering, though ambiguous, assurances of those about her, she had that clear knowledge of her own state which, without contradicting, simply put aside such assurances, and, as her soul was departing-, feebly named her son Benoni, Son of my sorrow. She felt keenly, what was, to a nature like hers, the very anguish of disappointment. She was never to feel the little creature stirring in her arms with personal human life, nor see him growing up to manhood as the son of his father’s right hand. It was this sad death of Rachel’s which made her the typical mother in Israel. It was not an unclouded, merely prosperous life which could fitly have fore shadowed the lives of those by whom the promised seed was to come; and least of all of the virgin to whom it was said, “A sword shall pierce through thine own soul also.” It was the wail of Rachel that poetical minds among the Jews heard from time to time mourning their national disasters – “Rachel weeping” for her children, when by captivity they were separated from their mother country, or when, by the sword of Herod, the mothers of Bethlehem were bereaved of their

babes. But it was also observed that that which brought this anguish on the mothers of Bethlehem was the birth there of the last son of Israel, the blossom of this long-growing plant, suddenly born after a long and barren period, the son of Israel's right hand. Still another death is registered in this chapter. It took place twelve years after Joseph went into Egypt, but is set down here for convenience. Esau and Jacob are, for the last time, brought together over their dead father – and for the last time, as they see that family likeness which comes out so strikingly in the face of the dead, do they feel drawn with brotherly affection to greet one another as sons of one father. In the dead Isaac, too, they find an object of veneration more impressive than they had found in the living father: the infirmities of age are exchanged for the mystery and majesty of death; the man has passed out of reach of pity, of contempt; the shrill, uncontrolled treble is no longer heard, there are no weak, plaintive movements, no childishness; but a solemn, august silence, a silence that seems to bid on lookers be still and refrain from disturbing the first communings of the departed spirit with things unseen. The tenderness of these two brothers towards one another and towards their father, was probably quickened by remorse when they met at his deathbed. They could not, perhaps, think that they had hastened his end by causing him anxieties which age has not strength to throw off; but they could not miss the reflection that the life now closed and finally sealed up might have been a much brighter life had they acted the part of dutiful, loving sons. Scarcely can one of our number pass from among us without leaving in our minds some self-reproach that we were not more kindly towards him, and that now he is beyond our kindness; that our opportunity for being brotherly towards him is for ever gone. And when we have very manifestly erred in this respect, perhaps there are among all the stings of a guilty conscience few more bitterly piercing than this. Many a son who has stood unmoved by the tears of a living mother – his mother by whom he lives, who has cherished him as her own soul, who has forgiven, and forgiven, and forgiven him, who has toiled, and prayed, and watched for him – though he has hardened himself against her looks of imploring love and turned carelessly from her entreaties and burst through all the fond cords and snares by which she has sought to keep him, has yet broken down before the calm, unsolicitous, resting face of the dead. Hitherto he has not listened to her pleadings, and now she pleads no more. Hitherto she has heard no word of pure love from him, and now she hears no more. Hitherto he has done nothing for her of all that a son may do, and now there is nothing he can do. All the goodness of her life gathers up and stands out at once, and the time for gratitude is past. He sees suddenly, as by the withdrawal of a veil, all that that worn body has passed through for him, and all the goodness these features have expressed, and now they can never light up with joyful acceptance of his love and duty. Such grief as this finds its one alleviation in the knowledge that we may follow those who have gone before us; that we may yet make reparation. And when we think how many we have let pass without those frank, human, kindly offices we might have rendered, the knowledge that we also shall be gathered to our people comes in as very cheering. It is a grateful thought that there is a place where we shall be able to live rightly, where selfishness will not intrude and spoil all, but will leave us free to be to our neighbour all that we ought to be and all that we would be.

02.08. LECTURE VIII: JOSEPH'S DREAMS

LECTURE VIII JOSEPH'S DREAMS

Genesis 37:1-36 "That sad obscure sequestered state, Where God unmakes but to re-make the soul He else made first in vain."

"Envy might lead men to cast poor stones At heaven while it thunders; death waits on it; On hatred still it feeds and hideous dreams, And, like a serpent, tracks its victim's heels. In meanness it begins; proceeds to blood; And dies of sallow horror by itself."

Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee." Psalms 76:10

THE migration of Israel from Canaan to Egypt was a step of prime importance in the history. Great difficulties surrounded it, and very extra ordinary means were used to bring it about. The preparatory steps occupied about twenty years, and nearly a fourth of the Book of Genesis is devoted to this period. This migration was a new idea. So little was it the result of an accidental dearth, or of any of those unforeseen calamities which cause families to emigrate from our own country, that God had forewarned Abraham himself that it must be. But only when it was becoming matter of actual experience and of history did God make known the precise object to be accomplished by it. This He makes known to Jacob as he passes from Canaan; and as, in abandoning the land he had so painfully won, his heart sinks, he is sustained by the assurance, "Fear not to go down into Egypt; I will there make thee a great nation." The meaning of the step and the suitableness of the time and of the place to which Israel migrated, are apparent. For more than two hundred years now had Abraham and his descendants been wandering as pilgrims, and as yet there were no signs of God's promise being kept to them. That promise had been of a land and of a seed. Great fecundity had been promised to the race; but instead of that there had been a remarkable and perplexing barrenness, so that after two centuries one tent could contain the whole male population. In Jacob's time the population began to increase, but just in proportion as this part of the promise showed signs of fulfilment did the other part seem precarious. For, in proportion to their increase, the family became hostile to the Canaanites, and how should they ever get past that critical point in their history at which they would be strong enough to excite the suspicion, jealous}-, and hatred of the indigenous tribes, and yet not strong enough to defend themselves against this enmity? Their presence was tolerated, just as our countrymen tolerated the presence of French refugees, on the score of their impotence to do harm. They were placed in a quite anomalous position; a single family who had continued for two hundred years in a land which they could only seem in jest to call theirs, dwelling as guests amid the natives, maintaining peculiar forms of worship and customs. Collision with the inhabitants seemed unavoidable as soon as their real character and pretensions oozed out, and as soon as it seemed at all likely that they really proposed to become owners and masters in the land. And, in case of such collision, what could be the result, but that which has ever followed where a few score men, brave enough to be cut down where they stood, have been exposed to mass after mass of fierce and bloodthirsty barbarians? A small number of men have often made good their entrance into lands where the

inhabitants greatly outnumbered them, but these have commonly been highly disciplined troops, as in the case of the handful of Spaniards who seized Mexico and Peru; or they have been backed by a power which could aid with vast resources, as when the Romans held this country, or when the English lad in India left his pen on his desk and headed his few resolute countrymen, and held his own against unnumbered millions. It may be argued that if even Abraham with his own household swept Canaan clear of invaders, it might now have been possible for his grandson to do as much with increased means at his disposal. But, not to mention that every man has not the native genius for command and military enterprise which Abraham had, it must be taken into account that a force which is quite sufficient for a marauding expedition or a night attack, is inadequate for the exigencies of a campaign of several years duration. The war which Jacob must have waged had hostilities been opened, must have been a war of extermination, and such a war must have desolated the house of Israel if victorious, and more probably by far, would have quite annihilated it. It is to obviate these dangers, and to secure that Israel grow without let or hindrance, that Jacob's household is removed to a land where protection and seclusion would at once be secured to them. In the land of Goshen, secured from molestation partly by the influence of Joseph, but much more by the caste-prejudices of the Egyptians, and their hatred of all foreigners and shepherds in particular, they enjoyed such prosperity and attained so rapidly the magnitude of a nation that some, forgetful alike of the promise of God and of the natural advantages of Israel's position, have refused to credit the accounts given us of the increase in their population. In a land so roomy, so fertile, and so secluded as that in which they were now settled, they had every advantage for making the transition from a family to a nation. Here they were preserved from all temptation to mingle with neighbours of a different race, and so lose their special place as a people called out by God to stand alone. The Egyptians would have scorned the marriages which the Canaanites passionately solicited. Here the very contempt in which they were held proved to be their most valuable bulwark. And if Christians have any of the wisdom of the serpent, they will often find in the contempt or exclusiveness of worldly men a convenient barrier, preventing them, indeed, from enjoying some privileges, but at the same time enabling them, without molestation, to pursue their own way. I believe young people especially feel put about by the deprivations which they have to suffer in order to save their religious scruples; they are shut off from what their friends and associates enjoy, and they perceive that they are not so well liked as they would be had they less desire to live by conscience and by God's will. They feel ostracized, banished, frowned upon, laid under disabilities; but all this has its compensations: it forms for them a kind of Goshen where they may worship and increase, it runs a fence around them which keeps them apart from much that tempts and from much that enfeebles. The residence of Israel in Egypt served another important purpose. By contact with the most civilised people of antiquity they emerged from the semi-barbarous condition in which they had previously been living. Going into Egypt mere shepherds, as Jacob somewhat plaintively and deprecatingly says to Pharaoh; not even possessed, so far as we know, of the fundamental arts on which civilisation rests, unable to record in writing the revelations God made, or to read them if recorded; having the most rudimentary ideas of law and justice, and having nothing to keep them together and give them form and strength, save the one idea that God meant to confer on them great distinction; they were transferred into a land where government had been so long established and law had come to be so thoroughly administered that life and property were as safe as among ourselves to-day, where science had made such advances that even the weather-beaten and time-stained relics of it seem

to point to regions into which even the bold enterprise of modern investigation has not penetrated, and where all the arts needful for life were in familiar use, and even some practised which modern times have as yet been unable to recover. To no better school could the barbarous sons of Bilhah and Zilpah have been sent; to no more fitting discipline could the lawless spirits of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi have been subjected. In Egypt, where human life was sacred, where truth was worshipped as a deity, and where law was invested with the sanctity which belonged to what was supposed to have descended from heaven, they were brought under influences similar to those which ancient Rome exerted over conquered races. The unwitting pioneer of this great movement was a man in all respects fitted to initiate it happily. In Joseph we meet a type of character rare in any race, and which, though occasionally reproduced in Jewish history, we should certainly not have expected to meet with at so early a period. For what chiefly strikes one in Joseph is a combination of grace and power, which is commonly looked upon as the peculiar result of civilising influences, knowledge of history, familiarity with foreign races, and hereditary dignity. In David we find a similar flexibility and grace of character, and a similar personal superiority. We find the same bright and humorous disposition helping him to play the man in adverse circumstances; but we miss in David Joseph's self-control and incorruptible purity, as we also miss something of his capacity for difficult affairs of state. In Daniel this latter capacity is abundantly present, and a facility equal to Joseph's in dealing with foreigners, and there is also a certain grace or nobility in the Jewish Vizier, but Joseph had a surplus of power which enabled him to be cheerful and alert in doleful circumstances, which Daniel would certainly have borne manfully but probably in a sterner and more passive mood. Joseph, indeed, seemed to inherit and happily combine the highest qualities of his ancestors. He had Abraham's dignity and capacity, Isaac's purity and power of self-devotion, Jacob's cleverness and buoyancy and tenacity. From his mother's family he had personal beauty, humour, and management. A young man of such capabilities could not long remain insensible to his own powers or indifferent to his own destiny. Indeed, the conduct of his father and brothers towards him must have made him self-conscious, even though he had been wholly innocent of introspection. The force of the impression he produced on his family may be measured by the circumstance that the princely dress given him by his father did not excite his brother's ridicule but their envy and hatred. In this dress there was a manifest suitableness to his person, and this excited them to a keen resentment of the distinction. So too they felt that his dreams were not the mere whimsicalities of a lively fancy, but were possessed of a verisimilitude which gave them importance. In short, the dress and the dreams were insufferably exasperating to the brothers, because they proclaimed and marked in a definite way the feeling of Joseph's superiority which had already been vaguely rankling in their consciousness. And it is creditable to Joseph that this superiority should first have emerged in connection with a point of conduct. It was in moral stature that the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah felt that they were outgrown by the stripling whom they carried with them as then drudge. Neither are we obliged to suppose that Joseph was a gratuitous tale-bearer, or that when he carried their evil report to his father he was actuated by a prudish, censorious, or in any way unworthy spirit. That he very well knew how to hold his tongue no man ever gave more adequate proof; but he that understands that there is a time to keep silence, necessarily sees also that there is a time to speak. And no one can tell what torture that pure young soul may have endured in the remote pastures, when left alone to withstand day after day the outrage of these coarse and unscrupulous men. An elder brother, if he will, can more effectually guard the innocence of a younger brother than any other relative can, but he can also

inflict a more exquisite torture. Joseph, then, could not but come to think of his future and of his destiny in this family. That his father should make a pet of him rather than of Benjamin, he would refer to the circumstance that he was the oldest son of the wife of his choice, of her whom first he had loved, and who had no rival while he lived. To so charming a companion as Joseph must always have been, Jacob would naturally impart all the traditions and hopes of the family. In him he found a sympathetic and appreciative listener, who wiled him on to endless narrative, and whose imaginativeness quickened his own hopes and made the future seem grander and the world more wide. And what Jacob had to tell could fall into no kindlier soil than the opening mind of Joseph. No hint was lost, every promise was interpreted by some waiting aspiration. And thus, like every youth of capacity, he came to have his day-dreams. These day-dreams, though derided by those who cannot see the Caesar in the careless trifler, and though often awkward and even offensive in their expression, are not always the mere discontented cravings of youthful vanity, but are frequently instinctive gropings towards the position which the nature is fitted to fill. “Our wishes,” it has been said, “are the forefeeling of our capabilities;” and certainly where there is any special gift or genius in a man, the wish of his youth is predictive of the attainment of manhood. Whims, no doubt, there are, passing phases through which natural growth carries us, flutterings of the needle when too near some powerful influence; yet amidst all variations the true direction will be discernible and ultimately will be dominant. And it is a great art to discover what we are fit for, so that we may settle down to our own work, or patiently wait for our own place without enviously striving to rob every other man of his crown and so losing our own. It is an art that saves us much fretting and disappointment and waste of time, to understand early in life what it is we can accomplish, and what precisely we mean to be at; “to recognise in our personal gifts or station, in the circumstances and complications of our life, in our relations to others, or to the world – the will of God teaching us what we are, and for what we ought to live.” How much of life often is gone before its possessor sees the use he can put it to, and ceases to beat the air. How much of life is an ill-considered but passionate striving after what can never be attained, or a vain imitation of persons who have quite different talents and opportunities from ourselves, and who are therefore set to quite another work than ours. It was because Joseph’s dreams embodied his waking ambition that they were of importance. Dreams become significant when they are the concentrated essence of the main stream of the waking thoughts and picturesquely exhibit the tendency of the character. “In a dream,” says Elihu, “in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that He may withdraw man from his purpose.” This is precisely the use of dreams: our tendencies, unbridled by reason and fact, run on to results; the purposes which the business and other good influences of the day have kept down, act themselves out in our dreams, and we see the character unimpeded by social checks, and as it would be were it unmodified by the restraints and efforts and external considerations of our conscious hours. Our vanity, our pride, our malice, our impurity, our deceit, our every evil passion, has free play, and shows us its finished result, and in so vivid and true though caricatured a form, that we are startled and withdrawn from our purpose. The evil thought we have suffered to creep about our heart seems in our dreams to become a deed, and we wake in horror and thank God we can yet refrain. Thus the poor woman, who in utter destitution was beginning to find her child a burden, dreamt she had drowned it, and woke in horror at the fancied sound of the plunge – woke to clasp her little one to her breast with the thrill of a grateful affection that never again gave way. So that while no man is so foolish as to expect

instruction from every dream any more than from every thought that visits his waking mind, yet everyone who has been accumulating some knowledge of himself is aware that he has drawn a large part of this from his unconscious hours. As the naturalist would know but a small part of the animal kingdom by studying the creatures that show themselves in the daylight, so there are moles and bats of the spirit that exhibit themselves most freely in the darkness; and there are jungles and waste places in the character which, if you look on them only in the sunshine, may seem safe and lovely, but which at night show themselves to be full of all loathsome and savage beasts. With the simplicity of a guileless mind, and with the natural proneness of members of one family to tell in the morning the dreams they have had, Joseph tells to the rest what seems to himself interesting, if not very suggestive. Possibly he thought very little of his dream till he saw how much importance his brothers attached to it. Possibly there might be discernible in his tone and look some mixture of youthful arrogance. And in his relation of the second dream, there was discernible at least a confidence that it would be realised, which was peculiarly intolerable to his brothers, and to his father seemed a dangerous symptom that called for rebuke. And yet “his father observed the saying;” as a parent has sometimes occasion to check his child, and yet, having done so, feels that that does not end the matter; that his boy and he are in somewhat different spheres, so that while he was certainly justified in punishing such and such a manifestation of his character, there is yet something behind that he does not quite understand, and for which possibly punishment may not be exactly the suitable award. We fall into Jacob’s mistake when we refuse to acknowledge as genuine and God-inspired any religious experience which we ourselves have not passed through, and which appears in a guise that is not only unfamiliar, but that is in some particulars objectionable. Up to the measure of our own religious experience, we recognise as genuine, and sympathise with, the parallel experience of others; but when they rise above us and get beyond us, we begin to speak of them as visionaries, enthusiasts, dreamers. We content ourselves with pointing again and again to the blots in their manner, and refuse to read the future through the ideas they add to our knowledge. But the future necessarily lies, not in the definite and finished attainment, but in the indefinite and hazy and dream-like germs that have yet growth in them. The future is not with Jacob, the rebuker, but with the dreaming, and, possibly, somewhat offensive Joseph. It was certainly a new element Joseph introduced into the experience of God’s people. He saw, obscurely indeed, but with sufficient clearness to make him thoughtful, that the man whom God chooses and makes a blessing to others is so far advanced above his fellows that they lean upon him and pay him homage as if he were in the place of God to them. He saw that his higher powers were to be used for his brethren, and that the high destiny he somehow felt to be his was to be won by doing service so essential that his family would bow before him and give themselves into his hand. Me saw this, as every man whose love keeps pace with his talent sees it, and he so far anticipated the dignity of Him who, in the deepest self-sacrifice, assumed a position and asserted claims which enraged his brethren and made even his believing mother marvel. Joseph knew that the welfare of his family rested not with the Esau-like good-nature of Reuben, still less with the fanatical ferocity of Simeon and Levi, not with the servile patience of Issachar, nor with the natural force and dignity of Judah, but with some deeper qualities which, if he himself did not yet possess, he at least valued and aspired to. Whatever Joseph thought of the path by which he was to reach the high dignity which his dreams foreshadowed, he was soon to learn that the path was neither easy nor short. Each man thinks that, for himself at least, an exceptional path will be broken out, and that without difficulties and humiliations he will inherit the

kingdom. But it cannot be so. And as the first step a lad takes towards the attainment of his position often involves him in trouble and covers him with confusion, and does so even although he ultimately finds that it was the only path by which he could have reached his goal; so, that which was really the first step towards Joseph's high destiny, no doubt seemed to him most calamitous and fatal. It certainly did so to his brothers, who thought that they were effectually and for ever putting an end to Joseph's pretensions. "Behold, this dreamer cometh; come now therefore, and let us slay him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." They were, however, so far turned from their purpose by Reuben as to put him in a pit, meaning to leave him to die; and, doubt less, they thought themselves lenient in doing so. The less violent the death inflicted, the less of murder seems to be in it; so that he who slowly kills the body by only wounding the affections often counts himself no murderer at all, because he strikes no blood-shedding blow, and can deceive himself into the idea that it is the working of his victim's own spirit that is doing the damage. The tank into which Joseph's brethren cast him was apparently one of those huge reservoirs excavated by shepherds in the East, that they may have a supply of water for their flocks in the end of the dry season, when the running waters fail them. Being so narrow at the mouth that they can be covered by a single stone, they gradually widen and form a large subterranean room; and the facility they thus afford for the confinement of prisoners was from the first too obvious not to be commonly taken advantage of. In such a place was Joseph left to die: under the ground, sinking in mire, his flesh creeping at the touch of unseen slimy creatures, in darkness, alone; that is to say, in a species of confinement which tames the most reckless and maddens the best balanced spirits, which shakes the nerve of the calmest, and has sometimes left the blankness of idiocy in masculine understandings. A few wild cries that ring painfully round his prison show him he need expect no help from without, a few wild and desperate beatings round the shelving walls of rock show him there is no possibility of escape; he covers his face, or casts himself on the floor of his dungeon to escape within himself, but only to find this also in vain, and to rise and renew efforts he knows to be fruitless. Here, then, is what has come of his fine dreams. With shame he now remembers the beaming confidence with which he had related them; with bitterness he thinks of the bright life above him, from which these few feet cut him so absolutely off, and of the quick termination that has been put to all his hopes. Into such tanks do young persons especially get cast; finding themselves suddenly dropped out of the lively scenery and bright sunshine in which they have been living, down into roomy graves where they seem left to die at leisure. They had conceived a way of being useful in the world; they had found an aim or a hope; they had, like Joseph, discerned their place and were making towards it, when suddenly they seem to be thrown out and are left to learn that the world can do very well without them, that the sun and moon and the eleven stars do not drop from their courses or make wail because of their sad condition. High aims and commend able purposes are not so easily fulfilled as they fancied. The faculty and desire in them to be of service are not recognised. Men do not make room for them, and God seems to disregard the hopes He has excited in them. The little attempt at living they have made seems only to have got themselves and others into trouble. They begin to think it a mistake their being in the world at all; they curse the day of their birth. Others are enjoying this life, and seem to be making something of it, having found work that suits and develops them; but, for their own part, they cannot get fitted into life at any point, and are excluded from the onward movement of the world. They are again and again flung back, until they fear they are not to see the fulfilment of any one bright dream that has ever visited them, and that they are never, never at all,

to live out the life it is in them to live, or find light and scope for maturing those germs of the rich human nature that they feel within them. All this is in the way to attainment. This or that check, this long burial for years, does not come upon you merely because stoppage and hindrance have been useful to others, but because your advancement lies through these experiences. Young persons naturally feel strongly that life is all before them, that this life is, in the first place, their concern, and that God must be proved sufficient for this life, able to bring them to their ideal. And the first lesson they have to learn is, that mere youthful confidence and energy are not the qualities that overcome the world. They have to learn that humility, and the ambition that seeks great things, but not for ourselves, are the qualities really indispensable. But do men become humble by being told to become so, or by knowing they ought to be so? God must make us humble by the actual experience we meet with in our ordinary life. Joseph, no doubt, knew very well, what his aged grandfather must often have told him, that a man must die before he begins to live. But what could an ambitious, happy youth make of this, till he was thrown into the pit and left there? as truly passing through the bitterness of death as Isaac had passed through it, and as keenly feeling the pain of severance from the light of life. Then, no doubt, he thought of Isaac, and of Isaac's God, till between himself and the impenetrable dungeon-walls the everlasting arms seemed to interpose, and through the darkness of his deathlike solitude the face of Jacob's God appeared to beam upon him, and he came to feel what we must, by some extremity, all be made to feel, that it was not in this world's life but in God he lived, that nothing could befall him which God did not will, and that what God had for him to do, God would enable him to do. The heartless barbarity with which the brethren of Joseph sat down to eat and drink the very dainties he had brought them from his father, while they left him, as they thought, to starve, has been regarded by all later generations as the height of hard-hearted indifference. Amos, at a loss to describe the recklessness of his own generation, falls back upon this incident, and cries woe upon those "that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointment, but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." We reflect, if we do not substantially reproduce, their sin when we are filled with animosity against those who usher in some higher kind of life, effort, or worship, than we ourselves as yet desire or are fit for, and which, therefore, reflects shame on our incapacity; and when we would fain, without using violence, get rid of such persons. There are often schemes set on foot by better men than ourselves, against which somehow our spirit rises, yet which did we consider, we should at the most say with the cautious Gamaliel, Let us beware of doing anything to hinder this, let us see whether, perchance, it be not of God. Sometimes there are in families individuals who do not get the encouragement in well-doing they might expect in a Christian family, but are rather frowned upon and hindered by the other members of it, because they seem to be inaugurating a higher style of religion than the family is used to, and to be reflecting from their own conduct a condemnation of what has hitherto been current. This treatment, who among us has not extended to Him who in His whole experience so closely resembles Joseph? So long as Christ is to us merely, as it were, the pet of the family, the innocent, guileless, loving Being on whom we can heap pretty epithets, and in whom we find play for our best affections, to whom it is easier to show ourselves affectionate and well-disposed than to the brothers who mingle with us in all our pursuits; so long as He remains to us as a child whose demands it is a relaxation to fulfil, we fancy that we are giving Him our hearts, and that He, if any, has our love. But when He declares to us His dreams, and claims to be our Lord, to whom with most absolute homage we must bow, who has a right to rule and means to rule over us, who will have His will done by us and not our own,

then the love we fancied seems to pass into something like aversion. His purposes we would fain believe to be the idle fancies of a dreamer which He Himself does not expect us to pay much heed to. And if we do not resent the absolute surrender of ourselves to Him which He demands, if the bowing down of our fullest sheaves and brightest glory to Him is too little understood by us to be resented; if we think such dreams are not to come true, and that He does not mean much by demanding our homage, and therefore do not resent the demand; yet possibly we can remember with shame how we have “anointed ourselves with the chief ointment,” lain listlessly enjoying some of those luxuries which our Brother has brought us from the Father’s house, and yet let Himself and His cause be buried out of sight – enjoyed the good name of Christian, the pleasant social refinements of a Christian land, even the peace of conscience which the knowledge of the Christian’s God produces, and yet turned away from the deeper emotions which His personal entreaties stir, and from those self-sacrificing efforts which His cause requires if it is to prosper. There are, too, unstable Reubens still, whom something always draws aside, and who are ever out of the way when most needed; who, like him, are on the other side of the hill when Christ’s cause is being betrayed; who still count their own private business that which must be done, and God’s work that which may be done – work for themselves necessary, and God’s work only voluntary and in the second place. And there are also those who, though they would be honestly shocked to be charged with murdering Christ’s cause, can yet leave it to perish.

Chapter 17

02.09. LECTURE IX: JOSEPH IN PRISON

LECTURE IX JOSEPH IN PRISON

Genesis 39:1-23 “Blame I can bear, though not blameworthiness.”

“More skilful in self-knowledge, even more pure, As tempted more; more able to endure, As more exposed to suffering and distress;

Thence, also, more alive to tenderness.”

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life.” James 1:12

DRAMATISTS and novelists who make it their business to give accurate representations of human life, proceed upon the understanding that there is a plot in it, and that if you take the beginning or middle without the end, you must fail to comprehend these prior parts. And a plot is pronounced good, in proportion as, without violating truth to nature, it brings the leading characters into situations of extreme danger or distress, from which there seems no possible exit, and in which the characters themselves may have fullest opportunity to display and ripen their individual excellencies. A life is judged poor and without significance, certainly unworthy of any longer record than a monumental epitaph may contain, if there be in it no critical passages, no emergencies when all anticipation of the next step is baffled, or when ruin seems certain. Though it has been brought to a successful issue, yet, to make it worthy of our consideration, it must have been brought to this issue through hazard, through opposition, contrary to many expectations that we plausibly entertained at the several stages of its career. All men, in short, are agreed that the value of a human life consists very much in the hazards and conflicts through which it is carried; and yet we resent God’s dealing with us when it comes to be our turn to play the hero, and by patient endurance and righteous endeavour to bring our lives to a successful issue. How flat and tame would this narrative have read had Joseph by easy steps come to the dignity he at last reached through a series of misadventures that called out and ripened all that was manly and strong and tender in his character. And take out of your own life all your difficulties, all that ever pained, agitated, depressed you, all that disappointed or postponed your expectations, all that suddenly called upon you to act in trying situations, all that thoroughly put you to the proof – take all this away, and what do you leave, but a blank insipid life that not even yourself can see any interest in? And when we speak of Joseph’s life as typical, we mean that it illustrates on a great scale and in picturesque and memorable situations, principles which are obscurely operative in our own experience. It pleases the fancy to trace the incidental analogies between the life of Joseph and that of our Lord. As our Lord, so Joseph was the beloved of his father, sent by him to visit his brethren, and see after their well-being, seized and sold by them to strangers, and thus raised to be their Saviour and the Saviour of the world. Joseph in prison pronouncing the doom of one of his fellow-prisoners and the exaltation of the other, suggests the scene on Calvary where the one fellow-sufferer was taken, the other left. Joseph’s contemporaries had of course no idea that his

life foreshadowed the life of the Redeemer, yet they must have seen, or ought to have seen, that the deepest humiliation is often the path to the highest exaltation, that the deliverer sent by God to save a people may come in the guise of a slave, and that false accusations, imprisonment, years of suffering, do not make it impossible nor even unlikely that he who endures all these may be God's chosen Son. In Joseph's being lifted out of the pit only to pass into slavery, many a man of Joseph's years has seen a picture of what has happened to himself. From a position in which they have been as if buried alive, young men not uncommonly emerge into a position preferable certainly to that out of which they have been brought, but in which they are compelled to work beyond their strength, and that for some superior in whom they have no special interest. Grinding toil, and often cruel insult, are their portion; and no necklace heavy with tokens of honour that afterwards may be allotted them, can ever quite hide the scars made by the iron collar of the slave. One need not pity them over much, for they are young and have a whole life-time of energy and power of resistance in their spirit. And yet they will often call themselves slaves, and complain that all the fruit of their labour passes over to others and away from themselves, and all prospect of the fulfilment of their former dreams is quite cut off. That which haunts their heart by day and by night, that which they seem destined and fit for, they never get time nor liberty to work out and attain. They are never viewed as proprietors of themselves, who may possibly have interests of their own and hopes of their own. In Joseph's case there were many aggravations of the soreness of such a condition. He had not one friend in the country. He had no knowledge of the language, no knowledge of any trade that could make him valuable in Egypt – nothing, in short, but his own man hood and his faith in God. His introduction to Egypt was of the most dispiriting kind. What could he expect from strangers, if his own brothers had found him so obnoxious? Now when a man is thus galled and stung by injury, and has learned how little he can depend upon finding good faith and common justice in the world, his character will show itself in the attitude he assumes towards men and towards life generally. A weak nature, when it finds itself thus deceived and injured, will sullenly surrender all expectation of good, and will vent its spleen on the world by angry denunciations of the heartless and ungrateful ways of men. A proud nature will gather itself up from every blow, and determinedly work its way to an adequate revenge. A mean nature will accept its fate, and while it indulges in cynical and spiteful observations on human life, will greedily accept the paltriest rewards it can secure. But the supreme healthiness of Joseph's nature resists all the infectious influences that emanate from the world around him, and preserves him from every kind of morbid attitude towards the world and life. So easily did he throw off all vain regrets and stifle all vindictive and morbid feelings, so readily did he adjust himself to and so heartily enter into life as it presented itself to him, that he speedily rose to be overseer in the house of Potiphar. His capacity for business, his genial power of devoting himself to other men's interests, his clear integrity, were such, that this officer of Pharaoh's could find no more trust worthy servant in all Egypt – "he left all that he had in Joseph's hand: and lie knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat." Thus Joseph passed safely through a critical period of his life the period during which men assume the attitude towards life and their fellowmen which they commonly retain throughout. Too often we accept the weapons with which the world challenges us, and seek to force our way by means little more commendable than the injustice and coldness we ourselves resent. Joseph gives the first great evidence of moral strength by rising superior to this temptation, to which almost, all men in one degree or other succumb. You can hear him saying, deep down in his heart and almost unconsciously to himself: If the world is full of hatred, there is all the more

need that at least one man should forgive and love; if men's hearts are black with selfishness, ambition, and lust, all the more reason for me to be pure and to do my best for all whom my service can reach; if cruelty, lying, and fraud meet me at every step, all the more am I called to conquer these by integrity and guilelessness. His capacity, then, and power of governing others, were no longer dreams of his own, but qualities with which he was accredited by those who judged dispassionately and from the bare actual results. But this recognition and promotion brought with it serious temptation. So capable a person was he that a year or two had brought him to the highest post he could expect as a slave. His advancement, therefore, only brought his actual attainment into more painful contrast with the attainment of his dreams. As this sense of disappointment becomes more familiar to his heart, and threatens, under the monotonous routine of his household work, to deepen into a habit, there suddenly opens to him a new and unthought-of path to high position. An intrigue with Potiphar's wife might lead to the very advancement he sought. It might lift him out of the condition of a slave. It may have been known to him that other men had not scrupled so to promote their own interests. Besides, Joseph was young, and a nature like his, lively and sympathetic, must have felt deeply that in his position he was not likely to meet such a woman as could command his cordial love. That the temptation was in any degree to the sensual side of his nature there is no evidence whatever. For all that the narrative says, Potiphar's wife may not have been attractive in person. She may have been; and as she used persistently, "day by day," every art and wile by which she could lure Joseph to her mind, in some of his moods and under such circumstances as she would study to arrange he may have felt even this element of the temptation. But it is too little observed, and especially by young men who have most need to observe it, that in such temptations it is not only what is sensual that needs to be guarded against, but also two much deeper-lying tendencies, the craving for loving recognition and the desire to respond to the feminine love for admiration and devotion. The latter tendency may not seem dangerous, but I am sure that if an analysis could be made of the broken hearts and shame-crushed lives around us, it would be found that a large proportion of misery is due to a kind of uncontrolled and mistaken chivalry. Men of masculine make are prone to show their regard for women. This regard, when genuine and manly, will show itself in purity of sympathy and respectful attention. But when this regard is debased by a desire to please and ingratiate oneself, men are precipitated into the unseemly expressions of a spurious manhood. The other craving – the craving for love – acts also in a somewhat latent way. It is this craving which drives men to seek to satisfy themselves with the expressions of love, as if thus they could secure love itself. They do not distinguish between the two; they do not recognise that what they most deeply desire is love, rather than the expression of it; and they awake to find that precisely in so far as they have accepted the expression without the sentiment, in so far have they put love itself beyond their reach. This temptation was, in Joseph's case, aggravated by his being in a foreign country, unrestrained by the expectations of his own family, or by the eye of those he loved. He had, however, that which restrained him, and made the sin seem to him an impossible wickedness, the thought of which he could not, for a moment, entertain. "Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; there is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Gratitude to the man who had pitied him in the slave-market, and shown a generous confidence in a comparative stranger, was, with Joseph, a stronger sentiment than any that Potiphar's wife could stir in him. One can well

believe it. We know what enthusiastic devotedness a young man of any worth delights to give to his superior who has treated him with justice, generosity, and confidence; who himself occupies a station of importance in public life; and who, by a dignified graciousness of demeanour, can make even the slave feel that he too is a man, and that through his slave's dress his proper man hood and worth are recognised. There are few stronger sentiments than the enthusiasm or quiet fidelity that can thus be kindled, and the influence such a superior wields over the young mind is paramount. To disregard the rights of his master seemed to Joseph a great wickedness and sin against God. The treachery of the sin strikes him; his native discernment of the true rights of every party in the case cannot, for a moment, be hoodwinked. He is not a man who can, even in the excitement of temptation, overlook the consequences his sin may have on others. Not unsteadied by the flattering solicitations of one so much above him in rank, nor sullied by the contagion of her vehement passion; neither afraid to incur the resentment of one who so regarded him, nor kindled to any impure desire by contact with her blazing lust; neither scrupling thoroughly to disappoint her in himself, nor to make her feel her own great guilt, he flung from him the strong inducements that seemed to net him round and entangle him as his garment did, and tore himself, shocked and grieved, from the beseeching hand of his temp tress. The incident is related not because it was the most violent temptation to which Joseph was ever exposed, but because it formed a necessary link in the chain of circumstances that brought him before Pharaoh. And how ever strong this temptation may have been, more men would be found who could thus have spoken to Potiphar's wife, than who could have kept silence when accused by Potiphar. For his purity you will find his equal, one among a thousand; for his mercy scarcely one. For there is nothing more intensely trying than to live under false and painful accusations, which totally misrepresent and damage your character, which effectually bar your advancement, and which yet you have it in your power to disprove. Joseph, feeling his indebtedness to Potiphar, contents himself with the simple averment that he himself is innocent. The word is on his tongue that can put a very different face on the matter, but rather than utter that word, Joseph will suffer the stroke that otherwise must fall on his master's honour; will pass from his high place and office of trust, through the jeering or possibly compassionating slaves, branded as one who has betrayed the frankest confidence, and is fitter for the dungeon than the steward ship of Potiphar. He is content to lie under the cruel suspicion that he had in the foullest way wronged the man whom most he should have regarded, and whom in point of fact he did enthusiastically serve. There was one man in Egypt whose good-will he prized, and this man now scorned and condemned him, and this for the very act by which Joseph had proved most faithful and deserving. And even after a long imprisonment, when he had now no reputation to maintain, and when such a little bit of court scandal as he could have retailed would have been highly palatable and possibly useful to some of those polished ruffians and adventurers who made their dungeon ring with questionable tales, and with whom the free and levelling intercourse of prison life had put him on the most familiar footing, and when they twitted and taunted him with his supposed crime, and gave him the prison sobriquet that would most pungently embody his villainy and failure, and when it might plausibly have been pleaded by himself that such a woman should be exposed, Joseph uttered no word of recrimination, but quietly endured, knowing that God's providence could allow him to be merciful; protesting, when needful, that he himself was innocent, but seeking to entangle no one else in his misfortune. It is this that has made the world seem so terrible a place to many – that the innocent must so often suffer for the guilty, and that, without appeal, the pure and loving must lie in chains and bitterness,

while the wicked live and see good days. It is this that has made men most despairingly question whether there be indeed a God in heaven who knows who the real culprit is, and yet suffers a terrible doom slowly to close around the innocent; who sees where the guilt lies, and yet moves no finger nor speaks the word that would bring justice to light, shaming the secure triumph of the wrong doer, and saving the bleeding spirit from its agony. It was this that came as the last stroke of the passion of our Lord, that He was numbered among the transgressors; it was this that caused or materially increased the feeling that God had deserted Him; and it was this that wrung from Him the cry which once was wrung from David, and may well have been wrung from Joseph, when, cast into the dungeon as a mean and treacherous villain, whose freedom was the peril of domestic peace and honour, he found himself again helpless and forlorn, regarded now not as a mere worthless lad, but as a criminal of the lowest type. And as there always recur cases in which exculpation is impossible just in proportion as the party accused is possessed of honourable feeling, and where silent acceptance of doom is the result not of convicted guilt, but of the very triumph of self-sacrifice, we must beware of over-suspicion and injustice. There is nothing in which we are more frequently mistaken than in our suspicions and harsh judgments of others. “But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.” As in Potiphar’s house, so in the king’s house of detention Joseph’s fidelity and serviceableness made him seem indispensable, and by sheer force of character he occupied the place rather of governor than of prisoner. The discerning men he had to do with, accustomed to deal with criminals and suspects of all shades, very quickly perceived that in Joseph’s case justice was at fault, and that he was a mere scape-goat. Well might Potiphar’s wife, like Pilate’s, have had warning dreams regarding the innocent person who was being condemned; and probably Potiphar himself had suspicion enough of the true state of matters to prevent him from going to extremities with Joseph, and to imprison him more out of deference to the opinion of his household, and for the sake of appearances, than because Joseph alone was the object of his anger. At any rate, such was the vitality of Joseph’s confidence in God, and such was the light-heartedness that sprang from his integrity of conscience, that he was free from all absorbing anxiety about himself, and had leisure to amuse and help his fellow-prisoners, so that such promotion as a gaol could afford he won, from a dungeon to a chain, from a chain to his word of honour. Thus even in the unlatticed dungeon the sun and moon look in upon him and bow to him; and while his sheaf seems at its poorest, all rust and mildew 7, the sheaves of his masters do homage. After the arrival of two such notable criminals as the chief butler and baker of Pharaoh – the chamberlain and steward of the royal household – Joseph, if sometimes pensive, must yet have had sufficient entertainment at times in conversing with men who stood by the king, and were familiar with the statesmen, courtiers, and military men who frequented the house of Potiphar. He had now ample opportunity for acquiring information which afterwards stood him in good stead for apprehending the character of Pharaoh, and for making himself acquainted with many details of his government, and with the general condition of the people. Officials in disgrace would be found much more accessible and much more communicative of important information than officials in court favour could have been to one in Joseph’s position. It is not surprising that three nights before Pharaoh’s birthday these functionaries of the court should have recalled in sleep such scenes as that day was wont to bring round, nor that they should vividly have seen the parts they themselves used to play in the festival. Neither is it surprising that they should have had very anxious thoughts regarding their own fate on a day which was chosen for deciding the fate of political or courtly offenders. But it is remark able

that they having dreamed these dreams. Joseph should have been found willing to interpret them. One desires some evidence of Joseph's attitude towards God during this period when God's attitude towards him might seem doubtful, and especially one would like to know what Joseph by this time thought of his juvenile dreams, and whether in the prison his face wore the same beaming confidence in his own future which had smitten the hearts of his brothers with impatient envy of the dreamer. We seek some evidence, and here we find it. Joseph's willingness to interpret the dreams of his fellow prisoners proves that he still believed in his own, that among his other qualities he had this characteristic also of a steadfast and profound soul, that he "reverenced as a man the dreams of his youth." Had he not done so, and had he not yet hoped that somehow God would bring truth out of them, he would surely have said: Don't you believe in dreams; they will only get you into difficulties. He would have said what some of us could dictate from our own thoughts: I won't meddle with dreams any more; I am not so young as I once was; doctrines and principles that served for fervent romantic youth seem puerile now, when I have learned what human life actually is; I can't ask this man, who knows the world and has held the cup for Pharaoh and is aware what a practical shape the king's anger takes, to cherish hopes similar to those which often seem so remote and doubtful to myself. My religion has brought me into trouble: it has lost me my situation, it has kept me poor, it has made me despised, it has debarred me from enjoyment. Can I ask this man to trust to inward whisperings which seem to have so misled me? No, no; let every man bear his own burden. If he wishes to become religious, let not me bear the responsibility. If he will dream, let him find some other interpreter. This casual conversation, then, with his fellow-prisoners was for Joseph one of those perilous moments when a man holds his fate in his hand, and yet does not know that he is specially on trial, but has for his guidance and safe-conduct through the hazard only the ordinary safe guards and lights by the aid of which he is framing his daily life. A man cannot be fore warned of trial, if the trial is to be a fair test of his habitual life. He must not be called to the lists by the herald's trumpet warning him to mind his seat and grasp his weapon; but must be suddenly set upon if his habit of steadiness and balance is to be tested, and the warrior instinct to which the right weapon is ever at hand. As Joseph, going the round of his morning duty and spreading what might stir the appetite of these dainty courtiers, noted the gloom on their faces, had he not been of a nature to take upon himself the sorrows of others, he might have been glad to escape from their presence, fearful lest he should be infected by their depression, or should become an object on which they might vent their ill-humour. But he was girt with a healthy cheerfulness that could bear more than his own burden; and his pondering of his own experience made him sensitive to all that affected the destinies of other men. Thus Joseph in becoming the interpreter of the dreams of other men became the fulfiller of his own. Had he made light of the dreams of his fellow-prisoners because he had already made light of his own, he would, for aught we can see, have died in the dungeon. And, indeed, what hope is left for a man, and what deliverance is possible, when he makes light of his own most sacred experience, and doubts whether after all there was any Divine voice in that part of his life which once he felt to be full of significance? Sadness, cynical worldliness, irritability, sour and isolating selfishness, rapid deterioration in every part of the character – these are the results which follow our repudiation of past experience and denial of truth that once animated and purified us; when, at least, this repudiation and denial are not themselves the results of our advance to a higher, more animating, and more purifying truth. We cannot but leave behind us many "childish things," beliefs that we now recognise as mere superstitions, hopes and fears which do not move the maturer

mind; we cannot but seek always to be stripping ourselves of modes of thinking which have served their purpose and are out of date, but we do so only for the sake of attaining freer movement in all serviceable and righteous conduct, and more adequate covering for the permanent weaknesses of our own nature – “not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon,” that truth partial and dawning may be swallowed up in the perfect light of noon. And when a supposed advance in the knowledge of things spiritual robs us of all that sustains true spiritual life in us, and begets an angry contempt of our own past experience and a proud scorning of the dreams that agitate other men; when it ministers not at all to the growth in us of what is tender and pure and loving and progressive, but hardens us to a sullen or coarsely riotous or coldly calculating character, we cannot but question whether it is not a delusion rather than a truth that has taken possession of us. If it is fanciful, it is yet almost inevitable, to compare Joseph at this stage of his career to the great Interpreter who stands between God and us, and makes all His signs intelligible. Those Egyptians could not forbear honouring Joseph, who was able to solve to them the mysteries on the borders of which the Egyptian mind continually hovered, and which it symbolized by its mysterious sphinxes, its strange chambers of imagery, its unapproachable divinities. And we bow before the Lord Jesus Christ, because He can read our fate and unriddle all our dim anticipations of good and evil, and make intelligible to us the visions of our own hearts. There is that in us, as in these men, from which a skilled eye could already read our destiny. In the eye of One who sees the end from the beginning, and can distinguish between the determining influences of character and the insignificant manifestations of a passing mood, we are already designed to our eternal places. And it is in Christ alone your future is explained. You cannot understand your future without taking Him into your confidence. You go forward blindly to meet you know not what, unless you listen to His interpretation of the vague presentiments that visit you. Without Him what can we make of those suspicions of a future judgment, or of those yearnings after God, that hang about our hearts? Without Him what can we make of the idea and hope of a better life than we are now living, or of the strange persuasion that all will yet be well a persuasion that seems so groundless, and which yet will not be shaken off, but finds its explanation in Christ? The excess of side light that falls across our path from the present seems only to make the future more obscure and doubtful, and from Him alone do we receive any interpretation of ourselves that even seems to be satisfying. Our fellow-prisoners are often seen to be so absorbed in their own affairs that it is vain to seek light from them; but He, with patient, self-forgetting friendliness, is ever disengaged, and even elicits, by the kindly and interrogating attitude He takes towards us, the utterance of all our woes and perplexities. And it is because He has had dreams Himself that He has become so skilled an interpreter of ours. It is because in His own life He had His mind hard pressed for a solution of those very problems which baffle us, because He had for Himself to adjust God’s promise to the ordinary and apparently casual and untoward incidents of a human life, and because He had to wait long before it became quite clear how one Scripture after another was to be fulfilled by a course of simple confiding obedience – it is because of this experience of His own, that He can now enter into and rightly guide to its goal every longing we cherish.

02.10. LECTURE X: PHARAOH'S DREAMS

LECTURE X PHARAOH'S DREAMS

Genesis 41:1-57 "The Word of God Worketh its secret way, and needs no help, Like to a jewel (hid in desert sands) Of wondrous lustre, as creation old, That finds its way into a nation's eye – A matchless excellence of priceless worth – So precious truth doth jewel the fair world, Or, buried, sleeps unnoted but of God."

"Thus saith the Lord, that frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that confirmeth the word of His servant, and performeth the counsel of His messengers: that saith of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure." Isaiah 44:25; Isaiah 44:28

THE preceding act in this great drama – the act comprising the scenes of Joseph's temptation, unjust imprisonment, and interpretation of his fellow-prisoners dreams – was written for the sake of explaining how Joseph came to be introduced to Pharaoh. Other friendships may have been formed in the prison, and other threads may have been spun which went to make up the life of Joseph, but this only is pursued. For a time, however, there seemed very little prospect that this would prove to be the thread on which his destiny hung. Joseph made a touching appeal to the Chief Butler: "yet did not the Chief Butler remember Joseph, but forgat him." You can see him in the joy of his release affectionately pressing Joseph's hand as the king's messengers knocked off his fetters. You can see him assuring Joseph, by his farewell look, that he might trust him; mistaking mere elation at his own release for warmth of feeling towards Joseph, though perhaps even already feeling just the slightest touch of awkwardness at being seen on such intimate terms with a Hebrew slave. How could he, when in the palace of Pharaoh and decorated with the insignia of his office and surrounded by courtiers, break through the formal etiquette of the place? What with the pleasant congratulations of old friends, and the accumulation of business since he had been imprisoned, and the excitement of restoration from so low and hopeless to so high and busy a position, the promise to Joseph is obliterated from his mind. If it once or twice recurs to his memory, he persuades himself he is waiting for a good opening to mention Joseph. It would perhaps be unwarrantable to say that he admits the idea that he is in no way indebted to Joseph, since all that Joseph had done was to interpret, but by no means to determine, his fate. The analogy which we could not help seeing between Joseph's relation to his fellow-prisoners, and our Lord's relation to us, pursues us here. For does not the bond between us and Him seem often very slender, when once we have received from Him the knowledge of the king's good-will, and find ourselves set in a place of security? Is not Christ with many a mere stepping-stone for their own advancement, and of interest only so long as they are in anxiety about their own fate? Their regard for Him seems abruptly to terminate as soon as they are ushered to freer air. Brought for a while into contact with Him, the very peace and prosperity which that intercourse has introduced them to, become opiates to dull their memory and their gratitude. They have received all they at present desire, they have no more dreams, their life has become so plain and simple and glad, that they need no interpreter. They seem to regard Him no more than an official is regarded who is set to

discharge to all comers some duty for which he is paid; who mingles no love with his work, and from whom they would receive the same benefits whether he had any personal interest in them or no. But there is no Christianity where there is no loving remembrance of Christ. If your contact with Him has not made Him your Friend whom you can by no possibility forget, you have missed the best result of your introduction to Him. It makes one think meanly of the Chief Butler that such a personality as Joseph's had not more deeply impressed him that everything he heard and saw among the courtiers did not make him say to himself: There is a friend of mine, in prison hard by, that for beauty, wisdom, and vivacity would more than match the finest of you all. And it says very little for us if we can have known anything of Christ without seeing that in Him we have what is nowhere else, and without finding that He has become the necessity of our life to whom we turn at every point. But, as things turned out, it was perhaps as well for Joseph that his promising friend did forget him. For, supposing the Chief Butler had overcome his natural reluctance to increase his own indebtedness to Pharaoh by interceding for a friend, supposing he had been willing to risk the friendship of the Captain of the Guard by interfering in so delicate a matter, and supposing Pharaoh had been willing to listen to him, what would have been the result? Probably that Joseph would have been sold away to the quarries, for certainly he could not have been restored to Potiphar's house; or, at the most, he might have received his liberty, and a free pass out of Egypt. That is to say, he would have obtained liberty to return to sheep-shearing and cattle-dealing and checkmating his brother's plots. In any probable case his career would have tended rather towards obscurity than towards the fulfilment of his dreams. There seems equal reason to congratulate Joseph on his friend's forgetfulness, when we consider its probable effects not on his career, but on his character. When he was left in prison after so sudden and exciting an incursion of the outer world as the king's messengers would make, his mind must have run chiefly in two lines of thought. Naturally he would feel some envy of the man who was being restored, and when day after day passed and more than the former monotony of prison routine palled on his spirit; when he found how completely he was forgotten, and how friendless and lone a creature he was in that strange land where things had gone so mysteriously against him; when he saw before him no other fate than that which he had seen befall so many a slave thrown into a dungeon at his master's pleasure and never more heard of, he must have been sorely tempted to hate the whole world, and especially those brethren who had been the beginning of all his misfortunes. Had there been any selfishness in solution in Joseph's character, this is the point at which it would have quickly crystallized into permanent forms. For nothing more certainly elicits and confirms selfishness than bad treatment. But from his conduct on his release, we see clearly enough that through all this trying time his heroism was not only that of the strong man who vows that though the whole world is against him the day will come when the world shall have need of him, but of the saint of God in whom suffering and injustice leave no bitterness against his fellows, nor even provoke one slightest morbid utterance. But another process must have been going on in Joseph's mind at the same time. He must have felt that it was a very serious thing that he had been called upon to do in interpreting God's will to his fellow-prisoners. No doubt he fell into it quite naturally and aptly, because it was liker his proper vocation, and more of his character could come out in it than in anything he had yet done. Still, to be mixed up thus with matters of life and death concerning other people, and to have men of practical ability and experience and high position listening to him as to an oracle, and to find that in very truth a great power was committed to him, was calculated to have some considerable result one way or other on Joseph. And these two

years of unrelieved and sobering obscurity cannot but be considered most opportune. For one of two things is apt to follow the world's first recognition of a man's gifts. He is either induced to pander to the world's wonder and become artificial and strained in all he does, so losing the spontaneity and naturalness and sincerity which characterise the best work; or he is awed and steadied. And whether the one or the other result follow, will depend very much on the other things that are happening to him. In Joseph's case it was probably well that after having made proof of his powers he was left in such circumstances as would not only give him time for reflection, but also give a humble and believing turn to his reflections. He was not at once exalted to the priestly caste, nor enrolled among the wise men, nor put in any position in which he would have been under constant temptation to display and trifle with his power, and so he was led to the conviction that deeper even than the joy of receiving the recognition and gratitude of men was the abiding satisfaction of having done the thing God had given him to do. These two years, then, during which Joseph's active mind must necessarily have been forced to provide food for itself, and have been thrown back upon his past experience, seem to have been of eminent service in maturing his character. The self-possessed dignity and case of command which appear in him from the moment when he is ushered into Pharaoh's presence have their roots in these two years of silence. As the bones of a strong man are slowly, imperceptibly knit, and gradually take the shape and texture they retain throughout; so during these years there was silently and secretly consolidating a character of almost unparalleled calmness and power. One has no words to express how tantalizing it must have been to Joseph to see this Egyptian have his dreams so gladly and speedily fulfilled, while he himself, who had so long waited on the true God, was left waiting still, and now so utterly unbefriended that there seemed no possible way of ever again connecting himself with the world outside the prison walls. Being pressed thus for an answer to the question, What does God mean to make of my life? he was brought to see and to hold as the most important truth for him, that the first concern is, that God's purposes be accomplished; the second, that his own dreams be fulfilled. He was enabled, as we shall see in the sequel, to put God truly in the first place, and to see that by forwarding the interests of other men, even though they were but light-minded chief butlers at a foreign court, he might be as serviceably furthering the purposes of God, as if he were forwarding his own interests. He was compelled to seek for some principle that would sustain and guide him in the midst of much disappointment and perplexity, and he found it in the conviction that the essential thing to be accomplished in this world, and to which every man must lay his shoulder, is God's purpose. Let that go on, and all else that should go on will go on. And he further saw that he best fulfils God's purpose who, without anxiety and impatience, does the duty of the day, and gives himself without stint to the "charities that soothe and heal and bless." His perception of the breadth of God's purpose, and his profound and sympathetic and active submission to it, were qualities too rare not to be called into influential exercise. After two years he is suddenly summoned to become God's interpreter to Pharaoh. The Egyptian king was in the unhappy though not uncommon position of having a revelation from God which he could not read, intimations and presentiments he could not interpret. To one man is given the revelation, to another the interpretation. The official dignity of the king is respected, and to him is given the revelation which concerns the welfare of the whole people. But to read God's meaning in a revelation requires a spiritual intelligence trained to sympathy with His purposes, and such a spirit was found in Joseph alone. The dreams of Pharaoh were thoroughly Egyptian. The marvel is, that a symbolism so familiar to the Egyptian eye should not have been easily legible to even the most

slenderly gifted of Pharaoh's wise men. "In my dream," says the king, "behold, I stood upon the bank of the river: and, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine," and so on. Every land or city is proud of its river, but none has such cause to be so as Egypt of its Nile. The country is accurately as well as poetically called "the gift of Nile." Out of the river do really come good or bad years, fat or lean kine. Wholly dependent on its annual rise and overflow for the irrigating and enriching of the soil, the people worship it and love it, and at the season of its overflow give way to the most rapturous expressions of joy. The cow also was reverenced as the symbol of the earth's productive power. If then, as Joseph avers, God wished to show to Pharaoh that seven years of plenty were approaching, this announcement could hardly have been made plainer in the language of dreams than by showing to Pharaoh seven well favoured kine coming up out of the bountiful river to feed on the meadow made richly green by its waters. If the king had been sacrificing to the river, such a sight, familiar as it was to the dwellers by the Nile, might well have been accepted by him as a promise of plenty in the land. But what agitated Pharaoh, and gave him the shuddering presentiment of evil which accompanies some dreams, was the sequel. "Behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill-favoured and lean-fleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness: and the lean and the ill-favoured kine did eat up the first seven fat kine: and when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them; but they were still ill-favoured, as at the beginning," – a picture which to the inspired dream-reader represented seven years of famine so grievous, that the preceding plenty should be swallowed up and not be known. A similar image occurred to a writer who, in describing a more recent famine in the same land, says: "The year presented itself as a monster whose wrath must annihilate all the resources of life and all the means of subsistence." It tells in favour of the court magicians and wise men that not one of them offered an interpretation of dreams to which it would certainly not have been difficult to attach some tolerably feasible interpretation. Probably these men were as yet sincere devotees of astrology and occult science, and not the mere jugglers and charlatans their successors seem to have become. When men cannot make out the purpose of God regarding the future of the race, it is not wonderful that they should endeavour to catch the faintest, most broken echo of His voice to the world, wherever they can find it. Now there is a wide region, a borderland between the two worlds of spirit and of matter, in which are found a great many mysterious phenomena which cannot be explained by any known laws of nature, and through which men fancy they get nearer to the spiritual world. There are many singular and startling appearances, coincidences, forebodings, premonitions which men have always been attracted towards, and which they have considered as open ways of communication between God and man There are dreams, visions, strange apprehensions, freaks of memory, and other mental phenomena, which, when all classed together, assorted, and skilfully applied to the reading of the future, once formed quite a science by itself. When men have no word from God to depend upon, no knowledge at all of where either the race or individuals are going to, they will eagerly grasp at anything that even seems to shed a ray of light on their future. We for the most part make light of that whole category of phenomena, because we have a more sure word of prophecy by which, as with a light in a dark place, we can tell where our next step should be, and what the end shall be. But invariably in heathen countries, where no guiding spirit of God was believed in, and where the absence of His revealed will left numberless points of duty doubtful and all the future dark, there existed in lieu of this a class of persons who, under one name or other, undertook to satisfy the craving of men to see into the future, to forewarn them of danger, and advise them regarding

matters of conduct and affairs of state. At various points of the history of God's revelation these professors of occult science appear. In each case a profound impression is made by the superior wisdom or power displayed by the "wise man" of God. But in reading the accounts we have of these collisions between the wisdom of God and that of the magicians, a slight feeling of uneasiness sometimes enters the mind. You may feel that these wonders of Joseph, Moses, and Daniel have a romantic air about them, and you feel, perhaps, a slight scruple in granting that God would lend Himself to such displays – displays so completely out of date in our day. But we are to consider not only that there is nothing of the kind more certain than that dreams do sometimes even now impart most significant warning to men; but, also, that the time in which Joseph lived was the childhood of the world, when God had neither spoken much to men, nor could speak much, because as yet they had not learned His language, but were only being slowly taught it by signs suited to their capacity. If these men were to receive any knowledge beyond what their own unaided efforts could attain, they must be taught in a language they understood. They could not be dealt with as if they had already attained a knowledge and a capacity which could only be theirs many centuries after; they must be dealt with by signs and wonders which had perhaps little moral teaching in them, but yet gave evidence of God's nearness and power such as they could and did understand. God thus stretched out His hand to men in the darkness, and let them feel His strength before they could look on His face and understand His nature. It is the existence at the court of Pharaoh of this highly respected class of dream-interpreters and wise men, which lends significance to the conduct of Joseph when summoned into the royal presence. Such wisdom as he displayed in reading Pharaoh's visions was looked upon as attainable by means within the reach of any man who had sufficient faculty for the science. And the first idea in the minds of the courtiers would probably have been, had Joseph not solemnly protested against it, that he was an adept where they were apprentices and bunglers, and that his success was due purely to professional skill. This was of course perfectly well known to Joseph, who, for a number of years, had been familiar with the ideas prevalent at the court of Pharaoh; and he might have argued that there could be no great harm in at least effecting his deliverance from an unjust imprisonment by allowing Pharaoh to suppose that it was to him he was indebted for the interpretation of his dreams. But his first word to Pharaoh is a self-renouncing exclamation: "Not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." Two years had elapsed since anything had occurred which looked the least like the fulfilment of his own dreams, or gave him any hope of release from prison; and now, when measuring himself with these courtiers and feeling able to take his place with the best of them, getting again a breath of free air and feeling once more the charm of life, and having an opening set before his young ambition, being so suddenly transferred from a place where his very existence seemed to be forgotten to a place where Pharaoh himself and all his court eyed him with the intensest interest and anxiety, it is significant that he should appear regardless of his own fate, but jealously careful of the glory of God. Considering how jealous men commonly are of their own reputation, and how impatiently eager to receive all the credit that is due to them for their own share in any good that is doing, and considering of what essential importance it seemed that Joseph should seize this opportunity of providing for his own safety and advancement, and should use this as the tide in his affairs that led to fortune, his words and bearing before Pharaoh undoubtedly disclose a deeply inwrought fidelity to God, and a magnanimous patience regarding his own personal interests. For it is extremely unlikely that in proposing to Pharaoh to set a man over this important business of collecting corn to last through the years of famine, it presented

itself to Joseph as a conceivable result that he should be the person appointed he a Hebrew, a slave, a prisoner, cleaned but for the nonce, could not suppose that Pharaoh would pass over all these tried officers and ministers of state around him and fix upon a youth who was wholly untried, and who might, by his different race and religion, prove obnoxious to the people. Joseph may have expected to make interest enough with Pharaoh to secure his freedom, and possibly some subordinate berth where he could hope fully begin the world again; but his only allusion to himself is of a depreciatory kind, while his reference to God is marked with a profound conviction that this is God's doing, and that to Him is due whatever is due. Well may the Hebrew race be proud of these men like Joseph and Daniel, who stood in the presence of foreign monarchs in a spirit of perfect fidelity to God, commanding the respect of all, and clothed with the dignity and simplicity which that fidelity imparted. It matters not to Joseph that there may perhaps be none in that land who can appreciate his fidelity to God or understand his motive. It matters not what he may lose by it, or what he could gain by falling in with the notions of those around him. He himself knows the real state of the case, and will not act untruly to his God, even though for years he seems to have been forgotten by Him. With Daniel he says in spirit, "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another. As for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but that the interpretation may be known to the king, and that thou mayest know the thoughts of thine heart, He that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass." There is something particularly noble and worthy of admiration in a man thus standing alone and maintaining the fullest allegiance to God, without ostentation, and with a quiet dignity and naturalness that shows he has a great fund of strength behind. That we do not misjudge Joseph's character or ascribe to him qualities which were invisible to his contemporaries, is apparent from the circumstance that Pharaoh and his advisers, with little or no hesitation, agreed that to no man could they more safely entrust their country in this emergency. The mere personal charm of Joseph might have won over these experienced advisers of the crown to make compensation for his imprisonment by an unusually handsome reward, but no mere attractiveness of person and manner, nor even the unquestionable guilelessness of his bearing, could have induced them to put such an affair as this into his hands. Plainly they were impressed with Joseph; almost supernaturally impressed, and felt God through him. He stood before them as one mysteriously appearing in their emergency, sent out of unthought-of quarters to warn and save them. Happily there was as yet no jealousy of the God of the Hebrews, nor any exclusiveness on the part of the chosen people: Pharaoh and Joseph alike felt that there was one God over all and through all. And it was Joseph's self-abnegating sympathy with the purposes of this Supreme God that made him a transparent medium, so that in his presence the Egyptians felt themselves in the presence of God. It is so always. Influence in the long run belongs to those who rid their minds of all private aims, and get close to the great centre in which all the race meets and is cared for. Men feel themselves safe with the unselfish, with persons in whom they meet principle, justice, truth, love, God. We are unattractive, useless, uninfluential, just because we are still childishly craving a private and selfish good. We know that a life which does not pour itself freely into the common stream of public good is lost in dry and sterile sands. We know that a life spent upon self is contemptible, barren, empty, yet how slowly do we come to the attitude of Joseph, who watched for the fulfilment of God's purposes and found his happiness in forwarding what God designed for the people.

02.11. LECTURE XI: JOSEPH'S ADMINISTRATION

LECTURE XI JOSEPH'S ADMINISTRATION Genesis 41:37-57; Genesis 47:13-26 "And he but filled his fortunes like a man Who did intend to honour them as much As they could honour him"

"He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance: To bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom." Psalms 105:21-22

"MANY a monument consecrated to the memory of some nobleman gone to his long home, who during life had held high rank at the court of Pharaoh, is decorated with the simple but laudatory inscription, 'His ancestors were unknown people'" – so we are told by our most accurate informant regarding Egyptian affairs. Indeed, the tales we read of adventurers in the East, and the histories which recount how some dynasties have been founded, are sufficient evidence that in other countries besides Egypt, sudden elevation from the lowest to the highest rank is not so unusual as amongst ourselves. Historians have recently made out that in one period of the history of Egypt there are traces of a kind of Semitic mania, a strong leaning towards Syrian and Arabian customs, phrases, and persons. Such manias have occurred in most countries. There was a period in the history of Rome when everything that had a Greek flavour was admired; an Anglo-mania once affected a portion of the French population, and, reciprocally, French manners and ideas have at times found a welcome among ourselves. It is also clear that for a time lower Egypt was under the dominion of foreign rulers who were in race more nearly allied to Joseph than to the native population. But there is no need that so complicated a question as the exact date of this foreign domination be debated here, for there was that in Joseph's bearing which would have commended him to any sagacious monarch. Not only did the court accept him as a messenger from God, but they could not fail to recognise substantial and serviceable human qualities alongside of what was mysterious in him. The ready apprehension with which he appreciated the magnitude of the danger, the clear-sighted promptitude with which he met it, the resource and quiet capacity with which he handled a matter involving the entire property of Egypt, showed them that they were in the presence of a true statesman. No doubt the confidence with which he described the best method of dealing with the emergency was the confidence of one who was convinced he was speaking for God. This was the great distinction they perceived between Joseph and ordinary dream-interpreters. It was not guess work with him. The same distinction is always apparent between revelation and speculation. Revelation speaks with authority; speculation gropes its way, and when wisest is most diffident. At the same time Pharaoh was perfectly right in his inference: "Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art." He believed that God had chosen him to deal with this matter because he was wise in heart, and he believed his wisdom would remain because God had chosen him. At length, then, Joseph saw the fulfilment of his dreams within his reach. The coat of many colours with which his father had paid a tribute to the princely person and ways of the boy, was now replaced by the robe of state and the heavy gold necklace which marked him out as second to Pharaoh. Whatever nerve and self-command and humble dependence on God his varied experience had wrought in him were all needed when Pharaoh took his hand and placed his own ring on it, thus transferring all his

authority to him, and when turning from the king he received the acclamations of the court and the people, bowed to by his old masters, and acknowledged the superior of all the dignitaries and potentates of Egypt. Only once besides, so far as the Egyptian inscriptions have yet been deciphered, does it appear that any subject was raised to be Regent or Viceroy with similar powers. Joseph is, as far as possible, naturalised as an Egyptian. He receives a name easier of pronunciation than his own, at least to Egyptian tongues – Zaphnath-Paaneah, which, however, was perhaps only an official title meaning “Governor of the district of the place of life,” the name by which one of the Egyptian counties or states was known. The king crowned his liberality and completed the process of naturalisation by providing him with a wife, Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah, priest of On. This city was not far from Avaris or Haouar, where Joseph’s Pharaoh, Ra-apepi II, at this time resided. The worship of the sun-god, Ra, had its centre at On, (or Heliopolis, as it was called by the Greeks,) and the priests of On took precedence of all Egyptian priests. Joseph was thus connected with one of the most influential families in the land, and if he had any scruples about marrying into an idolatrous family, they were too insignificant to influence his conduct, or leave any trace in the narrative. His attitude towards God and his own family was disclosed in the names which he gave to his children. In giving names which had a meaning at all, and not merely a taking sound, he showed that he understood, as well he might, that every human life has a significance and expresses some principle or fact. And in giving names which recorded his acknowledgment of God’s goodness lie showed that prosperity had as little influence as adversity to move him from his allegiance to the God of his fathers. His first son he called Manasseh, Making to forget, “for God,” said he, “hath made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house” – not as if he were now so abundantly satisfied in Egypt that the thought of his father’s house was blotted from his mind, but only that in this child the keen longings he had felt for kindred and home were somewhat alleviated. He again found an object for his strong family affection. The void in his heart he had so long felt was filled by the little babe. A new home was begun around him. But this new affection would not weaken, though it would alter the character of, his love for his father and brethren. The birth of this child would really be a new tie to the land from which he had been stolen. For, however ready men are to spend their own life in foreign service, you see them wishing that their children should spend their days among the scenes with which their own childhood was familiar. In the naming of his second son Ephraim he recognises that God had made him fruitful in the most unlikely way. He does not leave it to us to interpret his life, but records what he himself saw in it. It has been said: “To get at the truth of any history is good; but a man’s own history – when he reads that truly … and knows what he is about and has been about, it is a Bible to him.” And now that Joseph, from the height he had reached, could look back on the way by which he had been led to it, he cordially approved of all that God had done. There was no resentment, no murmuring. He would often find himself looking back and thinking, Had I found my brothers where I thought they were, had the pit not been on the caravan-road, had the merchants not come up so opportunely, had I not been sold at all or to some other master, had I not been imprisoned or had I been put in another ward – had any one of the many slender links in the chain of my career been absent, how different might my present state have been. How plainly I now see that all those sad mishaps that crushed my hopes and tortured my spirit where steps in the only conceivable path to my present position. Many a man has added his signature to this acknowledgment of Joseph’s, and confessed a providence guiding his life and working out good for him through injuries and sorrows, as well as through honours, marriages, births. As in the heat

of summer it is difficult to recall the sensation of winter's bitter cold, so the fruitless and barren periods of a man's life are sometimes quite obliterated from his memory. God has it in His power to raise a man higher above the level of ordinary happiness than ever he has sunk below it; and as winter and spring-time, when the seed is sown, are stormy and bleak and gusty, so in human life seed-time is not bright as summer nor cheerful as autumn; and yet it is then, when all the earth lies bare and will yield us nothing, that the precious seed is sown: and when we confidently commit our labour or patience of to-day to God, the land of our affliction, now bare and desolate, will certainly wave for us, as it has waved for others, with rich produce whitened to the harvest. There is no doubt then that Joseph had learned to recognise the providence of God as a most important factor in his life. And the man who does so, gains for his character all the strength and resolution that come with a capacity for waiting. He saw, most legibly written on his own life, that God is never in a hurry. And for the resolute adherence to his seven years policy such a belief was most necessary. Nothing, indeed, is said of opposition or incredulity on the part of the Egyptians. But was there ever a policy of such magnitude carried out in any country without opposition or without evilly-disposed persons using it as a weapon against its promoter? No doubt during these years he had need of all the personal determination as well as of all the official authority he possessed. And if, on the whole, remarkable success attended his efforts, we must ascribe this partly to the unchallengeable justice of his arrangements, and partly to the impression of commanding genius Joseph seems everywhere to have made. As with his father and brethren he was felt to be superior, as in Potiphar's house he was quickly recognised, as in the prison no prison-garb or slave-brand could disguise him, as in the court his superiority was instinctively felt, so in his administration the people seem to have believed in him. And if, on the whole and in general, Joseph was reckoned a wise and equitable ruler, and even adored as a kind of saviour of the world, it would be idle in us to canvass the wisdom of his administration. When we have not sufficient historical material to apprehend the full significance of any policy, it is safe to accept the judgment of men who not only knew the facts but were themselves so deeply involved in them that they would certainly have felt and expressed discontent had there been ground for doing so. The policy of Joseph was simply to economize during the seven years of abundance to such an extent that provision might be made against the seven years of famine. He calculated that one-fifth of the produce of years so extraordinarily plenteous would serve for the seven scarce years. This fifth he seems to have bought in the king's name from the people, buying it, no doubt, at the cheap rates of abundant years. When the years of famine came, the people were referred to Joseph; and, till their money was gone, he sold corn to them probably not at famine prices. Next he acquired their cattle, and finally, in exchange for food, they yielded to him both their lands and their persons. So that the result of the whole was, that the people who would otherwise have perished were preserved, and in return for this preservation they paid a tax or rent on their farm-lands to the amount of one-fifth of their produce. The people ceased to be proprietors of their own farms, but they were not slaves with no interest in the soil, but tenants sitting at easy rents – a fair enough exchange for being preserved in life. This kind of taxation is eminently fair in principle, securing, as it does, that the wealth of the king and government shall vary with the prosperity of the whole land. The chief difficulty that has always been experienced in working it, has arisen from the necessity of leaving a good deal of discretionary power in the hands of the collectors, who have generally been found not slow to abuse this power. The only semblance of despotism in Joseph's policy is found in the curious circumstance that he interfered with the people's choice of residence, and shifted

them from one end of the land to another. This may have been necessary not only as a kind of seal on the deed by which the lands were conveyed to the king, and as a significant sign to them that they were mere tenants, but also Joseph probably saw that for the interests of the country, if not of agricultural prosperity, this shifting had become necessary for the breaking up of illegal associations, nests of sedition, and sectional prejudices and enmities which were endangering the community.* Modern experience supplies us with instances in which, by such a policy, a country might be regenerated and a seven years famine hailed as a blessing if, without famishing the people, it put them unconditionally into the hands of an able, bold, and beneficent ruler. And this was a policy which could be much better devised and executed by a foreigner than by a native.

* “It happened very often that the inhabitants of one district threatened an attack on the occupants of another on account of some dispute about divine or human questions. The hostile feelings of the opponents not unfrequently broke out into a hard struggle, and it required the whole armed power of the king to extinguish at its first outburst the flaming torch of war, kindled by domineering chiefs of nomes or ambitious priests.” Brugsch, History of Egypt, i. 16.

Egypt’s indebtedness to Joseph was, in fact, twofold. In the first place he succeeded in doing what many strong governments have failed to do: he enabled a large population to survive a long and severe famine. Even with all modern facilities for transport and for making the abundance of remote countries available for times of scarcity, it has not always been found possible to save our own fellow-subjects from starvation. In a prolonged famine which occurred in Egypt during the middle ages, the inhabitants, reduced to the unnatural habits which are the most painful feature of such times, not only ate their own dead, but kidnapped the living on the streets of Cairo and consumed them in secret. One of the most touching memorials of the famine with which Joseph had to deal is found in a sepulchral inscription in Arabia. A flood of rain laid bare a tomb in which lay a woman having on her person a profusion of jewels which represented a very large value. At her head stood a coffer filled with treasure, and a tablet with this inscription: “In Thy name, O God, the God of Himyar, I, Tayar, the daughter of Dzu Shefar, sent my steward to Joseph, and he delaying to return to me, I sent my handmaid with a measure of silver to bring me back a measure of flour; and not being able to procure it, I sent her with a measure of gold; and not being able to procure it, I sent her with a measure of pearls; and not being able to procure it, I commanded them to be ground; and finding no profit in them, I am shut up here.” If this inscription is genuine – and there seems no reason to call it in question – it shows that there is no exaggeration in the statement of our narrator that the famine was very grievous in other lands as well as in Egypt. And, whether genuine or not, one cannot but admire the grim humour of the starving woman getting herself buried in the jewels which had suddenly dropped to less than the value of a loaf of bread. But besides being indebted to Joseph for their preservation, the Egyptians owed to him an extension of their influence; for, as all the lands round about became dependent on Egypt for provision, they must have contracted a respect for the Egyptian administration. They must also have added greatly to Egypt’s wealth, and during these years of constant traffic many commercial connections must have been formed which in future years would be of untold value to Egypt. But above all, the permanent alterations made by Joseph on their tenure of land, and on their places of abode, may have convinced the most sagacious of the Egyptians that it was well for them that their money had failed, and that they had been compelled to yield themselves unconditionally into the hands of this remarkable ruler. It is the mark of a competent statesman that he makes

temporary distress the occasion for permanent benefit; and from the confidence Joseph won with the people, there seems every reason to believe that the permanent alterations he introduced were considered as competent as certainly they were bold. And for our own spiritual uses it is this point which seems chiefly important. In Joseph is illustrated the principle that, in order to the attainment of certain blessings, unconditional submission to God's delegate is required. If we miss this, we miss a large part of what his history exhibits, and it becomes a mere pretty story. The prominent idea in his dreams was, that he was to be worshipped by his brethren. In his exaltation by Pharaoh, the absolute authority given to him is again conspicuous: "Without thee shall no man lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." And still the same autocracy appears in the fact that not one Egyptian who was helpful to him in this matter is mentioned; and no one has received such exclusive possession of a considerable part of Scripture, so personal and outstanding a place. All this leaves upon the mind the impression that Joseph becomes a benefactor, and in his degree a saviour, to men by becoming their absolute master. When this was hinted in his dreams at first, his brothers fiercely resented it. But when they were put to the push by famine, both they and the Egyptians recognised that he was appointed by God to be their saviour, while at the same time they markedly and consciously submitted themselves to him. Men may always be expected to recognise that he who can save them alive in famine has a right to order the bounds of their habitation; and also that in the hands of one who, from disinterested motives, has saved them, they are likely to be quite as safe as in their own. And if we are all quite sure of this, that men of great political sagacity can regulate our affairs with tenfold the judgment and success that we ourselves could achieve, we cannot wonder that in matters still higher, and for which we are notoriously incompetent, there should be One into whose hands it is well to commit ourselves – One whose judgment is not warped by the prejudices which blind all mere natives of this world, but who, separate from sinners yet naturalised among us, can both detect and rectify everything in our condition which is less than perfect. If there are certainly many cases in which explanations are out of the question, and in which the governed, if they are wise, will yield themselves to a trusted authority, and leave it to time and results to justify his measures, any one, I think, who anxiously considers our spiritual condition must see that here too obedience is for us the greater part of wisdom, and that, after all speculation and efforts at sufficing investigation, we can still do no better than yield ourselves absolutely to Jesus Christ. He alone understands our whole position; He alone speaks with the authority that commands confidence, because it is felt to be the authority of the truth. We feel the present pressure of famine; we have discernment enough, some of us, to know we are in danger, but we cannot penetrate deeply either into the cause or the possible consequences of our present state. But Christ – if we may continue the figure – legislates with a breadth of administrative capacity which includes not only our present distress but our future condition, and, with the boldness of one who is master of the whole case, requires that we put ourselves wholly into His hand. He takes the responsibility of all the changes we make in obedience to Him, and proposes so to relieve us that the relief shall be permanent, and that the very emergency which has thrown us upon His help shall be the occasion of our transference not merely out of the present evil, but into the best possible form of human life. From this chapter, then, in the history of Joseph, we may reasonably take occasion to remind ourselves, 1st , that in all things pertaining to God unconditional submission to Christ is necessarily required of us. Apart from Christ we cannot tell what are the necessary elements of a permanently happy state; nor, indeed, even whether there is any such state awaiting us. There is a great deal of truth in what is

urged by unbelievers to the effect that spiritual matters are in great measure beyond our cognizance, and that many of our religious phrases are but, as it were, thrown out in the direction of a truth but do not perfectly represent it No doubt we are in a provisional state in which we are not in direct contact with the absolute truth, nor in a final attitude of mind towards it; and certain representations of things given in the Word of God may seem to us not to cover the whole truth. But this only compels the conclusion that for us Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. To probe existence to the bottom is plainly not in our power. To say precisely what God is, and how we are to carry ourselves towards Him, is possible only to Him who has been with God and is God. To submit to the Spirit of Christ, and to live under those influences and views which formed His life, is the only method that promises deliverance from that moral condition which makes spiritual vision impossible. We may remind ourselves, second, that this submission to Christ should be consistently adhered to in connection with those outward occurrences in our life which give us opportunity of enlarging our spiritual capacity. There can be little doubt that there would be presented to Joseph many a plan for the better administration of this whole matter, and many a petition from individuals craving exemption from the seemingly arbitrary and certainly painful and troublesome edict regulating change of residence. Many a man would think himself much wiser than the minister of Pharaoh in whom was the Spirit of God. When we react in a similar manner, and take upon us to specify with precision the changes we should like to see in our condition, and the methods by which these changes might best be accomplished, we commonly manifest our own incompetence. The changes which the strong hand of Providence enforces, the dislocation which our life suffers from some irresistible blow, the necessity laid upon us to begin life again and on apparently disadvantageous terms, are naturally resented; but these things being certainly the result of some unguardedness, improvidence, or weakness in our past state, are necessarily the means most appropriate for disclosing to us these elements of calamity and for securing our permanent welfare. We rebel against such perilous and sweeping revolutions as the basing of our life on a new foundation demands; we would disregard the appointments of Providence if we could; but both our voluntary consent to the authority of Christ and the impossibility a resisting His providential arrangements, prevent us from refusing to fall in with them, however needless and tyrannical they seem, and however little we perceive that they are intended to accomplish our permanent well-being. And it is in after years, when the pain of severance from old friends and habits is healed, and when the discomfort of adapting ourselves to a new kind of life is replaced by peaceful and docile resignation to new conditions, that we reach the clear perception that the changes we resented have in point of fact rendered harmless the seeds of fresh disaster, and rescued us from the results of long bad government. He who has most keenly felt the hardship of being diverted from his original course in life, will in after life tell you that had he been allowed to hold his own land, and remain his own master in his old loved abode, he would have lapsed into a condition from which no worthy harvest could be expected. If a man only wishes that his own conceptions of prosperity be realised, then let him keep his land in his own hand and work his material irrespective of God’s demands; for certainly if he yields himself to God, his own ideas of prosperity will not be realised. But if he suspects that God may have a more liberal conception of prosperity and may understand better than he what is eternally beneficial, let him commit himself and all his material of prosperity without doubting into God’s hand, and let him greedily obey all God’s precepts; for in neglecting one of these, he so far neglects and misses what God would have him enter into.

02.12. LECTURE XII: VISITS OF JOSEPH'S BRETHREN

LECTURE XII VISITS OF JOSEPH'S BRETHREN "Kneel not to me: The power that I have on you is to spare you; The malice towards you to forgive you; live, And deal with others better."

Genesis 42:1-38; Genesis 43:1-34; Genesis 44:1-34

"Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." Genesis 1:19-20

THE purpose of God to bring Israel into Egypt was accomplished by the unconscious agency of Joseph's natural affection for his kindred. Tenderness towards home is usually increased by residence in a foreign land; for absence, like a little death, sheds a halo round those separated from us. But Joseph could not as yet either re-visit his old home or invite his father's family into Egypt. Even, indeed, when his brothers first appeared before him, he seems to have had no immediate intention of inviting them as a family to settle in the country of his adoption, or even to visit it. If he had cherished any such purpose or desire he might have sent down waggons at once, as he at last did, to bring his father's household out of Canaan. Why, then, did he proceed so cautiously? Whence this mystery, and disguise, and circuitous compassing of his end? What intervened between the first and last visit of his brethren to make it seem advisable to disclose himself and invite them? Manifestly there had intervened enough to give Joseph insight into the state of mind his brethren were in, enough to satisfy him they were not the men they had been, and that it was safe to ask them and would be pleasant to have them with him in Egypt. Fully alive to the elements of disorder and violence that once existed among them, and having had no opportunity of ascertaining whether they were now altered, there was no course open but that which he adopted of endeavouring in some unobserved way to discover whether twenty years had wrought any change in them. For effecting this object he fell on the expedient of imprisoning them, on pretence of their being spies. This served the double purpose of detaining them until he should have made up his mind as to the best means of dealing with them, and of securing their retention under his eye until some display of character might sufficiently certify him of their state of mind. Possibly he adopted this expedient also because it was likely deeply to move them, so that they might be expected to exhibit not such superficial feelings as might have been elicited had he set them down to a banquet and entered into conversation with them over their wine, but such as men are surprised to find in themselves, and know nothing of in their lighter hours. Joseph was, of course, well aware that in the analysis of character the most potent elements are only brought into clear view when the test of severe trouble is applied, and when men are thrown out of all conventional modes of thinking and speaking. The display of character which Joseph awaited he speedily obtained. For so new an experience to these free dwellers in tents as imprisonment under grim Egyptian guards worked wonders in them. Men who have experienced such treatment aver that nothing more effectually tames and breaks the spirit: it is not the being confined for a definite time with the certainty of release in the end, but the being shut up at the caprice of another on a false and absurd accusation; the being cooped up at the will of a stranger in a foreign country,

uncertain and hopeless of release. To Joseph's brethren so sudden and great a calamity seemed explicable only on the theory that it was retribution for the great crime of their life. The uneasy fettling which each of them had hidden in his own conscience, and which the lapse of twenty years had not materially alleviated, finds expression: "And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." The similarity of their position to that in which they had placed their brother stimulates and assists their conscience. Joseph, in the anguish of his soul, had protested his innocence, but they had not listened; and now their own protestations are treated as idle wind by this Egyptian. Their own feelings, representing to them what they had caused Joseph to suffer, stir a keener sense of their guilt than they seem ever before to have reached. Under this new light they see their sin more clearly, and are humbled by the distress into which it has brought them. When Joseph sees this, his heart warms to them. He may not yet be quite sure of them. A prison-repentance is perhaps scarcely to be trusted. He sees they would for the moment deal differently with him had they the opportunity, and would welcome no one more heartily than himself, whose coming among them had once so exasperated them. Himself keen in his affections, he is deeply moved, and his eyes fill with tears as he witnesses their emotion and grief on his account. Fain would he relieve them from their remorse and apprehension – why, then, does he forbear? Why does he not at this juncture disclose himself? It has been satisfactorily proved that his brethren counted their sale of him the great crime of their life. Their imprisonment has elicited evidence that that crime had taken in their conscience the capital place, the place which a man finds some one sin or series of sins will take, to follow him with its appropriate curse, and hang over his future like a cloud – a sin of which he thinks when any strange thing happens to him, and to which he traces all disaster – a sin so iniquitous that it seems capable of producing any results however grievous, and to which he has so given himself that his life seems to be concentrated there, and he cannot but connect with it all the greater ills that happen to him. Was not this, then, security enough that they would never again perpetrate a crime of like atrocity? Every man who has almost at all observed the history of sin in himself, will say that most certainly it was quite insufficient security against their ever again doing the like. Evidence that a man is conscious of his sin, and, while suffering from its consequences, feels deeply its guilt, is not evidence that his character is altered. And because we believe men so much more readily than God, and think that they do not require, forsake, such needless pledges of a changed character as God seems to demand, it is worth observing that Joseph, moved as he was even to tears, felt that common prudence forbade him to commit himself to his brethren without further evidence of their disposition. They had distinctly acknowledged their guilt, and in his hearing had admitted that the great calamity that had befallen them was no more than they deserved; yet Joseph, judging merely as an intelligent man who had worldly interests depending on his judgment, could not discern enough here to justify him in supposing that his brethren were changed men. And it might sometimes serve to expose the insufficiency of our repentance were clear-seeing men the judges of it, and did they express their opinion of its trustworthiness. We may think that God is needlessly exacting when He requires evidence not only of a changed mind about past sin, but also of such a mind being now in us as will preserve us from future sin; but the truth is, that no man whose common worldly interests were at stake would commit himself to us on any less evidence. God, then, meaning to bring the house of Israel into Egypt in order to make progress in the Divine education He was giving to them, could not introduce them into that land in

a state of mind which would negative all the discipline they were there to receive. These men then had to give evidence that they not only saw, and in some sense repented of, their sin, but also that they had got rid of the evil passion which had led to it. This is what God means by repentance. Our sins are in general not so microscopic that it requires very keen spiritual discernment to perceive them. But to be quite aware of our sin, and to acknowledge it, is not to repent of it. Everything falls short of thorough repentance which does not prevent us from committing the sin anew. We do not so much desire to be accurately informed about our past sins, and to get right views of our past selves; we wish to be no longer sinners, we wish to pass through some process by which we may be separated from that in us which has led us into sin. Such a process there is, for these men passed through it. The test which revealed the thoroughness of his brothers repentance was unintentionally applied by Joseph. When he hid his cup in Benjamin's sack, all that he intended was to furnish a pretext for detaining Benjamin, and so gratifying his own affection. But, to his astonishment, his trick effected far more than he intended; for the brothers, recognising now their brotherhood, circled round Benjamin, and, to a man, resolved to go back with him to Egypt. We cannot argue from this that Joseph had misapprehended the state of mind in which his brothers were, and in his judgment of them had been either too timorous or too severe; nor need we suppose that he was hampered by his relations to Pharaoh, and therefore unwilling to connect himself too closely with men of whom he might be safer to be rid; because it was this very peril of Benjamin's that matured their brotherly affection. They themselves could not have anticipated that they would make such a sacrifice for Benjamin. But throughout their dealings with this mysterious Egyptian, they felt themselves under a spell, and were being gradually, though perhaps unconsciously, softened, and in order to complete the change passing upon them, they but required some such incident as this of Benjamin's arrest. This incident seemed by some strange fatality to threaten them with a renewed perpetration of the very crime they had committed against Rachel's other son. It threatened to force them to become again the instruments of bereaving their father of his darling child, and bringing about that very calamity which they had pledged themselves should never happen. It was an incident, therefore, which, more than any other, was likely to call out their family love. The scene lives in every one's memory. They were going gladly back to their own country with corn enough for their children, proud of their entertainment by the lord of Egypt; anticipating their father's exultation when he heard how generously they had been treated and when he saw Benjamin safely restored, feeling that in bringing him back they almost compensated for having bereaved him of Joseph. Simeon is revelling in the free air that blew from Canaan and brought with it the scents of his native land, and breaks into the old songs that the strait confinement of his prison had so long silenced; all of them together rejoicing in a scarcely hoped-for success, when suddenly, ere the first elation is spent, they are startled to see the hasty approach of the Egyptian messenger, and to hear the stern summons that brought them to a halt, and boded all ill. The few words of the just Egyptian, and his calm, explicit judgment, "Ye have done evil in so doing," pierce them like a keen blade – that they should be suspected of robbing one who had dealt so generously with them; that all Israel should be put to shame in the sight of the stranger! But they begin to feel relief as one brother after another steps forward with the boldness of innocence; and as sack after sack is emptied, shaken, and flung aside, they already eye the steward with the bright air of triumph; when, as the very last sack is emptied, and as all breathlessly stand round, amid the quickrustle of the corn, the sharp rattle of metal strikes on their ear, and the gleam of silver dazzles their eyes as the cup rolls out in the sunshine. This, then, is

the brother of whom their father was so careful that he dared not suffer him out of his sight! This is the precious youth whose life was of more value than the lives of all the brethren, and to keep whom a few months longer in his father's sight Simeon had been left to rot in a dungeon! This is how he repays the anxiety of the family and their love, and this is how he repays the extraordinary favour of Joseph! By one rash childish act had this fondled youth, to all appearance, brought upon the house of Israel irretrievable disgrace, if not complete extinction. Had these men been of their old temper, their knives had very speedily proved that their contempt for the deed was as great as the Egyptian s; by violence towards Benjamin they might have cleared themselves of all suspicion of complicity; or, at the best, they might have considered themselves to be acting in a fair and even lenient manner if they had surrendered the culprit to the steward, and once again carried back to their father a tale of blood. But they were under the spell of their old sin. In all disaster, however innocent they now were, they saw the retribution of their old iniquity; they seem scarcely to consider whether Benjamin was innocent or guilty, but as humbled, God-smitten men, "they rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city." Thus Joseph in seeking to gain one brother found eleven – for now there could be no doubt that they were very different men from those brethren who had so heartlessly sold into slavery their father's favourite – men now with really brotherly feelings, by penitence and regard for their father so wrought together into one family, that this calamity, intended to fall only on one of their number, did in falling on him fall on them all. So far from wishing now to rid themselves of Rachel's son and their father's favourite, who had been put by their father in so prominent a place in his affection, they will not even give him up to suffer what seemed the just punishment of his theft, do not even reproach him with having brought them all into disgrace and difficulty, but, as humbled men who knew they had greater sins of their own to answer for, went quietly back to Egypt, determined to see their younger brother through his misfortune or to share his bondage with him. Had these men not been thoroughly changed, thoroughly convinced that at all costs upright dealing and brotherly love should continue; had they not possessed that first and last of Christian virtues, love to their brother, then nothing could so certainly have revealed their want of it as this apparent theft of Benjamin's. It seemed in itself a very likely thing that a lad accustomed to plain modes of life, and whose character it was to "ravin as a wolf," should, when suddenly introduced to, the gorgeous Egyptian banqueting house with all its sumptuous furnishings, have coveted some choice specimen of Egyptian art, to carry home to his father as proof that he could not only bring himself back in safety, but scorned to come back from any expedition empty-handed. It was not unlikely either that, with his mother's own superstition, he might have conceived the bold design of robbing this Egyptian, so mysterious and so powerful, according to his brothers account, and of breaking that spell which he had thrown over them; he may thus have conceived the idea of achieving for himself a reputation in the family, and of once for all redeeming himself from the somewhat undignified, and to one of his spirit somewhat uncongenial, position of the youngest of a family. If, as is possible, he had let any such idea ooze out in talking with his brethren as they went down to Egypt, and only abandoned it on their indignant and urgent remonstrance, then when the cup, Joseph's chief treasure according to his own account, was discovered in Benjamin's sack, the case must have looked sadly against him even in the eyes of his brethren. No protestations of innocence in a particular instance avail much when the character and general habits of the accused point to guilt. It is quite possible, therefore, that the brethren, though willing to believe Benjamin, were yet not so thoroughly convinced of his innocence as they would have desired. The

fact that they themselves had found their money returned in their sacks, made for Benjamin; yet in most cases, especially where circumstances corroborate it, an accusation even against the innocent takes immediate hold and cannot be summarily and at once got rid of. Thus was proof given that the house of Israel was now in truth one family. The men who, on very slight instigation, had without compunction sold Joseph to a life of slavery, cannot now find it in their heart to abandon a brother who, to all appearance, was worthy of no better life than that of a slave, and who had brought them all into disgrace and danger. Judah had no doubt pledged himself to bring the lad back without scathe to his father, but he had done so without contemplating the possibility of Benjamin becoming amenable to Egyptian law. And no one can read the speech of Judah – one of the most pathetic on record – in which he replies to Joseph's judgment that Benjamin alone should remain in Egypt, without perceiving that he speaks not as one who merely seeks to redeem a pledge, but as a good son and a good brother. He speaks, too, as the mouth piece of the rest, and as he had taken the lead in Joseph's sale, so he does not shrink from standing forward and accepting the heavy responsibility which may now light upon the man who represents these brethren. His former faults are redeemed by the courage, one may say heroism, he now shows. And as he spoke, so the rest felt. They could not bring themselves to inflict a new sorrow on their aged father; neither could they bear to leave their young brother in the hands of strangers. The passions which had alienated them from one another, and had threatened to break up the family, are subdued. There is now discernible a common feeling that binds them together, and a common object for which they willingly sacrifice themselves. They are, therefore, now prepared to pass into that higher school to which God called them in Egypt. It mattered little what strong and equitable laws they found in the land of their adoption, if they had no taste for upright living; it mattered little what thorough national organization they would be brought into contact with in Egypt, if in point of fact they owned no common brotherhood, and were willing rather to live as units and every man for himself than for any common interest. But now they were prepared, open to teaching, and docile. To complete our apprehension of the state of mind into which the brethren were brought by Joseph's treatment of them, we must take into account the assurance he gave them, when he made himself known to them, that it was not they but God who had sent him into Egypt, and that God had done this for the purpose of preserving the whole house of Israel. At first sight this might seem to be an injudicious speech, calculated to make the brethren think lightly of their guilt, and to remove the just impressions they now entertained of the unbrotherliness of their conduct to Joseph. And it might have been an injudicious speech to impenitent men; but no further view of sin can lighten its heinousness to a really penitent sinner. Prove to him that his sin has become the means of untold good, and you only humble him the more, and more deeply convince him that while he was recklessly gratifying himself and sacrificing others for his own pleasure, God has been mindful of others, and, pardoning him, has blessed them. God does not need our sins to work out His good intentions, but we give Him little other material; and the discovery that through our evil purposes and injurious deeds God has worked out His beneficent will, is certainly not calculated to make us think more lightly of our sin or more highly of ourselves. Joseph in thus addressing his brethren did, in fact, but add to their feelings the tenderness that is in all religious conviction, and that springs out of the consciousness that in all our sin there has been with us a holy and loving Father, mindful of His children. This is the final stage of penitence. The knowledge that God has prevented our sin from doing the harm it might have done, does relieve the bitterness and despair with which we view our life, but at the same time it strengthens the most effectual

bulwark between us and sin – love to a holy, over-ruling God. This, therefore, may always be safely said to penitents: Out of your worst sin God can bring good to yourself or to others, and good of an apparently necessary kind; but good of a permanent kind can result from your sin only when you have truly repented of it, and sincerely wish you had never done it. Once this repentance is really wrought in you, then, though your life can never be the same as it might have been had you not sinned, it may be, in some respects, a more richly developed life, a life fuller of humility and love. You can never have what you sold for your sin; but the poverty your sin has brought may excite within you thoughts and energies more valuable than what you have lost, as these men lost a brother but found a Saviour. The wickedness that has often made you bow your head and mourn in secret, and which is in itself unutterable shame and loss, may, in God's hand, become food against the day of famine. You cannot ever have the enjoyments which are possible only to those whose conscience is laden with no evil remembrances, and whose nature, uncontracted and unwithered by familiarity with sin, can give itself to enjoyment with the abandonment and fearlessness reserved for the innocent. No more at all will you have that fineness of feeling which only ignorance of evil can preserve; no more that high and great conscientiousness which, once broken, is never repaired; no more that respect from other men which for ever and instinctively departs from those who have lost self-respect. But you may have a more intelligent sympathy with other men, and a keener pity for them; the experience you have gathered too late to save yourself may put it in your power to be of essential service to others. You cannot win your way back to the happy, useful, evenly-developed life of the comparatively innocent, but the life of the true-hearted penitent is yet open to you. Every beat of your heart now may be as if it throbbed against a poisoned dagger, every duty may shame you, every day bring weariness and new humiliation, but let no pain or discouragement avail to defraud you of the good fruits of true reconciliation to God and submission to His lifelong discipline. See that you lose not both lives, the life of the comparatively innocent and the life of the truly penitent.

02.13. LECTURE XIII: THE RECONCILIATION

LECTURE XIII THE RECONCILIATION

Genesis 45:1-28 “That heart which had grown old, but had corrupted not.”

“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.” Hebrews 11:22

IT is generally by some circumstance or event which perplexes, troubles, or gladdens us, that new thoughts regarding conduct are presented to us, and new impulses communicated to our life. And the circumstances through which Joseph’s brethren passed during the famine not only subdued and softened them to a genuine family feeling, but elicited in Joseph himself a more tender affection for them than he seems at first to have cherished. For the first time since his entrance into Egypt did he feel, when Judah spoke so touchingly and effectively, that the family of Israel was one; and that he himself would be reprehensible did he make further breaches in it by carrying out his intention of detaining Benjamin. Moved by Judah’s pathetic appeal, and yielding to the generous impulse of the moment, and being led by a right state of feeling to a right judgment regarding duty, he claimed his brethren as brethren, and proposed that the whole family be brought into Egypt. The scene in which the sacred writer describes the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers is one of the most touching on record; – the long estrangement so happily terminated; the caution, the doubts, the hesitation on Joseph’s part, swept away at last by the resistless tide of long pent-up emotion; the surprise and perplexity of the brethren as they dared now to lift their eyes and scrutinize the face of the governor, and discerned the lighter complexion of the Hebrew, the features of the family of Jacob, the expression of their own brother; the anxiety with which they wait to know how he means to repay their crime, and the relief with which they hear that he bears them no ill-will – everything, in short, conduces to render this recognition of the brethren interesting and affecting. That Joseph, who had controlled his feeling in many a trying situation, should now have “wept aloud,” needs no explanation. Tears always express a mingled feeling; at least the tears of a man do. They may express grief, but it is grief with some remorse in it, or it is grief passing into resignation. They may express joy, but it is joy born of long sorrow, the joy of deliverance, joy that can now afford to let the heart weep out the fears it has been holding down. It is as with a kind of breaking of the heart, and apparent unmanning of the man, that the human soul takes possession of its greatest treasures; unexpected success and unmerited joy humble a man; and as laughter expresses the surprise of the intellect, so tears express the amazement of the soul when it is stormed suddenly by a great joy. Joseph had been hardening himself to lead a solitary life in Egypt, and it is with all this strong self-sufficiency breaking down within him that he eyes his brethren. It is his love for them making its way through all his ability to do without them, and sweeping away as a flood the bulwarks he had built round his heart, – it is this that breaks him down before them, a man conquered by his own love, and unable to control it. It compels him to make himself known, and to possess himself of its objects, these unconscious brethren. It is a signal instance of the law by which love brings all the best and holiest beings into

contact with their inferiors, and, in a sense, puts them in their power, and thus eternally provides that the superiority of those that are high in the scale of being shall ever be at the service of those who in themselves are not so richly endowed. The higher any being is, the more love is in him: that is to say, the higher he is, the more surely is he bound to all who are beneath him. If God is highest of all, it is because there is in Him sufficiency for all His creatures, and love to make it universally available. It is one of our most familiar intellectual pleasures to see in the experience of others, or to read, a lucid and moving account of emotions identical with those which have once been our own. In reading an account of what others have passed through, our pleasure is derived mainly from two sources – either from our being brought, by sympathy with them and in imagination, into circumstances we ourselves have never been placed in, and thus artificially enlarging our sphere of life, and adding to our experience feelings which could not have been derived from any thing we ourselves have met with; or, from our living over again, by means of their experience, a part of our life which had great interest and meaning to us. It may be excusable, therefore, if we divert this narrative from its original historical significance, and use it as the mirror in which we may see reflected an important passage or crisis in our own spiritual history. For though some may find in it little that reflects their own experience, others cannot fail to be reminded of feelings with which they were very familiar when first they were introduced to Christ, and acknowledged by Him. 1. The modes in which our Lord makes Himself known to men are various as their lives and characters. But frequently the fore-running choice of a sinner by Christ is discovered in such gradual and ill-understood dealings as Joseph used with these brethren. It is the closing of a net around them. They do not see what is driving them forward, nor whither they are being driven; they are anxious and ill at ease; and not comprehending what ails them, they make only ineffectual efforts for deliverance. There is no recognition of the hand that is guiding all this circuitous and mysterious preparatory work, nor of the eye that affectionately watches their perplexity, nor are they aware of any friendly ear that catches each sigh in which they seem hopelessly to resign themselves to the relentless past from which they cannot escape. They feel that they are left alone to make what they can now of the life they have chosen and made for themselves; that there is floating behind and around them a cloud bearing the very essence exhaled from their past, and ready to burst over them; a phantom that is yet real, and that belongs both to the spiritual and material world, and can follow them in either. They seem to be doomed men – men who are never at all to get disentangled from their old sin. If anyone is in this baffled and heartless condition, fearing even good lest it turn to evil in his hand; afraid to take the money that lies in his sack’s mouth, because he feels there is a snare in it; if anyone is sensible that life has become unmanageable in his hands, and that he is being drawn on by an unseen power which he does not understand, then let him consider in the scene before us how such a condition ends or may end. It took many months of doubt, and fear, and mystery to bring these brethren to such a state of mind as made it advisable for Joseph to disclose himself, to scatter the mystery, and relieve them of the unaccountable uneasiness that possessed their minds. And your perplexity will not be allowed to last longer than it is needful. But it is often needful that we should first learn that in sinning we have introduced into our life a baffling, perplexing element, have brought our life into connection with inscrutable laws which we cannot control, and which we feel may at any moment destroy us utterly. It is not from carelessness on Christ’s part that His people are not always and from the first rejoicing in the assurance and appreciation of His love. It is His carefulness which lays a restraining hand on the ardour of His affection. We see that this burst of

tears on Joseph's part was genuine, we have no suspicion that he was feigning an emotion he did not feel; we believe that his affection at last could not be restrained, that he was fairly overcome, – can we not trust Christ for as genuine a love, and believe that His emotion is as deep? We are, in a word, reminded by this scene, that there is always in Christ a greater love seeking the friendship of the sinner than there is in the sinner seeking for Christ. The search of the sinner for Christ is always a dubious, hesitating, uncertain groping; while on Christ's part there is a clear-seeing, affectionate solicitude which lays joyful surprises along the sinner's path, and enjoys by anticipation the gladness and repose which are prepared for him in the final recognition and reconcilement. 2. In finding their brother again, these sons of Jacob found also their own better selves which they had long lost. They had been living in a lie, unable to look the past in the face, and so becoming more and more false. Trying to leave their sin behind them, they always found it rising in the path before them, and again they had to resort to some new mode of laying this uneasy ghost. They turned away from it, busied themselves among other people, refused to think of it, assumed all kinds of disguise, professed to themselves that they had done no great wrong; but nothing gave them deliverance – there was their old sin quietly waiting for them in their tent door when they went home of an evening, laying its hand on their shoulder in the most unlooked-for places, and whispering in their ear at the most unwelcome seasons. A great part of their mental energy had been spent in deleting this mark from their memory, and yet day by day it resumed its supreme place in their life, holding them under arrest as they secretly felt, and keeping them reserved to judgment. So, too, do many of us live as if yet we had not found the life eternal, the kind of life that we can always go on with – rather as those who are but making the best of a life which can never be very valuable, nor ever perfect. There seem voices calling us back, assuring us we must yet retrace our steps, that there are passages in our past with which we are not done, that there is an inevitable humiliation and penitence awaiting us. It is through that we can alone get back to the good we once saw and hoped for; there were right desires and resolves in us once, views of a well-spent life which have been forgotten and pressed out of remembrance, but all these rise again in the presence of Christ. Reconciled to Him and claimed by Him, all hope is renewed within us. If He makes Himself known to us, if He claims connection with us, have we not here the promise of all good? If He, after careful scrutiny, after full consideration of all the circumstances, bids us claim as our brother Him to whom all power and glory are given, ought not this to quicken within us everything that is hopeful, and ought it not to strengthen us for all frank acknowledgment of the past, and true humiliation on account of it? 3. A third suggestion is made by this narrative. Joseph commanded from his presence all who might be merely curious spectators of his burst of feeling, and might, themselves unmoved, criticise this new feature of the governor's character. In all love there is a similar reserve. The true friend of Christ, the man who is profoundly conscious that between himself and Christ there is a bond unique and eternal, longs for a time when he may enjoy greater liberty in uttering what he feels towards his Lord and Redeemer, and when, too, Christ Himself shall by telling and sufficient signs put it for ever beyond doubt that this love is more than responded to. Words sufficiently impassioned have indeed been put into our lips by men of profound spiritual feeling, but the feeling continually weighs upon us that some more palpable mutual recognition is desirable between persons so vitally and peculiarly knit together as Christ and the Christian arc. Such recognition, indubitable and reciprocal, must one day take place. And when Christ Himself shall have taken the initiative, and shall have caused us to understand that we are "verily the objects of His love, and shall have given such expression to His

knowledge of us as we cannot now receive, we on our part shall be able to reciprocate, or at least to accept, this greatest of possessions, the brotherly love of the Son of God. Meanwhile this passage in Joseph's history may remind us that behind all sternness of expression there may pulsate a tenderness that needs thus to disguise itself; and that to those who have not yet recognised Christ, He is better than He seems. These brethren no doubt wonder now that even twenty years alienation should have so blinded them. The relaxation of the expression from the sternness of an Egyptian governor to the fondness of family love, the voice heard now in the familiar mother tongue, reveal the brother; and they who have shrunk from Christ as if He were a cold official, and who have never lifted their eyes to scrutinize His face, are reminded that He can so make Himself known to them that not all the wealth of Egypt would purchase from them one of the assurances they have received from Him. The same warm tide of feeling which carried away all that separated Joseph from his brethren bore him on also to the decision to invite his father's entire household into Egypt. We are reminded that the history of Joseph in Egypt is an episode, and that Jacob is still the head of the house, maintaining its dignity and guiding its movements. The notices we get of him in this latter part of his history are very characteristic. The indomitable toughness of his youth remained with him in his old age. He was one of those old men who maintain their vigour to the end, the energy of whose age seems to shame and overtax the prime of common men; whose minds are still the clearest, their advice the safest, their word waited for, their perception of the actual state of affairs always in advance of their juniors, more modern and fully abreast of the times in their ideas than the latest born of their children. Such an old age we recognise in Jacob's half-scornful chiding of the helplessness of his sons even after they had heard that there was corn in Egypt. "Why look ye one upon another? Behold! I have heard that there is corn in Egypt; get ye down thither and buy for us from thence." Jacob, the man who had wrestled through life and bent all things to his will, cannot put up with the help less dejection of this troop of strong men, who have no wit to devise an escape for themselves, and no resolution to enforce upon the others any device that may occur to them. Waiting still like children for someone else to help them, having strength to endure but no strength to undertake the responsibility of advising in an emergency, they are roused by their father who has been eyeing this condition of theirs with some curiosity and with some contempt, and now breaks in upon it with his "Why look ye one upon another?" It is the old Jacob, full of resources, prompt and imperturbable, equal to every turn of fortune, and never knowing how to yield. Even more clearly do we see the vigour of Jacob's old age when he comes in contact with Joseph. For many years Joseph had been accustomed to command; he had unusual natural sagacity and a special gift of insight from God, but he seems a child in comparison with Jacob. When he brings his two sons to get their grandfather's blessing, Jacob sees what Joseph has no inkling of, and peremptorily declines to follow the advice of his wise son. With all Joseph's sagacity there were points in which his blind father saw more clearly than he. Joseph, who could teach the Egyptian senators wisdom, standing thus at a loss even to understand his father, and suggesting in his ignorance futile corrections, is a picture of the incapacity of natural affection to rise to the wisdom of God's love, and of the finest natural discernment to anticipate God's purposes or supply the place of a lifelong experience. Jacob's warm-heartedness has also survived the chills and shocks of a long lifetime. He clings now to Benjamin as once he clung to Joseph. And as he had wrought for Rachel fourteen years, and the love he bare to her made them seem but a few days, so for twenty years now had he remembered Joseph who had inherited this love, and he shows by his frequent reference to him

that he was keeping his word and going down to the grave mourning for his son. To such a man it must have been a severe trial indeed to be left alone in his tents, deprived of all his twelve sons; and we hear his old faith in God steadying the voice that yet trembles with emotion as he says, “If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.” It was a trial not, indeed, so painful as that of Abraham when he lifted the knife over the life of his only son; but it was so similar to it as inevitably to suggest it to the mind. Jacob also had to yield up all his children, and to feel, as he sat solitary in his tent, how utterly dependent upon God he was for their restoration; that it was not he but God alone who could build the house of Israel. The anxiety with which he gazed evening after evening towards the setting sun, to descry the returning caravan, was at last relieved. But his joy was not altogether unalloyed. His sons brought with them a summons to shift the patriarchal encampment into Egypt – a summons which evidently nothing would have induced Jacob to respond to had it not come from his long lost Joseph, and had it not thus received what he felt to be a divine sanction. The extreme reluctance which Jacob showed to the journey, we must be careful to refer to its true source. The Asiatics, and especially shepherd tribes, move easily. One who thoroughly knows the East says: “The Oriental is not afraid to go far, if he has not to cross the sea; for, once uprooted, distance makes little difference to him. He has no furniture to carry, for, except a carpet and a few brass pans, he uses none. He has no trouble about meals, for he is content with parched grain, which his wife can cook anywhere, or dried dates, or dried flesh, or anything obtainable which will keep. He is, on a march, careless where he sleeps, provided his family are around him – in a stable, under a porch, in the open air. He never changes his clothes at night, and he is profoundly indifferent to everything that the Western man understands by comfort. “But there was in Jacob’s case a peculiarity. He was called upon to abandon, for an indefinite period, the land which God had given him as the heir of His promise. With very great toil and not a little danger had Jacob won his way back to Canaan from Mesopotamia; on this return he had spent the best years of his life, and now he was resting there in his old age, having seen his children’s children, and expecting nothing but a peaceful departure to his fathers. But suddenly the wagons of Pharaoh stand at his tent-door, and while the parched and bare pastures bid him go to the plenty of Egypt, to which the voice of his long lost son invites him, he hears a summons which, however trying, he cannot disregard. Such an experience is perpetually reproduced. Many are they who having at length received from God some long-expected good are quickly summoned to relinquish it again. And while the waiting for what seems indispensable to us is trying, it is tenfold more so to have to part with it when at last obtained, and obtained at the cost of much besides. That particular arrangement of our worldly circumstances which we have long sought, we are almost immediately thrown out of. That position in life, or that object of desire, which God Himself seems in many ways to have encouraged us to seek, is taken from us almost as soon as we have tasted its sweetness. The cup is dashed from our lips at the very moment when our thirst was to be fully slaked. In such distressing circumstances we cannot see the end God is aiming at; but of this we may be certain, that He does not wantonly annoy, or relish our discomfiture, and that when we are compelled to resign what is partial, it is that we may one day enjoy what is complete, and that if for the present we have to forego much comfort and delight, this is only an absolutely necessary step towards our permanent establishment in all that can bless and prosper us. It is this state of feeling which explains the words of Jacob when introduced to Pharaoh. A recent writer who spent some years on the banks of the Nile and on its waters, and who mixed freely with the inhabitants of Egypt, says: “Old Jacob’s speech to Pharaoh really made me laugh because it is so

exactly like what a Fellah says to a Pasha, Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, Jacob being a most prosperous man, but it is manners to say all that." But Eastern manners need scarcely be called in to explain a sentiment which we find repeated by one who is generally esteemed the most self-sufficing of Europeans. "I have ever been esteemed," Goethe says, "one of Fortune's chiefest favourites; nor will I complain or find fault with the course my life has taken. Yet, truly, there has been nothing but toil and care; and I may say that, in all my seventy-five years, I have never had a month of genuine comfort. It has been the perpetual rolling of a stone, which I have always had to raise anew." Jacob's life had been almost ceaseless disquiet and disappointment. A man who had fled his country, who had been cheated into a marriage, who had been compelled by his own relative to live like a slave, who was only by flight able to save himself from a perpetual injustice, whose sons made his life bitter, – one of them by the foulest outrage a father could suffer, two of them by making him, as he himself said, to stink in the nostrils of the inhabitants of the land he was trying to settle in, and all of them by conspiring to deprive him of the child he most dearly loved – a man who at last, when he seemed to have had experience of every form of human calamity, was compelled by famine to relinquish the land for the sake of which he had endured all and spent all, might surely be forgiven a little plaintiveness in looking back upon his past. The wonder is to find Jacob to the end unbroken, dignified, and clear-seeing, capable and commanding, loving and full of faith. Cordial as the reconciliation between Joseph and his brethren seemed, it was not as thorough as might have been desired. So long, indeed, as Jacob lived, all went well; but "when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him." No wonder Joseph wept when he received their message. He wept because he saw that he was still misunderstood and distrusted by his brethren; because he felt, too, that had they been more generous men themselves, they would more easily have believed in his forgiveness; and because his pity was stirred for these men, who recognised that they wore so completely in the power of their younger brother. Joseph had passed through severe conflicts of feeling about them, had been at great expense both of emotion and of outward good on their account, had risked his position in order to be able to serve them, and here is his reward! They supposed he had been but biding his time, that his apparent forgetfulness of their injury had been the crafty restraint of a deep-seated resentment; or at best, that he had been unconsciously influenced by regard for his father, and now, when that influence was removed, the helpless condition of his brethren might tempt him to retaliate. This exhibition of a craven and suspicious spirit is unexpected, and must have been profoundly saddening to Joseph. Yet here, as elsewhere, he is magnanimous. Pity for them turns his thoughts from the injustice done to himself. He comforts them, and speaks kindly to them, saying, Fear ye not; I will nourish you and your little ones. Many painful thoughts must have been suggested to Joseph by this conduct. If, after all he had done for his brethren, they had not yet learned to love him, but met his kindness with suspicion, was it not probable that underneath his apparent popularity with the Egyptians there might lie envy, or the cold acknowledgment that falls far short of love? This sudden disclosure of the real feeling of his brethren towards him must necessarily have made him uneasy about his other friendships. Did every one merely make use of him, and did no one give him pure love for his own sake? The people he had saved from famine, was there one of them that regarded him with anything resembling personal affection? Distrust seemed to pursue Joseph from first to last. First his own family misunderstood and persecuted him. Then his Egyptian master had returned his devoted service with suspicion and imprisonment.

And now again, after sufficient time for testing his character might seem to have elapsed, he was still looked upon with distrust by those who of all others had best reason to believe in him. But though Joseph had through all his life been thus conversant with suspicion, cruelty, falsehood, ingratitude, and blindness, though he seemed doomed to be always misread, and to have his best deeds made the ground of accusation against him, he remained not merely unsoured, but equally ready as ever to be of service to all. The finest natures may be disconcerted and deadened by universal distrust; characters not naturally unamiable are sometimes embittered by suspicion; and persons who are in the main high-minded, do stoop, when stung by such treatment, to rail at the world, or to question all generous emotion, steadfast friendship, or unimpeachable integrity. In Joseph there is nothing of this. If ever man had a right to complain of being unappreciated, it was he; if ever man was tempted to give up making sacrifices for his relatives, it was he. But through all this he bore himself with manly generosity, with simple and persistent faith, with a dignified respect for himself and for other men. In the ingratitude and injustice he had to endure, he only found opportunity for a deeper unselfishness, a more God-like forbearance. And that such may be the outcome of the sorest parts of human experience we have one day or other need to remember. When our good is evil spoken of, our motives suspected, our most sincere sacrifices scrutinized by an ignorant and malicious spirit, our most substantial and well-judged acts of kindness received with suspicion, and the love that is in them quite rejected, it is then we have opportunity to show that to us belongs the Christian temper that can pardon till seventy times seven, and that can persist in loving where love meets no response, and benefits provoke no gratitude. How Joseph spent the years which succeeded the famine, we have no means of knowing; but the closing act of his life seemed to the narrator so significant as to be worthy of record. “Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.” The Egyptians must have chiefly been struck by the simplicity of character which this request betokened. To the great benefactors of our country, the highest award is reserved to be given after death So long as a man lives, some rude stroke of fortune or some disastrous error of his own may blast his fame; but when his bones are laid with those who have served their country best, a seal is set on his life, and a sentence pronounced which the revision of posterity rarely revokes. Such honours were customary among the Egyptians; it is from their tombs that their history can now be written. And to none were such honours more accessible than to Joseph. But after a life in the service of the state, he retains the simplicity of the Hebrew lad. With the magnanimity of a great and pure soul, he passed uncontaminated through the flatteries and temptations of court life; and, like Moses, “esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” He has not indulged in any affectation of simplicity, nor has he, in the pride that apes humility, declined the ordinary honours due to a man in his position. lie wears the badges of office, the robe and the gold necklace, but these things do not reach his spirit. He has lived in a region in which such honours make no deep impression; and in his death he shows where his heart has been. The small voice of God, spoken centuries ago to his forefathers, deafens him to the loud acclaim with which the people do him homage. By later generations this dying request of Joseph’s was looked upon as one of the most remarkable instances of faith. For many years there had been no new revelation. The rising generations that had seen no man with whom God had spoken, were little interested in the land which was said to be theirs, but which they very well knew was infested by fierce tribes

who, on at least one occasion during this period, inflicted disastrous defeat on one of the boldest of their own tribes. They were, besides, extremely attached to the country of their adoption; they luxuriated in its fertile meadows and teeming gardens, which kept them supplied at little cost of labour with delicacies unknown on the hills of Canaan. This oath, therefore, which Joseph made them swear, may have revived the drooping hopes of the small remnant who had any of his own spirit. They saw that he, their most sagacious man, lived and died in full assurance that God would visit His people. And through all the terrible bondage they were destined to suffer, the bones of Joseph, or rather his embalmed body, stood as the most eloquent advocate of God's faithfulness, ceaselessly reminding the despondent generations of the oath which God would yet enable them to fulfil. As often as they felt inclined to give up all hope and the last surviving Israelitish peculiarity, there was the unburied coffin remonstrating; Joseph still, even when dead, refusing to let his dust mingle with Egyptian earth. And thus, as Joseph had been their pioneer who broke out a way for them into Egypt, so did he continue to hold open the gate and point the way back to Canaan. The brethren had sold him into this foreign land, meaning to bury him for ever; he retaliated by requiring that the tribes should restore him to the land from whence he had been expelled. Few men have opportunity of showing so noble a revenge; fewer still having the opportunity, would so have used it. Jacob had been carried up to Canaan as soon as he was dead: Joseph declines this exceptional treatment, and prefers to share the fortunes of his brethren, and will then only enter on the promised land when all his people can go with him. As in life so in death, he took a large view of things, and had no feeling that the world ended in him. His career had taught him to consider national interests; and now, on his deathbed, it is from the point of view of his people that he looks at the future. Several passages in the life of Joseph have shown us that where the Spirit of Christ is present, many parts of the conduct will suggest, if they do not actually resemble, acts in the life of Christ. The attitude towards the future in which Joseph sets his people as he leaves them, can scarcely fail to suggest the attitude which Christians are called to assume. The prospect which the Hebrews had of fulfilling their oath grew increasingly faint, but the difficulties in the way of its performance must only have made them more clearly see that they depended on God for entrance on the promised inheritance. And so may the difficulty of our duties as Christ's followers measure for us the amount of grace God has provided for us. The commands that make you sensible of your weakness, and bring to light more clearly than ever how unfit for good you are, are witnesses to you that God will visit you and enable you to fulfil the oath He has required you to take. The children of Israel could not suppose that a man so wise as Joseph had ended his life with a childish folly, when he made them swear this oath, and could not but renew their hope that the day would come when his wisdom would be justified by their ability to discharge it. Neither ought it to be beyond our belief that, in requiring from us such and such conduct, our Lord has kept in view our actual condition and its possibilities and that His commands are our best guide towards a state of permanent felicity. He that aims always at the performance of the oath he has taken, will assuredly find that God will not stultify Himself by failing to support him.

Chapter 22

03.00. THE PARABLES OF OUR LORD

THE PARABLES OF OUR LORD BY MARCUS DODS, D.D.

AUTHOR OF “THE PRAYER THAT TEACHES US TO PRAY,”

“AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT,”

“ISRAEL’S IRON AGE,” ETC.

NEW YORK THOMAS WHITTAKER 2 AND 3 BIBLE HOUSE

03.01. THE SOWER

THE SOWER Matthew 13:1-9; Matthew 13:18-23 ; Luke 7:4-15 This parable had to be spoken. It gave expression to thoughts which burdened the mind of Jesus throughout His ministry. On the day He uttered it, he had left the house and was sitting by the sea-side, “and there were gathered unto Him great multitudes.” He had no difficulty in finding an audience. It is one of the greatest pleasures to listen to a good speaker. It is a pleasure which attracts young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. A good speaker is always sure of an audience, and especially where he has not to encounter the rivalry of books. But as Jesus watched the crowd assembling, and perceived the various dispositions with which the people came. He could not but reflect how much of what He had to say must certainly be lost on many. He knew He had that to tell men which, if received, would change the face of society, and turn the wilderness into a garden. He was conscious of that in His own mind which, could it only be conveyed into the minds of those pressing around Him, would cause their lives to flourish with righteousness, beauty, love, usefulness, and joy. He had “many things to say” to them, things that never yet had fallen and never again could fall from human lips; and yet who, of the thousands that listened, would believe? They came, some out of curiosity, some saying within themselves, “What will this sower of words say?” some out of hatred, seeking occasion against Him; but all thinking themselves entitled to hold and express an opinion regarding the importance or worthlessness of what He said. They needed to have their critical faculty exercised upon themselves, and to be reminded that in order to benefit by what He had to say, they must bring certain capacities. The parabolic form of teaching is pleasant to listen to; it is easily retained in the memory; it stimulates thought, each man being left to find an interpretation for himself; and it avoids the offensiveness of direct rebuke. To the crowd Jesus speaks only of the sower in the fields, and makes no explicit reference to Himself or to them. The object of this parable, then, is to explain the causes of the failure and success of the gospel. Apart from experience, it might have been supposed that our Lord had only to proclaim His kingdom in order to gather all men to His standard. If it were so that God desired all men to enter into everlasting joy, did not this remove every difficulty, and secure the happiness of all? Could such a messenger and such a message fail to move every one who came in contact with them? Alas! even after so many centuries Christianity is not the one only religion men believe in; and even where it is professed, it is most inadequately understood and received. Why, then, is it so? why, to so lamentable an extent does every agency for the extension of Christ’s kingdom fail? It fails, says our Lord, not because the claims of the kingdom are doubtful, not because they are inappropriately urged — these causes may no doubt sometimes operate — but the kingdom fails to extend because the fructification of the seed of the word depends upon the nature of the soil it falls upon, and because that soil is often impervious, often shallow, often dirty. The seed is not in fault, the sowing is not in fault, but the soil is faulty — a statement of the case as little accepted by those in our own day who discuss Christ’s claims, as it was by our Lord’s contemporaries.

1. The first faultiness of soil our Lord specifies in the words, “Some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up;” and the interpretation or spiritual analogue He gives in the

words, “When any one heareth the word of the kingdom and understandeth it not then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.” The beaten footpath that crosses the corn-field, and that is maintained year after year, or the cart-track along the side of the field, may serve a very useful purpose, but certainly it will grow no corn. The hard surface does not admit the seed: you might as well scatter seed on a wooden table, or a pavement, or a mirror. The seed may be of the finest quality, but for all the purposes of sowing you might as well sprinkle pebbles or shot. It lies on the surface. This state of matters then represents that hearing of the word which manages to keep the word entirely outside. The word has been heard, but that is all. It has not even entered the understanding. It has been heard as men listen to what is said in a foreign language. The mind is not interested; it is roused to no inquiry, provoked to no contradiction. You have sometimes occasion to suggest a different course of action to a friend; and, in order to do so, you mention a fact which should be sufficient to alter his purpose, but you find he has not apprehended its significance, has not seen its bearing — it has not fructified in his mind as you expected, and you say to yourself; “He does not take it in.” So says our Lord: there are hearers who do not take in what is said; they do not see the bearings of the word they hear; their understanding is impervious, impenetrable. Are there such hearers? Surely there are. There are persons on whom the seed of the word falls as by accident, and who have neither prepared themselves to hear it, nor make any effort to retain it. They are members of a church-going family, or they have formed a church-going habit of their own; they have perhaps their reason for being found side by side with those who hear with profit, but they do not come for the sake of hearing; they are not anxious to hear, thoughtful about what they hear, careful to retain it. There are careless persons who hear the word not as the result of a decision that it is to be heard; not as they would, on beginning the study of chemistry or of philosophy, seek out certain teachers and certain books; but as the hearing of the word happens to be the employment of the hour, they submit to this social convention, and they allow the seed of the kingdom to fall upon them with no more expectation than that with which they hear the passing salutation of a friend on the street, knowing that whether he says it is a fine day or not, it is equally without significance. This hearing of the word has come to be one of the many employments with which men fill up their time, and this hearer has never thought why, nor whether it does him any good or no. He has never considered why he personally should listen to this special kind of word, nor what he personally may expect as the result of it.

There are, in short, persons who, either from preoccupation with other thoughts and hopes, have their minds beaten hard and rendered quite impervious to thoughts of Christ’s kingdom, or from a natural slowness and hard frostiness of nature, hear the word without admitting it even to work in their understanding. They do not ponder what is heard, they do not check the statements they hear by their own thought; they do not consider the bearings of the gospel on themselves. When you propose to a farmer who is paying too high a rent to go to some part of the country where rents are lower, the idea will probably find entrance into his understanding. He may not ultimately adopt it, but it will stir a great many hopes and thoughts of various kinds in him, and he will find his mind dwelling on it day after day, and hour by hour, so that he can speak of little else. But the proposals made to the wayside hearer suggest nothing at all to him. His mind throws off Christ’s offers as a slated roof throws off hail. You might as well expect seed to grow on a tightly-braced drum-head as the word to profit such a hearer; it dances on the hard surface, and the slightest motion shakes it off. The consequence is, it is forgotten. When seed is scattered on a hard surface

it is not allowed to lie long. The birds devour it up. Every hedge, every tree, every roof contributes its eager few, and shortly not a corn remains. So when not even the mind has been interested in Christ's word, that word is quickly forgotten; the conversation on the way home from church, the thought of to-morrow's occupations, the sight of some one on the street — anything, is enough to take it clean away. In some persons the word is admitted though it does not at once bring forth fruit. As in the old fable the words spoken unheard in the Arctic circle were thawed into sound and became audible in warmer latitudes; so when a man passes into new circumstances and a state of life more congenial to the development of Christian discipleship, the word which has apparently been lost for years begins to stir and make itself heard in his soul. But it cannot be so with the wayside hearer, for in him the word has never found any manner of lodgment.

2. The second faultiness of soil our Lord enumerates is shallowness. What we commonly understand by "stony ground" is a field thickly strewn with small stones; not the best kind of soil, but quite available for growing corn. This is not the soil meant here. Our Lord speaks rather of rocky ground, where a thin surface of mold overlies an impenetrable rock. There is a mere dusting of soil on the surface; if you put a stick or a spade into it, you come upon the rock a few inches below. On such ground the seed quickly springs, there being no deepness of earth to allow of its spending time in rooting itself. And for the same reason it quickly withers when exposed to the fierce heats which benefit and mature strongly-rooted plants. Precocity and rapid growth are everywhere the forerunners of rapid decay. The oak that is to stand a thousand years does not shoot up like the hop or the creeper. Man whose age is seventy years has a slowly growing infancy and youth, while the insect grows up in a day and dies at night or at the week's end. The shallow hearer our Lord distinguishes by two characteristics; he straightway receives the word, and he receives it with joy. The man of deeper character receives the word with deliberation, as one who has many things to take into account and to weigh. He receives it with seriousness, and reverence, and trembling, foreseeing the trials he will be subjected to, and he cannot show a light-minded joy. The superficial character responds quickly because there is no depth of inner life. Difficulties which deter men of greater depth do not stagger the superficial. While other men are engaged in giving the word entrance into all the secret places of their life, and are confronting it with their most cherished feelings and ways, that they may clearly see the extent of the changes it will work: while they are pondering it in the majesty of its hope and the vastness of its revelation; while they are striving to forecast all its results in them and upon them; while they are hesitating because they are in earnest, and would receive the word for eternity or not at all, and would give it entrance to the whole of their being, or exclude it altogether, — while others are doing this, the superficial man has settled the whole matter out of hand, and he who yesterday was a known scoffer is to-day a loud-voiced child of the kingdom.

These men may often be mistaken for the most earnest Christians: indeed they are almost certainly taken to be the most earnest; you cannot see the root, and what is seen is shown in greatest luxuriance by the superficial. The earnest man has much of his energy to spend beneath the soil, he cannot show anything till he is sure of the root. He is often working away at the foundation while another is at the copestone. But the test comes. The very influences which exercise and mature the well-rooted character, wither the superficially rooted. The same shallowness of nature which made them susceptible to the gospel and quickly responsive, makes them susceptible to pain, suffering, hardship, and easily defeated. It is so in all departments of life.

The superficial are taken with every new thing. The boy is delighted with a new study or a new game, but becomes proficient in neither. The youth is charmed with volunteering, but one season of early rising is more than he can stand: or he is fascinated with the idea that history is an extremely profitable kind of reading; but you know quite well when he asks for the loan of the first volume of Gibbon or Grote, that he will never come to you for the last. The action of the shallow man is in every case hasty, not based on a carefully considered and resolutely accepted plan: he is charmed with the first appearances, and does not look into the matter, and forecast results and consequences. Accordingly, when consequences have to be faced, he is not prepared and gives way. But how, then, can the shallow man be saved? Is there no provision in the gospel for those who are born with a thin, poor nature? This question scarcely falls to be answered here, because the parable presents one truth regarding shallow natures, which is verified in thousands of instances. Men do thus deal with the word, and thus make shipwreck of faith, and that is all we have here to do with. But passing beyond the parable, it may be right to say that a man's nature may be deepened by the events, and relationships, and conflicts of life. Indeed, that much deepening of character is constantly effected, you may gather from the fact that while many young persons are shallow, the old persons whom you would characterize as shallow are comparatively few.

3. The third faultiness of soil which causes failure in the crop is what is technically known as dirt. The soil is not impenetrable, nor is it shallow; it is deep, good land, but it has not been cleaned — there is seed in it already. Sometimes you see a field of wheat brilliantly colored throughout with poppies; or a field of oats which it is difficult to cut on account of the dense growth of thistles, and of rank grass. But the soil can only feed a certain amount of vegetation, and every living weed means a choked blade of corn. This is a worse case than the others. No crop can be looked for on a beaten road, not much can be expected from a mere peppering of soil upon rock; but here there is rich, deep, loamy mould, that must be growing something, and would, if cared for, yield a magnificent harvest, and yet there is little or nothing but thorns. This is a picture of the preoccupied heart of the rich, vigorous nature, capable of understanding, appreciating, and making much of the word of the kingdom, but occupied with so many other interests, that only a small part of its energy is available for giving effect to Christ's ideas. These ideas are not excluded from the thoughts, they are welcomed; the mind is full of intelligent interest in Christian truth, and the heart has a real and profound sympathy with the work of Christ in the world and with His spirit, and yet, after all, little practical good proceeds from the man — Christian principle does not come to much in his case— the life shows little result of a specially Christian kind. The reason is that the man is occupied with a multitude of other views, and projects, and cares, and desires, and the peculiarly Christian seed does not get fair play. It influences him, but it is hindered and mixed up with so many other influences that the result is scarcely discernible. The peculiarity of a good field of wheat is not the density of the vegetation, but that the vegetation is all of one kind, is all wheat. Leave the field to itself, you will in a short time have quite as dense a vegetation, but it will be of a multifarious kind. That the field bears wheat only, is the result of cultivation — not merely of sowing wheat, but of preventing anything else from being sown. The first care of the diligent farmer is to clean his land. And as there is generally some one kind of weed to which the soil is congenial, and against which the farmer has to wage a continual war, so our Lord here specifies as specially dangerous to us "the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches." The care of this world has been called the poor man's species of the deceitfulness of riches, and the deceitfulness of riches a variety of the

care of this world. There are poor men who have no anxiety, and rich men who are not misled by their riches either into dependence on their wealth, or desire to make it more. But among rich men and poor men alike you will find some or many who would be left without any subject of thought, and any guiding principle in action, if you took from them anxiety about their own position in life. It is this from which all the fruit they bear springs. Take the actions of a year, the annual outcome or harvest of the man, and how much of what he has produced you can trace to this seed — to a mere anxiety about income and position. This is really the seed, this is all that is required to account for a large part of many men's actions. Our Lord therefore warns us that if the word is to do its work in us, and produce all the good it is meant to produce, it must have the field to itself. It will not do merely to give attention to the word while it is preached: the mind may be clean on the surface, while there remain great knots of roots below, which will inevitably spring up, and by their more inveterate growth choke the word. This is the mistake of many. It is proper, they know, to hear the word — proper to give it fair play. They do make an effort to banish worldly and anxious thoughts, and to give their attention to divine things, but even though they succeed in putting aside for the time distracting thoughts, what of that if they have not the care of the world up by the roots? Cutting down won't do: still less, a mere holding aside of the thorns till the seed be sown. What chance has the seed in a heart from which these eager thoughts and hopes are merely held back for the hour? The cares of the world will just swing over again and meet above the good seed, and shut out the day and every maturing influence. You receive to-day good impressions, you give the good seed entrance, and it begins to spring in you, it prompts you to a reasonable generosity and self-denial. To-morrow morning the tender blade of a desire to purify and prepare your spirit by some real and devout converse with God has sprung up in you, but the habitual craving to be at your work and lose no moment from business crushes and chokes the little blade, and it can no more lift its head. Or the seed has produced even the green ear of a growing habit of living under God's eye, of walking with God and bringing all your transactions before His judgment, — mature fruit seems on the point of being produced by you, when suddenly the promise of a rich harvest is choked by the old coarse thorn of a fondness for rapid profits, which leads you to ambiguous language, and reservations, and unfair dealings, such as you feel separate you from God, and dash your spiritual ardor, and make you feel like a fool and a knave both, when you speak of your citizenship being in heaven. It is vain, then, to hope for the only right harvest of a human life if your heart is sown with worldly ambitions, a greedy hasting to be rich, an undue love of comfort, a true earthliness of spirit. One seed only must be sown in and, you it will produce all needed diligence in business, as well as all fervor of spirit.

These, then, are the three faulty soils to which our Lord chiefly ascribes the failure of the sowing. The question arises, Does the result follow in the moral sowing and in the world of men as uniformly and inevitably as it follows in the sowing of corn in nature? In nature some soils are irreclaimable, vast tracts of the earth's surface are as useless as the sea for the purposes of growing grain. They may indirectly contribute to the fruitfulness of corn lands by influencing the climate, but no one thinks of cultivating these tracts themselves, of sowing the sands of Sahara or the ice-fields of Siberia. But the gospel is to be preached to every creature, because in man there is one important distinction from material nature; he is possessed of free will, of the power of checking to some extent natural tendencies, and preventing natural consequences. Accordingly, we cannot just accept the bare teaching of the parable as the whole truth regarding the operation of the gospel in man's heart, but only as one part of the truth, and that a most important part. The

parable enters into no consideration nor explanation of how men arrive at the spiritual conditions here enumerated; but, given those conditions — and they are certainly common however arrived at — given those conditions, the result is failure of the gospel. In contrast, then, to these three faults of impenetrability, shallowness, and dirt, we may be expected to do something towards bringing to the hearing of the word a soft, deep, clean soil of heart, or, as Luke calls it, “an honest and good heart.” There are differences in the crop even among those who bring good hearts; one bears thirty-fold, one sixty, one an hundred-fold. One man has natural advantages, opportunities of position, and so forth, which make his yield greater. One man may have had a larger proportion of seed; in his early days and all through his life he may have been in contact with the word, and in favoring circumstances. But wherever the word is received, and held fast, and patiently cared for, there the life will produce all that God cares to have from it.

Honesty is a prime requisite in hearing the word, and a rare one. Men listen honestly to a lecture on science or history, from which they expect information; but where conduct is aimed at, or a vote is concerned, men commonly listen with minds already made up. It is notorious that men vote as they meant to vote, no matter what, is said. If a Liberal were found voting with Conservatives on any important point, some mistake would be supposed. The last thing thought of would be that his convictions had been altered by the speaking. But if we are to hear the word as we ought, we must bring an honest heart, we must not listen with a mind already made up against the gospel, with no intention whatever of being persuaded, cherishing purposes and habits, alongside of which it is impossible the word should grow. On the contrary, we should consider that this is the seed proper to the human heart, and which can alone produce what human life should produce — the word of God, which we must listen to gratefully, humbly, sincerely, greedily, and with the firm purpose of giving it unlimited scope within us. But where is the attentive, painstaking scrutiny of the heart which this demands? Where is the careful husbandry of our souls, which would secure a kindly reception for the word? Where is the jealous challenging of every sentiment, habit, influence, association, that begs for a lodging within us? For where this is, and not elsewhere, we may expect the fruit of the kingdom. But even this is not enough. The fruitful hearer must not only bring an honest and good heart, he must keep the word. The farmer’s work is not finished when he has prepared the soil and sown the seed. If pains be not taken after the sowing, the seed that has fallen on good soil may be taken away as utterly as that which has fallen on the beaten path. The birds scatter over the whole field. We must therefore set a watcher; we must send the harrow over to cover in the seed, and the roller to give the plant a better hold on the soil. The word must not be allowed to take its chance, once it has been heard. Mere hearing does not secure fruit; it goes for nothing. Your labor is lost unless your mind goes back upon what you hear, and you see that it gets hold of you. All of us have already heard all that is necessary for life and godliness; it remains that we make it our own, that it secure a living root and place in us and in our life. In order to this we must keep the truth; we must bear it in mind, so that whatever else comes before the mind throws new light on it, and gives it a further hold upon us. We must not let the events of the world and the occurrences of our day thrust it from our minds, but must confront it with these, and test it by these, so that thus it may become more real to us, and have a vital influence. One truth received thus, brings forth more fruit than all truth merely understood. It is not the amount of knowledge you have, but the use you put it to — it is not the number of good sayings you have heard and can repeat, that will profit you, but the place in your hearts you have given them, and the connection they have with the motives, and principles, and ruling ideas of your life.

And, therefore, meditation has always been, and must always be, reckoned among the most indispensable means of grace. Since ever saints were, their saintliness has been in great part due to a habit of meditation. Without it, the other means of grace remain helplessly outside of us. The word does not profit except the mind be actively appropriating God's message and revolving it. Prayer is but a deluding form, that means nothing, expects nothing, and receives nothing, if meditation has not provided its material. Unless a man think upon his life and try his ways, his confession can but remove the scum from the surface, leaving the heart burdened and polluted; for the graver sins do not float, but sink deep, and must be dragged for with patience and skill, if not descried through a very rare natural clearness and simplicity of character. It is in the stillness and quiet of our hours of reflection, when the gusts of worldly engagements and desires have died down, that the seeds of grace are deposited in our souls. It is then that our thoughts are free to recognize reasons of humility and causes of thankfulness. It is then that the thought of God resumes its place in our souls, and that the unseen world reasserts its hold upon us. It is then only that the soul, taking a deliberate survey of its own matters, can discover its position and necessities, can assert its claims and determine its future, can begin the knowledge of all things by knowing itself. So that, "if there is a person, of whatever age, or class, or station, who will not be thoughtful, who will not seriously and honestly consider, there is no doing him any good." But there is probably no religious duty so distasteful as meditation to persons whose habits are formed in a state of society like our own. We are, for the most part, infected by the hastiness and overdone activity of the business world. The rapidity and exactness of mechanical action rule and regulate all our personal movements. We are learning to value only what gives us speedily and uniformly achieved and easily appreciated results. We are civilized so nearly to one common level, and are in possession of so many advantages which hitherto have been the monopoly of one class, that competition is keener than ever before; and all our time and energy are demanded for the one purpose of holding our own in things secular. But the dissatisfaction with slow processes, and the desire to get a great deal through our hands, must be checked when we come to the work of meditation. There are processes in nature which you can't hurry. You must let your milk stand, if you wish cream. And meditation is a process of mind whose necessary element is the absence of hurry. We must let the mind settle and discharge itself of all irritating distractions and fevering remembrances or hopes; we must reduce it to an equable state, from which it can look out dispassionately upon things, and no longer see the one engrossing object, but all that concerns us in due proportion and real position. The soul must learn to turn a deaf ear to the importunate requirements of the daily life, and turn leisurely and with an unpreoccupied mind to God. Were it only to keep the world at bay, and teach the things of it their subordinate place, these meditative pauses of the soul were of the richest use. A third and last requisite for the fructification of the seed is, according to Luke, patience. The husbandman does not expect to reap to-morrow what he sowed to-day. He does not incontinently plow up his field again, and sow another crop, if he does not at once see the ripe corn. He watches and waits, and through much that is disappointing and unpromising, nurses his plants to fruitfulness. We also must learn with patience to bring forth fruit; not despairing because we cannot at once do all we would; not sinking under the hardships, sacrifices, failures, sorrows, through which we must win our growth to true fruit-bearing, but animating and cheering our spirits with the sure hope that the seed we have received is vital, and will enable us to produce at last the sound and ripe fruit our lives were meant to yield. We must have patience both to endure all the privations, all the schooling, all the trial of various kinds which

may be needful to bring the seed of righteousness to maturity; and also to go on zealously yielding the perhaps despised fruits which are alone possible to us now, and striving always to strike our roots deeper and deeper into the true life.

03.02. THE TARES

THE TARES Matthew 13:24-30; Matthew 13:36-43 In this parable Christ warns His servants against expecting to see in this world that unmixedly good condition of society which will at length be brought about in the world to come. The kingdom of heaven is to have universal sway, it is to stand without rival and without mixture of evil, but the time is not yet. Those who are themselves within this kingdom must beware of acting as if the final judgment were already passed. At all times those who believe in God have been perplexed by the fact that this world is so far from a condition of unmingled good. Is it not God's world? He could not sow bad seed. Whence then the tares? Sometimes this has pressed very heavily on the faith of men. It seems so unaccountable a thing that the field of God should not produce an unexceptionable harvest. We believe that God created the world, and created it for a purpose, and originated whatever was needful for the accomplishment of this purpose. Whatever has proceeded from Him can have been only good. No degenerate or noxious grain can have escaped His hand. And yet, look at the result. How difficult in some parts of the field to see any fruit of God's sowing; how mixed everywhere is the evidence that this is God's field. Is it not the ill-cultivated patch of a careless proprietor, of the ill-conditioned, unworkable tract on which the wealthy owner has not wasted the labor which might better be expended elsewhere! Has God mistaken the capabilities of His field, or does He not care to develop them? or does He like this mingled crop? Does He not sympathize with His servants when they grieve over this sad waste? Has murder a horror only for us? does falsehood excite no indignation but in us? are violence and lust, disease and wretchedness matters of indifference to God? What do we see in the world? Centuries of folly, passion, toil, and anguish; countries desolated by the vices of their inhabitants; diseases which the most skilful cannot alleviate, nor the most callous view without a shudder; sorrow and sin more bitter, more cruel, more appalling than any disease. And this is the lot of God; here He delights to dwell. On no field of all His possessions has He spent more. Well may we join with the servants and say, "Sir, didst not Thou sow good seed in Thy field? From whence then hath it tares?" But Christ comes and inaugurates a new order of things, and all evil will disappear from earth. Man's natural condition is but the dark background on which the saving grace of God may display its brilliant effects. God Himself comes and dwells with men, rolling back the heavy darkness with the light of His presence and wisdom, infusing His own life into all. Now will the earth yield her increase. Alas! the failure of the harvest of God is in many respects even more conspicuous in the Church of Christ than in the non-Christian world. The very method adopted to redeem the failure of the original creation seems itself also to be in great part failure. We are perplexed when we find wild and useless vegetation in the outlying wilderness, but when we enter the garden of God, and within that redeemed enclosure still find weeds and disorder, our perplexity deepens into dismay. Yet the fact is that, with scarcely an exception, all the useless and pernicious plants found outside Christendom are found also within. Where is there to be found a more passionate greed of gain, or a more self-indulgent luxury, or a more thoroughgoing worldliness than among the masses of the trading Christian races? The gambling, the unscrupulous hasting to be rich, the cruel and heart-hardening selfishness that abound in our own society are only made more deceptive and dangerous by being crossed with

plants of heavenly origin, and by disguising their true nature under the flowers of Christian utterances, occasional charities, seeming repentances, and ineffective purposing of better things. Lust and villainy, fraud, malice, cruelty, — these noxious plants flourish within as without the Christian pale. And it is within Christendom we must look, if we would see some of the worst species of human iniquity. One is ashamed to read the history of the Church. Beside the good corn whose full ear bends in humble maturity of service, the deadly plant of delusive self-righteousness rears its pretentious and empty head. Ignorance, fear, and self-seeking have imitated every Christian grace, till the whole ground is covered with an overgrowth that hides from the eye the healthy plants of Christ's own sowing. Insincerity, superstition, obscurantism, intolerance, pious fraud, the prostitution of the highest interests of men to aims the most contemptible and vile, the disguising of a rotten character under a professed faith and hope of the most elevating and glorious kind, — these are the plants which flourish in the garden of God. All that is double, all that is mean, all that is craven, all that is shallow and earthly in human nature, seems to be stimulated by this cultivated soil. The field which was to be the nursery of free souls who, with eyes unsealed to see the true beauty of eternal goodness, should devote themselves with courage and generosity to the common good, has become a paddock in which the timorous seek refuge from a future they dread, and in which every low desire thinks it may burrow with impunity. Looking at Christendom as it actually is, we may well ask, Is this what Christ sowed? Is this what He has produced on earth? Is this the kind of Christendom He intended? "Sir, did'st not Thou sow good seed in Thy field? From whence then hath it tares?" The explanation of this disappointing state of matters is given in the words, "An enemy hath done this." It is not the result of Christianity, but of agencies opposed to Christianity. To sow a neighbor's field with noxious seed is in some countries a common device for venting spite or wreaking vengeance; and a more villainous injury can scarcely be imagined. It blasts hope; it is a long grievance, daily meeting the eye and wearing out the spirit till the harvest; it spoils the crop and injures the soil. It seems to say that all this time, from day to day, I have an enemy who hates me, so that there can be no truer joy to him than that which gives me sorrow. He cannot be happy if I am. My happiness is his misery; my misery his greatest happiness. This is his spirit, the spirit of the Evil One, by whomsoever shown; a spirit not wholly absent from our relations with other men, but betrayed even when we suppose ourselves to be animated with righteous indignation or warrantable revenge.

There is something characteristically devilish too, in the deed being done "when men slept;" when the sun has gone down and the wrath of man begins to quiet and cool; when men of right mind are resolving not to act in heat, or be provoked to unworthy and low-toned iniquities, but to think over their matters; when they are perhaps dreaming that they are once again boys together, and walking folded in one another's arms; when the stillness and solemn grandeur of night rebuke the loud clamor and petty wranglings of men; when, at least, a pause is given to sin, this spirit's malignity tires not, but like the beasts of prey is roused to a livelier activity, and recognizes the darkness and quiet as his peculiar season. In him there is no folding of his hands from evil, no wearying, no hesitation in his course, no questioning whether, after all, this is not too bad, no desire to mingle with it a little good, no desire of rest or forgetfulness, but the grateful memory of past wickedness inciting him to new iniquities.

Such being the state of the field, and such its cause, what are the servants to do? "Wilt Thou that we go and gather out these tares?" Men are ever for prompt measures. "Lord, wilt Thou that we

command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" Few understand the sparing of profligate cities for the sake of ten righteous men. We inwardly grudge that there should be so little difference now manifested between God's treatment of the righteous and the wicked; and that it should only at intervals appear that the former are His peculiar possession. Did our feelings rule the world, we should allow very few tares to appear. We cannot wait, but must anticipate the harvest. This and that other effective propagator of falsehood, would it not be well if he were out of the way? Would not good men come to a quicker and more fruitful maturity, were they not continually damaged by the blighting influences of skeptical literature, worldly society, superficial religionists?

"Let both grow together until the harvest," is the law of the Master. Again and again the Church has, in the face of this parable, taken upon her to root out infidels and heretics. The reasoning has been summary: We are Christ's, these men are Satan's, let us destroy them. All such attempts violently to hasten the consummation, and to make the field of the world appear uniform, have most disastrously hindered the growth of true religion. The servants have wrought a more frightful desolation and barrenness in the field than anything which could have resulted from the existence of the tares.

It is, indeed, not always easy to know how far we should act upon the acknowledged fact of a man's ungodliness. In this country there is a strong feeling against opinions which are believed to be dangerous; perhaps it may be said that the animosity excited by a man's profession of atheism is more vehement and active than that which immorality excites. And though, happily, we do not now go so far as to remove such persons from the world, we do not scruple to visit them with serious social and civil disabilities. Now this parable emits the law regarding such persons. It does not say the world is as it ought to be; it does not say there is no distinction, or a very insignificant one, between good and bad men, or between Christians and atheists; but it enjoins upon us the necessity of refraining from acting upon this distinction to the injury of any. Punishments must be inflicted by society on its injurious members, but not on the score of their ungodliness or unprofitableness in Christ's kingdom. The distinction between a criminal and a benefactor of his country may not be so great as between a ripe Christian and a full-blown atheist; but while we are compelled to act upon the former distinction, and pluck up the criminal from his place, and banish him from our society, the latter distinction is not fully manifested, and must not be fully acted upon in this world. The man who habitually swears, or leads a grossly immoral life, or propagates infidelity, may do a great deal more harm than the starving boy who steals a loaf; but we are called upon to punish the latter and not the former. And in so far as we damage the prospects, or asperse the good name, of any man because we consider him "tares," and not wheat, in so far we fly in the face of this parable. The reasonableness of this method of delay is sufficiently obvious. Within the Church itself it is often impossible even to be as sure as the servants of the parable were that there is darnel sown among the wheat, or at least to discriminate between the wheat and the darnel. An opinion, or a practise, which is at first sight condemned as scandalous or full of danger, may turn out to be sound and wholesome. But if no time be allowed it to grow, if it be summarily pronounced tares, and thrown over the hedge, the good fruit it might have borne is thrown away with it. Truth may be in the minority — always is at first in the minority; and if, as the servants view the field, they merely take a vote as to what is wholesome and what poisonous, they are likely enough to do evil rather than good. And even where it is certain that evil has sprung up in the

Church, it is a further question whether it should be summarily removed. This parable, it is true, is not the guide for the action of the rulers of the Church towards its members; but, indirectly, a warning against hasty action is given to those in authority. False doctrine may sometimes be more easily got rid of, if it be regarded in silence, or with a few words of convincing exposure, than if it be signalized with assault. No man who had any regard for his field would carry a seeding thistle through every part of it, and give it a shake in every corner. But our Lord Himself in the parable assigns two reasons for this abstinence from immediate action. First, you are not to root up tares, because you will inevitably root up good corn with them. It is almost impossible to pull up a single stalk of corn by the root; you may break it off, but if you take up its root you are almost sure to bring away with it a number of other stalks and a mass of soil. The one root refuses to be detached from the rest — a striking representation f of what happens when injury is inflicted on any member of society. You cannot injure one man and one only. In him you strike his children, his friends, his followers if he be a man of influence. No man is so forlorn that none will be made lonelier by his death, or be embittered or saddened by his misfortune. We live for the most part in little circles, bound one to the other by indissoluble relationships, nurtured from one soil, and matured by common interests and feelings. And these circles are not separate from one another, but some member of your circle belongs also to another; and so the whole world is linked together, and you cannot put forth your hand and strike any man whose pain shall not be felt by others, nor thrust him from you without repelling all who are attached to him. And of those who are attached to him, are you sure there are none who belong to the kingdom, no little blade springing up by his root, which, did you let it grow, would abound in fruit? For, that a man is evil himself, is no proof that all his connections are evil. On the contrary, an ungodly man will often cling to those who belong to the kingdom, as if somehow they must find entrance for him along with themselves. A father who cannot change his own ways nor yield the opinions of his youth, seeks to protect his children from the influences that destroyed himself, and to atone for his own barrenness by their productiveness. Some who are held as by a terrible fatality from winning the kingdom, will yet entreat others to use violence to enter it. Even the most profligate have commonly some one ripe and living soul devoted to them, who could wish that himself were accursed for their kinsmen according to the flesh. But this first reason rests upon the second: and that is, that the time is coming when the distinction between the wheat and the tares is to be acted upon. Only let a man accept the account here given of the end of the tares, and he will have very little desire to anticipate or hasten that end. When God says, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” we feel that the darkest injustice and wrong-doing will be adequately taken account of. When we reflect that what has roused our indignation has also been observed by God, and will be dealt with by Him, not only is our indignation mitigated, but, in view of the judgment of God, our pity is moved towards the transgressor. We were about to punish as if we were the offended party, as if we saw the matter in all its bearings and could justly judge it, and as if we had the right punishment at hand; but when this final judgment looms in sight we see how different are God’s judgments and God’s punishments from ours, and an awful pity possesses us. Believe that the bar of God lies across the path of each of us, believe that a veritable sifting of men is to be, and that all men are to be allotted to suitable destinies, and compassion will extinguish every other feeling you may have cherished towards the wicked. The position in which we in this life are is full of awe, and fitted also to engender in us the tenderest feelings one towards another — growing up as we are side by side, but with destinies perhaps immeasurably wide asunder; here for a little united root to root,

and yet, it may be, severed to all eternity. Could any position be better calculated to banish from our minds all indifference to one another's prospects, all sullen and revengeful feelings, all variance and hatred, and to quicken within us a true affection and compassion, a considerate and helpful tenderness? The bearing of this parable, then, on ourselves cannot be mistaken. Wheat and darnel, it says, are almost identical in appearance, and are, in the meantime, treated as if the one was as valuable as the other; but let them grow, and the fruit will prove that the root principle of the one is different as possible from the other; the one is good food, the other poison. And they will eventually be treated accordingly. Everything must ultimately find its place according to its nature; not according to its appearance, nor according to any pretensions put forward in its behalf, but only and simply according to its own real character and quality. Each of us is growing to something, and from some root. No one may be able to say — perhaps you yourself are unable to say — to which kind and to what root you belong; perhaps you cannot confidently affirm what it is to which you are growing, but beneath all appearances there is in you a real character, a root that determines what you shall grow to. As we grow up in society together, one man is in the main very like another. Of two of your friends, it may be the one who makes least profession of religion that you would go to in a difficulty in which much generous help and toil are needed. Take a regiment of soldiers or a ship's crew, and you may find the ungodly as brave and self-sacrificing in action, as observant of discipline as the others. There may be little to show that there is a radical difference in character; sometimes, of course, this difference is very rapidly manifested, but in general there is so much similarity as to make it notorious that the Church is not distinctly marked off from the world. Society does resemble a field in which the wheat and the darnel are still in the blade, and can be discriminated only by a very careful observer. So that, first, this is apt to make the darnel think itself as good as the wheat. If we merely look at appearances we are apt to think that, take us all round, there is not much to choose between the wheat and us. We see in truly Christian people evil tempers, a revengeful, tyrannical, ungenerous spirit, we detect bitterness and meanness in them, sometimes sensuality, and a keen eye for worldly advantage, and we are encouraged to believe that really we stand comparison with them very favorably. So no doubt you do. The world would be insufferable if all men had the spirit which many Christians show. But that is not the point. The question is not whether you are not at present, to all appearance, as useful and pleasant a member of society as they; but the question is, whether there is not that in them which will grow to good, and whether there is not that in you which will grow to evil. Do you, that is to say, sufficiently consider this parable, which most frankly admits that at present, so far as things have yet grown, there may be no very marked difference between the children of the kingdom and others, but at the same time emphatically declares that the root is different, and that, therefore, the life is really of a different quality, and will in the long run appear to be different? The question is, what is your root? What is it that is producing the actual life you are making, and the actual character you are growing into? What is the motive power? Is it mere desire to get on, or craving for a good position among men? Is it respect for your own good name? or are you a child of the kingdom? Are you the result of the word of the kingdom? that is, is your conduct being more and more animated and regulated, and is your character being more and more formed, by the belief that God calls you to live for Him and for eternity? Do you like this world really better than one in which you have a hope only of spiritual joys, of true fellowship with God, and holiness of heart? Can you make good to your own mind, that in some quite intelligible sense you are rooted in Christ, and grow out of Him? It is the root you live from which will eventually show itself in you, and

determine your eternal position.

Again, the urgency of the call to Christ is deadened by the fact that we are not treated differently at present. Men argue: we get on well enough now, and the future will take care of itself. But this is to brush aside at a blow all that we are told of the connection of the present with the future. This state bears to a coming world the relation which seed-time bears to harvest. No violence will be done to you at present to convince you that you are useless to God. No judgment will be declared, no punishment inflicted — that were out of season, for in this life we are left to choose freely and without compulsion, whether we desire to be in God's kingdom or not. In this life you must judge yourself and do violence to yourself. But this argues nothing regarding the future life. It is only then a beginning is made of treatment corresponding to character.

Lastly, not only is the darnel apt to think itself as good as the wheat, but the wheat is apt to think itself no better than the darnel. You can never outstrip others in good as you would like. You are troubled because they seem to be as regular, as zealous, as successful in duty as you. Possibly, too, they are not only as judicious in conduct, as generous, as true, of as good report as yourselves, but, moreover, exercise a healthier influence than you do on those they live with. Some natural infirmity of temper has fixed its indelible brand on you, something which makes you less attractive and less influential than you might otherwise be. Or perhaps you are choked by uncongenial surroundings, kept down in growth by the tares around you, often betrayed into sins which better company would have made impossible. Are you somehow continually kept back from growing to all you feel you might grow to? Is there good in you that has never yet been elicited? Look then to the end, when "the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Be sure only that there is that in you which will shine forth if the hindrances and blinds are removed. There is no change to pass on the wheat; but only the tares shall be taken away, and it will stand revealed, good corn. Bring forth your fruit in patience: maintain the real distinction between good and evil, and at last it will be apparent.

03.03. THE MUSTARD SEED

THE MUSTARD SEED Matthew 13:31-32

Neither the parable of the Sower nor the parable of the Tares was calculated to elate those who were interested in the kingdom of heaven. The hindrances and disappointments incident to the establishment of that kingdom were too plainly stated to be gratifying. It was not exhilarating to the hearers of these parables to learn that the state of things to which they had eagerly looked forward as the realization of their ideal, and the embodiment of all excellence, could not be actually achieved on earth. In this parable of the mustard seed our Lord turns the other side of the picture, and affirms that the little movement already stirring society would grow to vast dimensions; that the influences He was introducing so unobtrusively into human history were vital, and would one day command attention and be productive of untold good. He does not anticipate the parable of the leaven, and explain the precise mode of the spread of Christianity, but merely predicts the fact of its growth. He invites us to compare the visible cause with the visible result; he directs our thoughts to the two facts of the small beginning and the ultimate grandeur of the kingdom of heaven, and suggests that the reason of this growth is that the originating principle of the kingdom has vitality in it.

It is the study of the laws of growth which in recent years, has given so great an impulse to human knowledge and to the delight men find in nature. How this world has come to be what it is; its rude and unpromising beginnings, and its steady progress towards perfection; the development of an infinitely various and complicated life from a few rudimentary forms; — these have been the commonest subjects of scientific investigation. It has been shown that everything we are ourselves now connected with has grown out of something which went before; that nothing is self-originated. The growth of languages and religions, of customs and forms of government, of races and nations, has been traced; and a new interest has thus been imparted to all things, for everything is found to have a history which carries us back to the most unlikely roots, and is full of surprises. Creation excites wonder; but growth excites an intelligent admiration and wonder as well. For, after all investigation and exposition of its laws, growth remains marvelous. That the swift-flying bird, sensitive to the remotest atmospheric changes, should grow out of the motionless, strictly encased egg, is always an astonishment. That the wide-branching tree, hiding the sky with its foliage, should be the product of a small, insignificantly shaped seed, never ceases to excite wonder. Nothing could well be more unlike the bird than the egg; nothing less like a tree than the seed it has grown out of; but by an unseen and ultimately inscrutable force the egg becomes a bird, and the seed grows into a tree. To see the stateliest pile of building filling the space which before was empty, makes an appeal to the imagination: that kind of increase we seem to understand; stone is added to stone by the will and toil of man. But when we look at the deeply-rooted and wide-branching tree, and think of the tiny seed from which all this sprang without human will or toil, but by an internal vitality of its own, we are confronted by the most mysterious and fascinating of all things, the life that lies unseen in nature. In the difference, then, between the beginning and the maturity of our Lord’s kingdom there was nothing exceptional. The same difference may be

observed in the case of almost every person or influence that has greatly helped mankind. Many of the inventions to which we are hourly indebted entered the world like little seeds casually blown to their resting-place; they floated on, unheeded, unobserved, till at last, apparently by the merest chance, they caught somewhere, and became productive. It is the very commonness of this career, from small to great, to which our Lord appeals for the encouragement of His disciples. Here is the least among seeds; it flies before your breath; it is not noticed in the balance; a miser would scarce trouble himself to blow it from the scale; the hungry bird will not pause in his flight to pick it up; but let a few years go by, and that seed shall have become a tree, in which the birds of the air may lodge, and which no force can uproot. The seed, as you now see it, is doing and can do nothing that the tree does; it casts no shade, it shelters no birds, it yields no fruit or timber, it does not fill the eye and complete the landscape; but give it time, and it will do all these things, as nothing else will or can. In this parable, then, our Lord gave expression to three of the ideas which frequently recurred to His mind regarding the kingdom of heaven: — 1st. Its present apparent insignificance; 2d. Its vitality; 3d. Its future grandeur.

1. Our Lord recognized that to the uninstructed, ordinary observer His kingdom must in its origin appear insignificant, “the least of all seeds.” It might seem less likely to prevail, and to become a universal benefit, than some other contemporary systems or influences. In point of fact, so extravagant did Christ’s claim to be a benefactor of the race appear, that those who wished to mock Him could devise no more telling and bitter taunt than to bow before Him and salute Him as a king. That such a tame-spirited, forsaken person should attain a place among the strong-handed rulers of the world seemed altogether too preposterous. The Roman magistrate, before whom He was arraigned on the charge of rebellion against Caesar, found it difficult to treat the charge seriously. Open the histories of His time, and your eyes are dazzled with the magnificence of other monarchs, and the magnitude of their words, but He is barely named — so little known, that He is sometimes misnamed through sheer ignorance. It was no discredit to the most learned and accurate of historians to know nothing of Jesus Christ. This obscurity and insignificance would not have been disconcerting to the followers of a mere teacher, for the best teaching is rarely appreciated in the first generation; but as our Lord claimed to be a lawgiver and real king, it certainly did not bode well for His kingdom that during His lifetime so few obeyed or even knew Him. The very circumstance that He was a Jew might have seemed to those of His contemporaries who were best able to judge, enough in itself to ensure the defeat of any purpose of universal sway. The exclusive character of the religious and social ideas of the Jew, and the hostility with which this exclusiveness was returned by other nations, seemed to make it most improbable that all men should be brought into one common brotherhood and community by a Jew. Moreover, Jesus Himself was no Hellenist, whose Jewish ideas might have been modified by Greek learning and cosmopolitan associations and customs; but He was a Jew of purest blood and upbringing, educated in all Jewish customs and ideas, and subjected to the ordinary Jewish influences, never visiting other lands, and rarely speaking to any but His own countrymen. So far as we know. He made no inquiries into the state of other countries, and read no books to inform Himself; He did not send emissaries to Rome, inviting men to consider His claims; He made no overtures of any kind to men at a distance; — that is to say. He did not present Himself as a grown tree branching friendly outwards, to which might flock the birds of the air which had been driven out by the winter of their own land, and had wandered far in search of food, and were weary from their long flight.

Even among His own people, from whom He might have expected a hearty welcome and loyal advocacy, He met with either contemptuous neglect or positive opposition. He obtained no recognized standing, even among the Jews. Those who formed the opinions of society pronounced Him an impostor, and the people were so completely convinced by them, that they clamored for His death. The few who were attached to Him, and who thoroughly believed in His sincerity and spiritual greatness, persistently misunderstood the essential parts of His purpose and teaching. They could not, even to the last, rid their minds of the natural impression that His being crucified as a malefactor was the end of all their hopes. And is it not probable that even Jesus Himself, as He was ignominiously hurried to His death by a handful of Roman soldiers, may have been tempted to think, What is there in this to regenerate a world? Will such an everyday incident even be remembered next Passover? Certainly, so far as appearances went, and in the judgment of all who saw and were interested, His kingdom was at that time comparable to anything but a firmly-rooted and flourishing tree.

After the resurrection of Christ, His kingdom became slightly more visible, but its prospects must still have seemed extremely doubtful. A handful of men, none of them having much weight in the community, or being in any way remarkable, compose the force which is to conquer the world. To win a single soul to an unpopular cause is difficult, but these men were summoned to the task of converting all nations. They had no ancient institutions, no well-tried methods, no strong associations, no funds, no friends to back them. On the contrary, everything seemed banded against them. Teachers, who disagreed in all else, combined to scorn the folly of the cross; emperors, who would allow every other form of religion, could not tolerate that of Jesus. Everywhere the world was already preoccupied by ancient and jealously-guarded religions, by habits, and ideas, and traditions adverse to the spirit of Christ. The instrument, too, which was to convert the world seemed as powerless as the men who were to wield it. They were to tell of Jesus, of His life, His death. His resurrection. Was it not vain to expect that remote and barbarous races would become so attached to a person they had never seen, that they would govern their passions and amend their lives for His sake? Was it likely that, on the word of unknown men, the person of an unknown man should become the center of the world, commanding the adherence of all, and imparting to all the most powerful influences?

2. But at the very moment when our Lord was most conscious of the poor figure His kingdom made in the eyes of men, He was absolutely confident of its final greatness, because, small as it was, it was of the nature of seed. It had a vital force in it that nothing could kill; a germinating and expansive power which would only be quickened by opposition. His own death, the obscurity and limitation to which His cause was at first subjected, were not, He knew, the first symptoms of permanent oblivion, but were only the sowing of the seed. He was no more anxious than the farmer is who, for the first week or two, sees no appearance of his plants above ground. Our Lord knew that, could He only get His kingdom accepted at even.one small point of earth, the growth would inevitably and in good time follow.

There are certain human qualities, ideas, utterances, and acts which are vital and must grow. They have in them an expansive, living energy; they sink into the hearts and minds of men, and propagate a lasting influence. What, then, is the vital element in Christianity? What is it that has given permanence and growth to the kingdom of Christ? What did Christ plant that no one else has planted? What is it that keeps Him in undying remembrance, and gathers from each new

generation fresh subjects for His kingdom? It is not the wisdom and beauty of His teaching. That might have led us to immortalize His words by reprinting and quoting them. Neither is it solely the holiness of His life, or the love He showed. These might have kindled in us admiration, but could never have prompted that real allegiance which is implied in a kingdom. But it is chiefly the revelation of God in Him which draws men to Him. In His death and resurrection we get assurance of Divine love and Divine power abiding in Him. It is God in Him that draws us. We cleave to him, because through Him we are lifted to God and to eternity. In His brief career He gives us a perception of the reality of the spiritual world, the permanence of the individual, and the nearness and love of God, which nothing else gives us. In Him men meet a God satisfying all their expectations; so devoted to their interests, that He lives and dies with them, and for them; so hopeful regarding them, that He proclaims pardon and newness of life to sinners; so victorious over all the evils weighing upon man, that He conquers death itself, and throws open to all the gates of life everlasting. The seed is the highest product of the plant: the fruit is but the accompaniment of the seed; it is into the seed that the plant each year puts its life. So in man, the ripest product of the individual, the actions or words into which he gathers up his whole character and strength, — it is these which are vital and germinant. The vital element in the life of Christ cannot be mistaken: it was, in a word, the Divine Son giving Himself for us; God expressing the fulness of Divine Sympathy and sacrifice in our behalf — a seed, surely, from which great things must spring.

3. Our Lord points to the eventual greatness of His kingdom. The despised seed, ground into the soil under the heel of contempt and hatred, will become a tree, whose leaves shall be for the healing of the nations. The disciples do not seem to have gathered from this parable the encouragement which was laid up for them in it; but an instructed onlooker might have admonished the crucifiers of the Lord that they were fulfilling His words — “That cross which you are setting up, and which you will take down before the sun is set, shall stand in the thought of countless millions as the point of earth most illuminated by the light of heaven; that blood which you are shedding, as you would pour water out of your way on the ground, is to be recognized by your fellow-men and by God as precious, as that by which the souls of men are redeemed and purified.” The kingdom of heaven has indeed become a tree. It would be difficult to count even the greater branches of it; difficult to number the various twigs which depend upon the central stem; impossible to count the leaves or to form an idea of the fruit which, through past years, has gradually ripened and fallen from it. This religion which emanated from a country so detested by the surrounding nations that they might be expected to say of it, as the Jews themselves of Nazareth, “Can any good thing come out of Judea?”— this religion propagated by Jews who had become Christians, so that being excommunicated by their own countrymen, and naturally hated by all other people, they seemed the most unlikely instruments to commend new ideas; this religion which could offer no high posts or secular rewards, and numbered few wise, wealthy, or noble among its adherents; which would not tolerate other religions, and yet proclaimed doctrines which excited the ridicule of the educated; which demanded from all alike, not only an absolutely pure morality and a repulsive and humbling self-renunciation, but a newness of spirit impossible to the natural man; this religion which seemed to have everything against it, which seemed like a sickly child which it was scarcely worth calling by a name to be remembered as a living thing, — this has grown to be the greatest of all powers for good in the world. The seed determines the character of all that springs from it; the quality of the fruit and its abundance may vary with the

nature of the soil and with the presence or absence of careful cultivation and other advantages, but the tree will still be recognizable as of that kind to which the seed belonged. And as the seed of the kingdom of heaven was love and holiness and Divine power, so have similar fruits been borne by men wherever the kingdom has come. The outmost branch, looking in an opposite direction from the distant branches on the other side of the tree, and apparently quite dissociated from these branches, is still identified with them by the fruit it bears. Wherever in all these past ages, and in all the scattered countries of Christendom, there has been a Christ-like life; wherever sinners have been drawn to love God and hate their sin through the knowledge of the cross; wherever in hope of a blessed immortality men have borne the sorrows of time without bitterness, and committed their dead to the grave in expectation of a life beyond, — there the seed Christ sowed has been showing its permanent vitality. The figure of the tree inevitably suggests other considerations regarding the Church, besides those which are directly taught in the parable. The tree, with its single stem and countless branches, is only too true a picture of the diverging belief and worship of those who own a common root in Christ. Sometimes, indeed, one is tempted to compare the Church to one of those trees in which the branches diverge as soon as they appear above ground, so that you cannot tell whether the tree is really one or many. In some of its aspects, again, the church resembles the huge tree that stands on the village green, looking benignly down on the joys of the young, and giving shade and shelter to the aged, seeing generation after generation drop away like its own leaves, but itself living through all with the freshness of its early days; its lower bark only marked by the ambition of those who have sought to identify their now scarcely legible names with its undecaying life, but whose work has after all not entered into the life of the tree, but only marred its external hull. Again, we see that some of the lowest, earliest grown branches are quite dead or drooping; that Christianity has passed from the people among whom it first found root, and that satyrs dance where the praises of Christ were once sung. It would almost seem as if there were a melancholy accuracy in the figure used in the parable, and that the tree, having once attained its full dimensions, grows no more. After some years the rapid growth which was so striking in the young tree is no longer discernible. It maintains equal or perhaps stronger life, but spring after spring you look in vain for any discernible increase in size. But certain it is that this plant which Christ planted has shown vitality, drawing nutriment from every soil in which it has been tried, and assimilating to its own life and substance all that is good in the soil, using the faculties and accomplishments, the literary or artistic or commercial leanings and gifts of the various races so as to further the true welfare of men; gathering strength from sunshine and storm alike, cherishing a hidden life through the long winters when every branch seemed hopelessly dead, and drawing supplies of vitalizing moisture from sources beyond the ken of man when the scorching heats threatened to wither up every living leaf. The tree is growing now, gradually absorbing into itself all the widening thoughts of men, and by the chemistry of its own life extracting nutriment from criticism, from philosophy, from research, from social and political movements, from everything that forms the great stirring human world in which it is rooted; not afraid to stand out in the open and face the day, but gaining vigor from every brisker air that tosses its branches. This parable was spoken for the encouragement of the disciples: it is needed still for the encouragement of all who are interested in the extension of Christ’s kingdom. In many respects our outlook is even more hopeless than that of the first disciples. The novelty, the first enthusiasm, the external signs, are all gone; the solidarity of the Church is also gone, and in its place we have to overcome the discrediting exhibitions of discord and internal conflict, as well as

the weakening influence of skepticism, and the slowly corroding materialism that is destroying the very foundations of religion. The missionary enterprise of the first disciples seems never to have extended very far from the Mediterranean coasts. They were unaware of the vast multitudes beyond, and of the solidity and attractiveness of some of the religions already in occupation; whereas to the eye of the modern Church populations are disclosed, numbered by hundreds of millions, and adhering to religions more ancient and more outwardly impressive than our own. Our zeal, too, is slackened by the very fact that all this yet remains to be done; that Christianity should have been growing for nearly two thousand years, and that it has not yet convinced all men of its superiority, and that in places where it has been most ardently received it has borne fruit of which every man must feel ashamed. To all persons who are disheartened, whether by the apparent fruitlessness of their own efforts or by the slow growth of the Church at large, this parable says. You must measure things not by their size, but by their vitality. What you can do may be very little, and once it is done there may be no sign of results; but if you put yourself into it, if it come from the heart — a heart whose earnestness and hope are the result of contact with Christ — then fruit will one day be borne. You must have some imagination. You must have some faith that will enable you to wait patiently for fruit. Make sure that what you sow is good seed; that what you teach your children is true; that what you strive to introduce into society is sound and helpful; that the ideas you propagate, the charity you support, the industry you seek to advance, are all such as belong to the kingdom of Christ, and you may be sure your labor is not lost. You may not see the results of your actions. You may not see full grown the trees of your planting, but your children will lie under their shade, and dream of your sheltering forethought, and strive to fulfil your best purposes. Do not be discouraged because all is not yet done on earth, and much remains for you to do; do not be discouraged because there is room for sacrifice and faith, devotedness, and wisdom, and love, and skill. It is not hot-house results we seek to produce, nor, like the Indian jugglers, to make a tree visibly shoot up by sleight of hand. What we look for is the real growth of human good, and this can be accomplished by no rapid and magical processes, but only by the patient nutrition of the soil by all that is truest and deepest in human nature, and by all that is most real and most testing in human effort. Honestly seek the growth of this tree, and be not too greatly dismayed by the portentous difficulties of the task. “He that observeth the wind shall not sow, and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand, for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.” In conclusion, is it not relevant to ask whether we have joined the Christian Church, because it is large, or because it is living? Simon in the temple held all Christendom in his arms, and yet felt sure the redemption of the world was nigh. Is your faith like his? Is it the Person of Christ and not what has grown round His person that you cleave to? Do you find that in Christ which compels you to say that, though you were the only Christian, yourself the Church visible, you must abide by Him? Is there some independence in your choice, some individuality in your experience? Can you say, with some significance, “I know Him in whom I have believed”? or do you but adopt the fashion that prevails, and feel the propriety and safety of going with the majority? In any case it is well that you recognize that there is this tree planted by the Lord Himself, and still growing upon earth. There is upon earth a society of men not always easy to find, but in true sympathy with Him; a progress of human affairs to which He gave the initial impulse. There is on earth a tree, the seed of which is His own life, whose growing bulk embodies, from

generation to generation, all that exists in the world of His purpose and work. The good He intended for men He deposited in that seed. He came to impart to men permanent blessings. He saw our condition, recognized what we needed, and introduced into the world what He knew would achieve the happiness of every one of us.

03.04. THE LEAVEN

THE LEAVEN

Matthew 13:33 This parable directs attention to two points connected with the spread of Christianity. It illustrates —

1. First, the kind of change which Christianity works in the world; and 2. Second, the method by which this change is wrought.

I. First, our Lord here teaches that the change which He meant to effect in the world was a change, not so much of the outward form, as of the spirit and character of all things. The propagation of His influence is illustrated not by the figure of a woman taking a mass of dough and baking it up into new loaves of a shape hitherto unseen; but by the figure of a woman putting that into the dough which alters the character of the whole mass. She may set on the table loaves that are to all appearance the same as the old, but no one will taste them without perceiving the difference. The old shapes are retained, the familiar marks appear still on the loaves, but it is a different bread. The appearance remains the same, the reality is altered. The form is retained, but the character is changed.

There are two ways in which you may revolutionize any country or society. You may either pull down all the old forms of government, or you may fill them with men of a different spirit. If an empire is going to ruin, you may either change the empire into a republic, or you may put the right man in the office of emperor. If any society or club or association has become effete and a nuisance, doing harm instead of good, you may reform it either by revising its constitution, making new laws and regulations, and so making it a new society, or you may fill its official positions with men of a right spirit, leaving its form of constitution untouched. A watch stops, and somebody tells you it needs new works, but the watchmaker tells you it only needs cleaning. A machine refuses to work, and people think the construction is wrong, but the skilled mechanic pushes aside the ignorant crowd and puts all to rights with a few drops of oil. “Your bread is unwholesome,” says the public to the baker, and he says, “Well, I’ll send you loaves of a new shape;” but the woman of the parable follows the wiser course of altering the quality of the bread.

Few distinctions are of wider application, few need more careful pondering by all of us whether in our social, political, or religious capacity. Many of us take a huge interest in the institutions of our country, and are ready to lay our finger on this and that as needing reform. This parable should therefore haunt the ear, and always suggest the question: Is this or that institution radically bad? or, supposing good and wise men were working it, would it not serve a good purpose? What is wanted in the world is not new forms, but a new spirit in the present forms. New forms, new institutions, new regulations, new occupations, new trades, new ways of occupying our time, new customs are really as little to the purpose as putting the old make of bread into new shapes. What our Lord by this parable warns us to aim at and to look for is rather the possession which Christian feeling and views take of previously existing customs, institutions, relationships, occupations, than

the new facts and habits to which Christian feeling gives birth. It is the regenerating rather than the creative power of Christ's Spirit that He dwells upon. His Spirit, He says, does not require a new channel to be dug for it; its fuller stream may flood the old banks, may wear out corners here and there, may break out in new directions, but in the main, the channel remains the same. The man has the same arteries, but now they are filled with health-giving blood. The lump is the same lump, and done up into the same old shapes, but it is all leavened now. The coming of the kingdom of heaven does not then consist in an entire alteration of human life, as we now know it. The kingdom of heaven comes not with observation, but is within you. It does not alter empires into republics, it does not abolish work and give us all ease, it does not find fault with the universal frame of things, or refuse to fit itself in with the world as it is; but it accepts things as it finds them, and leavens all it touches. As the outward forms of the world's business, its offices and dignities, its need of work and ways of working, would be little altered if all men were suddenly to become absolutely truthful or absolutely sober, so the change which Christ proposed to effect was of an inward, not of an outward kind. It was to be first in the individual, and only through the individual on society at large. Our Lord in establishing a kingdom on earth, did not intend to erect a vast organization over-against the world, but He meant to introduce into the world itself a leaven which should rule and subdue all to His own Spirit. The Church itself therefore may become too visible, has become in many respects too visible, and has thus unfortunately succeeded in at once separating itself from the world as a distinct and alien institution, and becoming entirely "of the world," by imitating the institutions, the ambitions, the power, the show of the world. It has learned to measure its success very largely by the bulk it occupies in the eyes of men, by its well-ordered services, its creeds and laws and courts; and it has too much forgotten that its function is of quite another kind, namely, to be hidden among the flour.

2. Secondly, this parable pointedly directs attention to the precise method by which the kingdom of heaven is to grow; or, as we should more naturally say, by which the whole world is to be Christianized. To one who considers the probable future of any new or young force in the world, to one who stands beside the cradle of a new power and speculates on its future, there will occur several ways in which it may possibly prevail and attain universality. It may so commend itself to the common sense of men, or it may so appeal to their regard to their own interests, as to win universal acceptance. Railways, banks, insurance companies, do not need statutes compelling men to use them; they win their way by their own intrinsic advantages. There have been governments so wisely administered, that men not naturally subject to them have sought to be taken under their protection for the sake of advantages accruing. Some kingdoms have thus been largely extended; but more commonly they have been extended by the sword, by the strong hand. Not by this latter method would Christ have His religion propagated. Yet the idea that men can somehow be compelled to accept the truth, seems never to be quite eradicated from the human mind. Very slowly is it recognized that to support a religion by any kind of force instead of by reason alone, is to admit that reason condemns it. The methods of compulsion change; the coarser forms of compulsion, the sword and the stake, give place; but more disguised and less startling forms of compulsion remain, equally opposed to the spirit of Christ. The spread of Christianity, then, is illustrated in this parable, not by the propagation of fruit trees, nor even by the sowing of seed, but by the leavening of a mass of dough. Religion, that is to say, spreads not by a fresh sowing in each case, but by contagion. No doubt the e is a direct agency of God in each case, but God works through natural means; and the natural means here pointed at is personal

influence. And it is not the agency of God in the matter which our Lord wishes here to illustrate, and therefore He says nothing about it. He is not careful to guard Himself against misrepresentation by completing in every utterance a full statement of the whole truth, but presses one point at a time; and the point He here presses is, that He depends upon personal influence for the spread of His Spirit. The Church often trusts to massive and wealthy organizations, to methods which are calculated to strike every eye; but according to the Head of the Church His religion and spirit are to be propagated by an influence which operates like an infectious disease, invisible, without apparatus and pompous equipment, succeeding all the better where it is least observed. Our Lord bases His expectation of the extension of His Spirit throughout the world not upon any grand and powerful institutions, not on national establishments of religion or any such means, but on the secret, unnoticed influence of man upon man. And indeed there exists no mightier power for good or evil than personal influence. Take even those who least intend to influence you and seem least capable of it. The little child that cannot stand alone will work that tenderness in the heart of a ruffian which no acts of parliament or prison discipline have availed to work. The wail of the suffering infant will bring a new spirit into the man whom the strongest police regulations have tended only to harden and make more defiant and embittered. By his confidence in your word, the child is a more effectual monitor of truthfulness than the keen or suspicious eye of the grown man who distrusts you: the child's recklessness of to-morrow, his short sadnesses and soon recovered smiles, his ignorance of the world and the world's misery, are the proper balance of your anxiety, and insinuate into your heart some measure of his own freshness and hope. Or what can reflect more light upon God's patience with ourselves than the unwearying love and repeated forgiveness that a child demands, and the long doubting with which we wait for the fruit of years of training? So that it is hard to say whether the parent has more influence on the child, or the child on the parent? Or take those who have been pushed aside from the busy world by ill-health or misfortune — have not their unmurmuring patience, their Christian hope, their need of our compassion, done much to mold our spirits to a sober and chastened habit? have they not imparted to us the spirit of Christ, and cherished within us a true recognition of what is essential and what accidental, what good and what evil in this world?

What, then, does the parable teach us regarding the operation of this influence? It teaches us, first, that there must be a mixing; that is to say, there must be contact of the closest kind between those who are and those who are not the subjects of Christ. Manifestly, no good is done by the leaven while it lies by itself; it might as well be chalk or anything else. It must be mixed with the flour. So must Christians be kneaded up together with all kinds of annoying and provoking and uncongenial people, that the spirit of Christ which they bear may become universal. Had our Lord not eaten with publicans and sinners; had He sensitively shrunk from the rough and irreverent handling He received among coarse men who called Him "Samaritan," "devil," and "sot;" had He secluded Himself in the appreciative household of Bethany; had He not made Himself the most accessible Person, little of His Spirit would have passed into other men. Other things being equal, the effect of Christian character varies with the thoroughness of the mixing. It is so with all personal influence. The depth of the love, the closeness of the intimacy, the frequency and thoroughness of the intercourse, is the measure of the effect produced. In a country such as our own, in which the population is dense, and in which an unobstructed communication subsists between man and man, things constantly tend to equalize; and what yesterday was the property of one person is today enjoyed by thousands. And precisely as a fashion or a contagious disease

passes from man to man, with inconceivable and sometimes appalling rapidity, so does evil or good example propagate itself with as certain and speedy an increase. And this it does all the more effectually because insensibly; because we do not brace ourselves to resist this subtle atmospheric influence, nor wash our hands with any disinfectant provided against these imperceptible stains. There is no quarantine for the moral leper, nor any desert in the moral world where a man can be evil for himself alone. For this mixing is provided for in various ways. It is provided for by nature which sets us in families and mixes us up in all the familiarities and intimacies of domestic life; and by society which compels us, in the prosecution of our ordinary callings, to come into contact with one another of a close and influential kind. One part of the world is “mixed “with other parts by commerce, by colonization, by conquest, so that there exists a ceaseless giving and taking of good and evil. One generation is mixed with others by reading their history and their literary remains, and by inheriting their traditions and their long established usages. So that whether we will or no this mixing goes on, and we can as little prevent certain results arising from this intercourse as we can prevent our persons from giving off heat when we enter an atmosphere colder than ourselves. We find it to be true that “The world’s infectious: few bring back at eve Immaculate the manners of the morn.

Something we thought is blotted: we resolv’d, Is shaken: we renounced, returns again.

Each salutation may slide in a sin Unthought before, or fix a former flaw.” But beyond nature’s provision, beyond the unavoidable contact with our fellow-men to which we are all compelled, there are voluntary friendships and associations into which we enter, and casual meetings which we unawares are thrown into. Such casual and passing acquaintanceships have very frequently illustrated the truth of this parable, and have been the means of imparting the Spirit of Christ in very unlikely quarters. And it would help us to use wisely such accidental opportunities if we bore in mind that if there are to be any additions made to the kingdom of Christ, these additions are chiefly to be made from among those careless, worldly, antagonistic persons who do not at present respond to any Christian sentiments. But besides the mingling which nature, and what may be called accident, afford, there are connections we form of our own choice, and companies we enter which we might, if we chose, avoid. There is a borderland of amusements, occupations, duties, common to the godly, and the ungodly, and for the regulation of our conduct, in respect to such intercourse, this parable suffices. Can the occupation be leavened, and can it be leavened by us? Can it be engaged in in a right spirit, and are we sure enough of our own stability to engage in it with benefit? A man of strong physique may scathelessly enter a room out of which a weaker constitution would inevitably carry infection. And it is foolish to argue that because some other person is none the worse of going to this or that company, or engaging in this or that pursuit, therefore you would not be the worse of it. You would not so argue if your entrance into an infected house was in question. But there is also a culpable refusal to mix, as well as an inconsiderate eagerness to do so. Most of us shrink from the responsibility of materially influencing the life of another person. Ask a man for advice about any important matter, and you know what devices he will fall upon to avoid advising you. Many of us are really afraid of incurring the hazardous responsibility of making a man a Christian. Two opposite feelings dispose us to shrink from mingling with all kinds of people. One is a feeling of hopelessness about others. They seem so remote from the acknowledgment of Christ’s rule, that we feel as if they could never be leavened. The parable reminds us, that while no doubt it is impossible to leaven sand, so long as the meal

remains meal it may be leavened. The other feeling is one rather of despair about ourselves than about others. We feel as if our influence could only do harm. We are afraid to live out our inward life freely and strongly lest it injure others. This feeling, however, should prompt us neither to seclude ourselves from society, nor to behave in a constrained and artificial manner in society, but to renew our own connection with the leaven till we feel sure our whole nature is throughout renewed. If any one is exercising a healthy influence while we are languid and incapable, it is simply because that other person is in connection with Christ. That connection is open to us as well. The mixing being thus accomplished, how is the process continued? Besides mingling with society and joining freely in all the innocent ways of the world, what is a Christian to do in order that his Christian feeling may be communicated to others? The answer is, He is to be a Christian; not to be anxious to show himself a Christian, but to be careful to be one. It has been wisely said that “the true philosophy or method of doing good is, first of all and principally, to be good — to have a character that will of itself communicate good.” This is the very teaching of the parable, which says, “Be a Christian, and you must make Christians, or help to make them. Be leaven, and you will leaven.” The leaven does not need to say, I am leaven; nor to say that which lies next it, Be thou leavened. By the inevitable communication of the properties of the leaven to that which lies beside it, and by this again infecting what is beyond, the whole, gradually and unseen, but naturally and certainly, is leavened. This illustration of the leaven must, of course, not be too hard pressed, as if the parable meant that only by the unconscious influence of character and not at all by the conscious and voluntary influence of speech and action, the kingdom of Christ is to be extended. Yet no one can fail to observe that the illustration of the parable is more appropriate to the unconscious than to the intended influence which Christians exercise on those around them. It is rather the all-pervading and subtle extension of Christian principles than their declared and aggressive advocacy that is brought before the mind by the figure of leaven. It reminds us that men are most susceptible to the influence that flows from character. This influence sheds itself off in a thousand ways too subtle to be resisted, and in forms so fine as to insinuate themselves where words would find no entrance. A man is in many circumstances more likely to do good by acting in a Christian manner, than by drawing attention to the faults of others and exposing their iniquity. The less ostentatious, the less conscious the influence exercised upon us is, the more likely are we to admit it. And when we are compelled to reprove, or to advise, or to entreat, this also must be in simplicity and as the natural expression, not the formal and forced exhibition of Christian feeling. The words uttered by a shallow-hearted and self-righteous Pharisee may by God’s grace turn a sinner from the error of his ways; the lump of ice, itself chill and hard, may be used as a lens to kindle and thaw other objects; but notwithstanding this, he who does not speak with his whole character backing what he says, may expect to fail. It is man that influences man; not the words or individual actions of a man, but the complete character which his whole life silently reveals.

If then you sometimes reproach yourself for not exercising any perceptible influence for good over some friend or child, if it disturbs you that you have done less than you might have done by conversation or direct appeal, it may indeed be quite true that you have thus fallen short of your duty; yet remember that conduct often tells far more than talk, and that your conduct has certainly told upon the secret thoughts of your friend, whereas were you to speak merely for the sake of exonerating your conscience, the chances are, you would speak in an awkward, artificial, and ineffective manner. That conversation is often the most religious which in appearance is most

secular; which concerns bills, and cargoes, and investments, and contracts, and family arrangements, and literature; and which, without any allusion to God, the soul, and eternity, secretly impregnates the whole of human life with the Spirit of Christ. If that only is to be reckoned religious conversation in which the topics of religion are discussed, then religious conversation has commonly produced more heat and bitterness and antagonism to Christ's Spirit than any other.

While, then, direct address forms one great part of the means of leavening those around you, it is to be borne in mind, that in the first place you must be what you wish others to become. If not, then certainly nothing that you can say is at all likely to compensate for the evil you may do by your character. It does not need that you intend evil to any; it will be out whether you mean it or no. If you are yourself evil, then most certainly you are making others evil. Can you number the times that you have checked the utterance of Christian feeling in those who knew they would find no response in you? Can you tell how many have been confirmed in a sinful course by your winking at their faults, and have none been led into sin by your removing the scruples of their innocence? Are you sure that your example has never turned the balance the wrong way at some critical hour of your neighbor's life? Is there no one who can stand forward and charge you with having left him in darkness about his duty, when you might have enlightened him? with having made him easy in sin by your pleasant, affable, unreproving demeanor towards him? Are there none who to all eternity will bear the punishment of sins in which you were aiding and abetting; none whom you have directly encouraged to evil, who would, but for you, have been clear of evil thoughts, desires, and deeds of which they now are guilty; none in whose punishment you might see the punishment of sins which were as much yours as theirs, and the memory of which might seem sufficient, if that were possible, to poison the very joys of heaven? Do not turn the warning of this parable aside by the thought. Am I my brother's keeper? Most assuredly you are responsible for your own character, and for all its effects. If you are not doing good to others, it is because there is something wrong in yourself. If you are not leavening others, it is because you are yourself unleavened: for there is no such thing as leaven that does not impart its qualities to that which is about it. Can you confine the perfume to the flower, or restrict the light of the sun to its own globe? Just as little can you restrain all Christian qualities within your own person: something material, something essential to Christian character is lacking if it be not influencing those about it.

It is a glorious consummation that this parable speaks of. It tells of a mixing that is to go on till "the whole" is leavened. The Spirit of Christ is to pervade all things. That Spirit is to take possession of all national characteristics and all individual gifts. Every variety of quality, of human faculty, temperament, and endowment, is to be Christianized, that all may serve Christ. In His kingdom is to be gathered all that has ever served or gladdened humanity: the freshness of childhood and its simplicity, the sagacity, gravity, and self-command of age, the enterprise and capacity of manhood, the qualities that suffering matures, and those that are nurtured by prosperity; all occupations that have invited and stimulated and rewarded the energies of men, all modes of human life, and all affections that conscience approves, all that is the true work, joy, and glory, of our nature is to be pervaded with the sanctifying, purifying, elevating leaven of Christ's Spirit. And this is to be achieved not otherwise than by personal influence. Is it possible that you should have no desire to help in this? that you should be in the world of men and not care to see it accomplishing this destiny? that you should know the earnestness of Christ in this behalf, and never lift a finger or open your lips to aid Him? Surely it will pain you to come to the end of life and

have it to reflect that not one soul has been effectually helped by you. Would you not save many if by a wish you could lift them to the gate of heaven? Is it, then, because of the little labor and sacrifice that are needed for this purpose that you hold back from helping? Is there nothing you can do, is there nothing you ought to do in the way of leavening some little bit of the great mass? Come back yourselves to the leaven, cultivate diligently that fellowship with Christ Himself, which is alone sufficient to equip you for this great calling. Make sure of the reality of your own acceptance of His Spirit, and then whatever you do, utter, touch, will all be leavened.

Chapter 27

03.05. THE HID TREASURE AND THE PEARL OF PRICE

THE HID TREASURE AND THE PEARL OF PRICE Matthew 13:44-46

These two parables have one and the same object. They are meant to exhibit the incomparable value of the kingdom of heaven. They exhibit this value not by attempting to describe the kingdom or its various advantages, but by depicting the eagerness with which he who finds it and recognizes its value, parts with all to make it his own. This eagerness is not dependent on the previous expectations or views or condition of the finder of the kingdom, but is alike displayed whether the finder is lifted by his discovery out of acknowledged poverty, or has his hands already filled with goodly pearls; whether he has no outlook and hope at all, or is eagerly seeking for perfect happiness. The one parable illustrates the eagerness of a poor man who lights upon the treasure apparently by accident; the other illustrates the eagerness of a rich man whose finding of the pearl of price is the result of carefully studied and long sustained search. This difference in the two parables sets clearly before the mind a distinction which is frequently apparent among those who become Christians. Men naturally view life very differently, and take up from the first very various attitudes towards the world into which we all have come. One person is from the first quite at home in it, another slinks through it as if there were nothing friendly or congenial to him here. One man seems to regard it as a banqueting house which is to be made the most of ere the sun rise and dispel his illusion, while another uses it as a battle-field where conquests are to be made, and where all is to be done in grim earnest and strenuously with no thought of pleasure. And as these parables indicate, there are men born with placid and contented natures, others with eager, soaring, insatiable spirits; some, in a word, are born merchants, others day-laborers. Some, that is, are born with a noble instinct which never forsakes them, but prompts them to believe that there is infinite joy and satisfaction to be found, and that it shall be theirs: they cannot rest with small things, but are driven always forward to more and higher. Others, again, never look beyond their present attainment, cannot understand the restless ambition that weeps for more worlds, have no speculation in them, no broad plan of life, nor much idea that any purpose is to be served by it. They have the peaceful, happy industry which makes the day’s labor easy, but not the enterprise which can plan a life’s work and make every available material on earth subserve its plan. This difference, when exhibited in connection with religion, becomes very marked. Looking upon some men, you would say you don’t know how ever they are to be brought to Christ, they are so thoroughly at home and at rest in their daily business, and this seems to afford them so much interest, satisfaction, and reward that you cannot fancy them so much as once reflecting whether something more is not needed. They seem so peculiarly fitted for this world, you can fancy them going on in the same sphere forever. Of others, again, you are perpetually wondering how they have not long ago found what they have been so long seeking; you know that, employ themselves as they will in this world, their inward thought is writing vanity on all this world gives them — they crave a spiritual treasure. In the first of these two parables, then, we see how the kingdom of heaven is sometimes found by those who are not seeking it. The point of this part of the parable and its distinction from the other seems to lie in this, that while the man was giving a deeper furrow

to his field, intent only on his team, his plowshare suddenly grated on the slab that concealed or rung upon the chest that contained the treasure, or turned up a glittering coin that had fallen out in the hasty burial of the store. Or he may have been sauntering through a neighbor's field, when his eye is suddenly attracted by some sign which makes his heart leap to his mouth and fixes him for the moment to the spot, because he knows that treasure must be there. He went out in the morning thinking of nothing less than that before nightfall his fortune would be made — suddenly, without effort or expectation of his, he sees untold wealth within his grasp. He knows nothing of the history of the treasure — does not know on whose feet these bright anklets gleamed in the dance, knows none of the touching memories that are associated with that signet ring, nothing of the long hard strife by which these gold-pieces were acquired, nor of the disaster which tore them from the reluctant hand of the possessor. It is not his blood that has dyed the gold on that jewel-hilted scimitar. He can imagine the careworn man when trouble and war overran the land, stealing out in the darkness and making his treasure secure, and marking it by signs which, alas he was never again to note; but he knows nothing of him, knew nothing of him. Ages before, this treasure had been hid; for him it had been prepared without any intention or labor of his, and now suddenly he lights upon it; out of poverty he to his own astonishment steps into wealth, and his whole life is changed for him without hope or effort of his own.

So, says our Lord, is the kingdom of heaven. Suddenly, in the midst of other thoughts a man is brought face to face with Christ, and while earning his daily bread and seeking for no more than success in life can give him, unexpectedly finds that eternal things are his. Christ is found of them that sought Him not. Is it not often so? The man has begun life not thinking that any very great thing can be made of it, as little as the plowman expects to be lord of the manor, and to own the horses, lands, and comforts of the proprietor. He begins with the idea that if he is careful, diligent, and favored by circumstances, life may be pleasant. He has a prospect of a decent, comfortable livelihood, or, at the best, of a good-going business, with margin of leisure for friendly intercourse, the reading of pleasant literature, and so on. He is confident he will marry happily, and live and see good days. In other words, he has extremely modest expectations of what life can do for him: has no soaring anticipations of "the ampler aether, the deviner air," does not recognize his own capacity nor the size he may grow to, but, like the child for whom the world can do no more if he is promised some favorite toy, fancies that no better thing can come to him than houses, lands, wife and children, friendships and prosperity. Or if he once had visitings of a higher, ampler hope, and seemed to see that round and beyond the successes of business and the common pleasures of life there lay a limitless ocean of feeling and of thought, — worlds upon worlds, like the starry unfathomable firmament, in which the soul might find expanse and joy forever, — these visions have been wiped out by the coarse hand of some early sin, or have been worn from the surface of the mind by the hard traffic of the world; and now what the shriveled creature seeks is possibly but the accomplishment of a daily routine, possibly the attainment of some poor ambition, or the wreaking of a low revenge, or triumph over a rival who has defeated him, or possibly not even anything so definite as that. He had a vision of a life which might fulfil high aims, which might be ennobled and glorified throughout by true and pervading fellowship with God, he once was confident that what the human imagination could conceive of good, that, and far more than that, was possible to the human nature, and to every man who had it; but that bright vision has passed as the morning, all aglow with light and freshness, is quenched in rain and cloud and gloomy wretchedness.

This, then, is in point of fact the condition of many a man as he passes through life — he has no conception of the blessedness that awaits him, he has as little hope of any supreme and complete felicity as the man of the parable had any expectation of lighting upon a hid treasure. We only think of what we can make of life, not of the wealth God has laid in our path. But suddenly our steps are arrested; circumstances that seem purely accidental break down the partition that has hemmed us in to time, and we see that eternity is ours. We thought we had a house, 100 acres of land, £1000 well invested, and we find we have God. We were comforting ourselves with the prospect of increased salary, of ampler comforts and advantages, and a voice comes ringing through our soul, “all things are yours, for ye are Christ’s and Christ is God’s.” How it is that the eyes are now opened to this treasure, we can as little tell as the plowman who has driven his slow steers over that same field since first he could guide the plow but has never till this day seen the treasure. A few words casually dropped, a sentence read in an idle moment, some break in our prosperous course, some pause which allows the mind to wander in unaccustomed directions, — one cannot say what is insufficient to bring the wandering and empty soul to a settled possession of the kingdom of heaven, for the treasure seems to be his before he looks for it, before he feels his need of it, before has taken thought or steps about it. This morning he was content with what a man can have outside of God’s kingdom: this evening everything outside that kingdom has lost its value and is as nothing. The man who is lost in mist on a wild hill thinks himself exceptionally well off if he can find a sheepfold to give him shelter, and is thankful if he can see two steps before him and can avoid the precipice; but suddenly the sun shines out, the mist lifts, and he sees before him a boundless prospect, bright placid dwellings of men, and his path leading down to the shining valley with all its stir of life, and now what comforted and sufficed him before is all forgotten.

You will not fail in passing to draw the inference from this presentation of the manner of finding the kingdom, that conversions which have taken place quite unexpectedly and with great ease on the part of the converted person, need not therefore be insufficient and hollow. We are very apt to think that because the kingdom of heaven is so great a treasure a man should spend much labor in attaining it — that as the acceptance of Christ is the most important attainment a man can make, there ought to be some proportionate effort and expectancy on his part — that so great a treasure is not to be made over to one who is not caring for it or thinking of it. But this parable shows us that there may be a finding without any previous seeking, and that the essential thing is, not whether a man has been seeking, and how long, and how earnestly — no, but whether a man has found. The man in the parable would not have found more in that spot had he been seeking more and seeking it elsewhere all his days; the buried money was not accumulating interest while he was spending years in the search. The very same treasure may be found by the man who has grown gray in the quest of treasure, and by the child who plays in the field; by the alchemist who has spent his life in examining the boasted tests for finding treasure, and by the laboring man who has never heard of such tests and does not dream of finding sudden wealth. The question is, Does a man know the value of what has turned up before him, and is he so in earnest as to sell all for it? Let us not hesitate to believe that in one hour some heedless person has found what we have all our life been seeking, if only he shows his appreciation of the treasure by parting with all for it. The second parable introduces us to the other, the higher type of man, the merchantman — the man who has not moderate expectations, who refuses ever to be satisfied until he has all, who is always meditating new ventures, and to whom his present possessions are only of value as the means of acquiring what is yet beyond his reach. He sets out with the inborn conviction or instinct

that there is something worth seeking, worth the labor and the search of a life, something which will abundantly repay us, and to which we can wholly, freely, and eternally give ourselves up, and on which we shall delight to spend our whole strength, capabilities, and life. He refuses to be satisfied with the moderate, often interrupted and often quenched joys of this life. He considers physical health, the respect of his fellow-men, a good education, good social position, and so forth, as all goodly pearls, but he is not going to sit down satisfied with these things if there is anything better to be had. He refuses to have anything short of the best. He goes on from one acquirement to another. Money is good, he at first thinks, but knowledge is better. He parts with the one to get the other. Friendship is good, but love is better, and he cannot satisfy himself with the one, but must also have the other. The respect of his fellows is good, but self-respect and a pure conscience are better. Human love is a goodly pearl, but this only quickens him to crave insatiably for the love of God. He must always have what is beyond and best. He refuses to believe that God has created us to be partially satisfied, happy at intervals, content with effort, believing ourselves blessed, disguising the reality of our condition by the aid of fancy, or fleeing from it on the wings of hope, but to be partakers of His own blessedness, and to enjoy eternally the sufficiency of Him in whom are all things. This spirit of expectation is encouraged by the parable. It stems to say to us, Covet earnestly the best gifts. Never make up your mind merely to endure or merely to be resigned. Test what you have, and if it do not satisfy you wholly, seek for something better. It is not for you who have a God, a God of infinite resource and of infinite love, to accustom yourselves to merely negative blessings and doubtful, limited conditions. You are to start with the belief that you are not made for final disappointment, nor to rest content with something less than you once hoped for or can now conceive, but that there is somewhere, and attainable by you, the most unchallengeable felicity — that there does exist a perfect condition, a pearl of great price, and that there is but a question of the way to it, a question of search. You are to start with this belief, and you are to hold to it to the end. Under no compulsion or enticement, in the face of no disappointment, give up this persuasion that goodly pearls are to be had, and to be had by you, that into your life and soul the full sense of ample possession is one day to enter. When you come up from a breathless eager search like the pearl-diver, spent and bleeding, and with your hands filled only with mud or worthless shells; or when, like the merchant, you have ventured your all, and are reduced to beggary and thrown back to the very beginning, the great hope of your life being taken from you; when all your days seem to have been wasted in fruitless search; when every feeling within you rises up in mutiny against you, and like an ignorant crew scorns your adventure, and would put about and run with the wind back from the new world you seek, put them down; you have certainty on your side, simple, sheer certainty, for “he that seeketh, findeth. The important point in these parables is that which is common to both. The teaching which our Lord desires to convey by their means regards the incomparable value of the kingdom of heaven, and the readiness with which one who perceives its value will give up all for it. He wishes us to consider the alacrity, gladness, and assurance with which one who apprehends the value of the kingdom will and should put aside everything which prevents him from making it his own. It is the usual, universal, mercantile feeling. The merchant does not part with his other possessions reluctantly when he wishes to obtain some better possession; he longs to get rid of them; he goes into the investment about which he has satisfied himself with thorough good will; he clears out as fast as he can from every other investment, and endeavors to realize wherever he can that he may have his means free for this better and more productive venture. People who do not know its value

may think the man mad selling out at low prices, at unsuitable times, at a loss; but he knows what he is doing. I don't care what I lose, he says to himself, for if I can only get that field I shall have infinite compensation for my losses. As soon as he has made up his mind that there is a treasure in the field, he is filled with tremulous, sleepless eagerness, till he makes it his own. Day and night his heart is there and his thoughts. His dreams are full of visions of possession, or of heart-breaking failure. His waking hours are nervously agitated by fears and schemings. He always finds that his road home lies past the longed-for property. He is jealous of the very birds that hover over it. The world is full of stories, and every day adds to the stock of stories that display the ingenuity, craft, perseverance, consuming zeal, spent in winning the bit of ground that is coveted. No labor is grudged, no sacrifice is shrunk from, no present poverty is a trial if it brings the coveted property nearer. But is this a similitude for the kingdom of heaven? Is it not rather a picture of what ought to be than of what is? What we commonly find is that the kingdom of heaven is not so esteemed. We see men hesitating to part with anything for it, looking at it as a sad alternative, as a resort to which they must perhaps betake themselves when too old to enjoy life any longer, as what they may have to come to when all the real joy and intensity of life are gone, but not as that on which life itself can best be spent. Entrance into the kingdom of heaven is looked upon much as entrance into the fortified town is viewed by the rural population. It may be necessary in time of danger, but they will think with longing of the fields and homesteads they must abandon; it is by constraint, not from love, that they make the change. In short, it is plain that men generally do not reckon the kingdom of heaven to be of such value that they sacrifice everything else for its sake. And it is of supreme importance that we should clearly see the grounds on which we base our confidence that we ourselves are exceptions to the general rule, if we have such a confidence. Have we really shown any of that mercantile eagerness which the parable speaks of? Have we in any way shown that the kingdom of heaven is first in our thoughts? What meaning has this "selling of all" in our life? For it is to be observed that there always is this selling wherever the kingdom is won. We have it not at all unless we have given all for it. It is like a choice between living in the town or in the country. We know we cannot do both, and in order to secure the advantages of the one kind of life we must give up those of the other. So, living for ourselves prevents us from living for God, and we cannot do the one without wholly giving up the other. If you value the kingdom of God more than all else, you will eagerly give up everything that prevents your winning it; but no mere pretended esteem for it will prompt you to make the needful sacrifices, or will actually give you possession. If you do not really desire the kingdom more than aught else, then you have not found it. A feigned desire does not move us to obtain anything. It is what you really love that you spend thought and effort and money upon, not what you know you ought to love, and are trying to persuade yourself to love. In conclusion, this parable lets fall these two words of warning — 1. Make your calculations, and act accordingly. If you think the world will pay you better than Christ, then serve it; give yourself heartily and without compunction to it. Do not be so weak as to allow thoughts of things eternal and a spiritual world you have forsaken to haunt you and spoil your enjoyment. Make your choice and act upon it. If there is no better pearl, no richer treasure than what you can win by devotion to business and living for yourself, then by all means choose that, and make the most of it. But if you think that Christ was right, if you foresee that what is outside His kingdom must perish, and that He has gathered within it all that is worthy, all that is enduring, all that is as it ought to be, if you know that you are not and can never be blessed outside that kingdom, then let the reasonableness and remonstrance of this parable move

you to show some eagerness in winning that great treasure. Make your choice and act upon it. Let your mind dwell on the objects Christ has in view till you become enamored of them, and till they alone draw you and command your effort. Strive to shake off the pitiful avarice, the timorous anxieties, the cowardly self-seeking, the low, earthly, stupid aims of the man who serves the world, and let the Spirit of Christ draw you into fellowship with His aims, and give you a place in His kingdom.

2. If you have this treasure, do not murmur at the price you have paid for it. If you have to forego earthly advancement, if you are inwardly constrained to part with money which might have brought many comforts, if you have been drawn to do things which are misconstrued and which make you feel awkward with your friends, if self asserts itself again and again, and claims pleasure and gain and gratification of various kinds, do not murmur at what the kingdom is costing you, but rather count over your treasure, and see how much more you have than you have lost. Having what worlds cannot buy, you will surely not vex yourself by longing for this or that which the poorest spirited slave of this world can easily obtain. Suppose you had the offer to barter your interest in the kingdom for any or all of the possessions, advantages, and pleasures you are deprived of, you would not do it; if, then, in your own judgment, and by your own deliberate choice you have the better portion, it is scarcely fair to bewail yourself as an ill-used person. Anything you have been required to give up for the kingdom’s sake was either of no real value — it was the coin which, so long as you kept it, could neither warn nor clothe you, and whose only use was to buy valuables; or if of real value, the relinquishment of it has given you what is of infinite value.

03.06. THE NET

THE NET Matthew 13:47-50 In the foregoing parables of the kingdom Jesus has pointed out the causes of its success and failure, its mixed appearance in this world, its surprising growth from small beginnings, and the method of its extension. He now points to the result of all, when the great net shall be drawn to shore, all the influences and efforts of this life ended and brought to a pause; when there shall be “no more sea,” no fluctuation, no ebb and flow, no tide of good resolve and progress sucked back from all it had reached, and leaving a foul and slimy beach; especially no mingling of bad and good in an obscure and confusing element; but decision and separation, a deliberate sitting down to see what has been made of this world by us all, and a summing up on that eternal shore of all gains and results, and every man’s aim made manifest by his end.

There is obviously considerable resemblance between this parable of the net and the parable of the tares. But the one is not a mere repetition of the other under a different figure. Every parable is intended to illustrate one truth. Light may incidentally be shed on other points, as you cannot turn your eye or the light you carry on the object you wish to examine without seeing and shedding light on other things as well. Now the one truth which is especially enforced in the parable of the tares is that it is dangerous in the extreme to attempt in this present time to separate the evil from the good in the Church: whereas the one truth to which the parable of the net gives prominence is that this separation will be effected by and by in its own suitable time. No doubt this future separation appears in the parable of the tares also, but in that parable it is introduced for the sake of lending emphasis to the warning against attempting a separation now; in this parable of the net it is introduced with no such purpose. A weeding process might very naturally suggest itself, indeed always does suggest itself, to one looking over a hedge at a dirty field; but no one watching the drawing of a net would dream of plunging in to throw out worthless fish. Let the net be drawn; then, as a matter of course, the separation will be made. The value of the take, which cannot yet be estimated, will be ascertained by and by. The whole results of the work of Christ in the world will then but not sooner be known.

Another point of distinction between the two parables is this, that while in the one parable the springing of tares among the good corn is ascribed to the design of an enemy, in the other the mixture of good and bad in the net is rather exhibited as necessarily resulting from the nature of the case. In hunting, a man can make his choice and pick out the finest of the herd, letting the rest go; but in fishing with a net no such selection is possible; all must be drawn to shore that happens to have been embraced within the sweep of the net. So in sending out His servants to invite men to the kingdom, our Lord did not name individuals to whom they were to go, and who should, from first to last, prove themselves obedient to the word; He did not even name classes of persons or races with whom they would be sure to find success, but He told them to go into all the world and invite all men without distinction. The preachers of the kingdom have no powers to make selections for God; and to say of one that he will be, and of another that he will never be valuable to God. They are to cast the net so as to embrace all, and leave the determination of what is bad and what is good to the end.

Before endeavoring to extract from the parable its direct teaching, one cannot fail to notice some more general ideas suggested by the figure used. We are, for example, reminded that we are all advancing through life towards its final issue. Our condition in this respect bears a close resemblance to fish enclosed in a net. You have seen men dragging a river, fixing one end of the net, taking the other across the whole stream, and then fetching a wide compass, and enclosing in their net everything dead or alive, bad or good, from surface to bottom. Or you have seen the same thing done in the sea, one net enclosing quite a lake within itself, and gradually as it closes round the fish, and they find that it is sunk to the sand and floated to the crest of the wave, you have pitied their wild efforts to escape, and seen how sure a barrier these imperceptible meshes are. At first, while the net is wide, they frisk and leap and seem free, but soon they discover that their advance is but in one direction, and when they halt they feel the pressure of the net. So is it with ourselves — we must go on, we cannot breakthrough into the past, we cannot ever again be at the same distance from the shore as we were last year, yesterday, now. Yesterday, however delightful, you cannot live twice; eternity, however distasteful, you are certainly going on to. This day you have less space and scope than ever you had before, and every hour you spend, every action you do, every pleasure you enjoy makes this little space less. You cannot make time stand still till you shall resolve how to spend it. You cannot bring your life to a pause while you make experiments as to the best mode of living. The years you spend ill, you cannot receive again to spend well, the years spent in indecision, in doubt, in selfish seclusion are spent, and cannot now be filled with service of God and profit to your fellows. Your lifetime you have but once, and each hour of it but once; and as remorselessly as the last night of the convicted criminal is beat out and brings round the morning that is to look upon his death, so are your lives running steadily out, never faster when you long for to-morrow, never slower when you fear it, but ever with the same measured and certain advance. Do what you will, make what plans you will, settle yourself as fixedly in this life as you will, you are passing through and out of it, and shall one day look on it as all past — forever past. By no will of our own have we come into this life, but here we find ourselves and the net fallen behind us, so that we must accept all the responsibilities of human life, and go on to meet all its consequences.

Besides enclosure and inevitable passing on to a termination, the net suggests the idea of entanglement. Looking at fish in a net you see many that are not swimming freely, but are caught in the meshes and dragged on. The experience of some persons interprets this to them. While all of us are drawing on together towards eternity there are some who feel daily the pressure of the net. They have got into circumstances which they would fain be out of but cannot. Their position is not altogether of their own choosing, and they discharge its duties because they must, not because they would. At some former period they were too careless, or shortsighted, or irresolute; they exercised too little their right to determine their own course, and they now suffer the bondage consequent on this neglect.

If the conduct required of you by the position or connection into which you have come be disapproved by your conscience, then you must somehow break through and escape, else your soul will suffer detriment, and that in you which was good when first you were entangled will be landed broken, bruised, and useless. But if the conduct required be only disagreeable and humiliating and not sinful, you may have to adjust yourself to your circumstances. Do not toss and struggle in the net, but quietly set yourself to make the most of the condition you have

unfortunately brought yourself into. It may now be your duty to continue in a position it was not your duty originally to enter. A wrong choice may have brought you to a right thing. Do not, therefore, allow any feeling of the awkwardness, restrictions, unsuitableness, or painfulness of your position, nor any reflections on the folly that brought you into it, to fret you into uselessness. Just because it seems in so many ways unsuitable, it may call out deeper qualities in you, a patience which otherwise might have been undeveloped, a knowledge of God and man, a meekness and strength, which enlarge and mature your spirit.

Under very strange influences and forces are we passing onwards; by hopes and ambitions, by sickness and watching, by anguish and mirth, by the forlorn remembrance of a happy past and the sad forecasting of the future, by occupations that hurry us on from day to day, and by longings that abide with us through life and are never satisfied. And often we would fain escape from the gentle compulsion by which God draws us to our end, and have to remind ourselves that however entangled and tied up we are, and however prevented from our own ways and directions, this present time is after all but the drawing of the net and not the time of our use; that though now debarred from many pursuits we think we might be useful in, and hurried past enjoyments that delight us, we are passing to a shore where there is room and time enough for the fulfilment of every human purpose and the exercise of every human faculty; that after all our sins and follies, after all our pains and anxieties and difficulties, there does most surely come the kingdom of heaven and its glorious liberty. Here we quickly wax old, our freedom of choice and liberty of action are quickly taken from us, we stretch forth our hands and another girds us and carries us whither we would not; but there our youth shall be renewed with all its freedom from care, its spring and energy, its fresh views of truth, its boldness to live and see good days, its purpose for the life that lies before it unsullied; and it shall be again as when “thou wast young and girdedst thyself and walkedst whither thou wouldest.” But these are not the points emphasized in the parable. The parable sets the present mixture of good and bad in the kingdom of heaven or in the Church over against the eventual separation.

I. First then, we have the truth that the net gathers “of every kind.” This is the first thing that strikes one looking at a net drawn ashore — the confused mass of dead and living rubbish and prize. Shells, mud, starfish, salt-smelling weed, useless refuse of all kinds, are mingled with the fresh and wholesome fish that lie gasping and floundering in the net. Of the bad there is every kind of thing that can spoil the net and injure its contents; and of the good there is every kind, small and great, coarse and fine. And until the net is fairly landed it is impossible to say whether the weight is to be rejoiced in or not. This is set before us as a picture of the Church of Christ as it now is. It embraces every variety of character. At one time we are tempted to think that the mass of professing Christians is but so much dead weight; at other times we measure the success of the gospel by the mere numbers brought within the Church. The truth is, we cannot yet say much about the success of the gospel. Occasionally indeed there may be a gleam through the water that gives assurance of a large and fine fish: there may be deeds done which draw the eye of every one, and unmistakably prove that in the Church there are men after God’s own heart. We feel that of some men the character and quality are already ascertained, and that it needs no day of separation to tell us their worth. But there remains a vast mass about which we can say little; nay, we know that in the Church there are foul, lumpish, poisonous creatures. This is what our Lord anticipated, that while His Church would attract men whom God would gather to Him with delight

as being of His own spirit, there would also be drawn to it a number of wretched creatures who would go through life trying to hide from themselves that they love the world much more than God, and who must in the end be thrown aside as fit for no good purpose, as so much useless rubbish. This mixture arises from the manner in which the kingdom of heaven is proclaimed among men. It is not proclaimed by addressing private messages to selected and approved individuals, but publicly to all. And it is so proclaimed because it is for men generally and not for any special kind or class, and because God “would have all men to be saved.” The recruiting sergeant watches for likely men and singles them out from the crowd; but the kingdom of heaven opens its gates to all, because it has that which appeals to humanity at large, and can make use of every kind of man who honestly attaches himself to it. Our freedom of choice is left absolutely uncontrolled so far as the outward offer of the gospel goes; it is not even biased by any knowledge on our part that we are considered specially suitable for the work God has to do. Christ’s kingdom gathers in not only those in whom there is a natural leaning towards a devout life, or those who are of a susceptible temperament, or those who are attracted by a life of self-sacrifice, but it gathers in “of every kind.” You really cannot say who among your friends is most likely to become a Christian, because men become Christians not from any apparent predisposition, not because religion suits their idiosyncrasy, their individual mood and special tastes, but because the kingdom of heaven satisfies human wants which are as common to the race as hunger and thirst. But the kingdom being thus open to all, many enter it for the sake of some of its advantages, while they remain at heart disloyal, and are never carried out of themselves by a sense of its glory, and are alien to that great movement for the lasting good of men which the kingdom truly is. They have an external present attachment to the kingdom, but they do not belong to it and are not in it heart and soul. But this mixture is at length to give place. In the net, while we are in this world, all distinctions seem to be made light of; in the end, on the shore, a final and real distinction is to be exhibited and acted on. All are to pass through the hands of skilled judgment. The angels sever the wicked from among the just, so that the just alone are left in the net. The purpose of the net, of the draught, of the whole ongoing of this world is at length seen to have been for the sake of the just. Much bulkier, weightier, noisier, brighter colored, more curious things are drawn up, but these are cast aside summarily — it was not to secure these the net was drawn. The fishermen were not mere naturalists dragging for what is curious and rare; not mere idlers fishing for sport and caring little for the use of the result; not mere children amazed and delighted with every strange or huge thing they land; but they have cast the net for a purpose, and whatever is not suitable for this purpose is refuse and rubbish to them. The huge creature that has been a terror to the deep, the lovely sea plant that has waved its fruitless head in the garden of the sea — these are not twice looked at by the fishermen. They are acting on an understanding that the net was drawn for a purpose. And so it shall be in the end of the world. The end is not a mere running down of the machinery that keeps the world going, it is not a mere exhaustion of the life that keeps us all alive, it is not a hap-hazard cutting of the thread, it is a conclusion, coming as truly in its own fit day and order, as much in the fulness of time and because things are ripe for it, as the birth of Christ came. It is the time of the gathering up of all things to completion, when the few last finishing strokes are given to the work, that suddenly show the connection of things which seemed widely separate, and reveal at once the purpose and meaning of the whole. Men will then understand, what now scarcely one can constantly believe, that it is God’s purpose that is silently being accomplished, and that it is usefulness to Him that is the final standard of value. The distinction which finally separates men

into two classes must be real and profound. It is here said to be our value to God. Are we useless to Him, or can He make us serve any good purpose? Have we become so wholly demoralized by a selfish, limited life, that we cannot cherish any cordial desire for the common good, or enter into sympathy with purposes that do not promise profit or pleasure to ourselves? You have some idea what the purposes of God are; you see these purposes in the life and death of Christ; you know that in God's purposes that which contributes to the elevation of character takes precedence of what merely secures outward comfort or present advantage; you recognize that His Spirit delights in deeds of mercy, of self-sacrifice, of holy service — have you, then, such qualities as would be helpful in carrying out such purposes? are you already influential in society for good, helpful in extirpating vice and crime, and in alleviating the wretchedness of disease and poverty? do your sympathies and your thoughts run much towards such an expenditure of your energies? have you the first requisite of His servants, such a participation in His love for men, and such a zeal for the advancement of the race as wither within you all isolating and debasing selfishness? The fish taken in the net are disposed of by the fishermen, and are in their hands without choice or motion. A minute before they were swimming hither and thither, moving themselves by their own energies; now they are dealt with according to a judgment not their own. The situation is not more novel to the fishes than it will be to us. Here in this world we are conscious of a power to choose our own destiny, to change our character, and become different from what we are. We are not yet all we ought to be, but we can discard evil habits, repress base motives, and become at length suitable for God's work, harmonious with Him through all our being. So we flatter ourselves. But there comes a time, when, whatever we are, that we shall forever be; when we shall be, as it were, passive in the grip of destiny, disposed of by it, and unable to resist or alter it; when we shall find that the time for choosing is past, and that we must accept and abide by the consequences of our past choices; when for us the irrevocable word shall have gone forth, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

Amidst the sudden revolutions of thought and revulsion of feeling, amidst the utter discomfiture of many a hope on that day when the net is drawn and we are all suddenly thrown out on the eternal shore, will your hope not fail you? As you anticipate the hand that is to separate the good from the bad, do you rejoice that a penetrating eye and an unerring wisdom will guide it? do you rejoice that it is God who is coming to judge the world in righteousness, and that no mistake can be made, no superficial distinction hide the real one?

It is possible some one may defend himself against the parable by saying, "I will not alarm myself by judging of my destiny by my own qualities; I am trusting to Christ." But precisely in so far as you are trusting to Christ, you have those qualities which the final judgment will require you to show. "If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." You are useful to God in so far as you have the Spirit of Christ. Plainly the criterion given by the parable is the only sufficient criterion by which men can be judged as they issue from this life. Are they in such sympathy with God as to be capable of entering into His work and ways in the future, or have they only cultivated habits and qualities which served them for a life that is now past? Only by what we are, can we be finally judged; not by what we believe, but by what our belief has made us; not by what we profess, not by what we know, but by the results in character of what we have professed and known. In the final judgment, we shall not be required to assert that we are converted persons, or that we are trusting in Christ; we shall not be required to assert anything; but our future shall be determined by

our actual fitness for it. Fitness for carrying on God's work in the future, fitness for helping forward the cause of humanity in the future, fitness for living in and finding our joy in the future which Christ's Spirit is to rule, we must have if we are to enter that future. Get the fitness how you may, it is this you must have. If you can get it by some other means than by adherence to Christ and the reception of His Spirit, use that means, but this fitness you must have. And I think any one who seriously accepts this as the real outlook for us men will feel that he cannot do better than go to school to Christ that he may acquire not only a perception of what this fitness is, but that genuine humility and absorption in great and eternal aims which are its prime requisites. Apart from Christ, men may be good handicraftsmen, they may be gifted with genius that delights and aids mankind and beautifies life, they may see clearly what constitutes civil prosperity, in one way or other they may materially help forward the common cause; but if after all they are not in sympathy with the purpose of the king who rules and heads the forward movement, if their motives in using their gifts are still selfish, it can never be said to them, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." His joy is a joy they are not prepared to share, if they have sought their own advantage and not with Him sacrificed themselves to the common good. It is impossible to say who are helping and who are hindering the cause of Christ; and happily it is not our part to judge. The aims and ideas which Christ introduced to the minds of men have so permeated society that no one can grow up in a Christian country without coming more or less in contact with them. And the Spirit of Christ may have wrought in men in ways we are quite unable to trace. But it would seem as if only through Christ it were possible for us to come into that full sympathy at once with God and with men, which we see so clearly in His life and death, and which also is our salvation from selfish isolation and all ungodliness and inhumanity. It is serviceableness which is to determine our entrance into or exclusion from the future of God; or, as God does not desire service in which is no spirit of fellowship, but rather the intelligent and delighted co-operation of sons, it is sonship that determines our destiny. And who but Christ enables us to see what sonship is and to become sons? How is that tender, humble, sin-fearing, reverent spirit of God's children to be produced, how has it ever been produced, save by the acceptance of Christ as God the Son dying for our sin to bring us to the Father?

03.07. THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT OR THE UNFORGIVING DEBTOR

THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT OR THE UNFORGIVING DEBTOR Matthew 18:23-35 The occasion of this parable was a question put by Peter. Our Lord has once again been warning His disciples against that self-sufficient spirit which makes men quarrelsome and implacable and censorious. Their ambitious temper had been again showing itself in the discussion of their favorite topic: “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” They had been betraying their eagerness to be influential and important persons, their proneness therefore to despise the uninfluential and to treat with harshness the “little ones” of the kingdom, those who were weak and erring and always needing forgiveness. Our Lord therefore warns them that the little ones rather than the great ones are His care, and that provision is made in His kingdom not for those who need no forgiveness, not for those who can see only the faults and weaknesses of others, but for those who make constant demands on mercy. But Peter, when he hears the precept that he must gain his brother by forgiving him his trespass, foresees the very probable result, that his brother thus forgiven will repeat his offense, and puts therefore the question whether some different treatment ought not then to be adopted. “How often,” he says, “shall I forgive my brother?” He knew the Jewish rule: Forgive a first offense, forgive a second, a third — punish the fourth. And he seems to wish to meet at once the most liberal sentiments of his Master in expanding this common law to more than double its original measure: “Shall I forgive him till seven times?” But this question was framed in the very spirit of the old law of retaliation. By proposing any limit whatever to forgiveness, Peter showed that he still considered that to forgive was the exceptional thing, was to forego a right which must some time be reassumed, was not an eternal law of the kingdom but only a tentative measure which at any moment may be revoked; that underneath the forgiveness we extend to an erring brother there lies a right to revenge which we may at any time assert. This feeling wherever it exists shows that we are living with retaliation for the law, forgiveness for the exception. But Christ’s law is, that forgiveness shall be unlimited: “I say not unto seven times, but until seventy times seven “— that is to say an untold number of times. Seven was with the Jews the number of perfection. When time has run through seven days, it begins again; the circle is complete. So that no expression could more forcibly convey the impression of endless, ever renewed, eternal iteration than “seventy times seven.” The parable is added to illustrate the hatefulness of an unforgiving spirit. In it the Lord gibbets the implacable temper of the man who refuses to extend to others the forgiveness he himself needs. His own debt of something like two millions sterling indicates that he occupied a position of trust, and had exceptional opportunity of advancing his Lord’s interests. And probably the magnitude of the debt was intended not merely to suggest the vastness of the liabilities of all men to God, but also to hint to the Apostles that men so closely allied to their Lord as they were, might possibly incur a greater debt than those in an inferior position had opportunity of incurring.

It may seem as if there were some inconsistency between the two parts of our Lord’s directions regarding the treatment of an offending brother. In the parable and in His direct answer to Peter’s

question He speaks as if the sole duty of an injured person were to forgive. In the preceding verses He speaks as if much more were needful, and indeed He lays down the principles which have ever since governed, theoretically at least, ecclesiastical prosecutions. An injured person is not to act as a strong healthy minded, good-natured man is very apt to act. He is not to say to himself, “What does it matter that so-and-so has called me “cheat” or “liar;” my character will outlive his attacks; what harm has he done save to himself by circulating slanders about me, or by taking me into the extent of a few pounds? I am not going to dirty my hands or bother my head about such a poor creature.” No doubt there are slight injuries of which this is the proper treatment. To notice them at all would be to make them of more importance than is wise. But this may be carried too far; and it is frequently carried too far by the easy-going pleasant-tempered men who are so agreeable an element in society. There are, says our Lord, offenses of which the proper treatment is to go to the offending party and remonstrate with him. There are few more disagreeable duties in life, but sometimes it is a duty. There are matters that come to your knowledge which you cannot pass by — you feel that if you do so, it is because of an element of cowardliness in your nature. Duty requires you to go to the offending party and endeavor to bring him to repentance. But this treatment and all that follows it is in strict harmony with the injunction to forgive, for you are never required to forgive an impenitent person: but you are required — and this is, I think, a duty more difficult and more frequently neglected than even the duty of forgiveness — you are required to do all you can to bring to repentance the person who has injured you. To forgive the man who has wronged you, when he comes humbling himself, admitting he was wrong and heartily begging you to forgive him, in most actual cases makes no great call on Christian charity: but to go affectionately and without a spark of vindictive feeling to the man who has done you a wrong, and strive patiently to make it as plain to him as it is to yourself that he has done wrong, and so to do this as to win your brother — this seems to be about the highest reach of Christian virtue we are likely to meet in this present world.

There is another initial difficulty. Not only do we feel it almost impossible to forgive certain injuries, but some well-instructed Christian writers explicitly maintain that there are injuries which men ought not to forgive.* One who has done much to elevate the tone of modern literature, introduces the following lines in his most celebrated drama:

“Oh sirs, look round you lest you be deceived, Forgiveness may be spoken with the tongue, Forgiveness may be written with the pen, But think not that the parchment and mouth pardon Will e’er eject old hatreds from the heart.

There’s that betwixt you been men ne’er forget Till they forget themselves, till all’s forgot.

Till the deep sleep falls on them in that bed From which no morrow’s mischief knocks them up.”

* On this point, see the remarkable chapter on Forgiveness, in “Ecce Homo,” from which the thought of this paragraph is derived. The Author cites a modern novelist who makes one of his characters say: “There are some wrongs that no one ought to forgive, and I shall be a villain on the day I shake that man’s hand.”

It might seem then as if those who knew human life best agreed that there is a limitation which must be put to forgiveness, that there are injuries which no man can be expected to forgive or can forgive, that there are circumstances in which this rule of Christ’s must be set aside.

Let us test this idea by a very simple instance. Some of the most thoroughly Christian and wise headmasters have been inclined to wink at fighting among their boys, taking care that it does not become too frequent nor go any serious length. And even the most forgiving and Christlike of parents is not altogether comfortable if his boy comes home from school and tells him that he was grossly insulted and struck by a boy somewhat bigger than himself, but that instead of defending himself he forgave the offender. Why then is the parent not quite comfortable, why would most parents be really more gratified to hear that their boy had fought a bigger boy, than that when struck he had turned the other cheek? Simply because most parents might have some suspicion that softness and cowardliness had as much to do with the turning of the other cheek as Christian feeling. If they had unmistakable proof of their boy's courage and manliness, if they were perfectly sure that fear was a quite unknown feeling to their boy, they would delight in his having forgiven insolence and ill treatment. But unfortunately fear and a craven spirit are so much commoner than high spirit moderated by Christian temper, that wherever gross injuries are forgiven, we are apt to ascribe this apparently Christian conduct to that spirit which is at the very antipodes from the spirit of Christ. The parent does not think his boy ought not to forgive — nay, he is sure that is the highest and manliest, and to many boys the most difficult conduct — but until he is quite sure that in a given case the forgiveness has sprung not from a sham magnanimity thrown over a sneaking and feeble character, he is afraid to commend it. So it is everywhere. There is no limitation to forgiveness; no injury so gross that it ought not to be forgiven. But there are injuries so gross that when men forgive them they are sure to be suspected of doing so from unworthy motives. So little is Christian feeling in its highest reaches and manifestations counted on, so little is it seen or even understood, that when a man forgives one who has deeply injured him, this forgiveness is apt to be ascribed to what is mean, and not to what is Christlike in the injured party. But wherever, as in the case of our Lord Himself there is no question of the power to defeat or the courage to face one's enemies, wherever forgiveness can be ascribed only to a merciful spirit, there men do admire the disposition to forgive even the greatest of injuries. The parable is intended to enforce the teaching of our Lord regarding forgiveness by exhibiting the unreasonableness and meanness and danger of an unforgiving spirit. The hatefulness of such a spirit is emphasized by two aggravating features: —

1. The unmerciful servant had himself required forgiveness and had just been forgiven.

2. The debt due to him was infinitesimally small when compared with the debt which had been remitted to him.

1. First, the man is not softened by the remission of his own great debt. He goes straight from the presence of his master who had forgiven him all his talents, and lays violent hands on one of his associates who happened to owe him a few shillings. Having just been forgiven, he might have been expected to remember, with humble and softened feeling, that there is a better law than retaliation. He thought mercy a good thing so long as he was the object of it. So long as he was in the presence of a creditor he had much to say of the calamity of debt, a thousand reasons to urge for the exercise of patience, and a thousand excuses for wrongdoing. Five minutes after, in the presence of a debtor, there is to him no law in the world, but harsh and hasty exaction of dues. He is deaf to the reasons which had filled his own mouth immediately before, deaf to everything which was not a promise to pay, and that instantly. This is no over-colored picture. It is over-colored neither as a representation of what naturally occurs in connection with pecuniary debts, nor as a

picture of the treatment which sinners give to sinners like themselves. Men who begin to use the money which belongs to others, and to invest on their own account funds which either do not exist at all except in their own hopes, or which belong to others and are only passing through their hands, become deadened with surprising rapidity to all sense of the injury they do. If they prove bankrupt, it is much more their own inconvenience and loss they bewail than the wrong done to others. The enormous debtor of the parable betrayed no sense of shame, no feeling for his lord's loss, but only craven dread of slavery and personal suffering. No serious humility, no honest and thoughtful facing of the facts, no deep truthfulness have entered his spirit. He is ready to promise anything, if he can only escape present consequences. This is a true picture of the temper in which we sometimes crave pardon. Our iniquities overtake us with a throng of painful and overwhelming consequences, and in terror we cry for forgiveness. But the distress of our own condition blinds us to the wrong we have done, and no true humiliation enters the spirit. Deadened by long self-indulgence to a sense of everything but what directly affects himself with pleasure or pain, the sinner has no thought of the deeper spiritual relations of his sin. He stupidly thinks God withholds punishment because he has made a foolish purpose of paying his dues by amending his ways. There is no deep contrition; no conscience-stricken yet joyful recognition of the relation he holds to God; no intense delight and glorying in a God capable of passing by such transgressions as his; no rising of the spirit to new attachments and new ideas; no "truth in the inward parts," but only a desire to escape, as selfish and as soft as was the desire to sin. But the forgiving love of God, if it does not humble, hardens us. To carry an unhumbled, self-regarding spirit through such an experience gives the finishing touch to a dehumanizing selfishness. We have a key here to the conduct of those religious persons who act as if they meant to make up for their own deficiencies by charging others with theirs; as if they supposed that the violent and unrelenting condemnation of those who offend them were the fittest exercise of their privilege as persons forgiven of God. The little taste of religion they have had seems to have soured their temper and hardened their heart. They would be more human had they no religion at all. Just as this man proposes to build up his credit again by scrupulously exacting every farthing that others owe him, so do those who have not been thoroughly humbled by God's forgiveness show their zeal in exposing and reproving the faults of others. So far from being softened and enlarged in spirit by their own experience of mercy, they grow more punctilious in their exactions, more cruel and stiff in their demeanor.

2. Second, the petty amount of the debt he exacts is set over against the enormity of that which had been remitted to himself. You might expect that a man who had been forgiven talents would have no heart to exact pence. You would suppose that one whose eye had been fixed on a kingdom's revenue would not know how to count farthings. There is something almost incredibly mean as well as savage in this man's quick remembrance of the few pence due to himself, while he so easily dismisses from his mind the ten thousand talents due by him. But our incredulity gives way as we look at the facts which underlie the parable, and measure the debt we owe to God with the peccadilloes committed against ourselves, and which we are so slow to forget.

What are the offenses which we feel it impossible to forgive, and which alienate us from one another? If other men do not serve us well and fulfil our expectations; if they do not throw themselves heartily into our work and perfectly accomplish what we entrusted to them, we have no forgiveness for them; they must go. Or some one has been so presumptuous as to differ from us, and has opposed the propagation of our opinions on some political, or theological, or practical

matter. Or men patronize us, and make us feel insignificant; or they tell some damaging story about us; or they win the prize that we worked for, or succeed in getting possession of a little bit of property we coveted. Or has even some grand exceptional injury been done you? has your whole life been darkened and altered and obstructed by the injustice or neglect or selfishness of some one, whose influence circumstances compel you to submit to? Is there some one whom you cannot think of but with a tumult in the blood and a passionate emotion? Take the injury that is most difficult for you to forgive, and measure it with that for which you yourself need to ask forgiveness of God, and say whether you ought to be implacable and resolved on revenge.

I suppose there are few persons who have not often sat and wondered why it is that they feel so little sense of obligation to God, and so little shame that their sins are sins against Him. It is so difficult for us to have any genuine shame before God, though so easy to feel it before men, that we are sometimes tempted to fancy that a sense of sin must after all be a fictitious feeling, and not a feeling which increases in intensity with soundness of mind and clearness of mental vision. Several considerations, however, combine to show that the representation given in the parable fairly apportions the comparative guilt of sinning against God and sinning against man. All our sins directly or indirectly touch God, while only a few touch any individual on earth. In the injuries done to yourself by other men you may be able to detect more malice, more intention to wound and injure than has entered into any sin you have committed against God. But then, what are the obligations which bind any man to your service compared with the obligations which bind you to God? For whom have you done, or for whom can you do, any portion of that which God daily does for you? Debt is measured by obligation. There can be no debt where there has been no obligation. We are not equally bound to all. We are not bound to educate another man’s children as we are bound to educate our own. We can have no debt to a shopkeeper from whom we have received nothing. And our debt to God is enormous because we have received from Him benefits deep as life itself, and are bound to Him in ways as varied as the manifestations of that life. We cannot sin against one another as we can sin against God. Just as the servant of the parable, in dealing with his lord, had intromissions with larger sums than he could touch in dealing with a fellow-servant, so in dealing with God we are lifted to relations unique in kind and of surpassing sacredness, and are involved in responsibilities of wider and deeper consequence than any that would otherwise attach to our life. There ought, then, to be some proportion between our perception of the wrong done us and the wrong we do. If we so keenly feel the prick of a needle when inflicted on ourselves, we may be expected to consider with some compunction the gaping wounds we inflict on another. Is our shame for sin against God as intense and real as the blaze of indignation, or is it continuous and persistent as the slow-burning hate which an injury done to ourselves begets? In speaking of those who defraud or injure us we express our opinion of what wrong-doing deserves. Is our judgment as explicit, our feeling as strongly expressed in regard to our own transgressions? As strongly? But they ought to be a thousand times more vehement; there should be against ourselves an indignation such as no enemy of ours could excite against himself though his offenses were many times aggravated. And what after all, is our reputation, our happiness, our property, that we should make much wail about injury done to them? Our good name and our advancement in the world are no doubt much to ourselves, but they are of very little moment indeed to the world at large. The fate of the unmerciful servant tells us in the plainest language that the mere canceling of our guilt does not save us. It tells us that unless the forgiveness of God humbles us and begets within us a truly meek and loving spirit, we cannot be

owned as His children. The best assurance that we are ourselves forgiven is the consciousness that the very spirit of the forgiving God is working in our own hearts towards others.

“Tis not enough to weep my sins, ’Tis but one step to heaven; When I am kind to others, then I know myself forgiven.”

“He that revengeth shall find vengeance from the Lord, and He shall surely retain his sins. Forgive thy neighbor the hurt that he hath done unto thee, so shall thy sins also be forgiven when thou prayest. A man beareth hatred against another, and doth he seek pardon from the Lord? He showeth no mercy to a man who is like himself: and doth he ask forgiveness of his own sin?” (Sir 28:1-4) “If ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.” If you are hard, unrelenting; always chiding; slow to recognize merit, quick to observe faults; admitting no excuse and making no allowances; cherishing ill will; still feeling resentment on account of injuries done you ten years ago; if there are persons from whom you would if you could exact the uttermost farthing — then you have reason to fear for your own forgiveness. Can you humbly beseech God, and with tearful eyes look up to Him for pardon while you have your foot upon your brother’s neck or your hand at his throat? The very fact that you are proud and unbending should itself convince you that you have never been humbled before a forgiving God. The very fact that you can be overbearing and exacting should prompt you to question most seriously whether you have in very truth let your heart be flooded with God’s undeserved pardoning mercy. The very fact that in any relation of life you can carry yourself in a haughty, imperious, and unchastened manner should bid you ask whether in very truth you are at heart lowly before God as one who day by day needs His forbearance and pardon. Every bitter word you speak, every unmerciful, inconsiderate act you do, every relentless, cruel, exacting thought you have, casts suspicion on your Christianity, and makes it seem possible that your Master may yet have to mete to you with your own measure.

Thus then does the Lord lay down the law of unlimited forgiveness as a law of His kingdom. The kingdom or society He came to form, that new. grouping and association of men which He means to be eternal, cannot be held together without the observance of this law. This is one of the essential laws of His kingdom. Men are to be held together and to work smoothly together not by external compulsion, not by a police agency, not by a criminal law of alarming severity — it seems ludicrous to speak of such forces in connection with an eternal and perfect society — but it is to be held together by the inward disposition of each member of it to forgive and be on terms of brotherly kindness with every other member.

We lose an immense deal of the power and practical benefit of Christ’s teaching by refusing to look at things from His point of view, and to listen as cordially to what He says of His kingdom as to what He says of individuals. We are not perhaps too much but we are too exclusively taken up with the saving of our own souls. We neglect to consider that the Bible throughout takes to do with the Church and people of God, with the kingdom, and with the individual only as a member of the kingdom. It is not for the individual alone that Christ legislates. He does riot point out a path by which one man by himself can attain to a solitary bliss; but He founds a kingdom, and lays down as its fundamental law the law of love, a law which shows us that our individual happiness and our individual perfection can only be won in fellowship with others, and by truly entering into the most enduring bonds with them. To unite us again individually to God, our Lord recognizes as only half

His work: to unite us to one another is as essential. Salvation consists not only In our being reconciled to God, but also in our being reconciled to men. When we attach ourselves to Christ we become members of a society, and can no longer live an isolated life. We must live for the body we belong to. Until we catch this esprit de corps we are poor Christians. The man who is content if he is sure his own soul is safe has great cause to believe it in danger; for there is no surer mark of a healthy Christian than his practical acknowledgment of the claims of other men and his interest in the kingdom to which he belongs. But how are we to attain to that thoroughly healthy state of spirit to which it shall be natural to forgive until seventy times seven? This parable indicates that the most important step towards this is taken when we learn to accept God's forgiveness in a right spirit. The true way to a forgiving spirit is to be forgiven, to go back again and again to God, and count over our debt to Him. The man who thinks justly of his own wrong-doing has no heart to make much of the injuries done to himself. He always feels how much more he has been forgiven than he can ever be called upon to forgive. His soul gladdened, softened, and humbled by a sense of the great compassion that has remitted his great debt, loses all power to be harsh and damnatory.

We must therefore begin with the truth about ourselves. It is not required of us that we go out of our way to make an ostentatious display of our guilt, but it is requisite that we let the conviction of our great debt so sink into our minds that we shall go softly all the days of our life. It is required of us that we discover and recognize the truth about ourselves, and that we abide and walk in the truth and not in the unreal world of our own self-satisfied fancy. It is required of us that we have a character, and that this character be founded on and grow up out of God's forgiving grace. We need not proclaim to every man we meet the reason, but we must let all men see that we have a reason for loving-kindness, for humility, for gravity, for tender consideration of others, for every quality that banishes hatred from earth and welds men closer into one community.

Chapter 30

03.08. LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD. FIRST LAST AND LAST FIRST

LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD. FIRST LAST AND LAST FIRST

Matthew 20:1-16 The key to this parable is found in the question to which it was the answer, and in the circumstances which suggested that question. A young man of high character and still higher aspirations, but of unfortunately great wealth, had recognized in Jesus a teacher who in His own person and demeanor bore evidence that He understood how man could attain to the highest ideal. He accordingly introduced himself to our Lord as one who was bent upon achieving the highest human attainment, and who was only anxious to know what more could be done beyond what he had already accomplished. But on learning that for him the path to perfection lay through the abandonment of his great possessions, he felt that this was more than he could do, and turned away ashamed and wretched. As he passed out of sight, our Lord, sympathizing with the severity of his temptation, turned to His disciples, and with His usual form of strong asseveration, said, “Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.” When Peter saw how keenly the Lord appreciated the difficulty of giving up property and detaching oneself from familiar comforts and employments, he suggested that those who overcame this difficulty were peculiarly meritorious. “Behold,” he says, “we have forsaken all and followed Thee: what shall we have therefore?” But in asking this question Peter betrayed precisely that disposition which most thoroughly vitiates all service of Christ, the disposition to bargain, to work for a clearly defined reward and not for the sake of the work itself and in generous trust in the justice and liberality of the Master. Peter had to all appearance made, so far as was possible in his circumstances, the very sacrifice which the rich young man had declined to make; but if a sacrifice is made merely for the sake of winning for oneself some greater gain, then it is no longer a sacrifice but a bargain. Love and trust are of the essence of sacrifice. Peter had left his home, his boat and fishing gear, and all the pleasant associations of the lake: he had torn himself up by the roots; but if he had done so not from simple love of Christ which found its ample reward in His company, but with a clear understanding that he would have a good return in kind for all he had given up, then he was perhaps premature in so complacently comparing himself with the rich young man. It is the motive which gives virtue to any sacrifice or service. The spirit which asks what compensation is to be made for every sacrifice, is self-regarding, mercenary, greedy, not generous, trustful, loving: it confounds two things diametrically different, bargain and sacrifice. The Lord’s answer to Peter’s question is twofold. He first assures His followers that they shall have ample compensation for all present loss. Sharing with Him in work, they shall share in His reward. The results He works for shall be theirs as well as His. But having given them this assurance. He takes occasion to rebuke the disposition to bargain, the somewhat craven spirit that sought to be quite sure it would take no harm by following Him. And he warns them against comparing their sacrifices and services with those of other men, affirming that many who, like the apostles, were called at the very beginning of the Lord’s ministry, and were first not only in point of time, but in eminence of service, and who might therefore seem sure of a conspicuous and exceptional reward, will after all be found no better off than those whose expectations have been extremely

meager. “Many shall be last that are first, and first that are last.”

It was to illustrate this statement that the parable of the laborers in the vineyard was spoken. This is the point of its teaching to which all else is subordinate. The nature of the work in the vineyard and its exhausting toil; the unwearied compassion of the Lord of the vineyard, going out hour after hour to invite the unemployed; these and all other details are but the feathers of the arrow helping it to fly straight to its mark; but the point is, that those who were first hired were last paid and least paid, and this because the first-hired entered on their work in a bargaining spirit and merely for the sake of winning a calculated and stipulated remuneration, whereas the late-hired laborers did their work in faith, not knowing what they were to get, but sure they would not get less than they deserved. The parable, then, is intended to show us the difference between work done in a bargaining spirit and work done in trust; between the reward given to work which in quantity may be very great but in motive is mercenary, and the reward given to work which in quantity may be very small, but in motive is sound. It directs attention to the fact that in estimating the value of work we must take into consideration not only the amount done or the time spent upon it, but the motive that has entered into it. It is this which God chiefly regards. One hour of trustful, humble service is of greater value to God than a lifetime of calculating industry and self-regarding zeal. A gift that is reckoned by thousands of pounds; an ecclesiastical endowment that makes a noise through a whole generation; a busy, unflagging, obtrusive zeal which makes itself seen and felt throughout a whole land, these things make a great impression upon men — and it is well if they do not make a great impression on the parties themselves who do them and prompt them inwardly to say, “What shall we have therefor”— but they make no impression upon God unless animated by a really devoted spirit. While men are applauding the great workers who ostentatiously wipe the sweat from their brows and pant so that you can hear them across the whole field, God is regarding an unnoticed worker, who feels he is doing little, who is ashamed that any one should see his work, who bitterly regrets he can do no more, who could not name a coin small enough to pay him, but who is perfectly sure that the Master he serves is well worth serving. It is thus that the first become last and the last first. That we are meant to see this difference of spirit in the laborers is obvious alike from the terms of their respective engagements, from the distribution of the wages, and from the temper shown by the last paid men.

1. First, the parable is careful to state that those who were hired early in the day made an agreement to work for a stipulated sum. This sum was the usual day’s wage of the period: a fair wage, which of itself was sufficient inducement to work. These men were in a condition to make their own terms. They ruled the market. At four or five in the morning the laborers in a hiring market have a keen sense of their own value, and are in no mood to sell themselves cheap. The masters and stewards have a very hard time of it as they are hooted from knot to knot of lusty fellows with the pride of the morning in their faces, and strive in vain to pick up labor at a reasonable figure. No man in the market at that hour engages without making his own terms, without saying what So-and-so offers, without knowing to a halfpenny what he will have, and striking hands with his hirer as his equal. The laborer means to make a good thing of it for himself; if he does not like the look of one steward he chooses another, if he thinks one master’s pay too little he waits for a better offer. He is not going to work all day to oblige some neighboring proprietor, he is going to work to make a good wage for himself. It’s hot, hard, thirsty work, but it pays. But in the evening the tables are turned. The masters now have it all their own way. It’s no

longer, “Will you give us more than So-and-so? what will you offer?” but “We’ll leave that to you, sir; supper and a bed at the most is all we can expect. There’s scarcely time to get to your place, but we’ll hurry and do our best, if you’ll have us at all.” Possibly these men were the proudest in the morning, and missed their chance. Group after group of men has been detailed off at various hours, and now the shadows begin to lengthen; their pride gives place to hunger and anxious thoughts of the coming night. They are beginning to have gloomy thoughts of lying down in the darkness, with no food to refresh them, no roof to shelter, no promise of more work from an appreciative master, no pleasant talk and song with their comrades in the vintage. But as the day wears desolately away, and as now the hard task-masters are heard on all sides beating down the wages of the jaded hirelings, there rises the considerate voice of this good and upright householder, “Go ye also into my vineyard, and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.” In no condition to make a bargain, they most gladly trust themselves to one whose words have the ring of truth. They go, glad to get work on any terms; they go, not knowing what they are to get, but quite sure they are in good hands. They go humble, trusting, and grateful; the others went proud, self-confident, mercenary.

2. Secondly, the same difference in the spirit in which each set of laborers had entered on their work is implied in the striking scene which ensued at the close of the day. Those who had barely got their work begun were first paid, and were paid a full day’s wage. There must, of course, have been a reason for this; it was not mere caprice, but was the result and expression of some just idea. It could not be that these late-hired laborers had done as much in their one hour as the others in twelve; for the others, those who had worked the full day, are conscious of having done their work well. No hint is given that they were less skilful or less zealous than the late-hired men. We are thrown back, therefore, for the explanation on the hint given in the hiring, namely, that those who wrought merely for the sake of pay received the pay they looked for, while they who came to the vineyard conscious that they had wasted their day and not daring to stipulate for any definite wage, but leaving themselves confidently in the hands of a master they believed in, were gladdened by the unmerited reward of the fullest wage. The men who bargained were paid according to their bargain; the men who trusted got far more than they could have dared to bargain for. The principle is more easily understood because we ourselves so commonly act upon it. The man who bargains and must have everything in black and white, and thus shows that in working for you it is himself he is looking after and seeking to profit, gets every penny he bargained for, but not a penny beyond; whereas the man who fears his work may not please you, but, if you wish it, will try and do his best, and says not a word about pay — to this man you give as much as you decently can, and always more than he is expecting. What you relish and reward, God also relishes and rewards. It is work done with some human feeling in it that you delight in. What you give out to be done at a certain rate you accept and pay for, but take no heed of him who does it. There is nothing personal between you. He does not work for you, but for his wage. His work may be most important and thoroughly well done, it may bear the mark of time and toil upon it, but it is the work of a hireling with whom you are quits when you pay him what he contracted to receive.

3. Thirdly, the same difference of spirit among the laborers is brought out in the envious and grudging temper of the first hired and last paid men. Peter must have felt himself gravely rebuked by the picture here drawn of the man who had listened to the first call of Christ, but who, after a full, honest day’s work, was found to be possessed of a selfish, grudging spirit that filled him with

discontent and envy. It was now plain that this early-hired laborer had little interest in the work, and that it was no satisfaction to him to have been able to do twelve times as much as the last-hired laborer. He had the hireling's spirit, and had been longing for the shadow and counting his wages all day long. English sailors have been known to be filled with pity for their comrades whose ships only hove in sight in time to see the enemy's flag run down, or to fire the last shot in a long day's engagement. They have so pitied them for having no share in the excitement and glory of the day that they would willingly give them as a compensation their own pay and prize-money. And the true follower of Christ, who has listened to the earliest call of his Master and has reveled in the glory of serving Him throughout life, will from the bottom of his heart pity the man who has only late in life recognized the glory of the service, and has had barely time to pick up his tools when the dusk of evening falls upon him. It is impossible that a man whose chief desire was to advance his Master's work, should envy another laborer who had done much less than himself. The very fact that a man envies another his reward is enough of itself to convict him of self-seeking in his service. The difference in the spirit of the workers which is thus brought out in the parable will be found, says our Lord, in the Church, and it will be attended with like results at the time of judgment and award. Here also "many that are first shall be last," not all, but many; so commonly will this be exemplified that there must be something in the nature of the case inducing it. Many who have done the largest works shall receive the smallest reward. Many first in man's esteem shall be last in God's reckoning. Many who have borne the burden and heat of the day, who have been conspicuous in the work of the church, whose names are identified with certain charities or philanthropic institutions will be rated below j obscure individuals who have almost no work at all to point to. Many who have served longest in the Lord's vineyard have a consciousness that they are the great workers, which likens them to the self-complacent Peter rather than to the humble, trustful, self-ignoring spirit of the late-hired laborers. So, many who are most forward in the work of the Church and of the world are plainly animated by motives which are not above suspicion, that nothing is more obvious or more commonly remarked upon than that "many are called but few chosen." Many make trial of the work, and labor vigorously in it, but few have the purity of motive which gives them an abiding place, and wins the approval of Christ. And they especially are tempted to faultiness of motive who are first in work; they are impressed with their own consequence; they find it difficult to avoid inwardly comparing themselves with those who waste their day; and moreover, many of those who live outwardly blameless and correct lives, and who abound in practical work, do so because they are originally of a calculating disposition. But though many of the first, yet not all of them shall be last. This also we know to be true. Some at least of the best known workers in the vineyard, some who entered it early and never left it for an hour, some who scarcely once straightened their backs from toil, and dropped asleep as they came to the end of their task, knowing nothing but God's work their whole life through, have also wrought in no bargaining spirit, but passed as humble a judgment on their work as the last and least and lowest of their fellow-laborers on theirs. It is a thing that recalls the mind from thinking cynically and contemptuously of human nature to find how often the highest faculty, the most conspicuous and helpful gifts are used with absolute humility and lowliness, with scarcely one conscious thought that great good is being done. Happily there are some first who shall remain first; first at their work, and foremost in it; first in the field for amount and quality of work done, and yet first also in reward, because first in unaffected forgetfulness of self and pure devotedness to their Master's interests, and to the work itself. As it is often the man who is first in the breach who least

understands why men should praise him for courage, he himself having had no thought of danger; as the charitable man who has helped countless miserable creatures and made sacrifices which could not be hid, is distressed when his friends speak of making public recognition of his charity, so some who have most materially advanced the cause of Christ and of humanity are precisely those who think most shamefacedly of what they have done, and are unfeignedly astonished to hear they have been of any service, and cannot once connect the idea of reward with any toil they have undergone.

Again, as there are some first who remain first, so there are some last who remain last. Not all who enter the vineyard late enter it humbled. Not all who do little do it well. Mercenariness is not confined to those who have some small excuse for it. Even those who have wasted their life, and bring but the wreck of it into the kingdom, are sometimes possessed with a complacency and shamelessness that are astonishing to those who know their past history. To come to Christ late, and to come unhumbled, is the culminating exhibition of human complacency. To bring to the vineyard neither strength to labor nor purity of motive is the extreme of unprofitableness. This parable, rightly read, gives no encouragement to late entrance into the Lord's service. To think of this service as that which we can add at any convenient time to the other work of life is to mistake it altogether. The service of Christ should cover the whole of life; and what is not done as a part of His work may in some respects as well not be done at all. All outside His vineyard is idleness. You may be busily, painfully engrossed in worldly business, and yet absolutely idle as to what conscience persistently reminds you is the one thing needful. Your life may be far through, as years go, but the main business of it not yet begun: your prospects always improving, yourselves no better than when you began. If there are those among you who feel this painfully enough, who keenly feel the vanity of life, who have tasted its distresses and disappointments, who know how little it all comes to, a few pleasures, a few excitements, one or two great changes, a great deal of dull labor, and a good many sorrows, and then the plunge into oblivion; if there are those who would welcome anything that would put a heart and a purpose into the whole, and lift every part of life up out of the low and despicable rut in which it for the most part moves, then why do you hesitate to respond when Christ says, "Why stand ye here all the day idle? Go ye into My vineyard, and what is right ye shall receive?" Do you not believe Him? Do you fancy that He will suffer you to spend yourself in what is despicable, and fruitless, and disappointing? Why waste your day? Why waste another hour of it, if there is real work to be done, if there is work of such importance to be done that He Himself left heaven to do it, if there is work to be done that the world needs, that men will be the better for, if there is the least opening for you to put your hand to what will stand God's inspection, why go on idling and frittering your one precious life away on what you yourself despise and are weary of?

Let us then examine ourselves in the light of this parable. Our Lord pointedly invites us to work for Him, to live for Him, and to do so in the assurance that whatsoever is right He will give. These laborers who went in faith got more than the men who had made what they considered a good bargain. In other words, you are as sure to be rewarded for every hour you spend in Christ's service as if you had His written bond and had made your own terms. If you had considered what you would like in return for anything you do for Him, and if you had stipulated for this, you would not thus have so much as you are sure to have by simply leaving it to Him. We need not concern ourselves about the future: we need not be mentally counting our wages; He would have us fall in

love with the service, so that even though there were to be no reward at all, we should still choose it as the most honorable, the most useful, the most joyful way of spending our life, indeed as the one service which is perfect freedom, and satisfies our idea of what life should be. The slow, hesitating, suspicious person that thinks Christ wants to use him for some ends that are not the proper ends of human life, the foolish person that always feels as if Christ did not understand what it is that gives the truest relish to human life — such persons are not the laborers He desires. The bargaining spirit gets what it bargains for, but also gets His rebuke: the spirit that is too broken to bargain, too crushed and self-diffident to make terms, but can only go and work and trust, gets a reward that carries in it the hearty approval and encouragement of the Lord. Are you then in His vineyard at all, or are you still among the unhappy ones who cannot decide, or among those who have looked at the vineyard in the distance, and have fallen asleep in the market-place and are dreaming they are in it? or are you among those who eagerly watch for the reappearance of the Master, and as soon as He turns the corner of the street offer themselves to Him? He calls you now; He calls you every hour of the day. And if already in His service, are we among those who wish to know what they are to get or make by it? or do we leave all that to Him and enter His work because we are weary of idleness and sick at heart with hope deferred, or sore with the ill-usage we have received from other masters?

None of us, surely, dare push this parable aside and pass on into life without satisfying our conscience about this matter. Many of us are called. Many of us are in the vineyard, and have long been in it. We have borne, in a mild fashion, the burden and heat of the day. We have given money; we have spent a great deal of time; we have performed a number of worrying duties. And we mean to go on. Well, in what spirit have we labored? Has it been to earn or maintain a reputation, or to make our influence felt? Has it been under a dim impression that such works and sacrifices are necessary in those who claim to be Christians? Have you rendered them as a kind of payment to enable you to maintain the feeling that you are Christ’s people? Have you striven to help others mainly for the sake of doing yourself good, of helping out your own salvation, and keeping your own hands clean? Has your object been advantage to yourself, either future or present, spiritual or worldly? If so, you will have your penny, but the cordial approval of your master goes to others. You may say, Is it not right to aim at our own salvation, and do those good works which are needful for that purpose? Certainly it is right to save yourself, but it is better to save ten other people. It is he who loses sight of his own interests and forgets himself because he is so much taken up with the common work and the common good that finds he has won the highest reward.

Look, then, to your motives. See that it be pure love of the work and love of the Master that draw you to it. Actions are always within our own power. Hard work is always possible, and great sacrifices almost any man can make. It is the motive that is unattainable save by those whom Christ Himself has renewed.

03.09. THE TWO SONS

THE TWO SONS Matthew 21:28-32 The three parables of which this is the first were spoken at one time, and that the most critical of our Lord's life. He had come to Jerusalem knowing the danger of doing so, but also persuaded that it was now high time to bring matters to an issue. He saw that things were now ripe for a public manifestation of Himself as the Christ. A career of obscure philanthropy in Galilee could no longer be pursued. The time was past for His laying His hand on the mouth of those who would have published His majesty and proclaimed their conviction that He was the Son of God. He goes to Jerusalem, that in the temple itself and before the chief priests and constituted authorities, He may again proclaim His own dignity, and be explicitly and finally received or rejected. Accordingly He makes it impossible for the authorities any longer to overlook His actions. They are compelled by the growing excitement of the people to appoint a deputation of their best men to wait upon Him. This deputation challenge His right to teach in this unlicensed way, and put to Him the testing question, "By what authority doest thou these things," no doubt with the expectation that He would claim Divine authority, and so give them a handle against Him. But our Lord declines to give any account of His authority further than what was manifest in His words and deeds themselves. If they could not see divine authority in the things themselves, if they did not feel that in His presence they were in the presence of God, they were not likely to see or to feel the Divine presence merely because He said it was there.

It is astonishing with what persistency numbers of persons continue to make the demand of these priests, and put themselves in the condition our Lord condemns. They will not accept a thing as Divine because it has the attributes of Divinity attaching to it, but they ask for further evidence. They will not accept a teacher as inspired, because of the truth he utters, but ask for an authority external to himself, and over and above his teaching, which shall guarantee it to them. They will not bow before Christ Himself, because their whole nature finds in Him the highest and best they know; but, like these ignorantly dishonest priests, they ask for His authority. They ask for a guarantee outside of Himself which shall warrant them in trusting Him, as if there could be any possible guarantee so perfect as the actual moral supremacy they feel Him to possess. That man's faith is resting on a very precarious foundation who believes not because the truth itself has laid hold upon his conscience, but because he is yielding to authority; who accepts Christ, not because he finds in Christ the true Lord of His spirit, but because the claims of Christ are established by what is external to His person.

Jesus, however, is not content merely to evade their entangling question. He turns their assault against themselves, and so leads the conversation that they are compelled to utter their own condemnation in presence of the multitude. The parable is too plain-spoken to be evaded. They cannot deny that the satisfactory Son is not the one who professes great respect for His father's authority, while he does only what pleases himself, but the one who does his father's bidding, even though he has at first disowned His authority. They are compelled, that is, to own that a mere bowing to God's authority and professing that they attach great weight to it is of no account in God's sight unless it be accompanied by an actual doing of the things He enjoins. John came to

you, our Lord says to the priests and elders, in the way of righteousness, enjoining the works that belong to the kingdom of God, setting clear before your conscience the duties actually incumbent on you. You felt he was God's messenger, the words he spoke proved him to be so; the holy conduct he enforced compelled you inwardly to own him a messenger of God to you you dare not now in the presence of these people deny that he was from God. Why then did you not do his bidding? He was God's messenger, he told you plainly who the Christ was, and yet you believed him not. You refused to work the work of God peculiar to your time and office, the work of acknowledging and believing in the Son of God, witnessed by John whom ye yourselves know to be a true witness. You come now and ask Me for my authority as if, were you convinced it was Divine, you would gladly yield to it; as if you were anxious to know God's will, as if there were on your lips constantly the "I go, sir," of this Son, whereas already it has been made clear to your own conscience what God would have you do regarding Me, and yet you obey Him not. These publicans and harlots whom you despise and loathe are in the kingdom of God while you are outside; for bad as they were and daringly as they had disowned God's authority, and little profession of belief in God as they made, they yet repented when John proclaimed the coming kingdom, and have believed in and submitted to the King.

These men were thus unceremoniously dealt with by our Lord because they were false. They may not have clearly seen that they were false, but they were so. They were false because they professed to be anxious for additional evidence regarding Christ, while already they had sufficient evidence. They were resisting the light already shed into their conscience, and yet professed a desire for further light. And probably in no age of the world's history have there been so many in their state of mind as in our own. There is a very general misapprehension as to the amount and kind of evidence that may reasonably be demanded in favor of Christ's claims, and also as to the manner in which the evidence may be expected to find entrance into the mind and produce conviction. And it is certain that unless we use the light we have and follow it, we are not likely to reach fuller light. If we are at present sure that at any rate the moral teaching of Christ is healthy, let us practise that teaching; for, if we do not, we reject the aid which more than any other is likely to bring us to Christ's own point of view, and to open our sympathies with His purpose and to enlighten us regarding His whole position. The application of the parable, then, to those to whom our Lord was speaking could not be misunderstood. The first son — the man who at first said he would not go but afterwards repented and went — was the representative of the publicans and harlots. They had openly asserted their unwillingness to work for God: they had made no professions of obedience, they had decidedly turned their backs on everything good. They had lived in open sin, and were not surprised that men should denounce them as hopelessly corrupt. The lad that plainly told his father he was not going to the vineyard but meant to have a holiday with his boon companions would not have been more astonished to he called a dutiful and obedient son, than these publicans and harlots would have been had any one addressed them as good and godly people. They knew they were doing wrong: they were conscious of their wickedness. But John's preaching went to their hearts, because he assured them that even for them there was an open gate into the kingdom of God. They repented because they were assured that for them there was a place for repentance and a way back to purity of conscience, to holiness of life, to God. The priests and elders, the men who represented all that was respectable and religious in the country, were depicted in the second son who promptly said he would go and work for his father, but did not do so. This son gives his answer in the one word "I," as if he meant, "Oh!

you need have no doubt about me. I am ready. I am at your service. My brother is a shameless fellow, but as for me you have only to command me." This son takes it for granted he is the dutiful son; he puts no pressure on himself to secure obedience; he is conscious of no necessity to guard against temptations to forgetfulness, to indolence, to selfishness. He takes for granted that no deficiency will be found in him, and his complacency is his ruin. We all know this kind of man: the tradesman to whom you give elaborate instructions, and who assures you he will send you an article precisely to your mind, but actually sends you what is quite useless for your purposes; the friend who bids you leave the matter to him, but who has no sooner turned the corner of the street than he meets some one whose conversation puts you and your affairs clean out of his mind. If promising had been all that was wanted, no community could have been more godly than Jerusalem. These priests and elders spent their lives in professing to be God's people. Their day was filled with religious services. They had no secular business at all; they were identified with religion; their whole life was a proclamation that they were God's servants, and a profession of their willingness to obey. And yet they failed to do the one thing they were there to do. They heard John's teaching, they knew it was the voice of God, but they refused to prepare their hearts and understandings, as he taught them, that they might recognize Christ. The one thing that John commanded them to do, to prepare for and receive the King, they failed to do. Their whole profession collapsed like a burst bubble; they were proved to be shams, to be dealing in mere words with no idea of realities.

It is natural to suppose that the religious world will in every generation present similar phenomena. It requires no exceptional discernment to see that in our own day the spiritual condition of these priests and elders is abundantly reproduced. There are many now whose life is in great part devoted to various ways of declaring a willingness to serve God, but whose life is also marked by disobedience. If you listen to what these persons say you would fancy they were God's most industrious servants; if you look at what they do you find nothing done for God at all, or that their own peculiar and chief duty is neglected. Every person, therefore, who is conscious that he resembles this son in professing a willingness to do God's will, should consider whether he does not also resemble him in leaving that will undone. We seem to be anxious to discover what God would have us do. We read His word — we go where we hear it explained and enforced — we are rather proud of our exceptional knowledge of its meaning — we seem to set great value on any hand that will point out the way, on any voice that will say to us: There, that is the work for you. But does not this forwardness in hearing what God's will is sometimes take the place of our doing it? Do we not sometimes mistake our zeal in hearing good counsel about spiritual things for a zeal in God's service? Is not our knowledge, or our pious feeling, or our known sympathy with religion, allowed to stand for actual work done? Are we not sometimes as satisfied with ourselves when we have seen clearly the reasonableness and desirableness of serving God, and when we have felt some desire to serve Him, as if we had, in fact, made a sacrifice in our business for the sake of righteousness? We congratulate ourselves on feeling well-disposed, we complacently number ourselves among God's people, we think with satisfaction of our clear and moving views of Christ's work; and when all these clear views and pious feelings have passed away without any result in the shape of work done, we still congratulate ourselves on having cherished them. There may be some doubt about our morality, but there can be none about our religion. Men may not be quite sure how far they can trust us in a business transaction; our influence at home may not be of the best kind; but no one can have any doubt that if the religious men of the city were convened our

name would appear among the invited.

Let us then deal honestly with ourselves, and wipe off the reproach of promising without performing, and of staying among the mere preliminaries of obedience. God has desired us not only to think right, to cherish certain feelings, to maintain certain observances, but He has enjoined all those things as helps and incentives to the doing of His will. He has said to each of us, “Go, work.” His call comes to us in this form. If you have any connection with God at all, He has said to you, “Go, work.” And it is a poor reason, surely, to offer for our not working, that we have seen most clearly the reasons for working, and that no one has been more ready to promise obedience. Which of you, being a parent, would not stand amazed, if, when you challenged your child for not doing what you had told him, he were to say in excuse, “But I promised to do it; I know that I ought to have done it.” Would you not fear that some strange obliquity of moral vision had affected your child; and would you not fear lest a child who could offer so utterly unreasonable an excuse might fall into the most flagrant and enormous vices? The question, then, is, What have you done? The passer-by who saw the one son stripped and hard at work under the sun among the vines, while the other lounged simperingly on the road telling people what an admirable man his father was, and what a pleasure it was to work for him, and how much he hoped the vintage would be abundant — I say, the passer-by would have not the slightest difficulty in forming a judgment of the two sons. Would he that has noted your habits — and many have noted your habits — feel quite sure you were God’s obedient son? Would he think it absurd to ask whether you had said you would obey, having the far better proof of an obedient spirit, that you were actually obeying? So judge yourself. Do not believe in your purpose to serve God better until you do serve Him better. Give no credit to yourself for anything which is not actually accomplished. Do not let us be always speaking of endeavors, and hopes, and intentions, and struggles, and convictions of what is right, but let us at last do God’s will. The other son bluntly refused at first to go and do his father’s bidding. His father had addressed to him a most reasonable request, and applied to him an epithet much more endearing than our word “Son;” but he is answered with a harsh, surly refusal. There is no attempt made by the son to excuse himself or soften the refusal; no mention of previous engagements, private business of his own, or necessary duties elsewhere. He is unfeeling and wantonly rude, as well as disobedient. He represents, therefore, those who are rather forward in their repudiation of God’s authority. So far from desiring to be considered godly, they rather affect a deeper, more resolute ungodliness than they feel, a more vicious wickedness than belongs to them. They flaunt their opposition to all that is Christian.

Such persons are frequently the subjects of a peculiar delusion. Being themselves quite honest and open in their ungodliness, they profess and cultivate a special abhorrence of hypocrisy. No character is so contemptible in their eyes as that which pretends to grace, and thus loses the pleasure both of sin and of holiness; and amidst all their enjoyments there are few greater than that which proceeds from the unmasking of some professed Christian. They seem to think hypocrisy the crowning sin; and so zealously do they cultivate their skill in detecting it that they become blind to every other. Like well-trained hounds, they know no game but that they are trained to hunt. And thus they actually glide into the belief that because they are not hypocrites, they are not in a dangerous position. But if a man is going to destruction, it is, after all, a poor consolation that he is doing so with his eyes open. Is it not time for a man to bethink himself, when he finds matter for self-gratulation in the fact that he does not make the smallest profession of

serving God or of seeking to be saved? You are honest in refusing to assume a character you do not possess, but are you wise to refuse the real attainment of that character? You are honest in seeking to be known for what you are, but are you wise to be what you are? Could you not be equally honest were you nearer to God and liker Him? It will not stand you in the day when God takes account of His servants to say that you never professed to serve Him. But the whole history of this first son is not that he refused to labor for his father; he afterwards repented and went. Perhaps the hurt look of his father had shot some compunction into his soul. Perhaps the very roughness of his own voice had startled him, and suddenly revealed to him how far he had gone in sin, and how fast his heart was hardening. Perhaps the weary gait of his aged and unassisted father, his feeble efforts to accomplish tasks that required younger sinews than his, his evidently heart-broken and listless and mechanical way of setting about the work — perhaps this smote the young man's heart as he lay sunning himself in indolence, and recalled old days when he was happy with his father, and went to carry the tools he was too young to use; and the old feelings of filial affection rose again within him, — he repented and went to the vineyard. Are there none who know that it is time for them to follow this youth's example; none who are conscious they have not done their duty towards God; who have made no pretense even of doing God's will, but have persistently shut their eyes to His love, denied His claims, and despised His commandment? Do you feel no compunction? Are you. worse than even those publicans and harlots who no sooner learned there was forgiveness and a clean life for them than they eagerly sought God? Do you prefer a life every hour of which pains and grieves your heavenly Father, and a life which in itself is condemned by God and man; do you prefer a life which in your sober moments you cannot yourself approve, and which lacks all tenderness towards God and all [truth and purity, to a life which God Himself calls you to as worthy of you and as the beginning of never-ending blessedness? Were it possible for God to call you by name and from His unseen dwelling this moment to break silence and call you to work for Him, were He to tell you of His love for you and to invite you to turn to Him, would you refuse Him, could you refuse Him? Does He not then summon you now? Does He not do even more than this? Does He not speak within your own heart, and cause you to feel it were well and wise to meet with humble welcome all His overtures? Can you rest under the stigma of a hard-heartedness that cannot be moved by infinite tenderness? Can you rest content to turn away to your own private employments and ways while God offers you that which will make your whole work and your whole life true? As a whole, this parable shows us how God is served by men, and shows us especially that though there are greater and less degrees of disobedience and impenitence, there is no such thing as consistent uniform obedience. The best that God gets from earth is the obedience of repentance. Men must still, each for himself, try their own way, and only when this is found to be quite foolish and hurtful and hopeless, do they try God's way. No one can take God's word for it that such and such are the things to be done; such and such others to be avoided. We must for ourselves know good and evil, we must be as gods making choice between the good that sin brings and its evil, and if then God's judgment about sin tallies with our own, we accept it. Such a thing as simple, perpetual acceptance of God's commands from first to last is not to be found; and repentance, though certainly to be rejoiced over, is, after all, only the second best thing. Apology, however sincere, is at all times a very poor substitute for conduct that needs none.* And yet you will often see that a man considers that a graceful apology, whether to God or men, more than repairs the wrong he has done.

* So John Foster in his " Lectures."

Let us then be on our guard lest even our repentance be sin, and our humiliation tainted with pride. When we come to God with apology for neglect of duty, we are often as proud of having insight enough to see deeply into the evil of our hearts as we are humbled by a sense of the wrong we have done in omitting whole years of service. We seem to be more worthy of praise for discovering the sinfulness of a past action than of blame for committing it. We are secretly flattered by finding that we are taking our place among those who have a fine discernment of the higher duties of the Christian life and of the secret and subtle iniquities of the human heart, and when we confess these, it is with less shame than complacency. Through all our confession there is running a silent, "I thank Thee, Lord, that I am not as other men, who could not confess such sins as I am confessing, because they are still down among the glaring and immoral wickednesses, and have not so much as thought of those duties that I have been striving after." It is, no doubt, right to be convinced we have been wrong, it is right to turn in to God's vineyard, even though it be after refusing to do so, but that complacency should mingle with our repentance is surely a triumph of duplicity. To make our very confession of total unprofitableness matter of selfgratulation is surely the extreme of even religious self-deception. But if we carry anything at all with us from this parable, it must be this: How greatly our knowledge is in excess of our action. Our Lord easily elicited from these persons an unqualified condemnation of conduct which precisely represented their own. They held in their minds principles which, had they only been applied to their own conduct, would have made them very different men. This reproach never passes from the world: all of us know more than we practise. In the best of us there lies unused a large amount of instructive, stimulating, consolatory knowledge. The worst regulated life, the conduct which is most shameful and hurtful, is frequently that of a thoroughly intelligent and well-instructed person. In the mind of the most careless among us there is held truth enough to save the world, and principles which, if only applied, would form an unblemished character. And which of us, when we recount and condemn the faults of others, does not show an intelligence and a zeal for virtue of which there is small sign in some parts of our own life? The question which this parable suggests is not, what do you know? but, what are you doing? not, have you acknowledged the righteousness of God's demands? have you seen that it is good for you to obey? do you own and constantly profess that you are His servants? but, have you done what God has given to you to do? God has commanded you to love Him with all your heart and strength; you know you ought, but have you done it? He has told you that this especially is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He hath sent; have you done it? He calls you to work for Him, to consider what you can do to forward what is good, to set before you as your aim in life not advantage of any kind to yourself, but righteousness in yourself and in others. Do not despair of doing something useful; there are ways in which you can be helpful. These publicans and harlots might well have thought there was no room for them to do good in the community, and that their tastes were such that they could never love purity and truth and unselfishness. You may feel the same. You may feel that if you do the external duty you yet have no love for it, and you cannot bear to look forward to a life in which at every step you will require to put compulsion on yourself to do so. But such will not be the case. Do the duty, and the spirit will come. Obey God, and you will learn to love Him. Compel yourself to all duties now, and soon you will like the duties that are now distasteful. The man that is drawn out of the water half-drowned can only be restored by artificial respiration, but, if this is persevered in, the natural breathing at last begins, and the functions of healthy, unforced respirations supersede the artificial means. And thus God educates us to ease and naturalness in all duty. Under cover of

the outward conduct, the new spirit grows and grows to such strength that at last it maintains the outward conduct as its natural fruit.

Chapter 32

03.10. THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN Matthew 21:33-45

“Hear another parable,” says our Lord to these ecclesiastical dignitaries who were probably feeling that they had heard quite enough already. Their dignity, they felt, was suffering in the eyes of the mob, who could not fail to see that the tables had been turned against them, and who rarely conceal the rough relish they have in contemplating the discomfiture of pompous ignorance and sanctimonious arrogance. If there flew round the circle none of those jeering remarks or smart personal hits which would inevitably have been elicited from an English crowd, there would not be wanting significant nods and satisfied smiles which would show with equal clearness to the priests and elders that in seeking to expose the pretensions of Jesus they had only exposed themselves. Their falseness in disguising their reluctance to accept Jesus as the Christ under pretense of seeking further evidence, was with a wonderful facility laid bare to all. They stood convicted of refusing to accept the testimony of one whom they dared not deny to be from God. They stood convicted of having incapacituted themselves for recognizing the divine in Jesus. But theirs is not the guilt of the common unbeliever; it was not merely their personal duty and interest to keep themselves awake to the divine by righteousness of life, it was their official duty as well. It was the duty for which their office existed. They must therefore be shown up as men who are hollow shams, who are complacently maintaining their official dignity and the routine and forms of their office, while they are wholly oblivious of its one great object. They are worse than useless. They are as agents whom a man has appointed to manage his business or his property for him, and who use their positions for embezzling the entire proceeds, and enriching themselves at his expense. The parabolic dress under which this warning or judgment is carried home to them is a very thin veil, through which no one could fail to discern the living truth. The liberally cared-for vineyard, furnished with every advantage to facilitate productiveness, was of course Israel, hedged off from the outlying and less cared for fields of heathenism, and furnished with all that goes to fructify human nature. As God had long since declared, nothing that could be done had been left undone. As many men will go to any expense in improving their property, trying new methods, providing the best implements, taking a pride in having every road and fence in good repair, so everything had been done in Israel that could be expected to fertilize human nature. A small section of humanity had been railed off, and the experiment was made that it might be seen to what a pitch of productiveness this m.ost fruitful of God’s plants could be brought. A family or race of men was chosen and set apart for the very purpose of receiving every advantage which could help men to produce the proper fruit of man; to maintain a vigorous, healthy life, and to yield results which might seem to justify the care spent on them. There was to be a nursery of virtue, where any one would only have to look in order to see what proper cultivation could effect. Here it was to be shown that barbarism, degradation, violence, lust, and idolatry were not the proper fruit of human nature. In this garden man was to receive every possible aid and inducement to development and productiveness: nothing was wanting which could win men to holiness, nothing which could enlarge, purify, fertilize human nature. And what was the result? The result was that

which every reformatory in the country gives, namely, that human nature in the abstract is one thing; in the concrete, in the individual, another; that as some soils simply absorb all that you can put into them and give no sign, so do most men simply absorb all manner of inducements, counsels, warnings, aids, and bring forth nothing serviceable to God or man. Even persons professing religion are quite contented, nay, even think they are making vast attainment and thriving magnificently, when they are merely receiving, and doing nothing or little. They measure themselves by the care God is spending on them, not by the fruit they are yielding; by the amount of instruction they have received and retain, not by the use they have made of it; by the grace spent upon them, and not by the results. In short, they make the blunder which subverts the whole of religion, of turning means into ends. But in this parable it is not the plants that are censured for barrenness, but the keepers of the vineyard that are condemned for unfaithfulness to the owner. The fruit borne, whether more or less than common, was intercepted by the husbandmen. They used their position solely for their own advantage. That is to say, the priests and elders of the Jews had fallen into the common snare of ecclesiastical leaders, and had used the dignity and advantageous position of their office for their own behoof, and had failed to remember that they had it only as God's servants. The religious leader is quite as liable as the political or military leader to be led by a desire for glory, applause, notoriety, distinction, power. And the Church is quite as open a field for the exercise and manifestation of such unworthy motives as the State is.* The Church, being a society of men, must be managed by the usual methods, which all societies of men adopt. There must be combination, contrivance, adjustment, discussion, laws and regulations. The Church in its outward system and movements must be wrought by the same machinery as other large associations use. And it is notorious that the mere working of this machinery requires no spiritual faculty in the persons who manage it. It calls into exercise a certain class of gifts and faculties, certain talents and qualities which are eminently serviceable, but which may equally be exercised for the State or for the Church, for the world or for God. The political leader who negotiates with foreign powers, who foresees calamity and has skill to avert it, who can control large bodies of men and keep vast organizations in noiseless motion, may exercise these great gifts either for his country and his God, or merely for the sake of making or maintaining his reputation as the most influential man of his generation. And the ecclesiastic who has very much the same kind of work to do, feeling the pulse of the theological and ecclesiastical world, making out through the distorting haze of public report and opinion what are the facts of a case and what is best to be done in it, and talking over to his view large bodies of men — this man, like the politician, may be serving his God, or he may be serving himself. Success may be the idol of the one as truly as of the other. To have a large religious following and wide influence in the Church may be as thoroughly selfish and worldly a desire as to be at the head of a strong political party. It is not the sphere in which one's work is done that proves its spirituality or worldliness; neither is it always the nature of the work that is done, but the motive that tests whether it is spiritual or worldly. These priests and elders had not escaped the snare into which their predecessors had fallen, and to which all their successors are exposed. They had used their position to attract applause to themselves, or to make their influence felt in the community, or to win for themselves a name as defenders of the faith.

* See the late Canon Mozley's Sermon on "The Reversal of Human Judgment."

Another and still more insidious form of the same temptation it may be worthwhile to notice. It is that temptation to which our Lord alluded when He censured this same class of persons for their zeal in proselytizing. But why so? Is not zeal in propagating religion a good thing? If these foremost men in the Jewish Church compassed sea and land to make one proselyte, is this not that very missionary zeal which the Jews are upbraided for wanting, and the modern Church prides itself on possessing? Is evangelistic fervor in the nineteenth century a thing to applaud, while the same fervor in the first is to be condemned? or what was it in these men's zeal that so roused our Lord's indignation? It was that same element which so often still taints zeal for the propagation of religious truth — the desire rather to bring men over to my way of thinking and so to strengthen my own position, than to bring them to the truth. My way of thinking may be the truth, or may, at least, be much nearer it than the opinions held by others, and for them it may be a good thing to be brought over to my views; but for myself it is a bad thing and the mere strengthening of a selfish craving, if I seek to propagate my opinions rather because they are mine than because they are the truth. And how wide-spreading and deep-reaching an evil this is, those well know who have observed religious controversy and seen how dangerously near propagandism lies to persecution. The zeal that proceeds from a loving consideration for others does not, when resisted, darken into violence and ferocity. The mother seeking to persuade her son does not become fierce when opposed, but only increasingly tender and pitifully gentle. The zeal for truth that storms at opposition and becomes bitter and fierce when contradicted, you may, therefore, recognize as springing from a desire rather to have one's own wisdom and one's own influence acknowledged than from either deep love for others or deep regard for the truth as the truth. But to return — the implied and slightly disguised condemnation of the parable our Lord proceeds to enforce in an explicit form. The truth which had been sheathed in the parable He thrusts home now with naked point. "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." And this warning is grounded not on a parable, which they might have affected to despise, but on a passage of the very Scriptures they professed to be the guardians of. There had been the warning before their eyes, read by them, sung by them at their festivals, carefully treasured in their memories; and yet, like us all, they had so little penetrated to its sense, had so little thought out its meaning and possible application, had looked upon it so much as a dead letter and so little as alive for them and for all men, that our Lord has yet to ask them: "Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner? "Is not this stone the same as the heir sent by the lord of the vineyard? Are not ye now in danger of fulfilling the prophecy ye know so well? Are you not about to reject and cast contempt on one whom in your souls you know to be worthy of far other treatment? The careful reader of this conversation will be struck with two points in it — first that Jesus claims to be the heir of God; in other words, He deliberately sets Himself on a wholly different level from the other prophets — high above Isaiah, Elijah, nay, even high above Moses himself. They were all servants; He is in quite a different relation to the proprietor, that is, to God. He is the Son and Heir; in acting for God He acts for Himself. It is because the vinedressers identify Him with the owner that they have a hope of gaining possession of the vineyard by killing the heir. To kill a mere servant would have served no such purpose, another servant can always be appointed; however high his office and title, another can always be raised, and equal authority can be delegated to him; but there is no other son. It is nature and relationship, not mere official dignity, that underlies this title and that is implied in the parable. But the second point is even more worthy of remark. Our Lord implies that

this was known by these Jewish leaders. Their condemnation was, that knowing Him to be the Son of God, they slew Him. Peter, indeed, apologetically says that they would not have slain Him had they known He was the Lord of glory. It may have been so in some instances; and, no doubt, had they allowed the fact to stand clear before their minds, had they given free course to it and weight to it, they could not have done what they did. Still, as the parable shows, it was just because they knew this was the heir that they were so eager to remove Him. Their state of mind is perfectly intelligible and very common. There lay latent in them a deep consciousness which they would not allow to become distinct and influential. They had a conviction that Jesus was the Christ, but they would not let their mind dwell upon it. There are few of us who have not such buried convictions, few of us who do not leave out of sight thoughts which, if allowed influence, would urge us to unwelcome action. There are thousands who have a haunting suspicion that Jesus deserves a very different kind of recognition from that which they give Him. Is there not lying in the mind of some of you half-formed thoughts about Jesus, possible if not actual convictions, which if you carefully thought them out would lead you to take up a different and much more satisfactory attitude towards Him? And if there are those who feel that things should be plainer, that the majesty of Christ should be so borne in upon the soul that all would yield to Him, this is natural; but it is to overlook the fundamental fact that room must be left for freedom of choice and the exercise of judgment. The fact is, that the rejection of Christ by so many is one of the proofs that He is Divine. It is worldly worth that is acknowledged by all, and worldly blessings that are universally accepted. The higher the blessing, the fewer accept it. All wish plenty to eat, a minority value good education, a few seek the kingdom of God. And so our Lord here points out that it had long been foreseen that when He came He would be rejected. In reply to those questioners who ask how He can allow the Hosanna Psalm to be applied to Him by the people, He takes this very psalm, and out of it proves to the authorities that their very resistance and rejection of Him is the proof that He is what the crowd were affirming Him to be — the Messiah, the Son and Heir of God, the Stone despised of the builders, but chosen of God. Rejection by the builders was one of the marks by which the foundation chosen by God was to be identified. Truth is often more convincingly exhibited by the opposition of a certain class of men. It is not discredited by their opposition; but a prima facie point in its favor is that they do not receive it. And, certainly, had the claims of Jesus been accepted by these dried-up formal traditionalists we should have had some cause for doubt.

Abandoning the figure used in the parable, our Lord makes use of a new figure to complete the warning. He speaks of two possible contingencies — “Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken”— this had been declared by Isaiah — “but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder,” this figure had been familiarized by Daniel’s use of it. The stone which lies ready hewn and suitable for the best part of a building may inflict severe injury on the builder, either by his carelessly stumbling upon it, falling from a height upon it, and so getting himself bruised and broken; or it may fall from a height upon him, in which case it is certain death. The first case is that in which Christ is a stone of stumbling to those to whom He is presented. God lays this stone everywhere in our way that we may build upon it or set it high in the place of honor, and we cannot simply walk on as if God had done no such thing. Whatever else Christ is, He is substantial, a reality as solid as the stone against which your foot is jarred. To make as if He were not, and to pass on untouched and unchanged, is impossible. If we attempt to do so, ignoring that the stone is there, we stumble and fall and injure ourselves. The foundation stone becomes a stone of offense. Every one who hears the gospel, every one in whose path Christ is laid, is either the better or the

worse for it. The gospel once heard is “henceforward a perpetual element in the whole condition, character, and destiny of the hearer.” No man who has heard can be as if he had not. Though he may wish to pass on as if he had not seen Christ at all, he is not the same man as he was before, his spiritual condition is altered, possibilities have dawned upon his mind, openings into regions which are new and otherwise inaccessible, he is haunted by unsettled perplexities, doubts, anxieties, thoughts. This attitude of mind must have been very common in Christ’s own time, many persons must have shrunk from the responsibility of determining for themselves what they ought to think of Him. Many now do the same. They wish to overlook Him and pass on into life as if He were not in their path. But how foolish if He be the one foundation on whom a life can safely be built. Men do not think of sin as a permanent foundation — they only think of it as a temporary expedient — practises get into a man’s life which he does not like to think of as permanent, but only as serving present turns. They do not deliberately choose anything as permanently satisfactory, cannot bring their minds to the idea of being built and settled finally, even though they have some consciousness that it were wise to be so. Those who thus overlook Christ and try to pass on into life as if He were not, damage their own character, because they know He is there, and until they make up their minds about Him, life is a mere make-believe. It is thus they are bruised on this stone of stumbling. They are practising upon themselves, and are not true to their own convictions. They do not walk steadily and uprightly as those whose path is ascertained and assured, but they stumble as those who are still tripped up and held back by something they have not taken account of. Just as a person who feels he has forgotten something, cannot give his mind fully to what is before him, but is held back by the unconscious effort to remember, so here the spirit that has yet to take account of Christ and decide regarding Him is held back and distracted. Besides, this unwillingness to face facts fairly, this desire to do for a time without Christ, and as if He were not in our path, is apt to produce a habitual falseness in the spirit. You may be unconscious of any such process, but many processes go on in us quite as effectually without as with our intention. Those which are fatal to the body do so. Each refusal to determine regarding Christ makes your conscience blunter, your heart less open to righteous and reasonable influence. It may be by a very little, yet it does. The frost of a minute, or of thirty minutes, may be imperceptible in its result, or it may only draw a few pretty lines upon the water, but it is frost all the same, and is gradually forming a strength of surface which no hammer can break, nor any fire melt. By trying, then, to get past Christ and make a life for yourself without Him, by trying to build on some other foundation, you are both trying to do what everything is arranged to defeat, and you arc injuring your own character, not yielding to the influences that you feel to be good, nor listening to convictions which you shrewdly suspect to be reasonable. This bruised condition, however, is remediable. The second action of the stone on the builder is described as final. The stone, which is of sufficient massiveness to uphold a world, falls upon the unhappy opposer, and the living, hopeful man lies an undistinguishable mass. At once slain and buried, those who determinedly opposed Christ lie oppressed by that which might have been their joy. Their dwelling and refuge becomes their tomb. Every excellence of Christ they have leagued against themselves. It is their everlasting shame that they were ashamed of Him. The faithfulness, truth, and love of Christ, that is to say, the qualities whose existence is all that any saved man ever had to depend upon, the qualities in the knowledge and faith of which the weakest and most heartless sinner sets out boldly and hopefully to eternity, these all now torment with crushing remorse those who have despised them. Do not suppose this is an extravagant figure used by our Lord to awe His enemies, and that

no man will ever suffer a doom which can be fairly represented in these terms. It is a statement of fact. Things are to move on eternally in fulfilment of the will of Christ. He is identified with all that is righteous, all that is wise, all that is ultimately successful. To oppose His course, to endeavor to defeat His object, to attempt to work out an eternal success apart from Him is as idle as to seek to stop the earth in its course, or to stand in the path of a stone avalanche in order to stem it. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom — He has become the Head of our race, that in Him we may together be led on to everlasting prosperity and righteousness. The whole forward movement of individuals and of the race must be made on the lines laid down by Christ, and the time is coming when this shall be so plainly manifested that all who have not His spirit shall feel that all power has left them, and shall see the whole stream of life and progress flow past them, leaving them stranded and wrecked and useless. For a long time it may be doubtful in a country and in national affairs whether progress and prosperity are bound up with one party or another, with one spirit in trade and in government or with another, and men take their sides and adopt their several causes according to their tastes and judgment; but a day comes when the one party is put to confusion, and when it is entirely left behind by the current of events. So is it here, but in a far more momentous sense. It is not only national affairs that are governed and guided by certain deep laws that the craftiest statesman has no power whatever to alter; but the affairs of the individual, of each one of us, and of all men together, similarly move onwards according to certain immutable moral laws. These are revealed to us in Christ, that we may know and appropriate them. For, just in proportion as we do so, and attach ourselves to Him, and feel the power and beauty of His way and of His spirit, shall we ourselves stand with Him when all opposition has slunk away ashamed, and enter with Him on the great future which will open to those who are capable of taking a part in it. What, then, you feel it in you to do by God’s grace in the way of bending your will to what is right, of subduing the evil in you which you see can but lead to death and disturbance, these things do, hoping in Him who has promised to return and reign eternally.

Chapter 33

03.11. THE MARRIAGE OF THE KING'S SON

THE MARRIAGE OF THE KING'S SON Matthew 21:45-46; Matthew 22:1-14 This parable is spoken to the same mixed crowd as the parable of the Two Sons and the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen. Sorely hit by the two former parables, the chief priests and Pharisees would fain have put a stop to this kind of teaching, but they feared the people. Public opinion here, as often elsewhere, was healthier than the opinion of the clique which had the official guidance of ecclesiastical and theological affairs. Public opinion was too markedly in favor of Jesus just at this time for the Pharisees to ignore or brave it. They felt they must take it into account, and either wait for a turn in the tide, or compass their end by craft, and secretly. While they hesitate and stand measuring the heartiness of the crowd in Jesus' favor, and considering how far they may venture, this third parable is launched against them. The object of it is still the same — to set in a vivid light the guilt of the Jewish leaders in rejecting Christ, and the punishment which in consequence was to fall upon them; but to this third parable an appendix is added, which is even more striking than the parable itself — an appendix spoken, as we shall see, rather for the sake of the crowd than as a warning to the Pharisees.

Already in His parables our Lord had compared the kingdom of God to a feast, for the sake of illustrating the rude, discourteous, and mistaken way in which men deal with God's invitations. There are occasions on which men combine to be happy, meet for the understood purpose of enjoyment, so that anything which interrupts or represses the hilarity of the company is frowned upon as out of place and inopportune. Matters of great importance are postponed, questions requiring much gravity in their discussion are avoided, anything that might irritate or slightly annoy or discompose any single guest is excluded, and, in short, everything is arranged to admit of free, unrestrained mirth. And when such occasions are public, he who refuses to join in the national festivity is looked upon as a traitor, and he who has private griefs is expected to keep them in abeyance, "to anoint his head and wash his face that he appear not unto men to fast." Disloyalty could scarcely assume a more marked form than if a man being invited to share the festal joy of his king on some such worthy occasion as that here adduced, were either to refuse the invitation, or, accepting it, were to conduct himself with so sullen and rude a demeanor as to show that his feelings were quite out of harmony with his host's. Such a man would be at once recognized as disaffected and a rebel, and also as a rebel who had chosen a singularly unfortunate and discourteous mode of exhibiting his rebellion. But the specialty of this parable is that the feast to which the king invites His subjects is a marriage feast. Prominence is given to the circumstance that the host is a king, and that the occasion of the feast is the marriage of His Son.

It is obvious how this figure was suggested to the mind of Christ. Long before His time the relation between husband and wife had been used to exhibit the devotedness and fidelity with which God gives Himself to men, as well as the intimacy and loving care to which He admits them. And the close alliance between God and men which was thus expressed, was actually consummated in the person of Jesus Christ. His assumption of humanity into perfect union with His own Divine nature was the actual marriage of God and man. In Him God and man are made one — so truly

and perfectly one, that whereas formerly marriage was used to illustrate this union, now this union stands as the ideal to which marriage may aspire, but which it can never reach. It is a union which has the characteristics of marriage. It is the result of love and choice, not of nature; and it implies that the stronger party assume the responsibilities and watch over the interests of the weaker. The marriage is formed that the stronger party may have fuller opportunity to help and serve the weaker. God then might reasonably expect that men should, at least on this occasion, recognize that God and they constituted one kingdom and cause. Well might He expect that now, at least, they should rejoice with Him. It is their nature that is seated on the throne, their rights that are thus secured, their prosperity that is thus guaranteed. And yet, though proclamation had been made of the coming festivities, though due invitation had been given, and though, finally, John had been sent to say that now all things were ready and to herald the bridegroom in visible form through their streets, the people had listened with dead indifference, as if it had been a kingdom in the moon that was spoken of, and as if God had wholly mistaken in supposing that such an event had any bearing at all on them or their interests. This union of God and man that is as natural as love, and as supernatural as God — this union, consummated in Christ, is the foundation of our hope. Apart from this we may find some little help in the hour of temptation, some faint glimmering of hope in the time of trouble, but nothing that can quite satisfy and bring to us a perfect light — nothing that can give us God, the Highest of all, the Eternal, the Almighty, the unfailing Love and Life. Jesus Christ blesses mankind not by His superior moral teaching mainly, nor only by His giving us a clearer knowledge of God than other teachers have done, but by His bringing God into human life, by showing us our God suffering with and for us, by bringing God to work among us and in our place, and thus to lift humanity, by a power Divine, to its highest level. It is by bringing thus a new thing into the world, the fulness of God into human life, that He has done that which no one but He could do, and which merits the gratitude of every man. He has thus become the true Bridegroom of men, the joy and help of us all. That was a memorable expression of Napoleon's when he said, "Jesus Christ has succeeded in making of every human soul an appendage to His own." He has made Himself the indispensable person to us all — the indispensable "fellow-worker with each man in the realization of his supreme destiny." The earnest sincerity of God in seeking our good in this matter is illustrated in the parable by one or two unmistakable traits — first, by the king's willing observance of every form of courtesy. Among ourselves there are certain forms, an etiquette, which a host who is anxious to please his guests is careful to conform to. There are ways of putting an invitation which make it almost impossible even for the reluctant to withhold acceptance. In the East one of these forms is the sending of a second messenger to announce the actual readiness of the feast. In countries where no memoranda are written, and where no fixed hours are observed or appointed, such a final and second invitation is almost necessary; or, if not necessary, does at least pleasantly display the cordiality of the host. To this form God condescended. He not only sent invitations by the prophets, bidding the Jews expect this festivity, but when it was ready He sent John to remind them and to bring them. So it is always. Because God is so true in His purpose to bless you, therefore is He most careful of all your feelings, picking each smallest stone out of your path that might cause you to stumble and take offense, leaving the reluctant without apology. God does not invite you to what has no existence, nor to what is not worth going so far to get, nor on terms it is impossible to fulfil, nor in such a manner that no man who respects himself can accept it. On the contrary, what God offers you is that in which He Himself rejoices. He offers you fellowship with His own Son, He offers you righteousness and love,

and He offers this to you with the observance of every form that could prove consideration of your feelings, and in a way which involves that every one who really wishes to be blessed will receive all the help he requires in striving to be so. Another proof of the earnestness of God in His invitation is His wrath against the murderers who had refused it. You are not much offended at one who refuses an invitation you have given in jest, or for form's sake, half hoping it would not be accepted. God is angry because you have treated in jest and made light of what has been most earnest to Him; because you have crossed Him in the sincerest purpose to bless you; because after He has at the greatest expense, not only of wealth and exertion, but of life, provided what He knows you need, you act towards Him as if He had done nothing that deserves the least consideration. This acceptance or rejection of God's offers that we come and talk over, often as if the whole matter were in our hands and we might deal with it as we arrange for a journey or an evening's amusement, is to God the most earnest matter. If God is in earnest about anything, it is about this; if the whole force of His nature concentrates on any one matter it is on this; if anywhere the amplitude and intensity of Divine earnestness, to which the most impassioned human earnestness is as the idle vacant sighing of the summer air, if these are anywhere in action, it is the tenderness and sincerity with which He invites you to Himself. There may be nothing so trivial as to be powerless to turn you from God's message, but nothing is so important as to turn Him from seeing how you receive it. You may think His invitation the least interesting of all subjects, you may In point of fact scarcely ever seriously consider whether it is to be accepted or not, whether it is an invitation, whether you might act upon it, and why you do not — the whole matter of God's offer to you may be unreal, but your answer is matter of God's consideration, and nothing can so occupy Him as to turn His observation from you. No glad tidings from any other part of His government can so fill His ear as to drown your sullen refusal of His grace. To save sinners from destruction is His grand purpose, and success in other parts of His government does not repay Him for failure here. And to make light of such an earnestness as this, an earnestness so wise, so called for, so loving, pure, and long suffering, so Divine, is terrible indeed. To have been the object of such earnest love, to have had all the Divine attributes and resources set in motion to secure my eternal bliss, and to know myself capable of making light (making light!) of such earnestness as this, this surely is to be in the most forlorn and abject condition that any creature can reach. The last scene in this parable comes upon us unexpectedly, and forms indeed an appendix introducing a new lesson, and directed to a special section in the audience. No doubt our Lord perceived that parables such as He had been uttering were open to misconstruction. Ill-living and godless persons, coarse, covetous, and malicious men might be led to fancy that it mattered very little how they had lived, or what they were. They saw that the gates of the kingdom were thrown open, that all indiscriminately were invited to enter, that God made no distinction, saying to one, "I cannot forget your former neglect," to another, "I do not wish your presence," to a third, "You are too far gone in sin, I do not invite you." It had been made quite clear to them by these parables that they themselves were as free to enter the kingdom as those religious men they had been accustomed to consider so much more in God's favor than they were. This perception of the absolute unconditioned freedom of entrance, this sense borne in upon their mind that they were the objects of God's love and invitation, might possibly lead them to overlook the great moral change requisite in all who enter God's presence and propose to hold intercourse with Him. It is to disabuse them of the idea that the acceptance of God's invitation entails no alteration in their habits and spirit, that this appendix is added. This object is gained by setting before them an instance in which one who

accepted the invitation was convicted of a contempt of the host even greater than that which was involved in rejecting his invitation. He entered the banqueting hall without a wedding garment, appeared at the King's table in just the dress in which he had been found in the streets by the servants. But had he any means of obtaining a dress more in keeping with the occasion? Was he not perhaps a man so poor that he could afford no preparation of any kind? Had this been so, it would have been pleaded in excuse. But no doubt the parable supposes that the not unusual custom of providing for the guests the needed garment had been adopted; a provision which this guest had despised and refused; he had pushed past the officious servants who would have clothed him. It is this that constituted the man's audacity and guilt. Similar audacity in entering the king's presence without putting on the robe sent by the king for that purpose, has been known to cost a prime minister his life. A traveler who was invited, with the ambassadors he accompanied, to the table of the Persian king, says: — "We were told by the officer that we, according to their usage, must hang the splendid vests that were sent us from the king over our dresses, and so appear in his presence. The ambassadors at first refused, but the officer urged it so earnestly, alleging, as also did others, that the omission would greatly displease the king, since all other envoys observed such a custom, that at last they consented, and hanged, as did we also, the splendid vests over their shoulders." So at this marriage, dresses had been provided by the king. The guests who had been picked off the streets were not told to go home and do the best they could for their dress, but in the palace, in the vestibule of the banquet hall each man was arrayed in the dress the king wished to see worn. — Possibly this man who declined the offered garment had a dress of his own he grudged to cover. Possibly he thought he was as well dressed as need be. He would stroll in superciliously as a patron or spectator, thinking it very fit for those poor, coarse-clothed and dirty people to make use of the king's wardrobe, but conscious of no speck nor uncleanliness in his own raiment that should cause him to make any alteration of it.

Neither is this a formal and artificial custom representing a formal and artificial method of judging men. In point of fact this rejection of the marriage-dress is proof of alienation of spirit, disaffection, want of sympathy with the feelings of the king. The man who could refuse the festive dress on such an occasion must lack the festive spirit, and is therefore a "spot in the feast." It is a real and internal, not a merely formal and external distinction that exists between him and the rest of the guests. He sits there out of harmony with the spirit of the occasion, despising the exultation and mirth of his neighbors, and disloyal to his king. Therefore is his punishment swift and severe. The eye of the king that travels round the tables and carries welcome and hearty recognition, gladdening all his loyal subjects, is suddenly arrested upon this unseemly, audacious, unjustifiable intruder. As every guest turns to see the cause of the changed expression in the face that lights up the whole feast, there with head that would, but cannot, hang, with horror-stricken eye riveted upon the face of the king, stands the despiser of the wedding-garment — speechless — all his guilt and easy confidence gone, fearful misgivings sliding into his heart, quailing and fainting beneath that just and pitiful eye that empties him of all self-deceit, of all self-confidence, of all untruth. He welcomes the attendants who hurry him from the gaze of the assembled guests and the brilliant lights of the hall; but not the outer darkness of an Eastern street, not the pitchy blackness in which he lies unseen and helpless, can hide him from that gaze of His Lord which he feels to be imprinted on his conscience for evermore. It is that which pursues him, that which makes him outcast from all consolation and all hope, that he has alienated his Lord, has been branded by his king, has forfeited the approval and favor of Him whose recognition and fellowship

carry with them all joy, and hope, and blessing. Does this man's conduct signify anything to ourselves? Does his doom cover any great truth that concerns ourselves? How idle it seems to ask the question. Is there any commoner way of dealing with God's invitation than that which this man adopted? He had no deep love for his king, no grateful and humbling sense of his kindness, no perception of what was due to him, but with the blundering stupidity of godlessness, thought selfishness would carry him through, and ran right upon his doom. What is commoner than this self-complacency, this utter blindness to the fact that God is holy, and that holiness must therefore be the rule everywhere; what is commoner than the feeling that we are well enough, that we shall somehow pass muster, that as we mean to take our places among the heavenly guests we shall surely not be ejected? How hard it is for any of us fully to grasp the radical nature of the inward change that is required if we are to be meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Conformity to God, ability to rejoice with God and in God, humble and devoted reverence, a real willingness to do honor to the King's Son, these are great attainments; but these constitute our wedding-garment, without which we cannot remain in His presence nor abide His searching gaze. It will come to be a matter between each one of you singly and Him, and it is the heart you bear towards Him that will determine your destiny. No mere appearance of accepting His invitation, no associating of yourself with those who love Him, no outward entrance into His presence, no making use of the right language is anything to the purpose. What is wanted is a profound sympathy with God, a real delight in what is holy, a radical acceptance of His will,— in other words, and as the most untutored conscience might see, what is wanted is a state of mind-in you which God can delight in, and approve of, and hold fellowship with. To His table, to His everlasting company, to Himself and His love He invites you, and in order to accept this, the only invitation He gives (for there are no degrees, no outer and inner circles, no servants made of those who will not be friends) — in order to accept this invitation, or in the acceptance of it, acceptance of God, of His spirit, character, and ways is necessary. There is no real acceptance of the invitation, no abiding entrance into God's favor | where there is no growing likeness to God; without this it is mere word and self-deception. "Know ye not that the unjust shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God." For "many are called, but few chosen." To all of us the invitation comes; there is no man whom God does not desire to see enjoying His bounty. There is no question about the invitation — you have it — good and bad alike are invited, and yet even among those who seem to accept it, there is sometimes lacking that which can alone give them a permanent place in His presence and favor. There is no real sympathy with God, no pleasure in those matters which He deems important, no similarity of spirit — in a word, no real goodness. This is a state of spirit which will one day develop into a consciousness that we have nothing in common with God.

But, in conclusion, there is abundant encouragement in this parable to all who are willing and desirous to put on the Lord Jesus. As the poor people picked up by the servants of the king would have felt very awkward about their dress, and could not in decency have accepted the invitation had they not been assured that a suitable dress would be given them; so should we feel very awkward indeed, if, when summoned into God's presence, there should remain in us anything to make us feel out of place, uneasy, fearful. But the invitation itself guarantees the provision of all that follows it. It is the first business of every host to make his guest feel at home, and therefore does God provide us not only with great outward blessings, but with all that can make us feel easy

and glad in His presence. Fellowship with Him is indeed reverential, for He is our King: but being our Father there will be in it also more of the exuberant delight of a family gathering than of the stiffness of a formal state banquet throughout which we long for the termination, or are hindered from all enjoyment through fear of doing something out of place.

Though, therefore, there are many called but few chosen, there is no reason why you should not be among the few. For God not only offers enjoyment, but also power to enjoy. If you could not be easy in God's presence without great alterations in your character, these alterations will be made. The bona fide invitation is your guarantee that they will be made. If you could not be easy in God's presence without knowing that He was fully aware of all you had thought and done against Him, and forgave it you; if you could not eat at the table of one against whom you harbored ill-will; if you could not enjoy anything in company thoroughly uncongenial, whose conversation was all of subjects quite uninteresting to you; if you are conscious that in order to enjoy any entertainment the prime requisite is that you have a genuine admiration and love for the host — then this will all be communicated to you on your acceptance of God's invitation. Do you always feel that God's holiness is too high and distant for fellowship? But consider how Christ drew men and women to Him. No one ever created such a passion of devoted love as He. Consider Him and you will at length learn to think more wisely of holiness. Are you conscious that your habitual leanings and likings are earthly, that as yet you are more at home in other companics than in God's? Does your unfitness even more than your unworthiness deter you — does your want of ability to find your joy in God alarm you more than your guilt? Still you see here that God invites you as you are, and those whom He casts out are only those who have so fond a confidence in themselves as to think they are fit enough for His presence as they stand.

03.12. THE TEN VIRGINS

THE TEN VIRGINS

Matthew 25:1-13 The prolonged discourse of which this parable forms a striking part was uttered in reply to a very natural question which the disciples had put to our Lord. In ignorance of what was chiefly engaging His thoughts, and in simple-minded, rustic admiration of the metropolis, they had been taking Him round to show Him the marvels of the now completed temple. And well might they expect to hear their own exclamations of surprise and overwhelming admiration echoed from every one who in their day walked about Zion “and marked her bulwarks, or gazed on the astounding pile of marble that crowned the opposite summit of Moriah. Buildings of similar magnificence were scarcely elsewhere to be seen. It can scarcely have been with cold contempt for those stupendous architectural works, but rather with deep sorrow and compassion that our Lord, after silently gazing upon them, or entering with sympathy into the enthusiasm of his companions, at last let fall the unexpected word, “Verily I say unto you there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” It was inevitable that the disciples should eagerly desire to know when this catastrophe was to occur. “Tell us when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the world.” Our Lord’s reply to this question is, that the day and the hour of His corning are known to the Father only, and that therefore the only way to be prepared for that hour is to be always ready, prepared for any hour and every hour. This is the lesson which He means the parable to convey, and which He expressly draws in the words, “Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh.” And we must beware of pressing this or any parable to say more than it was meant to say. We get what it was intended to give when by its vivid imagery we are practically aroused to the necessity of being always prepared for our Lord’s coming. We may therefore dismiss a great deal of minute allegorizing and searching for hidden meanings in little turns of expression and parabolic accessories with the words of one of the Reformers who says, “It is nothing at all to the purpose to speculate and refine about virginity and lamps and oil and those who sell oil. These refined speculations are the trifles of allegorizers. But the one idea that is of moment is, that they who are really prepared shall enter into the joy of the Lord, while the unprepared shall be excluded.” Or we may say with Calvin himself: — “Some expositors torment themselves greatly in explaining the lamps, and the vessels, and the oil; but the simple and genuine meaning of the whole is just this, that it is not enough to have a lively zeal for a while. We must have in addition a perseverance that never tires.”

Neither need we spend time on the customs from which the parable draws its imagery. Let it suffice to read the words of one of the most accurate describers of what is to be seen in India. “At a marriage,” he says, “the procession of which I saw some years ago, the bridegroom came from a distance, and the bride lived at Serampore, to which place the bridegroom was to come by water. After waiting two or three hours, at length, near midnight, it was announced, as if in the very words of Scripture, “Behold the bridegroom Cometh, go ye out to meet him.” All the persons employed now lighted their lamps, and ran with them in their hands to fill up their stations in the procession.

Some of them had lost their lights, and were unprepared; but it was then too late to seek them, and the cavalcade moved forward to the house of the bride, at which place the company entered a large and splendidly illuminated area before the house covered with an awning, where a great multitude of friends, dressed in their best apparel, were seated upon mats. The bridegroom was carried in the arms of a friend, and placed upon a superb seat in the midst of the company, where he sat a short time, and then went into the house, the door of which was immediately shut, and guarded by sepoys. I and others expostulated with the doorkeepers, but in vain. Never was I so struck with our Lord's beautiful parable as at this moment: and the door was shut." This imagery so familiar to our Lord's hearers was used on this occasion to illustrate chiefly these three things: the meaning of our Lord's command to watch; its reason; and the means of fulfilling it. It illustrates the meaning of the command; showing us that it does not mean, " Be ye always on the watch," but "Be always prepared." The fisherman's wife who spends her time on the pier-head watching for the boats, cannot be so well prepared to give her husband a comfortable reception as the woman who is busy about her household work, and only now and again turns a longing look seaward. None of the virgins were on the watch for the bridegroom, but some of them were nevertheless prepared for His coming. It is impossible for us to be always looking out for the coming of Christ, but it is quite possible to be prepared for His coming. Our life is to bear evidence that one of the things we take into account is the approach of our Lord.

2. It illustrates also the reason of the command. No one can tell when this second great interruption of the world's even course is to take place. It may be nearer than some expect; or as the parable shows, it may be more distant than some expect. The expectation of a speedy termination of things which so largely prevailed in the first Christian generation might have been moderated by the wide circulation of this parable. The virgins who neglected to carry reserve-flasks of oil were those who expected the bridegroom would soon appear. They did not anticipate a long delay; they made no provision for continuance. Had the hour been a fixed one they would have been prepared, but they were betrayed by its uncertainty. And no doubt if any one could say with authority, "The Lord is to come on Tuesday first," a very large number of persons would at once prepare as best they could to meet Him. If the belief really grew up within them that on a certain day not far distant they must face their Lord, that belief would certainly produce a multitude of thoughts, and some efforts at preparation. It is, then, after all, your baseless sup, position that the Lord will not come quickly that betrays you into carelessness. This parable assures you you have no ground for saying, "My Lord delayeth His coming." You really do not know how near He is. And if any one feels, "Well, this then comes to no more than an appeal to fear. The appeal made by the parable is grounded on the assumption that Christians will be better men, and do more if they expect to be quickly summoned into Christ's presence,"— if this be felt, it can only be said in reply that fear is in many circumstances the equivalent of prudence, and a very wholesome motive; and further, that the expectation of Christ's coming does not give rise only to fear, but also to hope; that it braces the Christian's energies, and in accordance with human nature quickens the spiritual life. Or if any one feels that to have stimulated all past generations with the expectation of an event which did not after all occur, is artificial and unworthy, it should be enough to reflect that the beneficial system of insurance proceeds on principles to a large extent similar.

3. The parable shows us how we are to prepare for meeting the Lord. We are to be prepared to join in the festal celebration of His coming. We are to be in a position to join with those who add

luster to His presence, who give Him a hearty welcome, and who enter with Him into His joy. We are prepared for His coming if we are in the spirit of the occasion, and if we are furnished with what may fit us for suitably appearing in His company. The lamps of the virgins were meant to lend brilliancy to the scene; they were intended as a festal illumination. The virgins whose lamps burned brightly were not ashamed to be seen forming part of the bridal company. They were in keeping with it. Conscience will tell us what numbers us among the wise or among the foolish. Everything in us that heartily welcomes Christ's presence, and heartily rises to do Him honor; everything about us that can reflect any brightness or glory on Him; everything that makes us better than blots and blacknesses in His retinue; everything that will seem a suitable accompaniment in the triumph of a holy Redeemer, is a preparation for Christ's coming. The parable is not addressed to those who have never made any preparation for Christ's coming, but to those who have not made sufficient preparation. It reminds us that all who may at one time show similar preparedness for Christ's presence do not in the end show the same. Of those who start with similar intentions and similar external appearance a number fail to fulfil their original intention, and in the end belie their promising appearance. It is the same everywhere: in severe marches, prolonged and fatiguing enterprises and labors, a number always tail off and are not forthcoming at the final muster. The number who at any period of their life really go forth to meet their Lord, delighting to do Him honor and seeking His presence, may not be very large; but it is much larger than the number who maintain their preparedness to the end. The reason of this so frequent failure is here declared. The folly of the foolish virgins consisted In this, that while the wise took oil, they took none: that is to say, made no provision against any delay in the time of the Bridegroom's appearance. They lit their lamps, but made no provision for feeding them: the flame was to all appearance satisfactory, but the source of it was defective. And without running the figure too hard, we may say that those who In the end of their life fail to show as much fitness for Christ's presence as they did at some previous period, fail because they have been all along superficial and have never been filled with grace at the source, have not had the root of the matter in them. The foolish virgins, then, are a warning to all who are tempted to make conversion everything, edification nothing; who cultivate religion for a season and then think they have done enough; who were religious once, can remember the time when they had very serious thoughts, and very solemn resolutions, but who have made no earnest effort, and are making none, to maintain within themselves the life they once began. The wise are those who recognize that they must have within them that which shall enable them to endure to the end — not only impressions, right Impulses, tender feelings, but Ineradicable beliefs and principles which will at all times produce all right impulse and feeling. It is not in vain that our nature is made as it is made. In body and soul things are so ordered that one part aids and feeds another part. Without a good digestion no other function can be thoroughly well performed; as well performed as it might be. And in our spiritual nature, our feelings and impulses are nourished by our beliefs and perceptions. If we recognize the truth, if we have come to an assured and settled conviction that Christ has lived, and that He now lives, if our perceptions and beliefs are bringing us in contact with the truth, with Christ, and with things unseen, then we may expect to continue to the end.

Another point may be accepted from this part of the Parable: that there must be regard paid both to the outward and inward life. The vessel of oil is not enough without the burning lamp; nor the lamp merely lighted and with no supply of oil. There is a something which makes you worthy of entering with Christ into lasting joy. And this something is not an exhibition of the external marks of

a Christian, neither is it the certainty that once you had inward grace; but it is the continuous maintenance, to the end, both of the outward works which manifest, and of the inward graces which are the life of a Christian. The inward life of the soul and the outward expression of that life bear to one another an essential relation. On the one hand, if you do not constantly renew your supply of grace, if you do not carefully see to the condition of your own spirit, your good works will soon become less frequent, less sincere, and less lovely: your flame will burn low. But, on the other hand, if you tend only the life of your own soul, if you seek only to possess as much grace as possible for yourself, if you ask for the Holy Spirit and yet do none of those things in which the Spirit would naturally express Himself, if you do not let your light shine before and upon men in the actual circumstances you are placed in, then you will soon find that your internal life begins to stagnate and corrupt. To a healthy Christian life these two things are essential. A vessel of oil is, in itself, of no use on a dark night. The oil is not light, and might as well be water unless a light be added. And a burning wick which lasts only for half a minute, is only disappointing and tantalizing. A Christian must not only feel right but do right; and must not only do right but feel right. To be filled with the Spirit you have but to pray. You cannot manufacture nor create that which can sustain your spiritual life: God only can give it, and give it He does, gladly and liberally, in answer to your requests. And having the Spirit you must use Him; letting your light shine not so as to show yourself more conspicuously, but so as to help on others in their dark and doubtful way through this life; by dealing fairly with them, by being generous and considerate, by doing the best you can for every one you have to do with in any capacity. This is the reason why many of us feel slightly jarred in spirit when we hear converts rising in a confession-meeting one after another and saying, “I was saved last Wednesday night,” “I was saved on the 18th February,” “I was saved on the 12th March,” and so on. It is not that we do not believe that they are speaking the truth, but that we know that they have yet to be tested by life. We rejoice with them because they have found their Saviour; we tremble for them because we know that they have yet to work out their own salvation through years of temptation. All that their confession means is, that their lamp is lit, but how long it will burn is quite another question. They are merely in the condition of the ten virgins as they first went out, and only time can show whether they have oil or not. They may have been able to rejoice in Christ at a given hour last week or last month, and may at that hour have risen to greet Him, and there is nothing wrong in their declaring that such has been the case: but their trial has yet to take place; it has yet to be discovered whether, when many years have passed, they shall still be found rejoicing in Him. For in many cases it would appear as if conversion and salvation were looked upon as equivalents: in many cases there is a lack of soberminded counting of the cost, and a jubilation of spirit which would be more becoming at the close of the long fight of faith than at its commencement. You may say you are saved when you fairly put yourself into Christ’s hand; but you must also remember that then your salvation is only beginning, and that you cannot, in the fullest sense, say you are saved until Christ has wrought in you a perfect conformity to Himself. This being the distinction between the wise and foolish virgins, that which brings it to light is that the Bridegroom did not come while all the lamps were yet burning, and that during His delay they all slumbered and slept. This seems to mean no more than that all, having made such preparation as they judged sufficient “calmly and securely waited the approach of the Bridegroom.” There can scarcely be any more than this meant by the sleep; nothing which would make the sleep culpable on the part of the wise, for we do not find that any evil consequence whatever followed to them; rather they would be all the fresher for their rest, the better prepared to enter on

the joy. But the security which is excusable, and the repose which is necessary to one condition, is in another utter madness. Unconstrained mirth, eager pursuit of business, is one thing in the man who has just examined his books and made arrangements to meet all claims, but it is quite another thing in him who has made no such arrangements and does not know whether he can meet his engagements. So it is one thing to turn away your attention from the person and coming of Christ when you have made sure you are prepared to meet Him, and altogether another thing to turn your attention to other things in mere thoughtless security. It is one thing to engage in the business of this life, knowing that though your Lord find you in it, you have what will enable you to meet Him, the graces then required being really in you and ready to show themselves, though not at present called into exercise by the calculation, or the plan, or the work you are engaged in for the hour; but it is wholly another thing to plunge into the world's business without having once considered whether you have given sufficient attention to your preparedness for that event which may interrupt any day's business, or without keeping up a constant examination of the inward life of your spirit. But we may learn from the slumber of the wise, as well as from the rash sleep of the foolish. There is a kind of sleep in which the sense of hearing, at least, is on the alert, and when by a skilful discrimination unattainable when awake, the sense takes note only of the one sound it waits for, so that the sound of a distant and watched-for footstep arouses to the keenest wakefulness. If you look on these weary, slumbering virgins, you see the lamps firmly grasped, and when you try to unclasp the slumbering but faithful fingers, every faculty is at once on the alert. Other noises do not awaken them, but before the cry, "The Bridegroom cometh" has ceased to echo in the porch that shelters them, they stand erect and are trimming their lamps. So should it be with us; whatever necessary occupation, whatever necessary saturation of our minds with the thoughts of this world's property, turns our direct attention from the approach of our Lord, there should still be an openness of sense in His direction, a settled persuasion that it is His voice that must be hearkened to, a predisposedness to attend rather to Him if He should call, an inwrought though latent expectation of His coming, a consciousness, which but a whisper will arouse, that what we are here for is not to slumber, not to do what we might as well or better do anywhere else and with no hope of our Lord's coming, but still to meet Him. Through all the sleep of these virgins, dream would be chasing dream, they would be seeing bridal processions, gorgeous with all the gay and fantastic adornment which the closed eye so clearly sees, hearing sackbut and dulcimer and all kinds of music, and ever and anon starting to hear if the cry, "The Bridegroom cometh" were not real and summoning themselves. So through all the occupations of a Christian in which he is not watching for his Lord and trimming his lamp, there is, or should be, an under-current of expectation, ever keeping him in unconscious prepared, ness, occasionally roused into actual looking out to see. He is not always gazing forward, but ever and anon sends a messenger from the inmost citadel of his soul to inquire, "Watchman, what of the night?"

While they are thus all slumbering, and when their sleep is deepest, when the fatigue of watching is most felt, when things are stillest, and men count upon a few hours quiet and deliverance from care, "at midnight," the cry is heard, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!" And now the difference between the really and apparently prepared is manifested. There is something terrible in the security of the foolish maintained up to the last. They, too, arise and trim their lamps; even though there is nothing but a quenched, foul wick yet they seem to think still that matters are not so bad. They have but to ask oil of their pleasant companions. Not yet are they aware that their fate is already sealed. And this sudden and appalling reversal of their hopes, this mingling at a marriage

feast of exultant joy and the most melancholy and calamitous ruin, seems intended to fix in our minds an idea opposite to, and that should extirpate the idle fancy that things somehow will come all right; that there is no real need of all this urgent warning and watching; that in a world governed by a good and loving God, and where things are going on now pretty tolerably and so very prosaically, there cannot occur those startling, unnatural, desolating events predicted in God's word. It seems so fearful and incredible a thing that a world men take so lightly and joyously should be quietly leading them on to eternal ruin, that men maintain their easy disposition to the last, and cannot believe that out of a life that may be jested or trifled away, consequences so lasting and so awful can possibly flow. Many things are needed to drive this security out of us, and many things are given us for this end. The virgins go out with no thought but of festivity, enjoyment, and happy excitement; five of them, before the night is gone, are found and left in the bitterest sorrow and self-reproach. "They that were ready went in to the marriage, and the door was shut." In these words one seems to hear the decisive, final doom of the lost. The crash of the heavy dungeon door and the retiring footsteps are not more sickening to the heart of him that is left to die of hunger, than the heavy, sudden closing of this door that shuts in the saved and shuts out the lost. As the feeling; of comfort inside the house increases when the storm howls around and shakes it, as if seeking an entrance that it cannot find, so does the misery of those left outside increase when they hear the sound of revelry and mirth, and see the warm lights thrown out on the darkness. They look round despairingly as the storm begins to rise, as the first moan of the gathering tempest nears and lights upon them, and warns them, as if in pity, of the blasts that follow as if in anger. But once the door is shut no piteous clamor outside can open it. No sense of the awful state of things outside, no willingness now to be within, avails to force it back upon its hinges. Every voice that wails for entrance is still met by the same chilling, hopeless reply, " I know you not." A new thing it is for that door to be shut. So long has it stood open, thrown wide back, that we forget there is a door that can shut that entrance; that it is not more useful now to let in, than one day to keep out. But the time comes when whosoever will shall not be saved; when it will be vain pointing men to the door; when whosoever is outside, there remains. And this time may be before you rise from where you now sit. No man can say it shall not. He who feels it most unfair to be hedged up thus to an hour, to be told it is unsafe and unreasonable to delay even so long, cannot assert that the end is further distant. To-day the door is open, to-morrow it may be too late to seek entrance. The hand that closes it may already be laid upon it.

It is foolishness, not wickedness, that is reprehended in these virgins — that is to say, in those who are represented by them. The wise man is he who shapes his conduct in accordance with the truth of things and with actual facts; the foolish man is he who shuts his eyes to what he does not wish to see, and fancies that somehow, though he can't tell how, things will go all right with him. He is, in fact, the ostrich who buries his head in the sand and fancies he has escaped because he has shut his eyes to what is hostile. The man who makes no preparation for the future is a foolish man. He may explain it to himself as he pleases, but to attempt an explanation is only to give further proof of his foolishness. He may see his way with perfect clearness a few paces before him, but if he does not see where it is to end, how can he tell whether he ought to go on even these few paces? The man who does not think, who does not consider whether he is prepared for the future or not, who does not seriously measure himself by every standard he can think of, and especially by the inevitable requirements of God and eternity, is a foolish man. He may be clever, brilliant in talk and very entertaining in company, he may be useful in business, he may be

well-meaning, but he is foolish — has none of that wisdom which consists in seeing things as they actually are, and in conforming oneself to them. The man who at this present time is in point of fact leaving it to mere chance whether he is to be saved or lost, must surely feel that he is profoundly foolish.

Let us then meet Christ's intention in the parable, and see that for our part we are prepared for His coming. Let us make sure that the little flame once kindled is not already burning low. Let us be sure that we are living in constant communication with the source of all spiritual life; that the very spirit of Christ dwells in us richly. Is there one who feels that things are not with him as they ought to be, and that he has declined from the glad preparedness he once enjoyed, or even that he has never attained to a state in which any luster could be thrown by him on the redeeming grace of Christ? To this person Christ speaks the parable. It is you He longs to see providing yourself with the material of everlasting goodness and everlasting joy. There is a Spirit offered you through whom you can become pure and loving, capable of good, at peace with yourself and with God. What response do you make to Christ's offers? Are you to turn away and let it be possible that the next summons you hear may be: "Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him?"

03.13. THE TALENTS

THE TALENTS Matthew 25:14-30 This parable illustrates the great principle which regulates the distribution of rewards and punishments in the kingdom of God — the principle that men shall be judged according to the means at their disposal. The “talents” represent everything over and above natural ability, by which men can advance the interests of the kingdom; position, opportunities, and especially the measure of grace given to each man. All the interests of Christ upon earth are entrusted to His people. He has distributed among us all that He values upon earth. Destroy from earth what men have and enjoy, and all that Christ prizes is gone. There is no interest of His carried forward without human labor; if His servants all cease to work, His cause on earth is at an end. And every servant of His is endowed with means enough to accomplish his own share in Christ’s work. He may not have as much as others. But to be fair, there must be little put in the hands of the servant who can only make use of a little, and much put at the disposal of him who can manage a large amount. It is as easy — you may say — to make ten talents out of five, as to make four out of two; perhaps easier. Yes, if you choose the right man, but many a man who could make a small business pay, would ruin himself in a big one. Each gets what each can conveniently and effectively handle; and no one is expected to produce results which are quite out of proportion to his ability and his means. And in order that the judgment may be fair, the reckoning is not made until “after a long time.” We are not called upon to show fruit before autumn. The servants are not summoned to the reckoning while yet embarrassed by the novelty of their position; time is allowed them to consider, to calculate, to wait opportunities, to make experiments. The Lord does not quickly return in a captious spirit, but delays till the wise have had time to lay up great gains, and even the foolish to have learnt wisdom. So with ourselves: we cannot complain if strict account be taken at the end, because we really have time to learn how to serve our Lord. We have time to repair bad beginnings, to take thought, to make up in some degree for lost time. We are not hurried into mistakes and snatched to judgment, as if life were an ordeal we were passing through, where the slightest failure finishes our chances and is relentlessly watched for and insisted upon. We see well enough that with God it is quite otherwise; that He wishes us to succeed, will not observe our failures, winks at our shortcomings, and often repairs the ill we have done.

It is not without significance that the servant who did nothing at all for his master, was he who had received but one talent. No doubt those who have great ability are liable to temptations of their own; they may be more ambitious, and may find it difficult to serve their master with means which they see would bring in to themselves profits of a kind they covet. But such men are at all events not tempted to bury their talent. This is the peculiar temptation of the man who has little ability, and sullenly retires from a service in which he cannot shine and play a conspicuous part. His ambition outruns his ability, and while he envies the position of others, he neglects the duties of his own. Because he cannot do as much as he would, he will not do as much as he can. By showing no interest in that situation in life that God has seen fit he should fill, he would have us believe he is qualified for a higher.

There are many to whom this hint of the parable applies. You are in the same condemnation as this servant when you shrink from exercising your talent; because it is only one and a small one; when you refuse to do anything, because you cannot do a great deal; when you refuse to help, where you cannot lead; when you hesitate about aiding in some work, because those with whom you would be associated in it do it better, and show better in the doing of it than yourself; when you refuse to speak a word in behalf of Christ, because you could not satisfy your own taste, because you could not do it so well as some other person could; when you refuse to take some position, engage in some duty, be of some use in a certain department in which you would not excel, and would be recognized as surpassed by some others. This miserable fear of being mediocre, how many a good work has it prevented or crippled. If we wait till we are fully qualified to serve Christ, we shall never serve Him at all. If we cannot stoop to learn to do great things by doing very little things, we shall never do great things. The only known way to become a strong and full-grown man is to be first a little child.

It is a true proverb that “the sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men that can render a reason.” He can always justify his conduct. The insolence of this man’s words is not intentional. He reads off correctly his own state of mind, and fancies that his conduct was appropriate and innocent. It was not his fault that his master was a man who struck terror into the hearts of his servants, and whom it was useless trying to please. And probably this man’s account of the reason of his inactivity was accurate. All wrongness of conduct is at bottom based on a wrong view of God. Nothing so conduces to right action as right thoughts about God. If we think with this servant that God is hard, grudging to give and greedy to get, taking note of all shortcomings, but making no acknowledgment of sincere service, exacting the utmost farthing and making no abatement or allowance — if we one way or other virtually come to think that God never really delights in our efforts after good, and that whatever we attempt in our life He will coldly weigh and scorn, then manifestly we shall have no heart to labor for Him. But this view of God is unpardonably narrow, and the action flowing from it is after all inconsistent. It is unpardonably wrong, and the very heartiness with which these other servants were greeted refutes it. You hear the hearty “well done” ringing through the whole palace — there is no hesitating scrutiny, no reminding them they had after all merely done what it was their duty to do — not at all — it is the genial, generous outburst of a man who likes to praise and hates to find people at fault; he has been hoping to get a good account of his servants, and it is far more joy in them than gratification in his increased property that prompts this exclamation of surprise and delight and approval. He feels himself much richer in the fidelity of his servants than in their gains. He has pleasure in promoting them, in bringing them up more nearly to his own rank and person, and in making them thus share in his own plans and arrangements and rule and joy.

Moreover, not only is the view of the master wrong, but the consequent action, as the master points out, is inconsistent. If the master is so slow to recognize sincere effort, so oppressive in his exactions, demanding bricks where he has given no straw, requiring impossible performances, and measuring all work by an impossible standard, is this a reason for making no effort to conciliate him? If you feared that, in the necessary hazard of business, you might lose your lord’s talent, yet surely his anger would be as much aroused by inactivity as by unsuccessful efforts to serve him? Why did you not at least put his money into the hands of men who would have found a use for it, and would have paid you a good interest? If you were too timid to use the trust your lord

left you, if you knew too little of business and the world's ways to venture on any self-devised investment, there were plenty of substantial genuine undertakings into which you might have put your means. You could work under the guidance of some more masculine nature, who could direct and shelter you.

There are numberless ways in which the most slenderly equipped among us can fulfil the suggestion here given, and put our talent to the exchangers, into the hands of men who can use it. There is no lack of great works going on for our Lord to which we may safely attach ourselves, and in which our talent is rather used by the leaders of the work, invested for us, than left to our own discretion. Just as in the world there is such an endless variety of work needing to be done, that every one finds his niche, so there is no kind of ability that cannot be made use of in the kingdom i of Christ. The parable does not acknowledge any servants who have absolutely nothing; some I have little as compared with others, but all have some capacity to forward the interests of the absent master. Is every one of us practically recognizing this — that there is a part of the work he is expected to do? He may seem to himself to have only one talent that is not worth speaking about, but that one talent was given that it might be used, and if it be not used, there will be something lacking when reckoning is made which might and ought to have been forthcoming. Certainly there is something you can do, that is unquestionable; there is something that needs to be done which precisely you can do, something by doing which you will please Him whose pleasure in you will fill your nature with gladness. It is given to you to increase your Lord's goods. But the law which is exhibited in this parabolic representation is also explicitly announced in the words: "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance, but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." This may be called the law of Spiritual Capital. It is a law with the operation of which we are familiar in nature, and in the commercial world. It is he who has even a little capital to begin with, and who makes a right use of it, who soon leaves far behind the man who has none, or who neglects to invest what he has. And the more this capital grows, the more rapidly and the more easily is it increased. After a certain point, it seems to increase by virtue of its own momentum. So in certain sicknesses, as soon as the crisis of the disease is past and a little health has been funded again in the patient's constitution, this rapidly grows to complete recovery. So with popularity, it begins one scarce knows how; but once begun, the tide flows apace. You may scarcely be able to say why one statesman or one author should be so immeasurably more popular than others; but so it is, that when once a beginning is made, tribute flows in naturally, as waters from all sides settle in a hollow. It is the same with the acquirement of knowledge: the difficulty is to get past a certain point, it is all up-hill till then; but that point once gained, you reach the table lands and high levels of knowledge where you begin to see all round you, and information that has been fragmentary, and therefore useless before, now pieces itself together and rapidly grows to complete attainment. Everything your hear or see now seems by a law of nature to contribute to the fund you have already acquired. It claims kindred with it, and unites itself to it. " 'Tis the taught already that profits by teaching."

It is this same law which regulates our attainment in the service of Christ. However little grace we seem to have to begin with, it is this we must invest, and so nurse it into size and strength. Each time we use the grace we have by responding: to the demands made upon it, it returns to us increased. Our capital grows by an inevitable law. The efforts of young or inexperienced Christians to give utterance to the life that is in them may often be awkward, like the movements of most

young animals. They may be able to begin only in a very small way, so small a way that sensitive persons are frequently ashamed to begin at all. Having received Christ, they are conscious of new desires and of a new strength; they have a regard for Christ, and were they to assert this regard in the circumstances which call for its assertion, their regard would be deepened. They have a desire to serve Him, and were they to do so in those small matters with which they have daily concern, their desire and ability would be increased. Grace of any kind invested in the actual opportunities of life cannot come back to us as small as it was, but enlarged and strengthened.

Such grace then as we have, such knowledge as we have of what is due to others, to ourselves, and to God, let us give free expression to. Such investments of Christian principle as are within our reach let us make; such manifestations of a Christian temper and mind as our circumstances daily demand let us exhibit, and it must come to pass that we increase in grace. There is no other way whatever of becoming richly endowed in spirit than by trading with whatever we have to begin with. We cannot leap into a fortune in spiritual things; rich saints cannot bequeath us what their life-long toil has won; they cannot even lend us so that we may begin on borrowed capital. In the spiritual life all must be genuine;; we must work our own way upwards, and by I humbly and wisely laying out whatever we now possess, make it more or be forever poor. And yet how few avail themselves of this law, and lay up treasure in heaven. How few make great fortunes in the spiritual life. The mass of Christians never get even fairly started in a career which is at all likely to end in great saintliness of character and serviceableness. They act as if they had no capital of grace to begin with, no fund to trade upon; and they never make any more of it than they made the first week of their profession. They are not traders, every year increasing their stock and enlarging their gains, but they resemble men who receive a weekly wage, which is no more to-day than it was years ago. Is it not worthy of remark that after years of prayer and of concernment with the fountain of all spiritual life, there should be so small a fund of it laid up within ourselves? Is it not the fact that we seem to be living from hand to mouth, on the verge of bankruptcy, with no more between us and spiritual starvation than the day we believed? Are we conscious that our Christian principle has been deepening year by year? Can we count over our spiritual gains this day, and reckon up solid accumulations of grace in our character? Or are we still merely keeping the wolf from the door, and not always that? Are we making a bare shift to get through without absolutely breaking down? Is it all we can do to make ends meet, and to keep up in our own souls the idea that we are servants of Christ? Do we feel as if they were the thinnest partition between us and great sin? In a word, are we enriched with the “more abundance “of the well-doing servant, and do we find ourselves every way better equipped for all good work; or does even that which we once persuaded ourselves we had seem to be vanishing away? But the parable reminds us that it is not only the careless who fail to use their talents to advantage, but that the same result sometimes follows from a deliberate but false conception of the service of Christ. As in the world, there are many who prefer comfort to wealth, and have no ambition to rank as millionaires, so in the Christian life many prefer what they conceive to be security to eminent saintliness. They do not care about greatly increasing the godliness they already have. They would like to have so much grace as would set them on the right hand, not on the left; on the winning and not on the losing side; but they are not concerned to have an abundant entrance if only they get into the kingdom at all. They therefore make no thoroughgoing effort to keep moving forwards, but rather avoid whatever would effectually commit them to a more devoted and self-sacrificing life. They rather repress the gracious feelings they have than seek to secure for them an increasing expression in

their life. They see customs in business which they cannot approve, but they make no remonstrance. They recognize circumstances in which a word of Christian advice might be beneficial, but they do not speak it. They decline to appeal to the highest motives of those around them. They do not pray in their families. They avoid all action which might give them a character for zeal. They seek to live a moderate, decent life. They seek to hit the mean and to be neither obviously godless nor to be righteous over much. They have some grace, but they do not circulate it and seek to make it more; they have a talent, but they bury it. Of such a method of dealing with our connection with Christ, there is only one possible result. The unused talent passes from the servant who would not use it to the man who will. A landlord has two farms lying together: the one is admirably managed, the other is left almost to itself, with the least possible management, and becomes the talk of the whole country-side for poor crops and untidiness. No one asks what the landlord will do when the leases are out. It is a matter of course that he dismisses the careless tenant, and puts his farm into the hands of the skilful and diligent farmer. He enforces the great law: “To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken even that he hath.” In the kingdom of Christ this law is self-acting. To bury our talent and so keep it as originally given is an impossibility. To have just so much grace and no more is an impossibility. It must either be circulating and so multiplying, or it! ceases to be. It must grow, or it will die. You might as well try to keep your child always a child: he must either grow or die. In the physical world the law has become familiar. The unused muscle dwindles and disappears: no one needs to come and remove it; want of use removes it. The ants whose habits of life enabled them to find food without the aid of sight have gradually lost the organ of sight itself. And so is it in the spiritual world also. The unused faculty becomes extinct. Hence it is that you see some old persons absolutely callous: the time was when they had at least a capacity for believing in divine things and for choosing God as their portion, but now you would say that the very capacity is destroyed; no Godward emotion can find a place in their heart, nothing can stir a penitent thought in them. Hence it is that in your own souls you perhaps are finding that, no matter what effort you make, you cannot enter as heartily into holy services and occupations as once you did, but are finding your old joy and assurance honey-combed by unbelieving thoughts. Hence it is that the susceptibility to right feeling you had in boyhood has gone from you. You did not mean to become unfeeling, but only shrank from acting as feeling dictated. But he who blows out the flame, finds that the heat and the glow die out of themselves. The teaching of this side of the parable, then, is alarming in the extreme. The warning it conveys proceeds not from an external voice we can defy or which may be mistaken, but from the laws of our nature; and it speaks not of an arbitrary infliction of punishment, but of results which these laws render inevitable. The unused faculty dies out. The capacities we have for loving and serving God are taken from us. That which was once possible becomes forever impossible. The future once open to us is closed. We are permanently crippled, limited, paralyzed, deadened. Had we followed the openings given to us, had we used the talent committed to us, endless expansion and fulness of joy would have been ours, but now our chances are past. We have had our opportunity, we have for years been on probation, but now it is over for us. How gladly would a man renounce all that sin has brought him, if only he could stand again with his talent in his hand, and all life’s opportunities before him. If there is one truth more than another on which the young may begin to build their life, it is this: that each time you decline a duty to which your better selfs prompts you, you become less capable of doing it; and on the other hand, that each resistance to temptation, each humble and painful effort

after what is good, is real growth in character, growth as real and as permanent as the growth in stature which, once attained, can never again dwindle to the size of the child.

Let us then give ear to the parable, and if we are conscious that even now we are very poor in spiritual things, let us make the most of the grace we have lest we become altogether destitute. If we are now stammering in prayer, the likelihood is we shall soon be dumb, unable to pray. If we are more frequently questioning the reality of God's interference in human affairs, and if we more freely admit doubts regarding cardinal truths, the likelihood is we shall soon disbelieve, and have the very faculty of faith paralyzed so as to be unable to perceive evidence the most weighty and conclusive. If we are letting go one by one our Christian connections, and involving ourselves more and more with worldly matters, the probability is that shortly we shall be hardened and eager worldlings. We have seen the process going on in many; why is it not to go on in ourselves? If good works and charitable employments are more a burden to us than they were, let us beware lest we wither and become fit only for the axe and the fire. As the cramped and numbed arm warms and wakens the sleeper, so let this creeping hardness that comes over our spirits awaken us, while yet there is time to chafe the dead limb to life. If yet we can summon into active life one self-denying resolution, if yet we can feel at all the constraining power of Christ's love, and can obey His voice in any one particular, if yet we can prevail upon ourselves to give up worldly and carnal ideas of life, and entertain humble and chastened desires; then let us most anxiously cherish such feelings, let us fan every good disposition into flame lest it die, let us at once circulate and invest our little remaining capital in the good works we are daily called to, that the very faculty of doing anything for God and our fellow-men may not forever perish out of us. In closing, it may be well to give special prominence to a truth which has throughout been implied that increased grace is its own reward; or at any rate, an essential part of it. The servant who had multiplied his talents is rewarded by the possession and use of these multiplied talents. He does not now get the burden of business lifted off his shoulders, and a life of ease appointed to him. This would be to reward the successful officer by depriving him of his command, as if an ample pension would compensate to a martial spirit for the want of active service and fresh opportunities of using richer experience and ampler powers. The talents gained are left in the hands, that gained them, and wider opportunities for their use are afforded. This is the reward of the faithful servant of Christ; the grace he has diligently used is increased, and his opportunities continually multiply. He is always entering upon; his reward; and entrance into heaven only marks the point at which his Lord expresses His approval, and raises him from a position in which his fidelity is tested to a position of rule, that is. of acknowledged trustworthiness and self-control, the position of one who has acquired an interest in the work, and who so manifestly lives for it that it is impossible any interest of his own should divert him from this. He has no other interest. His joy is his Lord's joy, joy in successfully advancing the best interests of men, joy in the sight of others made righteously happy.

This, then, is the reward Christ offers to us, a reward consisting mainly in increased ability to serve Him and forward what is good. There can be no reward more certain, for it begins here and now. Your increasing grace is your heaven begun. This is the earnest of the Spirit, the dawning of eternal day. No one need tell you that there is no heaven: the kingdom of heaven is within you. And this reward is also the best you can imagine. All other rewards would be external to yourself and separable from yourself, but this reward is within you, in your own growth in character. Not

your condition alone, but you yourself are to be good. What can be better than this? What is the reward the sick man receives for his attention to every prescription of his physician and his avoidance of everything that would throw him back? His reward is that he becomes healthy. . What reward has the boy for obedience and diligence and purity? His reward is that he becomes a vigorous and capable man, fit for the ampler enjoyments which the nobler activities of life bring. So says our Lord, “I am come that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly.” If it be asked, what is the great inducement? what is that which makes life worth living? what is that which we can set before us as our sufficient reward and aim? the answer can only be: the inducement is that we have the sure hope of becoming satisfactory persons, of: growing up to the stature and energies of perfect men, of becoming perfect as our Father is perfect, who needs no reward but delights evermore in being and doing good; who loves and is therein blessed.

03.14. PARABLE OF THE TWO DEBTORS

PARABLE OF THE TWO DEBTORS

Luke 7:36-50 The reader of the Gospels cannot fail to remark that the narratives of physical cures are greatly in excess of the narratives of spiritual restorations. Even in cases where spiritual good was received, this comes in sometimes as a mere appendage to the physical healing. Neither can it be thought that the faith required for the cure of the bodily disease itself guarantees the permanent health of the spirit; for there is convincing evidence that not every one who was physically restored was also emancipated from spiritual disorder. In fact, the reader longs for fuller information regarding our Lord's method of dealing with those whose soundness of body enabled them to dispense with appeal to His miraculous power, but who were yet broken in fortune, defeated in life, enthralled by evil habit. This little story presents us with such a case; and it gives us a glimpse of the background of the life of Christ. It was only by accident this woman's case came to the front. There may have been many who, like her, received light and healing of soul from a few minutes' quiet talk with Christ, and who returned to their occupations unnoticed but renewed. Before she came to Simon's house, this woman had heard Jesus, and had found in Him salvation; but nothing is told us of that part of her history. In asking Jesus to dine with him, the Pharisee probably acted, as most men on all occasions act, from mixed motives. Others were invited, and gladly, no doubt, availed themselves of the opportunity of meeting Jesus and for themselves determining whether His claim to be a prophet was or was not valid. That the Pharisee felt himself in the position of a superior person who might sit in judgment on this man from Nazareth, is apparent from the circumstance that though he asked Him to his house, he gave Him a barely civil reception, pointing Him to His place without even the formal courtesies which, though small in themselves, greatly facilitate freedom and friendliness of intercourse. A Pharisee, above all men, might have been expected to be punctilious in these matters. But very often those whose manners are formed upon irreproachable models fail grievously in the genial consideration of others which springs from sweetness of nature. The coldness of the reception given to Jesus by the self-satisfied Pharisee was unexpectedly set in a very strong light by the strikingly opposite conduct of the woman who came into the room where the company was dining. The common Eastern fashion is to sit cross-legged on the floor at meals. But the Jews of our Lord's time had adopted the more luxurious Greek style of reclining on couches round a raised table. Jesus was thus reclining on His left side, with His head towards the table and His feet extended on the couch towards the wall of the room. The intrusion of an uninvited guest during meals would of itself excite no remark. In fact, provision was often made for such intruders by setting cushions round the wall of the room for the accommodation of persons who might wish to talk with the guests either on business or other matters. But that a woman of notoriously bad character, and who could not fail to be known in the little town to all but strangers, should thus enter the dining-room of a Pharisee, was probably an unheard-of presumption. But her whole nature was for the time absorbed in devotion to Jesus, and she could not wait for a quieter time or more convenient place, but passed unheeding through the abuse and repulses of the servants of the house. For her there was but one

presence there. She saw no one else; she thought of no one else. Her impulsive temperament, which had possibly led her astray at first, now stands her in good stead, and rebukes our cold and tardy expressions of gratitude, our cautious and timorous professions of love to Christ.

She enters the room with the intention of anointing the feet of Jesus. But ere she can offer Him this adoration, the fulness of her heart, stirred by His presence, overflows, and in a tumult of penitence, joy, and love she sinks at His feet and bursts into tears. In her confusion, seeking for something to wipe the feet her tears have wet, she uses the hair that is hanging disheveled about her, and her face being thus drawn down and hidden, she covers His feet with kisses. Then remembering her errand, she pours the ointment over them. That our Lord did not interrupt her is more remarkable than that none of the onlookers did. To any ordinary teacher or benefactor there would have been extreme awkwardness in receiving so extravagant a demonstration of affection and in such circumstances. She kissed His feet. Homage can find no lowlier tribute to pay. Adoration can no farther go. And we cannot but rejoice that for the credit of our common humanity such a tribute was paid to our Lord. There were at least some on earth who recognized that He deserved all they could give. This woman's worship is an exhilarating spectacle. She creates an atmosphere it does one good to breathe, an atmosphere of high and true sentiment, in which things are rightly estimated, and in which conventionality disappears. Would only that her kissing of the feet of incarnate goodness and love were the representative expression of the feeling of all men towards Christ! But to the Pharisee the admission of this woman to such liberties was proof that Jesus was no prophet. He himself would have allowed no such unseemly familiarities at the hands of a degraded person; and indeed he might be very easy on that score, for it is not the sanctimoniousness of the Pharisee that elicits such tributes of devotion. Judging Jesus by himself and his class, he did not doubt that He too would have spurned this woman's attentions had He known her character. It was obvious to the Pharisee that Jesus could not know her character, and he therefore concluded He had none of the spiritual insight supposed to characterize the prophet. Jesus penetrates his thought, and makes him sensible that whether or not He had understood the woman's state. He at any rate accurately gauged him. In a conversational, easy way He shows, by the Parable of the Two Debtors, that love is proportioned to indebtedness; and then, applying the Parable, He defends the woman's conduct, and leaves Simon to draw edifying conclusions from his own. The Parable is so put that it is obvious to the entire company that great love means great forgiveness, while meager love means small or doubtful forgiveness. Our Lord then contrasts Simon's conduct with the woman's; his supercilious violation of the commonest courtesies with her gratuitous attentions; his haughty suspicion with her undoubting and devoted reverence; his self-serving and contemptuous hospitality, his languid and cool civility, which was unequal to the task of filling even the common forms of politeness, with the woman's uncontrollable love that broke through all rules and proprieties of life, and forced new channels for its own vast volume. The facts are obvious to the whole company; the woman's love is unmistakable, Simon's coldness is equally apparent.

What deduction, then, is to be drawn from these facts regarding the spiritual condition of either party? Simon himself has announced the rule for making such a deduction. Great love, he has just said, is the result of great forgiveness. The larger debtor loved his creditor because he forgave him much. This woman, then, has been greatly forgiven; her love is the evidence, the proof of it, according to Simon's own showing. Love, you have told us, varies with indebtedness; this

woman's great love means that she is greatly indebted, has been greatly forgiven. The vehemence, or as no doubt you would say, the indecency of this woman's affection, is proof that her many sins are forgiven; that is to say, that she is pure. But — our Lord adds with a significant warning — to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little; a hint which might raise in the mind of Simon the question, Am I forgiven at all? If love be the index by which we can read the amount of forgiveness, and if I have barely love enough to show decent respect, what am I to conclude regarding my own debt? Our Lord's immediate object in this Parable was to defend the woman and justify His own allowance of her presence and expressions of affection. This defense and justification are accomplished when it is shown that the very familiarities which the Pharisee thought Jesus should have rebuked are the proof that the woman is forgiven, cleansed, and pure. Simon had inwardly condemned both the woman and Jesus; the woman for being a sinner, Jesus for admitting her familiarities. By the Parable, Jesus gives him to understand that her love is its own justification. In this reasoning there is involved — first, that love to Christ is love to God, and is therefore the measure of purity; and secondly, that love to Christ is the result of forgiveness.

1. First, Christ points to the woman's demonstrations of love to Him as proof that her sins are forgiven. He is the creditor who has forgiven much, and is therefore loved much. In other words, He puts Himself, and allows the woman to put Him, in the place of God; accepting her love for Himself as if it were love to God, and therefore proof that she is forgiven and pure. He does not appeal to the fact that her heart was filled with love, irrespective of the object of the love; He does not argue that because she was now possessed by a pure and unselfish affection, she was in a radically sound state of spirit. His argument is, that she has been forgiven a debt, and therefore loves her creditor. It is Christ Himself she loves, and He therefore is the creditor who has forgiven her; but her debt was sin, transgression against God, and it is therefore God who is her true creditor. Christ thus identifies Himself with God, and in the simplest manner accepts love to Himself as if it were love to God, and as decisive evidence regarding the woman's relation to the Highest. On another occasion the Pharisees observed what was implied in Christ's forgiving sin, and took exception to His doing so on the valid ground that none can forgive sins but God only. And it maybe supposed that on reflection this woman saw what was implied in her connection with Christ. It may be that as yet she had no definite ideas regarding the relation in which Christ stood to God. We do not know how He had got round her heart and quickened within her a craving for purity, and encouraged her to strive after it. But plainly He had enabled her to believe herself forgiven, and had filled her heart with new desires, and to her He was the embodiment of the Divine. All she sought was in Him. And Christ does not warn her, as if this passionate devotion to Him might arrest a love which should go beyond His person. He allows her to worship Him, to rivet her affections and her hopes upon Him; He encourages her to think of Him as the forgiver of her sin, as the one to whom it was right to give undivided and unstinted love, as her Lord and her God.

Christ is, in human personality, "the power not ourselves that makes for righteousness." He is God manifest in the flesh. In Him we have all that lifts us to what is best and highest in human nature. In Him we find God; all that is sufficient to give us confidence, guidance, peace; to fill our affections and quicken them, to educate conscience and cleanse it, to lift us out of ourselves and give us eternal satisfaction. And Christ links us to Himself by love, and through our love imparts all the blessing He gives. To create an enthusiasm for Himself, a true attachment to His own person, is His chief object. This woman may have had many foolish ideas about God and man, she may

have retained much that was faulty, but in that passion of devotion to Himself our Lord saw the beginning of all good in her. Affection for Him deadens every evil passion; it maintains the soul in an atmosphere of purity; it assimilates the whole nature to the Divine, and fills the heart with love to men. Love to Christ is, therefore, the measure and the pledge of purity.

2. Secondly, love to Christ is the result of forgiveness, and varies with the amount of debt forgiven. But this statement requires certain modifications. We must not force out of the parable any numerically exact ratio between pardon and love. Jesus does not mean that the one debtor of the Parable was precisely ten times as grateful as the other, although his canceled debt was ten times as great. Manifestly the character of the debtors must be taken into account, and their way of looking at the debt. If they were men of a precisely similar sensitiveness of conscience and quickness of feeling, then their gratitude would be in proportion to their debt. But where do we find two such men? Is it not notorious that while one man is broken-hearted under the shame of bankruptcy, another, less nicely educated to mercantile honor, jauntily sets about repairing his shattered fortunes, and gaily trims his sails to catch the changing wind? And between these extremes are there not all possible gradations of feeling and of conduct? So is it with our debt to God. He who has inherited a sensitive conscience, and has been trained to shrink from the smallest stain, will on that very account be deeply humbled even by sins which others make light of, and will highly value the mercy that forgives them. A coarser nature, habituated to vice, and saturated with depraved ideas, may accept forgiveness with surprisingly little sense of the goodness of God. It is not, in short, the amount of sin, but the sense of it, which is the measure of gratitude to Him who forgives it. To suppose that by sinning deeply you secure that one day you will love much, is a fallacy. You may have more sin to be conscious of; but your consciousness of it, instead of being greater, will be less. You will seek in vain for the old shame, for the early remonstrances of conscience, for the same humiliation on account of many sins that you once had on account of few. Your many sins will stand as facts in your history; but your heart, long used to their company, will refuse to loathe them as once it did. To be very wicked is no safe receipt for becoming very good. But the fact to which our Lord points in the parable is the commonly recognized one, that abstinence from crime, and from vices which society condemns, and which stain the outward life, frequently produces a self-satisfied and superficial character. The Pharisee is essentially shallow. He accustoms himself to judge by what appears; and when he is conscious that he satisfies the requirements of men like himself, who see no deeper than the conduct, he thinks little of his essential character, and spends no pains on ascertaining in what his virtue is rooted. The obvious difference between himself and the flagrant transgressor of the law betrays him into self-complacency, pride, and ignorance of the spiritual life and of God. Such a person remains unhumbled, and has no thirst for forgiveness, not being sensible of defilement. He criticises Christ, observes and considers but does not fully understand Him. He investigates His relation to other men; but no instinct of his own prompts him to cast himself upon His friendship as the very Person he needs. In contrast to this cold and self-satisfied character, our Lord sets the humbled penitent, the person who is broken-hearted on account of the defilement and accumulating misery and hopelessness of his sin. His transgression may have been of a kind that makes a dark blot on the life. Originally of a warm and passionate nature, he may have burst the ordinary trammels which society lays upon men, and may have brought into his life a great deal of wretchedness. He may be so entangled that deliverance seems hopeless; character and strength of will alike gone, he may go from day to day not knowing where to look for any help, and

sometimes disposed to abandon all thought of restoration, and give himself frankly and finally to ruin. Such a person, when he is lifted out of his solitary despair by the loving recognition of Christ, when he feels the forgiving hand laid upon him and sees the gate of a new life standing open at his very feet, when he becomes conscious that through all his vileness and selfishness a Divine compassion has followed him, is wholly overcome with mingled shame and joy, and hails the Saviour as One who seems to have been provided precisely for his necessities. This is the advantage that the conscious sinner has over the self-righteous Pharisee. The sins of the one being branded by public sentiment, and bringing the sinner into collision with physical and social laws, are recognized by the sinner himself as deadly and humiliating evils. He cannot blind himself to the fact that forgiveness and cleansing, inward help and purity, are needed by himself. Sin, if it has not deepened his nature, has, at all events, convinced him of its own reality, and of the terrible influence it can exert in a human life. The Person who sets him free from this pervasive, intractable, and overmastering evil becomes all in all to him. But how was Simon, and how are we, to profit by the knowledge that love to Christ is the result of forgiveness? We are conscious that for the settlement and perfecting of the spirit there is nothing like love to Christ. We know that the existence in us of this affection would secure that our relations to everything else should be right. We have a sense of degradation so long as we are attracted by other persons and things, and yet feel only a slight attraction and an insecure attachment to Christ. We would fain love Him with the whole strength of our nature. But how are we to achieve this highest state of feeling? It is useless to demand love, as if such a demand could be directly enforced. This is the old dead law over again: “Thou shalt love.” This, we find, we cannot fulfil. We cannot love just because we are commanded to love; no, nor because it would be to our advantage to love, nor even because we wish to do so. Love must be spontaneous: it is created in presence of what fits our nature, so that often we cannot tell why we love such and such a person, not understanding our own nature sufficiently to see the suitableness. Love to Christ is the spontaneous product of our sense of His suitableness to our nature and condition, and of our indebtedness to him. A sense of indebtedness does in some cases produce hatred rather than love. But we cannot seek or accept forgiveness until we are humbled and see something of the transcendent attractiveness of the Lord. The soil is thus prepared for the springing of love in response to the sunshine of His favor.

Besides forgiveness is not a solitary gift. It is the beginning of a new life, a center from which life and light radiate, a germ which exists not so much for itself as for what it produces. It brings assurance of a friendship that is of infinite value; it imparts a reliance upon God, as our God, teaching us to count upon Him, exhibiting to us His hitherto unthought-of goodness. It pervades the soul with new and exhilarating sensations, and fills it with new desires and purposes. Therefore the Gospel does not directly say “Love,” but “Believe.” Trust in Christ as willing to forgive. Bring to Him your empty, ruined, ungodly, unloving spirit, and have it healed, filled, renewed. Act upon what you at present know, that He makes provision in His own person and work for sinful men. Humbly appeal to Him with such penitence and with such earnestness as you have; and as you open your spirit more and more to His influence, and find increasingly how complete you are in Him, your love will grow. It may not be of the passionate type elicited in this woman by the visible presence of the Lord, but it will be sound enough to urge you to serve and to please Him. The character of the love we bear Him must be in some respects different from that which those felt who saw His loving expression of face, and heard their forgiveness pronounced by His own lips; but it cannot be impossible or unlikely that we should learn truly and deeply to love

Him who alone brings into our life the fruitful and happy expectation of endless purity and love, who alone gives us assurance that this life is anything better than a short and uneasy dream. Can we fail to love Him whose love for us is, after all, almost the only fixed and sure thing we can count upon? Can we fail to love Him to whom we must be indebted for as great a forgiveness as was this woman?

She sat and wept beside His feet; the weight Of sin oppressed her heart; for all the blame, And the poor malice of the worldly shame, To her was past, extinct, and out of date;

Only the sin remained,— the leprous state;

She would be melted by the heat of love, By fires far fiercer than are blown to prove And purge the silver ore adulterate.

She sat and wept, and with her untressed hair Still wiped the feet she was so blest to touch; And He wiped off the soiling of despair From her sweet soul, because she loved so much.

I am a sinner, full of doubts and fears;

Make me a humble thing of love and tears.

03.15. THE GOOD SAMARITAN

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke 10:25-37 The lawyer who unwittingly gave occasion to our Lord to utter the Parable of the Good Samaritan, was not one of those who sought to betray Him into some indiscreet or unorthodox expression with which they might accuse Him before the authorities. He was rather of the less offensive type of person very largely represented in our own day, who takes an interest in religious subjects and religious teachers, who goes to hear all the varieties of preaching, and is ready with an opinion on every novel theory, and who for the most part measures all he hears by a standard as obsolete and inapplicable as it would be to measure the sufficiency of a town's defenses by their ability to resist sling-stones or battering rams. This lawyer tested our Lord by putting to Him a question on which a great many others hinged, and which gave promise of a lively discussion in which a number of our Lord's opinions would be expressed and a full view of His teaching laid open. He wished to arrive at that kind of knowledge of our Lord's religious position and whereabouts which in our own day is sometimes sought to be reached by putting the question, Do you believe in miracles? or, Do you believe that Jesus is truly and properly God? The question, however, proved an unfortunate one for the scribe's purpose, though one of the luckiest ever put, in so far as it called out one of those Parables which the child eagerly listens to and which never throughout his whole life cease to have some influence upon him.

What answer the lawyer expected it is impossible to say. Certainly he did not expect to be referred directly and solely to the moral law, but probably thought he should hear of fasts and prayer and sacrifices. And in responding as he did and quoting a perfect summary of the law, he no doubt anticipated that Jesus would speak of purely religious duties in which the scribe was probably exemplary, or would at all events take off the edge of the bare commandment by muffling it round with a number of observances, explanations, and so forth. But in place of this he is staggered by having the naked law thrust home upon himself as the sole and sufficient reply to his own question: That is God's law; He asks no more; you already know all His requirement; do it, and you live.

There is, of course, not the smallest shade of quibble in this answer of our Lord's. It is the simple eternal truth. All we have to do to inherit eternal life is to love. God is love, and in creating us He made us such that all we have to do is to love. Let us only do this, heartily love God and our neighbor, and we fulfil the whole law. God has given us this feeling to be both the spring and regulator of all else, so that if it be in life and healthy exercise all else goes well with us. To ask why we may not hate or neglect, is to ask why we are as we are, why God has made us thus? For us eternal life is eternal love. Christ did not come to abolish this law, but to fulfil it; to make it possible to us to keep this eternal law of our being. What we in this generation have to do and to be in order to be eternally alive, is, of course, precisely the same as what men of any generation have had to do and to be; the difference is, that we have better means of fulfilling the law. The lawyer, however, cannot allow his question to be so easily disposed of. He seeks to pursue the

subject, and accordingly puts the further question, “Who is my neighbor?” The simplicity of the answer of Jesus to his first question must have excited in the minds of the bystanders some suspicion of the scribe’s sincerity. They must have felt that any one professing to know the law might have answered such a question for himself. The scribe therefore “desiring to justify himself,” to show that he had a real interest in the subject, and that it was not so easily disposed of as Christ’s answer implied, asks for a definition of the term “neighbor.” To one trained as he was, it was a natural inquiry, and yet it betrays the shallowness of his thoughts on the subject. No one whose heart was filled with love could have asked such a question. Love never seeks limits, but always outlets wider and freer. In His reply, therefore, our Lord does not direct attention to the objects of love, but to those who exercise it. He does not directly answer the question, “Who is my neighbor?”— a question that bore in it the hope that these neighbors might prove to be few and such as might be easily loved — friends, relatives, connections; but He shows, by an instance of the actual working of love, that it makes neighbors. It is not the defining of neighbors that gives us the definition of love, but the experience of love that defines for us who are our neighbors. He makes the lawyer at once see who his neighbor is, by showing him what love is. He lets him see that his question cannot be asked by a loving heart. Love is here, as elsewhere, a much prompter and truer teacher than theological definition.

It is this, then, that our Lord teaches by means of the Parable — that love, or a merciful spirit, finds a neighbor in every one that is in need and can be helped; that no tie of kindred or obligation imposed by office is so keen-sighted in detecting a neighbor as love is. This He illustrates with the same wonderful readiness and finished perfection and fertility of thought as are displayed in all the Parables. The instance of misery or misfortune which our Lord chose was one constantly occurring. It was as common for a man to fall among thieves on the Jericho road and be left half dead as it is now for miners to be killed by an explosion of fire-damp or for men to be maimed for life by a machinery accident. So notorious had that road become for robbery and violence that it was called “the red or bloody way.” It only needs to be observed about this poor man, that he lay in the most urgent need of a friend, of one who would give him help, of one who would take a little trouble and spend a little time over him. It remained to be seen whether such a person would turn up. The first to come to the spot was a priest, that is, the man of all others bound to do him a friendly turn. The priest was not only a Jew, he was the representative of the Jews, the Jew by preeminence; as especially Jewish as the British sailor is especially British, and to be counted on wherever a fellow-countryman is in trouble. He was by his birth and by his office the brother of all his race, not suffered to recognize one tribe more than another, not suffered to allow even his own family ties to draw him from close attachment to all the people. The medical officer of a parish would surely not pass a man lying on the road with his head cut open, or why does he hold his appointment? A soldier who has fallen wounded in a retired part of the field of battle will hail it as an unusually fortunate circumstance if the first man that comes up is the surgeon of his own regiment. So, if this wounded Jew had strength enough to see the priest as he came in sight, he must have considered it a remarkably happy coincidence which brought just the person who might most naturally be expected to show him kindness — one who lived for the people’s good, and one who had just been engaged at Jerusalem in services well fitted to bring him into sympathy with the various distresses of men. If any man might be included in the term “neighbor,” surely the priest might. But the priest thought otherwise. Like many another man, he was content to do what he was obliged to do, and what his ritual prescribed, but had none of the spirit of his office. And so it

had happened to him as it happens to all who so use their official position — it had hardened on him as a shell, and separated him from his fellows. He was not more a man because a priest, but less a man. It was not the fulness of his humanity that made him a fit priest; but his priestliness actually blighted his humanity all round. The other order of men who might chiefly have been expected, from the nature of their order and office, to be forward to assist and put themselves as public property at the disposal of all, was the Levitical. The insufficiency of a merely official tie is therefore further illustrated by our Lord's introduction of a Levite on the scene. He also sees, but turns his head away and almost persuades himself he does not know his help is needed. It is as if the English consul in some Italian port, in passing along the street, saw an Englishman being assaulted and in danger of his life, but instead of interfering turned into a side street, trying to persuade himself that the man was not an Englishman, or that the quarrel was not serious, though he saw blood; or that the robbers were Government officials securing a culprit.

It is unfortunately too easy for us all to imagine, with the aid of our self-knowledge, what excuses these men would make for themselves. Possibly the priest knew the Levite was behind him, and thought the work fitter for him; if so, it is one instance more of the folly of leaving to others work which is fairly our own. Possibly both men were tired with their service in Jerusalem, and eager to get home. Possibly both were a little afraid of delaying in a spot in which there was such speaking evidence of its insecurity. Probably neither of them cared to get mixed up with a business which might involve them in legal proceedings, necessitating them to appear as witnesses, or which might even bring suspicion on themselves. So they passed by on the other side — they tried not to see it. From our translation you might suppose the Levite made a more minute examination of the man than the priest — "came and looked on him," it says — but the words are the same in both cases. There is no reason to suppose the Levite was either so much harder-hearted that he went out of curiosity close up to the man to see how he was hurt, nor that he was so much softer-hearted as to intend at first to help him, but found, or persuaded himself he found, his wounds too deep for skill of his. The significant fact in both cases is, that they saw the man, but passed by on the other side, as if trying to persuade themselves there was no man there and no reason why they should pause. This conduct, I say, we can too well understand. Which of us has not been guilty of passing by on the other side, of leaving misery unrelieved because it was not clamorous? This unfortunate, lying half dead by the roadside, could make no importunate supplications for relief, could not sit up and prove to the priest that it was his duty to help him, could not even ask help, so as to lay on the priest the responsibility of positive refusal; and so he got past with less discomfort, but not with less guilt. The need is often greatest where least is asked. And how many forms of misery are there lying within our knowledge as we journey along the blood-stained road of life, but which we pass by because they do not bar our progress till we give our help, or because it is possible for us to put them out of our mind and live as though these things were not. It is true we could not live, or certainly could only live in depression and wretchedness, if we kept constantly before our minds all known suffering, — if we had a vivid image of the pain and sorrow at this present moment afflicting thousands of gentle and innocent persons, — if we set before the mind's eye the the hopeless, wearing anguish that is hidden in every hospital in this and other lands, the blank despair that numbs the spirit of whole tribes swept into slavery under the crudest oppression, the various miseries and difficulties which desolate life and cause many and many a victim to curse the day of his birth. To go about our ordinary duties with all this present to our mind would be as impossible as to live in peace, or to live at all, if our

senses were acute enough to make audible to us all the noise within a radius of two or three miles, or to make visible to us all that exists unseen. But the passing by on the other side which leaves guilt upon the conscience is the putting aside of distress that comes naturally before us, and the refusing to assist where circumstances give us the opportunity of assisting. A lost child is crying on the street, but it is awkward to be seen leading a dirty, crying child home, so we refuse to notice that the child is lost; a man is lying as if he were ill, but he may only be intoxicated, and it looks foolish to meddle, and may be troublesome, so we leave him to others, though another minute in that position may, for all we know, make the difference between life and death. You read a paragraph of a paper giving a thrilling account of a famine in China, or some other great calamity; but when yoi. come to a clause intimating that subscriptions will be received at such and such a place, you pass to another column, and refuse to allow that to make the impression on your mind which you feel it is beginning to make. In short, you will, in these and many like circumstances, wait till you are asked to help; you know you could not in decency refuse if you were asked, if the matter were fully laid before you and all the circumstances detailed, but you will put yourself out of reach before this can be done; you will not expose yourself to the risk of having your charitable feelings stirred, or at any rate of having your help drawn upon; you will, if possible, wipe the thing from your mind, you will carefully avoid following up any clue, or considering steadily any hint or suggestion of suffering.

But, as we have said, it was not just another man, or just another Jew, that came and saw this man lying in his blood, it was, both in the case of the priest and Levite, one who had a special tie or obligation to be compassionate. These men were supposed to be a kind of embodied and living law of God, an incarnate compassion, a reflex on earth of the mercy of the Most High. They of all men should have recognized this Jew as their brother. Their peculiar guilt is ours when we repudiate any special responsibility, and make as though there were no tie between us and the object needing help. And happy are they who can say that at least of this special guilt they are free, — who have really filled up with active love all the relationships of life by which God has brought them into connection with others, and who cannot reproach themselves with failing to see what any friend, servant, relative required, or, having seen it, to do it for them, — who know no instance in which they failed to bring assistance because it was of a troublesome kind, or of a kind that would have brought them into connection with disreputable people, or would have made them look foolish or meddling or romantic. Surely if not in your own case, then in the case of others, you see that it is not always the relationship that gives the love, but the love that makes the relationship, — that there is often a friend that sticketh closer than a brother — an outlaw from the faith that is more substantially helpful, wiser and readier in advice and prompter in lending a hand, than one belonging to the same “household of faith.” Had you met this Levite after seeing his conduct, would you not have been tempted to say to him, What are you a Levite for, if not to give such help? If you encountered a police official who carefully avoided all dangerous and troublesome interference, would you not be apt to challenge his right to retain his post? But might we not turn our challenge on ourselves, and say to ourselves, Why are you a Christian? what do you unite yourself to Christ for? Is it not that you may be able to do good, to be helpful, to become salt to the earth, and of exceptional value among men? If, then, you shrink from all exceptional duty, from all that calls for trouble and real sacrifice, from all that puts you seriously about, what is the good of your Christianity? where does it go? But while there are men whose lack of humanity empties their relationships and every office they hold of all service to others, save only what they

are rigidly bound to by the letter of their engagement, and compelled to by the insistence or observance of others, there are also men whose love throws out sympathies on all sides, invents obligations where no claim could be enforced, and breaks through restrictions naturally hindering them from interference. So far from seeking excuse for not helping, they invent excuses for helping, or are unconscious that excuses are needed. Of this class of men the Good Samaritan is the mortal type — the once-drawn picture of the master-hand that needs no added touch. In him you see that it it is love that makes the difference; that in the time of need a compassionate heart is to more purpose than any tie, engagement, office, or bond. All the excuses the others had might have been his, and many more. He was not bound to the man by any tie of country, he was not even a mere foreigner, but was of the Samaritans, who had no dealings with the Jews. What the Christian is to the Mohammedan, the Jew was to the Samaritan. Born among a people whose most active energy was spent in demonstrations of enmity against the Jews, part of his education must have been to annoy and persecute. Neither was this man an official like the priest, who might have been greeted with a respectful salutation had the man been in a condition to have given it, and who would probably have resented the omission of such a token of respect; but he was an alien who would more likely have read the expression of a mocking hatred on the face of the passer-by, or have even been greeted with cursing, or “Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil.” But over all these influences love triumphs, and he with whom this wounded Jew would at any other time have contemptuously refused to deal has now dealings with him of a very touching nature. That is to say, it is love that makes man neighbor to man. The true neighbor is the man who has a compassionate heart and a friendly spirit. Where this is wanting, it avails not that a man lives next door, or belongs to the same congregation, or is a member of the same club or union or profession; it ought to be so that these external associations quicken our friendliness, and so they often do, and where love exists they find expression for it in many suitable ways; but these external bonds can never supply the place of love. No doubt the people who saw how careful the Samaritan was of his protégé would say, He must be his brother, or his neighbor, or an old friend; for the truth is, that genuine compassion and affection make a man brother, neighbor, and friend of all. It is not, then, by any marks in others that you can test who is your neighbor; it is not by the marks of race, neighborhood, religion, common pursuits, old friendships, not by anything in them at all you can determine; but only by what is in yourself, namely, humanity of disposition, friendliness, compassion, or whatever name you choose to give it. Love alone can determine who is your neighbor.

Another point is incidentally brought out by our Lord. Love does not ask, What claim has this man and that man on me? but, What does this or that man need that I can do for him? It must have been, and it still is, an edifying sight to see the completeness of the Samaritan’s attentions — to see him kneeling with the interested, anxious eye of a friend by the side of the Jew, gently raising his head, cleansing his wounds, mollifying them with oil, binding them with strips torn from the first thing that came to hand, restoring in him the grateful desire of life, and greeting his return to consciousness with the strength-giving congratulations of genuine affection. We might suppose he had now done enough. How is his own business to go forward if he thus delays? But love is not so soon satisfied. He sits by him till he is strong enough to be set on his beast, and does not resign his charge to any other. He does not feel that the robbed man is off his hands when he has got him to an inn. He has himself to go on his journey, but he will not on that account, nor on any account, disconnect himself from the man; he will disconnect himself from him only when he needs no more

assistance. This is love's way. To be asking, How far am I to go in helping others? shows we have not love. To be asking, To what extent must I love? Where can I stop? Whom can I exclude? and From what sacrifices may I reasonably turn away? is simply to prove that we have not as yet the essential thing, a loving spirit; for love asks no such questions, but ever seeks for wider and wider openings.

This, then, is our Lord's answer to the question. How shall I inherit eternal life? The answer is. Love as this Samaritan did. You will not receive eternal life as the reward of doing so, in the sense that, having now helped men and sacrificed for them, you shall enter into an eternity in which you may cease doing so, and live in some other relation to them. Not so. But by loving men thus you hereby enter into that state of spirit and that relation to your fellow-men which is eternal life, the only eternal relation possible. What more can you be asked to do than to love those you have to do with? It is that which will alone enable you to fulfil all duty to them. You need not ask. What is due to this man or that, how much service, how much assistance, how much substantial help? These are very useful questions where there is no love, but they are never sufficient, and they are therefore all summarily dismissed by Paul in his brief rule, "Owe no man anything, but to love one another,"— that is the one debt always due, never paid off, always renewed, and that covers all others. You are meant to live happily and strongly and sweetly; the relations of society part to part are meant to move as sweetly as the finest machinery, and love alone can accomplish this. It is a mere groping after harmony and order and social well-being that we are occupied with while we try to adjust class to class, nation to nation, man to man, by outward laws or defined positions.

One of our most popular teachers, Emerson, is indeed bold enough to say, in direct contradiction to this Parable, " Do not tell me, as a good man did today, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they my poor? I tell thee, thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent, I give to such men as do not belong to me, and to whom I do not belong. There is a class of persons to whom, by all spiritual affinity, I am bought and sold; for them I will go to prison if need be." Him we may well leave to be answered by that deeper seeing heathen, who said, "Nature bids me assist men; and whether they be bond or free, gentlefolk or freedmen, what matter? Wherever a man is, there is room for doing good." To obey Emerson's law would be to introduce into a world already sufficiently broken up into sects, classes, and parties, a division more alienating and inextinguishable than creed distinctions, more bitter and personal than race hatred, more irreconcilable and truly hardening than class separation.

We may therefore measure ourselves thus, and thus we may see what our religion has done for us. Our Lord came to set us right with one another; to put us on a footing with those with whom we are to spend eternity, such as shall make it possible to us to do so. He said, again and again, "This is the command I give unto you, that ye love one another." This is one half of our salvation, one half which involves the other, and you may measure the help you have received from Christ and ascertain in how far you are a saved person by the ability you have to keep this command. This is the test John gives: "We know that we have passed from death to life." How? "Because we love the brethren." How is it, then, with ourselves? While Christ tells us we should not hesitate even to lay down our lives for the brethren, that is to say should not be behind even natural generosity, which week by week prompts men to sacrifice life for others, even for persons they could not name, — while Christ leaves us this command, and illustrates it by His whole life, do we grudge to live uncomfortably for our brethren? This comfort and that we raise to the rank of necessities, and

limit our givings and our sympathies. But love sweeps away such necessities, and shows itself the highest law of all. If still you say, What are we to do for others? is it not enough to give what law and decency require us to give? is it not enough to forbear doing harm, speaking evil, inflicting injury? your Lord has but the one answer: Love them first of all, and see what will come of that.

03.16. THE RICH FOOL

THE RICH FOOL

Luke 12:13-21 This is yet another Parable in which our Lord illustrates the attitude He expects us to assume towards the world and its goods. It was occasioned by an unusually blunt exhibition of worldliness. Our Lord had been assuring His disciples that if they were brought into court, the Holy Ghost would teach them what to say. There is a man in the crowd to whom, at last, the words of Jesus begin to seem practical; courts, lawsuits, inheritances, were the staple of his thoughts, and the familiar words make him prick his ears. This ability to speak in courts is the very thing he has been seeking. If Jesus has it, He will possibly be good enough to use it for him, and so he will get his law gratis, as well as recover his share in the inheritance. This is a delightful prospect, too good an opportunity to let slip. And so, utterly blind to the kind of interests our Lord had at heart, utterly regardless of the crowd, possessed with the one thought that for months and years had consumed him, and seeing only that Jesus had great wisdom and justice, a remarkable faculty of putting things in their right light, and an authoritative manner, which surely not even his brother could resist, he blurts out—“Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.” To one whose interests are religious, or political, or literary, or scientific, it is always amusing to see the unbounded importance which many men whose business is in money attach to their department of affairs, and the unaffected earnestness with which they discuss them. There is a solemnity in their manner when they speak of large sums; they seem to grow and swell with the amounts they name, a mystery and awe in their tone as they tell of big transactions, a pompous and grand dignity as they give the history of some bit of property, which is abundantly instructive. They turn from religious talk to this monetary style with the air of one who should say, Religion is all very well as a pleasing speculation or emotional tonic, but this other is the reality; let us now put aside all mere play of the imagination and turn to the substantial affairs of life. They constantly betray the understanding on which they live, the understanding that everything must give way to business, that it is the real thread on which life is strung. The egotism of worldliness was never exhibited in a more barefaced, naked, shameless form. Here had this man, through all our Lord’s conversation, been thinking his own worldly thoughts; what he gathers from all our Lord has been saying is, that He would make a good lawyer; and the best thing he can imagine that Christ, with His felt authority and goodness, can do for him, is to help him to a better income. He is sensible of Christ’s power; if he was informed that He had come down from heaven, he would not be disposed to question it. What is it then, as he stands in presence of this highest beneficence, that he will claim; what is it, now, that he finds his opportunity, that he will have? That half-acre his brother has kept him out of. So are men judged by their wishes and cravings. In many small towns you find harmless lunatics, who are glad to find a stranger on their streets whom they can lay hold of, and pour out their wrongs to, and repeat the old story of their claims to this estate or that title or handsome fortune. One would be glad to think this man was such an irresponsible creature, who, merely recognizing in our Lord a strange face, gave utterance to his one constant demand, “Speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance.” But covetousness and lunacy are always so nearly

allied that this man can scarcely be considered as showing any special signs of lunacy. We can all detect in ourselves the germs of his character. We know how possible it is to retain a grasping disposition and avaricious purposes through very solemn converse with things spiritual. We know what it is to let some one important affair take such possession of our thoughts that, for the time, God and all spiritual things are as though they were not. Nay, do we not know what it is to calculate on the influence of Christ moving some one to do us a worldly advantage, which otherwise we could not hope for?

What a contrast did these two central figures of the crowd present! This man in whom no response whatever is found to anything spiritual, who can stand and listen to God Incarnate and be conscious of no new desires, no new world opening to his hope, — this poor shrunken creature on the one hand, and on the other Jesus, in whose eye no answering sparkle met the glitter of gold, who could listen to talk about disputed successions and undivided properties without the smallest interest, who could not be tempted to assume authority in affairs where the arbiter would not be forgotten. What our Lord continued throughout His life to do. He did here — refused to interfere in civil matters, repelling indignantly the idea that He was to be used as a petty magistrate. Not that the kingdom He had come to establish was to have no influence on the world, for it was destined to influence its minutest affair, but this was all to come about in a regular way; the hearts of men were to be Christianized, and they being so, all other things would feel the influence. Our Lord would not spend a word in composing that fraternal difference, but He would spend all the force of His teaching on extirpating the cause of the difference. “Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?” He said, but also, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness.” If our Lord, who saw in every case what was right to be done, refused to intermeddle, how much more should we limit ourselves to what is our own sphere, who neither clearly and wholly understand, nor are wise to act. A great part of the mischief that is done in the world comes of men overstepping the region with which they are familiar, and in which they are authoritative. It is amazing to hear with what boldness and unsuspecting confidence men pronounce upon matters with which they have had the most meager acquaintance.

It was the shock produced by this man’s naive display of his absorbing worldliness which made our Lord at once turn to the crowd with the words, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth.” This, then, is pointed out as the great snare of covetousness, that it tends to make a man identify himself with his possessions and rate himself by them. This is what our Lord here lays His finger on, as being especially disastrous in this vice; it blinds a man to the fact that he remains forever distinct from his possessions; that he is one thing, his possessions another; that he and they cannot be amalgamated, but must remain separate in essence and in destiny. That covetousness has this tendency every one knows. The man who values himself for what he has, and not for what he is, the man who fancies himself great because his possessions are great, is one of the most familiar objects of ridicule. But take heed, for there is a current setting that way which all of us feel the force of. Money-making is one of the most obvious and convenient goals which a man can choose for himself in life. Many men, when young, are sadly at a loss what to make of life, and are burdened with their capabilities. They know they can do something, but cannot determine what. They have not tested themselves, and cannot say what might be the prudent course. They have no strong natural bent towards any particular calling. Now to realize a competence supplies an

aim, easily thought of and easily held in view. To make a fortune is an appreciable result, that a man may spend his effort on and measure his progress by. If it be made, there it is to show, it is actual visible achievement, a monument of labor spent. And in the course towards the goal there is a great deal of satisfaction, there is evident progress. A man is fallen very low indeed, if he is not at all concerned to know that he is making any advance one way or another. Now, men can very soon learn the art of measuring their progress, not by themselves, or their own personal growth, not by any ripeness of character and real internal acquisition, but by mere outward, material gain. They are content with some little glows of satisfaction that they are rising in the world, that they are able this year to command some luxuries that were last year beyond their reach, and especially that this actual thing, money, has increased in their hands. This is the way we practically come to measure ourselves by what we have, and to think that our life consists in the abundance of the things we possess. And what our Lord insists upon here, and seeks to impress us with, is the folly and disaster of so doing. He shows us that a man and his possessions are distinct; that a man's life is not longer nor happier in proportion to what he has; that the man, the living soul, is one thing, the goods another; that he goes one way, they another; and that by no ingenuity can a man get himself and his property so united that he shall be beautiful, strong, lasting as it is. He may fill his shelves with the wisest and most elevating books, and yet remain illiterate; he may gather round him precious works of art, and be a clown and a boor; he may buy up a county, and be the smallest souled man in it; he may erect a mansion which will last for ten generations, and may not have ten years of life or ten minutes of health to enjoy it. A man's possessions obstinately stand off from himself. Naturally we all feel that we are expanding and enlarging ourselves in extending our possessions, that we are more firmly rooting ourselves on earth; in each of them we seem to have a mirror reflecting ourselves, and each of them adds to our importance. Our Lord, therefore, presents to our view a man who has abundant, superabundant possessions, but has no life left. He had laid up goods in abundance, and reckoned on life in abundance, a long, full, lively life. He forgot the distinction, but it was made nevertheless. He is shown to us separate from his possessions, and transferred to a sphere where, like old-world coins, their value is unknown and they can neither be accounted, used, nor enjoyed. The rich man of the parable is represented as one of the exceptionally favored children of fortune. He had already become wealthy at an age at which he might naturally count upon having several years of enjoyment. His wealth, too, had been acquired, not by hard fatiguing labor, but in that line of life in which, more than in any other, a man's time is his own, and he can work or play as he feels disposed. And especially it is to be remarked that no sin attached to his money-making; he had not made his money by gambling, he had not profited by another man's disaster, no one was the loser for his winnings, it was the honest, unsullied gift of Heaven to him; his fields yielded enormously. But as a sudden and great alteration of circumstances is the best revealer of what a man really is, this sudden wealth disclosed a selfishness in this land-holder of which before he had perhaps not been suspected. The manner in which his wealth had come to him sets his ingratitude to God in a stronger light. Though his wealth had come to him through that medium which is most evidently at God's discretion, so evidently that even men who are ungodly in other matters make some show of acknowledging that years of famine and years of plenty depend on God's will, — though the gifts of God had come to him by the shortest route, as if from and out of God's very hand, unhidden by any complicated transactions with men, — though his wealth had been built up by the elements, whose influence he could neither command nor restrain, — yet he seizes and claims as his own

the fruits of his fields, as if he had been the maker of them, as if no one else had spent anything on them, and as if he had to consult no one but himself as to their disposal. What most men would have decency if not devotion enough to call a Godsend, he calls a windfall, and gathers up as his very own. A great success solemnizes some men; they hurry home and fall on their knees; they are ashamed of so much goodness coming to men so unworthy, and they hasten to make acknowledgment. Serious-minded men who engage in business not for the mere excitement and gain of it, walk in God's presence, and bear in mind that the silver and the gold are His, that promotion cometh not from the north or south by the wind that happens to be blowing, and are therefore ever ready to say, What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? Can anything be more pitiable than the man who stands at his counting-house door and forbids God's entrance while his balance is being struck, who does not care that God should know how much he made last year, but goes and prays that this God would give him success this year? Is it not astonishing how religious men who profess to live for God, should so carefully keep Him from interfering in their money matters, that is, in those matters round which their life really revolves? If we cannot go before God and frankly say, This is what I have made this year, and I could not have made it but for Thee and Thy help, — this is because we fear God will claim too much, and prompt us to use it as we are not prepared to do. Must there not be something wrong if we are not letting God's eye and judgment fully and freely into every transaction we engage in, and every gain we make? In the case of this rich man, certainly his blindness to the source of his wealth and the bad use he made of it did hang together. He missed the opportunity of being God's almoner, of dispensing God's bounty to the needy. He did not recognize that it was the Lord who gave, and therefore it was not the Lord's poor who got. The goods are his goods — he can't get past that; he may do what he likes with them, he cannot see that there is any other vote or voice in the matter. In what sense the fulness of the world is God's he has no mind to consider. His barns are bursting, he has more wealth than he knows what to do with; but one thing is certain, it must all be spent on himself. You would suppose he had never seen a hungry child in his life; you would suppose he had never met a beggar, or seen a blind man or a cripple in his market town. "Where shall I bestow my goods? "This was his difficulty, and yet he had the world before him, a world filled with want, abundant in misery, rich in cases of need. How many hundreds there were who could have given him very pointed and definite directions! how many who would quickly have relieved him from his perplexity! how many at that very hour, when he was wondering what he could do with his superfluity, were tortured by the opposite perplexity, wondering where they could get bread for these pale, appealing children, where they could find temporary aid to help them through a year of disaster! Among all the investments he had heard and thought of, there was one prospectus he had apparently not seen, that to which God has put His name, "He that giveth to the poor, lendeth to the Lord." He did not apprehend that their bare and empty homes would be better houses of investment than his own locked and useless barns.

It is no more than what thousands of rich men, and of men who are not rich, every day do; he would not be in the Parable if he were exceptional. He is here because he is typical — typical of the men who, in considering how they shall invest their gains, look only to their own interests, — who, in considering their next step, have chiefly in view, what advantage can I win for myself? and who do not consider what good they can do. Life is constructed almost entirely on selfish principles: business is carried on upon the understanding that every man must look out for himself. One of the many benefits of war is, that it counteracts this selfishness; men learn to think of the

common cause, of the public good, of the prosperity of the country, of the honor of their regiment. But in most departments of life men are prone to consider merely or chiefly. How can I get the utmost of good for myself? Often and often no other thought whatever is at the root of an investment, a transaction, an enterprise. The future is sketched in the mind, and I am the center, and all else is arranged so as most effectually to contribute to my joy. They are the few whose first thought it is, Is there any one I can benefit? and who so frequently think how they can promote the welfare and happiness of others, that at last this becomes a habit with them. When we consider the sleek and complacent selfishness of the man that could quietly propose to spend many years of comfort without a thought of others, we are almost glad to hear of his sudden disappointment. Doubtless the man might have died as suddenly if he had been better prepared. Had he invited all the poor of the district, to make a distribution to them of his surplus, he might all the same have died without seeing his benevolence enjoyed. But while there are few things more delightful to contemplate than the sudden painless departure of the man who has walked with God, there are few things so shocking as the sudden death of the sinner, who dies in passion with an oath on his lips, or never wakens from the insensibility of drunkenness. And what this Parable draws attention to is the vanity, the insecurity of worldly and selfish expectations. The man had one view of the future: God another. The man was saying, “Thou hast much goods laid up for many years:” God was saying, “Not another night shall you possess a single bushel.” What a satire is here upon man! Truly every man walketh in a vain show; he heapeth up riches and knoweth not who shall gather them. He builds his house and purposes to live and see good days, but a voice falls from heaven, Thou misreckoning man, the house may be built, but there will be no man to inhabit it. In his own thoughts the man was living through long years of ease and plenty, but the cold reality touched his warm expectations, and they withered death-stricken. The wind passeth over him and he is gone, and the place he counted his knows him no more. He was reckoning that no life could be worthy of comparison with his; that his shrewd plans had been fully accomplished, his utmost hopes exceeded, he was in the full triumph of self-gratulation, counting himself the most successful of men, the man to be envied; but this is God’s judgment: “Thou fool.” But might he not set even God’s judgment of his conduct at defiance? Was he not surrounded by tokens of his success, by proofs of his wisdom? Alas! in that very article and particular in which he had judged himself most wise, he was exhibited as conspicuous in folly. He had spent all his poor wisdom in providing for this soul of his an easy, merry, plentiful life, and he finds that so far from providing an abundant life for himself, he is unable to secure life of any kind, and would gladly exchange his position for the life of the meanest of his slaves. Stripped, naked, a bare, desolate soul, he passes from our sight, lost in the darkness of eternal remorse, his own voice still dolefully echoing the condemning voice of God, his own soul turning on itself with the everlasting reproach “Thou fool! thou fool!”

“This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall these things be, that thou hast provided?” The answer comes from many a dissipated fortune, from many an auction room, in which are exposed the accumulations of a lifetime. There is one of the places a man proud of his possessions may moralize. The most precious and frequently handled gems of the departed owner are handed over to men who never saw him, or who made a jest of his avarice, or to men who rivaled him, and are now proud of living a year or two longer and getting as their own what they had long grudged to him. The books he read are now penciled by others; his plate his defaced and marked with other names; the very bed he lay on he needs no more; the clothes he

wore he shall never again use; his mirrors, it is well they cannot now reflect him.

“So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.” So that is equally senseless, and in an equally precarious position. But how many does this judgment hit? Yet not all; for some, on finding unexpected means coming into their hands, would have said within themselves. This is delightful, this will enable me to provide for this needy relative, this will at last put me in a position to make up for loss I unwittingly occasioned. This will precisely fit the wants of this or that benevolent institution that I know makes admirable use of its funds. God identifies Himself with all that is needy on earth, and spending treasure for the needy is spending treasure for God. And in so spending we become rich towards God, are provided for so far as our outlook Godwards is concerned. How is it then with us? Suppose all earthly possessions were suddenly to drop from about you, as they one day will, what would you have left? Would you then be rich or poor? Would the wants you would then begin to feel be amply provided for? Here we are now without our possessions, are we rich at this moment? Suppose we never got back to our homes, suppose we were by some great natural catastrophe at this hour separated from all that we have provided for this life, should we still be rich? Is there something so belonging to you that you can say, This is mine for evermore — mine through every change, through health and sickness, in life and death — mine though I be stripped of all that can be separated from my person, though I stand a bare spirit without connection with material things? Will you honestly give yourselves an answer to this question? What have I towards God? What that is certain to increase the nearer I go to Him? Am I so joined to Him that I can say, “I am persuaded, that neither life nor death, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?”

03.17. THE BARREN FIG-TREE

THE BARREN FIG-TREE

Luke 13:6-9 This Parable formed part of the conversation which our Lord held with those who reported to Him the fate of some Galileans whom Pilate had slaughtered in the temple. The Galileans were notoriously turbulent, and on more than one occasion Pilate quelled their disposition to riot with the decisive and unrelenting ferocity that characterized him. On this occasion he seems to have stepped beyond his jurisdiction, and to have sent soldiers into the temple to slay the sacrificers among the beasts they were sacrificing — an act which would have desecrated a pagan temple, and which was peculiarly horrible in a temple so sacred and exclusive as that of the Jews. Indeed, one is tempted to suppose the atrocity had been magnified by rumor, and that what had at first been related in strong figures was at last taken literally; that Pilate had slaughtered some Galileans who had come to the city to sacrifice, but were not yet inside the temple; and that some one returning to Galilee, and finding himself an object of interest as a participator in the disturbance, and desiring to make a terse and picturesque report of what had happened, said with an allowable figure of speech that Pilate had mingled their blood with that of their sacrifices. This report a hearer taking literally might suppose to mean that Pilate had sent soldiers into the temple and had slain the worshipers among the altars and sacrificial animals.

Whatever the act of Pilate had been, those who now spoke of it seemed impressed, not so much with any perfidy or profane ferocity on his part, as with the exceptional guilt which they suppose these Galileans must have incurred to justify their consignment to such a doom. They argue that God would not have delivered up any of His worshipers to so shocking a death, had they not been guilty of some exceptional iniquity. And with the pleasure men find in speaking of the disasters of others while themselves secure, and of commenting upon wickedness which they believe to exceed their own, these persons come with their story to Jesus, hoping to hear some edifying discourse on the wickedness of the world at large, and some suggestions which may warrant them in congratulating themselves with still more satisfied complacency.

They are, however, disappointed. In this slaughter of the Galileans, as well as in other calamities to which public attention had been drawn, our Lord sees no evidence of exceptional guilt, but rather samples of calamity threatening the whole nation. These disasters were the first mutterings of the storm which was shortly to break over the whole community. The Jews were not to look at the Galileans, or at those of their own number on whom the tower of Siloam fell, as separate from themselves by any peculiar wickedness; they were to consider them as integral parts of the nation, and to accept and gather warning from the strokes which thus fell upon the people at large. These strokes, our Lord says, were meant to awaken the whole nation to its precarious condition. They were meant to make the people at large consider whether they did not as a people together deserve a like doom. They are, in short, the first efforts of the husbandman to stimulate the tree to greater activity. The branches which have been cut off are cut off not for any special fault of theirs, but to quicken the whole tree. If the Jewish ear were opened, it would hear in these thickening

accidents and disasters, not any private calamity, but the voice of the husbandman wondering how the whole tree can be made to produce any proper and valuable fruit. Hence the Parable of the Fig-tree. The direct meaning of the Parable is unmistakable. What had happened to these Galileans would shortly happen to the whole nation unless they so repented as to accomplish God's purpose with them. This Jewish people was like a fig-tree enjoying every advantage, but bearing no fruit. As three years make up the full lime which it is reasonable to spend upon the cultivation of an apparently barren tree, so there is a fulness of time in the history of a nation during which it receives its opportunities. This time had now expired with the Jews, and the forty years that were yet given them, in answer to the "Father, forgive them," which our Lord breathed from the cross, were the tree's ultimate year of probation which was to decide its fate. To every nation God has given a special task, and special gifts and opportunities to accomplish it. As the body requires many members, and all the members have not the same office, — as the orchard has many kinds of trees, and one kind cannot bear all fruits, — so each nation has had some special impulse to give to the progress of the race. A modern nation, however civilized, cannot do the work which was committed to an ancient tribe, of choosing out the habitable parts of the earth and sowing the seed which all subsequent times have been reaping. The Greeks and Romans, the Egyptians and Persians, Cyrus, whom God owned as His servant, and many besides, had their peculiar functions in the education of the race and in preparing the world for Christ. But the Jews were called to a distinctive place. A different species of fruit was expected from them. Their special function was to acknowledge Christ when He came, and to form His kingdom. This fruit they had not borne. As a nation they had failed, and seemed likely yet to fail, whatever individuals among them had done and were yet to do. Having failed and continuing to fail, they would become mere cumberers of the ground. There would be no reason why their national existence should be continued. The Parable, however, has important personal bearings. Every man's conscience gives the Parable a personal application. You would hardly find any one who would deny that God expects some fruit of his life. If you asked yourself or any one else, Is it a matter of absolute indifference to God what results from your life? you would be answered, That it is impossible to conceive of God at all without supposing that He desires every human life to serve some good purpose. This, at all events, is Christ's view. This it is which made His life what it was, influential to all time, and the unfailing source of the highest energy to all other lives. That is to say, He has given us the most cogent of all demonstrations that in proportion as we accept His view of the connection of our life with God, shall we resemble Him in the utility and permanent result of all we do. It has become obvious that in the world of nature nothing is isolated and independent, but that everything is connected more or less remotely with everything else; that all nature is one whole, governed by one idea and fulfilling one purpose. Human lives are under the same law. No life is outside of the plan which comprehends the whole; every life contributes something to the fulfilment of the great purpose all are to serve. Our Lord tells us that this purpose is in the mind of God, and that He judges us by our fulfilment or non-fulfilment of His will. And that we should be reluctant to bring forth fruit to God, or hesitate to live for Him, has its root in the foolish and objectionable idea that God and we have opposing interests, so that to help out God's idea of the world and to work with Him and towards His end is really not our best. Nothing seems to teach us that God is all on our side. It has taken men six thousand years to find out some part of the provision for our good which He has laid up in the material world, and it seems it will take us even longer to discover the provision He has made for feeling and thought and for spiritual strength and joy. But not only has

each human life a purpose; most men have the more or less distinct perception that they are as fig-trees among vines; that they have peculiar opportunities not given to other men, and that in one way or other they enjoy special advantages. The fig-tree of the Parable was not lost among a forest of precisely similar, equally cared-for and equally uncared-for trees; it was one, standing by itself among plants of different kind, and receiving different attention. You have little feeling of responsibility to God so long as you think you have dropped into your place casually as the seed blown by the wind, or that what you receive you receive not because it is suitable for you, and therefore given by God, but only because you and all around you are included in some general order of things, and. dealt with in the mass and regardless of individual characteristics. But if you deal with God about your life at all, you find it to be necessarily implied that you ascribe to Him a constant watchfulness over it and a power to introduce what is needful for you, and to give you all that is needed for fruit-bearing, for accomplishing His purpose. The position, then, that you occupy and the advantages you enjoy are the indication that God means your life to serve a good purpose. If you look at life with the secret or expressed conviction that it is a pitiful and contemptible thing from which nothing good can result, it will in your case become a contemptible and barren affair. But begin with the belief that God's purposes are worth accomplishing, and that they can be and are being accomplished by men, and that you may accomplish them and this will give to your life a steady and hopeful energy, and put your life on the only track that is really eternal. A man may indeed find the thought rising in him, that as some nations have served God's purpose by war, by godless culture, by living out their own nature irrespective of God, so may I accomplish His purpose although I pursue the bent of my own nature and build up my life solely in accordance with my own views and plans. But why has God given you light about His will if He meant you to make no use of it? You can only judge of the kind of fruit God wishes you to bear by considering the position He has set you in; and you can bear that fruit only by using all the advantages He has given you. The gardener leaves some plants out and unsheltered, but others he brings into the walled garden, and some he puts under glass; and if the vine were treated like a gooseberry bush, it would bear neither grapes nor yet gooseberries. So if we exclude or neglect influences which God has seen fit to furnish us with, we must be failing to produce the fruit He wishes. If He has brought you light in Christ which you are not making any use of, if you decline to live in that communion with the heart of all spiritual life which exists in the Father of spirits, then it must be that you are failing to produce the fruit for the sake of producing which He has given you these advantages. Are you sure there is nothing to be gained by fellowship with Christ? are you sure that you can be as complete a man without this person who felt it in Him to draw all men to Him? are you sure that you can serve every good and worthy purpose just as well without any direct help from Him as with it? Because, if you are not sure, then it is obvious that, for all you know, you are shutting out an influence which would simply make all the difference between bearing fruit and not doing so; between your life serving the best purpose possible and serving a purpose disappointing and disastrous; between fruit borne on the south side of a high brick wall and fruit borne or attempted on the north side. And what can be more utterly humiliating than to have our life examined by absolute insight and the most loving justice, and to be pronounced barren? To fail in any one department of life is humiliating enough, but to fail over the whole, and to find that the whole thing is gone for nothing, must be impossible to bear. To have consciously failed in helpfulness to a friend, or to have failed as a son or as a parent, to have quite disappointed one who was trusting to us, makes a mark on our conscience we do not easily cover

over; to be engaged with others in a work all of which is retarded or spoiled by a piece of stupidity or neglect on our part, affects us with a very sensible shame. But think of failing in what our whole life was given us to accomplish! How vain to defend ourselves by affirming that if we have not pleased God and borne the fruit He desired, we have yet not lived in vain! A young surgeon is appointed to an hospital, but the mortality greatly increases; inquiry is made, and it is found that he has neglected his duties. He is charged with neglect, and acknowledges it. “But,” he says, “come with me, and I will show you I have not been idle.” He takes the authorities to his room, and shows them a freshly finished painting or a half-written book which he expects will make his fortune. No one questions whether such a person will be retained or dismissed. For the charge of bringing forth no fruit is not the only one which the owner of the fig-tree brings against it. It also cumbered the ground, took up a place in his vineyard which might be more profitably used. It not only bore no fruit itself, but “sucked the soil’s fertility” from wholesome and productive plants. It used up room and nourishment which another tree might have used for fruit-bearing. This tree had given promise, and because of its promising appearance had been set where it was — but it failed. And it reminds us of the guilt we incur when we engage to perform duties which nevertheless we neglect. Had we not professed a willingness to perform them, others would have been found to do them. Had we not thrust ourselves forward, or would we only stand aside and yield the duties to others, they would be performed; but by taking engagements upon us and not fulfilling them, we both omit our own part and prevent others from performing it: like a crowd idly gazing from the shore at a man drowning, and hindering the one eager to rescue who cannot make his way to the water’s edge through the idle mass. Have you never seen some one spoiling a piece of work which you were sure you could do well, but with which you cannot interfere because the other is the party engaged to do it? Far better that he were out of the way; but until he is discharged by a competent authority, he must be allowed, not only to spoil the work himself, but to prevent any one else from doing it well. The reason why no one interferes with your work is not always that it is perfectly satisfactory. You may blunder and weary, you may do your work in a perfunctory and slovenly way, but while you occupy the place, the better workman cannot interfere to mend matters.

It is a saddening but also a stimulating reflection, that many duties might be better performed were we out of the way. To many parents it must occur that their children would have been better provided for in an orphan hospital, sometimes even better clothed and fed, better instructed in religion, with a more worthy example to incite them to well-doing, and receiving a better start in life than they can do while their natural guardians are alive and engaged to perform duties which are almost wholly neglected. And in many directions in which our relations in life branch out, it may well shame us to look upon the dead barren twigs into which we send no sap, and which might be all beautified and bending under mellow fruit were some other enjoying the place that we occupy with our lifeless bulk. If others had had our advantages, is it not probable that more beneficial results would have appeared? If others had enjoyed the same parent1 age, the same thoughtful prayerful love watching over their early years, the same clear light regarding duty, the same encouragement to well-doing, — if others had received as fully as we of what is thoroughly beneficial in life, or what goes to form character and to make the conduct wholesome and helpful, — is it not likely that fruit of a rarer quality and of greater abundance would have appeared?

It is impossible that such waste of ground should be suffered forever in such a vineyard as this of the Parable. If we on whom certain duties are depending are the very persons who prevent these duties from being done, this is not a state of things which a wise God will allow. Indolence, distrust, anything which hinders us from working harmoniously with God, must be removed and is being removed from His dominion. Such things can only be suffered for a time, and do not belong to the eternal condition of things. Therefore God in His mercy warns us that all such obstructive dispositions must be abolished. Here Christ in His office of Saviour and Intercessor is represented as interposing between the owner and the barren tree: “Lord,” He says, “ let it alone this year also. Let me give it one chance more, let me do my utmost for it.” This request is acceded to, but on the distinct understanding that this is a last chance. It is agreed on both sides that if fruit be not now borne, the end has come. There will be no more pleading. The spade will be thrown aside and the axe lifted. There is no hurry in the matter, but a distinct agreement — one thing or other must be done — either the fruit borne or the tree cut down. As it is said, “God does not pay on Saturdays, but at last He pays.” His judgments are not weekly, but they are infallibly certain. Every delay He makes, He makes with a distinct understanding of what He means by it, of how long it is to be and of what will take place at the expiry of the term. There comes a time when even the tears of Christ will not save us; when even He can do no more than weep. The Jews accordingly received their year of grace. Judgment was delayed for forty years; for a generation. Time was given for passions to die down, for prejudice to pass away, for reflection to be made on all that Christ had been and done. The tree was digged about and well cared for. Means never before used were now used. Preachers as zealous as the old prophets and with more telling words to utter held clearly before them the king they had disowned. The trees planted near them all began to yield fruit. In fact, as every one sees, it was useless trying to do more to bring them to acknowledge Christ; nothing more could be done. And so the heavy hand of Rome which so long had been held back was at last allowed to fall, and the nation went to pieces under the blow. But when the old tree is torn up by the storm, what chiefly astonishes us is to see that the mass below the ground has been almost as widespread as the branches above: that each branch and leafy twig that has waved in the air is represented by an unseen root or sucker below which has fed and sustained it; and so if you look below the surface through this period of grace, your eye lights upon the sustaining love of God, your ear discerns the regretful, dirge-like mourning that breathed through the words, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,” the bitter disappointment and yearning that can only with deepest sorrow and pain give up hoping and that still repeats, “Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in My ways! I would soon have subdued their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries.” This Parable, then, bears in it a strong encouragement that may well pervade and strengthen our whole life. For this vinedresser had not interceded for the tree unless he had thought it possible that fruit might yet be borne; and you may be sure the pains he spent on that tree would exceed all that he spent on the rest. You can fancy him leaning on his spade and carefully studying it, thinking of it as he went home at sundown, talking it over with neighboring vinedressers, and coming out early to try some fresh method, resolved that it should lose no chance of mending. And were our ear keen enough to hear the deliberations and judgments pronounced now in the spiritual world, might not some of us become aware that we ourselves were under discussion and that the time of our final probation had come; that methods were now being tried with us which, if they fail, cannot be renewed? If hitherto you have done little for God, and if lately the thought of your opportunities of doing good service has been borne in

upon you, if your advantages have been strikingly increased, your position improved, and hindrances taken out of the way, then ought you not in reason to construe this into a renewed invitation on God's part that you should make up your mind at length to live for Him? Suppose you could overhear the remarks passed upon your condition by these unseen overseers, suppose you could overhear what is thought of your past and what is resolved regarding your future, have you no reason to believe that you would hear remarks very similar to those which were called forth by this tree from the persons who stood and considered it? If it be so, if you are now to be put on a final trial, then He who seeks and longs that you win is at your side to give you every advantage, such arrangement of your worldly circumstances as is most likely to tell upon you for good, such influences brought to bear upon you as you must consciously resist if you are not to bring forth fruit, such promptings of conscience and present light about duty as you must shut your eyes to if you are not to see and obey. If this consideration and treatment of you is going on, and if indeed the main reason of your being in life at all is that it may go on, then are you not to think what may come of it, are you not to bestir yourself to some serious and thorough response to God's dealing? If you so bestir yourself, then you are certain of success. Christ does tend you. Much that He does may be offensive to you, much unintelligible; but believe in Him, frankly and heartily co-operate with Him; welcome His efforts in your behalf; consider how much fruit His own life bore, how, through neglect and contradiction of sinners, through unsettlement and poverty and at last suffering, He still served God's purpose. Consider how utterly His life gives the lie to all within you that would either say that life is easy, or that it is fruitless and empty and contemptible. Consider Him and His promise that His Spirit, which made Him what He was, shall pass into you, and take courage to live with Him and like Him. Believe that He means you well, believe that He understands human life and means to make yours worthy, and that if you co-operate with Him, nothing can defeat you.

There is encouragement also for those who have long been striving to serve God. Do not despond about your own bad state and its many unfavorable symptoms. Do not learn to treat life carelessly, as if its duties and trials had no reference beyond the present time; do not treat this world as if Christ had never been in it and had not shown you how everlasting results may flow from a brief time spent among men and their sins and passions. Do not believe that you are left on earth to grope and stumble blind and forlorn to an uncertain termination, but abide in Christ and keep your mind occupied with His ways and seek His presence, until you feel sure that every day comes to you with opportunities of living as He did. It may seem very poor fruit such soil as you are planted in can produce, but leave that to Him; He knows the kind of fruit He seeks from your life; and, if it satisfies Him, it may satisfy you. Do not fancy that all is over with you, and that fruit is what once might have been, but now cannot be. Even out of the withered hopes that lie damp upon your heart and the comforts that have gradually fallen from about you and now lie dead and saddening all your life, your Lord can bring happiness and profit to you, can use these disappointments and griefs as nature uses the dead leaves of the autumn to nourish and feed the spring and the coming harvest. Certainly this remains to us all to say: I may bring forth fruit to God, it is open to me to please and gratify Him, it is open to me to make my life worthy of the approval and commendation of Him compared to whose judgment the praise or blame of men is as the bluster of the wind that, once heard, dies out forever. Life may in other respects be sad and dreary; I may be fixed in one cramped and narrow spot all my days, enlivened and stimulated by no change, the same familiar employments palling upon me more drearily every day; I may have to stand out exposed to

burning heat or chilling storms, and may long for shelter, for comfort, for ease, for pleasure, but the want of any or all of these ought not to make me think there is no object in my life, no good use I can put it to, no worthily compensating end it will serve. In the assurance of my Lord I mean to abide, that there still and always remains to me the possibility of doing God's will, and opportunity of satisfying His purpose with me.

03.18. THE GREAT SUPPER

THE GREAT SUPPER

Luke 14:16-24 The occasion of this Parable is carefully explained by Luke. One Sabbath-day, a leading Pharisee of the metropolis had invited a large and apparently distinguished company to dinner; possibly the guests were invited on the express understanding that they would have an opportunity of conversing with Jesus more freely than they could in a public place; possibly Jesus was a casual guest, asked at the moment. At all events the innate authority which shone through His bearing and conversation at once disarmed His intended critics, and instead of a spirited debate they found themselves forming an audience to this dangerous teacher. It was strictly tabletalk our Lord here indulged in. His remarks, though not calculated to make either host or guests feel quite at their ease, were seasonable. Perhaps His advice to guests that they should modestly take the lowest place is rendered less needful in our own society, in which any obtrusive assumption of precedence would be considered a breach of good manners. And yet there are still extant characters which by kindred vices become the bane of all genial and sociable intercourse. There is the man who uses every dinner table as an occasion for the exhibition of his own wit or knowledge or powers of conversation. .There is the man who is uncomfortable and unhappy all the evening if he does not meet with full recognition of his importance. There is the woman who is offended if you ask her to sit at the same table with those whom she considers much her inferiors in station. There is the person who is always thinking of what is due by others to himself, never or rarely of what is due by him to others. To His host, our Lord, as He looks round on the richly-clad and well-conditioned guests, remarks that his hospitality might be better expended on those who had more need of it. Our Lord does not mean to discountenance friendly gatherings, which are, have been, and always will be among the highest pleasures in life, but He means to warn against heartless and hollow civilities, — against asking people to your house whom you really don't care to see, but to whom you must return the doubtful favor they have shown you in giving you a similar invitation. Our Lord, that is to say, complains of what society itself is continually complaining of, that so much time, means, thought, and energy are spent on the giving and returning of formal civilities which every one knows to be hollow. Where a real advantage can be conferred by your hospitality, where the comfort of a stranger can be secured, where innocent and exhilarating pleasure can be bestowed, where you can be the means of forming friendships useful and satisfactory to yourself and others, — in such cases be given to hospitality; but on every account emancipate yourself from the dreary, wasteful, resultless round of entertainments which are likely to be as distasteful and heartless to those who receive them as those of which they are the recompense were to yourself. But this kind of talk began to touch the company somewhat too nearly, and one of them makes an unsuccessful attempt to put an end to the conversation by a pious remark that no one will be irreverent enough to criticise or throw over. The remark is skilful — sufficiently in the line of what had previously been said to warrant him in making it, sufficiently off the line to change the subject, and sufficiently solemn to prevent any from violently returning to the old subject. "Blessed," he says, "is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God" — a most

undeniable and edifying assertion, and which, for the matter of it, might have fallen from the lips of our Lord Himself, but Pharisaic in this, that, under the guise of piety, it was intended to turn the conversation from what was personal and profitable to a vague generality which touched nobody. You can see the sanctimonious old hypocrite solemnly shaking his head, and letting the words fall unctuously from his tongue. But with all our Lord's benignity and forbearance, there was one thing He could not stand, and that was cant. He therefore does not answer the man as if he had been a simple soul longing for communion with God, but utters a Parable to remind him and the rest that a verbal appreciation of the blessedness of the kingdom was often joined with an entire refusal to enter it. A person with less delicate edge on his teaching and less skill to manage a conversation, might have bluntly replied to the Pharisee, What avails it to extol with so much pious enthusiasm this blessedness, if all the while you yourself are rejecting it? The Parable illustrates the difficulty of finding any to accept what all acknowledge to be desirable: the lack of all obtrusive eagerness to take the place next the host, when the host happens to be Divine; and the wisdom of making a feast not for the well-to-do, who will rather excuse themselves, but for the needy, who will accept the invitation with glad surprise. Our Lord exposes the insincerity of the Messianic expectation which found utterance in such expressions as that of the sanctimonious guest, by exhibiting the actual treatment which was at the same time being given to God's invitation to the Messianic feast. He utters a Parable which shows how hard God finds it to furnish with guests a table He has spread with the utmost bounty. He shows that notwithstanding first and second invitations proclamations of God's friendship and bounty by the prophets and by the Baptist, the Jews were so immersed in political and commercial schemes that they despised and ignored the happiness God had so carefully prepared for them. They professed to be waiting for the Messiah, but when He actually came and offered them places in His kingdom, they contemptuously declined. Of all those who never broke bread without exclaiming, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God," scarcely one was found to take his place at the table God actually spread before them. To furnish His table with guests God had to pass from the first invited and call in the outcasts among the Jews themselves, and after ransacking the lanes and slums of the city, had to go far afield among the highways and hedges of the outlying Gentiles that His bounty might not be wasted. The application of the Parable to our Lord's contemporaries is sufficiently obvious. It has also obvious applications to ourselves which may be briefly indicated. And as it is to the manner in which men deal with God's invitations that the Parable directs attention, rather than to the fact that the Messianic kingdom is suitably represented by a feast, it may be enough to say regarding this latter point, that those who actually enter God's kingdom find all their cravings satisfied, all their necessities provided for; and that in the present person and work of Christ God's kingdom was open to men, and remains open now to us. The feast being prepared, whom will God invite to partake of it? For admission to a feast is solely by invitation. You may have a strong desire to be at some entertainment which you know is to be given; you may have most urgent reasons for wishing to be there; your happiness for some time to come may, so far as you can judge, depend upon your presence; and yet you can do nothing but wait for an invitation. The idea of going unasked is not once thought of; your presence or absence depends entirely on the will of another person. If they wish your company, or think it advisable to ask you, that decides the matter. You may see invitations, which others have received, but you cannot beg, buy, or borrow these. Unless one comes to yourself, you remain outside, excluded from the company you crave, ignored by the set you long to be in, prevented from pursuing your most warmly cherished plan. The same rule

applies to the feast of the Parable. There is a “not transferable” impressed on every invitation issued. It must come to yourself from God, or it is invalid and a forgery. If it were known that only three men in a generation were admitted to intimacy with God, and that all others were omitted, passed by, and left in exclusion, with what envy would these three men be looked upon. Or if it were known that a small, indefinite number were chosen in each generation, and that for each of them it was settled at the age of thirty by some distinguishing mark appearing on their person, we should then feel how completely we were dependent on the will of God in this matter. Yet we are as dependent on His invitation as this would imply. If God has prepared nothing for you, what can you do? If God does not desire that you be provided for, if no place is set apart for you at this feast, if He has not had you in view in making it, what can you do to mend matters? Do not think of salvation as a thing there, ready for you, whenever you choose to go and take it. It depends on God’s invitation whether any good awaits you. You have first to discover whether God in unmistakable words invites you or not.

Those to whom it was first intimated that the supper was ready, had previously been prepared for this announcement. They were the Jews the well-instructed, Messiah-expectant Jews. They were persons who might seem to be on friendly terms with the host, and had no appearance of destitution. We must look for their counterpart in men whose need of salvation does not lie on the surface, whose sins are not going before them to judgment, and crying out in the hearing of all, but who rather seem to be on terms of amity with God, and have no difficulty in believing that they are invited to His banquet. That which exhibits the true character of these men is their actual treatment of a present invitation; not what they said about it, not the flattering terms in which they replied to the host, but their conduct when summoned to come now to the feast. It is this which marks off the real friend of God from him whose spurious devotion enables him to ejaculate, as he thinks of a future and heavenly state, “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.” We are all prepared to utter such an otiosed sentiment; but the pious contemplation of heavenly blessedness is one thing, the entrance upon such friendships and habits as make us capable of it is quite another thing. The man who provoked the Parable was not saying what he did not feel: his feeling was present, but it was merely sentimental, with no result in action. The Parable gives three specimens of the grounds on which men refuse the invitation of God, and of the terms in which they couch their refusal. 1. The first says: “I have bought a piece of ground, and must needs go and see it. I pray thee have me excused.” No doubt he had seen the ground before he bought it, but it was a much more interesting sight now. A piece of ground, very poor-looking in itself, becomes attractive to a new purchaser. He can now mentally divide it out and plan its crops or its buildings. This man of the Parable had not been of so much consequence in the world when he first accepted the invitation. He still sees the desirableness of maintaining friendship with the host; but his invitation does not now seem so attractive as it did before he was a landowner. He endeavors, therefore, with a show of courtesy to set up an opposing necessity. It is not, he says, that he does not desire to accept the invitation, not at all; the host will quite misconceive him if he thinks he is not dying to come; but necessity compels him to look after his property. He must go and take it over, and make arrangements about its use. He is extremely sorry, but so it is. The invitation of God comes inopportunely to the man who is enjoying the first pleasures of proprietorship. He feels himself to be a solid part of this world, and is disposed to resent anything which reminds him that there are claims more pressing than even those of his recent investment. It will now appear which possession the owner thinks most substantial and finds most attractive, the

bit of land or the friendship of God. He tries to persuade himself he has a regard for God too, and is compelled for a little to defer the manifestation of that regard. These are ominous necessities indeed which grow up between a man and God, and prevent him from enjoying God's friendship. And yet do you not constantly find men speaking of the necessity of postponing God's will and work to the world's business? Do not . men on all hands betray that inwardly they put earthly possessions first, God second? They profess to be compelled to do so, and to be sorry they are compelled; and do not see that nothing compels them but their own likings and will.

2. The second refusal was worded: "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them. I pray thee have me excused." This man merely announces his intention, assuming that there can be no doubt of its propriety. However disappointed the host is, he must see that the guest's conduct is justifiable. This guest does not stay to explain the urgency; he does not even condescend to say that there is a necessity; simply states that he goes, as if every one must at once recognize the reasonableness of his conduct. He is so absorbed that he does not even perceive the claims the host has upon him. Of how many men in their prime does this man stand as the representative; men so engrossed in the business or pursuits of the world that they positively do not know that God has any claims upon their time, — so busy in pushing] forward mercantile or scientific or literary or political or military affairs, that it never once occurs to them that there are other objects for the sake of which these affairs should be for a time suspended. All men appreciate what contributes to bodily comfort, to convenience of moving from place to place, to rapidity in attaining a competence; and those arts and skilful applications of science which are daily with increasing success contributing to these ends, come to be almost worshiped by us. There is a palpable utility which imparts a dignity to the cultivation of the arts which enlarge and beautify life, and few escape the temptation to ascribe to them even greater power than they possess. When we do choose them as our pursuit in life, and discover the real wonders they work, and the mysterious and apparently limitless powers that lie in them, we are fascinated. To check a man in the launching of some great undertaking which is to bring material advantage to a city or country, to recall him from the abstraction of deep research, or the anxiety of fine and prolonged experiment, to interrupt him in a calculation of some large financial scheme, to invite him to curtail the time he gives to business for the sake of entering more fully into the enjoyment of fellowship with God — this seems to many a man a mere impertinence, an absurdity bordering on madness. The objects for which men labor are to them so real and commanding that they do not see that they are required to justify an entire devotion of themselves to these objects. A man's life seems to be nobly spent in subduing the powers of nature to the use of his fellow-men; but these powers, how mysterious and beautiful soever they be, are but as the five yoke of oxen when compared with that closest intercourse with the God of nature to which we are invited. And as this man would have had more temper to manage his young oxen in the morning had he treated his host with proper respect, and put friendship before self-interest, so there is no one of us who will not make a better use of the powers of this world if he himself is inspired with the thoughts and purposes which spring from fellowship with God.

3. The third who refuses to go to the supper gives as his reason: "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." These several grounds of refusal are instanced as illustrating that anything is considered sufficient ground, and as showing also the various engagements which occupy men to the exclusion of fellowship with God, rather than because each has some

distinctive and significant feature. If it be supposed that this refusal is distinctive, then it may be said that it reminds us that pleasure as well as business prevents us from paying due regard to the appeals of God. Marriage, if not always really so, is at least symbolically joyful; and it seems to this man that the host takes quite the wrong time to invite him. So, with a greater harshness than the former decliners, he almost rudely refuses the invitation. Many feel as if God's invitations came at the wrong time. They think God might stand aside for a little. The thought of perfect purity, of a life of consecration, of devotedness to the highest aims, of renunciation of all that is paltry and self-pleasing, comes inopportunely when they have just launched on a current that promises quiet domestic pleasure, and a happiness that tempts to forgetfulness of others' woes and wants. The three refusals have this in common, that under a very thin disguise there lies a real indifference to the feast. They had better engagements elsewhere — more exciting, profitable, and pleasant than conversation with their professed friend. His kind intentions are nothing to them: whatever he can have provided for their entertainment is beneath their notice. They can apologize afterwards, but meanwhile they must attend to more important matters. Had they really liked his society and heartily honored him, they would have found it easy to go. The land would not have vanished before next day; the cattle would have been proved in time to get to the feast; and even the wife would not have been an insuperable difficulty. But any engagement was enough to compete with one they wished to decline. And the Parable is spoken that men may be warned and may see clearly how amidst considerable profession of friendship with God there may exist a real distaste for His society and His pleasures. If there is anything else to attend to, it will receive our first attention. God is postponed to everything else. This fact, so obvious in the life of many of us, should let light in upon our true I state of heart; and it will let light in where such; light is honestly desired. It is a severe Parable, saying very pointedly to many now as to this sanctimonious person who provoked it, That is your real estimate of communion with God: you talk a great deal about it, you extol spiritual pleasures, so that, to hear you, one would suppose you scarcely belonged to earth, but your life reveals a very different state of matters. Judging by your verbal acknowledgments of the excellence and infinite superiority of spiritual to worldly things one would expect to find you absorbed in the work of Christ, but your actions give the lie to your words, and prove them to be pitiful cant — phrases with which you unintentionally blind yourself to your real likings.

Judging, then, not from our words, not from the easy phrases that drop from our lips as readily as remarks about the weather, but judging from our life and actions, where are we to say that our real pleasures lie? What is it for which we will defer any engagement? what is it we never forget, never neglect, never find tedious and an unwelcome interruption? Let us know this; for it is not our profession that we ought to be spiritual, nor our acknowledgment that we ought to love God that avails; but what avails is our being Spiritual and our actually loving God above all. When we think of the kingdom of God as a future state in which all shall be assembled as to a family gathering in the quiet and cool of evening, it is easy to express desire to be present there. Who does not feel some desire to see face-to-face the real person of the Lord, and have leisure to scan the features of this Host to whom he is so intimately linked? Who does not desire to exchange thoughts with Him, and so to learn how personal and searching is the interest the Lord has taken in him? But these desires are apt to be merely sentimental, and before we trust them they must be tested by the actual use we now make of the access to Christ we already have. The doom of those who reject God's invitation is plainly pronounced. They are passed by, and the offer is made to others.

Paul, seeing this doom accomplished, said, “Through their fall — the fall of the Jews — salvation is come to the Gentiles.” Does the threat that none of those who were bidden should taste of His supper seem by no means very terrible? Does it strike you as extravagant and grandiloquent to put such a threat in the form of a threat at all? And yet I suppose there are persons you so esteem that, if such a message came from them, you would feel that disgrace had fallen upon you, and that until you were justly reinstated in the goodwill and friendship of those persons, your life must be clouded and full of bitterness. Is it less ignominious to treat God with disrespect, and less disastrous to be excluded from His favor? Suppose you were sure that this doom had been pronounced upon you, and that therefore it was quite vain for you to expect God’s help or blessing in any matter you have to do with, — suppose you had the prospect of entering the world of spirits unaided and uncared for, and that while others were seen to and provided for by God, you were left to yourself, — suppose you had reason to know that God, who is slowest to take offense and never unjust, is offended with you, and henceforth renounces you, deleting your name from among His friends, — would this not affect you with shame? would it not at least move you to consider what just cause of offense you have given, and would it excite no anxiety; or is it all one to you whether there opens up before you an eternity full of brightness and hope, calculated to call out every high sentiment and all worthy activity in you, or one that is full of gloom, disappointment, and misery, the lot of lost, defeated, sunken, degraded souls? The invitation, when despised by those to whom it was originally addressed, was conveyed to those who could least of all anticipate any such communication. The class of outcasts described in the Parable is recognizable at all times. They are those who seem to be beyond help and hope — the maimed, the blind, the vagrant, the destitute, the criminal Such descriptions are self-interpreting. Whoever finds himself in a wretched and abandoned condition is taught here that God invites him to His table. He who cannot discover in his condition one hopeful symptom; he who is crushed and defeated; he who has been maimed in the service of sin, and has laid himself down by the hedge-side, to let the busy stream of life run past without noticing him; he who is utterly weary and heart-broken, and knows not how he can ever be restored to virtuous and serviceable living — to him comes God’s invitation to the utmost of His bounty. The servants were sent to invite promiscuously every one they found: bold sinners in the streets, secret and shamefaced sinners in the lanes, proud sinners in the highways, and woebegone sinners by the hedges; wherever they found a man, wherever human life yet stirred the mass of filthy rags, that they were to bring to the feast.

Such persons were to be compelled to come in. The servants were not to let them away to dress themselves under promise of coming in an hour. They were to bring them as they stood or as they lay. They were to take no excuse, but were to “compel” them to come. They were to use the strongest persuasion in their power; to allow no shame, no sense of unworthiness, no fear of offending the host, no remembrance of wrongs done to the host, to deter them; but they were to use authority, argument, entreaty, everything to move them; or doing less, they did less than their master’s pleasure. They were not merely to walk along the highways with a placard, or to proclaim as they passed by that any who chose might go. They were to lay their hands on the men, and compel them to listen. They were to represent their master’s cordiality and urgency. They were not to leave any in doubt as to how they would be received, and they were not to let any away with a mere promise to come. They were to bring them. And if the lame gave as an excuse that they could not go, or if the blind said they would have been glad to go had they been able to find their way, the servant was to become eyes to the blind and feet to the lame; he was not to think he had

cleared his conscience by giving them the invitation, but was to see them inside the guest-chamber. Such is the freedom and such the urgency of the Gospel of Christ.

Chapter 41

03.19. THE LOST SHEEP AND THE LOST PIECE OF MONEY

THE LOST SHEEP AND THE LOST PIECE OF MONEY

Luke 15:1-10 The heathen philosopher Seneca made a practise of dining with his slaves, and when challenged for an innovation so directly in the teeth of all customary proprieties and so offensive to the Roman mind, he defended himself by saying that he dined with some because they were worthy of his esteem, and with others that they might become so. The action and its defense were alike admirable, and read a salutary lesson to the aristocrats of Rome. But it was even a greater shock to the Pharisees, and, if possible, even more unaccountable, that Jesus should prefer the society of notorious sinners to their own irreproachable manners and decorous conversation. They were honestly surprised and nonplussed by His treatment of these abandoned characters. They could not understand why a teacher of holy life, instead of frowning upon the notoriously profligate, should show a preference for their society. Our Lord's explanation is ample and thorough. It was of extreme importance that His demeanor towards sinners should be made perfectly intelligible, and that its reasonableness should be put beyond a doubt. He devotes, therefore, the three Parables recorded in this chapter to this purpose.

It is perhaps worth remarking that on one point He felt that no explanation was required. Even the Pharisees did not suspect Him of any sympathy with sin. These critics of His conduct had not failed to remark that in His presence the daring profanity and audacious license of wicked men were tamed. They could not but remark that into these doubtful companies He carried an influence that quite overmastered the habitual manners and tendencies of the degraded creatures among whom He so unostentatiously took His place. They never suspected Him of any desire to be initiated into the mysteries of crime, nor was any one blind enough to fancy He had some secret liking for the talk and experiences of the vicious. When Samuel Johnson, late one night, found a poor woman lying on the streets of London, exhausted with want, disease, and poverty, and carried her home on his back, and nursed her with all tenderness and sought to put her in a virtuous way of living, no one misconstrued his motives. It was seen to be the Christ-like act of a simple, great, and charitable nature. But while the contemporaries of our Lord did not suppose He had any personal relish for sin, they still held it to be an unaccountable if not blameworthy feature of His conduct that He received sinners and ate with them. For as we sometimes find ourselves laying to a man's charge that which is his chief claim to our regard, and citing that as his weakness which in reality is his strength, so did the Pharisees and scribes bring against our Lord as a damning accusation that very habit which is His eternal praise: "This man receiveth sinners." The most desolate and broken soul cannot desire any better account of the Saviour's work than is thus given by those who were reading off the most obvious facts of His life.

Those who so narrowly criticised our Lord's conduct might have seen its reasonableness had they been able to look at it from another point of view. With equal surprise they might have exclaimed: "Sinners receive this man and eat with Him." Among them it was a new thing that the godly should consort with sinners; but surely it was equally novel that sinners should seek the company of One

whose conversation was instinct with purity and breathed of heaven. Could the people recall many instances in which outcasts and profligates had been seen longing to talk with a man whose words were all of purity and righteousness? These dissolute and lawless characters could themselves have explained the change. They were attracted to Jesus because, together with unmistakable sanctity, and even somehow appearing as the chief feature of His sanctity, there was an understanding of the sinner's position and a hopefulness about him which threw a hitherto unknown spell over them. Separate from sinners, as they had never before felt any one to be, He seemed to come closer to their heart by far than any other had come. He had a heart open to all their troubles. He saw them through and through, and yet showed no loathing, no scorn, no astonishment, no perplexity, no weariness. Instead of meeting them with upbraiding, and showing them all they had lost. He gave them immediate entrance into His own pure, deep, efficient love, and gladdened their hearts with a sense of what they yet had in Him.

Therefore men whose seared conscience felt no other touch, who had a ready scoff for every other form of holiness, admitted this new power and yielded to it. Old sinners broke down before Him, and with tears and simplicity as when they had sobbed out their first fault on their mother's bosom, repented of their weary life of sin. Men from whom the Roman lash could draw no word of confession; men whom society had branded as outcasts and who flung back on society a scorn as contemptuous as its own; men who had long since abandoned all belief in goodness, and who delighted in showing their disbelief, were not ashamed even in the public streets, to own to Him their sin and to supplicate His mercy. Women whose vanity and light-heartedness had led them to self-loathing and despair, who forced a ghastly gaiety from hearts that lay cold and heavy as stone in their breasts, found to their astonishment that Christ did not shrink from them, but spoke to them with a tenderness and a hope which were new sounds to them. The disheartened, the polluted, the ruined, the degraded came to Him, because in Him they found an inexhaustible compassion. He did not give advice; He did not I warn; He did not send them away with minute directions for godly living; — there were plenty who could do that — He received them, opened to them His heart, and gave them to feel through their whole being that they were loved and thought of by this highest and purest of persons. The contrast between this new attitude of a holy person towards the sinner and that to which men had commonly been accustomed, has been finely described in the following words: "He who thought most seriously of the disease held it to be curable; while those who thought less seriously of it pronounced it incurable. Those who loved their race a little made war to the knife against its enemies and oppressors; He who loved it so much as to die for it, made overtures of peace to them. The half-just judge punished the convicted criminal; the thoroughly just Judge offered him forgiveness. Perfect justice here appears to take the very course which would be taken by injustice."

It is this, then, that calls for explanation. And it is explained by our Lord in three Parables, each of which illustrates the fact that a more active interest in any possession is aroused by the very circumstance that it is lost. The sheep that is lost is not on that account disregarded by the shepherd but receives for the time greater attention than those which remain in the fold. The piece of money that has gone amissing becomes on that very account of greater immediate importance to the woman than all she has safe in her jar in the cupboard. If one of a family turns out ill, it is a small mitigation that all the rest turn out well; it is after the lost the parent's heart persistently goes. So is it with God. The very circumstance that men have strayed from Him evokes in Him a more

manifest and active solicitude in their behalf. The attitude of God and of Christ towards sinners is reduced to the great principle, that anything which is lost and may be regained exercises our thought more and calls out a more solicitous regard than a thing of equal value which rests securely in our possession. This is the principle which these Parables are intended to illustrate: that with God as with men that which is lost occupies, for the time and until restored, more of His thought and provokes clearer and larger manifestations of His love than that which has not been lost or is already restored. The figures used for the purpose of illustration must not be pushed too far. They are not so much images of our state as instances of the application of one common principle. They are instances of lost articles; that is all. It is merely accidental that there is a resemblance between the silly sheep that heedlessly nibbles the sweet grass that lies before it and so crops its way from spot to spot of pasture till it is utterly lost, and the man who looks only to present gratification and so strays on with the same foolish thoughtlessness and unconsciousness of danger, and is only awakened to see how near akin thoughtlessness is to wickedness by finding himself involved in inextricable difficulties and threatened with danger of the most alarming kind. In like manner it may be said that we resemble lost coin that has fallen out of circulation and is lying unused and being gradually tarnished, defaced, and buried in dust; for we too have been issued with the image of our Maker upon us, but are gradually suffering it to be defaced and are dropping aside from all serviceable living. But the points of the comparison for the sake of which these illustrative instances are introduced are simply the lostness of the sheep, the money, and ourselves alike; the consequent concentration of attention on what is lost; and the joy of finding it again.

1. The first point, then, suggested by these Parables is, that God suffers loss in every sinner that departs from Him. To the Pharisaic mind this was a new light on the character of God. The Pharisee himself trusted little to tenderness, much to rigid law. Naturally he thought of God also as standing upon His rights, enforcing His will by compulsion, and with equanimity punishing and driving into permanent exile those who have strayed from Him. It is a revelation to them to hear that the lostness of the sinner is God’s loss; that God suffers more than the sinner in the separation. For God loves the sinner and this love is wounded, whereas the sinner has no love for God that can be wounded by separation. The silly sheep is quite satisfied with its state, while the shepherd’s heart beats fast with anxiety about its possible fate. It is not the son but the mother whose hair turns gray with slow anguish as she marks the increasing frequency with which he is absent from her fireside, and how he is becoming lost to her. So it is God who suffers, and not the heartless sinner, who, without a thought of the wounds he is inflicting, goes his own wretched way and courts the destruction which Christ died to save him from. All the broken-heartedness of parents who year by year watch the failure of all their efforts to lead some misguided child to well-doing; all the crushing anguish of wives who see their husbands slowly hardening in vice and sinking out of reach of their love; all the varied misery that love must endure in this sinful world, is after all but the reflection of what Infinite Love suffers in sympathy with every sinner who spurns it and chooses death. Look at the sorrow of God in Christ, and say whether the loss God suffers in your separation from Him is true or feigned. This was what the Pharisees had wholly left out of account, that God loves men and mourns over every ill that befalls them. And this is what we find it so hard to believe. It is only very slowly we come to believe even in human love. With difficulty we believe that there are persons to whom it would give real pleasure to make a sacrifice for us. How impossible is it for a child to understand the love his parent has for him. How few of us conceived

anything of the tenderness and intensity and persistence and self-sacrifice of parental love, till we ourselves grew up and had it interpreted to us by our own feelings. In some of us, grief for lost friends or parents has j been embittered by the thought of what we might I and would have done for them, had we only sooner learned what we have since discovered of their love for us. Are none of us preparing for ourselves a similar remorse by our neglect of that Love which is the true spring of all other affection, and itself greater than all?

These Parables thus bring us face to face with the most significant and fertile of all realities, God's love for us. This love encompasses you whether you will or no. Love never asks leave; it cannot; it enters like sunshine, and often where it seems much out of place. You may destroy all love to God in your own soul, but you cannot destroy His love for you. It persists, because it is love. It waits patiently for requital; it humbles itself to be often slighted, often misconstrued, often refused. Can it be true that God loves you; that you yourself are connected by this most fruitful of ties to the eternal God? Surely there is no question that may more worthily engage the attention. It will not do for a man to persuade himself he is honorable and rightminded, if he is making no account of this expenditure of love upon him. This is no question of casuistry that plain men need not trouble their heads about. It is no question of doctrine which a man may believe or disbelieve, and still remain sound at heart. It is a question regarding your conduct towards a Person, a question that touches what lies deepest in our life and character.

2. Secondly, these Parables suggest that the very fact of our being lost excites action of a specially tender kind toward us. God does not console Himself for our loss by the fellowship of those who have constantly loved Him. He does not call new creatures into being and so fill up the blank we have made by straying from Him. He is not a Sovereign who has no personal knowledge of His subjects, nor an employer of labor who can always get afresh hand to fill an emptied post: He is rather a shepherd who knows His sheep one by one, a Father who loves His children individually. He would rather restore the most abandoned sinner than blot him from his place to substitute an archangel. Love is personal and settles upon individuals. It is not all the same to God if some other person is saved while you are not.

"Thou art as much His care as if beside Nor man nor angel lived in heaven or earth." When men sin, therefore, and fall into difficulties, God cannot remain indifferent or quiescent. Interference of a direct and special kind becomes necessary. The normal relations being disturbed, and man becoming helpless by the disturbance, it falls to God to restore matters. A new set of ideas and dealings is brought into play. So long as things go smoothly and men by nature love God and seek to do His will, there is no anxiety, no meeting of emergencies by unexpected effort, hidden resources, costly sacrifice. But when sin brings into view all that is tragic, and when utter destruction seems to be man's appointed destiny, there is called into exercise the deepest tenderness, the utmost power of the Divine nature. Here where the profoundest feeling of God is concerned, where His connection with His own children is threatened, Divinity is stirred to its utmost. This appears, among other things, in the spontaneity and persistence of the search God institutes for the lost. The shepherd who misses one of his flock does not sit down by the ninety and nine in the pasture, but straightway goes in search of the lost. He does not expect that it will seek him; he goes after it. He does not expect to meet it coming home to him, so that if he had only waited and left it to itself, it would have found its own way back. On the contrary, he knows the recovery of the sheep depends wholly on himself and he prepares himself for trouble, provocation,

risk. On him must fall the burden of finding it, of devising means of rescue and of bringing it back to the fold. Yet men sometimes seem to suppose that God is not alive to their dangers, but needs to be aroused to take a livelier interest in their condition and to help them in their strivings against evil. He is thought of as sitting coldly watching our passionate and almost despairing struggles to break away from evil and make our way back to a pure and helpful life; as if He were saying, I will let this sinner learn what it is to have strayed from Me. But it is not so: God is as truly beforehand with the sinner as the shepherd with the sheep. The initiative is God's; and all that you desire or do in the way of return to righteousness is prompted by Him, He has already sufficiently shown that He is alive to the emergency and that no trouble is too great, no sacrifice too great, while there is a possibility of saving the human soul.

God's search is also persistent. The woman of the Parable sweeps out every dusty corner; she shakes out every article of clothing; she lifts boxes that have not been lifted for years; she carefully searches drawers where she knows the coin cannot be; she reads the face of every one J who has come near her house for a month; she I exhausts every possibility of finding her piece of i money. Possibly she required it to make up a sum for a purchase. Certainly God needs us for some end He has in view. This is not our whole history, that with immense outlay of Divine resources we are restored to permanent rectitude. There must be much beyond, and for this God prepares us now. The experiences of earth, however exalted, do not exhaust the eventfulness of our eternal life. Therefore God seeks us with earnestness as if we were necessary not only to His love but to His purposes. He makes diligent search. He leaves no stone unturned. With active, intelligent, unwearied search. He strives to win the sinner to purity and love. Christ astonished men on earth by the company into which He found His way, and by the affection with which He spoke to low and worthless people; and so does He still, by means less observable but equally efficient, seek to win men to the recognition of His love and of all the good He makes possible. The shepherd sought "until he found" his sheep; the woman swept diligently "until she found" her coin. But while God's search is infinitely more persistent, it may be baffled by the cold indifference, the resolute badness of the sinner.

3. The third point illustrated by these Parables is the exceeding joy consequent on the restoration of the sinner. "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." The joy is greater, because the effort to bring it about has been greater, and because for a time the result has been in suspense, so that when the end is attained there is a sense of clear gain. The joy of success is proportioned to the difficulty, the doubtfulness of attaining it. All the hazards and sacrifices of the search are repaid by the recovery of the lost. The value of the unfallen soul may intrinsically be greater than the value of the redeemed; but the joy is proportioned, not to the value of the article, but to the amount of anxiety that has been spent upon it. So that Christ virtually says to the Pharisees: "You murmur at Me; but if you were in sympathy with heaven, you would rejoice with Me. You need no repentance, — at least you think so; and for this very reason I seek to attract those who do. Their state is admittedly precarious, and to win them will be clear gain to the kingdom of heaven. The finding is an intenser joy than the keeping safe, because the loss has been actually felt and is now relieved, the pang of separation has been actually endured and is now swallowed up in the joy of restoration." To the sinner then, these Parables say, It is your unspeakably happy privilege to give God joy. There is no joy comparable to the joy of successful love; of love, that is to say, not only recognized and

returned, but which succeeds in making the object of it as happy as it desires, and does so after many repulses and misunderstandings and hazards. This is God's greatest joy. When God succeeds in securing the happiness, — the inward purity and rectitude, and therefore the happiness, — of any one who has been estranged from Him, there is joy in heaven. What can more worthily give joy to intelligent beings than the increase of goodness? God's joy is the unutterable joy of the parent who for many years has been anxiously watching his son's growth, his leanings, his temptations, his resolutions, his declensions, his alienations of spirit, and at length sees proof that the lad is wholly sound at heart, that he has chosen the better part and thrown off all vice that clung to him; that he is bent now upon a pure and honorable life, and with his own soul hates the thought of evil; that he has finally abjured the allurements that tempted and bound him formerly, and has in himself that deep principle and those wise and generous dispositions which will guide him in all circumstances and in all companies. This joy you have it in your power to give to God. There is a joy which no one but yourself can excite in God, a joy over your repentance, over your return to good; a joy therefore which none but yourself has the humble glory of stirring in the mind of God. In this joy the angels are represented as sharing. Their experience of the blessedness of life with God, gives them sympathy with all who enter that life. They know the happiness that lies before every one who yields himself to God's purpose and to God's love, and therefore they rejoice. And if it be true that the conversion of one soul be so reasonable a ground of joy to those who are merely spectators, what unspeakable gladness ought it to bring to those who themselves experience it? Have you ever had such happiness that you would deem it reasonable that all heaven should rejoice with you in it? Yet there is such happiness open to you. Uninteresting, solitary, monotonous, and unobserved as your life may seem, it is, if there be truth in these words of the Lord, an object of intensest interest to God and angels. With all its evils, its fears, its misery, it may be lifted to so true a harmony with the ever-living God, that those pure and discerning spirits who see it cannot forbear rejoicing over it with well-grounded satisfaction.

If God with all heaven is thus in sympathy with I us, defeated in our defeat, triumphing in our victory; if the cause of love and moral order is one throughout the universe, we have every encouragement to play our part well. It is no short and easy passage of arms we are called to; we are wearied and often overcome by the constant accompaniment of sin, weakness, and folly in all we do; but in all this evil and conflict there is material for victory and joy. Are you weighted by nature with a poor craven spirit, a vain selfish heart, sordid or gross passions, a feeble inconstant will, a nature that often causes shame? Humbly recognize all this as what you are actually called to master; do not waste your energies envying those who have a better nature and an easier task, but face the conflict that actually awaits you and carry into it the assurance that every stroke for the right and every defeat of evil you accomplish has an echo of the truest kind in heaven. Remember the greater joy God has in the painful, difficult, penitential return of a lost . soul than in the easy righteousness of the naturally pure.

Chapter 42

03.20. THE PRODIGAL SON AND HIS ELDER BROTHER

THE PRODIGAL SON AND HIS ELDER BROTHER

Luke 15:11-32 In the Parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Piece of Money, our Lord has already shown that the very circumstance that men are lost inevitably attracts towards them the greater solicitude on God's part; that so far from their notoriously bad character and gross breach of all law, human and Divine, putting them beyond God's love, this really only provokes a more manifest and touching exhibition of God's love. In this Parable He repeats this lesson, but adds another figure to the dramatis persona; a figure which represents the objecting Pharisees and scribes, and in which they might see the unreasonableness and hatefulness of the spirit which could find fault with the unquestioning welcome and festal reception of the returning penitent. There is also another difference between the Parables. The two former bring into great prominence the loss which God sustains in the lapse and destruction of the sinner, the suffering which His love necessarily endures in being prevented from achieving the happiness of its object. In this Parable of the Prodigal, so much is said of the wretchedness to which the sinner is reduced, that while the central figure it still the father, our attention is strongly directed towards that which was entirely absent from the other Parables, the experience and change of mind in the lost sinner himself. It is, however, to be borne in mind that this description of the sinner's misery is given still to give point and justification to what might otherwise seem the extravagant joy of the father. Had the son been absent for a year or two on a mercantile mission as his father's agent, and were he now returning successful, this exultation would be out of place. The miserable plight of the prodigal is detailed to justify the recoil of the father's feeling from long-suppressed love, compassionate anxiety, and longing to overflowing, unrestrained rejoicing. The few strokes in which the career of the prodigal is sketched have approved themselves at the bar of universal experience, and have become part and parcel of the imagery in which all of us clothe our thoughts. It has, too, been kept alive in the minds of men by the unhappy circumstance that the career here depicted is so often actually reproduced in the lives of young men who start with every advantage and comfort, and who perish miserably in some distant colony, or in a few years run through their health, and come home only to die in sorrow and shame. The beginning is the same in all cases; an incapacity to find the fullest enjoyment in God's love, God's presence, and God's ways. The son grows weary of the father's home; he desires his goods, but not his presence; he wishes to be his own master, believing that he is cramped and straitened by goodness, and that liberty to do evil is the true emancipation. There is nothing in sin that affects us with a keener sense of degradation than the youthful folly that runs through it all, the inexperienced and thoughtless fancy that unless we sin we have not freedom, and the sense that God would be more to us were He less in Himself. He is too good for us to be quite at home in His presence. His holiness shames us and discomforts us. His presence ceases to be the most grateful, the most enjoyable, the easiest. What answer do you get when you ask yourself, Should I be satisfied were God to give me as my own what would make me independent of Him? Were I sure of life, of power to spend and enjoy it as I pleased, with no interference of punishment or remonstrance from God, would this satisfy me? Or would it be itself

a terrible punishment to me to be cast forth from God, even though I had provision for all my future? Were communion with God denied me, would this really make a difference to me, would my life seem a blank? would this take the soul out of all my hopes, all my plans, all my enjoyments? Should I feel as a homeless outcast suddenly ejected into an undesired, bleak, blank world, my heart unable to rest in anything, but turning ever back to the Father I had lost? When the heart is thus alienated, God does not desire a constrained bodily service. He does not compel us to abide with Him. If our real desire is for His portion, and not for Himself, He gives us our desire. He does not treat us as if we had no capacity of choice. He does not save us, whether we will or no. But neither does He let us go without regret or into oblivion. The father by dismissing his son does not help to lose him; but foreseeing that nothing but an experience of the world's emptiness can bring him to appreciate the home and love of his father, he sadly sends him to this painful school. He sees him away and turns into his house, and who can tell the brokenhearted anguish with which in secret he pictures to himself the probable career of his loved child? What servant on the farm does not well understand the sudden lack of interest in all the work, the absent look as schemes of improvement are detailed to him, the many signs that reveal that his heart is with his lost son, and that all else is matter of indifference to him? But the son, for his part, after the first pang, exults in the freedom he has gained, wantonly puts the greatest distance between his father and himself, does not provide for a return home, nor dreams of needing further help, but boldly launches on the world sufficient for himself. It is thus that in the pride of life when health is unbroken, and the world untried, we reckon only on a life of success and gratification, gather to us all our means and powers of enjoyment, and accept guidance solely from our own casual impulses or shortsighted longings, without a thought of the pain we are inflicting on Him whose love persistently follows us, and with out a thought of the misery we are courting.

How soon the scene shifts, and how utterly! The gay youth who was foremost in every revel, whose bright face and confident bearing seemed the very embodiment of the pride of life, whose wealth gave him command of every form of luxurious living, and to whom no earthly pleasure was unfamiliar — look at him now, blackened with starvation and filth, clothed in the rags that others have thrown out, noticed only by those who gaze with astonishment at him as one who is too sunken to be helped. But to none does he look so miserable as to himself. In his mind alone is there visible the full contrast between what he is and what he was; between what he is and what he might have been. The love he might have enjoyed, the noble uses he might have served, the expansion of his life under the wise enterprise of his father, the growing influence and respect, the share in the real work and permanent rewards of life that might have been his, — all this gone beyond his reach, and in its place cold and filth, hunger and nakedness, neglect and desolate bitterness of soul.

Against how many of us does this picture lift up its parable! For he is not the only prodigal who in riotous pleasure or vain display brings himself to beggary; but he is the prodigal who in any way wastes the powers and means God gave him to effect substantial good and results that might always be looked on with pleasure. It seems a matter of no importance, and gives us not a thought that we are living for ourselves; we think that living for God is a height of consecration that some may aspire to, but that it is no law of life for all; but we come to find that it is just this which makes the difference, and that all we have done on any other footing had far better have been left undone. We have been laboriously carting stones into a moss which quietly absorbs all our labor,

and shows absolutely no result. If we have spent our portion, our talents, our opportunities, our life, in striving to please ourselves, — if we have not made common cause and partnership with God, and been content to have our individual portion merged in His, — then manifestly we have as thoroughly alienated ourselves and our portion from God as if we had spent it on riotous living.

Indeed the riotous livers always seem to have more to say for themselves than the more respectable self-pleasers. They say or they feel, There is a great untried sphere, a world that promises enjoyment, away in that direction. Let us try this promising freedom, let us make experiment of that life that lies beyond law and restraint; we shall at least know more. Yes, as John Ruskin says, “You now know the habits of swine and the taste of husks; do you think your father could not have taught you to know better habits and pleasanter tastes, if you had stayed in his house; and that the knowledge you have lost would not have been more, as well as sweeter, than that you have gained?” “No one ever gets wiser by doing wrong, nor stronger. You will get wiser and stronger only by doing right, whether forced or not; the prime, the one need is to do that, under whatever compulsion, till you can do it without compulsion.” And this is not a mere critical remark made upon us from without, by one who has different tastes from ourselves; it is a truth that asserts itself in the experience of every prodigal. The famine comes, and the husks won’t satisfy. They may keep down the gnawing pangs of hunger, they may stay the appetite for the hour, but they do not nourish. Take any pleasure or pursuit that is ungodly, and you know that this is all it does. It passes the time, it interests and engages you, it stays an appetite; but your nature is not fed, the deepest parts of your nature are unfilled; yourself in that which is most yourself, is impoverished. You are not growing in any fitness for the future, you are not gaining mastery of your spirit, you are not enlarging in your love of goodness. Do you wish proof of this? Have you never wished that your nature did not require anything better than the world provides? As this poor prodigal lying by the swine’s trough may sometimes have wished that he could fatten on that food as they did, so it is not a wholly unknown desire among us to wish that we were a shade liker the beasts, that every part of our nature might be satisfied with that which only satisfies the lower parts of it, that it were not wrong to enjoy the pleasures of sin, and that God had made us for no higher ends than our own weak and depraved hearts aspire to. But our natures will not remake themselves. They are made for God, and nowhere else can we find eventually aught but famine. You may as well try to feed a horse upon carrion or a lion upon straw. “Man liveth by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” We must have assurance of God’s presence with us, and of His love. He must speak to us words of approbation and encouragement, we must be on terms of the truest affection with Him. We live through all our being when the words and sentiments that come straight and true from the heart of God Himself come home to our hearts, when He manifests Himself to us, — gives us to understand, as with His own lips, what no other can tell us of His love, — conveys to us the inward assurance that He is ours, and that we are His for evermore.

If you have learned that after all enjoyment of this world, there is a something more you must have if enjoyment is to last; if you are not yet wholly citizens of this world, but have still some feelings of the alien, some longings, however faint, after another kind of home, some indications, however slight, that this is not filling and feeding you, that this may do for a while, but would be misery if forever, — if you feel, in short, your need of God, — then look and listen to His Incarnate Word. Christ is sent to speak these words of everlasting life to you, to win you back to your true home

and Father, to be the channel through which the whole fulness of God's love is poured into your famishing spirits, to refresh and invigorate you with undying hope, to loosen the hands that are feely clutching the foul husks, and fill them with the bread that cometh from heaven. The return of the prodigal was perhaps not prompted by the very highest of motives. What high motives could you expect in a man who had lived for his own pleasure, and was now lying starving? But who would be saved if he had to show a repentance void of all selfishness? The chief reason why men turn to God is in the great majority of cases the same as that which prompted the prodigal's return. The prodigal could not make a better of it; we too have tried everything else, and been disappointed. We do not try God until convinced that nothing else will serve our turn. Health gives way, or the spirit is broken, or hope baffled, or one way or other we find the world is not going to be the paradise we expected. The world sees and says this; it sneers at conversion as if it were unreal, because it is so often the result of disappointment with the world. God sees and says it too; but receives the returning sinner, and in the reception a better mind is produced in him, and his selfishness broken.

Besides, there was even in this compulsory return that belief in the father's love which condones all offenses. There was the instinctive undying feeling that a parent is still a parent, and will receive when others cast us out. You have, I dare say, read the experience of the great French philosopher Diderot. "The first few years of my life in Paris had been rather irregular, my behavior was enough to irritate my father, without there being any need to make it worse by exaggeration. Still calumny was not wanting. People told him — well, what did they not tell him? An opportunity for going to see him presented itself. I did not give it two thoughts. I set out full of confidence in his goodness. I thought that he would see me, that I should throw myself into his arms, that both of us should shed tears, and that all would be forgotten. I thought rightly." So thought the prodigal. And whatever his motives were, his action was right. He put himself again within reach of his father's love, and that love received him without question, exulting in the ample opportunity of uttering itself. It had opportunity now of helping its pitiable object, of doing all for the still loved son. This was no time for inquiry as to why he had come. Here he was, and in need. That is enough for true love.

Nothing can surpass the pathos of the meeting of father and son. While the prodigal was " yet a great way off," his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. It is as if he had been watching for him night and day; as when a mother has lost a son, she will start at every ring or footstep, thinking it may perhaps be he. Every feature, every peculiarity of gait, every line of his figure was imprinted on the father's heart, so that long before another eye could recognize him, the father's heart had welcomed the son. He saw him, and had compassion, simultaneously; there was no hesitation to be fought against, no pondering whether he should not harden himself against this heartless profligate; but as soon as his eyes rested on him, all his sorrow passed away, the sun of his life shone out again. The rags that would have disguised him from any other eye could not hide him from the father; the rags and misery that would have tempted others to spurn him as a hopeless, abandoned creature, drew forth the father's love. He ran to meet him, everything else neglected, his own dignity out of the question; he cares not to require a seemly submission on his son's part that the servants may understand he is justified in receiving him. There is no attempt to impress upon the son a sense of his demerit, nothing done to make sure that he has a sufficient sense of guilt to justify pardon. The reason of the father's

receiving him is not that; is not that the son has a sufficient sense of anything, but only that the father loves him, and the son is now within reach of the father, will suffer him now to show his love. And therefore the father runs as if it were all on his side the blessing were, as if it were he who was to win favors from his son; he runs and falls on his neck, overcome with joy, his heart bounding with happiness, his soul satisfied, his life complete. No words can express the first welcome, the father cannot find language to utter the fulness of his heart; but in that eager embrace, in that kiss of love and peace, the prodigal knows himself a son still, as surely and more vehemently loved by his father than if he had never sinned. This is a picture of the reception the returning sinner receives. You may have wasted the best years of your life in selfish gratification, without a thought of serving God; you may have indulged in sins that fill you with self-loathing; you may have sunk to a state of heart that you would be ashamed to lay bare to the most generous and charitable of men; you may painfully feel that you have nothing to offer to God but the worthless dregs of a wasted life; you may be conscious that even your heart is not given to God as it ought, and that through the whole of your repentance your original selfishness is running; but only put yourself into God's hands as you are, and as this father was not hindered by the foul and sour rags of his son who came to him from among the swine, but fell on his neck, overcome by joy, so will you find in God no revulsion, but an immediate and hearty welcome that will cause you to rejoice in His love. You need not fear that you are to be put through some preparatory discipline, lodged in some sad and dreary moral quarantine till some of the loathsomeness and defilement of sin be worn off you. You will not be charged with your sins and reminded of your folly. All that will be left to yourself, and what God does is to meet you with the tenderest love, and to do everything to give you assurance of it, and wipe out the past. The father does every, thing to assure the son of his immediate reinstatement as his son, — everything to relieve him from fear, from want, from pain, from sadness; and whatever God must give us, if we are to be delivered from the same sensations, we are warranted in expecting. The father cannot do enough for the son; would like him at this hour of return to tell him of every least way in which help could be given him. It is this that God longs for, that we give Him the opportunity of blessing us, that we learn to trust in His love, and knowing that all else has failed us, believe that it will prove sufficient. And because it is love we have to do with, no one need fear that having been received he will yet make no progress in all that constitutes man's real growth and happiness; nor need any one suppose that they who are received are suffered to remain just what they were. They have been received because they are loved, and the love of God is not inactive nor ineffective, but does most certainly continue to watch over its objects, and to confer the highest gifts upon them. Whatever more complete severance from old habits and desires is needed, whatever persistence in well-doing, whatever deepening repentance, whatever growth in knowing and loving the Father is requisite, — all this will most certainly be given. And now in contrast to this joy of God in the returning sinner, our Lord sets the cold-hearted jealousy of the Pharisaically righteous man. He not only justifies His own conduct by showing how the father acts, but condemns the objections of the Pharisees by holding up to them in this elder brother a mirror in which they may see their own hateful likeness. The Pharisees had murmured against our Lord, " This man receiveth sinners;" He shows them an elder brother saying of his father, "This man receiveth a sinner," and leaves them to draw their own conclusion. Every touch in the description brings out some ungenial, servile, grudging, and envious feature of his character. He was " in the fields "when his brother came; too busy with his industrious and useful labors to share in his father's earnest watching for the prodigal's return; not

perceiving from his mercenary point of view that he might have pleased his father immeasurably more by going after and recovering his lost brother than by an ostentatious and punctilious performance of his own private duties; not even having such insight into his father's heart as would have enabled him to guess the one occurrence that could have given his father such gladness; not even observing that by contrasting his own life of toil with his brother's riotous living, he betrays his own secret liking for that, and proves that his service had been the heavy, unacceptable task of one who is not in sympathy with either the object of the work or him who set him to it. Thus may a man, after years of respectable living, disclose a heart alien from God, and out of sympathy with Him; thus may he disclose that his whole past life has been unloving and self-seeking. But as the father was patient and loving with the younger brother, so is he with the elder. He answers his bitter words and audacious reproaches in a tone of surprised and pained yet gentle and encouraging remonstrance: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." Why grudge thy brother this hour of gladness, when the calm and even joy of abundant life has all along been thine? I have never given thee a kid, because all I have is thine. We have mistaken one another. I thought that to be with me from day to day, sharing my thoughts, my plans, my joy, my prosperity, would be enough for you. As I am satisfied in my work, in increasing good, and in thy love, I judged that you also were finding it your joy to be with me, my partner in all things. But now I see you have been serving as a slave, doing your work not for its sake, not for mine, but for reward.

There is sufficient Pharisaism in each of us to justify the application of this to ourselves. They who have long served God with care and diligence and yet find their life a hard struggle, with few bright passages, many disappointments, and never joy such as the penitent at once enters into, naturally feel some soreness that one step should bring a life-long sinner abreast of them. You may have been striving all your days to be useful, and making great sacrifices to further what you believe to be the cause of God, and yet you cannot point to any success; but suddenly a man converted yesterday takes your place, and all things seem to shape themselves to his hand, and the field that was a heart-break to you is fertile to him. You have denied yourself every pleasure that you might know the happiness of communion with God, and you have not known it, but you see a banquet spread in God's presence for him who has till this hour been delighting in sin. You have had neither the riotous living nor the fatted calf. You have gone among the abandoned and neglected, and striven to enlighten and lift them; you have done violence to your own feelings that you might be helpful to others; and, so far as you can see, nothing has come of it. But another man who has lived irregularly, who has not prepared himself for the work, who is untaught, imprudent, unsatisfactory, has the immediate joy of winning souls to God. Have you not been tempted to say, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency".All this may be needful to convince you that it is not service that wins God's love; that His love is with you now, and that your acceptance of it will make all that has seemed to you grievous to be light and happy. Take refuge from all failure and disappointment in the words, "Son, I am ever with thee, and all that I have is thine." Learn to find your joy in Him, and you will be unable to think of any reward.

03.21. THE UNJUST STEWARD

THE UNJUST STEWARD

Luke 16:1-13 The occasion, and therefore the intention, of the last Parables we considered — those of the preceding chapter — were obvious. They formed our Lord's defense of His solicitude for great sinners. The occasion and intention of the Parables in this chapter are not so obvious. But it would appear that the same crowd was yet around Him. There were Pharisees still hanging about, as the fourteenth verse shows. But what our Lord had now to say was not addressed directly to them, as the three preceding Parables had been, but "to His disciples"; and very probably it was for the sake of the publicans and rich men among these disciples that His teaching took the peculiar cast it now did. These publicans and sinners had suddenly been made aware of the fact that the fraud, extortion, violence, and luxurious living which had made them outcasts from the purest Jewish society had rather attracted towards them an exceptional solicitude on God's part. The place they still held in God's love had been vividly set before them. The value He set upon them, the eagerness of His desire to recover them, the glad welcome and full forgiveness with which they were met, had been brought home to their hearts with irresistible force. Being but men, and men whose character had been sapped by constant familiarity with crime, and whose views of all transactions were determined by their own selfish habits, it was natural that they should be tempted to think less severely of their sin than was right. It is true that nothing so cleanses the heart as the knowledge of God's love. To be overcome by God's love is the only effectual cleansing and bar against sin. But as yet the holiness of God's love had not been signalized in the cross, and there was a danger, as there is even now a danger, of the penitent luxuriating in the love of God, while oblivious that this love is consumingly holy. It is at last the holiness of God's love that gives it its power; at last we come to see that His love and His holiness are one and the same thing; but at first we are tempted to forget that the love of God burns to make us holy as Himself.

Apparently, therefore, though not certainly, these Parables were spoken that the publicans might distinctly understand how their ill-gotten gains were to be used. They were to be taught that, though their past is forgiven, they have a duty to do with the gains they have made. And they are addressed as men thoroughly versed in all the ways of monied men, wide awake to appreciate hard work, vigilance, enterprise, and promptitude. And the aim of this first Parable is to impress on them the necessity of carrying over with them into the kingdom of God the qualities which had made them successful in the kingdom of mammon. They are to use the world's opportunities, and especially what we significantly call "means," with the same vigor and sagacity, but for higher ends; they are so to use their opportunities that, when they terminate, they shall have served to provide a competence for eternity. The figure or character through whom this lesson is conveyed is one with which they were perfectly familiar and had daily transactions. Indeed, it is not unlikely that when the unjust steward was described, significant glances would be exchanged by some of the crowd who had good reason to know how close to reality the description lay. He was a steward; not a farm steward, or a house steward, but, in modern language, an agent, factor, or

“man of business.” He was apparently much employed in the receipt of rents, the tenants paying to the landlord not a regular sum of money, but a proportion of the harvest; and apparently, also, it depended on the tenant himself to say truthfully, subject no doubt to the inspection of the steward, what the crop of each year yielded, and how much was due to the landlord as his proportion. Each tenant gave in, it seems, a bill to the steward stating the amount as his debt to the landlord, as his rent due; so that it lay between the tenant and the steward to be true or to impose upon the landlord. The landlord would make it the steward’s interest to be watchful and faithful, but there might yet be some collusion between the steward and the tenants. They might agree to state the crop as less than it had been, and therefore the landlord’s proportion as less. And in this case, as the Parable also shows, the landlord had no redress. He had, in the first place, no direct means of informing himself of the real amount of the harvest in the olive yards or corn lands; and even if, as in the case before us, some interested party informed him of the fraud that was being practised upon him, he had no redress; for it seems to have been established by law that what the steward did the landlord did. There was no legal redress against a steward’s infidelity, no legal means of recovering from the tenants what had been kept back by the steward’s sanction. When this steward of the Parable was called to give an account of his stewardship, he at once saw that it was at least quite in vain to think of talking his employer over, so that he might still be retained in his service. Without a thought of idle lamentation he at once faces the question, what was to be done when discharged. A life of luxury had unfitted him for manual labor; he had spoiled his chance of getting any other such situation as he now held; and he who had been regarded with greater dread than his master could not bring his mind to begging his bread. He sees at once the difficulty of his position, and, displaying here a business-like promptitude, sets himself to devise some scheme for extricating himself. The stewardship would be his no longer; it was already slipping through his fingers, but out of this fragment of stewardship that remained to him he resolved to make for himself a competent provision. While his master was laying to his charge one defalcation after another, his quick apprehension was taking in every element in his position; and undismayed by the ruin that stared him in the face, he held his sagacity so completely at command that he lighted on a solution of his difficulty. As his employer came to the last item in his indictment, and was pronouncing his dismissal, the subtle and active and self-possessed steward was saying in himself, “I have it “; “I see what to do.” And he was confident that he had resolved aright; there is no suspicious flurry in his dealing with his lord’s debtors, but only the speed which he knew he must use if his scheme was to be of any avail. One after another of the debtors of his lord was delighted by having a large part of his debt remitted to him. They cannot but feel most grateful for something like the gift of half a year’s income; and the steward at once sees that he has secured the gratitude and goodwill of some well-to-do men, who in turn will stand by him. The plan was, of course, thoroughly unprincipled and dishonest. It was simply stealing, taking out of his master’s pocket, and banking the stolen money in the houses of these new friends. Yet the plan was admirably ingenious. There could not indeed have been any other extrication from his difficulty so entirely devoid of evil consequences to himself, so completely furnishing him with all that he aimed at. Had he perpetrated a direct theft, the law could have pursued him; but he acted still as steward, so that what he did must hold as law, and his lord had no redress. So felicitous was the device, that the landlord, though himself the loser by it, cannot withhold his admiration of this parting proof his steward had given him of his ready-wittedness. He had humor enough to enjoy the man’s cleverness, candor enough to praise his prudence. “His lord commended the unjust steward,

because he had done wisely."

It is perhaps scarcely necessary to observe that it is merely the wisdom, the practical sagacity, the savoir faire of the steward that is commended to our attention and imitation. A bad thing may be well done. The most admirable qualities — industry, perseverance, bravery, quickness — may serve to accomplish a wicked as well as a righteous purpose. Few can withhold a tribute of applause from the forger who successfully copies a very difficult bank-note, or elaborates a professedly medieval document so as to deceive even the experts. No one commends the morality of David when he played the madman at Gath, and scrabbled on the gate, but who has not smiled at his skill in meeting the occasion, in overreaching all his enemies, and making them serve him by the simple device of hiding the brightest intellect of the age under the vacant, silly stare of the idiot? The wisdom of the unjust steward, which we are invited to admire, appeared mainly in his businesslike apprehension of the actual situation in which he was placed, and his sagacity and promptitude in making the most of it. He looked the facts in the face. He did not buoy himself up with delusive hopes. He did not waste his brief opportunity in idle expectations. He did not fool himself by thinking, "I'll never need any other home than the one I now have," but recognizing that he would soon be turned out of his present home and employment, and knowing that nothing is more desirable to a man out of a situation than a friend's house where he can be quite at home, he takes steps to provide this for himself. He manfully faced the inevitable, and this was his salvation. The ability to do so is a great part of what is known as a strong character. It is a great part of that wisdom of the children of this world, which surpasses the wisdom of the children of light. It is this that makes the successful general, the trusted statesman, the skilful man of business. To be able to distinguish between what we would wish to be the case, and what actually is the case; j to be able to brush aside all that blinds, and look steadily at realities — this is the beginning of practical wisdom. The wise man may, for example, ardently desire that his son should enter a certain profession, but he will not allow this desire to blind him to the qualities which unfit the lad for it; he will not fight against fate. By holding up for our imitation this style of man, our Lord suggests to us to inquire whether we are thus apprehending the situation. The children of this world have a clear idea of what they aim at, and they steadily and consistently pursue their aims. Their aim may be wholly "of this world;" but they are not distracted by desiring one thing, while they profess to be desiring another. They make everything subserve their actual purpose, and do not disguise the facts. Are we as clear-sighted and as single-eyed? Here is one large fact, for example, regarding our condition in this world. We are stewards who must shortly give account of our stewardship. Our opportunities are rapidly narrowing down. We should have had a very short and strong term to apply to this steward of the Parable, if he had made light of the message his lord sent him, — if he had said to himself, "I have been so long my own master, not interfered with, allowed to do as I like, and live comfortably, that I don't believe I am a steward. I am called a steward, but that is merely a title. If my lord does come, — though I do not believe he will, — it will be all right. He has always allowed me to do as I please, and I do not believe in this calling to account." Our friend of the Parable was no such fool. He knew how the case actually stood; he had a very lenient master, but he himself was but a steward.

I Let us also then be clear in our minds whether we are stewards or masters; whether we are to stay here for ever, or must shortly go hence and find another home; whether we are ourselves supreme, or whether we can be called to account. Let us face the facts of our existence here, and

understand the terms on which we live in this world. If we are stewards, set here to act justly, and faithfully to use for higher interest than our own whatever is in our power, then let us recognize that it is quite in vain for us to think of working any other principle. You might as well build a house on the understanding that never more will there be either wind or rain. Nature pays no respect to your understandings, but acts out her own laws without warning and without apology. You do not alter facts by hiding your eyes like the ostrich. You are called upon to assert your manhood by ascertaining what are the facts and laws of human life, and by frankly accepting them, knowing that they not only are inexorable, but are also the best for you. If we do not ascertain the very terms on which we are living, and using what we use, the judgment we must pronounce upon ourselves is certainly that we are dishonest, and fools into the bargain. But our Lord makes a special application of the example of the steward: “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when it fails, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.” The steward made use of his departing power over his master’s goods with such skill and effect, that when this power was taken from him he found himself welcomed into comfortable houses. You, says our Lord, ought to make such use of your opportunities, and especially of your share of the unrighteous mammon, that, when it fails you, and you cease to have any power over it, you may find yourselves welcomed into everlasting habitations. Doubtless this is a Parable specially for rich men, specially for those whose opportunities are considerable, who may be called stewards as having manifestly a responsibility to God on the one hand, and to men of inferior station on the other. The Parable is full of encouragement to such. It reminds them that the opportunity given them by being rich and influential is no slight one, that the power of wealth does not terminate with this world, that they need not greedily and fearfully try to get the utmost selfish enjoyment out of their money while they have it, because it must soon be beyond their power; but on the contrary, that they may so use it as to secure eternal comfort. They can so invest it that the interest shall be paid them as regularly in the world to come as here. They may, in short, be eternally the better for being rich men in this world. The love of money is the root of all evil, but the possession of it is an opportunity of much good.

It need scarcely be said that, if money is to serve this eternal purpose, it must be invested with some better feelings than the mere selfish foresight of the steward. And here lies the difficulty; a man may have love enough to give away a little, but he who has great wealth needs great love. It is like every other great opportunity, it needs some greatness in the man to use it greatly. At the same time it may be questioned whether in our day there is not just rather too much said against doing good for the sake of reward. The selfishness which buys an eternal inheritance at the price of great earthly advantages is not so very common a failing that much need be said against it. And, to say the least, the selfishness that can sacrifice money and earthly comforts for the sake of future and heavenly happiness is a nobler thing and a much better thing for the community than the selfishness which spends on display and pleasure without a thought of the future, or hoards with a view to satisfy the vulgar ambition of being rich, or without any view at all. But although this Parable was spoken to rich men, and for their special good, we have all more or less of the mammon of unrighteousness. Mammon is just the Syriac word for money, and it is called “unrighteous” or “unjust,” because those to whom our Lord was speaking had made their money by injustice. It was as little their own as the unjust steward’s was. The steward was unjust because he had not regarded himself as a steward; and in so far as we have forgotten this fundamental circumstance, we also are unjust. We may not have consciously wronged any man or defrauded

any; but if we have omitted to consider what was due to God and man, the likelihood is we have more money than we have aT right to. The name, indeed, “unrighteous mammon,” is sometimes sweepingly applied to all wealth and material advantages, because there is a feeling that the whole system of trade, commerce, and social life is inextricably permeated with fraudulent practises and iniquitous customs — so permeated that no man can be altogether free, or is at all likely to be altogether free, from all guilt in this matter. Take any coin out of your pocket and make it tell its history, the hands it has been in, the things it has paid for, the transactions it has assisted, and you would be inclined to fling it away as contaminated and filthy. But that coin is a mere emblem of all that comes to you through the ordinary channels of trade, and suggests to you the pollution of the whole social condition. The clothes you wear, the food you eat, the house you live in, the money you are asked to invest, have all a history which will not bear scrutiny. Oppression, greed, and fraud serve you every day. Whether you will or not you are made partakers of other men’s sins. You may be thankful if your hands are not soiled by any stain that you have wittingly incurred; but even so, you must ask, what compensation can I make for the unrighteousness which cleaves to mammon? how am I to use it now, seeing I have it? Our Lord says, “You are to make friends with it who may receive you into everlasting habitations.” You are so to use your opportunities that when your present stewardship is over you may not be turned out in the cold and to beggary, but may have secured friends who will give you a welcome to the eternal world. It is the same view of the connection of this world and the next which our Lord gives in His picture of the last judgment, when He says, “Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these, ye have done it unto Me.” Those whom we have done most good to are, as a rule, those whom we have most loved; and what better welcome to a new world, what more grateful guidance in its ways could we desire than that of those whom here on earth we have loved most dearly? Can you promise yourselves any better reward than to meet the loving recognition and welcome of those who have experienced your kindness: to be received by those to whom you have willingly sacrificed money, time, opportunities of serving yourself? The parents whose closing years you watched and sheltered at the sacrifice of the opportunities of your own youth, the children for whom you have toiled, the friend or relative whose long sickness you brightened and retarded by unwearied affection, the acquaintance you kept from poverty by timely intervention, the lad whose whole life you lifted to a higher level by giving him the first step — all those whom you have so loved here that your service of them has been ungrudging and unthought of — these are they who will receive you into everlasting habitations. But if any one staggers at such a reading of the Parable, there is no necessity that the “friends” be considered as persons. The word “friends” is used only for the sake of keeping up the figure introduced by the Parable, and may be legitimately applied to anything on which you spend yourself, and which you should like to renew acquaintance with in eternity. It is possible, this Parable reminds us, so to spend the time of our stewardship here that we shall hereafter live upon the happy results of what we have here done. The happy idea of the steward was to spend what was left in his hands, not on himself, but on those with whom he would have to do after he was ousted from office. It was this which showed his business capacity. An ordinary rogue would merely have exacted more from his master’s debtors and decamped with the whole. But far deeper was the plan of this astute individual; he would not eat his seed-corn in this rough style. The little he could make out of the few remaining transactions he could do for his master, he handed over to others, knowing that their friendship and good-will would return him a hundredfold. And you may do the same. Your life you may either spend or invest. You may use it

either as seed or you may devour it. You may so live that death will close all and shut you out into outer darkness, or you may so live that death shall usher you into an everlasting home, peopled with familiar faces that recognize and reassure you, and show you that in substance eternity is not so very different from time, and lead you to and assign to you your exact position in the eternal world and your real place among men. These brilliant and memorable apophthegms which form a kind of appendix to the Parable can be only briefly alluded to. The Parable is forgotten in the momentous reality it has served to set before our minds; and the great law is enounced, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.” Here are two great truths suggested to us: 1st, That we are here in this world merely on trial, and serving our apprenticeship; and 2d, That it is our fidelity that is tried, not so much whether we have done great or little things, but whether we have shown the spirit which above all else a steward should show — fidelity to the interests entrusted to him. The two verses following, in which this is applied, may best be illustrated by familiar figures. “If,” says our Lord, “ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust that which is real?” He considers us all in this world as children busy with mere playthings and toys, though so profoundly in earnest. But looking at children so engaged you can perfectly see the character of each. Although the actual things they are doing are of no moment or reality, although, with a frankness and penetration not given to their elders, they know they are but playing, yet each is exhibiting the very qualities which will afterwards make or mar him, the selfish greed and fraud of one child being as patent as the guileless open-handedness of the other. To the watchful parent these games that are forgotten in the night’s sleep, these buildings which as soon as complete are swept away to make room for others, are as thorough a revelation of the character of the child as affairs of state and complicated transactions are of the grown man. And if the parent sees a grasping selfishness in his child, or a domineering inconsiderateness of every one but himself, as he plays at buying and selling, building and visiting, he knows that these same qualities will come out in the real work of life, and will unfit their possessor for the best work, and prevent him from honorable and generous conduct, and all the highest functions and duties of life. So our Lord, observant of the dispositions we are showing as we deal with the shadowy objects and passing events of this seeming substantial world, marks us off as fit or unfit to be entrusted with what is real and abiding. If this man shows such greed for the gold he knows he must in a few years leave, will he not show a keener, intenser selfishness in regard to what is abiding? If he can trample on other people’s rights for the sake of a pound or two, how can he be trusted to deal with what is infinitely more valuable? If here in a world where mistakes are not final, and which is destined to be burned up with all the traces of evil that are in it, — if in a world which, after all, is a mere card-house, or in which we are apprentices learning the use of our tools, and busy with work which, if we spoil, we do no irreparable harm, — if here we display incorrigible negligence and incapacity to keep a high aim and a good model before us, who would be so foolish as to let us loose among eternal matters, things of abiding importance, and in which mistake and carelessness and infidelity are irreparable?

“And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?” A merchant sees among his clerks one whose look and bearing are prepossessing, and he thinks that by and by this lad might possibly make a good partner; he watches him, but he finds him gradually degenerating into slipshod ways of doing his work, coming down late in the mornings, and showing no zeal for the growth of the business, and so the thought grows in his

mind, “If he is not faithful in that which is another man’s, how can I give him the business as his own?” I can’t hand over my business to one who will squander what I have spent my life in accumulating; to one who has not sufficient liking for work to give himself heartily to it, or sufficient sense of honor to do it heartily whether he likes it or no. Much as I should like to lift him out of a subordinate situation, I cannot do so. Thus are determined the commercial and social prospects of many an unconscious youth, and thus are determined the eternal prospects of many a heedless servant of God, who little thinks that the Master’s eye is upon him, and that by hasting to be rich he is making himself eternally poor, and by slackness in God’s service is ruining his own future.

03.22. DIVES AND LAZARUS

DIVES AND LAZARUS

Luke 16:19-31 The Parable of the Unjust Steward was spoken for the purpose of encouraging rich men to make a right use of their wealth, as well as for the sake of reminding all Christians that the qualities which give success in the world and constitute practical wisdom are very much required in the kingdom of God. But the Pharisees, who were rich, and who under a show of godliness and piety kept a very firm hold on their money, laughed at the novel investment which our Lord proposed. In our day the views of Christ regarding the distribution of wealth are seriously discussed by political economists, and no one ventures to deride His suggestion. There are still, however, double-dyed Pharisees, who with decorous solemnity and without a shadow of a smile listen to our Lord's recommendations, but listen also without the slightest intention of allowing them any practical force, without one thought of giving them effect in their own life. The Pharisee who smiled incredulously in our Lord's face, and expressed pity for His ignorance of the world, was no match for our modern Pharisee, who can persuade himself he gives our Lord a reverent hearing though he does not dream of obeying Him. The satirical and mocking observations which began to fly round the crowd when the former Parable was closed, induced our Lord to expose still more plainly the folly of the Pharisees and rich men. They lived in the comfortable creed that wealth was a manifest sign, if not the manifest sign, of God's favor, while disease and poverty were the results of sin either in the sufferer or in his parents, a creed which had just truth enough in it to give it life and make it pernicious. They believed that the man who was wealthy here would be wealthy in the world to come, and that God could not but esteem that which commanded the admiration of the well-washed and decorous Pharisee. They had, to their own perfect satisfaction, reconciled the love of God and the love of money. They laughed at our Lord, therefore, when He told them that God and mammon were irreconcilable, and that to be rich and honored in this world was no sign whatever of riches and honor in the world to come. Our Lord, therefore, argues no further with them, but draws aside for a moment the curtain that hides the world of spirits and discloses to their view the after history of two men, one of whom had been opulent and powerful, the other nothing. He shows them what becomes of many highly respectable citizens, and what is frequently the result of the kind of life they chiefly admired. He takes them into the unseen world and gives them to understand that —

"Many there be who fill the highest place, Kings upon earth, who here like swine shall bide, Leaving but scorn and horror in their trace." The first figure our Lord sets before us in the Parable is intended as a mirror to the Pharisees. He is not intended to be depicted as a monstrous specimen of humanity or luxurious living. We do not read that his wealth had been unrighteously acquired. No doubtful speculations, no far too clever financing, no transactions generally condemned, are charged against him. He was simply a rich man, who had made his money in the usual way. Neither was he a miser who could not bear to spend what he had made; on the contrary, he liked to see his friends enjoying themselves at his expense. Had he been notoriously selfish and uncharitable, his gate would never have been chosen as the asylum of the beggar.

Indeed, this circumstance, that Lazarus was day after day laid there, points rather to a character for such Pharisaic almsgiving as would maintain his reputation as an observer of the law; for those who were careful enough to carry the beggar out in the morning would certainly set him where he would be pretty sure of being fed. The rich man did not refuse to have so loathsome an object at his gate, did not refuse to have his pleasure somewhat spoilt by the sickening sight, did not order his servants to drive the disgusting creature off his doorstep. Neither is it said that the man was a sensualist, curious in sauces and wines, knowing how everything should be cooked and in what season and with what relish it should be eaten. Not at all: he had money and liked to live pleasantly and brightly. He wore good clothes; not tissue of silver like Herod, nor anything that made him stared at in the streets, but merely, like fifty other rich men in his town, good linen next his skin and seemly purple over it. It is, in short, to his condition and not to his character our attention is in the first place directed. His character is shown by and by; but if we would receive the Parable in its full force, we must not anticipate its conclusion, but suffer ourselves to be led to it step by step. And this first step is to set before us a man surrounded by all the comforts of life and enjoying them to the full. In striking contrast to this affluent. easy, brilliant life is set the other extreme of the human condition. And here, too, nothing as yet is said of the character of Lazarus; it is only intended to paint vividly external circumstances as squalid, disgusting, and pitiable, as those of the rich Pharisee were enviable and glittering. While the gaily appareled guests throng into the mansion, while the sounds of mirth and dancing attract the passers-by, and the brilliant lights shed a radiance over all within, Lazarus lies through the weary hours in the outer darkness under the sweeping, chilling rain, waiting for the scraps that the hungriest slave casts out. Within, the Pharisee is receiving the flatteries of a hundred of his clients, and is wrapped round with all that nurses self-complacency; at his gate lies a helpless heap, a distorted wreck of a man that the dogs mistake for a carcass thrown out to them, and that men hurry past with a shudder. It is a contrast such as our own streets continually present, and if anything you have yourselves seen of the extremes of comfort and discomfort can add another touch to this picture, you are welcome to see remembered reality shining through the Parable.

There are some pictures so constructed that when the spectator is thoroughly impressed with the scene before him, a spring is touched, the picture turns on a pivot and exposes on its reverse side that which completes the intended impression. This picture is constructed on similar principles. The festive Pharisee and the diseased beggar filling the eye, the picture is in a moment reversed, and the Pharisee is seen dropped out of all comfort and affluence, craving a drop of water as a boon he has no means of procuring, while Lazarus is lifted to the pinnacle of human sufficiency and glorified above all earthly magnificence. There is something intentionally horrifying in the suddenness of the contrast. Fresh from his luxurious ease, Dives is in torments; quicker than a troop of bandits strip a traveler, is he stripped of all the inexhaustible equipment for comfortable living which had characterized him in life. In the suddenness, completeness, and terror of the contrast, it is comparable to that which passes under a brilliant southern sky where nature has been prodigal of her beauties, when there is but one moment’s murmur, and the earth opens, pours out its flood of fire, and the fruitful land lies a scorched and sterile waste.

It need scarcely be said that this is merely a pictorial or figurative representation. Disembodied spirits have not eyes, fingers, tongues, voices. But the impression conveyed to the reader is strictly true, that a man’s condition in this life may be reversed in the world to come. The truth our Lord

desired in the first place to enforce was, that what is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God — that while men hurry past Lazarus with sickening revulsion and seek the company of the luxurious Dives in his well-appointed house, it is from Dives that God turns with loathing. This is not at once made apparent, but in the ordinary course of things this judgment of God finds its counterpart in actual events and circumstances. And it is a pity that we should be so little able to enter into and sympathize with God's judgments; that our admiration should be so much spent upon rank, talent, wealth, success and prosperity. The man who invents a machine or makes a discovery which will facilitate business operations or add to the conveniences of life is at once raised to a pinnacle of fame; the author of a brilliant novel or the leader of a political party can scarcely make his way through applauding crowds. And it seems ungracious to turn the other side of the picture, and show their rank and place in a world where rank and place are determined solely by character. Yet the fact is that all things that make the greatest show in the world, wealth and power and genius, are the mere instruments with which character works, and are useful or hurtful according as the motive that wields them is good or evil. Let us learn then to esteem character, that it may not be said of us also, that what is highly esteemed by us is abomination in God's sight. It is of the essence of Pharisaism to be deceived by appearances, to have its judgment arrested on the outside and the surface, to be satisfied if the manners are good and the outward conduct respectable. It is weak and Pharisaic to be taken in by what is not of the essence of the man, and may be changed with circumstances, and must be left behind at death. And it is this way of judging by the outsides and accidents of things, that prepares those tremendous reversals of human judgment exemplified in the Parable. If men were now grouped and ranked according to their spiritual and moral qualities, how often would rags take precedence of purple, and the outcast from under the hedge be counted more valuable for all eternal purposes than the well-housed and respectable citizen. On the other hand, when tempted to murmur at the rougher portions of your lot, when you begin to look upon your misfortunes as punishment driving you from God, when you suffer your outward circumstances to regulate your inward peace, and find it hard to believe in the love of God when it sends you no better physicians than dogs, no ampler provision than crumbs from a rich man's table, remember Lazarus, and learn that the outward circumstances of this life is no index by which you may read the relation you hold to God; that you may have one value in this world, another in the world to come; that here outward circumstances are the training of saints, there the unmistakable indication of the spiritual condition, sinners there being the only sufferers.

If the Parable, however, merely exhibited the sudden and shocking reversal of human judgments and alteration of human conditions, it might be open to the charge often brought against it, that it Is a mere condemnation of wealthy men as wealthy and a defense of poverty. But the Parable at once proceeds to show on what the reversal of human judgment is founded — it goes on to show what the character of the rich man had been, what was the moral element and principle which ran through and determined his life upon earth. "Son, remember," says Abraham to him, "remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things." That is to say, if you desired equality with Lazarus in this world of spirits, you should have laid the foundation for it in giving him equality with you in your lifetime. Had you made friends with the unrighteous mammon which you so abundantly possessed, you would have been anxiously expected and welcomed by Lazarus and all those you blessed. Had you used your wealth as God's steward for the use of God's suffering creatures, you would now be enjoying pleasures greater than ever you

experienced on earth. You beg for the friendship of Lazarus now, and entreat his kindly offices; but you had the means of making him your friend while on earth. He is now beyond reach of your good things and friendship, and you are beyond reach of his. It is you yourself who allowed the contrast between you and Lazarus to abide, and it does abide. “Remember,” look back on your earthly life, reflect upon its opportunities and the way you used them, and you will understand the origin and the justice of your present condition; you will recognize that it is yourself who have fixed this yawning chasm between you and all permanent joy. You did not bridge the chasm between you in life — you did not leave your splendor to sit by his side, to hold his racking, weary head, to drive off the dogs and make him feel that at least in one human breast he had an asylum — you did not even send your servants to bring him in to an outhouse to lie among your cattle — you had everything that he needed and you left him in his need — you did not inquire into his necessities, nor penetrate through the rags and stench and poverty to the humanity they encased — you did not own him as a brother, and in anticipation of his lying in Abraham’s bosom at the banquet of eternal bliss, take him in to yourself — you stood aloof and separated yourself from him, and that separation abides. Had you shared with him on earth, you would have shared with him now. This is no doubt a pretty hard lesson to learn. And I believe those will feel its hardness most who have most desire to learn it; who have candor enough and integrity of purpose enough to look straight at our Lord as He utters this counsel, and to feel that if they are to maintain a conscience void of offense they must be clear in their own minds as to the use they make of money and advantages. It is startling, too, to find that the destiny of Dives was determined by his conduct towards this one poor man; little as he thought of him, it was this powerless creature who could not even crawl into his path and force attention, who was exercising a more determining influence on his future than any of those who thronged his banqueting rooms and discussed with him all his plans and new devices of money-making or money-spending. What one person is it who holds this relation to our life; perhaps as little thought of by us as Lazarus by Dives, and yet truly determining what we are to be and to have in eternity? The man whose wants you relieve sullenly, almost angrily; the man whose too frequently recurring necessities you resent and spurn; the person who crossed your path when you were too much occupied with your own joys to observe his face of starvation or disease; such persons, and they whose claims you now refuse to look at for a moment, are determining your eternal condition. But “beside all this”— the thing you ask is impossible. It is, in the first place, just that there should be this reversal of your condition; but supposing that Lazarus were willing to forget the long wretched hours he spent at your gate, or supposing that his experience of pain made him sensitive to yours and anxious to relieve it, the thing cannot be done. This too is an essential part of the Parable. The results produced by character and a life-long habit cannot be expunged in the easy way suggested by Dives. The consequences of a selfish life of pleasure cannot be reversed as soon as they begin to be uncomfortable and distressing. If you take the wrong turning at the entrance to a mountain pass, you may emerge very near your friend who has taken the right one, but with a yawning gulf between that no human agility can leap — the only way is to go right back and follow the path he has taken, and if it is too late to go back, if the night has fallen and the mist closed in around you, no beseeching of the inexorable hills will repair your error. So a life of easy careless selfishness leads to a moral condition, a state of heart and of lot, from which no sudden leap can bring a man into the company and condition of those who have passed through long years of purifying pain and patient endurance that have tested every fiber of their character.

It is a grave charge indeed that we are each of us entrusted with — to determine for ourselves the eternity in which we are to live. And are we to expect that this can be well done without thought, care, conflict, all that can prove us men and bring out our manhood? Does any one resent being called upon to be in earnest and to make this life an ideal and a noble life for himself? Does any one object to this life being a real trial of men, fitted to determine and actually determining what they really are? — Surely no right-minded person would shrink from a test that is real, that goes deep enough to search the very roots of evil and of good in us.

One would naturally expect that the Parable would close at this point. The doom of the selfish pleasure-seeker, of the man who does not use the means in his power to help the needy, has been clearly shown. It has been shown that if Pharisees on earth deride the proposal to serve God only and not mammon at all, the Pharisee who has left earth is in no laughing mood, is convinced of the justice of his doom and the impossibility of relief. And one would suppose this left no more to be said. But if no more had been said, the Pharisees, ever ready to justify themselves, would have said: This is a mere fancy sketch, spoken under provocation for the sake of alarming us. If things were as He represents them to be, some courteous ghost would blab it out — we should not be left by our father Abraham to glide on to such a doom, unstayed and unwarned. Anticipating such evasions, our Lord appends the pathetic supplication of Dives: “If I am past redemption, save my brethren; if no relief can reach me in this place of torment, hinder them from a similar doom.” And this request is introduced merely for the sake of bringing out that already all needed warning is given, and that the proposed additional warning would have no effect whatever — that is to say, the Pharisees are without excuse if they continue their attempts to make the best of both worlds. The statement of the Parable, however, to the effect that those who disregard Moses and the Prophets would equally disregard the appearance of a dead friend, is one which at first seems open to question. Who has not often longed to lift the veil and see for a little the actual condition of the dead? Who has not felt as if it would be so much easier to believe if we could but for one hour see? Who has not been ready to say with these Pharisees: Why not end all this doubt, all this plague of skepticism, all this brutality and worldliness, by sending back from among the dead some messengers who might be identified, and who might plainly tell us what they know, and allow us to cross-examine them? Could they be better employed? And if faith is so desirable, why is not everything done that can be done to give us faith? If there is a spiritual world in which it is so important that we believe, why are we not put in direct communication with it so that it would become as real to us as France or China or any country of whose existence we have no doubt, although we have never seen it? Is it possible that this world and a world so utterly different can be in so close a connection, as if separated only by a paper screen through which a man may any moment fall, and that yet we should so little know what passes in that world? Is it possible that that world can be filled with friends of our own, and yet not one of them whispers us a single word, no more than if there were no such world at all? Is it possible that men who are to-day fully occupied with this world, following its fashion and leaving the world of retribution to sober, religious people, may to-morrow find themselves in that world? And if so, why does not nature herself cry out to warn us from our ruin? Why do not the spirits of the dead return and command us to hold back?

Such feelings are natural, but they are misleading. The rich man’s brethren were heedless of the unseen world, not because they did not believe that any future state awaited them, but because this world’s pleasures absorbed their interes t. It was a profound moral change they needed, and

for effecting such a change, “ Moses and the Prophets,” the continuous revelation of God and His holiness in the past, was a much more powerful and appropriate instrument than an apparition. By such a messenger from the dead as the rich man proposed — supposing his message could be authenticated — our ideas of what lies beyond the veil might be altered, and fear might lead us to adapt our conduct to the revealed future; but could our character be thus changed? No revelation of punishment awaiting the evil-doer could avail to make us different in heart, or could unfix our real inward affections from sensual and worldly objects, and fix them upon God and what is spiritual and holy. Only the revelation to our own souls of the beauty of holiness, only the revelation of God, in the fullest sense of these words, can teach us to fix our hearts unalterably on God and all that lives with Him and in Him. Only by seeing and knowing Him can we learn to love Him; and only by loving Him are we perfected as men.

It is doubtful if even the information given by such a messenger — apart altogether from the effects such information might produce — would be of much value, or would be permanently accepted as valid. It is true, many in our own day are persuaded that they receive the most assured knowledge of the unseen world by holding direct communication with those who have entered it, and I would be slow to deny the possibility or actuality of all such communication; but as yet this method of discovering the unseen has merely shown how constant a craving for such knowledge exists in men, rather than that much assured and wholesome truth has been reached by it. He was more deeply instructed who rather shrank from any such reappearances of the dead, and anticipated the fruitlessness of any such comfort:

“If any vision should reveal Thy likeness, I might count in vain, As but the canker of the brain;

Yea, though it spake and made appeal To chances where our lots were cast Together in the days behind, I might but say, I hear a wind Or memory murmuring the past.”

It is not in that direction we need look for relief from our skepticism with all its unrest, vacillation, and brooding sadness. But does not God everywhere elude observation? Is God not unwilling that we should know Him? Does He not hide Himself? Are not clouds and darkness impenetrable round about Him? Not so. God seeks to make Himself known to you. He wishes to bring as much light as possible into your mind, and has used the best means of introducing that light. Why then do so many earnest men spend their years in a vain search for God? Why have so many most thoughtful and inquiring men missed the light they have all their days been looking for, and without which they have no joy in life? Partly, perhaps chiefly, because, like the rich man, each inquirer prefers some self-devised method of revelation to the method God has actually adopted. To those who understand that God is the One Living Spirit, all things reveal Him, He besets them behind and before, and though they should be oppressed by the presence and flee from it, God awaits them in their place of flight and they cannot escape Him. The intelligence discernible in all things, in their harmony and unity, in their universal subservience of one plan and contribution to progress — this is God. The holy love that is discernible in the law that governs human affairs — this is God. More discernible is this law in Jewish history than elsewhere, because the Jews awaited its working, and observed and recorded it, while other races mistook what they had to deal with. But if men look for a God that is not or where He is not, they cannot find Him. If they will not look at things as they actually are; if they will not consider what Moses and the Prophets teach; if they will not recognize the unseen Spirit that trained and guided and made Himself felt by Israel; if they

shut their eyes to the embodiment of that Spirit in Christ, and to His working since in millions of our race; if, that is to say, they exclude all that is most significant in human history, can we expect anything else than that the search for God elsewhere will be fruitless and disappointing? If we find God at all, we must find Him not spectrally separate from all known realities, but in and through all things that are, and especially in and through human history and our own souls.

Through all these things God reveals Himself to us, as to moral and reasonable creatures, who can be more profoundly influenced by appeals to conscience and reason than by startling and abnormal apparitions. And if from these things we can learn nothing about God and our duty to Him, still less are we likely to learn from necromancy. Conscience lies deeper in us and is a more essential organ than the eye, and if conscience responds to all that Moses and the Prophets, completed and interpreted by Christ, tell us about God, this is an infinitely worthier testimony to His existence and His truth than if an unsubstantial shade hovered before the eye, and in some hollow, sepulchral mutterings, warned us of the results of unbelief. If your faith is weak, do not wait for unusual manifestations or novel proofs of things unseen, but use the means of knowing God which others have found sufficient, and which God has actually furnished. Keep your mind saturated with the teachings and life of Christ, and what your conscience responds to, see that you act upon. For if the humble and loving tone of the morality you find there enters into your blood, the eyes of your understanding will become brighter to discern spiritual things. Begin at the right end, and with what is already within your reach. Begin with what you know to be true, that is, with what your conscience accepts. Begin with obedience, with gratefully accepting a light upon duty and upon your relation to the persons and things around you which you cannot but own to be the truest and best, and by following this light you will at length reach an atmosphere in which things will assume their right and true proportions. Thus will you earn the reward of humility and truthfulness of spirit, not outrunning your actual faith, but not lagging behind conscience; thus will you learn the truth of the Lord’s own words: “If any man do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.” The pure in heart shall see God; if not now, then hereafter.

03.23. THE UNJUST JUDGE

THE UNJUST JUDGE Luke 18:1-8; Luke 11:5-13. The two Parables of the Importunate Friend at midnight and the Importunate Widow illustrate the same idea, that importunity prevails irrespective of the character or disposition of the person on whom it is practised. Alike in this, the Parables differ inasmuch as the one has a genera], the other a special reference. The successful importunity of the midnight petitioner is a sample of the success that attends all persevering prayer. The widow's conquest of the surly judge is intended to encourage the disciples of Christ to the persistent expectation of His second coming, and to unwearied prayer for that good time when all their desires shall be fulfilled. All prayer is trying to the character, and few persons there are who can perseveringly offer the "effectual fervent "prayer which avails: but there is special temptation to faint in prayer for the coming of the Son of man. Wrongs are so slowly righted; wisdom, justice, and righteousness make such little way upon earth; misery and wickedness renew themselves with a vigor so unabated, that the most sanguine are often tempted to refer this to indifference on the part of Him who reigns and has all power. It is not easy to reconcile the meagre, unsatisfactory results of Christianity in the world with the claims and promises of Christ, and under the pressure of this difficulty many cease to hope and pray and sink into a bewildered or quite unbelieving habit.

These Parables, then, are meant to afford us effectual encouragement in prayer. Those who first faint in prayer and then cease to pray commonly do so from some kind of latent feeling that God does not regard them. Well, says our Lord, even supposing He does not regard you, do not give up asking, for even in the most unpromising circumstances persevering and importunate entreaty gets what it seeks. Take the most sluggish and selfish nature, the man who won't so much as get out of bed to do a friend a good turn, — you can make him do what you want by the very simple device of going on knocking till you cause it to dawn upon his slumbering brain that the only way to get the sleep he so much desires is first of all to satisfy you. Or take the other most unpromising case you can think of, that of a thoroughly and unscrupulously unjust judge. The man who, of all living Englishmen, knows the East best, says that "there are three ways of treating Asiatic officials — by bribe, by bullying, or by bothering them with a dogged perseverance into attending to you and your concerns," The two former methods being out of the question with a poor widow, she adopts the third. She does not go home and wail to her children, she does not content herself with regretfully wishing that a just judge occupied the judgment seat; she merely makes up her mind: "I will have justice. I will annoy, pester, harass, torment, plague him, until he sees that the easier course for himself is to look into my matters. I am but a poor, desolate, weak creature; but as the small insect can madden the hugest beast of the forest, so will I fix upon him until he shall be glad to get quit of me at any price." The principle which these Parables illustrate is well understood — the principle that importunity succeeds in wringing consent from the reluctant, relief from the niggardly, its own way from all. The dog that is driven from following his master understands that, if he only continue, his master will yield and give him his way. Never a child grew up ignorant of this, that prolonged, persistent crying can wring from a parent what has been absolutely refused at first.

It is to this principle the beggar trusts when he obstinately shuts his ears to denial, and follows supplicating till an alms is given, not to relieve him, but to relieve the giver. And it was on this principle the widow of the Parable acted, not counting at all on the charity of the judge, but still confident that she would get from him what he had no desire nor intention to give her; knowing that, if she only held to him, the time would come when he should be forced to say, “Because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.” There was nothing in the judge the widow could count upon. There was no influence, human or Divine, which this poor woman could bring to bear upon him. Would she threaten him with Divine vengeance and call heaven to I witness against his injustice? He would like it, he would count it a treat; he would call in his companions to help him to enjoy the widow’s anguish. Would she come meekly, piteously, and fall at his feet, pointing to her sackcloth and her train of helpless children? Would she hold up to him the little infant to smile in his face and melt the hard heart? He would drive her from his judgment seat with a curse, or he would jest with her, or turn to other business. Would she inform against him or expose him? He was already exposed, and had nothing to hide. Would she get help against him? But he was the man of whom all others were afraid. Here, in short, was a man of whom the description is intended to convey to us the idea that he was thoroughly impracticable, — that if in any circumstances a person might seem warranted in turning away hopeless, this widow was in such circumstances, and yet she obtained her request. The argument our Lord builds on these instances is very intelligible and very cogent. Reckon on finding in God no more readiness to hear and to help than you can count on in the most hardened and illiberal and selfish of men, and yet do not rest till you obtain your request from Him. Though you have not yet succeeded, and though you are beginning to think prayer utterly useless and a mere waste of time and of feeling, follow Him, cry after Him, lay hold on His skirt, and weary Him into compliance. Though, so far from indicating the slightest willingness to help and bless you, God had again and again repulsed you; though He had given you every reason to believe that He would never grant your request nor raise a finger to help you, yet the course which reason and your own interest approve is to persist in presenting your suit before Him. To do otherwise would be to prove yourselves bereft of the wit of this poor untrained widow, and even of the instinct of the inferior creatures. Though you had reason to believe that God has no love, no interest in you, that you are as unlikely to move Him as this widow who had none to speak a word for her to the judge, though all the world is saying, “There is no help for him in God,” and though your own soul is saying, “I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind,” yet you may have your desire. Only when you can say, There is nothing God can give me; only when you can say that already you have in actual and secure possession what you are ready to spend eternity with; only then can you reasonably cease to pray.

This, however, by no means exhausts the force of our Lord’s argument in the Parable. There is a “how much more” in it. The argument is not merely, If the unjust judge was thus coerced, you may also expect God to yield; but rather, If persistent entreaty prevailed with one who was resolved not to give, how much more will it prevail with one who is more anxious than the petitioner himself that justice be done. Suppose that the wisdom and integrity of the judge had never been questioned; that his name had become the synonym for righteous and equitable judgment; that every man who had a just cause rejoiced when appeal could be made to him; and that he was especially regarded by the poor and oppressed as their champion and defender; nothing but unpardonable weakness could have made the widow despair of being heard by such a man. Suppose that her case

required delay, and that the judge had assured her of this in the tenderest and most encouraging terms that could be used from his seat of office — would she not have been almost worthy of misery had she gone from court grumbling or fearful? Suppose still further that during the whole term of her suit the judge was doing her many acts of kindness, providing for her children, reminding her of his friendship for her deceased husband, assuring her on his oath of the ultimate success of her appeal, sending her every morning some little token to keep her heart up — can you conceive any one so unreasonable as to cherish suspicion in such circumstances? But even such a state of matters does not represent our own relation to God in prayer. For it is absolute justice, absolute faithfulness, absolute simplicity of purpose to bless us, with which we have to do. In our day fainting in prayer arises not from any direct doubt of God's goodness so much as from the belief that, however much He was concerned in setting this world in motion at the first. He has retired from any active interference in its affairs, and allows it to be regulated solely by laws inherent in things themselves, or at any rate actually in existence and inexorable. We all find that this world, with ourselves and all else that is in it, is under certain laws — laws of nature, as we call them. We find that a certain never-failing order of things is established. The sun rises every morning without fail, without fail it shines on us more in summer than in winter; the tides ebb and flow in unaltering and calculable order; certain diseases have a course that can be predicted. Wherever we recognize this inflexible course of things, we accept it as the order established by God's will and submit ourselves to it. A man may know that the rising of to-morrow's sun will bring with it death or misery worse than death, but he does not pray that the sun may not rise. He knows that, pray as he may, the sun will rise. The godly maiden, who for her faith was bound to a stake within reach of the tide, did not pray that the tide might be stayed in its flow; or, whether she prayed or not, the tide, gradually and precisely in its usual manner, came in, making no recognition of her prayers or of her condition. The most believing of men ceases to pray for the life of a friend who is declared and seen to be drawing near to death. In such cases it becomes apparent to the petitioner that his desires are not consistent with the will of God, and he feels that to continue to pray would be not reverent but irreverent. But it is argued, and with much plausibility, that every future event, every occurrence of any kind that may in any way affect us, is already as certain as the death of a man incurably diseased. The storm which wrecks the ill-fated ship is not aroused by chance, but by definite though sometimes obscure and complicated causes. And if the wife or mother who prays for those at sea saw these causes, would not prayer die from her lips, and the chill of despair freeze the warm utterances of faith? The prayer is uttered because the event is not seen to be certain; the effect is not seen in the cause; but an enlarged knowledge of the laws of nature, a j deeper insight into the connection of one thing with another, would see that only one event is possible, and that it is useless hoping for any other. Every man ceases to pray when he sees what is going to happen. But everything is as certainly produced by causes already in existence, as that effect which he distinctly foresees. We pray because we are ignorant of what is going to take place; but if our knowledge of all the laws of nature were as accurate as our knowledge of some of them is, we should altogether cease to pray.

Many persons, moved by such representations, do abandon the practise of prayer. We may suppose one of their number stating his case in this way: I believe in God. I believe that every law which regulates the course of things in this world is of His appointment, and is therefore the best possible. I am perfectly satisfied with what I receive from the operation of these laws; any suffering I have to endure I recognize as perfectly just. I am aware that the government under which I

should have been perfectly happy could not have been a just government. I am content to live on under these laws, and I resign myself to them. But when you ask me to pray, you perplex me. I can worship God: I can come to Him morning and evening and acknowledge Him and delight in Him. But when you ask me to be continually laying before Him some request for His interference with the natural result of those very laws He has appointed as the best; when you bid me ask Him for anything which would not come to me by the operation of natural laws, you perplex me wholly. Prayer, instead of being the strength and joy of my religion, has been my permanent difficulty, an insoluble puzzle. I seem to have more faith in God when I do not pray. I find it easier to believe in God when I think of Him as the Author of nature who knows that “we have need of all these things,” than when I am asked to supplicate His interference with the established order of things. And yet the reasoning which results in prayerlessness is not so conclusive as it seems. This reverence for the order of nature, on which it proceeds, does not prevent its devotees from resisting its laws to the utmost and from endeavoring to manipulate them to their own advantage. They check the natural course of a disease, and thwart the operation of the laws which govern disease, by the skill that comes of accumulated observation and experiment. They do not allow nature to take its course, but guide it so as to avert threatening danger. May not God do the same? May not the subtle, incomprehensible Intelligence that resides in nature and upholds it, guide it in ways and to issues unattainable by our puny efforts?

There are two powers which we ourselves possess and which we cannot but ascribe to God also. We have, first, a power in our own wills to move our own bodies. This power is mysterious and not as yet understood. We cannot understand how a spiritual force such as that of the will can become a physical force, lifting the arm, moving the lips, and so forth. But, understood or not understood, the power exists. God, though unseen and spiritual, has the same power directly to move material things and effect His will in them. To this power the limit can only be in God Himself, not in any external obstacle.

We have also a power to play off one law of nature against another; to make a balloon rise, e.g. by using the law of the levity of gas to counteract the law of gravitation. We can make one ingredient in nature counterwork another, and so use its right hand against its left as to make it harmless where otherwise it would be hurtful. The law that guides a disease to a fatal issue we can defeat by the help of another law which gives to certain remedies power to check and remove the disease. By adjusting one law of nature to another, by bringing together things naturally separate, and by directing the course of natural law into channels of our own devising, we can bring about results of the most surprising kind, and which could never be brought about by nature herself. The telescope, the hydraulic press, the railway, the telegraph — these are not natural results, but they are results of natural laws manipulated by human ingenuity. This power to use nature for purposes she could never of herself accomplish, we cannot but ascribe to God as well as to ourselves. We cannot but believe that if there be a God, a conscious, intelligent, individual existence at the root of all that is, He must have this power of playing off one law of nature against another, and of so guiding, controlling, and adapting the whole of nature and every part of it as to work out His own purposes. He has this power, not in the measure we have it so that we can produce results which seem miraculous to the uninitiated, but absolutely and without measure so that He can produce results inconceivable and incomprehensible. But even though God’s power to answer prayer be not questioned, it may still be doubted whether He can be expected to depart from His purpose or

“plan” of all that is to be. It is sometimes said to be impious, irreverent, blasphemous, to ask God to allow our wills to influence His, our wisdom to instruct His, our interests to counterbalance the interests of the universe. But it is obvious that God’s plan may have included this very thing, that certain results are to be brought about by prayer. God’s eternal will and knowledge embrace not only certain ends that are to be accomplished, but all that is to bring about these ends. His design is not an outline or skeleton draft of the future, but an outline filled in with every detail. It is very conceivable that God may have ordained that such and such things take place in connection with and as the result of the prayers of those who wait upon Him; and if so, prayer cannot be considered an interference with His plan, but a fulfilment of it. But that which too frequently gives force to all objections is our own experience of the slender results of prayer. We faint in prayer, and gradually become formal and remiss, because our own prayers have so often been apparently in vain. We believe in hard work, because what we work for we get. We can see in our life the results of hard work; but some of us are ready to say we can see in our possession not one thing which we might not equally have had, had we never prayed. This is the temptation not only of the individual, but of the Church. All Christian people have been praying for eighteen centuries that the kingdom of God might come, and how small an appearance of answer has there been. But convincing as the evidence of experience IS, we may misconstrue experience, and must balance it by considerations which also have weight. We must consider that there may be good reason for not answering some prayers, and also that our Lord foresaw that it would be difficult to maintain faith and therefore encourages us to do so. That there may be reason for not answering some prayers we cannot but admit. We are aware that we have uttered unseasonable, ill-considered, petulant, unholy prayers. It cannot but make us ashamed to reflect how frequently we have besought God to pander to the most unworthy feelings, to make provision for the flesh, to satisfy our own petty ambition, to gratify some earthly passion. Prayers which at bottom are dictated by mere self-love, sensuality, ambition, envy, revenge, covetousness, are not heard. And if in our conscience we know that the disappointment of our desires was calculated to do us more good than their gratification; if, that is, we recognize that the consideration which refused our petitions was really deeper than that which should have granted them; then we see how right and reasonable has been the delay in answering us. And such delays are teaching us more and more that it is when we “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness “that we are answered speedily; it is when we get up above what is merely selfish, individual, and earthly, and rise to the region in which we begin to see what it is God is aiming at and counts worthy of His effort, it is when our hearts are enlarged by a knowledge of His purposes, and we begin to seek the common good and blessings that are eternal, that we feel confidence in prayer and know it must prevail.

Answers are delayed, too, because the prayer was not hearty. God has made no promise to answer insincere prayer; and that prayer is insincere which is not followed up by hearty efforts to obtain the thing sought. Or it is so formal that, though the answer came, we should not recognize it. Angels are at our gates, but because their wings are folded and we have not traced their descent from heaven, we do not notice them nor invite them to abide with us. We lose thus a thousand of God’s gifts, not recognizing that the very thing we need is brought within our reach. We see the change of circumstances, not the fresh opportunity; we feel the disappointment, not the hand of God giving us humility; we recognize the bitterness and the sorrow, but not the heavenly mind and abandonment of worldly ambitions which they enfold.

Again, there is an order in God's gifts, and we cannot have the greater unless first we have the less. We ask God to give us this or that grace, as if it could be suddenly conferred upon us, irrespective of our present character; and we ask it without considering how much we ourselves may have to do and to suffer before we can attain it. Character has an organic Integrity and a consecutive growth as a tree has. You cannot expect fruit if there has been no blossom. No power can cause fruit to grow before a branch has grown to bear it. But in many of our petitions we ask God to give us fruit without either branch, blossom, or time. We ask Him to build the top story of our house before the lower story is begun. We wish ability to accomplish certain objects before we have the fundamental graces out of which that ability can alone spring. Your child asks you to give him your skill in calculating or your knowledge of a language; what can you do? You can only say to him, "My boy, these things cannot be immediately given. I can only see that you are educated and help you to persevere, and one day you will have the knowledge you ask. But it cannot be given; it must grow. You cannot get it without me, but neither can you get it without much hard work of your own." So when we are suddenly put to shame by our lack of Christian temper, or courage, or charity, or sobriety of mind, or unworldliness, we as suddenly ask Christ for the grace we need, apparently supposing that it is as easily manufactured and assumed as a new suit of clothes; that we have just to give the order and put on the readymade habit. Let us deal reasonably with God. Let us bear in mind that many of the gifts we are in the habit of asking are such qualities of soul as can be produced only by long and painful processes. You ask for humility. Do you consider that in so doing you ask for that which makes humility humiliation; for failure, mortified vanity disappointed hopes? You ask for a heavenly mind. Do you consider that in so doing you ask to be led forward to those painful times which compel men to feel that here they have no permanent home? You ask to be near Christ and like Him. Can you be baptized with His baptism, can you drink of His cup? But undoubtedly that on which we chiefly and wisely fall back is the plain command of our Lord, that we should continue praying. Very often we have just to own we do not see all round this matter, and abide by the unmistakable promise which built up our Lord's own strength, "Ask, and ye shall receive." If there was one thing more than another He taught about God, it was just this, that He answers prayer; if there is any truth, any meaning in His plain assertion that He knew God, and that by having been in heaven He understood how heavenly things are managed, then there can be no doubt that if we go on asking we shall receive, and that if we go on knocking at that door which now is shut we shall one day find entrance to the light we crave, and pass through all that bars our progress. This is the time of seeking, this is the time when we may reasonably say, "We are but of yesterday, and know nothing;" it becomes us, therefore, to believe, to inquire, to be diligent in seeking what our highest instincts prompt us to, assured that one day the door shall be open to those who have besieged it, and that we shall have what we now crave and enter on the fruit of all honest effort.

03.24. THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

Luke 18:9-14 The purpose of this trenchant Parable is explicitly stated. It was leveled at those who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.” Such a temper is offensive in whatever field of conduct it is displayed. It must not be confounded with humble self-reliance. It is quite possible to have a correct estimate both of one’s own merits and of other people’s. A military commander frequently conjoins with entire self-confidence a salutary respect for the skill and strength of the force that opposes him. But a self-confidence which exhibits itself at the expense of other men, and counts its merits exceptional, is offensive, and if not empty and delusive is at least foolish. Self-admiration effectually excludes a man from the admiration of others; and although self-confidence will often carry a man over many of the ordinary difficulties of life, it almost certainly betrays him into greater difficulties. That religion, whose function it is to render men humble and loving, should actually in many instances make them self-satisfied and contemptuous, calls for explanation. And the explanation is not far to seek. Human nature displays itself in religion as in everything else with which men have to do. The men who in the ordinary walks of life seek a cheap success carry their slothful ambition into religion, and crave an eminence that costs them little. The shallow characters that are content to have the appearance without the reality, reputation without worth, applause without desert, priority and high station without superior excellence, are content to be accepted as godly, although void of the love of God. And this lack of integrity and downright thoroughness, this craving for appearance and reputation irrespective of reality and excellence, is so common in every community that morality and religion tend to be dissociated. There are always persons who wish to be recognized as eminently religious; their desire for recognition exceeds their craving for that which deserves it, and unconsciously they erect a standard of judgment which is at once easy of attainment and out of the ordinary reach.

Pharisaism was the ripest historical manifestation of this constant tendency, and has therefore given its name to similar manifestations in all ages. With a single touch our Lord brings out in the Parable the two characteristics of all Pharisaism — its ambitious motive and its false standard. The Pharisee of the Parable thanks God he Is not as other men; his religion has been rather an affair between him and other men than between him and God. His object in cultivating religion has been to surpass other men and win their favorable judgment; and now that he has made good for himself the claim to be a religious man he is satisfied. Further, the standard of comparison which he uses, and by applying which he fancies himself superior to others, is one not of morality but of superficial purity and formal observances; he is not an adulterer, nor an extortioner, and he fasts twice a week.

It is this tendency to judge by outward acts rather than by the essential character, and to substitute observances for righteousness, which constitutes the danger of Pharisaism. Anxious rather to have the credit of being righteous than actually to be so, the Pharisee thinks it enough to maintain

an outward purity of life. The letter of the law he knows he must satisfy, and in all matters to which that letter applies he is careful and exact. But while attending to his conduct so far as it meets the eye, he is careless of the state of his heart. The man, the real nature and permanent dispositions, are overlooked, and nothing is thought of but the conduct. The idea grows that good actions make a good man, and it is forgotten that unless the man is good the actions cannot be good. The Pharisee holds that good fruit makes the tree good, and does not believe that only if the tree is good can the fruit be good. His own eternal character he is little concerned about, if only he has a good reputation: the real good of men is not the object of his moral endeavors, and so he is satisfied if he seems to be fulfilling the law. There is thus propagated a misconception of morality all round; a misconception of its nature, of its use, of the means of its attainment. Morality being thus misconceived, religion also is misconceived. The Pharisee, aiming only at a superficial and selfish morality, feels no need of coming into a living fellowship with the root of all goodness in God. It is impossible, therefore, he should understand what religion is. But seeking to have a conspicuous religion, he finds this in a routine of observances which can be performed irrespective of character, by good men and bad men alike. Certain observances are added to the moral law, and by degrees these observances take a higher place than the common duties of life. These extras come to be considered the distinctive mark of a religious man, so that each person's status or rank in the religious world is determined by his observance of these, and not by his regard to justice, charity, truth, purity. And when Pharisaism dominates in any community, men are actually judged irrespective of character, and their position as religious or irreligious persons is determined by their observance or non-observance of certain outward forms and practises which have no necessary connection with morality. If inquiry is made regarding a man's religion, if it is asked whether he is a religious or an irreligious man, such features of his life are cited as, that he has prayers in his family night and morning, that he is regular in his attendance at church, that he takes an interest in ecclesiastical affairs, but not that he is honorable and straightforward in business, helpful to his relatives, careless of display and of gain. It is obvious that a man of no character can fast twice a week, and will do so if he can thereby secure his own ends. Of all such observances we may use Paul's language and say, "Meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse." The Pharisee thus misapprehends the meaning and use of religious observances, and distorts the relation between morality and religion. The great end of religion is to bring us into perfect harmony with God, a harmony which is not the merely apparent and temporary alliance which can be effected by compulsion or outward arrangement, but the thorough unanimity and eternal fellowship which result from identity of will and similarity of character. In a word, the great end of religion is to make us like to God — to make us just and loving, truthful and pure. Religion has not done its work until we are in very truth the children of God; and we cannot be called religious men, in any but a most superficial and misleading sense, until we are morally like God. In order to accomplish this great end of religion a certain training is needful, and this training is aided by the observance of certain practises, rites, and forms of worship. Prayer, worship, attendance on ordinances, and so forth, are requisite as means for the attainment of the knowledge and love of God out of which holiness springs. Unfortunately, the practise of these observances is much more obvious as a distinctive mark of religious people than the result of them in exceptional holiness of life. Not all who profess religion become more upright and less worldly than their neighbors, but all who profess religion do attend church and maintain certain appearances of godliness. And in consequence, these observances

become identified with religion, while a high and pure morality does not become so identified; and in determining whether a man is or is not religious, attention is turned to a few habits, whose real importance lies solely in what they accomplish and not at all in themselves. And thus Pharisaism is encouraged; and men who would not for the world go to bed without saying their prayers, or who make a great scruple about it, make no scruple at all about slandering or cheating their neighbor, about being cold and sullen and tyrannical at home, greedy in business, vindictive and violent in their dealings with men.

Evidently no perversion of religion could be more fatal than this substitution of the means for the end. To make religion consist in repeating prayers, observing fasts, attending ordinances, upholding rites, is to reduce it to a pernicious, delusive, deadening, worse than useless burden, which reasonable men must and ought at once to abolish. To encourage men to imagine that they have attained the summit of human excellence when they can fast twice a week is plainly to burlesque religion. To induce men to measure their religious attainment by their diligence in any kind of ritual observances is simply to fatally delude them. Religion, instead of being the very life of the spirit, giving it its true place in the universe and imparting to it eternal principles, is transformed into a mere matter of external performances, which might be as accurately discharged by a soulless automaton. The character developed by such a conception of religion is obnoxious alike to God and man, offending God by a superficial homage and alienating men by self-satisfied pride. The God of the Pharisee is not the loving Father of all men, but a distant, self-seeking Sovereign who must be propitiated by rites and ceremonies and sacrifices, and who cares little for the love of men and has little interest in their genuine spiritual growth. The Pharisee's religion is a mere tax paid to this unattractive and impossible Being, and not an essential of human life. And the more diligent in his religion the Pharisee is, the less capable does he become of cherishing any rational and large views of God's relation to the world and of His work in it.

Such a religion stunts his humanity as well, and instead of softening him and widening his sympathies and expanding his heart and his life, by the consciousness that God is his and will control the future, it contracts and hardens his whole nature. He is recognizable by his "despising others." A just estimate of the difference in natural advantages which makes that easy to one which is impossible to others; an intelligent comparison of the various difficulties with which different men have to contend; a perception of what perfectness of character really is, tends to make good men slow to pronounce upon their neighbors. They know something of their own frailty, and how much depravity lies hid under a fairly righteous conduct; they know how obstinately the heart clings to natural vices of thought and feeling, and how insecure the attainment already made seems to be, and how remote from a state in which sin is impossible, and feeling how slight and hardly won their own victories are, they have sympathy with the defeated and are slow to condemn them. Besides, the chief element in true growth is growth in love: no man is making permanent growth in character who is not growing in sympathy, in pity, in helpfulness, in all that connects him with his fellow-men. To be perfect is to be able to add much to the good of the world, that is to say, to have the disposition and the ability to help weaker men against vice and its consequences. The attainment in godliness which is content with looking down on sinful men and keeping its own garments clean is no attainment at all. And any true discernment of the actual terms on which the battle of right and wrong has actually to be fought out by men in this world makes it impossible to despise those who fall. Pharisaic contempt can only result from a total misapprehension of what

human virtue consists in and of how it is attained.

Foolish, hateful, and fatal as these views of religion are then, we must beware lest we ourselves be infected with the leaven of the Pharisees. We are so, when we allow our attention to the forms of religion to hide from us our neglect of its inward spirit; when we can detect the slightest disposition to judge our religious life by its manifestations in worship rather than by its manifestations in conduct; when we allow ourselves in a self-satisfied comparison with those who do not carry so many of the external marks of religion as we do, but who surpass us in generosity, in honor, in kindliness, even in a self-abasing consciousness of sin. We are infected with the leaven of the Pharisees when we in any way mistake means for ends; when we read the Bible or pray as if these occupations were duties to be done for their own sakes and not for the sake of the result they have; when we are satisfied with having attended church, though it has done us no good; when we allow religious service to be an end in itself and not a means towards something beyond itself. We are infected with the leaven of the Pharisees when we look more to the duties we do than to the spirit and motive from which they spring; when we become satisfied with ourselves because we do certain things which other men do not, and when in place of lowliness and charity our religion is producing in us self-complacency and either a hard contempt or a compassionate patronage of other men.

This, then, is the type of religion our Lord exhibits in the Pharisee of the Parable. He sets before the mind's eye of His hearers a person they were very familiar with and secretly abhorred, though they feared to express their abhorrence. They daily saw the man enter the temple with scrupulous conformity to every prescription of the law of Moses and of the traditions of the elders — having undergone all the required ablutions, with phylacteries fastened in the most approved fashion, his face shining with sanctimonious self-satisfaction, or, on fast days, carefully left un. washed and untrimmed, that it might be seen he had been fasting, pompously and decorously approaching the place of prayer, and with measured phrase, disturbed by no agitating emotion, uttering his unwitting self-condemnation. The prayer our Lord puts into his lips looks at first sight like a caricature, and we find it difficult to believe that any man, however dyed with Pharisaism, could be so absolutely self-complacent in his superiority as this prayer indicates. But not only are there actual prayers on record which rival this in blind self-adulation, but it is certainly not an overdrawn picture of the Pharisaic mind. In contrast to the superficial religion of forms, our Lord sets true heart-religion. Over against the Pharisee, satisfied with himself and despising others, stands the publican, so occupied with his own sinful state that he cannot think of other men. There is no comparison instituted between the Pharisee and the impenitent sinner, though even such a comparison might not be altogether to the advantage of the clean-living Pharisee; for self-satisfaction is a more obstinate bar to progress than the vices of men who make no pretensions to virtue. But between the Pharisee and the penitent publican the comparison must be wholly in favor of the latter. Here is a man who unconsciously goes direct to the heart of religion. By a simple recognition of his actual condition he shoots at a bound far ahead of the Pharisee. The very circumstance that his sins are gross and undeniable is in his favor. Condemned as he is by the judgment of men, he feels himself to be inexcusable; and aided thus by the conscience of others, his own conscience loudly accuses him. The true penitent is identified by every mark of humble and sincere contrition: he stands afar off, his shame will not suffer him to lift up his eyes; in his misery he beats his breast; he cannot, so deep in his sense of guilt, even address God directly,

but merely ejaculates, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” It is the picture of a man thoroughly alive to all the shame and misery of sin. His sin is past apology, extenuation, or explanation. It is the grand feature of his life: he has nothing else to speak of; it occupies his thoughts. He has not the remotest idea that anything acceptable to God can be found in him. “A sinner”— that is the term that describes him. Mercy is the only attribute of God he dare appeal to. He does not buoy himself up with any remembrance of almsdeeds or prayers in the past, nor with any promise of amendment. His is a case that it is in vain to disguise; he does not attempt to give any account of it: he can but utter the one cry that is left to the man who knows his whole life has been wrong and that no power of reparation is now left to him.

Such a condition is probably not rare. Rare it may be in instructed and religious circles, where penitence is urged as a duty; but probably not rare among those who have not put themselves much in the way of religious instruction and whose penitence is the sincere and genuine growth of their own experience of the fruits of sin. Life is the most effective teacher; and where elaborate doctrinal instruction often produces only Pharisees, life produces true penitents. And plainly our Lord means to shed a ray of hope into those dark regions which lie outside the pale of ecclesiastical teaching; for though both men were praying in the temple, the impression is left on the mind that the publican was a somewhat unfamiliar visitant of the place of prayer. The ignorant cry of the sinner, almost crushed with despair, has in it, our Lord would say, the germ of a new life. The moment of heart-broken hopelessness is like the sinking in death of the old life, which makes way for a new hope in God and a new life in Him. To be absolutely broken in our own self-confidence and stopped in our own way is the turning point which brings us to God’s everlasting way. It is an experience full of wretchedness, but only by a clear recognition of our actual state can amendment be begun. If we are to find our life in God, life in self must be proved futile. If we are to use intelligently the helps God affords us, we must see our dangers. If salvation from sin is to be rational and real, it must meet us where we are and be applied to us as we are. We must face the actual truth about the relation which our life holds to perfect holiness. We must fairly judge ourselves by a perfect life and own to all actual derelictions of duty. We are not summoned to penitence as a seemly and suitable acknowledgment of God; we are summoned to own and face the truth, to touch and take to do with reality, to look at life as it really is and ourselves as we really are; and if the truth about our own life and character does not compel shame and humble us before God, we are not asked to force a penitence that is not natural and reasonable. The circumstance that the humble, brokenhearted publican went down to his house justified rather than the Pharisee, shows us that there is no true religion without a consciousness of sin; that the consciousness of God involves a consciousness of sin, as the strongest light casts the darkest shadows. God is so subtly interwoven with all things, and especially with all that is moral, that we cannot know Him until we know human life, and cannot know human life until we know Him. The two grandest parts of knowledge go hand in hand and grow together. And you can always tell how much a man knows of God by ascertaining how much he knows of his own sin. By the knowledge of God he is lifted into quite a new point of view. When he knows something of the love, patience, and sacrifice of God, he finds himself in anew moral world, in the presence of principles and purposes infinitely exalted above those he has been familiar with, and applying to all things a scale immeasurably higher. When the life of Jesus Christ is taken seriously as the one standard or mirror for all human life, when it is seen to be the Divine idea for us all, we cannot but sink in shame at the contrast it presents to our own. And to which of us is the prayer of the

publican unsuitable? Which of us has not sinned without excuse? Who among us can invite God's strict judgment? Would it not be the part of candor and honesty to go to God as frankly and humbly as the publican, and supplicate God's mercy? Must we not be living an altogether delusive life if we are living with sin unconfessed? Is it possible we can be satisfied with our life while we have been at no pains to ascertain how sin is to be dealt with? And is it possible we can leave a sinful past behind us and pass on to the future with principles unchanged, with no certainty that the future will be better than the past, with no real hope or assurance that we are advancing towards a sinless and perfect condition? To the real penitent this Parable is meant to bring encouragement. It plainly says that God will not despise the prayer of the contrite. When the heart fails under a sense of sin, when the whole of life is filled with darkness, then God is near and accepts the penitent. To be hopeless is at all times mistaken and wrong. To be hopeless is to be godless, and no man is godless however he may have denied God and forsaken Him. He has a God still, a God ready to forgive, delighting in mercy; and if nothing else convinces him of God's nearness, his own sense of sin ought to do so, proving, as it does, the supreme importance of all moral relations. THE END

Chapter 47

04.00. The Prayer That Teaches us To Pray

THE PRAYER THAT TEACHES US TO PRAY BY MARCUS DODS, D.D.

LONDON HODDER AND STOUGHTON 27, PATERNOSTER ROW

1900

4S234 ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

CONTENTS. THE PRAYER THAT TEACHES US TO PRAY1 BY MARCUS DODS, D.D.1 Chapter I. “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven.”1 Chapter II. “Hallowed be Thy name.”10 Chapter III. “Thy kingdom come.”19 Chapter IV. “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”29 Chapter V. “Give us this day our daily bread.”37 Chapter VI. “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”46 Chapter VII. “ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”57

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Matthew 6:9-13.

04.01. After manner therefore pray ye: Our Father

Chapter I. “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven.”

FAR better than all instructions and precepts about prayer is this simple model. Using this, we learn both how to pray and what to pray for. And when we have learned this prayer, it will be time to consider how we shall expand the teaching of our Lord. If it is “after this manner” we are to pray, then who can restrain prayer on the ground of lack of time for devotion? This is the “five words with understanding” preferable to ten thousand of formality or repetition. Here is no vain and heathenish babbling, as if the length of our prayer were to measure the value of its answer; nor any explanatory repetition, as if God did not know what things we have need of. But there is here only a straightforward laying before God of one desire after another. Simplicity and brevity are discernible at a glance, and are taught at the first lesson. But if it is “ after this manner “ we are to pray, then who can restrain prayer on the ground of mental inability to pray? For here are desires presented before God with the barest possible clothing of words. Elaborate language, then, is no essential of prayer; nor yet ingenious thought, nor the observant penetration of spirit which discovers the minute or hidden wants of man. Only so much language is required as makes the desire audible. We are backward in prayer, not because it is too difficult, but because it is too simple for us. It is so unlike our other ways of gaining and getting, that we are always trying to make it something more than it is, an asking for what we want. And to every man this model prayer says, “ If you want nothing from God, then do not pray you cannot pray; but whatever you want from Him, ask for, and you pray “. This prayer, however, is a model as much for its matter as its manner. So that we ought not only to imitate, but use it. We are not to be satisfied if our prayers have some general resemblance to it, but we are to use the very words taught us by our Lord. Does some one think that it may do well enough for beginners, or for ordinary occasions, or to eke out some petitions of our own devising, but that an advanced spiritual condition demands something fuller and richer? So apparently thought one of our Lord’s disciples; for we read in the narrative of Luke that, when the disciples saw Christ pray, one of them asked to be taught to pray; hoping, probably, to receive some fuller, more striking, more sublime petitions. But what says our Lord? Not only, as here, “ After this manner pray ye “; but, “ when ye pray, say “. And there is no getting past the evident precept here delivered, that we ought habitually to use these words. And as we use them, we shall find that though we learnt them at our mother’s knee, it takes a lifetime to fill them with their meaning, and eternity to give them all their answer. If these be our leading and guiding desires, it matters less what else we are seeking. But if these be not at all among our desires, then we are not being led in the best direction, and have yet to learn what these petitions include, and how desirable their contents are. To let this prayer lie with all the riches of its promise in our view, and not to use it, is to be cruel to our own souls as Saul was to his men, when he commanded that none should put forth his hand to take of the honey that was dripping from the trees of the wood, which taken would enlighten the eyes and give strength to the faint. Are we anxious to know what future lies before us? Let us pray this prayer and we become prophets of our own future, surely knowing that these are the things which shall be; for by commanding us so

to pray, our Lord has given us sure pledge of the fulfilment of these things. Here, then, we have the future of the Church, the future of those on whom God delights to show the wealth of His love. We have it here, as it lies now in the desires of those who are tending towards it through the unlikely and unpromising things of this world. And if with one heart and mind we were desiring these things, would they not be more speedily accomplished, the obstructions of the world sooner conquered, and our own blessedness and triumph in God more rapidly achieved? This prayer, taught by our Lord, and wrought by His Spirit in the desires of His people, is the bond of attraction, drawing earth steadily towards heaven; drawing it with a momentum ever increasing as the distance becomes less, and as these common desires find a hold in a greater number of hearts. Of the arrangement of this prayer many things have been noticed some fanciful, some just. It has been compared to the law of the Decalogue, inasmuch as, like it, this prayer has two tables, the first pertaining to the things of God, the second to the things of man. There has also been noticed (if not with more justice, at least with more meaning) a reference to the Trinity through out; the first petition of either part of the prayer referring to God as Creator and Preserver; the second petition of either part referring to God as Redeemer; and the third to God the Holy Spirit. This has considerable foundation in the form of the prayer, and not a little significance with regard to the completeness of the blessing we should seek. But the obvious division is the useful one to bear in mind. There are two parts. In the first part the object of worship rivets the thought that has been turned towards Him, and those desires which concern His great purposes are first uttered; and only after that follows the second part, in which tn^ attention turns to our own condition and wants. The petitions of the first part are inseparable from one another; each includes the one which follows; the name of God must be recognised and hallowed before His kingdom can be established, and only when His kingdom has come can His will be done. And, indeed, all these petitions are included in the very invocation, when we say, “ Our Father which art in heaven “; for when we say this with our hearts, we already hallow the name, own the authority, and submit to the will of God. And, again, the first part of the prayer paves the way for the second, and introduces it; for the things which we implore in the first part are not to come to pass irrespective of our condition. We are men; if, then, the will of God is to be done by us on earth, we must be maintained in life. We are sinners; if, then, His kingdom is to come to us, our sins must be for given, since nothing that defiles can enter that kingdom. If all the petitions of the first part are to be answered, and if our calling God “ Father “is not to be in word only, then we must depend on God to give us the guidance of His wisdom, and to rescue us from the power of the Evil.

Let us try, then, to learn what is contained in this invocation, and to see how it implies every good disposition for prayer, and includes every encouragement, remembering that as much that we say is determined by the tone, and that as some words in our common speech, such as “ mother,” “ father,” are peculiarly elastic, containing as much meaning as the heart which uses them can pour into them, so we have to learn to give to these words, “ Our Father,” the tone of Christ; and as we learn this, we shall find that we never do fill them to the full, that they rather still extend beyond our actual feelings, and show us that there is more to be striven after. Indeed, if there be any who thinks he has exhausted these words, who has never trembled at the glory and the promise that are in them, who has never hesitated, even on his knees, before he has dared to take them and use them as his words, is not he still using them merely as a form, not believing, perhaps never having even conceived, that there is a reality which they depict? The first thing to be noticed about these words is, that they are new in the Bible and in the world, put now for the first time into the

mouth of man. They begin New-Testament prayer.

They evidence that a change is passing; that as men are now expected to be more than formerly, having clearer declarations of the will of God, so they are invited to richer encouragement, having clearer exhibition of the nature of God. “ The true light now shineth.” God has passed through the clouds and darkness that are around His throne, and has dwelt with us, that we might “ acquaint ourselves with God “. What was given long before as a promise, “Thou shalt call Me, My Father,” is now fulfilled. In all the fervent confidence of David we never find him uttering these words, “ My Father “. And wherever we do find God spoken of as the Father of Israel, this title seems to refer to the kindness of God as their guide and defence, or to His creating and preserving power. Thus Malachi explains the cause, “Have we not all one Father?” by “Hath not one God created us? “ And even in this sense we do not find it used in the form of address. The nearest approach to it that we find is that most moving prayer recorded in Isaiah, in which the orphaned and desolate people reassure them selves of God’s favour in these words, “ Doubt less Thou art our Father, our Redeemer “; but by the last part of the same supplication we see that little more is meant even here than to call upon God as a faithful Creator, who has indeed entered into some peculiar connection with them, for it is said, “ Thou, O Lord, art our Father; we are the clay, and Thou our potter, and we are all the work of Thy hand! “ In this there is a dimness which the birth of Immanuel scatters. There is a feeling after the indissoluble bond, but in the humanity of our Lord we see the union formed.

It was for Christ the Son to give us this liberty of calling God “ our Father “. So that there is something more here than the mere acknowledgment of God as our Creator and Keeper. There is a recognition, distinct and necessary, of the Son of God and His work, and through Him we aspire to an intimacy which the Creator has not with any mere creature. By Christ we are lifted to quite a new level and rank before God. We still have God as our faithful Creator, who will supply all our necessities. The Creator is included in the Father; but in the Father we have, over and above, the assurance that our connection with Him is one of love and of lasting relationship; that we shall not be suf fered to go adrift, but shall be brought up into His likeness, and shall live with Him; and that the ground on which this relationship is established is one of unutterable dignity, the Son of God having become our brother, our nature being now worn by the same person as wears the nature of God. If, therefore, we do not acknowledge Christ in saying “ Our Father,” this epithet is either profane, misty, or heathenish. The heathen called God Father, seeing the goodness, but not understanding the majesty, of Him on whom they called. And there is among ourselves a confused idea of the love of God, and of His desire to bless us, which seems to justify our calling God, as by a figure, “Our Father”. But it is no such confused and delusive figure that Christ sets before us, but a reality. It is a fact accomplished, that God has become man; a present reality, that God is man. The Son of God has become Son of Man, and for this very purpose” that we might receive the adoption of sons “; that we might claim the same Father as Christ claims.

These words, then, which the Son puts into our lips, again and again raise our hearts to the belief, that not only may we expect for His sake many blessings from God, so that it shall be a very apt simile to call Him Father, but that God enters into a relationship with us in Him, and be comes for ever connected with us in a way that secures that all blessings shall be ours. It is not on account of what we receive from God that we are to think of Him with filial gratitude, and count Him a Father; but because He is in very truth our Father, we shall receive all things at His hand. The relationship

is to be first in our minds, deeper also in our affections; and, this being so, hope will be easy and humility natural. This is what humbles us and raises us up to believe that God has connected Himself with us.

Supposing that nothing ever came of this relation ship, still it must remain, and remain for ever. Our relationship to God has been established; the Elder Brother of our race calls God Father; and, irrespective of all that may result from it, this relationship is satisfying to man. Our natures are bound to that of God in the person of Christ; and so long as that person remains undestroyed, we remain related to God. There is, of course, no earthly relationship which fully sets forth this our connection with God. It is a separate, singular reality, and it must be conceived of separately in its own reality. Other relation ships may help us to understand it; but while it is only considered under earthly figures, we are in danger of forgetting that underneath there lies the substantial reality of our sonship. And this, instead of being less true than earthly relationships, is the one relationship which when a man enters into he ceases to be homeless and a wan derer, a fugitive and vagabond -upon the face of the earth, and from the face of God ceases to be a mere withered leaf borne helpless on the wind, whose origin none cares to trace, and whose destiny none turns to see. He has found his place in the universe, he has found a hold and a hope; and however in himself unstable, weak, and incapable, he rests enduringly in the unchangeable Father.

He has been outside, thinking the world a strange, cold, barren, friendless, and unsatisfying place; he has wandered about, not seeing " through the thick cloud," and still less dreaming that One was seeing and caring for him; and now he finds he has a Father One to love, One to serve, One to glorify, One to worship.* But is it so sacred a ground as this that we are to tread in each day's ordinary approach to God? No other path is open. The only prayer our Lord will teach begins, " Our Father ". These words it is easy to use in the figurative sense, * " I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto Thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living. "Psalms 142:4-5. for we can all readily acknowledge that God has been kind, and acted towards us like a Father. But this sense wins us nothing. It goes round, like a thief or a robber, seeking another entrance to the favour of God than the door that He has Himself opened in Christ, and therefore it brings us no nearer God, but only misleads us. And there is no need that we seek for another entrance, for the door is wide enough. It lets in every one that would pass through it. The one thing that we have to show as our passport by this gate is our humanity. If we say that we are born of woman, as Christ was "born of a woman," then His Father owns us. This is all.

There is no man who may not use this prayer. And there is no man who is more entitled to use it than another. For the title does not lie in the petitioner, but in Christ. These words do not say, " If you are of kindred spirit with Christ, if you can depend upon the resolves you have made to live a pure and holy life, if you have often used this prayer already, then come, and with freedom and boldness call God Father"; but they go out to the ends of the earth, they look upon all human conditions, they consider the fair and the foul, the stately, noble, and promising in human character, and also all that is wrecked and lost, and they say, " If you are human, if you wear the nature worn by the Son, if you are born of woman, then no matter whatever else you are, come, and say, My Father ".

These words may be abused. A man may shrink from this holy relationship, and yet call upon God. Of course, he gains nothing by it; the favour of God has never been stolen into under cover of deceit. He knows who come to Him through Christ, and who only name the name of Christ. But we may deceive ourselves. And therefore we are to listen to conscience, which tells us that a likeness of character is expected between father and child. This likeness is found in all who call God Father in truth.

Such an assimilation Christ supposes, saying, in this same Sermon on the Mount, " Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven". But to recognise, own, and call upon our Father is the first and most grateful promise of likeness to Him. And as the earthly parent feels a new bond to his child, when the child, in its first efforts at language, calls upon him and claims him as his father, so the first movement of the Spirit of holiness within the child of God teaches him to cry, "Abba, Father," and, imperfectly though it be spoken, God hails it as the sign of holiness begun, and as the earnest of likeness to Himself. This same idea is carried out by the epithet attached; for we say not merely, "Our Father," but distinctively, "Our Father which art in heaven". And as the ideas of holiness and power are those which all men naturally associate with "heaven," we are to bear in mind mainly these], two things about Him to whom we pray that He is holy, and that He is powerful. No doubt, there are other ideas which are also suggested to our thoughts as these words pass our lips. No doubt, by praying to Heaven, we acknowledge that earth is not sufficient for us; that the things of earth are gifts, not here of themselves, but sent by God, and that " a man can receive nothing, except it be given him of Heaven ". We look to Heaven as the source of all power; when the heavens hear the earth, then the earth yields her fruit. This expression helps us further in prayer, by giving to God a distinct habitation. Our prayer would be much more difficult were we permitted to say nothing more than " Our Father". Our minds are by far too weak to grasp the idea of an omnipresent spirit. It is true, as it has been said, " Where God is, there is heaven and where is God not? " But ought we not rather to say, " Whither Christ has ascended, and now lives with His human body, there is heaven, and the presence of the Father for us"? Unless so, unless we concentrate heaven in the person of Christ, and believe in His bodily appearing before God for us, then are we set to a harder task in our worship than were ever the ancient people of God. We need such an aid as is here given to keep the distinct personality of God before us. We are not to mingle Him with His creation, but are to pray to one who is separate from all He has made. So the Bible tells us of heaven, where His throne is set. Of the reality and position of this dwelling-place of God it is enough for us to know that Christ is there. Knowing this, God cannot be lost to us.

Wherever man is, there is a heaven above him; and from the spot he stands on, he may appeal to God through Him that is the Way. It is not to an idea of our own we appeal, but to a separate, definite person, who hears when we say, " Thou ". We do not make His presence by falling on our knees; He was before we prayed, and was present before we realised His presence. But the leading idea put into our minds by our Lord is, that as God will help us as our Father, so can He as being in heaven. As David says, " Our God is in the heavens, He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased". From the darkness of earth we pray to Him who is in the light of heaven; from the confusion of earth and its perplexity, we pray to Him who sits above, seeing to the end, and ordering all things; from the trouble and weakness of earth we cry up to the " blessed and only Potentate, God over all, blessed for evermore". It is good for us to remember that there even is a

heaven as well as an earth; a place where God's rule is seen, and where all is harmonious, well-ordered, steady, peaceful, as the blue vault that symbolises it. But how much better to direct our prayer into that kingdom, to its centre and throne, and thus to fasten and secure our hopes in the world above, where there is no more curse, and where they dwell who even now have overcome! This is our comfort, that while we are involved in this world we can appeal to One who is above it, and uncontrolled by it. Or this might be our comfort, did we not bring God also down to earth, and either lose sight of Him amid its confusion, or bind Him helpless with His own laws. Our prayer will not proceed in faith until we raise God high above us and all that we know, to the very supreme of power. When the utmost skill and strength of the child have failed, he runs to his father, never doubting that with him is more skill and sufficient strength. And we must learn to cease from measuring the power of God by our own, and reasoning from the one to the other. We must learn to set God above His own laws; not that He will reverse them, but use them as we know not how. We are not to think that, where we see no possibility, God sees none; that, when all human skill has been fruitlessly spent, there is no more that God can do; that, when everything goes wrong with us, and we are ready to sit down and wait for ruin, there is no help for us in God. Too often we pray to a God whom we do not set in the heavens, to whom we do not in fact ascribe as much wisdom and power as we do to men, whose help we do not as fully trust in as we should in the combined help of some on earth we know of, whom we scarcely trust in much more than in ourselves, else we should not be found despairing when we see no remedy for our ills, and when our own strength is exhausted.

Again, this invocation sets before us a God of heavenly holiness as well as of heavenly power. In the God to whom we pray centres all influence for good, and from Him proceeds no evil.

Every exercise of His power has been, and continues to be, on the side of good. " He cannot be tempted." No circumstances can combine to make Him favour evil-doing or neglect well-doing. It is of His nature to help, to give, to bless to the utmost. Free from all suspicion, because He knows what is in us, He appreciates the feeblest beginnings of good, cherishes and fosters into life what man would count dead and lost, knows nothing of the grudging, of the malice, of the captiousness of man; but watches how He may encourage us in the slightest efforts towards the right, watches how He may insinuate His help, and in proportion to His own freedom from all taint or shadow of evil, deals delicately with the sinner in all His way, until our eyes begin to open to the perfect rectitude, simplicity, and loveliness of His character; and we see that in Him there is help for us in all good, and deliverance from all evil. And when we see something of the holiness of God, we shall be careful to restrain such desires as are inconsistent with His purposes, but shall very boldly expect that He will " hear the right ".

It need scarcely be said, that the word "our," by which we are here taught to address God, can by no means prohibit or discountenance the indi vidual and private use of this prayer. But our Lord, viewing the need of the whole body of His people, gives one prayer for all; and it is when we pray together and for the things we need in common with all men who have lived through this world, that we feel the certainty of our being heard grow to its height. We then but swell the common voice which has gone up to God in all times and from all corners of the world, which has passed to Him from the unhardened lips of the child, and which He has caught up from the broken utterances of the dying; which has been sighed as a forlorn hope by the despondent and oppressed, when all other hope seemed vain, and which is gradually risen to, through other prayers, as the highest and

most hopeful utterance of Christian faith an utterance which, like the highest flight of angels on Jacob's ladder of prayer, carries the soul out of sight of earth, and, giving it the vision of the things of God, teaches it what is worthy to be desired. Round this prayer the desires of all the faithful cluster, and here we enjoy the communion of saints. Praying in remembrance of that great company of our fellow-men in whom we see more legibly and variously written all the sorrows and anxieties, all the pains and sins, that are incident to our common humanity, we learn what are indeed our deep and urgent needs. No more blinded by our own peculiar and immediately present circumstances, we learn to see through them to the wants which lie at the ground of our nature, and always exist. And thus we are taught what to pray for, both by the company in which we pray, and by the nature of Him to whom we pray. Praying with our fellow-men, and excluding no most distant character, nor saddest condition, nor deepest necessity, our hearts expand to desire those larger blessings which embrace our whole beings, and do not limit prayer to those particular benefits which touch only what is peculiar in our present case. And praying to the holy and loving God, our hearts renounce evil and earthly desires, and rise to things that are worthy to be given by the Father of glory. The propriety and breadth of this invocation are thus readily appreciated. To use it rightly, with the understanding and the spirit, is to begin prayer as we ought; confidently and lovingly, because we pray to "Our Father"; humbly, \ because we call God " Father " only through the humiliation of the Son; hopefully, because all power is with Him; carefully, because He is holy. When we are drawing near to God, as if we were hardly used, as if our misery were giving us a claim, as it gives God occasion of mercy, then this " Our Father" reduces our spirits to a lowly and suitable thankfulness. I cannot be hardly dealt with if I can say to God, " My Father ". When we are drawing near recklessly, more because the time of prayer has come round than because the heart is hungering after the things of God, does not this "Our Father" bring before our thoughts all the toil of Christ on our behalf, His incarnation and His passion, His ascension and His ceaseless appearing before God for us, and forbid us to use lightly what is so earnest a matter to Him? When we would gladly have the blessings of God's bounty and the security of His favour, but would rather have these at a distance from Himself, than come into any connection with Him which would oblige us to lead a holy life, does not this " Our Father" profitably remind us, that relationship, close, enduring, and assimilating, must be the beginning of all hope and blessing? When we are entering on an act of devotion, as if it were a mere exercise of the spirit, in which none is concerned but itself, this invocation reminds us that prayer is something more than " a posture of the soul," a beneficial state of mind, an under going of certain trains of thought and emotion, that it is address to another, transaction with a personal, present, living God. In short, this introduction suits itself to every praying spirit, attracting and encouraging and filling with all suitable thoughts and feelings.

Let us, then, use this common prayer with intelligence, striving always to fill it more fully with meaning and desire. Let us wait for no other introduction than that which is given us here; and, seeing that it is no stranger who asks for our worship, let us believe that thus He would have us get over that great difficulty of drawing near to Him suitably, and let us ask from Him, than whom none is nearer, none more intelligent of our condition, none more consider ate, none more painstaking about us. And as we have the faculty of love to attach us one to another, which makes solitude wearisome and friendlessness terrible, so we have this faculty of worship which is relieved and finds its object, when we return from our distance and banishment, and fall down before God, and say, " Our Father which art in heaven ". This is love, and admiration, and trust, the most

absolute. This is the ultimate repose of the spirit, beyond which nothing is desired, nor can be conceived. This is the feeling which at last says, “It is good for us to be here; here let us dwell, even in Thee, O Lord, who art our dwelling-place in all generations “.

04.02. Hallowed be thy name

Chapter II. “Hallowed be Thy name.” OF the petitions which are included in this prayer, none has been less prayed than this which our Lord sets first. Many a man has cried earnestly and sincerely enough, “ Give me this day my daily bread “; many with deeper earnestness, and out of a more appalling helplessness, have cried, “Deliver us from evil”; but few have learnt to have this petition deepest in the heart and readiest on the lip, “ Hallowed be Thy name “. At all times we recognise it as very proper, but rather as a doing of homage to Him we invoke, than as the first soaring petition, in which the spirit, feeling its liberty and rejoicing in the wealth of its prospect, rises at once to the very summit of all desire. Is there not this feeling still in our hearts (and is it not one that must be got rid of), that to desire God’s glory, and pray for it before we tell the wants which are gnawing our spirits with very sensible agony, may be a seemly and decorous order, but is cer tainly not the natural one; that, if it be right to seek the glory of God first, this must always be with us an artificial order; that the habit of our minds is so constantly to make for our own good that it can only be by constraint and correction we can reverse this habit, and seek other things as heartily? Now, prayer demands that the very order of it be sincere, that we do not set first among our petitions what ranks among the last of our desires, nor think to propitiate God by an artificial introduction wrought up beyond our feeling. The aid of the Spirit is afforded us that the deep-seated longing for the glory of God, which has seemed impossible to us, may become not only possible, but habitually predominant.

However, that we may not set before ourselves a higher attainment than God has set, and higher therefore than we can achieve, and so, instead of rising, sink into a despairing helplessness that gives up all effort, let us remember that God’s glory and our own good are so connected that we cannot desire the one without also, at least in directly, desiring the other; as little as a soldier can eagerly advance the glory of his commander without thereby advancing himself. And as there are times when the only way to secure the good of the cause in which he serves is to give his whole thought to the providing for his personal safety, and when he is so tumultuously and pressingly surrounded with dangers, that it were idle to ask him to think of anything else, or desire definitely anything else than his own deliverance and victory, so there are times when a man’s personal wants so throng before him, and when his own condition is so critical, that to ask him to pray for anything else than personal help and deliverance would be useless and wrong. For what so desirable as that a man be brought to God by the intense agonising desires of his own heart, and should own, out of his personal and unmistakable experience, that with God are blessings which must be had now, and before anything further can be thought of? But this prayer, while by its individual petitions it satisfies these occasional moods, is specially adapted to our ordinary condition, and teaches that to an unperturbed mind, calmly surveying the desirable state of things, the glory of God will appear to be the comprehensive and prime blessing, which, if secured, all else will go well. We are to desire it not as something different from, but as including our own good; nor yet are we to desire it for this one reason only, that it includes our own good, but in view also of all that other good which is besides embraced in it. The right condition of things, the

well-ordered and firmly-established condition, in which we may eternally abide with security, gladness, scope, and highest energy, is to be attained by this prayer; surely, then, first of all must God, the centre and head of all, get His place in the world. Should we believe that this was a prayer to be trusted to, did it open with any other, any lower petition? Is not this at least a good beginning, a sure foundation? Is not this that which all men, at all times, may agree to desire? But though these words, " Hallowed be Thy name," are a distinct petition, and not a mere appendix to the invocation, yet without the invocation we cannot understand nor use this first petition. For to think of God as we naturally do, and pray that His name may be hallowed, is impossible. The names by which our untaught hearts would call God are such as these, distant, inexorable unsympathising, grudging; inhabiting quite another world than ours; separate from, and even ignorant of, all influences which move us; having a will to humble and tyrannise over and baffle us. If such be the names which bestrepresent our idea of God, then of course we cannot pray, " Hallowed be Thy name ". But such is not the God to whom we have been introduced by Christ; He has taught us to say, "Our Father "; He has come, and, without upbraiding, has convinced us how totally we have misunder stood God. He has taken the veil from our hearts, and the fixed aspect of eternal and unalterable love moves us to humility and wondering devotion. He shows us how, while we have been forgetting God, He has been thinking upon us; how, while our thoughts toward Him have been full of suspicion, and weariness, and aversion, His towards us have been " precious," fraught with ineffable compassion, forbearance such as the patience of God could alone exhibit, and a marvellous goodness which has taken up every feature of our necessity, and being still unexhausted by this great draught upon it, has liberally and rejoicingly showered upon us lavish and unthought-of blessings. He has shown us above all, that, while we have been seeking to sever ourselves from God, He has been connecting Himself with us, so that no interests can be dearer to Him than ours; that " hitherto hath the Father worked " and the Son for the unconscious and helpless younger brethren; and that His care being to provide for us, His purpose to prosper us, His glory our well-being, and His Son our elder brother, He would have us know Him by this name, " Our Father ". And when we are moved by the Spirit of adoption to call God by this name, and to believe that there is one family in heaven and on earth, called by the name of the Son of man who came down from heaven; when we look to the face of this Father and see in its loving wisdom and majesty and truth that verily He is also God; when we survey the excellences which belong alone to Him whose love thus embraces us as in a sure dwelling place, then glorying, we glory in God; and saying, " Our Father which art in heaven," we say in the same breath, in the same burst of feeling, Hallowed be Thy name". We need not the old admonition, " If I be a Father, where is Mine honour? " For the time, at least, we have the feelings of God's children; and what so dear to the heart of the child as the honour of his father's name? As we approach and address Him our hearts fill and swell with a sense of His boundless might and marvellous counsel, of His supremacy in dominion and in excellence, so different from all else that He is seen to have right to His name, " I am, and there is none else beside Me," and yet " Our Father ": so separated from all besides that He and they can not be named under the same kind of existence, and yet " Our Father ". How can we but long that all men should revere this name, and should come to such knowledge of it as to live by it? But what precisely are the feelings we express when we say, " Hallowed be Thy name "? Is the name of God of similar use and meaning to the name of a man? A man's name is that by which we speak of him to distinguish him from every one else. When we use the name of any one, it calls up to our minds a certain character, not always according to truth,

but according to our idea of the man. And so, when we hear or use the name of God, there is also present to our minds a certain character; too often a character made up of the ideas which we have thoughtlessly suffered to cluster round the name; some times, however, a character which does on the whole agree with what God has taught us to believe about Him. The name of God is not God Himself, neither is it our idea of God; but it is that expressed idea of Him which He Himself would have us to possess, and which may be gathered from His own revelation. The name of God is not the nature of God, nor His relationship to us; but if the conception which God would have us to cherish of Him can be summed up in one word, then that word is the name of God. When it is said, " Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God," the meaning is, that confidence could be best maintained by remembering what God had taught concerning Himself. When it is said, " They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee," it is meant that whoever has that idea of God which He Himself by His dealings and teaching has warranted, will trust in Him. These dealings and teaching are not themselves the name, but rather the utterance of the name. From all that God has done and said, gather up the various features of His character, and express these, and in that expression you have the name. The name of God is that which we can contemplate and say, " God is that ". This name we are not left to find out for ourselves. From the first it has been the care of God " to spell out Himself to us, sometimes by one perfection, and sometimes by another ". One feature after another of His character has been revealed, until at length all has been shown us in Him who is " the express image of His person ". Hint upon hint was given of the loving purpose of God to man, until all was told in the Word who declared the Father. Nearer and nearer did heaven seem coming to earth, closer and closer did God involve His glory with human interests, till the Son came and showed us "the Father". Nothing now can be added to this name; in it all that God is to us is summed up, and all that He is in Himself is implied in it. He jealously guarded His former names, and called the attention of men to each addition to His name, that the glory of this final name might be understood and received. To Moses He says, " I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob by the name of God Almighty; but by My name Jehovah was I not known to them," intimating as distinctly as may be that now He is about to reveal something more of His character. When He gave this name, He was about to bring out of an idolatrous country, and plant in the midst of an idolatrous world, a people in whom the knowledge of the one God was to be maintained for all generations. And so He calls Himself now by a name distinguishing Him from all usurpant gods. He calls Him self Jehovah, the I Am, the living God, who alone has life in Himself, the eternal and unchangeable One, which is, and which was, and which is to come. So hallowed was this name by the Jews, that they would not pronounce it; nor do we wonder at their awe when we read their books, and see what God Himself made of this name.

There, at the end of warnings that are terrible to read, come these words as the seal, " I Jehovah "; He who would be of the same mind to all generations, whose threatenings could not be vain, but were the expression of an eternal decision, of judgment passed with all time present to His eternal, all-embracing vision. And at the end of promises reaching far into the future, and speaking of things far different from the then present, come again these words as the firm ground of all assurance, the signature of God, " I Jehovah ". This name was the fountain of all authority, and the guarantee of all confidence: a name asserting for its owner, what no other name ever did, the exclusive proprietorship of life; a " glorious and fearful name," which set itself above every name, and inhabited a glory of its own. But this name was then given not only to preserve those who

hallowed it from the hallowing of any names which were unworthy of worship, but to be a constant comfort and near refuge to them in all their wanderings. Jehovah is the eternal, the only God, because He only hath life, but also the only dwelling-place of His people, because He only is unchangeable. They had to be taught, as we have to be taught, that not in this place nor in that, but in God is the true rest. And so, while they were led from place to place, they had God dwelling among them by a striking symbol, and they had the name of the Eternal and Un changeable, keeping them in mind that He who led them changed not nor ever passed away. But to this was to be added a further name. To know God as a rest and a home, even this was not enough. It might seem at first sight to be enough to know Him as the " I AM," who has life, independent of all origin, independent also of all accidents and contingencies, who possesses the only true existence, and without whom nothing else can be; it might seem enough to know Him as the " I AM," the eternally Present, with whom is neither past nor future, whose name is " I AM," because in Him is no revolution of years nor succession and lapse of times. If He " is " now all that He ever has been, all that He ever shall become; if all time as well as all place is embraced in His existence; if by the name He has given us of Himself He has taught our faculties to strive to annihilate time and its changes and rise to His eternity, to resist our sinkings and waverings of faith and our varying moods, and to live now in all the peace and joy of a life that we have in the Eternal; if He has taught us thus that with Him there is and can be " neither variableness nor shadow of turning"; if He has taught us also to be independent of place, and has shown to us Himself as the One that is still with us, in whom we live, and who still brings us to the place that yields us the life He intends; if He does all this, is there more that He can do?

Over the virgin mother's babe He pronounces a name which so fills the heart that it excludes all others. " Behold, I send a messenger before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared; obey His voice, for My name is in Him." And the name that is in Him is " Our Father," no longer a name that needs to be interpreted by accompanying symbols, but a name that " is in" the living person of Jesus Christ, and that we read as often as we look to Him; no longer the dwelling-place merely, but the Father in whom we are secured of refuge and rest; no longer the Almighty to whom we may appeal with sure hope, but the Father who " Him self loveth us," and whose care it is to accomplish our blessedness; no longer a "fearful name," the utterance of which overwhelms us, and the comprehension of which is above us; but a name which every child of woman can understand, and whose very simplicity attracts and wins us by its condescending nearness to ourselves. But this name excludes all other names, only because it contains all that was in them. It comes " not to destroy, but to fulfil". It was this name that the hearts of God's people were unconsciously yearning after through all other names that were given, until the Son came forth, for whom all revelation of God's nature and relation to us was preparing, and in whom all revelation is summed up, the Word whom God "has magnified above all His name".

It is this name, then, which we are to hallow. The prayer runs thus, " Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name". And so it is of all the petitions: each is introduced by an in vocation to " Our Father". It is our Father we ask to rule us, our Father we ask to forgive us, our Father we ask to lead us. And it is, along with this, to be noted that this is a name which, though at first hearing it speaks only of relation ship to us, tells also and fully of God's nature. The relation it speaks of is one that comes of His attributes. It is not accidental nor arbitrary, but is so truly the

result and free expression of the nature of God, that through it we can read all that it concerns us to know of that nature. And this will be obvious to all who are accustomed to find in the incarnation and cross of Christ the most evident manifestation of God. So that we learn to pray that this name may be hallowed not only because it is our Father's name, but because the name of God is " Our Father"; that is, we see that the name of God is to be hallowed not only because of His connection with us, but in view also of all the worth which this connection reveals. Beginning, it may be, with more of gratitude for God's grace to us than of vision of His nature, and springing always from this source of grateful love, this petition yet leads us to all the depths and all the heights of worship. God would have us, first of all, to worship Him not as the Ruler of all worlds, but as bound to this world; not as attending to all parts of an infinite universe, but as regarding us; not, in short, as the Head of all things that are, but mainly and in the first instance as " Our Father". He confines our view that we may see more distinctly; this name does not show any part of His nature nor any portion of His dealings with which we are not concerned, but it runs directly between us and Him, and as through a glass which by confining magnifies and renders distinct, so through this name we are separated from distracting views of God, and led straight to all that He means to kindle our worship.

Learning what God is, we ask that His name may be hallowed or held sacred, regarded by all as a true and holy thing that is at any cost to be maintained in esteem, and under all temptation still believed in. May the idea of God, which He would have us to possess, be held as the choice possession of our spirits, the treasure on which our hearts rest, and to which they ever return; may it be held separate from all contamination of our own thoughts about God; and may it never be obscured by any cloud of adversity tempting us to think that God has changed; never lost sight of by any careless devotion of our thoughts to other objects and names; never presumed upon nor polluted as countenancing folly or sin, but cherished still and guarded as " the holy and reverend name of the Lord ". For this is what we all need, the abiding assurance of the reality of God in the excellences of His nature and the grace of His connection with us.

How heartily would this name of God in Christ have been welcomed by those who felt after God, if haply they might find Him; how would they have welcomed the utterance of God's name in the life of Christ, as giving to them at last the knowledge of what is eternally right and good, pure and holy; as giving them at last one whom they could eternally worship, from whom they could accept law and guidance, and in whom they could trust for all. And this is what we also must find; if there be One, and who He is, to whom we may ever look up, and whom we may love and worship; whose actings are not biassed by personal leanings, nor fashioned by the customs or ideas of others, but are true and righteous; One who "is light, and in whom is no darkness at all "; One in whom we may trust without fear, because He is absolutely good, His love breaking down at no point, interrupted by no suspicion or coldness, yet never leading us astray, nor doing for us what needs to be undone. This is what we need, to learn and not to invent the name of God; to see His character displayed in a perfect, living person, that we may no longer guess at His thoughts and ways from our own, nor worship our own best idea, but may worship one whom we can call by name; whose name is written for us, and has become familiar to us, by the actualities of life, and whose name embodies and represents to us all that is absolutely and eternally excellent. And who that worships at all has not found his need of a more fixed idea of God? Who has not learnt that, if he is to worship at all, or pray to some more real object than a Samaritan god, he needs this for his

first petition, “ Hallowed be Thy name “? This morning I found it easy to worship; God seemed near and living, as a second Person with me; His majesty so patent, that humility was natural, and levity impossible; His holiness and love so evident, that my soul was rapt from all other objects. I did worship, and I worshipped God; but when the remembrance of the morning bids me this evening seek a renewal of the delight, how different and how hard a task do I set my self! What seemed so substantial and living, has become shadowy and ideal only. He who seemed so attractive, that I was prepared to for sake all and follow Him, has put on the task master, or the cold, repulsive indifference of the ruler of other worlds. The name of God has not been hallowed by me; profane feet have trodden the shrine consecrated to it. The examples of men have pressed out of remembrance the unalterable holiness of God, and I have lived as if holiness were not expected of me. Eagerness to compete with the world at its own race, has hurried me beyond the voice of God, and the restraining sense of His presence has been sup planted by indifference and forgetfulness. Once having fallen, I have thought myself unworthy or made myself regardless of God’s forgiveness and aid, and have fought my own battles wiping the name of my Father from my heart. I have let go the thought of what God is to me, and have too freely admitted other claims. And now the name that I have so often denied seems untrue in my lips. And not less for life than for worship do we need that the name of God be hallowed; for by a man’s thoughts of God is his whole character formed.* Let him think of a god who delights in blood, and he will delight in the same; let him worship a god imperfect in holiness, and his efforts after holy living will not be many nor severe; let him think of a god who is pleased with ceremonies, and he will become a formalist; let him think of a god who can be paid by ser vice, and he will become a hypocrite; let him think of a hard master, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he strawed not, and he will shirk every duty he dare, and tremble through a life of slavery to a death of confusion and dismay. But let him know God as his Father in Christ, and every influence for good that can be brought to bear upon the human character is enjoyed by that man. This knowledge will be the little leaven leavening the whole mass; the new centre in the heart round which each regenerated principle within us will take its place.

It is an influence all for good, unlike that of the * “ Upon our thoughts of God, it will depend, in one time or another, whether we rise higher or sink lower as societies and as individuals.” MAURICE. character of man, which mingles harm with its healing. It is the character which from the first has sustained, and to the last will sustain, all good that is found in man. It is because God is what He is, that there has been any holiness on earth; because He loveth righteousness, therefore has He created men capable of righteous deeds; because He has been demanding perfect holiness, therefore have those who hallowed His name bitterly mourned over their shortcomings, and have still persevered and hoped, because He is their Father. By His name, by the real and holy and aiding personality which that name keeps within our ken, is the inevitable and stimulating idea of duty cherished within us. These words, “ Re member thy Father in Christ “ (which have taken the place of “Remember the Lord thy God”*), when spoken amid the tumult of the soul, have been as the monarch’s voice, and have been enough to calm and lay its wild rebellion, to curb its passionate desire, to turn again to its rightful object the attention and homage of the soul.

Under the most adverse circumstances, the name of God has still done its work. Through this name God has found entrance to the most har * See Tholuck on “ The Sermon on the Mount “. dened heart, and uttering it over the dead conscience that has long lain buried under manifold

iniquities, He has quickened it to life and wakeful activity; in hearts that have been a prey to all doubt, and whose doubt has been fostered by all impurity of life, this name has enshrined itself and round it has gradually been formed again a temple of the living God; and it has still been calmly and lovingly answering the doleful questions of despairing souls, and to those who have either wickedly or in their weakness cried, “ What is truth?” and, “Who will show us any good?” its response has ever been, “ Our Father “. Hope fully as the morning star has it risen on the benighted and weary; with healing and joy, as the Sun of Righteousness, has it ushered in the ever lasting “ day which the Lord hath made,” and from which all darkness is passed away, and in which. we see God as He is, and discover the holiness and the hope there is for us in Him.

Scattering all false ideas of sin and duty, all false rules of life that have grown with our growth, all blind thoughts of God which keep us murmuring and unbelieving, this name of God has come into the soul and said, “ Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God. even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work”. And what the name of God is for individuals it is for communities. If for our own land, or for other lands, we hope for better things than the present, these better things will be brought about, when the name of God is hallowed when His name is declared to all, and believed by all and kept jealously and sacredly by all; when it shines out from the contempt and misunderstanding which overlay it, and is recovered from the suspicion which banishes it; when it rises above all the representations and tones of man’s utterance of it, and appears in its own purity, as if written by the finger of God in the heavens; when it is acknowledged by all as the highest name, and receives from each a regard which nothing else commands; when, that is, men learn to look simply and constantly, intelligently and devoutly, to Jesus Christ as the “ image of God,” and will suffer no thought of God to find harbour and influence within them, which is not expressed in His person. When men own God, and own Him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, then will there be saving health among all nations. When men come to the knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent, then shall they have eternal life. Need it be said that there is nothing else that will reform the world than this, no other head under which all things can be reconciled, no other centre round which all can gather in love? Let all men have one common idea of God, and that the true one; let each man be a true worshipper of the true God; let each in the solemn and secret chamber of his own soul, where none seeth but our Father who seeth in secret, be owning his responsibility to his God; let each man lie prostrate and broken-hearted before the love of God in Christ; and is there not already “ Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth “? How different a world would be that little world with which each of us has to do, and which gives us samples of its sin and its misery, could we say of every one we had to deal with, “ I may trust that man to the uttermost; I may banish every fear, and all suspicion; I may expect great things of him, for I know that, far deeper than any earthly influence can penetrate, lies written on his heart the name of God, his Redeemer and Father; he knows and acknowledges God, and therefore acknowledges every right claim; he is already bound by an obligation which no entreaty, no persuasion of mine, could make more binding “.

Let each one, then, look on his own life, and on other lives, and see the blank which God’s answers to this petition might have already filled and may yet fill. Let him consider the place which God claims for Himself; let him give heed to His Word, “ Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom;

neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth “. And let him pray, “ From me, then, O Lord, remove all ignorance of Thee, and all unworthy thoughts of Thee; keep far from me all that is forgetful, irreverent, profane; cast forth from my heart all that opposeth and exalteth itself above all the name of God or that is worshipped; cast forth from Thy temple all that sitteth therein showing itself that it is God; all my rebellious distrust of Thee do Thou graciously turn into childlike attachment and confidence; my presumption of Thy indifference into hope of Thy mercy; grant to me the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Thee, that, whatever fails me, my trust in Thee may still increase, and that I may serve Thee in love and acceptance, and my body become a temple of Thine. And these things not in myself only, but in all others perform, that men may know that Thou whose name alone is Jehovah, art the Most High over all the earth; that all nations whom Thou hast made may come and worship before Thee, O Lord, and may glorify Thy name.” And this he prays, who with the understanding and the spirit prays, “ Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name “.

04.03. Thy Kingdom come

Chapter III. “Thy kingdom come.” WHEN we find an earthly and a heavenly thing called by the same name, we are very apt to think of the earthly as that which better fills and satisfies the name common to both. When God calls a spiritual thing or a heavenly arrangement by the name of something earthly and well known, we look upon this as merely a mode of illustration, possibly a happy, well-selected illustration, but nothing more. We still look on the earthly as the substantial reality to which the name belongs, and deem that there is far more in it than will be found in the other. We think that the heavenly is only somewhat like the other, but will fail in some point. Thus, when God speaks to us of His kingdom, we are too ready to view this as but a figure of speech, which may intimate that the government of God over us does in some points resemble the sway of a monarch over his subjects; whereas the truth is, that this kingdom is the only one which comes up to the idea of a kingdom, which falls short in nothing of what a kingdom should be. “ The Lord is King, not borrowing this title from the kings of the earth, but having lent His own title to them; and not the name only, but having so ordered, that all true rule and government upon earth, with its righteous laws, its stable ordinances, its punishment and its grace, its majesty and its terror, should tell of Him and of His kingdom which ruleth over all so that * kingdom of God is not in fact a figurative expression, but most literal: it is rather the earthly kingdoms and the earthly kings that are figures and shadows of the true.” * What king but one fulfils David’s idea of a king, the idea which he seems to have lived to learn, and which, dying, he left as a * Dean Trench, Notes on the Parables, p. 14, where the connection of the earthly with the heavenly is fully discussed. The following lines of Coleridge are worth remembering in this connection, “ For all that meets the bodily sense I deem Symbolical, one mighty alphabet For infant minds; and we in the low world Placed with our backs to bright reality, That we may learn with young unwounded ken The substance from its shadow “. legacy to his people, and surrounded with an emphatic accumulation of authority that strik ingly declares its importance? “ These be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet Psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God; and he shall be as the light of the morning when the sun - riseth, even a morning without clouds, as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.” Who is there that does not expect (more or less consciously) that some time there will be a better order of things than now we know of? Who is satisfied with this temporary state, in which evil seems so native, good so foreign? Or, if satisfied, is it not just because we are aware that it is only temporary, that it is to be got over, travelled through to some better beyond? Who can believe that God will never manifest to men, how He can govern, and show in actual history the perfection of His kingdom and the benign influence of His laws? Who believes that He will never let us know how right and how salutary a thing it is to obey Him only?

Nay more, who does not at least sometimes feel that this kingdom ought to be now, that now we ought to be living under one Supreme, together owning Him, seeing that He is not king elect, heir

to the crown, but eternal King? Those at least who acknowledge the name of God, and who believe that He is, and that He is what He has revealed Himself to be, heartily utter this petition: “ Our Father which art in heaven, Thy kingdom come “. That it may be intelligently and earnestly uttered, we need to see distinctly what it is. In common with all kingdoms, it is a community, an organised fellowship of men, the bond of whose fellowship is that they all obey the same living Head. It differs from all other kingdoms in this, that its King is the most high God. The subjects of it are all men who are willing to become its subjects, all who desire to obey the will of God, rather than any other. No men, therefore (it need scarcely be said), are subjects of this kingdom by birth. “ Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Natural or fleshly birth introduces us to the privileges of nature and of flesh. Birth in time and for time, which has in it the seed of eternal death, introduces us to the advantages of time, and among others to the external and temporary advantages of the kingdom of God. Spiritual birth gives us the internal and spiritual advantages. Born of the Spirit of God, we are introduced to the eternal and peculiar privileges of this kingdom. For “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink”; does not secure the mere protection and help which the kingdoms of this world make all their aim and effort; but it is within us. It begins not at the outside, but within; alters not our circumstances, but our selves. And therefore we are introduced to it, not by some accident of our position in this world, but by our own voluntary surrender to a Person, by yielding the allegiance of the whole soul and nature to a King, whom we choose as our King for evermore. This may well be called a birth, then, if for no other reason than this, that it alters the whole character. It is called a birth because it is the beginning of a new life; a life which meets with no death, nor needs any third birth to carry the man to a yet higher condition. It is called a second birth, because it breaks off the life which the first birth began, and swallows up the death to which it exposed us. It is a birth in which our own wills struggle to life, but only because such is the will of God.

It could not be called a birth, if we were our selves the sole or the first agents in the matter; but can only be called (without absurdity) a birth, because we thereby become through the generation of another something which we were not before. If we are to know it as a birth, then it should be quite unnecessary to reiterate that it is not of our own originating. We are born again, because “ the seed of God “ is quickening us. One might have supposed that it would have been readily believed that we cannot give birth to ourselves; and how a man can at once believe that the life to which the second birth introduces is a real, new, and eternal life, and that the person born into that life is his own begotten, is hard indeed to comprehend.* It is of God’s children, then, that His kingdom is composed. It is our Father’s kingdom

* It may here be observed, that “ the will of man “ (John 1:13) refers to the will of man begetting, and not to the will of man begotten. The opposition, “ but of God,” becomes thus more clear and telling. we desire the advent of. It is the renewed will which gives us entrance to it. But while this kingdom is established within, it makes itself felt and visible without. Finding its subjects in us, it makes its laws be obeyed in all our doings. It takes possession of every department of activity, of every region of actual life. These external things, are they our doings? This society, is it made of us? Then, if the kingdom of God be within us, it will find expression there. As it is impossible for any great earthly dominion to be solitary, uninfluential, but is appealed to and must interfere, is imitated and must mould others; so it is impossible for this kingdom of God to be side by side with other influences, and not reverse, increase, or some way operate on them. As little is this possible

as it is possible to carry a light through a dark room and scatter no darkness, but confine the light to the flame. This is the mode of the kingdom's increase, and the promise is that it will so increase. It will grow till there is no room for any opposing dominion on earth. It will express itself, and in this expression will be found so to excel the kingdoms of this world, that it will make for itself new heavens and a new earth. " For the kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." And these two features of the kingdom cannot be separated, its spiritual, internal character, and its outward manifestation and progress. But the name by which it is spoken of in the words just quoted may suggest to some the idea that "heaven" must be waited for, that this prayer may be answered. And no doubt the kingdom to be revealed, when the King appears in the glory of His own person, will surpass any thing that can be otherwise attained. But the name seems to be used not because the kingdom has heaven for its ultimate destination and sphere, but because it is of heavenly origin and character.

It is for this earth we seek a blessing, when we pray, "Thy kingdom come ". We know that this kingdom ought to be now. We do not look to the future to accomplish that which is eternally right. We do not expect that death will transfer us or others into a condition which Christ and His Spirit can alone transfer us into. And being distinctly conscious that we ought always to have been subjects of God, and grasping at the provision for our entrance into it, which is now put within our reach, we do not wait, but pray and labour that all may be brought into this kingdom, that its laws may affect all earthly arrangements and earthly governments. This prayer in all its parts is emphatically from earth and for earth. And what we express in this petition is the desire that a heavenly state of things be established on earth, that the King and laws of heaven be acknowledged on earth. Is it not a right thing and a possible thing, that all men should in their hearts yield allegiance to God? And were this allegiance yielded, would it not naturally result that all our relations to one another would be hallowed and leavened by our common spirit of obedience? Would it not necessarily result that the whole constitution of the world, in all its domestic, social, and political arrangements, would be guided by the Spirit of God, and would show, if not uniformly and in every particular, yet generally, and, on the whole, that God was ruling? It is not required for this that all forms of government be changed, but that the spirit of those who administer be changed. It probably is not needful that many employments or relations of life be altered, but it is needful that we ourselves be altered, The desirableness of this kingdom is obvious. The appearance of the King Himself among us, and His manner of founding the kingdom, the blessings it yields to its subjects, and the final glory to which it is destined, all teach us to pray for its coming. When we look to its actual founding, it is not without significance that this was achieved at the most brilliant age of the most powerful earthly monarchy; a monarchy which may be viewed as the ultimate specimen of what earth can accomplish in the matter of government. For extent it was unrivalled. The world was the Roman world. For polity it was unrivalled, the system of its laws being yet received as the basis of law in the most civilised and well-ordered communities. It was when this empire was in all the flush and pride of youth that the King of God's anointing came and established His empire.

He came with no noise and with little proclamation, no thunder of the captains and shouting.

He came as if it were quite a simple matter to establish His kingdom, though the firmest earthly empire was in possession already, and though a firmer than all earthly monarchies possessed the

hearts of those whom He came to rule. And how was this done? Most kingdoms have acquired power by violence and wrong, this by righteousness and grace and mercy. To no other conqueror can these words be addressed, “ Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Most Mighty, with Thy glory and Thy majesty; and in Thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness”. Sometimes the good done by conquerors has well-nigh atoned for the evils of war; and their greatest glory has been to raise the subdued, to overcome their barbarism, to conquer and to reduce them to civilisation. But the glory of our King is, that He conquers us for no other purpose than to raise us; that He seeks us not because the fame of our wealth and skill and power had excited His envy or ambition, but because the cry of the oppressed reached to heaven, and the sighing of the prisoner came before Him whose ear is delicate to catch the feeblest and most distant, and to understand the most confused desire of them that are in trouble; who saw that there was none to govern us, but rulers who led us through tyranny to destruction; He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was none to come between us and those who had us at their will, and therefore His arm brought salvation. He saw that by His government alone could we be rescued and raised, and He determined, through His own humiliation, to exalt us. He became one of us, that He might be our King; He clothed Himself in our dust, that we might wear His royal robe; He lay in our grave, that we might sit on His throne; He founded our joy in the deep bitterness of His own soul, our kingdom in His own obedience and subjection. Has He not claim to reign over us? A government, once firmly established, goes on for the most part easily enough, sometimes quite independently of the throne; but it takes a man of kingly qualities to found a kingdom under the most adverse circumstances, and out of the most unlikely material. What was the case with this kingdom? This was no case of quiet, undisputed succession, nor was it one of easy and rapid conquest. Of men wildly rebelling against all righteous and conscience-binding authority, Christ took in hand to make a people so submissive that they may be called “ living sacrifices “. Of men who scorned His rule with a special scorn, He has to make subjects, who gladly lay down their lives for their King; of men hating one another, envying, maligning, and despising one another, He has to form a community so attached that all possessions, and even life itself, are held as common property, and willingly yielded for the good of the whole; of men who, as soon as He leaves them, are invaded by His enemies, tempted, threatened, bribed, allured to disaffection, He undertakes to create faithful and staunch sup porters; of those who are emphatically “ not a people,” He has to form a peculiar people, a people of God. And this He actually does. Men begin life wicked, selfish, profligate, with a strong revulsion of soul from all good, and a headlong proclivity to whatever is sinful, their spirits all in disorder, and seeking no higher condition; they acknowledge Christ as King, and His laws bring harmony and orderly purpose into their lives; in the strength of loyal love to Him, they make successful war upon their own fatal desires, and have often so well understood what is due to Him, that they have spent their substance and their lives in toilsome and bloody service. And does it say nothing for the reality, the force, and the wisdom of His government, that He can leave His newly reduced enemies to administer it, and Himself return to the seat of His dominion, sure that this distant province which He leaves will be a nursery of faithful servants, and ever send up to Him trained and efficient rulers? Does it not, at least, very sufficiently show that He is a King, though unseen; and that His kingdom is real, though not of this world?

Besides its origin, the difficulty and success of its establishment, there are many other features of it which evince its fitness to take precedence, and its worthiness to be desired. One of the most

patent is its universality. It affords a meeting-place for all men, is capable of embracing all within it, and fusing them in one fellow ship. Founders of kingdoms have not lacked ideas of universality. Their ambition has been very catholic. They have taken steps also to wards the realising of their ideas; they have been careful to discover geographical centres, commercial centres, from which they might reach to all, and to which all, by natural leanings and interests, might incline; but so far as experiment has hitherto shown, it takes something more than worldly interest to bind the world together. By this, nations may work together for a while, but feeling that they are widely different, and that at any moment their interests may conflict. The bond is still without them, and not within. But in the kingdom which Christ has founded, there is a fellowship which does not recognise any distinction among nations. In it " there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, because Christ is all, and in all ". All own one King, all receive common rights, and all are actuated by the same spirit. In this kingdom we can claim nothing as being of this nation or of that, but only as be longing to the one family in heaven and on earth.

We stand upon a common ground with all, and enter a kingdom which excludes none. In it we learn the deepest affinity, and are drawn together by the only bond that is wide enough to encircle the world, and strong enough to draw together the unlikest. Whoever enter this kingdom resemble one another in the thoughts, feelings, and hopes that lie deepest within them, and which they count the most promising and permanent features of their character. Loyalty to their King possesses all alike, and this lies at the centre of the heart of each, working outwards and transforming all; and no difference, however great, can outweigh this resemblance, nor so in crease as to obliterate and outlive it; for in this kingdom we are brought into communion with the " one Spirit, the one Lord, the one God, and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all ". And here, too, is bridged over that wide distinction between dead and living, and are knit in closest bands with those who are advanced to the higher offices of trust, for " God is not a God of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto Him ". Shall we not, then, pray that this kingdom come, obliterating all hostile distinctions, using all diversity of gifts for one common Lord, and putting one language and oath of allegiance in the mouths of all, " We are Christ s, and Christ is God's "? The advantages which the kingdoms of earth offer are commonly summed up in these three, Liberty, Security, and Plenty. A man outside of every community can assure himself of none of these. The simplest form of government is that in which a number of men choose one in whom they can trust, and who is expected to look after the common interests, while they attend to their special callings. There may be among them one so wise in counsel, so far-sighted, so large hearted, so weighty, and so bold, that each member of the community feels " I am better in his keeping than in my own ". And unless the subjects of a kingdom can thus trust the governing power for the leading advantages just named, it is not a kingdom to be desired. But we must beware how we compare the kingdom of God with earthly kingdoms, lest we thereby not merely see what blessings are to be expected in a kingdom, but learn to expect blessings of similar nature. A man may feel that he is safe as to many things, but what can he know of absolute trust till he has trusted in Christ? What can he know of any of the blessings of the subject till he becomes subject to Christ? Is not the liberty, the security, the plenty we know, very shadowy and precarious, until we possess the eternal reality and substance of these in Christ? Until we possess that security which has heard the gates of the city of God shut behind, and has found the feet standing on a rock; which can view every contingency without dread, knowing whose will it is that is done in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; which can say, "Although

the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation “; that security which is secure in God, which rests in Him and knows that “ greater is He that is for us than all that can be against us”; that liberty, wherewith the Son of God makes free when He delivers us from our sins and from all that drags us down from high apprehensions of our calling in God; when He gives us entrance into the wide and lasting love of God, bringing us to the very brightness of His countenance, to that love which casteth out fear, and to that peace of God which passeth understanding; when He renews the mind to the persuasion that God is on our side against sin and all that comes of sin, and enables us to accept of all that God has been doing and does to free us from the curse; that plenty which is supplied by the fulness of the Godhead, and can only be enjoyed in a kingdom where there are no unknown and sunken masses; but where the King knows all and rules by personal influence over each; that plenty which provides not for a few wants of some, but for every want of all; which provides enlightenment of mind, renewal of heart, comfort, strength, and every grace that is needed to bring us to the measure of the stature of the perfect man. So that to become a citizen of this kingdom is just to reach the highest position a man can occupy, and to enter into everlasting blessedness. As among earthly kingdoms there are some so superior to others that it becomes a point of ambition to be enrolled as their citizens, because in them our rights are protected and our safety secured, because our labour receives its fullest recompense, and our liberty its freest exercise; so there is this kingdom of God, founded from everlasting, and destined to endure when time shall be no longer, the which if we enter into, we shall at once be installed in a secure liberty, which is protected by the Almighty, cared for by that King, the meanest of whose subjects knows no grievance, certified of our eternal well-being, associated with all that is joyous and with all that is holy in the universe, and confirmed in every good resolve and rewarded for every good service by the favour of a loving King. This is the one kingdom which all others will be seen only to have pointed towards and taught us to hope for; a kingdom so free that the law of it is love, so great that none are excluded and none unthought of, so righteous that murmur is never heard through all its borders, so stable that when heaven and earth are shaken this will “ not be moved “: a kingdom so wisely administered that in it each one of us shall find his right place, when we shall learn the blessedness we have in common with all the nations of the saved, and that peculiar property of bliss, with which a stranger cannot intermeddle, and which is prepared for us by Him who has written our names among His subjects, and gives to us that new name which no man knoweth save Him that receiveth it; a kingdom which we shall then only begin to learn the glory of, when we shall see it triumphant, and when the kings and nations of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And this is the one perfect kingdom, because He who reigns is the perfect King, alone able to found a kingdom in the deepest love and broadest righteousness. He is King of kings and Lord of lords, He is the blessed and only Potentate; but His special right of dominion over us is grounded in this, that He has taken our nature upon Him.

It is as one of us, as our Head, as the Son given to us, that He takes the government upon His shoulder, and brings us to the kingdom of the Father. And do we need to pray that His kingdom may come, or do we not? Are we sufficient for our own need, for our own future, or are we not? Do we need some one to rule us, to help us against our enemies, to help us against our selves, or do we not? Have not our eyes opened to the fact that thick between us and God there stand those

that bar the way, sins and hindrances of all kinds, that must be swept away or over come? Have we not tried to do this for our selves, and found again and again that when the shout of victory was on our very lip, we were prostrated in the dust of shameful defeat? Have we not felt at such times that all might yet be well with us, if some one, strong and mighty in righteousness, would only take possession of us, take us out of our own hands, and rule and command us by an authority more suasive than our own, and, imbuing us with a power that we have not of ourselves, make well-doing possible to us; if some one would take up this cause which our feebleness is making nothing of, and would see to it, as for his own glory and as his own interest, that we be delivered, and conquer, and reach the peace of God? What we daily find our need of is a ruler, and a ruler loving enough to give us all confidence in Him; firm enough to support us when we weary, and compel us to the right path when we waver, powerful enough to do what man cannot do, to change our hearts and deliver us from evil.

Such a ruler God offers to us, and such a ruler we choose when we pray, “ Thy kingdom come “. The reason why this petition should be used with a special view to the extension of the Church, and the encouragements there are so to use it, are so fully before the thoughts of all praying persons at the present time that less need be said on these points. Of course, the first ground of hope that this petition is now to be answered, more fully and visibly than hitherto, is just this, that it is being prayed more earnestly and believingly now than hitherto. Prayer is not the only means of bringing in the kingdom of God; but if it be, as we believe it now is, earnestly prayed for, the other means will also be used. And without prayer, earnest and sustained, what can we look for? Even the first descent of the Spirit as the Spirit of the kingdom of Christ, though certainly sufficiently provided for by the ascension of our Lord, was vouchsafed only to anxious and reiterated prayer. And in these latter days there is no desire more common to all Christians than that the Church may extend her influence; nor are there any more conspicuous features of modern Christianity than missionary zeal. No doubt there is much in these desires and efforts that is merely selfish and earthly, but unquestionably there is also much that is of heaven, and much too that is hopeful, because it is not the unrooted product of a year or two, or the mushroom growth of a passing excitement, but the fruit of a steady growth which many a year has nourished. This desire does not require to be fostered by any special theory of prophetical interpretation, nor can it in any time cease to be among the most ardent desires of the Christian. But no one can fail to draw some encouragement from what he sees, nor can any one fail to see that much of the progress around him is in directions which prepare a way for the kingdom of God. Increased intelligence and a more general and careful education, attention to the outcast, the distressed, and the criminal, more liberal ideas of civil liberty, the cordial, frequent, and increasing reference to union among different sections of the Church, and many other features of the age that are continually mentioned, all make our prayer more hopeful. But while hope is our duty, prophecy is beyond our province. Neither shall we be much inclined to prophesy, when we consider these three things; * how very different God’s thoughts must be concerning His kingdom and the whole plan of its advance, from ours who see but the merest glimpses of His purpose; when we think how often in past times there has been every prospect that now at last the Church would just steadily grow; and when we turn from speculation about the future to present fact, and think of “ the millions afar off that know not the Revelation of God, or of the thousands at hand that hold it in contempt “. Yet these things only the more plainly show us that it is of God to grant that His kingdom may come. Of the consummate glory of this kingdom it is very difficult to speak. We know that for earth the best

condition would be the kingdom of God, but what earth will be when this prayer is fully answered, who would undertake to say? It is ours to pray without ceasing, and to maintain fidelity to our King. We must cleave loyally to Him. He is coming in glory and will reign whose right it is. Let us, if need be, endure hardness for a little that we may evermore reign with Him. No one can take from us His words, * See Isaac Taylor's Saturday Evening throughout.

" He that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne ". And for those who desire some detail of future glory to attract their hope, no words can be more suitable than the following, written by one who spent his life in the service of his heavenly King, and has now enjoyed many lifetimes of reward. " O kingdom everlasting, kingdom enduring throughout all generations, where is never-failing light, and the peace of God, which passeth under standing; in which the souls of the saints securely rest, crowned with eternal gladness; whither the ransomed of the Lord shall come, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

O how glorious is the kingdom in which with Thee, O Lord, all the saints shall reign, clothed in white raiment, and with crowns upon their heads.

O kingdom of eternal blessedness, where Thou, Lord, the hope of the saints and the diadem of their glory, art seen face to face, gladdening them every one, and embracing them on every side with the comforts of Thy peace. There is joy unbounded, gladness unbroken, health untouched by woe, progress without pain, light without darkness, life without death, every good sifted from its ill, and enjoyed without alloy or interruption. Where youth never grows old and life never dies, where beauty never pales and love never cools, where health never languishes, where joy never wanes and where grief is never felt, where no moan nor sigh is heard nor any tear is seen, where gladness is ever enjoyed, and where there is no evil feared, because the highest good is possessed, which is to be always beholding the face of the Lord of righteousness and strength."

Chapter 51

04.04. Thy Will be done in Earth, in heaven

Chapter IV. “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” IN the second petition of this prayer, we have prayed “ for God’s spiritual kingdom, that it may be set up and established in our hearts; for His visible kingdom, or Church, that it may increase and spread, until it fill the whole earth; and for His heavenly kingdom, that it may soon drive away and put an end to every kind of sin and sorrow, and leave nothing to be seen in the new heavens and the new earth but a glorious God, filling all things with His presence, and ruling with a Father’s love over His dutiful and holy children “. Already, therefore, we have desired that those things be fulfilled which are contained in this third petition. We cannot desire that He be King over the earth, without desiring that His will be done on earth. We do not sincerely own Him as King, unless we set His will above our own and every other. For a kingdom where there is not one guiding will is a distracted kingdom, doomed to fall: a king whose will is not done is a mocked and virtually dethroned king. How ever, to add this petition is not to repeat, though it be to develop and follow out the preceding. The three petitions are to one another as root, stem, and fruit; as beginning, middle, and end. In the hallowing of God’s name the foundation is laid for the establishment of His kingdom; it is the first opening of the human eye to the majesty of God. Then the kingdom is established, the heart of man prostrates itself before its King, forgetting and cancelling its old laws, and rejoicing in its new allegiance. But this is not all; no one praying would stop here. It is not enough that the kingdom be established, that its boundaries be enlarged, and its glory delighted in; there is an end for which all this is brought about; and that end is, that the will of the Ruler may be done. We desire that God may assert His dominion over us and all men, and may give us to know that He is a living and near God by the force of His will upon us. From the “ name “ we pass to the work (as displayed in His kingdom), and from the work to the will. From the outskirts of His personality we pass to its heart. And we do not use this petition aright, till we fully apprehend that, besides names and outward show of authority, God has a will. This, of course, requires no proof nor theoretical explanation, but every one who is trying to pray knows how much need there is that it be practically enforced. How does his prayer seem to wander about searching for an ear, until the living will of God presents itself! When we think of God’s name as left with us to make up for His absence, and keep us mindful of an authority which is resident in a person far distant from ourselves, we cannot pray. When we think of God’s kingdom as established originally by Himself, but now left under viceroys or under a mere code of laws, we cannot pray. We need to meet behind the name a present will, and under all forms of authority and symbols of power to recognise an active will. From day to day, from one act of our wills to another, this we are to bear in mind, that God also has a will; that as by our wills we plan and set ourselves resolutely in one direction, so there are plans which have their origin in a will that is not of earth, but are yet to be carried out on earth; that alongside of our desires there are the things which God is desiring to be done.

Everywhere and in all things we are to meet this will of God. This kingdom of God we speak of, we have to learn to look upon as an absolute monarchy, wherein one will is supreme, and be yond which is the outer darkness, where all is confusion and dismay. And the peculiar discipline we

have each of us to go through in this life is to learn submission to the supreme will; a hard and distasteful lesson, though so plainly reasonable and necessary. Hard and distasteful, for a man does not find within him a will piously and wisely regulated by the will of God, but diverging to his own evil desires, murmuring, struggling, and only in the end, after long and painful teaching, coming to desire that in all things it be the will of God which is carried out.

It seems a strange thing that a lifetime should be spent in this, and that the very highest employment of the will of man is to surrender willingly to God's will; but so it is. And when can a man's will show its strength, if not when he wills the same things as God? It is not that a man gives up willing, nor resigns any property of his being whatsoever, when his will is conformed to that of God; it is not that he be comes either the unwilling victim or the passive tool of another will, but that the whole strength and bent of his will now lead him in God's direction. This yielding to the will of God, being a will so different from our own, is a great difficulty.

We yield to-day, and to-morrow it seems as hard as ever. We gather together all the reasons there are for yielding, and at length we are able sincerely to pray " Thy will be done "; we are very peaceful and very glad, and do not doubt that this is a final decision; but an hour undeceives us, and shows us that the decision has to be made again, and in still more trying circumstances. If any petition needs to be daily repeated it is this. But have we ever once as yet thrown all the will we are masters of into this petition? Have we so much as recognised that it is the will of a person we ought all to be obeying here? Are we satisfied with some loose ideas of right and wrong? Do we go by custom, habit, fashion, impulse, our own wisdom, or are we led by this will? There is no question about this, whether God's will or my own has most claim to my service: which is getting most of it? Let me, if possible, see my true position; God has a will, a will about me as well as about other things; it is not, then, with mere rules of direction I have to do, but with an active and authoritative will; I will not hide from it, nor distribute its force over the whole face of the earth, but I come out personally face to face with God; will to will with God; and now what is it to be opposing this will? This is a will which has always been planning and accomplishing good a will limitless in its embrace, and incomprehensible in its love a will reaching to the most distant and stooping to the most forgotten and sunken, bending over distress, and raising the fallen with ineffable tenderness, and I cannot pray that this will may be done. This will, which has not ceased to " work for the deliverance and blessedness " of myself and all of us, which has still been that all men should be saved, in spite of untold hindrances and at infinite cost this will it is that I have been resisting. This will into which no evil purpose ever entered, and the love of which man's heart fears to conceive, because it is above him, and seems unreal and impossible; this supreme and marvellous will, of which it seems akin to profanity to say that it is worthy to rule, I have scanned and misinterpreted, and against it I have set up my own private desires, objecting to the plans of God, not knowing my own nothingness before it, nor trembling before the great and loving Ruler in whom it resides. And unless we add to this the definite persuasion that this is an Almighty will, we shall scarcely pray in hope for the performance of God's will on earth. For we have done much to engender quite an opposite persuasion by neglecting and opposing the will of God. If, however, there be not infinite power to execute this will, then how is it to be done on earth?

What we see on earth is not readiness to accept and execute it, but opposition, unflinching, full grown, consolidated wickedness; and if there be not an Almighty will in opposition to this, where is our hope? But He to whom we pray is not a God that sleeps, or is on a journey, or talking,

engaged with and absorbed in other matters, but a willing God, a God already attending, and whose own purposes they are that we desire to be fulfilled. The aid we have to expect is not the very precarious aid we might receive from dexterously availing ourselves of the power that resides in the laws of God's kingdom; we do not bring influences to bear on this earth which may or may not reform it; it is the will of the Almighty we appeal to. It is a new hope which possesses us, when we come to the persuasion that the will which we have opposed, and which is yet our sole hope for ourselves and all men, is powerful as it is loving. And it is a new resignation which possesses us, when we see God, our Father, the living, loving, ordaining will, in the midst of our lot, and can say, " Thy will, Thy will then it is altogether good. Thou hast been the Author, Mover, Orderer throughout. Thou hast planned and begun and watchfully carried on, and therefore it is good. This Thou hast done not by compulsion, but by Thy will, whose will is done in heaven, whose will is leading me to heaven." Who shall say what may be thus contained in this petition, or predict how, using it, we shall be led from one degree of grace and blessing to another, become more and more conformed to the guiding will? Who shall penetrate the purposes of the only wise God, and tell the glory which lies there in the seed, and which we shall see with our eyes when God manifests what His will is? And are we to fall out of this blessed track of His will, are we to be cast sadly ashore out of this river of life? Shall we be found dropping this petition from careless lips, as if the accomplishment of God's will had little to do with us or with the world we are in? Are we not already enjoying the fruits of that will? Am I not the child of this will? Is it not this which has made me myself and not another? " My substance was not hid from Thee, yet being unperfect; and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God; how great is the sum of them." But in our petition there seems to be an emphasis on this, that the will of God is to be done. For as, when we have willed a thing, we do not sit down and expect to see it take place of itself, but set about the carrying out of our will by our work, so the will of God is not a thing to be spoken of, contemplated, waited for, but a thing to be done. And this will of God is to be done by us. For as a monarch does not rise from his throne to execute his own will, but has it executed by servants, to whom are allotted their several spheres of duty, so the will of God is given to us to do. It is still He who does it, but through our doings. The actual performance of His will has still been by the words and works of men. God has not been working in one place, man in another; but what God has done on earth, He has done by men on earth. And here it is to be observed, that in order to our carrying out the mightiest schemes of God, it is not necessary that we know what these are.

God gives to each what each can do, and by the various gifts and labours of all fulfils His own grand purpose. What we need to know is only the commands of God, what He sees fit for us to do. And doing this we may be sure that, so far as we are concerned, the secret purposes of God are being accomplished. He has given to all of us the same general orders, but by putting us in different situations, He does His will through each of us in different ways. One has little active work, but much to suffer. One is freed from the cares and temptations of eminence, but thinks his lowly condition not very suitable for doing the will of God. Another excuses himself from much reference to the will of God, because he is so distracted with the wills of men, and with their cares and burdens laid upon him. All such murmuring and excusing is vain, for these three things, God's commandment, our circumstances, and God's eternal purpose, are all of them springing from one source, the will of God, and do therefore harmonise. Our circumstances are allotted by the same will which commands us. And therefore let no one say, " I could do God's will better somewhere

else". What is God's will you speak of? Is it not that you serve Him where you are; is not that His will?

You were not made by God to be another man, and fill his place, and do his work. You were made as you are, to do your own work, and to fill the place in God's plan which He has appointed you. A weak monarch may mar his own design by employing his servants in posts for which they are most unfit. But God does not so mistake; He has " given to all according to their several ability," and so brings about His own ends. So that when we pray, " Thy will be done," we pray that God may so rule, that to the utmost ends of the earth, and in the minutest actions of men, and in all the arrangements of life, there may be the easily visible impress of God's will. This we pray for, but more directly that our circumstances may be so ordered as to enable us to carry out most effectually the design of God with us, and that we may be so gifted with wisdom, courage, and self-command, as to see and follow out the line of conduct most appropriate to us where God has set us. Praying thus, we are strengthened for all duty, whether it be active or sorely passive. We find in all that happens to us an answer to this prayer; and instead of being dismayed, as those are who have not prayed that the will of God may be done, we find, in every change and seeming chance of life, new scope for carrying on the work of God, our share in His plan; and for our ordinary days, which pass as yesterday passed, we find no healthier influence to give them a uniform tone and character than to write on the threshold of each, " Thy will be done". I cannot come thus before God without some strengthening sense of the dignity and responsibility of a life connected with God, and fulfilling His will. I come to Him as my Father and my King, as if bringing my life in my hand, desiring that He would take it again, and give it back to me moulded to His design. I stand alone with Him, not confused by what other men are doing, not hidden from God's will regarding me by the practice of the world; I know that there must be something which God has for me to do, else I would not have life to do it; and can I go straightway and forget that it is not my own will and the world's work I have to do, but these only in so far as they are God's will and God's work? I cannot sincerely pray, " Thy will be done," and begin my day with no desire to know and execute God's commands; I am under orders, I have a purpose to live for, am no longer open to every influence that may blow upon me, nor can I any more count this life a mere vanity. And what higher purpose can a man have than this, to fulfil the will of God with him, and satisfy the reason of his being what he is, and where he is? Surrendering our wills thus to God's will, we live with a determined strength of will that nothing else imparts. We carry with us from God's presence God's authority, and in the strength of it we make the world serve God; we fulfil His will in the world and by the world, find this authority more suasive than the solicitations and examples of men; find in it a commission which turns this world into the material of God's work. If not, we have only mocked God in saying, " Thy will be done," mocked Him in a way which is most offensive to Him, calling Him " Lord, Lord! " but not doing the things which He has commanded; like the son of the parable, who said, " I go, sir," but did not the will of his father. But very specially are we to dwell on the words " in earth," not suffering them to pass our lips without a degree of emphasis; for so hard is it to give ourselves, day by day, to the service of God, and to spend our whole time in the carrying out of His purposes, that we are tempted to give up this, and tempted by the most palpable delusions. And one of these delusions, which seems absurd when stated in words, but which never theless affects our conduct, is, that as in a future life we shall have opportunities of holiness such as we do not here enjoy, we are therefore not called upon to be living as carefully here as they do in heaven. Do we not find ourselves virtually saying, that because we have to live by our

own exertions, therefore we cannot be doing God's will; that we must defer doing God's will till we get more time? Is there not visible in our conduct the want of duly remembering that on earth we must do God's will; to-day in all we have to do, for to-morrow we may not be on earth the want of once for all coming to the persuasion, that what we are here for is to do God's will, not just to struggle through and reach death, but to live now as the servants of God; not to wait for holier times, but to redeem this time, because the days are evil; not to live as if we thought that hereafter we will be more bound to God as His subjects than now; and as if we thought that, though hereafter we may be expected to do His will, yet here we must do much that is not His will, much that is beside, and much that is contrary to His will; and that in the whole we cannot live with much reference to the will of God? Have we been praying with any true hope that God's will may be done on earth, or only believing that God's will may somewhat and sometimes modify the evil of earth, and may keep us from some of the grosser sins? Have we yet come to the strong sense of our responsibility, not to ourselves, not to our friends, not to the world, not to God's law, but to God Himself; a sense which makes us say, " Here on earth I have something to accomplish, and that for God. This manner of life I am choosing, is this that which best accomplishes God's will? If not, how do I pray, Thy will be done? In a thousand things I am choosing for myself, choosing what I shall do to-day, what I shall do for a time, whom I shall see, how I shall conduct my self towards this man and that; in all my choosing, am I referring to God's will, having resolved to do it? Or am I snatching my short time of wretched self-government, before God calls me to account? Am I doing my best to shape my life, so as to carry out God's will, or, having schemed, a life for myself, am I wresting God's will so as to bring it near to my own? Am I acting from God's will as my reason, and motive, and guide, or from my own untutored and unsubdued will? Knowing what the will of God is, am I considering, Now how much of this can I possibly achieve? "And being so tempted to forget that through all the employments, connections, and circumstances of this earthly life, it is God's will which must lead us, we must not cease enlarging this petition in words though not in meaning, to pray and to desire "that we may be filled with the knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that we may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness". And if ever tempted to relax our efforts, if ever tempted to fall from the hope of this petition to the sluggishness which says, " It is impossible to do the will of God as it is done in heaven, and therefore it is useless to pray for this "; let us remember that it is our sin that it is impossible; that whether impossible or not, it is what we earnestly desire when in a right frame of spirit; and that if it be so desirable, our part is not to give up because we cannot attain perfection, but to strive all the harder that we may come as near it as possible. It is one thing to attain perfection, another to desire it. And he who does not desire it here will certainly never attain it hereafter. So that the simple answer to the question, whether on earth we may pray for the perfection which obtains in heaven, and if it be not romantic or enthusiastic so to pray, is just this, that we pray for what we desire, and we cannot but desire to be perfectly serving God. It is vain to tell us we are too weak, too sinful, to reach perfection in this life; this only incites us to put forth more earnest desire and effort, and more beseechingly to implore the aid of " that glorious power which hath delivered us from the power of darkness," " that Almighty power which works (not indeed in the doubting, but) in all who believe". That there are things we cannot do is no reason why we should not be doing all we can. And if no man has reached perfection in this life, is there any man who has done all he could to reach it? But over

against the sad truth that we have omitted to make the most of this life, and are therefore now not “perfect and complete in all the will of God,” over against the truth that there are many parts of God’s will which, on account of our weakness, we have been unable to perform as they in heaven do, let this other truth be set, that there are parts of God’s will which can only be performed on earth. And would that we could so understand this as to awake to the value of this day we pray in, and bestir ourselves, and throw our whole energies into this present life, living out its duties with our might, exerting our selves so as to arouse efforts which will lift us out of our easy, natural level and rate of living, and which will show that we have now one thing to do, and one purpose to fulfil. To do the things God’s will now contains is not easy. We could not expect it to be so. Often has it been seen that, even among men, one dominant will has aroused thousands to hard, fatiguing activity, which, through the whole course of it, seemed all but beyond human strength; and shall we expect God’s will to be easy and natural to us? And this difficulty appears very specially in what God has set before us all as our common aim and work, as the one thing He would have all of us to do, so that He says of it, “ This is the work of God “. This work is to believe on Him whom He hath sent. This we cannot do hereafter; it is the work of this life, the will of God for earth. This is that which will bring the best good to us, and the highest glory to God out of the apparent poverty and woe and vanity of this life. Is there any use we can make of our lives so profitable that, for the sake of it, we may neglect the saving of our souls? And if not, what are we to do? are we to sit still, to let ourselves be drifted we know not whither, when God has a definite will concerning us, and has given us a definite work to accomplish? But this work, easy though it seems, is found to be hard; it takes us to go out of our way, to resist our inclinations, to pray as our life depends on it, “Thy will be done”.

Yet while the things to be done are different, the manner of our doing them is to be similar to the heavenly. We, the younger brethren, are to look upon our elders as they do the will of God in those higher posts to which we may not yet be advanced. Letting our hearts dwell on the blessedness of those who serve God and see His face, we are insensibly assimilated to their spirit, and are prepared to become rulers over greater trusts than are here committed to us. And since we cannot actually contemplate, and so imitate heavenly service, this petition becomes a prayer for the spirit of that service. We know that if we be animated by the same spirit, the manner of our working will resemble that of the heavenly places. When, therefore, we pray, “ Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” * we desire that God’s will be done on earth readily and cheer fully, humbly and zealously, faithfully and con

* And surely it may be inferred from these words, “ as it is in heaven,” that we are not to pray for the execution of God’s will in judgment, for this is not “ as it is in heaven”; not in opposition to and overturning the will of man, but as converting the will of man, and operating through it. stantly. And in looking to heaven as the model of our service, we need not pass by the visible heavens, from which David so constantly drew lessons for himself. To see how God’s will should be done, we have but to turn the eye to the “ unworn sky,” old in the service of God, but fulfilling His will as at first. We see the precise regularity which should characterise our service also. We see how unweariedly all perform their parts, the great sustaining the small, the small reflecting and enhancing the glory of the great; all as members of one system, obeying in peaceful harmony Him who calls them all by their names. We see how the sun, morning after morning, comes forth rejoicing to run his race; how the moon observes her appointed seasons, and the sun knoweth his

going down; how all, though it be in an unvarying course, fulfil the will of God untiringly. And is our glory to be our shame? Is the only result of our being gifted with will and intelligence, to be that we rebel against God, and revolt from His will? Ought not the order of nature, which we admire, and to which we trust, to be a continual rebuke to us? But it is to the inhabitants of heaven we are mainly to look, those “ angels who excel in strength, who do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word “. “ Hearkening unto the voice of His word,” for it is this which makes them worthy of imitation, that all they do is done with direct reference to the will of God; because it is God’s will, and not, in the first place, because they have chosen it. The throne of God is in their midst. They serve Him seeing His face, and what they see written there they haste to execute. And when our Lord asks us to pray this petition, He does not ask us to do what He has not done Himself. When He was on earth it was earth that taught heaven how the will of God should be done. Angels stooped to learn new devotion to Him whom they had already served without blame. And in the crisis of His life, the crisis also of the world’s history, this was His petition, “ Thy will be done “. And so also we are to pray, Order our circumstances so that we shall have best scope for serving Thee, and reconcile us to our circumstances, and fit us for them, so that with our will and heart we may serve Thee.

Preserve us from being conformed to this world; but transform us by the renewing of our minds that we may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Christ does not bid us pray that this good thing and that may be ours, but that God’s will may be done; for this is at the back of all good, and embraces now all the good that will ever be to any.

04.05. Give us this day our daily bread

Chapter V. “Give us this day our daily bread.” WHEN we set ourselves to fathom the character of a man, we do not so intently observe the expression of his thoughts, as their connection; we do not stand outside and listen just to what he pleases to tell us, but, if possible, enter within and observe the workings of his inner man; we do not care so much to know his ideas and sentiments in detail as to trace the links between them; so as to see the man, not only when he pleases to emerge to the surface, but in the entire current of his feelings and thoughts. And, when we ascertain those minor connections of his various utterances, and can trace all that appears back to that involuntary spring in the heart which suggested it, we have a pretty accurate idea, not of what the man desires us to think him, or even supposes himself to be, but of his real character. Now, when we submit these two petitions, “ Thy will be done on earth,” and, “ Give us this day our daily bread,” to this species of scrutiny, we at once detect the character of their Author. We see that He only could have thus passed from one to the other, who found it His meat and drink to do the will of His Father. Many would pray, “ Thy will be done,” and many would pray, “ Give us bread,” but to how many of us would this have suggested itself as the natural order of these petitions? Are there not few who have chosen the trade or business they follow, because they thought that therein they could best work out God’s will with them, compared to those who have made their choice as being the most pleasant, or most rapid, or most secure way of earning their bread: few to whom the supports and comforts of this life are practically of less importance than the doing of God’s will? If we divide men into two classes, those who work because they are hungry and have to work, and those who work because there is something to be done; those who consider how they may best win a livelihood, and trust that in it they shall somehow find opportunity of doing God’s will; and those who make it their first consideration how they may best serve God, and trust that in doing so bread shall be given them; we need not say which will be the larger class, and as little need we say which will be the more Christlike class. It is in truth a very advanced and enviable condition for a man to be in, when he desires to be supported in this life mainly for the purpose of doing God service. Yet not so advanced by any means that none attain to it, nor that we should be content only to envy without striving to imitate those who have attained it.

How many reasons urge all of us to pray for continuance in life, besides this simple one which led to the prayer of our Lord! When the mist that has long lain gloomily on our earthly future begins to lift and scatter, and reveals a fair and attractive prospect; when plans are entered into the full execution of which will take years to accomplish; when we have found a useful and not unpleasant way of employing our time; when we are surrounded with friends whose counsel guides, and whose affection cheers and rewards our labour, we have evident reason to pray, “ Give us still this day our daily bread “. But therefore ought we the more carefully to consider, whether there be one reason stronger than all these, whether there be one desire which at once and uniformly suggests this petition, and would dictate it still, though the world were blank of comfort and reward, and though natural feeling were prompting us rather to say, “ I would not live alway “. Not, of course, that we should be afraid of cherishing subordinate reasons for continuance in life, but that we

should beware lest they be come something more than subordinate, lest they oppose instead of aiding the performance of the main purpose; not that we should be afraid of the enjoyments and attachments of life, but that we should always give the doing of the will of God so prominent a place in our intentions and desires, that we shall very naturally pray, “ Thy will be done on earth,” and, therefore, in order that Thy will may be done, for this end and reason mainly, “ Give us this day our daily bread “. This petition, then, at once shows itself to be quite of a piece with the whole prayer before us. A petition for temporal support, it is a spiritual petition. It presents the world as the godly man sees it. Our meat and drink and raiment first come into view here, and here we see them from the heavenly side. This petition brings our whole earthly condition before God, and readjusts it before Him and with His help. It brings it back every morning to its true position, from which it veers and slides away in the forgetfulness and pressure of the day’s employment. Instead, there fore, of being easy, this petition is one of the most difficult to pray. It is the petition that least of all can be prayed from an earthly mind, for it comes from the directly opposite quarter to all earthly desires, and meets them on that very ground to which they most tenaciously hold. This is the petition of those who seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, who “ buy as though they possessed not, and use the world as not abusing it “. Yet let us not fear to utter it, though we know there is much that is selfish and earthly in the desire as we embrace it, for God is very ready to forgive the evil that is in our asking, that so we may receive His gift, and with His gift His blessing, which will purify us, and form our hearts to heavenly aspirations through the know ledge of His love.

Here, first, in this prayer, we come upon this word “ Give,” the key to the treasury of God’s riches; a word that opens over us the windows of heaven, that wakes the omnipotence of God, and causes the fulness of His resources to flow forth; a word which is as a rod of power in a man’s hand, if he knows to direct it to the great Giver, to Him from whom all things have come, who has given all out of Himself, and who continues to give not grudgingly, nor of necessity, but freely and liberally, because it is of His nature so to do; a word that we must use, be cause we are poor, but which is put into our mouths because we are intended to be rich; a word which, however often and greedily we use it, will still find its echoing “ receive “ in God. And there is no period when this word must be uttered for the last time, for God does not tire of giving, nor, like man, excuse Himself from giving more because already He has given so much, but by the further and more bountiful outpouring of His gifts satisfies that confidence in Him which His former gifts have inspired. And here this word “ Give “ stands in its simplicity, without apology, without circumlocution; in its childlike boldness and straightforwardness of request. It is the wide opening of the mouths of the young birds hungering round the parent. And it is remarkable, that the only introduction of this word in the prayer is when we ask for that which, of all things, we are most inclined to think may be got by our own exertions. We allow that there are spiritual gifts, which it is of God to give. Or at least there are graces which we are aware we cannot have without God’s aid, and which we feel so helpless to procure apart from Him, that it seems appropriate enough to call them “gifts”. But here we are taught to depend on the simple gift of God, not for the well-being of our spirits, but for the maintenance of our bodies. We are to say “ Give “ of that which our whole time is spent in procuring. We are not to say “ Provide,” not “ Put us in the way of acquiring “; but, however it is to be done, we are to say simply “ Give,” as if direct out of Thine hand into ours. What is true of the beasts of the field is equally, and almost as obviously, true of ourselves: “ These wait all upon Thee, that Thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That Thou givest them, they gather;

Thou openest Thine hand, they are filled with food." Let society refine and involve itself as it will, let it secure itself against all contingencies, and provide regular labour and suitable returns for labour, still it is God whose is our life and breath and all things. This security and plenty, which make us feel less dependent on God than the savage is, who has to-day to find to-day's food, are only the more liberal opening of God's hand to us, showing us that we, if we are not more dependent, have more dependence on God than most. And the nearer we come to the actual procuring of food, the more evidently do we see God. We may stay at our work, engrossed by it; we may sit in our rooms, chambers, or counting-houses, and plan, and there we may see no one but our selves providing our maintenance, and may fail to discern any symptoms of God's work; but when it comes to the end of all this, to the eating for life, we meet God and feel how utterly we are in the power of some other than ourselves.

It is not we who make the corn grow, nor by all the appliances of science could extort one harvest from an unwilling earth. Must not the proudest and best skilled among us, after doing his utmost, just simply wait on God for His bread? This lesson, which one year's famine so feelingly and unmistakably teaches, seems an easy lesson to learn from the regular and ordinary supply which God maintains by sending seed-time and harvest in the seasons of His appointment. When we consider the vast number of lives to be maintained, the variety of food by which they are maintained in all different parts of the earth, the numberless contingencies, things that might so easily happen, but which, if happening, would hasten multitudes to the grave, the remote and various causes which must all of them be together regulated and ordered to this one end of life, are we not convinced that God is no idle spectator of the earth He has framed for man?

One thing more very strikingly leads us to acknowledge that we are bound to God as the giver of our daily bread; and a thing it is, apparently, intended for this very end. We cannot make food, do what we will; and as little can we store it up for years and centuries. Some things are given us in perpetual retention, once for all, and not year by year; thus we possess the stone with which we build, the coal we burn, and others of the most useful commodities. But the actual food does not so exist, does not exist dead and stored up, so that we can never run out of it. It is of earth's annual production, and has its term of life, after which it is useless to us. It differs from those things that the earth already contains, and which have only to be taken and fashioned by us for our use, inasmuch as it has to be called into being. That which shall sustain us in the years to come has now actually no existence. It must itself be born and grow, must itself receive life, before it can communicate life to us. And thus are we very plainly unprovided for, except in the faithfulness of God. The future is a blank to us except in so far as God fills it with His goodness. And in what a light does this set the character of him who eats his daily bread, not only as if it must infallibly and of some natural necessity yield him life, but as if he had made it and given it the life which now it gives to him! " Talk no more, therefore, so exceedingly proudly, let not arrogancy come out of your mouth, for the Lord killeth and maketh alive; He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich; He bringeth low and lifteth up." What we have by inheritance, and what we have by our own endeavour; the abundance at hand, and the store laid up; all is the gift of God, and through all our possessions we must pray to Him who is at the back of them all, to the Fountain of Life from which they are drawing all that can give us life. For this prayer is not a fanciful connecting of earth with heaven, an elegant way of making our life of drudgery for bread a life sublime, nor a foolish, meaningless homage to God, but it is an asking for what we need and

can only have from God. But there is another word in this petition which we must take in connection with this word " Give ". And it seems, at first sight, strange that we should say, not only "Give us bread," but "our bread". The first truth which this suggests, when we pray, is, that what we ask for must be ours and not another s. We must, that is, ask for what God may give us without detriment to others. We are not to expect to reap what others have anxiously sown, nor to enter into other men's labours. " If any will not work, neither shall he eat." The bread we pray for is to be a gift so far as God is concerned, but it is to be ours so far as our fellow-men are concerned. We are to be careful that, in asking God to prosper us, we are not thinking of some other person's prosperity, and wishing that some of it were transferred to our lot. We are not to push our own interests regardless of the interests of others; still less, so as directly to injure others.

We are to keep within our own domain, and the limits of a fair and open competition. This prayer, then, saves from dishonesty and cruelty. When we thus pray, we see that our advancement is to run in the line of God's pleasure; and we are enabled to choose rather to wait to see His way of prospering us brought to pass, than to take the matter into our own hands, and, by means pleasing to Him or not, to make a competency for ourselves. It is bread provided honestly in the sight of man that we are to look for, and not the bread of idleness, of deceit, or of extortion. And, therefore, when we say, " Give us our bread," we do not expect that God will lift us above the common and toiling ways of men, nor loosen us from the hard and burden some conditions of this life, raining on us bread from heaven; but we trust that He will find for us labour, such as shall not only win us bread, but be otherwise beneficial to us.* And thus God, in that word of His which Christ rested on in the time of His trial, says, " Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God " that is, not by the simple and visible gift of God, but by His disposition of our circumstances, and distribution of natural ability to labour, and scope for exercising this ability.

But, again, this word "our" teaches us to be considerate in our desires, and discriminating; to ask not blindly for the good things we see

* Stier quotes a striking proverbial saying, " We lift our empty hands to heaven, and God lays work upon them ". others enjoy, nor for all that for a moment strikes us as desirable, but for " our " bread, for that which is suited to us in our present position.

What others are receiving, and may be both delighting in and profiting by, might be a very disastrous gift to us. This is, then, in other words, the wise prayer of Agur, " Feed me with food convenient for me ". And while there are hardships in poverty, which none will make light of who knows anything of their variety and their bitterness, yet, if this be the condition appointed to any, let these also thankfully pray for their pittance from God, remembering that He who taught us this prayer Himself lived from day to day, not knowing in the morning where the evening meal was to come from, not knowing in the evening where He would find shelter for the night, having while alive no home He called His own, nor when dead a place provided to lay His body, possessing nothing while in the world, and leaving behind Him no more than the raiment He wore. Though this be a condition which we cannot desire, yet -it has its own blessing, and those who find this allotted to them as their daily bread, will (if they are receiving it thankfully from God) find in the end that no better condition could have been assigned them, and that it has been no small inheritance to share the poverty of their Lord.

Again, it is perhaps not straining this word to find in it a reference to, and prayer for, others along with ourselves. In any case such prayer is very suitable, but it is specially appropriate when we pray for the provision of this life: inasmuch as in this we are all dependent one upon another, no one man's work sufficing for the actual accomplishment of his own sustenance, clothing, and comforts. In the savage state, men may be excused for some selfishness, where they can live in all things independently of one another, each man building for himself and catering for his own wants. But we are inexcusable, if we be not charitable, not only in prayer and intention, but in deed, we who daily enjoy what has cost the labour of many. And the more we live in liberal community with others, the better will our lives appear in the end to have been spent. On the whole, then, this word "our" teaches us to desire to be laborious, contented, and charitable; to work with our will and strength, doing our best in our place; to wait on God for fruit of our work and returns for our labour; and, receiving these, to be satisfied, if they be small, and willing that others should share with us, if they be large. He who has to earn his bread is girt by this prayer with a fresh and cheerful confidence for his daily duty: and he who has abundance is admonished to be diligent in the right disposal or increase of it, knowing, at least, that this prayer has not been from his true desire, if he leaves to their hunger and misery any whom his further labour might relieve. For our cause is a common cause with all mankind, as our Lord's self-sacrificing life stands ever teaching us; and while there is want in the world unsupplied, there should be no faculty of labour in the world unexercised. If the healthy do not work, what is to become of the sick? If the strong man do not labour, what help is there for the child and the aged? And to those who are labouring to their utmost, and yet not seeing the results they purposed and still desire, all that can be said is, Wait and pray this prayer still. This is all that can be said, not because your case is a desperate one, but because in this all consolation is included, and all hope, as you well know already, if the Spirit has taught you to say in simplicity, " Give me this day my daily bread ". By teaching us to ask for bread, our Lord indicates that our desires for worldly good should not be passionate, but moderate; restricted to the supply of the natural wants of our condition. For this the word bread naturally suggests to us.

We say that we do not desire a great deal, but enough to enable us to do God's will effectively, to be the most we can.* It is not a burden of luxuries and superfluous comforts, but the light equipment of a hardy abstemiousness, which is aimed at by this petition. We acknowledge the propriety of leaning rather to what is severe than to what is sumptuous; and while we by no means deprecate all extras, all comforts and pleasures, these are not sought with the fervency of prayer.

Here, accordingly, the question emerges: Can a man conscientiously pray thus, and straightway proceed to his employment, resolving to acquire, if possible, far more than enough for the maintenance of life? The answer to this has been anticipated, when it was said, that the honest offering of this petition impels a man to labour

* Clement of Alexandria cleverly compares a man's possessions to a shoe. They must fit him; being cumber some and uncomfortable if too large, as well as painful if pinched. to his utmost. Let him make what money he can, if that be fairly in the way of his calling, only let him, more than any other, keep repeating to himself the reiterated warnings of God's Word concerning the entangling power of wealth.

Let him start right from the petition preceding this. Let him be sure that his chief end in seeking gain be to do God's will on earth. Let him be very certain that his purpose is to employ his gains in a manner on which he can ask God's blessing; and let him through his whole career examine himself, to learn whether the means be not becoming more to him than the end, whether his desires are still going beyond the gold to the Christian expenditure he at first proposed. No doubt this requires a strong and watchful spirit, but since commercial ability, as well as every other talent, is to be consecrated to God, and since money is needed on all hands for the best of purposes, let him who has the ability to gain use this petition, and what he receives as God's gift he will use in His service. For do we not all feel, when we use this petition, that we must not use what God may this day give us, for the pampering of appetite, for the vanity of display, for waste, for anything which will not please God? We know how it has grieved ourselves to see what has been besought at our hands put to a use which the receiver knows we abhor or disapprove, and we determine to show ourselves worthy stewards of the gift of God to us, and to justify (so far as in us lies) our appointment to so many blessings. And as our prayers are moderate, so let us be thankful for ordinary benefits. For wherever there is material for prayer, there is material for thanksgiving. If we need to pray to God even for our bread, then even for our bread let us give thanks to Him. If to-day's supply does not come by chance, nor because we were similarly supplied yesterday and the day before, but because God regards our wants of to-day, and for this day also grants us life; then this day ought we to thank Him for this day's mercies, though they be but the same as yesterday s, and what all other men are enjoying. As each rising sun, touching the wing of the sleeping birds, wakes through the woods a fresh burst of glad melody, as if sun had never risen before; * so let each day's mercies awake our hearts afresh to the sense of God our Father's smile, and turn our lives towards His * See Three Wakings, and other poems. light. " Where nothing is deserved, everything should be received with thanksgiving; " how then shall we ever discharge our debt of thanks, who deserve to know the power of God's anger, but experience the power of His mercy?

There is another essential of this petition. We are to pray for this day only. And this is a point of so much importance to the right ordering of the godly life on earth, that our Lord follows it out in the subsequent discourse, and impresses it with a beauty and force of persuasion which have made this a marked passage of Scripture. He anticipated the objection that we must provide for to morrow as well as to-day, and reminds us that He who clothes the lilies of the field, and makes provision for the birds of the air, knows that we also have lives to be maintained, and constantly recurring necessities. By reminding us of our helplessness, of the folly of distracting forethought, and of the sufficiency of the care of God, He shames us into confidence. " Is not the body more than meat? " He who has given you the greater, will He not also provide the less? " Is not the life more than raiment? " He who can create and maintain the one, may well be trusted to supply the infinitely less costly want. " Are ye not of more value than many sparrows? " And yet is one want of one of these overlooked, for gotten, or despised? Does God find pleasure in lavishing on a flower which the eye of man never sees, a beauty which no forethought or effort of yours could produce, and will He spend no care on you, O ye of little faith? Does He not know what you have need of, so that you are constrained to be fearful and anxious in your own behalf? Or can you really, by all your pondering, provide one crumb beyond what He has provided for you? Does your scheming by day and by night remove you out of the care of God into an independent and self-supporting life of your own? "Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the

things of itself.

Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” Bring not, then, into this day’s cares, and to confuse the duties which this day requires of you, to-morrow’s cares and anxieties about its duties. I here ask God to take me through this day; if to-morrow comes, He knows that I shall be as dependent on Him then as now. But it forms no part of my care; I have cast it on Him. But does this forbid planning of all kinds? Does this preclude all saving or storing? Assuredly not. It forbids nothing which does not interfere with present duty. It precludes nothing which does not indicate mistrust of God, and beget fearfulness and depression of spirit. Any planning or storing of this kind is not for him who prays this prayer. Any anxiety which says, What shall I eat? as if there would be no God to-morrow; any thought of the unknown future which weakens us in any way for plain, present duty; and any self-confident storing, as if we had really more in our barns and banks than in the resources of God; all these are certainly precluded. That there is a great difference between faithless, anxious imagining and scheming, and godly prudence, every one understands who has given a thought to the matter. From the former one sometimes wakes up, thoroughly ashamed of it. Have I work for to-day, and strength for to day? Then let not thought of to-morrow’s food, or how I shall get through to-morrow’s duties, interfere with to-day’s duties, which require for themselves all my thought and care. Let me prepare for to-morrow, so far as I can consistently with what I am called on to do to-day. Let me, for example, lay up seven years corn, like Joseph, if I am given to understand there will be need of it. Let me, like our Lord Himself, gather up the fragments of to-day, that nothing be lost for to morrow. Let me lay by whatever will in all human probability be needed for simple maintenance; but let me do this, knowing that I am as dependent as ever on God, and let me do it only in so far as it does not clash with present claims of charity, hospitality, or station.

This, of course, is one of the cases in which a man’s own conscience must draw the line; must say how much he is to spend or give, and how much to set against a future call. There is no other rule than his own conscience to define this. But of the principle on which all are to act, no one will be left in doubt who is from day to day sincerely asking God for his daily bread. And of the two extremes, trusting in gold to the utter exclusion of all confidence in God, and trusting in God to the neglect of the rules of prudence which He has taught (which God calls “ tempting Him “),no one needs to be told which is the more dangerous, and few can safely dispense with self delivered warnings against it. The answer, therefore, to this petition will be, that our spirits will be cleansed from worldliness, covetousness, and hardness of heart; from highmindedness, self-confidence, and dishonesty; from discontent, envy, and indolence; and that we shall be enabled, without repining at what is past, or fretting ourselves with thoughts of the future (though repenting of the past and preparing for the future), to summon all the powers given us to this day’s duty. And as we learn our place as dependants, we shall awake to the value of what is consigned to us, and as we commit the past and the future alike to God, there remains before us this day, a portion competent to our faculties, and practicable, with no uncertainties to distract us from the “valuable certainties” of the present. And this dependence should not be found difficult by those who have an Advocate such as ours, who well understands human necessities, Himself having hungered; whose earnest, purposing, and planning love is the same now as when He “ be came poor that we might be rich,” and who has so opened His riches to our poverty, that sufficiency is found in Him every hungering soul finding enough in Him, every weary soul finding rest in Him, every tossed and breaking soul

for getting its sorrow in Him.

Chapter 53

04.06. And Forgive our debts, forgive debtors

Chapter VI. “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” No one who uses this prayer can be surprised to find that to the petition for bodily sustenance and the regulation of our earthly life, it is immediately added, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors “. To ask for more puts us in mind of what we have already received. To request the greatest favours from one who may give or withhold at pleasure, forces us to consider our claim, and calculate the probability of our being heard. And if our conduct towards any one has been unworthy, never does conscience make more painful mention of this than when circumstances bring us to acknowledge that we are dependent on this person. Nothing but sheer necessity will induce us to seek the good-will, or implore the aid of one whose past favours we have abused, whose person we have insulted, and of whose excellence and power we cherish a grudging and irritable dislike, rather than a frank and cordial admiration; but if necessity bids us seek the presence and favour of such, we cannot do so without at least a form of apology, which, though it be not willing nor true, is yet under stood to be requisite, and felt to be humbling.

Prudence prescribes, though penitence does not prompt. But there are cases in which the aid we seek is so vital, the gift we receive so munificent, that stiff and hardened pride gives way before genuine humility and contrite gratitude. And so it is when we ask from God our daily bread. “ Continue us in life,” we say to God; and (not from heaven but) from within there comes an answering voice, “ Why should God continue us in life? Is it to cumber His ground; to take up room others might better occupy; to waste His goodness and abuse His forbearance?” Give me this day my bread; but why to me? Am I so useful, so grateful, so considerate? To me; to whom is it I attract the regard of God when I use these words? “ Give me this day my bread; “ and why this day? Is it because yesterday was so well spent? Were all my duties yesterday so discharged that I can with some assurance ask another day? As every moment of it was charged with something from God, was there on my part an unbroken rendering to God of His due? Do I find in yes terday reasons for God’s maintaining me to-day, far outweighing whatever might induce Him to withdraw His support? or, conscious of some deficiency, do I say, “ Give me this new day,” that I may have some chance of paying off the debt I have contracted; that I may this day do more than my duty, and have a surplus to set over against yesterday’s deficit? Who needs to be told that such hopes are vain, that all we can this day perform is already due; that we cannot limit our service to God, nor by greater diligence part of the day free the remainder from all claim; that we cannot serve Him so many hours, and then say, “ Now I have done enough, now I may cease rendering obedience to God “? All that we have for to-day is needed for to-day; it cannot over flow to to-morrow, nor make up for the lack of yesterday. If we misspent yesterday’s bread, we must to-day simply ask forgiveness; if we ran into God’s debt yesterday by omission or transgression, then to-day we cannot make up for that, but must ask His free pardon. And the more we seek for some reason for God’s giving us this day’s bread, the more do we discover reason for God’s calling us to account for what we have already received. Our “ give “ must ever be fol lowed by “ forgive “. The goodness of God leads us to repentance. He overcomes our evil with His good, and never more

forcibly reminds us of our ungracious past than when the present shines with His grace. The linking of this petition to the preceding shows us further that forgiveness is a vital thing, as needful for our daily life as the bread it is here connected with. Forgiveness is as much the basis of a day's duty as bread. If we are to serve on earth, we must have bread; but if we are to serve either on earth or elsewhere, we must have forgiveness. As surely as we faint and die with out bread, so surely do we faint and die from all godly life, and for all godly purposes, if we have not forgiveness. Bread supplies the personal capability and outward opportunity of doing the things which please God: forgiveness supplies the inward condition in which a man can do any thing pleasing to God. Until the matter of sin is finally adjusted, and an understanding come to on this point between God and the soul, there is no willingness, no heartiness, no constancy, nor any acceptance of service. To serve God from any other motive than love has been proved impossible by the lives of so many, that words need not be spent upon the matter. And that a man cannot love God while he is heavily and inexcusably and hopelessly in His debt, is what no one needs to be told who is really seeking for information about service. I know this. Yes; but do I act upon my knowledge, or does not my knowledge condemn my practice? Do I begin each day with a spirit free, unburdened, and lively, running in the way of God's commandments, as the healthy body delights not in sluggish sauntering, but in vigorous and difficult exercise? As I often take it for granted that the bread will come of itself without any provident interposition of God, do I not also many a day pass by the forgiveness of God as if it would come of itself? But if it comes at all, it comes at my request. And if it do not come to-day, then this day is lost lost for the service and glorifying of Him who gives it, and lost for my own best good. For as bread not only satisfies the appetite which the past has begotten, but also gives strength for time to come, so forgiveness not only clears away what the past has accumulated, but lays the foundation for what is to come. And other foundation than this there is none, as little as there is any way of sustaining life besides eating and drinking. We can as little discover some elixir which shall work in our spirits the same charm as forgiveness, as we can discover some specific or private means of sustaining our bodies, which shall put us beyond the necessity of taking meat like other men. And therefore are we to be sure that we are obtaining this forgiveness, this daily spiritual nourishment; not using this petition lightly, as if we could live quite as well unforgiven as forgiven; as if it would make very little difference whether this day be spent in God's favour or under His displeasure. And how would God have us view our sins when we seek their forgiveness? As debts. To get at the full iniquity of sin, we need to consider it in various lights; and so in Scripture we find it designated by a variety of names, each of which suggests some peculiar quality of sin. It springs into life from such opposite parts of our nature, and gathers strength from so many different motives; its heinousness is darkened by so many aggravations, and its consequences run out in so many directions, that it is impossible to gather up all its evil and express it in a single word.

Sometimes it is transgression or trespass, and here we see our reckless wickedness in departing from the straight path of God's commandments, the " everlasting way " that runs on eternally into deeper blessedness. Sometimes it is rebellion against God, as if we took delight in going contrary to Him, irrespective of any pleasure or profit apparently to be gained. And sometimes it is folly, showing us the weakness of our hearts, and their proneness to be deluded, and to miss the aim and end of our being. But when we confess, we are helped by viewing them as debts; an expression which leads us to consider, not so much the evil dispositions from which our sins proceeded, as the relation to God in which they have left us. And manifestly it is this which is most

appropriate to be on our minds (and which, in truth, must be on our minds), when we come before God to ask His forgiveness. This view of sin takes us and sets us down in our true position before God as His debtors. It throws into my soul the confession, “ I am connected with God, and the connection is debt”. It is not a word which directly points to the moral evil of sin, but it very distinctly declares the position of the sinner. It may not be that view of sin which most powerfully excites repentance; it is not introspection nor self-loathing which it most directly induces; but it is a word which shows that our sins have to do with more than our selves, which shows that they have connected me with God, which speaks of God and myself in the same word, and at the same time exhibits the relation I presently hold to God. And this is just what we need to see clearly when we pray for pardon; that we are debtors, not only miser able sinners, whose pitiable case may well move God to compassion, but His servants who, in sinning and ruining themselves, have been most grievously wronging and defrauding Him, and whose sins have done as much injury (so He represents it) to Him as to themselves.

Sin, then, is a personal matter between myself and God. My sins have been affecting God. It has been a matter that He has considered, and He has noted a difference when I have done one thing rather than another. He has been expecting, waiting for service at my hand. At great cost He has furnished me with valuable aids and instruments, wherewith to further His purposes; and these I have abused, squandered, or destroyed.

Again and again He has renewed my equipment as His servant, never casting me off as hopeless, but carefully adjusting my circumstances, so as to make opportunities of good easy; and what have I rendered Him again? All my life I have been receiving at His hand; “ what have I that I have not received? “ What should I have, were He to withdraw all the support He is now affording me? What should I be, were He suddenly to banish me beyond His power? And for all I receive (which I can as soon number the hairs of my head as reckon), He expects a return. What return have I made? I hear His voice demanding of me, “ What owest thou to thy Lord? “ I cannot tell; I have never so much as known what I owed: have seldom so much as tried to form a careful, true, and honest estimate of what is due from me to Him; have seldom set myself against the known deceitfulness of sin, and determined that, at least, I should have a clear, definite understanding of what I owe to God, and endeavour, as the one thing which, at all events and at any cost, must be done by my life, to discharge what is due to God, to whom I owe all.

“ Debt “ is a designation of sin which calls to mind a large class of sins, which we are very prone to forget in seeking pardon sins of omission. These have no palpable and visible existence, such as glaring acts of sin possess. While they rival positive acts of wrong-doing in their iniquity, they outrival them in their power of eluding conscience. So that, if there be a man who, when he draws near to God with the purpose of confessing, is at a loss what to say; whose eye, as it turns back to scrutinise his life, is arrested by no startling forms of iniquity, is not glazed with terror, nor sinks in shame from the ghastly phantoms that pursue him, and stretch forth quick and strong hands of vengeance to seize him; let him look once more over that wide and void expanse, and let him turn upon himself and ask what there ought to be there.

Let him say to his soul, Ought there to be no thing more than you see? Was it to do nothing more than you have done, that God gave you this life, and made you what you are? Have you done all for yourself that you could, so that now you are as like to Christ as possible? Have you done all for

others that you could, so that none are hungering now, who might have been fed by you; none in sorrow now, whom a word or deed of yours might have relieved; none in bitterness of spirit or enmity against you now, whom a slight humiliation on your part might have saved from sin; none mistaken as to the character of Christ and His religion, who might have known differently had you done what you could? But there is one sin of omission that rises up * from every part of our life, and fills with condemnation the expanse which, to the careless eye, might seem vacant. There is one debt incurred which fills the soul with new and keener shame, however overwhelmed it has been already with a sense of sin. God's " unspeakable gift " has been abused by us. He has spent all upon us, the whole resources of Deity, all that made this world and more, all the wisdom, and the glory, and all (if we may say "all" of what has proved itself infinite) the love of God. Only when we can fathom the humiliation of Christ, only when

*" As at the resurrection men will rise from empty wastes, where it would not have been suspected that any were concealed, let a man look back on all his omissions, and think what the divine law can raise from them against him."

FOSTER'S Lectures, vol. 1, p. 348. f This idea will be found elaborated in the Patience of Hope, with the usual felicity of the authoress, we can understand what is contained in that expression " He emptied Himself," only when we can measure the interval between the throne of God and the tomb in Joseph's garden, between "the living God" and a dead man, shall we be able to measure God's gift to us and our debt to Him. And is the world to go on as if the Son of God had never been its inhabitant? Has Christ done all this for us, and is no return expected from us? Is all this to be done before us, and no new feelings to arise in our hearts, no new and wider thoughts, no lasting alteration of conduct? Can one act so closely in our interest, and our relation to Him be as it was? Let us take our stand before the cross, where we may see the freeness of God's giving at its height, and, standing there, let us say if we have rendered to Him His due. Call sin debt to Christ, and the matter is brought to a very simple issue. Had I myself spent my all upon another, put aside my own interest and prospects, and given my whole life and labour to him; had I, in that life, met with the sorest trouble on his account, and yet never turned aside, and had I been tempted by the most alluring openings for my self, and yet held the interest of the object of this life-long sacrifice so close to my heart, that I preferred bitterness and disgrace for him, to pleasure and profit for myself; and had this resulted in a successful issue, had I achieved prosperity and secure satisfaction for him, should I expect no return, should I not expect so much as some extra thought and regard; nay, would it not be the most unaccountable ingratitude if he did not become my firmest friend, the man on whom I could always count? How the world would hoot such a man; how the world would scorn his excuses! And is all changed when I myself am that man, and Jesus Christ the self sacrificing friend? Is all changed because the sacrifice becomes greater than the most laborious words can describe, and the blessing conferred increasingly rich through eternity? Can our hearts really deceive us thus; can any blindness leave unobserved our debt to Jesus Christ? But for all our debts, what does God demand of us? Are His demands anything like those of the human law of debt, of that old law which claimed the person of the debtor, and handed him over to his creditor, to be cut in pieces if he chose; to be sold with his family and effects, if he chose; to be chained to a life of drudgery, if such were the will of his creditor? Are we at least to suffer some penalty, to feel for a while something of the bitterness of that poverty to which we have brought another? Not so. All that is asked is, that we acknowledge the debt, and accept of its

remission. And what else can we do? We can find no way of evading our creditor: “ Though they dig into hell, thence shall Mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down; and though they hide themselves in Carmel, 1 will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from My sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them “. It is not, then, by any evasion of ours that our debts can be got rid of; neither will they pass away by any forgetfulness or waiting of ours. They are not fancies, which the changes of life may put to flight. They are not mere names or suppositions which need not be regarded. They are real; entered in the book of God’s remembrance to the utmost far thing. We cannot live our lives over again; the sins are committed; the debts are contracted.

We cannot now make up for what we have already done wrong and left undone. All our strength is needed for our present duty. The future will do well, if it keeps itself solvent. But “ ask, and ye shall receive “. “ The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart; “ will not the heart send to the lips this one petition, “ Forgive me my debts “? For pardon is one of the things that we can only have by asking. It is a thing which must come from another, from Him, namely, whom we have wronged. It is His to forgive, and nothing we can do can earn it. We cannot pass a free pardon upon ourselves, remit the debts we owe to another, absolve ourselves. But God, whom we have offended, and in whose debt we are, says, we may have pardon for the asking.

“There is forgiveness with God;” and were there not forgiveness with Him, then to look for it elsewhere were absurd, for He being the party offended can alone forgive the offence. Forgiveness is with Him, not as being provided by an other, and now put into His power to administer, but as it is dependent on His will solely, whether there shall be any such thing as forgiveness of sin or not. All provision that could be made for our pardon, and all administration of that pardon now, must of necessity depend on and originate in the will of God. And that will is, that we be freely pardoned. And this being so, it is deep dishonour we do to God’s will and word, if we say or think that something must be added to the simplicity of this petition, or that we are not to expect any very wonderful results from this prayer. These words are something more than an appropriate acknowledgment that we owe God much, they are not a charm by the mere repetition of which we win God’s favour; they are the petition of the soul for what we do need and can only have from God. But how does God Himself encourage us to use this petition in faith? He puts into our mouths these words, “ As we forgive our debtors “. And for our encouragement, first of all, these words are surely given us. For here we have the same argument as is elsewhere expanded in that marvellous verse which is instinct with persuasion, and which, as often as we read it, rekindles our faith: “If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? “ Here, with like force of reasoning, we are taught to say to God, If we, being evil, can forgive our debtors, how much more may we expect forgiveness of Thee, whose name is love, who art our heavenly Father, with whom there is forgiveness, and who hast made Thyself known as “ ready to forgive “? And to set us on the firmest ground, and in an absolutely unassailable position, when we thus pray, there comes further in aid of our plea the idea which God Himself has given us of human forgiveness; and we plead with still greater power, “ If on us who are full of wickedness, and in whom malice and bitterness congenially dwell, Thou Thyself hast laid the injunction to forgive seventy times seven, if our brother offend, what limit dare we put to Thy forgiveness, which is high above ours as heaven is above the earth? “Certainly this is a strong argument which God puts into our lips. Will not He do

more than He has commanded us to do? Are we not to expect more from Him than from one another?

Well may our Lord add, “ For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will for give you”. This clause, appended to our appeal for pardon, does not exhaust the reasons there are for assurance of success; we might be encouraged by many other considerations. The likelihood of our obtaining what we ask is grounded on the actual and abundant provision that has been made for our forgiveness, on the express offers of God, and on a number of circumstances made known in Scripture; but the likelihood that is here alone considered is that which arises from the nature of the person appealed to. It is simply God’s matchless readiness to forgive that we here use for our encouragement. We are reminded by the words we use that we are now appealing to one, the forgivingness of whose character is such, that He has impressed this attribute of His distinctly upon His law, and has commanded that, in order to please Him, it is but necessary that we be loving and forgiving. And nothing can more effectually maintain within us the confident boldness which He desires, than thus to under stand the infinite depth of love and length of for bearance that reside in Him with whom we deal, and on whose mercy we hang. It is (need it be said?) very fitting that before we approach God, we should distinctly understand how forgiveness has been prepared for us, and should, by the contemplation of the infinite merit and inexhaustible efficacy of the blood of Christ, encourage our selves to draw near to Him by whose- judgment we stand or fall; but when we actually stand in His presence, and are at length explicitly asking Him for pardon, no encouragement can be more fitting than that which arises from a deep impression of the forgiving nature to which our appeal is made, and nothing can more promptly and effectually create this impression than the remembrance, that forgivingness of disposition is enjoined upon us by God as the prime requisite of character, and that His one commandment is that we love one another. And it is this remembrance which these words of the prayer recall as often as we utter them with understanding. But is this an encouragement that all of us can use? Have we in heart accepted the seventy times seven as our rule, and do we desire to be found in its practice? Dare we thus reason from ourselves to God? Dare we point God to our conduct, and say, “As we forgive, so forgive us”? The words of the petition assure us that whatever may stand in the way of our forgiveness, it certainly is not this, that God is a hard judge who would rather condemn than acquit. But then they remind us of this, only by reminding us that even we ourselves, imperfect though we be, delight rather in the forgiveness than in the punishment of our enemy. But is this the fact? Of course, we expect God’s forgiveness to be of a very different measure from our own; but have we any forgivingness of spirit, even “according to the measure of a man,” from which we can take courage to hope in the wide and perfect and infinite forgivingness of God? Have we the little from which we can reason to God’s much? Or are not some, when they use this prayer, in danger of turning it into an imprecation? Is it not true that many of us are in danger of uttering that most terrible curse upon ourselves, which has been put into language and named “the prayer of the unforgiving man “? * “ O God, I have sinned against Thee many times from my youth up until now. I have often been forgetful of Thy goodness; I have not duly thanked Thee for Thy mercies; I have neglected Thy service; I have broken Thy laws; I have done many things utterly wrong against Thee. All this I know; and beside this doubtless I have committed many secret sins, which in my blindness I have failed to notice. Such is my guiltiness, O Lord, in Thy sight; deal with me, I beseech Thee, even as I deal with my neighbour. He has * By A, W, Hare. not offended me one-tenth, one-hundredth part as much as I have offended Thee; but he has offended me very

grievously, and I cannot forgive him. Deal with me, I beseech Thee, O Lord, as I deal with him. He has been very ungrateful to me, though not a tenth, not a hundredth part as ungrateful as I have been to Thee; yet I can not overlook such base and shameful ingratitude.

Deal with me, I beseech Thee, O Lord, as I deal with him. I remember and treasure up every little trifle, which shows how ill he has behaved to me. Deal with me, I beseech Thee, O Lord, as I deal with him. I am determined to take the very first opportunity of doing him an ill turn.

Deal with me, I beseech Thee, O Lord, as I deal with him." The encouragement of this petition, then, is not a mere commonplace which any one may safely use. A true cordial it is, but if applied to the wrong condition may prove deleterious and deadly. The boldness we have before God must not be the superficial presumption of sentimentalism, but it must be of a piece with the tenor of our life. For there is one thing we need in prayer as much as encouragement, and that is sincerity. We must be thrown back upon our real desires. That encouragement which is not backed by our true state of heart, and which does not consist with our conduct, is mere delusion. The only right confidence before God is that which the Apostle commends, and which can only be enjoyed "when our own hearts condemn us not "; that is, when we ask God, not for those things which we know we ought to desire, but for those things which are ever floating before our hopes, and drawing forth our hearts affections, and the efforts of our lives. If it is a fictitious desire, or a desire got up for propriety's sake, which we present before God, our hearts condemn us, and we have no confidence. And what is to be carefully marked as the key to the encouragement in this petition is this: that in point of fact every one who is set upon obtaining forgiveness does forgive his neighbour, and therefore every one who uses the petition in sincerity, in the truth of the heart, as the expression of the fixed bent of his soul, does receive the encouragement which is laid up in the appended clause. This encouragement is not for those who have a merely occasional and passing impression of their need of forgiveness; it is not for those who prize God's favour to-day but to-morrow forget it; it is not for the insincere, who hold this petition as a veil between God and their souls; nor for the double-minded, who love this life, but would also secure themselves against the next. It is not for any who can thoughtlessly and almost flippantly ejaculate this petition merely from the lip; but it is for all on whose heart God reads the deeply cut consciousness of their immeasurable debt, and the earnest and abiding desire for pardon. This appended clause has, therefore, a twofold use. Wrapt up in its encouragement there is a check to conscience. We are not to be allowed to present the petition at all, unless it be from the deepest sense of our need, and of the greatness of the gift we seek; a sense which is in reality equivalent to true repentance, and which brings with it, as its uniform and necessary fruit, love to our neighbour. And every one who knows how apt we are to become either hypocrites or careless formalists in prayer, will recognise the suitableness of such a check, and will appreciate the propriety of its being appended to this petition rather than any other. For this, more than any other, has been a lip-deep petition, and has been shame fully abused by self-satisfied or careless petitioners, by ourselves when we ask forgiveness, as we often ask it, without any considerate remembrance of the cost of it, thinking it the easiest thing for God to give, and forgetting that this has been prepared for us at a far greater expense, at a more personal expense, than anything else we can implore. It has been the endeavour of many teachers to persuade us, and yet we need to be reminded, that a word would create and beautify a world, and "an act of will bestow it upon us," but it has cost God the humiliation and suffering of His well-beloved Son to grant the boon which now we ask. And

therefore we are here suddenly startled out of all dreamy and indifferent prayer, and are aroused by being brought face to face with our own real desires and our own real life; we are reminded that our prayer had far better be unsaid, if it is not of a piece with our state of heart; that we cannot pray as one person and live as another; that we do not look as earnestly as we ought for the remission of our debts (and therefore need not expect it), unless we be doing what we can to avoid contracting new ones; that, in short, we have no encouragement whatever to present this petition, unless conscience assures us that the love of God, on which we hope, has entered our souls and changed them, and has become the principle and law of our lives.

All difficulty vanishes from this clause, once we recognise the point of fact, that a man humbled before God is invariably and necessarily charitable to his neighbour. The spirit of pride and the spirit of hatred are one; they stand and fall together. Do I find it hard to forgive the little offences of my fellow-servant, the few pence he owes me? Then do I, indeed, understand what it is I ask God to do, when I ask Him to cancel that debt of mine of ten thousand talents? For how can I have the heart to challenge another with his offences against me, when my own misdeed and sin against God is pressing upon my soul, and forcing me to cry for pardon? Myself helpless and keenly sensible that I am utterly dependent on the forbearance and free grace of God, alive to the shamefulness of my wrong doing against Him, and crying for mere mercy without a shadow of hope that I can make the slightest reparation, I cannot, I really cannot, harbour hard and unforgiving thoughts against my neighbour, nor insist upon my claims. The words of the evangelist Mark are therefore by no means alarming to one who really longs for pardon of his great debt, though they, even more distinctly than the words of Matthew, require that, before receiving the forgiveness of God, we forgive others. He quotes our Lord as saying, “ When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any; that your Father also, which is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.” As if He said, “ Your act of forgiveness must precede the act you hope that God will perform “. There is some thing standing in the way of your forgiveness which you must remove. Something is to be done before God can forgive you, which you must do. But, then, it is a thing which you cannot but be doing, if you are compelled to seek God’s forgiveness from any just sense of your own sin. For just in proportion as your own sin against God appears great, so will the offences of others against yourself appear small.

It is not that our forgivingness of spirit wins the forgiveness of God, but that pure unforgivingness cannot accept the forgiveness of God. By for giving others we do not earn our own forgiveness, but most assuredly we cannot receive that forgiveness until we forgive others. We are not prepared to seek it; we have not seen our own great debt, and are merely asking God for we know not what, unless humility and joy in the hope of God’s pardon have excluded from our hearts all malice against our neighbour. So that this clause merely forms a demand that, when we ask God for forgiveness, we shall know what we ask for. If we know what we ask for, we will ask it, and cannot but ask it, in the spirit here required. We come approving the law of forgiveness; it is all our hope for our selves, and we act upon it towards others. With divine skill and kindness these words, which we are to repeat as often as we ask forgiveness, bid us think how great a gift we seek, and forbid us to deceive ourselves with a merely verbal petition, and so to defraud ourselves of God’s pardon.

They refuse to let us near God, until we realise the vastness of His gift, and are prepared to claim it. When we feel unable sincerely to use this petition, we are not to turn our attention to our neighbour, and endeavour to kindle love in our hearts by extenuating his offences and magnifying his good deeds. Not at all. We are to bend our thoughts to our own state, to count up our debts to God, to set them in the light of His countenance, and thus measuring our own great debt, and learning that marvellous love which gives ground of hope even to such debtors, our hearts drink in a humility, a peace, and a joy with which hardness towards our fellow-men cannot dwell. And so invariably does the one feeling flow from the other, that we may learn the presence of the one from the fact of the other's presence. An infallible test is thus graciously put into our hands, by which we may learn whether we are asking enough from God. If there is still in our hearts any bitterness towards man, then there is too little desire for pardon. If there is too vivid a consciousness of our claims upon others, there is too low an estimate of God's claims upon us.

If the wrong done us by others seems greater than we can forgive and forget, then our own wrong-doing is affecting us less than it should; the mind of God and our mind still view very different objects, when our sins are spoken of. But God would fully pardon us. He would not have us live with a single debt uncancelled, and therefore He gives us a test by which we may always learn whether, when we use this petition, we are indeed seeking that all our great debt be forgiven. He gives us these words, certainly not to make our prayer impossible, but to preserve us from verbally asking for what He would have us seek with our whole soul; and because He would have us, indeed, receive what we ask, when we say," Forgive us our debts".

"Alas! alas!

Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once, And He that might the vantage best have took Found out the remedy. How would you be, If He, which is the top of judgment, should But judge you as you are? O 1 think on that; And mercy then will breathe within your lips, Like man new made."

Chapter 54

04.07. And Lead into temptation, but deliver evil

Chapter VII. “ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” OUR prayer, then, is not finished, when we have cast upon our Father in heaven all the cares of our earthly life, and have been also freed from the burden of our sins. It is pleasant to sit in God’s smile, and gather strength in the assurance of His favour; but the future frowns terribly upon us, and we quail at the remembrance that we are still surrounded by the world we have renounced, and are still liable to the sins we have just deplored. Acknowledged as the children of God, we do not yet enjoy the security of His home; and it is when we look forward and see what lies between us and that home, that we become aware that sin has not only stained but poisoned us; that the burden has not only weaned but weakened us; that the debt has not only hampered but demoralised us. It will not do to rest in the quiet calm of forgiveness, as if we had now attained that for which we were apprehended. “Thy sins be forgiven thee “ is followed forthwith not by “ well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord,” but by “ go and sin no more “. But this “go,” what a bleak and dangerous world does it launch us into; to what possibilities of disaster and hurt, to what likelihood of ruin does it dismiss us! How contradictory * it seems to add “ sin no more “! We cannot but turn and say, “ Do Thou, then, Lord, lead us; and lead us not into temptation “. And as we continue to pray daily for forgiveness, and find that it is mostly the same sins we have to confess, and how the appetite that is in us for evil finds food in the most unexpected and unlikely quarters, the sense of our weakness grows, and we should feel the prayer to be in sufficient for us, did not our fears find some hope in it, and our feebleness some security. Like those who have received a precious charge to convey safely through a country infested with enemies, undermined with pitfalls, or reeking with malaria, we go forth with spirits made rich by the favour of God, to traverse that dangerous interval between this present moment and our complete redemption. We fear to step out into * This idea occurs in a recent volume of devotional poetry. the ways of this world, lest our garments, made white in the blood of the Lamb, be again denied. The world has not changed to suit our condition.

We would not now sin as once we did, but the world will still be as pressing in its offers of easy helps to sin, as ever it was. There are our former companions in sin waiting for us to join them again; there are our old haunts, and the old seasons come round as before, and our familiar sins meet us again, and tell us that all things are ready. They take the words of wisdom, and say, “ Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled “. The same business awaits us, in which heretofore we have found such room for sinning; the same hours of leisure, and the same pleasant ways of spending these.

All remains the same, ready as ever to make our old course easy, but with no sympathy for our new condition, no rejoicing with us over our new-found treasure, no friendly desire to enter into and prosper our new views. All the world is as it was, and what disappoints us more than all, there is still in us too much that remains as it was. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak as ever. It is still flesh. It is still so adapted to what the world offers, that it clamours to be satisfied in the world’s way, hints that we wrong ourselves and undergo unnecessary hardships in striving to

subdue it, and that it cannot be very criminal to do what our nature demands, and what our circumstances not only permit, but induce and almost drive us to.

Those who have nothing to lose are (to a proverb) little put about by the presence of thieves; and of those whose hopes are small, the fears also are few and slight. The fear of defilement found no place in our souls, until the grateful sense of purity introduced it. It seemed a small thing to risk all temptation, before we experienced the grace and joy of the goodwill of God; but now that we have tasted His goodness, and prize His favour as our choicest possession, it seems a hazardous thing to venture into a sea of temptations, one or other of which will almost inevitably sweep over our soul, and leave it bare of its prize under the displeasure of God. I do not purpose to sin; I have no present and special resolve which I know to be wrong, but am I therefore secure? Or has it not often happened with me that, when least I expected it, evil was very powerfully present with me? Besides sinning deliberately, have I not sinned through ignorance, through weakness, through surprise, through habit? Did I not sin, because I was tempted by such a combination of inducements, and hedged off from the right path by so many difficulties, that I greatly fear to be placed again in a similar predicament? Rather will I pray, “ Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil “. A person may use these words as two distinct petitions; but, as they here stand, they are connected and form one double request. It is one utterance of the soul. The soul does not first view temptation and utter its desire about this, and then view evil, and utter a new desire about that; but seeing at one view temptation and evil, and knowing, moreover, how they are joined together, a prayer is uttered which, though it has two parts, is one. There is no end that we can propose for ourselves short of deliverance from evil, and no means can be suggested as more necessary to the attainment of this than being kept from temptation. To be kept from disease, from poverty, from loss of friends, from any ill that the soul dreads, would not be so broad and effectual a petition as this, if our end be deliverance from evil. From these and all other ills we desire deliverance j but if there be left within us evil dispositions that will respond to temptation, then there is no lasting deliverance for us. For this is the account of the whole matter which is given by the Apostle James: “ Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Evil, then, is that to which temptation leads, and to which sin binds. And there is that in every one of us which, if left to itself, will bring us to the most evil form of evil. Only let it have its way, only take no precautions against it, and gradually the evil within will wed the evil without, and death will grow up around you. This will as certainly result as death will result if you place an animal that lives by breath into a poisoned atmosphere. But if the evil be within us, how will a merely negative petition effect our cure? How will the mere absence of certain outward objects destroy the evil that has its life within the soul? It will do so by taking from that evil the food on which its life depends. Fire must have fuel, must be active, in order to be living; it may smoulder long, but die it must, if it be not fed. And so it is of evil dispositions and propensities. Give them no opportunity, let neither sense nor imagination minister to them by presenting their objects, and, finding no outlet, they will pine and die. This at least is the grand external means of deliverance from evil. Plant a tree in a congenial soil, and surround it with every advantage, it will grow and bear fruit after its kind; and just as certainly will our desires find nourishment in the world we are in, and so grow up to matured sins, and bring forth death, if they be not checked. And therefore we pray that God would not suffer the nourishment suitable to our fleshly and natural desires to be given, but would so order our circumstances that we shall have the least possible temptation to

sin; that we may be put in positions in which there is least opportunity of gratifying those of our inclinations to sin which are strongest, and in which our opposite tendencies may be most easily and effectually matured. Here the experience of our better mind arms itself against the law of the members. We take precautions against ourselves. The first question that rises in most minds concerning this petition is, “ Is there any likelihood that God would lead us into temptation, or why do we pray that He would not? “ Is it not said that as God is not tempted, so neither tempteth He any? But we do not present this petition because we suppose that God ever stands on the side of evil, and allures us to sin. This would be something more than leading into temptation. What God often does, what He did in the case of Abraham, of Job, and especially of our Lord Himself, is to expose a man in a very critical and precarious position, to bring him in the course of his life into circumstances where sin is very easy, holiness very difficult. We read that it was “ of the Spirit” that “ Jesus was led up into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil “; a very instructive intimation, giving us in one view all the parties concerned. The human nature, with its liability to temptation, its capability to suffer and to enjoy; the divine nature, ordering the circumstances which may permit the temptation to take place; and the diabolical nature, the tempter, exerting his ut most to induce sin. (For this is the distinguishing characteristic of Satan, that he desires that sin may be the result of every temptation.) Our Lord had just passed through His own trial, when He gave this prayer to His disciples. He remembered what it had cost Him, how His holy nature had seemed to be violently driven within sight of sin, and He knew that were His disciples to be similarly exposed, the result might be defeat instead of victory. It is He knows best what temptation is, and who has most successfully overcome it, that bids us pray, “Lead us not into temptation “. It became His own prayer before He entered on that greatest of all temptations, “ Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me “. And how is this, that we see the soul of Jesus trembling in prospect of temptation, while we brave it, fearlessly, confidently, and even boastfully? He knows what Satan’s power is, and He knows the evil of sin. And he who has some measure of the spirit of Christ, and fears above all else the Father’s displeasure, will not go forth believing that he is proof against every assault of Satan or the world, but will pray that God will so guide his path that he may escape from those more violent or seductive temptations to which he sees others yielding. He will not seek to change this petition into “ succour us when tempted,” but, out of the consciousness of his own weakness, desires rather to avoid temptation than to take the chances of overcoming it. And this raises a second question, “ Can I pray thus with any hope, seeing that life is just one series of temptations? “ Must we not meet temptations, whether we deprecate them or no? Is there any such man on earth as an untempted man? Can God give us what we ask for, and still keep us on this earth? How shall He guide us? Is there any course through life free from all inducement to sin? Where shall He put us? Is there any position where we shall no longer need constant vigilance, unflinching constancy, and painful effort of soul? “ Lead me not into temptation,” how do I expect that this will be answered? Is there some profession the members of which find nothing in it to foster their own corrupt affections? Is there some employment in which failure shall no more tempt us to murmur, nor success elate us to forgetfulness of God? We know that, be a man’s occupation what it may, he cannot be secure from all enticement. Various indeed are the temptations that assail men, from the statesman whose name is in every man’s mouth, to the invalid whom the world has long forgotten; but every one can tell of some part of his lot that seems bordering on evil, from which at any moment he could pass over into sin, and at which he is in constant danger of being urged by a sudden impulse across the boundary. Every one can tell of

something in his occupation that seems to conspire with something in his character, and make sinning easier to him there than elsewhere. He is passionate, and there is some constant source of irritation; or he is covetous, and there is an unrighteous but prolific source of gain always offering itself. He is ambitious, and there is a path open to its gratification, which would also lead him to sin; or he loves the applause of men, and that desire can be gratified. He is naturally despondent and distrustful, and he is called to endure protracted suffering; or he is naturally careless and worldly, and he enjoys unmingled prosperity. Or he is liable to sullenness, or pride, or sensuality, or indolence, and whatever be his infirmity, he will not be without drawings that way, encouragements in his infirmity, opportunities of showing what manner of man he is. And shall we therefore cease to use this petition?

We will all the more perseveringly use it. For if temptations be so thickly strewn around us, who shall say how soon we may be overtaken in a fault? At first this petition may pass our lips with no quite definite expectation. It only rises irrepressibly out of the sense of our own inability to cope with certain temptations. But as it is used from day to day, side by side with our daily life, it interprets itself more fully. We find in it the suitable expression of a desire that grows up within us, that, whilst we must be exposed to temptations, these may be proportioned to our strength; in other words, that God would keep us out of situations in which, so far as we can judge, it would be beyond our present strength to keep from sinning. The harder we purpose in our souls to live to God, the more clearly do we see how we displease Him. We begin to take account of this, that there are certain conditions in which we almost invariably, if not invariably, sin, despite all our resolves to the contrary. We remember our resolves, nay, we remember how a few hours ago we besought pardon of similar sin, and yet we yield. There are persons whose company always betrays us into slandering, or scoffing, or bitter envy, or hypocrisy, or some evil passion; there are places in which we cannot maintain, or have at least never yet maintained, even our usual regard to the will of God, and from which we return less disposed than we ought to remember Christ, or engage in any religious duty; there are books we read, or trains of thought we indulge in, which lower our tone and unhinge the mind for serious, vigorous, and devout exercise.

Now, it is very often the case, that it is quite at our option that we thus put ourselves in the way of temptation. It forms no part of our duty to ourselves or our friends thus to expose ourselves, and yet we find it very difficult to disentangle ourselves from the habits we have formed by a voluntary and repeated exposure to the same influences. So agreeable and fascinating have these situations or employments which tempt us become, that it is beyond our strength to give them up.

Surely in this case we may ask God so to order our circumstances that these things may have less power of appeal than formerly. How the prayer may be answered we do not know. We may be removed to a distance from the companions or objects which most effectually tempted us; our attention may be strongly diverted to some pursuit which dulls for a time the other attraction, and breaks the habit we have formed. But how the answer shall come it is not for us to decide.

God, in one way or other, may either make it a physical impossibility for us to be in the way of temptation, or He may add to our condition some balance, which keeps us from rushing into the arms of sin at every invitation. So that, whether the temptations we have reason to fear be in the way of our callings, or have been voluntarily and recklessly encountered by us, this petition is suit able; and it will inevitably rise to our lips, if we be fearing sin. But there is a third class of

temptations against which we have urgent need to use this petition. There are sudden surprises, which neither occur in the ordinary duties of our employments, nor as we might have anticipated and taken precautions against, but emerge unexpectedly. A special importance attaches to these, for it is thus that many of our greatest sins have been committed; and, when resisted, it is then that we have taken the greatest steps in advance Godwards. In short, these are the temptations in which, beyond all others, it is evident that God is making proof of us. To compare the temptation of David with that of Joseph, similar in kind, but so opposite in result; or that of Adam in the garden with that of Jesus in the wilderness, will sufficiently show us how critical these times are, against which we can use no precaution but this prayer, asking that God would not suffer us to be so assailed. Let a man choose some of his memorable sins, those that conscience needs not to search for, but keeps floating on the surface of the memory, and let him consider how it came about that he fell into these, and he shall find that in very many cases it was because he was suddenly tempted; an unexpected opportunity presented itself of doing what he had long desired to do, or of getting what he had often coveted, or of becoming what ambition or vanity had been set upon; and this opportunity did not offer itself bare, but well supported by inducements and incentives from every side. Was it an appeal to anger or hatred? Then something had first occurred to irritate or embitter. Was it to licentiousness the allurement appealed? Then something had first occurred to excite. Was it to love of gain the temptation spoke? Then something had previously shown the desirableness of wealth, or taught the bitterness of poverty.

Whatever it was that overran the soul and spoiled it, we think we could have resisted had the temptation come in some other shape, at some other time, when we had been under more wholesome influences; had there not, in short, been so many things conspiring against us. Everything seems to have been prepared for our sin; the train was laid, and the one little spark fell. Had we had any idea of what was going on we should have been on our guard; had we seen the possible sin we should have gone out of our way to avoid it. But so suddenly were we set down in presence of the tempting object, that there was scarce a thought of resistance. So wholly at a disadvantage were we taken, that we are inclined to believe that, were we in the same circumstances again, prepared by the same day's pleasure or day's business or night's trouble, instigated by the same company or by the same solitude, brought as suddenly face to face with the same open gate to sin, or driven by the same urgency of motive, freed from the outward restraint that is now upon us, and the reasons on the side of sin equally manifold and thronging, we should now (judging of our own strength from our present experience of it) sin again. And if so, what security have we (who know not what a day may bring forth) against a similar or far more seductive combination of circumstances, except in an appeal to God, whose will orders all things, and whose will is our sanctification? In this petition, then, we pray directly for this, that God in His consideration of our frailty would so order our life day by day that as little as possible we may be exposed to temptation. But it will be asked, " Has this petition, then, no reference to the temptations we do actually meet? Does it only avert possible temptations, and bring no strength to help us in those that actually occur? " Directly it does not ask from God any such aid. And it seems a profitless exercise of ingenuity, to wrest the words so that they shall include what is evidently included in the second part of the petition, " Deliver us from evil ". He who prays these concluding words will surely be little concerned to make the former words mean " bring us out of temptation safely," as well as " lead us not into it ". Nevertheless, it must not be overlooked, that this desire, " Lead us not into temptation," has a powerful reflex influence upon the spirit of the petitioner, which

enables him, if tempted, to quit himself very differently from what he would otherwise have done. It is a very different war we wage when we have prayed against it, from that we wage when we have carelessly exposed ourselves. The soldier who is steady in the din and carnage of battle which duty has led him into, will quail and tremble at the little hazards to which a fool ish exploit or unadvised adventure has exposed him. If we are engaged in plain duty when temptation assails us, then we can appeal to God for help. And by the acknowledgment of our weakness and fear of sin which is contained in this petition, we do indirectly, but not the less effectually, appeal to the compassion and help of God. If we have asked God to keep us from temptation, and still meet it, then we believe that what we meet is of His ordering, and that good, and not evil, will come of it. Passing through His fire, we are purified. Warring in His warfare, we are rendered more hardy, faithful, and experienced. But if we have not asked His guidance, but have gone forth at our own charges and risks, then how can we with any confidence ask in temptation the help which very probably we should never have needed to ask had we asked God's guidance before? Trying enough it is to fall into temptation after praying, but to fall into it without praying is a confounding and disastrous thing. It may be good for us to meet temptations, but it is never good to hope for them. It is God's prerogative to lead us into them, for He also (and He only) can bring us through them: it is ours to watch and pray against them, knowing our own weakness. And if any one thinks that by using this petition he resists the providence of God, let him ask himself the simple question, " Do I desire to be tempted? " If not, then let me pray God to preserve me from temptation. And if, after committing myself to God's care in this matter, I do meet temptations, I shall at least know by whose permission they come, and whose discipline they bring. To view severe temptation as a possible thing, and as a very dangerous thing, this is the best preparation against it.

Out of these words there are continually rising one or two important suggestions of a practical kind. The first is, that we must see to it that we make this an honest request. For it is a pleasant thing to go so far with sin, and break company before its terrible evil is consummated.

It is a narrow, but a most attractive path which separates actual, outward transgression from the region whence sin can be contemplated. Few Christians intend to sin, compared to those who only intend to place themselves in dangerous circumstances. There is a pleasure in letting the thoughts dwell on forbidden objects, which provokes us to tamper with sin, and prevents us from resolutely shunning the avenues that lead to evil. Have I never asked God to deliver me from evil, while a little deeper in my heart there lay the intention of putting myself in the way of temptation without any call? To do so is grievously to dishonour God. It is to expect that He will pander to my evil desires and appetites, that He will suffer me to enjoy the excitement of temptation, and preserve me from the outward disgrace and fully-formed evil of the sin. It is to take the place of God, and say that it is better I should pray, " Let me so far into temptation," than " Lead me not into it ". And he who can not comprehend how this should be the one prayer given us concerning the special advancement of our own spirits towards complete redemption, has not yet prayed it as he ought; is yet, under God's word, hiding his own desires. For this petition goes to the very core of our heart, and tries our real purposes severely; makes us say, if we are really anxious to be cut off from all chance of sin, all thought of it, and approach to it; brings us daily to decide whether we should like a state where there was not only no sin, but no temptation. The love of sin is pretty well broken within us, if we can use this petition always and fully; if, considering the persons we shall this day meet, the things that may be said to us, the gratifying offers that may be made to us, the

opportunities of pleasure or advancement that may occur, we can yet say, “ Rather let me meet none of these than that they should so much as tempt me to evil”.

Happy indeed is the man who, in the fulness and depth of this petition, can say, “ I this day wish to be far from everything which will nourish evil within me, and I desire the presence of such things only as will mature a Christian disposition. I do not desire success, if success is to minister to vain-glory; I do not wish to make money, if money is to minister to covetousness; I do not long for pleasant society, if that is to make me forgetful of God; I do not yearn for leisure, if leisure is to loosen my bond to Jesus Christ.” What is this but the entire surrender of our lives to God and for His purposes? What is this but a profession of self denial, and a resolution to endure all hardness?

It is the prayer of a humble and holy spirit; of a spirit at least set on holiness, and knowing that God only can guide us in this life, so that holiness shall be the result. Often it calls us to give up (so far as our own purposes are concerned) prospects of great attraction, but which, we fear, would be adverse to our spiritual growth.

We see the beauty of the prospect, it allures us on, but we know not whether the flowers wave and rustle with the healthy breath of heaven or with the subtle windings of the serpent. We will not venture where there may be danger, and where there is not a necessary call, but will pray still to God, “Lead us not thither”. And this fear to go where we may offend God, is the same feeling as gives us absolute courage to go wherever we may serve Him.

Another practical hint suggested by this petition is, to shun the beginnings of temptation. It puts us on our guard against the earliest movements of sinward inclination, and prompts us to deal vigorously with its faintest symptoms. All evil is easiest checked in its rise, with less pain to ourselves, and with more unalloyed result. To have parleyed with temptation is to have lost strength already. Go a mile with the tempter, and the chances are that he will persuade you to go two. He will first tell you that you are not going out of your way at all, and forthwith he will tell you that you have gone too far to go back. The first step may not be wrong in itself, but it is wrong if it be the first of a succession of steps which lands you in sin. When we find ourselves very anxious to discover reasons for going on, we may well suspect whither we are going. We shall probably find reasons enough, and only after the sin is committed open our eyes to their hollowness.

It is the former part of this petition which gives the tone to the latter. The evil we chiefly aim at being delivered from, is that which comes of temptation yielded to. Not that the words do not include every kind of evil, all that man redeemed will at last be free from, but the evil primarily in view here is sin, or what produces sin. By the words of Christ Himself we must interpret this prayer; and His own petition for His people is, “ I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil”. Without being at once put beyond the reach of the ordinary privations of this life, we may, then, be delivered from the evil. We can be kept from the evil without being set above disappointments, sicknesses, distress, loss. We can be delivered from evil without being delivered from this world. This evil, therefore, cannot be in the world so much as in ourselves; cannot be in our condition so much as in our character. All men have an idea that this world has something wrong about it, that our condition here is not altogether satisfying, but to be delivered from. And so we begin to deliver ourselves, and set to work at the outmost branches of evil instead of at the root; we provide against loss, guard against disease, while we ought to be asking God to deliver us from that evil which is within us, and which, though

all these outer branches of evil were lopped off, would send forth fresh branches; which, though we were put into a world where all was blessed, and well-ordered, and according to the best, would soon spoil that world as it has spoiled this. It was by yielding to temptation we ever became connected with evil of any kind; first with evil doing, and then with all other evil. Through the heart of man did evil steal its way into this world. And until it be expelled from the heart, it will find its way into all we are connected with. Could there be a fairer world than this was when God pronounced it very good, and " when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy "? Take from this world all that sin has wrought, and you shall have a world fairer than your imagination, though not than God's purpose, can conceive. No doubt we inherit a troop of evils, and fall heirs to the ills that men have been aggravating from the first; but there is that in each one of us which, if we be not delivered from it, will turn the happiest and most faultless inheritance into sorrow and confusion. Our evil dispositions do not show all their deadly influence now, only be cause what they would do is done already. They do not destroy the world, because the world is already destroyed. And appalling as are the effects of the " one man's disobedience," and of that whereby all his descendants have ratified his act and approved their parentage, more appalling still is it to find the hold and the power that sin has over us.

Many of the effects of sin, and especially those of them which are most palpable to us here, spend their force and pass away. That effect of sin which admonishes us of a sinful future, the helplessness and bondage of sin, that effect of sin which is sin itself, is the most alarming of its present results. We see no prospect of accidental deliverance from this, nor of its merely wearing out. With sin the law of age is reversed; and time, which weakens and consumes all else, adds vigour and life to sin. And yet there is hope, near and bright. However multiplied, involved, deep-rooted, or grievous be our sinful propensities, there is a deliverance out of them all. There is a deliverance from all their effects; but we can readily believe this, yes, and patiently wait for it, when we find that there is a deliverance from our sinful natures themselves. And this God has wrought, and now works, in all them that pray this prayer; for " God has raised up His Son Jesus, and sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities". It is He who "delivers us, and doth deliver, in whom we trust that He will yet deliver ".

Therefore will our hearts together praise Him, and our own joy will dictate these words, " Thine is the kingdom, the glory, and the power, for ever. Amen."

ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

48284 WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

Israel's Iron Age: Sketches from the period of the Judges. Crown 8vo, cloth, 3/6 The Visions of a Prophet. Studies in Zechariah.

Fcap. 8vo, cloth, 1/6 Erasmus and other Essays. Crown 8vo, cloth, 5/ Mohammed, Buddha, and Christ. Crown 8vo, cloth, 3/6 Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Crown 8vo, cloth, 3/6 The Parables of our Lord. (Matthew.), Crown 8vo, cloth, 3/6 The Parables of our Lord. (Luke.) Crown 8vo, cloth, 3/6 An Introduction to the New Testament.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 2/6 The Book of Genesis. Crown 8vo, cloth, 7/6 The Gospel of St. John/ Vol. I. Crown 8vo, cloth, 7/6 The Gospel of St. John. Vol. II. Crown 8vo, cloth, 7/6 The First Epistle to the Corinthians.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 7/6 LONDON: HODDER AND STOUGHTON, 27, PATERNOSTER Row.

TENTH EDITION

sermon index

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net