

WRITINGS OF WILLIAM H AITKIN - VOLUME 1

by William H. Aitkin

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

99 Chapters

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1. Devotional Thoughts

Devotional Thoughts

By William Hay Macdowall Hunter Aitken

1.1 A Living Sacrifice

Romans 12:1

I beseech you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God...

I. THE MOTIVE of the sacrifice: "the mercies of God" — the most cogent motive that can possibly influence a Christian soul.

II. THE METHOD. It is to be an act of presentation. "Here am I; send me." Make what use of me Thou canst and wilt.

III. THE SUBJECT. "Our bodies."

IV. THE OBJECT. "Acceptable to God."

(W. Hay Aitken, M.A.)

1.1 A Place of Feeling in Religion

Psalms 39:8

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

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

(J. B. Aitken.)

1.1 A Polished Shaft

Isaiah 49:2

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 A Sharp Sword

Isaiah 49:2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(3) Earnestness.

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 A Sinner Brought to His Right Mind

Luke 15:11-32

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 A Strange Plea

Psalms 25:11

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Anticipations of Faith

Exodus 15:17-18

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 As and So - The Method of Ministry

1 Peter 4:7-11

But the end of all things is at hand: be you therefore sober, and watch to prayer....

You and I can only give large sums of money to God's service, as God makes us wealthy. It is so in earthly things, and surely it must be so in spiritual things. If we are living in the fulness of God, then the promise of Jesus Christ shall be fulfilled in our case — "Out of our belly shall flow rivers of living water." If, on the other hand, we are straitened in ourselves, then what wonder that our life should be unprofitable, and that we should scarcely to any degree minister the gift, simply because we receive it so scantily. But when I look again at that word "as," another thought occurs to me. It strikes me that we have not only there a law of proportion, we have also a law of quality, qualifying the bestowal of the gift. The gift is bestowed by the hand of Him who is an example to us in giving, as well as in every other respect. As we receive, so we are to give. There ought to be a certain God-like liberality in our efforts to distribute the favours with which God loads us. But further, that word "as" seems to teach us more than this. Not only have we received the gift freely, but we have received it wisely; that is to say, God, in bestowing the gift upon us, exercised a wisdom which belongs to His own nature, preparing us for its reception, and bestowing upon us just the gift appropriate to our state. Are we not too often very clumsy in this respect? We get into a kind of stereotyped way of working for God. I cannot but feel that, if we would minister the gift as the Lord would have us minister it, we require greater delicacy of touch, keener discernment of human character, and a fuller appreciation of God's different methods of dealing with different souls than are commonly to be met with.

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

1.1 Assurance

2 Timothy 1:12

For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed...

It surely is evident that while justification is all that is necessary for safety, an assured knowledge of our justification on our own part must be necessary to give us the comfort and the joy of safety. Further, it is clear that the character of all our subsequent experiences must very largely depend upon such an assured knowledge; for I cannot feel, or speak, or act as a justified man unless I not only am justified, but know that I am justified. Nor can I claim my proper privileges, and enjoy the blessed results of my new relationship with God, unless I know certainly that this relationship exists. For our position is, that, though it be possible that you may be safe in God's sight, and yet not be safe in your own, you cannot lead the life that God intends you to lead unless you know of this your safety. First, you cannot draw near to Him with the filial confidence which should characterise all true Christian experience, and enter into the closest relations of true and trustful love. Next, you cannot learn from the happy results of this first act of faith the great life-lesson of faith. Then again you lose those mighty motives of grateful, joyous love which should be the incentives to a truly spiritual life, and instead of these there is certain to be an element of servile bondage even in your very devotion, and you must forfeit the glorious liberty of the child of God; and last, but not least, there can be no power in your testimony; for how can you induce others to accept a benefit of the personal effects of which you yourself know nothing? If your religion leaves you only in a state of uncertainty, how is it ever likely that you will have weight with others in inducing them to turn their backs upon those "pleasures of sin for a season" which, although they may be fleeting and unsatisfactory, are nevertheless a certainty while they do last. On the other side, let me point out that this knowledge of salvation is the effect and not the condition of justification. It would be absurd to teach that men are justified by knowing that they are justified. Of course they can only know it when it has happened, and to make such knowledge the condition of justification would involve a palpable contradiction. Indeed it would be equivalent to saying you must believe what is false in order to make it true. Look at these words of St. Paul; they sound bold and strong; yet just reflect for a moment. Would anything less than such a confidence as is indicated here have been sufficient to enable him to lead the life that he did? Would he ever have been fit for his life's work if his assurance of his own personal relations with God through Christ had been more dubious, and his standing more precarious? Would anything less than this settled conviction have enabled him fearlessly to face all the odds that were against him, and have borne him on through many a shock of battle towards the victor's crown? But now let us look more closely into this pregnant saying, and endeavour to analyse its meaning. On looking carefully at the words you will find that in stating one thing St. Paul really states three. **FIRST, HE TELLS US THAT HE HAS ASSUMED A DISTINCT MORAL ATTITUDE, AN ATTITUDE OF TRUST TOWARDS A PARTICULAR PERSON. NEXT, THAT THE ASSUMPTION AND MAINTENANCE OF THIS ATTITUDE IS WITH HIM A MATTER OF PERSONAL CONSCIOUSNESS; AND NEXT,**

THAT HE IS ACQUAINTED WITH AND THOROUGHLY SATISFIED WITH THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSON THUS TRUSTED. Let us consider each of these statements severally; and turning to the first, we notice that St. Paul represents his confidence as being reposed not in a doctrine, or a fact, but a person. "I know whom I have believed." Many go wrong here. I have heard some speak as if we were to be justified by believing in the doctrine of justification by faith. Let me say to such what common-sense should have let them to conclude without its being necessary to say it, that we are no more justified by believing in the doctrine of justification by faith than we are carried from London to Edinburgh by believing in the expansive force of steam. Knowledge of the laws of the expansion of vapour may induce me to enter a railway train, and similarly, knowledge of the doctrine of justification may induce me to trust myself to Him who justifies; but I am no more justified by believing this doctrine than I am transported from place to place by believing in the laws of dynamics. Others seem to believe that our faith is to be reposed upon the doctrine of the Atonement, and not a few upon certain particular theories which are supposed to attach to that doctrine. But surely it is clear that our views of doctrine may be never so orthodox and correct, and yet our hearts may not have found rest in Him to whom the doctrine witnesses. Once again, some seem to regard our salvation as dependent upon belief in a fact; but surely it is possible to accept the fact, and yet come no nearer to Him who was the principal actor in that fact. Faith rests on a person, not a doctrine, or a fact; but when we believe in the person, this undoubtedly involves faith in the doctrine (so far as it is necessary for us to understand it) and in the fact. For if I believe in Jesus Christ, I believe in Him as God's express provision to meet the case of fallen humanity, and this involves the doctrine. Once again, if I believe in Christ, I believe in Him as having accomplished all that was necessary to meet the case of fallen humanity, and this involves the fact. The doctrine and the fact both meet in Him; but apart from Him neither is of any real spiritual value to me. Nay, I will go so far as to say that my apprehension of the doctrine, and even of the fact, may be very inadequate and incomplete, yet if with all my heart I rest upon the person, my confidence can never be disappointed. Now let us consider this statement that St. Paul makes as to his moral attitude towards Christ. He tells us that he knows whom he has believed. The phrase is especially deserving of attention, and yet, curiously enough, it is generally misquoted. How commonly do we hear it quoted as if the words were, "I know in whom I have believed." I fear that the frequency of the misquotation arises from the fact that men do not clearly discern the point to which the words of the apostle as they stand were specially designed to bear witness. The phrase, as St. Paul wrote it, points to a distinctly personal relation, and the words might, with strict accuracy, be rendered, "I know whom I have trusted." The words, as they are misquoted, may be destitute of this element of personal relation altogether. If I were to affirm of some distinguished commercial house in this city that I believed in it, that would not necessarily mean that I had left all my money in its hands. If I were to say that I believed in a well-known physician, that would not lead you to conclude that he had cured, or even that I had applied to him to cure, any disease from which I might be suffering. But if I stated that I had trusted that firm or that physician, then you would know that a certain actual personal relation was established between me and the man or the company of men of whom I thus spoke. How many there are who believe in Christ just as we believe in a bank where we have no account, or a physician whose skill we have never proved, and our belief does us as much good in the one case as in the other. But perhaps the true character of trust is, if possible, still more strikingly brought out by the word which St. Paul here employs in the original Greek. It is the word that would be used by any Greek to

indicate the sum of money deposited, in trust, in the hands of a commercial agent, or, as we should say, a banker; in fact, the words used here simply mean "my deposit." If you carry about a large sum of money on your person, or if you keep it in your house, you run a certain risk of losing it. In order to ensure the safety of your property you make it over into the hands of a banker; and if you have perfect confidence in the firm to which you commit it, you no longer have an anxious thought about it. There it is safe in the bank. Even so there had come a time when St. Paul's eyes were opened to find that he was in danger of losing that beside which all worldly wealth is a mere trifle — his own soul; for what indeed "is a man profited, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Nay, it was not only that his soul was in danger amongst the robbers, it was actually forfeited to the destroyer, and then it was that, in his helpless despair, he made it over into another's hands — that other who had a right to preserve it and keep it alive, because He had ransomed it from the destroyer, and from that time forward there he had left it safe and secure, because He to whom he had entrusted it was trustworthy. Now have you done the same? Have you not only believed in Jesus, but have you trusted Him? Then this must lead us to the second of the three things that we saw St. Paul here affirms. Evidently St. Paul knew, and was perfectly sure, of his own moral attitude towards God; and here he explicitly asserts that his faith was a matter of distinct moral consciousness, for "I know whom I have believed" certainly contains within itself "I know that I have believed." Now turn this over in your mind. Surely it is reasonable enough when we come to think of it; for if we have something weighing on our minds that seems a thing of great importance, surely if we make it over into the hands of another, and leave it with him, we can hardly fail to be conscious of having done so. The question sometimes may be asked — and indeed it often is asked — "How am I to know that I have believed?" I confess that it is not easy to answer such an inquiry; but there are a good many similar questions which it would be equally hard to answer if people ever asked them, which, however, as a matter of fact, they never do. If I were to ask you to-night, "How do you know that you hear me speaking to you?" the only answer you could return would be — one that may sound very unphilosophical, but for all that one that is perfectly sufficient — "Because I do." If you answer, "Ah! but then that is a matter of sense," I reply, "Yes, but is it otherwise with matters that don't belong to the region of sense-perception at all?" If I were to ask you, "How do you know that you remember, or that you imagine, or that you think, or that you perform any mental process?" your answer must still be, "Because I do." You do not feel either able or desirous to give any further proof of these experiences; it is enough that they are experiences — matters of direct consciousness. But we need not in order to illustrate this point go beyond this question that we are at present considering. You ask, "How may I know that I believe?" This question sounds to you reasonable when you are speaking of Christ as the object of faith. Does it sound equally reasonable when you speak in the same terms of your fellow-man? How do you know, my dear child, that you believe in your own mother? How do you know, you, my brother, who are engaged in commerce, that you believe in your own banker? You can only answer in each case, "Because I do"; but surely that answer is sufficient, and you do not feel seriously exercised about the reality of your confidence, because you have no other proof of it excepting an appeal to your own personal consciousness. Let us now notice, further, that he knew well, and was perfectly satisfied with, the character of the person whom he did believe. Herein lay the secret of his calm, the full assurance of his faith. You may have your money invested in a concern which, on the whole, you regard as a safe and satisfactory one, yet when panics are prevailing in the city, and well-known houses are failing, you may be conscious of some little

anxiety, some passing misgiving. You have faith in the firm, but perhaps not full assurance of faith. It is otherwise with the money that you have invested in the funds of the nation; that must be safe as long as Great Britain holds her place amongst the nations of the world. Clearly our sense of comfort in trusting, our full assurance of confidence lies in our knowledge of, and is developed by, our contemplation of the object upon which our trust is reposed — if indeed that object be worthy of it — and feelings of peace and calm will necessarily flow from this.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Behold, He Cometh

Revelation 1:7

Behold, he comes with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him...

The second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is set before us as the supreme hope of the Church, that great and glorious event towards which all is leading up, or for which all is preparing. This being so, our feelings in regard of it will serve us as a test by which to gauge ourselves with respect to our present condition before God. If things are as they should be with us, we shall be able to say from our heart, "Even so, Amen." Have any of us failed before this simple test? Have we come to the conclusion that, though we hope we love the Lord, we do not love His appearing? What are the causes that render it possible for any true child of God to shrink from the thought of his Master's return? Conspicuous amongst these is that secret worldliness of heart, against which the Master so solemnly warned us: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your heart be overcharged with... the cares of this life." Have we to confess that we have been living and labouring to win wealth, or fame, or social distinction, or to better our position, and to gain the honour that cometh from man? Ah! no wonder then that we love not His appearing, for has not our worldly self become within us a little Antichrist, whom the Lord must needs destroy by the brightness of His coming? Or peradventure we are entangled by worldly associations. Instead of so loving the world as Christ loved it, and going into it to save its perishing children, we have gone there in search of social pleasure, and have found a social snare; and instead of going outside the camp bearing Christ's reproach, we have become conformed to the world's image, and accept its maxims and wear its uniform. Ah! how can we desire the Lord's appearing if we have been false to our colours? Or again, is it not only too obvious that many are prevented from uttering this prayer from the heart because they know that they have been leading an indolent and useless life? Have you an inward conviction that the Lord Jesus Christ must, as a matter of simple truth, say of your service, were He now to appear, "Thou wicked and slothful servant... take the talent from him, and give it unto him that hath ten talents"? Or, once again, how many a Christian is robbed of his Advent hope by some secret sin, known perhaps only to God and himself, extenuated and even defended by a perverted understanding, but already condemned by the inward witness of the Holy Ghost in his hearty It may be some crooked, or at any rate questionable, practice in business; it may be some impurity of thought, or even of action; it may be some habit of levity and frivolousness, or loose and giddy speech; or it may be a custom of exaggeration and untruthfulness which you have familiarised yourself with until you scarcely are aware of it when you fall into the fault. Or perhaps it may not be secret sin which stands between us and our hope, but rather an open and obvious inconsistency apparent to all around as well as to ourselves. Many real Christians, I am persuaded, are unable to love the Lord's appearing because they are walking rather after the flesh than after the Spirit. Now, if for any of these reasons you feel yourselves unable to love and pray for the Lord's appearing, consider, I pray you, whence you have fallen, how your highest glory is being turned into your deepest shame. Oh, cast away all that robs thee of thy Advent hope and of the joys of anticipation, and make a fresh and full surrender of thyself.

But if the thought of this glorious event prove so very heart-searching to us, who have already come under the influence of God's grace, how very powerfully should it weigh with those who have not yet taken the very first step in the Christian life! It is surely high time for such to listen to the Advent cry, "Behold, He cometh with clouds." "Behold, He cometh." Oh that men would respond to that call for here indeed is something worth looking at. Man may say "Behold!" about many things of small import, but when God says "Behold!" rest assured there is something worth looking at before us. A voice from heaven is pleading for our attention, and it seems to say, "Stop and think, the foredoomed hour draws nigh, return and come!" "And every eye shall see Him." It will not be a matter of choice or preference then, as it is now; a stern necessity will compel every human being that God has made, whether he will or no, to behold the approaching King. Drawn as by an irresistible force, all shall be brought into His presence, and find themselves arraigned before the bar of the Judge. Who are they to whom this revelation of Jesus Christ will cause such unspeakable despair? They are described here. And let us be honest with ourselves, and face the question candidly: "Do I belong to the classes that are mentioned here as being plunged into such dire distress? First we hear of those who pierced Him. Have any of us pierced Him? True, we were not present at Calvary, we had no part in driving in the iron nails into His quivering palms, or in thrusting the spear into His side. But have we never pierced Him? Yes, not once only, but over and over again, in the long, dark ages of man's history, Jesus Christ has been pierced, and He is being pierced still. How do men pierce Him? Surely by undisguised hostility and contemptuous scorn. It is wonderful to what length men will still go in their hatred of Christ. Still He has to complain, "They hated Me without a cause." The bitter things that men of the world say about Christians, what is it but a determined attempt to wound the Master through the servants? Others, again, pierce Jesus by cold indifference and heartless ingratitude. You can be kind and tender in every other relationship of life; you are a generous husband and a considerate and sympathising father; and you are a gentle and devoted wife and a tender-hearted mother and friend; there is only one Person whom you habitually slight and treat with ingratitude and neglect, as though it were a matter of indifference to you whether you pleased or pained Him, and that Person is Divine. Him you have treated with contempt, His love you have rejected, and His mercy you have despised. Ah, how will you face Him when every eye shall see Him, and you shall know at last how your callous indifference, your black ingratitude, has pierced the sensitive heart of the Son of Man, who lived and died for you? How will you endure the wrath of the Lamb? Some of you again have pierced Jesus by deliberately choosing something which He hates in preference to Himself. Ah, how often this is done! It may be that your preference falls on some evil habit that is destroying you, body and soul; it may be some accursed sin that is poisoning your whole being, and yet you prefer it to Christ. But our text speaks of others besides these. It tells us how "all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." To which of the two kindreds do you belong? Are you of the earth, earthy, or are you citizens of Mount Zion? for to one or other of these two classes we all belong. Judge yourselves, lest that day come upon you as a thief in the night, revealing to you your true character and position when the revelation comes too late. Again, we ask, Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? Those surely have nothing to fear from the Lord's appearing who can say, "Unto Him that has loved us," etc. Judgment has no terrors and eternity no alarms for those who are living in the conscious enjoyment of the benefits of redeeming love.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Bible Study

John 5:31-40

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

The Bible should be studied —

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 Burning the Roll

Jeremiah 36:20-26

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Can Two Walk Together, Except They be Agreed?

Amos 3:3

Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Christ At the Door of the Heart

Revelation 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him...

"Behold!" The sight is indeed a most astonishing one, which ought to fill our hearts with surprise and shame. God outside; He who ought to be recognised as Lord and Master of the human being, to whom we owe everything. I question whether there is any revelation made to us in the whole course of God's Word that more strongly illustrates the persevering love of God. The love of God is not content with redeeming a guilty world, but He brings the redemption to the door of every human being. How, it is natural we should ask, is this extraordinary phenomenon to be explained? If we look at the context, we discover what the explanation is. "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Ah! it is in those words that the clue is found to the extraordinary spectacle. I cannot understand a man going on, year after year, realising his own inward want, and yet not accepting the supply which God has given. How is it that Satan prevents this? How is it that he brings us to the position which is indicated to us by this figure? By filling us with all sorts of things which are not God. What are they? Some make their religion a substitute for God. That is one of the very worst substitutes that we can possibly fix upon. Again, how many persons there are who find an excellent substitute for Christ in morality. A man may have kept all the Ten Commandments, and yet, all the while, be shutting the door of his heart against Christ, and if a man does that, he keeps the letter of the Commandments, but not the spirit. Again, how many there are who take worldly pleasures as a substitute for God. Another thing set up in the place of God is the love of wealth. What is there that money cannot do? Another man puts learning in the place of God. What is there that intelligence cannot do? All these attempts to create substitutes, what are they? They are simply so many sins against your own soul. It would not have been at all a thing to be marvelled at, if we had read this passage thus: "The Lord once stood outside the door and knocked." Had the Lord Jesus Christ given us one offer of mercy, and given one loud, thundering "knock," and, being refused, left us to take the consequence, left us to our own miserable doom, you know we should have deserved it. Oh, deafen not your ears, men and women, against His call: do not be so blind to your own interest as to keep Him standing there: listen to what He says, "If any man hear My voice." Notice that. He does not say, "If any man makes himself moral; if any man will try and make himself better." That is not it, thank God! "If any man will shed oceans of tears." No, that is not it. "If any man has deep sorrow." No, that is not it. "If any man has powerful faith." No, that is not it, What is it He says? "If any man will hear My voice." As the preacher is speaking now, say, "God is speaking to my soul; He is speaking in all the infinity of His mercy: I cannot, I won't deafen my ear against Him." Well, as soon as the man hears the voice, he is on the highway to salvation. What more is wanted? Just one thing more. "If any man hear My voice, and will open unto Me." It does not sound very much, does it? "Ah, but," you say, "faith is so difficult. One man says, faith is this, and another says it is another thing." Do you think the Lord Jesus Christ will stand back if you say that? I tell you, you will find those bolts and

bars will fly back the moment you tell Him you are willing. Now, what are you going to do? Nay, what will He do? He says, "If any man will open to Me, I will come in." Well, what will He do? Young man! you are thinking to yourself, "I should like to have Jesus as my Saviour, but if He comes to my heart He will bring a funeral procession with Him; my countenance will fall, my life will be overshadowed, my joy will be gone; my youthful pleasures will disappear, and I shall become mournful and morose." I tell you that is the devil's lie, not God's truth. Wherever Jesus is, He carries a feast along with Him, and so He says to-night, "If any man will open unto Me, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

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

1.1 Contenders With God

Job 9:4

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

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

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

1.1 Conversion

Acts 3:19-21

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Conviction of Sin

Psalms 50:21

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

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

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

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

1.1 Cornelius

Acts 10:1-48

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,...

I. HE WAS A DEVOUT MAN. This takes him out of the ranks of those whose religion is not a religion of devotion. The religion of too many is a religion of fashion. They are expected to go to church, to pray and sing and hear while there, but they are glad when it is over, and that it will not have to be repeated for a week. As a devout man Cornelius was —

1. Thoroughly in earnest. Earnestness alone will never take a man to heaven, but no one ever got there who was not in earnest.

2. Impressed with the majesty of God. He had realised something of the glorious character of Him with whom he had to do. Are you overshadowed by the august presence of the Most High? If not, you are not in the same category as Cornelius.

II. HE FEARED GOD WITH ALL HIS HOUSE. He took an interest in the well-being of his subordinates. He did not regard himself as a mere ruler. Too many officers treat their men as mere automata, made to stand before them in a line and go through their evolutions like machines. Is it a matter of solicitude with us that our servants should feel the power of God's grace? How many ladies speak to their maids about their souls?

III. HE GAVE MUCH ALMS TO THE PEOPLE. He was a man of large-hearted liberality. How many professing Christians would be startled if they asked the question faithfully, "What proportion of my income do I give to God?" Remember the generosity of the Pharisees, and our Lord's declaration, "Except your righteousness shall exceed," etc.

IV. HE PRAYED TO GOD ALWAYS. How many are content with a few hurried moments of prayer, and think that a trouble.

1. He prayed for greater light. Many are perfectly satisfied with their attainments, or even with their non-attainments, and prefer darkness or twilight to light.

2. He prayed like a man who expected to receive the answer. Would anything surprise some of you more than if God were to answer your prayer?

3. When his prayer was partially answered, he took pains to secure the full blessing.

V. WE HAVE SAID A GOOD DEAL IN CORNELIUS' FAVOUR: Now what do you think of him? Some may say, That is an excellence I cannot hope to attain. Stop! Cornelius, with all his excellence, was AN UNSAVED MAN. Let me not be misunderstood. He had been faithful to the light he had, and if he had been called away he would have been judged according to that, and not by a standard that he was unacquainted with. Peter lays down this principle clearly in vers. 34, 35.

But Cornelius was so far unsaved that if when the gospel reached him he had rejected it, he could not have escaped condemnation (see Acts 11:14). You cannot save a man who is saved already. If so good a man could yet be a lost soul, what must be the case with many here?

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Divine Disappointment

Isaiah 5:4-6

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Enthusiasm Rebuked

Luke 18:35-43

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

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

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

1.1 Faith in Christ

John 16:9

Of sin, because they believe not on me;

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

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

1.1 Father

Luke 15:11-32

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Forgetful Hearers

James 1:25

But whoever looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work...

Were you to stand at the door of many of our churches, and ask the people as they came out what had been the subject principally dealt with, or the point aimed at by the discourse they had just been listening to, how many would be able to give an intelligible and satisfactory answer? In a large number of cases even the text is, I fear, forgotten before the ascription is reached. Only a short time ago a friend of mine was preaching in one of our cathedral churches. As he was going to select for his text a prominent passage in one of the portions for the day, he thought it expedient to inquire of the clerk, "What did the Canon preach from this morning?" The clerk became very pensive, seemed quite disposed to cudgel his brain for the proper answer; but, somehow or other, he really could not think of it just then. But there were all the men of the choir robing in the adjacent choir vestry; he would go and ask them. Accordingly the same question was passed round the choir, and produced the same perplexity. At length the sagacious clerk returned with the highly explicit answer, "It was upon the Christian religion, sir!" I think those good people must have needed a reminder as to how we should hear, don't you?

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

1.1 Free Forgiveness

Luke 7:42-43

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken.)

1.1 Give Me My Portion

Luke 15:11-32

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

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

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

1.1 Glad News

Luke 2:10

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

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

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

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

(W. H. Aitken.)

1.1 God Allows Man to Use His Independence

Luke 15:11-32

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

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

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

1.1 God Employs Various Means in Dealing with Men

Isaiah 5:4-6

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 God Glorified in the Fall if Pride

Jeremiah 13:15-17

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

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

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

II. HUMAN PRIDE MUST EFFECTUALLY BE BROKEN DOWN.

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

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

1.1 God's Call to the Fallen

Hosea 14:1

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Grace Our Teacher

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,...

The apostle proceeds to state that grace not only saves but undertakes our training; and this, of course, is a life-long work, a work that will only be concluded when grace ends in glory. Now, obviously, if this work is to be done as it should be done, the soul must, first of all, be in a position to receive teaching. If grace is really to undertake our training, and to teach us such lessons as only grace can teach, surely she must first of all calm the tumultuous misgivings which fill our hearts; and until grace has done this for us, how can she instruct us? If I am learning my lesson with a view to obtain grace, it cannot be grace that is acting the part of the teacher, for she can only teach where she has been already obtained. Grace cannot at one and the same moment be my teacher, and also that to obtain which I am being taught, for this, of course, involves a contradiction in terms. Hence, as we have said, unless this first point be settled, and we know that we are in the enjoyment of God's salvation, we are not in a position to learn from grace, whoever else it be that we may learn from. And thus it comes to pass, as a matter of simple fact, that a large number of nominal Christians are taught, indeed, after a certain fashion, but they are not taught by grace. They seek to learn of Christ in order that they may obtain the grace of Christ; they endeavour to become conformed to Christ in order that their resemblance to Christ may dispose the heart of God to regard them with the same favourable consideration which He bestowed on Him whom they seek to resemble. Such persons are under the law. Grace, then, is to be our instructress, and she has plenty of work before her in the training and preparation of the human subject for the glorious destiny which lies before him. Then only is it possible, after the adoption has taken place, for the education to begin. With these thoughts in our mind we will proceed to consider grace as our teacher, and first we will point out the contrast between the training of grace and the operation of law. Before the grace of God appeared men were under another teacher, and his name was "Law." Grace is our teacher, and she teaches us far more powerfully, far more efficiently, and far more perfectly than law can ever teach us. But observe, she will not share her office of teacher with law. The Christian is not to be a kind of spiritual mongrel, nor is his experience to be of a mongrel type — part legal, part spiritual, part savouring of bondage, part savouring of liberty: but the design of God is that we should stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and never allow ourselves, even for a moment, to be entangled in a yoke of bondage. How many Christians are there who never seem to have perceived that we are no more to be saved by grace and then trained by law, than we are to be saved by law and then trained by grace? How many who need to learn that as we are to be saved by grace at first, so we are to be trained by grace afterwards, until at last the cornerstone is raised upon the wondrous structure which only grace has reared, amidst shouts of "Grace, grace unto it!" All is of grace from first to last. Now in order that we may very clearly apprehend what the teaching of God's word is on this subject, let us just put side by side the teaching of law and the teaching of grace, contrasting them one with the other, and then we shall see how much to the advantage of grace

the contrast is. Grace teaches better than law.

1. She teaches better than law, first, because she delivers to us a fuller and more distinct exhibition of the mind and will of God as regards human conduct, based upon a more complete manifestation of the Divine character. Grace, as she takes possession of our heart, makes us acquainted with the mind and will of God in a manner in which we should never have become acquainted with these by the mere influence and teaching of law. If you reflect for a moment, you will see that the object of law is not to reveal the mind and the will of the Lawgiver, but to lay down certain positive precepts for the direction of those to whom the legislation is given, or for whom the legislation is designed. If an Act of Parliament is passed by the British Legislature, by both Houses of Parliament, and a person were to ask, "What is the object of this Act?" nobody would reply, "To reveal to the British public what is the mind and will of the members of our Legislature." Nothing of the kind. The object of the Act is to meet some specific political need, or to give some specific political direction to those who are subject to its authority. Even so the law delivered from Sinai was not primarily designed to reveal the mind and will of God. The law contained only a very partial revelation of the mind and will of God. The law consisted of certain positive precepts, which were given in the infancy of the human race for the direction and guidance of mankind. The rules and precepts which are laid down in the nursery are not designed to exhibit the mind and will of the parent, although they are in accordance with that mind and will. They are laid down for the convenience and for the benefit of those for whom the rules were made. A child knows something of the mind and will of the parent from personal contact with that parent, but not from the rules, or only to a very slender degree from the rules, which are laid down for its guidance. But when we turn from law to grace, then we see at once that we now are dealing with a revelation of the mind and the will of Him from whom the grace proceeds. Each act of favour which a parent bestows upon his child, or which a sovereign bestows upon his subject, is a revelation, so far as it goes, of the mind and will of the parent towards that particular child, or of the sovereign towards that particular subject, as the case may be. And even so every act of grace which we receive from God is a revelation, as far as it goes, of the mind and will of God towards us who are affected by the act.

2. Not only is the teaching of grace in itself fuller and more complete, but we are still more impressed by the superiority of the mode in which the teaching is given — the form in which this new doctrine is communicated. In the decalogue you are met with, "Thou shalt," or, "Thou shalt not" — and you observe at once that the command addresses itself directly to your will. Children are not appealed to so far as their understandings are concerned. They are told to act in a certain particular way, or not to act in a certain particular way; and if a child stops to reason with its parents, an appeal is at once made to parental authority. "Your duty, my child, is to obey, not to understand." Or, once again, the decalogue makes no appeal to the affections of those to whom it was delivered; it deals not with our moral states, or with the motives from which actions proceed; it simply concerns itself with those actions, and speaks to the will which is responsible for them. But when we turn from the decalogue to the sermon on the mount we find that all is changed. It does not begin with a direct appeal to the will, and yet the will is touched by a stronger influence, and moved to action by a more mighty force, than ever operated upon the will of the Israelites at Sinai. Grace is our teacher; and we observe that the first word that she utters in this lesson is a blessing. The law had summed up its all of teaching with a curse "Cursed is he that continueth not in all

things that are written in this book to do them."

2. She does not say, "Ye shall be blessed if ye will become poor in spirit." Grace drives no bargains; but she explains to us that a state of experience from which most of us would naturally shrink is a state of actual blessedness. Here you will observe that she appeals to our enlightened understanding, indicating to us a new and a higher view of self-interest, showing that God's will, so far from being opposed to our truest well-being, is in complete and full harmony with it; for He is our Father, and He loves us, and therefore desires to see us supremely happy like Himself. Does she not teach better than law? Once again. Not only does she teach by giving us a fuller and a deeper revelation of the mind and will of God, and exhibiting these to us in such a way as that she appeals not merely to our own will, demanding action, but to our understanding, and, through our understanding, to our feelings, kindling holy desires, and so setting the will at work almost before it is aware that it is working; but she does more than all this.

3. Grace teaches us by setting before our eyes the noblest and the most striking of all exemplars. Grace speaks to us through human lips; grace reveals herself to us in a human life. Now we all know how much more we learn from a personal teacher than from mere abstract directions. To watch a painter, and to see how he uses his brush, and carefully and minutely notice the little touches that give so much character and power to the product of his genius, does far more for us in the way of making us painters than any amount of mere abstract study of the art itself. This in itself may suffice to show the superiority of grace as a teacher. While the thunder sounded from Sinai and the fiery law was given, God still remained concealed. When the yell was taken away, and God was made flesh in the person of Christ, human eyes were allowed to look at Him, and human ears heard the sound of His voice. Perfection stood before us at last in concrete form. When grace teaches us, she always teaches us by leading up to Christ — by exhibiting fresh views of His perfection, drawing out our heart in admiration towards Him. Happy they who thus set themselves to learn Christ as their life lesson, not as a mere duty — that is legality — but because they have fallen in love with Christ! Happy they who learn Christ just as the astronomer learns astronomy! Why does he study astronomy? Would a Newton tell you that he has spent all those hours in the careful examination of the phenomena of nature, or absorbed in profound mathematical calculations, because he thought it his duty to do it? And even so those who are under the teaching of grace learn Christ, not because they are under a legal obligation to learn Him, but because they are mastered by an enthusiastic admiration for the Divine object. There is a beauty in Christ which wins the heart. But grace does more than even this.

4. She not only sets before us the highest of all exemplars, but she establishes the closest possible relationship between that Exemplar and ourselves. Grace is not content with merely setting an example before us; she takes us by the hand and introduces us to the Exemplar, tells us not only that this Exemplar is content to be our friend, but, more wonderful still, that He is content to be one with us, uniting Himself to us, that His strength may be made perfect in our weakness. "Know ye not," says grace, "that Christ is in you?" In you; not merely outside you as a source of power, not merely beside you as a faithful companion on life's journey, but in you. "Christ is your life," says grace. Do you prefer to be under the law? Do you really elect to be bondslaves? You say your prayers in the morning; it is your duty to do it. You do not feel comfortable if you do not say them. You go to church; but it is not because you love to go and cannot stay away, or because you want to know more and more of God, or delight in His worship. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let

us go into the house of the Lord." You go because it is your habit. May God save us from such bondage as this! Let us remember that all the while that we are thus trifling there is within our reach, if we would but have it, the glorious liberty of the children of God.

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

1.1 Great Truths Taught by the Passover

Exodus 12:21-23

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

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Hiding Places

Genesis 3:9-12

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

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

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

III. The bringing to light of the hidden things of darkness. The soul has many hiding places. There are —

(1) The hiding place of self-complacent propriety;

(2) the hiding place of the reasoner;

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Holiness, Under the Old Dispensation and Under the New

Isaiah 35:8-10

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

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 How to Return to God

Hosea 14:2

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Human Curiosity and Divine Mystery

John 4:20-29

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 Imitators of God

Ephesians 5:1

Be you therefore followers of God, as dear children;

Literally: "Become ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children." These words may be regarded as indicating the great subjective object of our lives. God's purpose concerning us is to conform us to the image of His own blessed Son. Our purpose concerning ourselves in our own life and conversation should be to become "imitators of God as dear children." Man was originally created in the image of God; but observe, in His image potentially rather than actually — just as the child is the image of the man, or, as we may say, the acorn contains potentially the image of the oak, inasmuch as it contains within itself that which will develop into the oak. Man was made innocent and pure, and so far in the image of God. But the positive attributes and qualities which are God's highest glory, and by which His glory is to shine forth through humanity, could not be exhibited till man had been submitted to a probation. Jesus Christ not only died, but lived — lived a life of perfect and complete obedience — in order that by that life He might bring within our view the image of God displayed in a truly perfect man. Thus the Divine image lost in the Fall has been restored to humanity in all the completeness of its moral beauty in the Incarnation, and as we contemplate it we learn to admire it, and become enamoured of it. In that revelation we have an opportunity of seeing both what God is and what man is designed by Him to become. As we have endeavoured to show, then, we need to have an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the object to be imitated, in order to imitate it; and then, when this is granted, we need carefully to study it. You cannot imitate the productions of a great painter unless you give your whole attention to that painter's style. It is not sufficient for you to have a general idea of the characteristics of his genius; you have to study the details of the works of art proceeding from his pencil; and only when you have made yourself acquainted with the various peculiarities of his style and the features of his work, are you in a position to become an imitator of that painter. And as with painting, so with every other art: we all know this. My friends, it is even so with our spiritual life. If we are to become imitators of God, as dear children, we first need to have a model set before us in such a form as that we can comprehend it, and next we need to study the model so set before us. And we have reason to thank God that the Divine model is brought down within reach of our finite powers of contemplation. If God had never been incarnate, and if Jesus had not come down to show Him to us, we might have been left to barren speculations about the Divine character and attributes, as were the ancient heathen philosophers. "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself; but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works." And this is surely the true answer to that dreary doctrine of the incomprehensibility of the Absolute — preached some time ago by an eminent thinker amongst ourselves, a Christian philosopher of no small repute — a doctrine which, if carried to its ultimate and practical issue, must be destructive alike of all true religion and morality. It was advanced by this author that because God is absolute, He is unknowable by the finite, and because He is unknowable, therefore His moral qualities may be totally different in kind from all that we

understand by terms employed to indicate them; that the "justice" of God, for example, may be a totally different thing from what we understand as justice, and His goodness a totally distinct thing from what we understand as goodness, and so on with each moral attribute in particular. This position, as I have said, seems to me subversive of all true morality, while it strikes at the root of all reasonable religion. For if God's qualities are different in kind from what I understand by the terms employed, why may not the greatest criminals be nearer the standard of Divine perfection than the worthiest of mankind? And how is it possible for me to admire, love, and, above all, trust a Being, of the nature of whose moral attributes I know practically nothing? Atheism itself were a relief as against the possibility of having to deal with such an unknown God. But the answer to such an appalling deduction of a pitiless logic is to be found in the fact that the perfections of the Absolute are presented to us in a concrete form in the Person of Jesus Christ. As we gaze upon Him we see what God is, and what He desires us to think and know of Himself. And we find here that God's moral perfections are identical in kind with those qualities which we recognize as such, and after which we aspire; that the justice of God is the same as that which we understand by the word justice; that the love, the purity, the truth, the faithfulness, which we regard as attributes of Deity, are the same in kind, though fuller in degree, as those virtues which bear these names amongst ourselves. For we observe that never were these so perfectly exhibited as in the life, character, and teaching of Him who completely revealed to us the image of God. Let me say, therefore, do not trouble yourselves because God seems so vast that you cannot comprehend Him, or because His attributes are so infinite that your imagination cannot grapple with them. Do not allow yourself to lose hold of the Divine Personality in the attempt to recognize His infinity. But to become closely acquainted with this model, and to be able to imitate it, we need not only to have it, but to study it. And hence the necessity of the careful, painstaking contemplation of the Christ of the Gospels. But to have the Model and to study it is not all that is required to render our imitation of God in Christ all that it should be. We must be careful not only to imitate the one true Model, but to imitate it in the proper way. And the true evangelical method of imitation is indicated to us in these suggestive words, "Be ye imitators of God, as dear children." It is in the nature of things that the child should imitate its parent. As a matter of fact, children for the most part do imitate their parents. The child of a carpenter will probably never be happier than when he can get a hammer and a few nails and make as much noise with them as possible, while he is endeavouring to imitate the skill of his parent, although with very poor success. The child of the soldier will naturally select the toy sword or gun or a noisy drum for its plaything. The child of the clergyman will delight in addressing an imaginary congregation, or perhaps a congregation of chairs and stools, with much vehemence, if with no great amount of intelligence. But why multiply illustrations? It is a fact we are all familiar with, that the child imitates the parent, not because it is constrained to do so, but because it finds a pleasure in doing so, and that just because it is, as we say, its father's own child. We may learn a great deal from this. The child receives a certain disposition by his hereditary relationship with his parent, and this disposition has a tendency to exhibit itself in his future conduct. How important it is, then, that in our own personal experience we should watch over all within us that seems to come from God — watch over it with such care as the horticulturist would expend on some lovely flower — some rare and beautiful exotic in his greenhouse. These holy aspirations and purer instincts of which we are conscious have been introduced to our nature by Divine grace; they come not of earth, they have their home in the very heart of God Himself; and hence as tender exotics they need to be guarded and protected against the cold breath of the blighting frosts of this

wintry world of ours, which would kill and destroy if possible every flower of Paradise. Give place at once to all that you have reason to believe comes from God, and respond at once to those inward impulses and instincts which are of a Divine origin. These are the motives of sonship, and by surrendering ourselves to these we shall fulfil the direction of our text, "Be ye imitators of God, as dear children." But there is something more than this suggested to us by the words. It is not merely that there are certain hereditary instincts which descend from the father to the child, but it is also the tendency of the close relationship which exists between the son and the father to strengthen these instincts, and to develop them into habits of life. In the first place this relationship usually evokes on the part of the child a feeling of admiration for the father. A little boy naturally thinks his father the greatest man in the world. If the Queen of England were introduced into his home, he would regard her as altogether a less important person than his parents. There is nobody so great in the eyes of a little child as his father or mother; and it is well that this should be so. And if we are the children of the Most High God, is it not more natural still that our whole being should be under the influence of a feeling of admiration for the great Father of spirits, from whom we derived our existence originally, and from whom we have received that new spiritual life — that life by virtue of which we live indeed? This feeling of admiration yields an additional stimulus to those instincts of imitation to which I have already referred. With what interest does the little child look on while his father engages in his ordinary employment. What a wonder of skill it all seems to him! And this admiration prompts those unskilful little hands to attempt an imitation, however feeble. I cannot help thinking that it is possible for us to exhibit in our spiritual experience something like a servile imitation of God, when we only endeavour to imitate Him because we think it is our duty to do so, and we may bring punishment upon ourselves if we do not endeavour to fulfil this our appointed task. This servile imitation must lead us into the region of mere legality, and when this is the case our imitation will be a travesty rather than a copy; for when this is our motive one essential characteristic of a true imitation will necessarily be absent — the element of joyous spontaneousness which makes the imitation so specially well-pleasing in the great Father's eyes. If therefore we desire the true imitation of God let us see to it that we imitate Him as children, and as dear children. But, as I have said, imitation requires to be carried out in detail, and we have to study the work imitated in all its various parts if we would produce anything really resembling it. In the present passage, however, St. Paul calls attention to some of the more prominent features of the Divine character, in respect of which we are to be imitators of God; and we will confine ourselves to a very brief consideration of these. First he speaks of that kindness and tenderness which were so characteristic of Jesus Christ: "Be ye kind," he says, "one to another, tender hearted." It is not enough that we should abstain from being unkind. There is scarcely anything in the life of Jesus that impresses us more than this. As He goes through the world, amidst all its sickening sights and sounds, He never seems to lose His quick sensibility. The next feature of the character of God mentioned here is His Divine readiness to forgive — "Forgiving one another, as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." This leads us to the third point in which St. Paul teaches us here to imitate God as revealed to us in Jesus; and it is the grandest feature of all in the Divine character that is brought before us here. Nay, rather it is the common element in which all other perfections meet; for "God is love." "Walk in love," exclaims the apostle, "as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." Kindness lies on the surface of our lives, and has to do mainly with our outward manner and conduct; but love is of the heart, its domain is within, where it lifts us from our native selfishness,

and develops the Divine. It is the genial warmth of that life blood that floweth forth from the heart of God into ours, and makes us live indeed! Of love we can say no less than St. John has said of it: "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him"; for "God is love." It is the very essence of Deity, and he who has most of it imitates God the best. Walk in love. Well, how shall we do it? How shall we become imitators of God in this respect? We cannot create love by a mere effort of our will; but we may expose ourselves to influences favourable to its development; we may foster and cherish it, or we may check and hinder it — a thing which I fear too many Christians do. The instincts of love naturally exist within those who are born of God, because we inherit the Father's characteristics; and the disposition to feel a new love for all with whom we have to do is an instance of that hereditary imitation to which I have already referred. But love grows, and is developed by exercise. If instead of checking these early impulses we encourage them, and go on to love, not "in word or tongue, but in deed and in truth," our disposition to love will be strengthened by loving deeds and words performed or spoken in obedience to the instincts of love. We may foster love negatively also by watching against the narrowing instincts of selfishness, or against anything that tends to render us self-absorbed, for charity seeketh not her own; and to seek our own is to strangle the life of love at its very birth. It is well, too, ever to endeavour to look at the lovelier side of human character, for most men have a lovelier side, and in Christian men this is the Divine element. The mention of Christ's gift of Himself brings us to the last point referred to here in which it is possible for us to imitate God. Let us become imitators of God in self-sacrifice. For self-sacrifice, wonderful to say, would seem to be the law of the Divine benevolence. Be imitators of God in this. Selfishness is no attribute of Deity, though for Him all exist. He fulfils His will in His creatures by making them partakers of His own blessedness, and nothing less than this will satisfy Him. Men seek for greatness in self-assertion, in pushing their own fortunes, and advancing their social status. But the Divine secret of true greatness lies in self-denial and self-forgetfulness, in the willing and cheerful surrender of our own rights and comforts and pleasures for the good of others.

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

1.1 Israel and King Jareb

Hosea 5:13

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Israel's Deliverance

Exodus 14:30-31

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

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

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

II. THE DELIVERANCE.

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Jacob's Struggle for a Blessing

Genesis 32:26

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

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

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

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Joy

Nehemiah 8:9-10

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

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

I. THE SOURCE FROM WHICH IT PROCEEDS.

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

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

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS THAT BELONG TO IT.

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

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

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

(1) The joy of calm acquiescence in the Divine will.

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 Justification More than Forgiveness

Romans 5:1

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

A friend with whom you have been long doing business falls into a condition of insolvency, and you find that he is your debtor to a large amount. There is no prospect of his ever being able to pay you back, and you have reason to know that this condition of debt arises not merely from his misfortune, but from his fault. Under these circumstances it would be possible for you to liberate him from his debt by an act of forgiveness. Let us suppose that you adopt this course; the man would no longer be in fear of a debtor's prison, and would no doubt feel himself under a great obligation to you. But would such a state of things be likely to bring you into closer personal relations with each other? Would it not necessarily produce on the contrary a certain distance and constraint? On the other hand, the forgiven debtor must needs, me thinks, feel ashamed to look his generous creditor in the face, must feel ill at ease in his presence, and would shrink from familiar social intercourse with the family of one on whom his conduct has inflicted such serious losses. On the other hand, the forgiving creditor could scarcely be expected to select such a person for his friend, and to treat his past conduct as if it were a thing easily to be forgotten. But to illustrate our position further, let us now present another case. Let us suppose that the creditor is so convinced of the sincerity of the regret which his debtor professes, and has reason to believe that the severe lesson has wrought in him so great a moral change that he feels himself free to make an experiment which most of us would certainly regard as a perilous one; let us suppose that, instead of remitting his debt, he introduces him into partnership with his own son, with whose business he is himself closely concerned. This his new connection with a solvent and flourishing firm places him, we may say, in a position of solvency, removes the stigma of bankruptcy, puts him in the way of making a full return to his benefactor, to whom at the same time it greatly enhances his obligation. Now it is easy to see how this man — not merely forgiven, but in a certain sense justified — will be brought by such an arrangement into the closest relations with his benefactor. Friendly social intercourse will exist without restraint, and he who under the former mode of treatment might have seemed little better than an escaped convict will now be a recognised and respected member of the social circle in which his creditor moves.

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

1.1 Justification by Faith

Romans 5:1

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

Some years ago a clergyman was preaching on this text in the East End of London, and at the end of his sermon he invited any who were anxious to come and converse with him in the vestry. He was followed by an intelligent looking young man, who said, "I am going to leave England in two or three days, and perhaps this is the last opportunity I shall have of talking with a clergyman: My father and I have had a terrible quarrel, and it ended in his turning me out, telling me never to darken his door again. I wandered up to London, but knew not where to look for employment. At last I found a berth as sailor before the mast, and before I go I want to ask you, 'What must I do to be saved?'" The clergyman endeavoured to make the way of salvation as clear as he could to him. They parted, however, without there being any apparent change in the young man's spiritual condition, though he seemed awakened and much in earnest. Time wore on, and the incident had almost passed from the clergyman's mind, when one day a sailor called at his residence. "Do you remember," he said, "some months ago a young man coming to your vestry after the Sermon you had preached on the words, 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God?'" "Oh, yes; I remember it perfectly." "Well, he went on board the London, and he and I became great friends, because I am a Christian, and I soon found out that he wanted to be a Christian too; so we used often to have long talks over our Bibles, and used to pray together; yet somehow or other I could never get him to see things quite clearly. I suppose he was looking to his feelings more than to Christ. Well, then came the terrible catastrophe, and that young man was told off by the captain, with myself and a few others, to man one of the boats. The boat was lowered, and soon was crowded; but by some means the poor fellow was left behind in the ship. We hardly knew what to do, for our boat was too full already. Besides, the ship was settling fast, and we were afraid of being dragged down with her. Yet we did not like to pull away. Then I heard him call me by name, as he clung to the rigging; and he shouted across the water, 'Goodbye, mate! If you get ashore safe, inquire for the Rev. H. B — , of Limehouse Docks, London, and tell him that here in the presence of God I can say at last, "Being justified by faith, I have peace with God through my Lord Jesus Christ.'" As he said the words, the ship gave her last lurch, and he disappeared in a watery grave."

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

1.1 King of Kings, and Lord of Lords

Revelation 19:11-16

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat on him was called Faithful and True...

Let us consider over what the Christ is king — how many kings He holds in submission to Himself. This earth has been tyrannised over by usurping kings, under whose grievous yoke humanity has had to groan. It is a sad history, that of these kings of the earth. The ancient Romans had one dark page in their history — it was the annals of the kings. The story began very well, but it ended very terribly; and so deep and indelible was the impression left on the national feelings by the record of the history of the kings, that even when in later years the Commonwealth and Republic gradually developed into an Autocracy, not even Julius Caesar, not even Augustus, dared to assume the title of king. Caesar became an emperor — a king he dared not become. But there is a still darker page in the history of the world, the annals of its sins. Where is the man whose breast sin has not entered? And what a tyrant power sin is I not an abstract idea, not a mere name given to a phase of experience, but an actual power exciting within us base desires, stimulating our neutral desires till they become base, perverting our reason, silencing our conscience, degrading our whole manhood, destroying our souls. We have indeed suffered many things from this king's tyranny; but to-night, as I survey the wondrous work of the Conqueror who has risen from His tomb, I rejoice to recognise Him as King of kings and Lord of lords, and first and foremost as King over this fearful tyrant. The rod of the oppressor is broken, and the staff of the shoulder the Lord Himself has undertaken for the human family. "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." O glorious message for those of us who have found all our strugglings and toilings and efforts futile! Now, when a king has asserted his supremacy over any conquered power, it is to the credit of that king that he should maintain that supremacy; and the practical thought I want to press home on your minds is this: If the Lord Jesus Christ has gained the right to be supreme over the powers of evil, within and without; if this is one of the royal crowns placed upon His brow; let us glorify Him by believing in His power, and let us with unwavering faith call upon Him to exercise His sovereign prerogative on our behalf. Don't you see what honour you put on Jesus when you claim that in virtue of His resurrection power you shall be enabled to do as He has done — put your foot on the neck of that which has previously tyrannised over you? When you approach sin, let there be no wavering, no holding back. Let us not approach the powers of darkness as uncertain of the issue of the conflict. Oh, children of God, when you are called to go into the midst of temptation, do you advance with palpitating heart, with inward misgiving? Very well; then thanks to yourself if you do fall, and fall again and again before the foe, if disaster follows disaster, and defeat, defeat. What! shall we rob Jesus of His rights by conquest? Is it a fact that He wears the royal crown upon His brow, which He has snatched from the head of the fallen dragon? Is it true that "as sin reigned unto death, even so grace reigns by righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord"? (Romans 5:21). Is it a fact that He holds this royal crown upon His brow? is He King of kings and Lord of lords? Is it true that He has trampled down

transgression, and made an end of sin? Has this been the glorious result of His passion? Then you are not merely privileged to ask Him to help you, but to claim that sin shall not have dominion over you, and to look the enemy in the face with holy calm. Our blessed Lord before His passion makes this statement: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Here is another dethroned monarch — and a very powerful one. Very few of us have not felt something of his sway. Very few of us have not bowed down before his throne, and yet, thank God, he too is conquered! A monarch, but a dethroned monarch. He has no longer the right to lord it over those whom Christ has made free. The man who is living in fellowship with Christ will survey the power of this world with the eye of holy jealousy, just as a loyal subject of Great Britain would be jealous of any person setting up his throne in any part of the dominions of Queen Victoria. But how much stronger would be such feelings in the heart of the Queen's own son, partaker as he himself is of her rank and greatness! How his jealousy would burn against any pretender or usurper who should set himself up as a rival of the royal authority! Nor would he rest without doing all in his power to overthrow the obnoxious sway. Are we not sons of God, and heirs with Christ Himself of the glory of God the Father? Once again. He is supreme over that regal force within our nature which we call self. Yes, He has rightful supremacy over every one of us. He conquered Himself as the Son of man, that He might teach us how to conquer ourselves; but, further, our wilful self has been crucified in Him, that we might be in a position to learn the lesson of self-mastery. He conquered for us, that He may conquer in us; He died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live to themselves, but to Him who died for them, and rose again. Do you want to lead a happy, do you want to lead a powerful, a successful, a God-like life? The greatest of all obstacles to this you find to be the power of self. How are you to resist that power? Fix your eyes on, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, as St. John did (John 1:13-18). It is as we gaze at Him, and behold His glory, as one after another His perfections shine out on us, that we begin to abhor ourselves, to hate our selfishness, to find out that His will is better than self-will, His character is nobler than ours, and that to yield ourselves up to His control is better than to fight our own way, and thus He who once triumphed over Himself will triumph over us, King of kings, and Lord of lords! Then when He has asserted His royal rights as King over sin, King over the world, and King over Self, there is another force that now we may trust Him to do battle with — nay, He has done battle with already; and because of His victory, blessed be God, we need not fear to face the foe. Death is conquered! he is only now a tributary of Jesus, only the door-keeper who stands at the palace gate; and it is his duty to open the door whenever the Master sends the summons. There is a kindly look on his face now, and it is a friendly hand that he stretches out. If we have proved the power of Jesus Christ to raise us above sin, death has lost all its terror: the dying saint may stretch out his hand to welcome that dread janitor, who once seemed so stern, but is now become so kind; who smiles as one after another he gathers the children of God into the heavenly houses.

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

1.1 Let Us Keep the Feast

1 Corinthians 5:7-8

Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened...

Contemplate the paschal feast —

I. IN ITS RELATION TO THE LORD'S SUPPER. I do not suppose that the apostle was actually referring to this, but he was speaking of that experience, to the necessity and importance of which our sacramental feast bears witness.

1. The word suggests —

(1) The idea of a sacred season, and thus the old distinction is no longer to be drawn in our lives between things secular and things sacred: all is to be sanctified.

(2) Enjoyment. Our life is to be a season of continuous festivity. In both these senses our lives are to be festal, and this holy ordinance has been appointed to keep ever before our minds the true idea of what our lives are to be.

2. Observe that —

(1) The Jewish passover was a continuous commemoration of a deliverance wrought out for Israel. So the Holy Communion is designed to be a perpetual remembrance of that wonderful deliverance wrought out for us on the Cross of Calvary. Human gratitude is apt to be short-lived, and only too many of us get out of the sight of the Cross. This feast was instituted by one who knew our human frailty, so that should we forget how much we owe to His dying love we may straightway be brought back again full in view of His Cross, and obtain deeper and clearer apprehensions of the benefits that redemption brings within our reach.

(2) The paschal feast was furnished by the very lamb whose blood secured the safety of the household. So Jesus, the victim, is Himself the feast.

(a) If the only object of the Holy Communion had been a commemoration, it would have been enough that the bread should be broken and the wine should be poured forth; for there was nothing in the fact of our Lord's crucifixion to answer to the eating and the drinking. The lesson, then, is that as our physical bodies are continuously dependent upon the material world, so the new life of the human spirit is constantly dependent upon a Divine Supply.

(b) But in order to receive real benefit something more is needed than the mere partaking of the consecrated elements. The outward act is designed to bring your faith to bear upon the thought that God is then and there through Christ communicating the Divine life to you; and as you bring your faith to bear upon that act of God's love towards you, you will be indeed a communicant.

(c) But the question may occur, What is meant by the words, "This is My body, and this is My blood"? The words must be used in a spiritual sense. For if we could have partaken of Christ's material body and blood at the time of the crucifixion that would have produced no spiritual change. The substance so received would have simply assimilated itself to our bodily tissues in the usual way. Similarly, if a supernatural act of transubstantiation were to transpire at that holy table the mere reception of these would leave us, so far as our spiritual condition is concerned, just where we were before.

II. AS AN EMBLEM OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. It was —

1. The feast of safety. The destroying angel was passing through the land, but the Israelites feasted in safety, because they knew that they were safe under the blood-stained lintel. They did not hope or think about it; they knew they were safe, because they had God's word for it. And if your life is to be a festal life you need a similar consciousness. Many religious people seem much more like keeping a funeral than a feast. They are always complaining of their doubts and fears. They are not quite clear as to whether they have sprinkled the blood, or, if they have done so, they do not take to themselves the full comfort which belongs to those who have; they don't rest upon the distinct declaration of eternal truth — "I will pass over"; "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life." We must thank ourselves for our miseries if we insist on doubting the Divine faithfulness.

2. A feast of deliverance. They were happy not only because they were safe, but because they were free. They were in the "house of bondage" still; but they felt the throbbings of national life, and their anticipations told them that, in spite of appearances, they were free. And it is even so with us. Romans 6:1-23. is just as true as Romans 5:1-21. The latter tells us about our justification; the former about our deliverance from the tyranny of sin. I don't say that you are to have no more temptation. The Israelites had not done with enemies when they crossed the sea. Indeed, they had hardly got out of Egypt before Amalek attacked them; and you will not have gone very far along your spiritual journey before temptation will attack you. But it is a very different thing to be attacked by Amalek and to be kept in the slavery of Pharaoh. From the hand of Amalek they had to be delivered by the same God that had delivered them out of the power of Pharaoh. And even so now you are free in Christ you will have to guard your liberties by employing the same Divine power that set you free to defend you.

3. The feast of separation. The Egyptians were not allowed to keep it. Up to that time the Egyptians and the Israelites had lived as neighbours, but now there was a line of separation between them. If you have not sprinkled the paschal blood you have no right at the table of the Lord. Nor can you participate in that feast of life which the Christian is privileged to keep; for you belong to the world, and the world has no part in the paschal feast. And Christians cannot properly enjoy it unless they are content to be separate from the world. I meet with not a few Christians from whose life all happiness seems to have departed just for this reason. They are not willing to be separated, and so they cannot keep the feast.

4. The feast of purification. "Not with the old leaven," &c. Careful search was to be made, and all that was leavened was to be excluded from their habitations. And here is a very important lesson. We may be delivered from the tyranny of sin, and yet how much of latent evil may still lurk within! But there is a Holy Spirit of burning who can and will consume the dross if we are only willing to be

cleansed.

5. The feast of wayfaring men. They were to eat it in haste, with shoes on their feet, &c. And if you want to enjoy the passover you must realise that you are a wayfaring man, and shape your life accordingly.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Loss of the First Love

Revelation 2:1-7

To the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things said he that holds the seven stars in his right hand...

I have often been constrained to notice that when Christians, from time to time, throw themselves into actual labour for the Lord, there is a great danger of a reaction coming, a consciousness of weariness: they begin to grow "weary of well doing"; perhaps there are a few disappointments; the work is not going on so flourishingly. When the wind and tide are in our favour, there are some of us who can work very hard; we can pull a very lusty oar as long as the boat. It seems to make progress, but when we find the tide dead against us, and it seems as though we were making no headway, we begin to feel faint, and weary, and ask somebody to take the oar. That is a dangerous snare. Can we honestly and truthfully say that we are workers, that we are labourers, and that we are patient labourers, so plodding that we have "not fainted" in spite of all the difficulties with which we have been surrounded? Is there anything more that could be said in their favour? Yes, something still. These Ephesian converts had held to God's truth in a day when there was a good deal of theological discussion, and also theological misconception and error. They were "orthodox to the backbone"; our Lord had no fault with them in this respect; they "hated the deeds of the Nicolaitanes," they would have nothing to do with them. How happy were these men! the Word of God, how they loved to pore over it! what treasures they found in it! It was a joy to them to open the sacred page. "But," you say, "I suppose Christian experience will not always be identical": and, certainly, it is not. Well then, when we have first passed out of darkness into light, it is natural that there should be a good deal of emotion in our experience, and much of this may reasonably be expected to pass away as we become more established Christians. Now there may be a great deal of truth in all this, and yet such pleading may indicate but too surely "the loss of the first love." Our experience is subject to change. But how is it to change? I wonder whether St. Paul loved his Master less, or more, when he said towards the end of his life, "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness," than he did at the moment when he first committed his soul into His hands. Do you suppose it is a sign of ripening experience to substitute work, energy, and a thousand other things for "love." Oh, let us not delude ourselves. There is one thing more important than "work," yes, more important than "labour," even more important than orthodoxy, and that one thing is Jesus Christ Himself. If we have got Him we shall have all the rest, and if we have got the rest and have not got Him, we have nothing. "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." How do people "lose their first love"? We think, as we first experience it, that it is so delightful in itself, there is so much of heaven upon earth in such experience, that we must be worse than mad ever to forfeit it. Now do not suppose that anybody throws it away wilfully. "It is little by little that the first love" is lost.

1. Many people "lose" it by earthly business. They lead bustling lives; they have so many cares pressing upon them, so much to think about, so much to be undertaken. It is even so with some of

our Christian workers. Or, perhaps, in our worldly employment, we are bent upon certain objects which are out of harmony with the will of Christ. There is some dark form of worldly care, or it may be of religious activity — something or other has crept in between us and God, and the whole heaven is darkened, the light is eclipsed, and the blessedness is gone.

2. Or, again, there are many Christians who "lose their first love" by forming another love. Thou art forfeiting that blessed inner life of love, which can only be realised by those who understand the full force of the first great commandment, "Thou shalt have none other gods but Me."

3. Yet again, how many of us "lose our first love" by little acts of thoughtlessness. Love is a very jealous thing.

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

1.1 Love

1 John 4:16

And we have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.

Love is the most essential and the most characteristic of Christian virtues. He who lacks this scarcely deserves the name of Christian at all, while he who possesses this is on the way to possess all. When we ask why such stress is laid upon the importance of possessing this virtue above all others, more than one answer suggests itself to our minds. First, we may observe that some explanation is given in the words of this text. A loveless soul can never be a God like soul; for "God is love." On the other hand, when we dwell in love, when it is, as it were, the element in which we live and move and have our being, we cannot remain altogether dissimilar to God, just because God is love. For love is one, whether it exists in Him or in us; and wherever it reigns it must needs produce similarity to Him who is its Divine Source. Yet another explanation of the importance assigned to love in the Christian economy is to be found in the fact that love is designed to supply the motive power in all truly Christian conduct and experience. For Christ looks at the quality even more than at the quantity of the work that we do for Him. A little offered as a love offering to Him is worth a great deal done merely because we think we ought to do it, or just because it is expected of us. Nay, we may go further. We may be moved by a feeling of interest in the work for its own sake; and yet there shall be little or no pleasure occasioned to the heart of God, just because the true motive has been wanting. When we ask why faith, not love, should be the condition of salvation, it is not difficult to give a reasonable answer, as we contemplate the two side by side, and notice the difference between them. Love, we observe, is a condition of our emotional nature, a state of passive consciousness, or a moral habit formed within the soul. Faith, on the other hand, is a definite moral attitude, voluntarily assumed towards a definite object as the result of our intellectual apprehension of the characteristics of that object. It follows from this that love cannot be directly induced by an act of our will, and that we are therefore only indirectly responsible for its possession. But it may occur to some to object: if we cannot directly produce love, how can we be responsible for having it? and how can God find fault with us, as He seems to do, if we have it not? If we cannot make ourselves love ore' fellow man by trying, how can we force ourselves to love God? To this it may be replied, love is not so capricious as at first sight it might appear to be. It springs from a combination of causes, which, however, it frequently happens that we never think of stopping to analyse. When, however, we carefully look into the matter, we soon find that our love has owed its existence either to some definite cause, or, as is more frequently the case, to some combination of causes. Now these causes may be, to a consider able extent, under our control; we may either avoid their influence, or put ourselves in the way of being influenced by them; and here, of course, moral responsibility comes in. Admiration either of appearances, or of physical or intellectual or moral qualities, frequently has much to do with the genesis of love, and this admiration may extend to the smallest things; indeed, I believe that it is more frequently by little things than by great that it is usually elicited. Intimacy again may have

much to do with the genesis of love. Gratitude, too, frequently induces affection. We love because we owe so much, and love seems the only way of repaying what we owe. There are, no doubt, many other causes which may contribute to produce love; such as sympathy, affinity of tastes, or disposition, or unity of interest; but, after all, nothing is so likely to cause love as love itself discovered to be pre-existent on the part of another. How often do we love because we find we are loved! How often does love, already supreme in our human heart, exert a species of irresistible fascination on the heart of another! Now it is clear that most of these various causes of love as existing amongst us men in our relations with each other, and as contributing to the genesis of a reciprocal affection, either exist in a much greater degree in the Divine Object than in any human being, or may be brought into existence as between us and Him. If we desire the Holy Spirit to work upon us efficiently in this respect, our wisdom lies in surrendering ourselves to His influence; and when we do He will always lead us up to the contemplation of those facts about the Divine Object and His relation to us, or to the apprehension of those experiences which tend to generate love. No gardener in the world can produce fruit; only the life within does that; yet how much does the fruit tree depend for its fruitfulness upon human skill! Man must see to it that the tree shall be planted where the sunshine can fall upon it, and the dew and the rain can water it. He must take care that it is not exposed to unduly trying conditions. And even so love, being a fruit of the Spirit of God, can only be produced by His presence and mighty operations within our nature; but though we cannot produce or manufacture it, still we are indirectly responsible for its production. The tree cannot cultivate itself, and here the figure fails us. Man, on the other hand, is a free agent, and therefore responsible for his own culture. It is not for us to attempt directly to induce this all-important fruit of the Spirit, but it is for us to see to it that we comply with the conditions of fruitfulness. Let us expose ourselves to the spiritual sunshine; let us live in the presence of God; let us see to it that we do not strike our roots down into earth, lest the cold clay of worldly mindedness check all our higher aspirations; let us guard against self-seeking and self-assertion; let us avoid exposing ourselves voluntarily to unfavourable influences as some Christians do, thinking more of worldly profit than of their spiritual interests; and let us cleanse off carefully the blight of impure thoughts and unholy desires, and then the Spirit of Love will be able to induce the fruit of love within our hearts.

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

1.1 Love Commended

Romans 5:7-8

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die....

I. HOW SHALL MAN BE CONVINCED OF GOD'S LOVE TOWARDS HIM?

1. He is indisposed to believe in it, and is disposed to doubt it. Many do not think of God's love at all; and others cannot bring themselves to believe that it is a personal affection. But all are exposed to the fatal influence of that arch-deceiver who poisons our mind by suggesting that God's commands are grievous, and His government unjust.

2. Then we have to consider the nature of our condition down here. God has been pleased to put us into a world where we do not see Him; we are not in a position to enter into direct communication with Him.

3. Perhaps it will suggest itself that God has only to reveal Himself to us, leaving us no longer in any degree of uncertainty about His relations with us. But in order to make such a revelation of Himself, God would first of all have to contravene the fundamental principles of His government. From that time forth we should be walking by sight, no longer by faith, and thus our probation would be ended.

4. But it may be replied that we see that God loves us in that He supplies our outward wants, and those pleasures which make life tolerable. This at first sounds plausible, but —

(1) These effects appear to come to us in the ordinary course of nature, and it is only natural to conclude that, if there be a God at all, His laws will be wise, and such as to render the condition of those creatures whom He has called into existence not wholly intolerable. If God were to create beings without a supply for their natural wants, it would be such an exhibition of folly as would cast a reflection upon His own character and glory.

(2) On the other hand, there are circumstances of sorrow which sometimes produce an opposite impression.

5. Perhaps it may be asked, Is it necessary that man should be convinced of God's love? If God really loves him, is not that enough? By no means. The love of God, if it be real love, should have a certain practical effect. Many a man may prate about the value of love, and yet be a total stranger to anything like the real affection. It is necessary that God's love should be made so manifest to me as to produce in me a similar moral attitude towards Him. True love always yearns for reciprocity.

II. IN THE FULNESS OF TIME GOD GIVES AN ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION; and it is such an answer as no imagination or genius of man could ever have suggested. It might have been emblazoned upon the starry skies so that all might read it, "God is love!" These wondrous words

might have been uttered by prophet or philosopher, wherever they went, they might have been the watchword of humanity, the battle cry of man in his conflict with all the powers of evil, and yet I apprehend that so strong is the latent suspicion sown in the heart of man by the great enemy, that we should still have remained indisposed to yield it full credence. God is not content to commit this truth to mere testimony; it is true St. John wrote these words, but he would never have written them if Christ had not first of all written them in His own life, and sealed the record by His wondrous death. The truth that God is love was only known to Him, can only be known to us, because Christ has demonstrated it in His own person upon the Cross.

1. Here is God's own confutation of that ancient doubt of the Divine character and purpose, sowed by the father of lies in the human heart. It is no longer possible that God can be careless of our well-being or indifferent to our happiness, when to secure these He gave His own Son to die.

2. By this we are able to form some conception of the extent and intensity of God's love. So far as it can be measured, the Cross of Christ is the measure of the love of God.

(1) What sacrifice is there that you would not willingly make for the benefit of your fellow man rather than such a sacrifice as we have here? If the inhabitants of this town were to be saved by some act of heroic self-sacrifice on your part, what is there — you that are a mother — that you would not propose to give up before your own dearly loved child? Yet such a sacrifice did God willingly make for us, and by such a sacrifice does He commend His love to us.

(2) But even this is not all. Why should God require a satisfaction before He lets is goodness take its course? It may well be replied, How much easier would it have been for God to act as His critics would have desired Him! How vast a sacrifice might He have escaped, what sorrow and suffering might the Son of His love have been spared, if He had contented Himself with the exercise of His prerogative of mercy! Was it a sign of greater or of less love that He adopted a more costly means of bringing the desired result about? There is a distinction between love and mercy. Mercy may be exercised without love. The Queen may extend mercy to a condemned felon, but would you say that this proved her love for the felon? You give a copper to a beggar and thereby show mercy, but this is no sign that you love him, perhaps the reverse. But if you put yourself to much trouble in order to make your mercy a real benefit, you are showing yourself to be animated by true feelings of philanthropy. Would the mere exercise of mercy, that costs God nothing, have impressed my mind with such a sense of Divine love as does the Cross of Calvary? Here I see that love has provided not merely for my pardon — mercy might have done that; but for my regeneration — for a change so complete and radical as to constitute me a new creature.

(3) But even this is not all. What if it should be found that in one sense all this amazing self-sacrifice was not absolutely necessary? Might not an Almighty God have guarded against any such necessity, by modifying the conditions of human existence, and placing man, as angels would seem to be placed, beyond the reach of temptation? Probably; but by so doing He would have rendered it impossible for man to rise to that special destiny of glory which is to be his. Was man to lose his true glory, or was the Son of God to die?

(4) But we shall not feel the full force of these considerations until we turn from the race to the individual. He loved me, and gave Himself for me. It is quite true that God's love is as wide as the world for "God so loved the world"; but it is equally true that it is as narrow as the individual. What

art thou that He should love thee so? How hast thou dealt with Him?

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Lying Vanities

Jonah 2:8

They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Martha; Or, Thoughts on the Active Life

Luke 10:38-42

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 Mary; Or, The Completative Life

Luke 10:38-42

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

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

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

truth from Him; it was rather that she found the truth in Him. He was Himself to her the Truth. And we, too, dear brethren, need to discern the difference between learning about Christ or learning by Christ and learning Christ. We may be good theologians and yet bad Christians. We cannot sit with Mary now before a visible Christ, but we can contemplate His moral features even as she gazed upon His outward countenance, and we can hear His spiritual teaching even as she heard His outward voice. And there is a sense in which we may be said to know more of Christ than at this time Mary did or could know; for she had never gazed upon the cross, and read the more perfect revelation of the Divine character as it is written there. Come, let us look at Mary, that we may learn to be a learner. How impressed she is with His superior wisdom; how little confidence has she in her own. Nay, the more she learns, I doubt not, the more she feels her ignorance. Oh, blessed is the ignorance that brings us so near to infinite wisdom, and blessed the child-like simplicity that enables us to understand what to the world may seem inexplicable! Then see how absorbed she is. I can never believe that Mary was selfish and inconsiderate. If she had been, I feel sure Jesus would have gently reprov'd and not commended her. When Mary is next introduced to our notice she is again at Jesus' feet, and this time she is at His feet as a mourner. Blessed are those mourners whom sorrow drives to Jesus' feet; for they shall indeed be comforted! I refer for a moment to the passage (John 11:32): "Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Oh, blessed are the trials that bring us to Jesus' feet! The sorrows of this world harden and embitter some people. They grow sour and selfish. I dare say she felt as if she had never loved Him so much before, as she loved Him then when she saw those tears of His. When we feel crushed with sorrow, do let us try to remember that Jesus Christ Himself was the Man of sorrows. Now, dear friends, let us look at Mary once again. We have seen her at the Lord's feet as a learner, and we have seen her there as a mourner: and now, in John 12:1-50., we shall see her at the Lord's feet as a worshipper. Turn for a moment to the beginning of that chapter: "Then Jesus, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom He raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served." Dear Martha! how I love her for it! Always true to her character; never weary of waiting on such a Guest, and this time not even in her own house. Even in the house of Simon Martha must wait upon her Lord; no mere hireling or slave shall be allowed to minister to Him while Martha's willing hands and heart are near. The truest form of worship is, first of all, the presentation to God of all that is most precious, all that is most costly, that we have or that we are.

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

1.1 Newness of Life

Romans 6:3-4

Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?...

1. We are called upon this Easter morning to contemplate the master miracle of Divine love as set against and triumphing over the masterpiece of Satan's malignity. As death must be regarded as the supreme development of evil, so resurrection must be regarded as the highest triumph of good. Now not only does God triumph over death, but He actually employs the enemy to produce this greater benefit.

2. The question of Nicodemus is a natural one. He might well conclude, "I must of necessity carry my old self along with me to the grave." Not so, "Ye must be born again." But what form of birth is there for the man grown old in habits of sin? The great discovery was not made until from the womb of death there arose the newborn man, "the first-begotten of the dead," "the first born of many brethren!" and from that time forward it became possible for the sinner to be severed from the incubus of the past, and to rise into newness of life in virtue of his union with Christ.

3. Now, observe the difference between God's way of dealing with fallen man, and ours. Nicodemus objects, "How can a man be born when he is old," etc. A moment's reflection will show us that the change in itself is exceedingly desirable. But all that we can suggest is to patch up the old creature; but a thing seldom looks well after it is mended, and it becomes less and less serviceable the more frequently it is mended; and the fact of its being patched indicates that it is nearly worn out, and will soon be laid aside. But a man with a new garment makes a fresh start. Now God does not mend — He recreates, and He presses death into the service, and through that we rise to newness of life, in which we are able to stand free from sin.

4. As we go into the country at this springtime, and gaze on the opening leaves and flowers, the newness of everything powerfully impresses us. God might have restored nature by a process of repair; but no! until the withered dead leaf is swept away into the tomb of corruption the new leaf does not unfold itself; but as soon as the old is dead and buried there arises a newness of life. How like the work of God! The most skilful artist who endeavours to imitate nature cannot reproduce nature's freshness. So there are many imitations of religion, but they are all devoid of that virgin freshness which is only produced by the touch of the Life-giver.

5. As the Lord teaches us this lesson in nature, so He enforces it by the striking symbolism of one of the sacraments. Baptism is not a mere washing; it is a burial and a resurrection. Not that the mere outward observance of the ordinance can ever produce this; there must be faith in the operation of God. When I have this whether it takes place at the moment of baptism, or after, or before, makes no difference. The point is this, that when my faith lays hold on the operation of God, manifested in the resurrection of Christ, and which is symbolised in baptism, then that ordinance in itself is a pledge that the reality of the blessing which the ordinance typifies is actually

mine.

6. With these thoughts in our minds, I want you to observe that Paul says that we are buried and raised up again with a definite object, viz., the walk in newness of life. You cannot walk in place if you do not reach that place; and I cannot walk in newness of life without having first of all been introduced into a condition of newness of life. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, even so walk in Him. And now what are the distinguishing characteristics of this newness of life?

I. THE NEWNESS OF RELATIONSHIP TO GOD. In the old life we felt there was something wrong between God and us; we desired that that something should be set right, and we hoped gradually to win His approval by a life of consistency. Some of us laboured very hard, and yet the end was disappointment. How was all this to be changed, and every barrier to confidence and love swept away? Not by patching ourselves up. We saw ourselves, represented by Christ, as enduring the penalty of the law; and were content to reckon ourselves as crucified with Christ; but "he that is dead is justified from sin," and so we found that there was now no further condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus. From the grave we rose into newness of life, and our first experience was the discovery that God was a reconciled Father.

II. NEWNESS OF POWER. Faith introduced me into this blessed condition; faith is to be the law of my experience in it. There is a power now working within me; the power of God, whose mighty Spirit has taken possession of me, and is working out His purposes within me. Electricians tell us that our nervous system is so constituted that under the force of electricity we can perform prodigies of strength and endurance which would be impossible under ordinary circumstances. We will suppose this book to contain a weight of several pounds. I hold it out at arm's length. Presently the sense of fatigue comes insupportable, and my arm must fall to my side; but turn on a current of electricity to the outstretched arm, and I am able to sustain the weight indefinitely, without any such sense of fatigue. Where does my part in the matter lie? — not in struggling to force my arm to do what it is too weak to do, but in yielding my member to the power which can enable it to accomplish what is otherwise impossible. I have to see to it that no non-conductor breaks the invisible stream of power; and that is just what I have to see to in my spiritual experience. Am I in full connection with Divine Omnipotence? "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." Now do you not see the difference between going about the work of life flurried with anxiety and weighted with care, now straining every nerve in an agony of effort, and now, weary and discouraged, sinking into lethargy, and the quiet, happy confidence of him who is walking in newness of life, assured that, whatever may arise, the new life within him is equal to any and every emergency.

III. NEWNESS OF CHARACTER. I meet with a great many who do not seem to expect this. How many of us are there who have so very much of the old self about us that even our fellow Christians cannot help being distressed and pained at it? "Are we walking in newness of life?" Are the old features passing away? — have they passed away? You who were naturally uncontrolled, are your natural passions well in hand? — not in your hand — in Christ's hand? You who were ready to say a bitter word without thinking how much pain it might give, who rather plumed yourself on being blunt even to rudeness, is the beauty of the Lord our God beginning to rest upon you? You, whose gifts of conversation were apt to degenerate into idle gossip, have you learned to keep the little member in its place? Are you doing all to the glory of God? What manner of man are we?

We are children of the resurrection. When we get down to the exchange, to the workshop, do we forget that? The glorious beauty of the Lord our God is for us; His freshness, purity, the very bloom of newness of life, is ours. Shake yourself loose of every encumbrance, turn your back on every defilement, give yourself over like clay to the hand of the Potter, that He may stamp upon you the fulness of His own resurrection glory, that we, beholding as in a mirror the glories of the Lord, may be changed from glory unto glory as by the Spirit of God.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 No Heaven Possible to the Uncleansed Man

Isaiah 6:5-8

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 No Place for the Word

John 8:31-59

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

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

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

(G. S. Bowes.)

1.1 No Temple in Heaven

Revelation 21:22-23

And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it....

He who witnessed the glorious vision recorded in this book had doubtless oft travelled from Galilee to Jerusalem to present himself before the Lord in the temple. He who had seen and rejoiced in the sight of the earthly Jerusalem had now a different scene opened before him. What would the earthly Jerusalem have been without its temple? A body without a soul, a world without a sun. In the world we have many institutions which are intended for good, but their very presence is an indication of evil. In going through the streets of a large city, you often find buildings, some of them like palaces, not intended for the rich and gay; but, it may be, for orphans, or destitute old men and women. What a blessed city that would be where there was no need of such institutions. And so is the absence of the temple the crowning glory of the Holy Jerusalem. That we may enter more into the meaning of the text, let us glance at the uses of the temple.

1. It was a meeting-place between God and His people. How grateful ought we to be that God has appointed to man meeting places. Are we strengthened, enlivened, comforted, by meeting with fellow-Christians? If the temple and the church now be a place for such purposes, how is it that the absence of a temple in the heavenly Jerusalem is a mark of its perfection? The history of our earth tells, when there was no imperfection, no sin in the world, there was no temple; there was no need for it. A temple conveys the idea of limiting the worship of God to a set time and place; and not only that, but it reminds us of how many places there are where we seldom think of meeting with God. In heaven there is no temple, because it is not needed. There is no need of a meeting-place when God dwells among the inhabitants; no need of a temple, for we shall never be forgetful of Him; no need of getting our hearts anew enkindled with a devout and heavenly flame when every heart is full of love.

2. The temple a place of reconciliation. If two friends have quarrelled, how delightful to see them reconciled and walking together! But the very fact of your saying that they are reconciled shows that they have quarrelled. So it is in the church and in the temple. You cannot listen, you cannot look upon the ceremonies, without at once learning that man has quarrelled with God; that he has sinned against Him, and is now reconciled. But in the New Jerusalem there is no need of the symbol, or the words that tell man has been reconciled to God — brought back to God — for he is with God; what need of a place where friends should come to be reconciled, when they are reconciled already.

(James Aitken.)

1.1 Not Our Own

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

What? know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own?...

A friend of mine was having an earnest conversation upon the necessity of full consecration with a lady who professed to know Christ as her Saviour, but shrunk from yielding herself fully to Him. At last she said, with more outspoken honesty I am afraid than many who mean exactly the same thing display, "I don't want to give myself right over to Christ; for if I were to do so, who knows what He might do with me; for aught I know, He might send me out to China." Years had passed away when my friend received a most deeply interesting letter from this very lady, telling of how her long conflict with God had come to an end, and what happiness and peace she now felt in the complete surrender of herself to her Lord; and referring to her former conversation she said, "And now I am my own no longer, I have made myself over to God without reserve, and He is sending me to China." Do you think that this lady is less happy obeying the Divine call, and working the Divine will out yonder in China, than she was when she shrunk from that will, and preferred to live a life of worldly ease and self-indulgence at home?

(W. Hay Aitken.)

1.1 Only To-Day is Yours

Hebrews 3:7-8

Why (as the Holy Ghost said, To day if you will hear his voice,...

To-day only, to-day is yours; to-morrow belongs to God, and you have no right to take it for granted that He will certainly give it you. What if He does not? An incident occurred some years ago which illustrates this point in a manner so exceptionally startling that I should not venture to relate it to you if it had only come to me by hearsay. I am able to relate it as a fact on the authority of a gentleman who was acquainted with the person referred to. A young lady of good family, a woman of the world, and a devotee of fashion, came home from a religious service, which she had been induced to attend, evidently profoundly impressed. On returning to her chamber, and turning over in her mind all she had heard, I suppose she felt under the force of a mighty influence that was drawing her towards better things. Moved no doubt by a spiritual impulse, she sat down by her table, and took pen, ink, and paper, and wrote down these words: "If God spare my life for six months from this time, I will give my heart to Him." She signed her name, and then I suppose a misgiving must have crossed her mind, for she drew her pen through what she had written, and she wrote again underneath, "If God spares me for three months from this time, I will give my heart to Him." Once again the voice within, I apprehend, urged the danger of delay. "Are you sure that you will live three months longer?" And a second time she drew her pen through what she had written, and once more she wrote, "If God spare me for one month from the present date, this day month I will give my heart to Him." The day before that date there was to be a great fancy dress ball, and she had made up her mind she must go to that ball at all costs; something, I conclude, told her that it would not be consistent to go if she were a real Christian, so she fixed the date just one day beyond this last scene of dissipation. "If God spare me one month from this time, I will give my heart to Him"; and she signed her name, and she went to her bed. The next morning her lady's maid came to call her as usual. She tapped at the door, but there was no answer. She threw it open, entered the room, looked at the bed. There upon the bed lay her young mistress, a cold corpse, and by her side was a sheet of paper, and on this sheet of paper were written the words, "If God spare me for one month, I will give my heart to Him." God did not spare her for one night. She had heard God's voice, but, alas! there would seem to be too much reason to fear that she had done what I entreat you not to do. "To-day if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts." One more illustration, and it shall be on the brighter side. Some years ago, at the close of an evangelistic service, a rough sort of man — a collier he was — came up to the minister who had preached. "Sir," he said, "do you mean what you told us in your address to-night?" "What did I tell you?" "Why, sir, you said that if we were determined to seek and find salvation, we might have it to-night." "Yes," said the preacher, "I did mean that." "Very well, sir; then I want to find it. It must be settled to-night with me; it must be settled now." "Thank God," said the preacher, "I am glad to hear you say that. Now let me try and show you how you may get it." Well, they had a long talk together. The preacher set before the poor ignorant man as plainly as ever he could the way of salvation; and then they got to their knees, and there they knelt praying and crying to God

together, while the preacher sought to direct the seeking soul to Christ. Time was creeping on, and at last the clock struck eleven. The preacher was very weary, and naturally enough, having his own home duties to care for, he said to the collier, "My dear fellow, I think now that perhaps you had better go home and consider what I have been saying. I don't see that we can get very much further to-night"; for the poor man was very ignorant and full of unbelief. "Sir, didn't you tell me that it might be settled to-night?" "Yes," said the preacher. "Very well," then he said; "I have made up my mind if it can be settled to-night it shall be settled to-night; I don't rise from my knees until it is settled." "Very good, then," said the preacher, "if that is so we will stay together." The clock struck twelve, still they were kneeling together; one, and still they were kneeling together; two, and still they were there. The summer's sun was just rising, daylight was just beginning to dawn, the poor man was thoroughly worn out. Like Jacob wrestling with the angel, he had no strength left. The moment of our weakness is the moment of God's power. Fairly exhausted and wearied out, at last he was fain to trust himself in the arms of Christ. He might have done so at first as well as at last, but it was only after these hours of anguish that he was brought to the point of utter helplessness and self-despair, and so at length he just rested his weary soul on Jesus, and in a moment the burden was gone. He sprang to his feet with a joyful shout. "Glory be to God," he cried, "it is settled at last; it is settled at last!" With a happy heart he went on his way rejoicing. In the middle of that day there was a hue and cry raised in the neighbourhood that there had been an accident down in the coal-pit, and, as is the custom in colliery districts, everybody rushed to the pit to know what had happened. The tidings soon spread that a portion of the earth in the pit had fallen in, and there was every reason to fear that a man was buried under the rubbish. Half a dozen stalwart colliers were soon at work, working with all that heroic determination which distinguishes those men under such circumstances. For many a long hour they continued their toil, until at last they got near to the place where the unfortunate man was imprisoned. Gently and carefully they prised up the superincumbent mass, and freed one shattered limb after another, and at last lifting the weight off the man's breast, they dragged him out all crushed and shattered as he was. As he felt the load taken off him, he opened his eyes for the last time. A smile came over his begrimed countenance as he gasped out, "Thank God it was settled last night!" and he fell back and died. To-day, to-day, to-day!

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Our Teacher's Mode of Teaching

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,...

You will observe that inasmuch as grace proposes to form Christ in our nature, she proceeds upon an altogether different method from that which is followed by law. Grace purposes to make the tree good, and then concludes, reasonably enough, that the fruit will be good; whereas law aims, so to speak, rather at improving the fruit than at regenerating the tree. Grace deals with the springs of action, and not primarily with action itself. She deals with actions, but deals with them only indirectly. She begins her beneficent operations by setting right that part of our nature from which actions proceed, and so, from first to last, grace is chiefly concerned with our motives, checking the sordid and the unworthy, and developing the noble and the godlike. Now, the contrast here lies between an outward objective law exhibited to the human understanding, claiming the homage of the will, and an inward and subjective law which becomes part and parcel, so to speak, of the nature of him who receives it. Now it is by the teaching of grace that this new state of things is introduced; it is by the operation of grace that the Father's Law is to be written upon the hearts of His once rebellious children. She effects this blessed result, first by opening up to us through His Son a revelation of the Father's heart, and by showing us how deep and strong is His love towards us; in the second place, by sweeping away all obstacles between the Father's love and our experience of it; and thus in the third place, by bringing our humanity under the mighty operation of the Holy Spirit of God, whose work it is to form within us the nature of Christ; and once again, in the fourth place, grace indelibly inscribes God's law upon our hearts in the very terms of her own manifestation. For it is from the Cross that Grace is manifested and it is involved in the terms of its acceptance, that to the cross the eye of him who accepts it should be turned. We have just said that the first effect of grace is to reveal the Father's love to us, and to sweep away all the barriers which interfere with our enjoyment of that love; by this first act of grace we are introduced into what may be described as the life of love — a life in which we are no longer influenced by mere considerations of moral or legal obligation. The love of God shed abroad in the heart, like the genial rays of the sun, produces a responsive love within us which is simply the refraction, so to speak, of those rays; and this love, the gospel teaches us, is the fulfilling of the law.

1. But love fulfils the law, not by a conscious effort to fulfil it, but because it is the voluntary response of the soul to the Person from whom the law has emanated. Love fulfils the law, not by commanding me to conform my conduct to a certain outward and objective standard, but by awakening within me a spiritual passion of devotion for the Person of Him whose will is law to those who love Him. Love knows nothing about mere restriction and repression — love seeks to please, not to abstain from displeasing; and so love fulfils, not merely abstains from breaking, the law. Thus we see that love takes us up to an altogether higher level than law. I cannot illustrate this point better than by referring for a moment to our earthly relationships to each other. There are certain laws which are applicable to these relationships. For instance, there are certain laws of our

land, and there are certain laws contained in the Bible, which apply to the natural relationships of the father and of the husband. It is obviously the duty of the father and the husband to care for his wife and his children, to protect them, to provide for them, to endeavour to secure their well-being so far as in him lies. A man who occupies that relationship is bound to do not less than this. But does a really affectionate husband and father perform those various offices because the law constrains him to do so, because it is his legal duty to do them? Does he perform acts of tenderness towards his wife and towards his child because the law demands them of him? Even so the man whom grace has taught finds a new law within his nature, the law of love, in surrendering himself to which he fulfils indeed the outward and objective law, not because he makes an effort to fulfil it, but because he is true to his new nature. So that I may say, to put the thing concisely, grace is not opposed to law, but is superior to law; and the man who lives in grace lives not "under the law," because he is above the law. We imprison the wife beater. Why? Because he has fallen from the level of love altogether, and thus he has come down to the level of the law, and is within the reach of the law. Even so here the only persons who are not under law are the persons who are above law. Is the law written within our hearts, or is it only revealed from without? In our attempt to do what is right, do we simply do, or endeavour to do, what is right because we have recognised a certain external standard of duty, and are endeavouring to conform our conduct to it? Or do we do what is right because we are living in happy, holy intercourse with an indwelling God in whose love we find our law, and in surrendering ourselves to the influence of whose love, our highest enjoyment? Herein lies the test of the difference between legal experience and evangelical experience.

2. But here let me point out that grace, whilst she teaches us gently and tenderly, and in a very different way from law, has nevertheless sanctions of her own. They are the rewards and punishments which are congruous to the life of love, whereas the rewards and punishments of legal experience are such as are congruous to the life of legal servitude. We shall detect in a moment what these sanctions are if we reflect upon the nature of our relation to Him who has now become to us our law of life. It is the glory of the life of love that we have something to love. Our love is not merely an empty abstraction, nor is it merely a wasted energy that wanders in infinity; it is attracted towards a living Person. In the enjoyment of His society, which to the real Christian is not a matter of sentiment, but a matter of practical experience, the soul finds its highest privilege. Ah! grace disciplines as well as teaches. She does not spoil her children. She is not like some fond and indulgent mother, who fancies that she is benefiting her children when she is really injuring them more cruelly than in any other way she possibly could, by always giving them their own way. Grace does not teach us to be negligent, thoughtless, heedless, careless. Grace does not whisper in our ears, "Now that you are saved once you are saved forever. Go on, and never mind what happens to you." But grace teaches us very delicately. "I will guide thee," says grace, "with my eye." Grace teaches us. She brings out the scales of the sanctuary, and into the one she puts our worldly idol — our love of popularity, our self-seeking, our slothfulness, our self-indulgence, our pride of heart, all those little and great things which we are so apt to set against the society of Jesus, or rather which we are so apt to allow to come in between us and the society of Jesus. Yes, grace has her sanctions. And I am afraid that there are only too many Christians who have often to feel the force of those dread sanctions. Their whole life has come to be a clouded, unsatisfactory, melancholy, woebegone life. How many Christians are there of whom it cannot be said that the joy of the Lord is their strength! And why? They are under the discipline of grace. Yes, God does not

forsake them altogether. He has not left them to their own waywardness, but He has visited their offences with the rod and their sin with scourges. They cannot be happy in the world since they have tasted something better in Christ. Nor can they be happy in Christ while they cast longing looks towards the world. But grace has also her rewards, and I love to think of them. What are they? The eye, perhaps, wanders on towards the future, and we think of the glories that are to be revealed. In this present world, amidst all the trials to which the Christian may be exposed, the school of grace has its prizes. Grace has her prizes. "The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace." Grace teaches indeed, but she teaches by first of all correcting, nay, by regenerating, the secret springs of our actions. Unless these are set right, how can our actions be right? How can you love God unless the love of God has conquered your heart?

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

1.1 Out of Company with Jesus

Luke 2:44-45

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 Paul's Reasonings

Acts 24:25

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go your way for this time...

Our text brings before us a very extraordinary scene. The prisoner at the bar seems to be exercising the functions of prosecutor, witness, jury, and handing over his judge, as a condemned culprit, into the hands of the supreme Judge of all, while the judge is neither able to defend or excuse himself. It is not an unusual thing in criminal trials to see the prisoner trembling. Here is a prisoner for whom his judge has no terrors. It is not unusual to see a judge dignified and self-possessed, but here sits a poor trembling wretch on whom the words of the prisoner fall like a death sentence. At last he can stand it no longer. Why should he make himself miserable? If the arguments of the apostle could not be answered, at any rate he might be silenced. But I want to call your attention to the fact that what made Felix tremble was not an exhibition of impassioned rhetoric, but it was a solemn appeal to his reasoning faculties. I by no means disparage appeals to the feelings, inasmuch as we all have hearts, but the strength of these lies in the presence of an intellectual conviction affecting the conscience of those whom we address. I can imagine the governor, prepared to find his prisoner a half-crazy fanatic, commencing his inquiries, while a cynical smile played over his sinister countenance: "I understand, Paul, that you are an ardent adherent of one Christ. Can you now explain to me why you make so much ado about this person, who was executed as a common felon?" This gave St. Paul his opportunity. "In order that I may the better explain to you what Christ is to me, it will be expedient that I should first touch upon certain subjects connected with religion and morality, with respect to which we may probably be able to understand each other." So now it is necessary to form just opinions on those subjects, in order that we may be led to feel our need of Christ. Paul reasoned —

I. CONCERNING RIGHTEOUSNESS.

1. The word has its root in the word right. Righteousness springs from that great law of right which pervades all the relations of man to his Maker and to his fellow man. The recognition of these rights and the fulfilment of the claims which they carry with them is righteousness.

(1) God has certain rights in us which we are bound to respect, and these arise out of the nature of our relations with Him.

(a) We are taught that of Him, and by Him, and for Him are all things. He, as the Author of our being, has created us for His own purposes; and therefore we are under an obligation to respect His intentions in thus allowing us to enjoy it. Not to do this is to wrong God, to defraud Him of His rights in us, and thus to break the fundamental commandment of the law of righteousness.

(b) As these claims of God are not arbitrarily imposed, so He cannot withdraw them. George III, when pressed by his prime minister to give his assent to a measure of which he did not approve,

exclaimed, "I'll not sign it, Mr. Pitt; it goes against my conscience!" "Then, sir," replied his minister, "I have no course open to me but to resign." "Very good, Mr. Pitt, very good; you can resign if you like, but I can't." The story may serve to illustrate our present point God cannot resign.

(c) As the result of the existence of these rights of God in us, He must needs claim it of us first, that we should make a full and willing surrender of ourselves to Him, to live for His glory and in accordance with His will; and secondly, He must needs claim it of us that we should abstain from anything that is opposed to His proper relations with us and His will concerning us.

(2) We are also under a certain obligation to our fellow men. Remember that universal bond of brotherhood which pervades the human family, and gives man the claim of kinsmanship upon his fellow man throughout the world. Then think upon the debt that we owe to society. We owe it to society that we have been fed, clothed, housed, educated, trained, and surrounded with all the comforts of civilised existence. Man, next to God, has been our greatest benefactor, and therefore man has certain rights in us. To recognise and respect these is to fulfil the law of righteousness; to ignore these is to break it. I am bound by the debt I owe to my fellow to do what lies in my power to help and benefit him as occasion may offer, and to abstain from injuring him in any way, either morally, intellectually, or physically.

2. How much of the law of righteousness do most men seem to recognise? Only one part out of four. How common a thing it is when we press men about their spiritual condition to meet with the reply, "Well, I've never done any harm to anyone." Granted; does that mean that you have performed your positive or negative duty towards God? or that you have performed your positive duty to your fellow man? The words convey no such idea. The priest and Levite did no harm to the half-dead man, but they failed to do him any good; and you do not even affirm that you have lived to benefit your fellow man any more than they. What then? To put the thing in a familiar form: you pay, or think you pay, five shillings in the pound, and then claim a quittance of the whole debt. That would hardly pass muster in a London bankruptcy court; and can you think that such a composition will be accepted at the last great assize? And what if the five shillings proves to have been paid in base coin? How few of us are there that can truly affirm that we have done no harm to anyone? Where is the godless man that has not done some injury to those around him?

3. We are now in a position to judge ourselves as to whether we are righteous. Does our own heart condemn us? You can judge for yourselves whether it be possible that these claims can be either modified or withdrawn. If they cannot, then you will of necessity begin to feel your need of that which St. Paul found in Christ. When once his eyes had been opened to see what the claims of righteousness really were, and hence to discover his own unrighteousness, there was no rest for him until he had found a new and better righteousness in Christ Jesus.

II. CONCERNING TEMPERANCE. As righteousness has to do with the rights which others have in us, so temperance leads us to consider the rights which we have in ourselves. The word conveys the idea of self-mastery — capacity to govern oneself in accordance with the dictates of sound reason.

1. There are within our complex nature certain elements which are obviously designed to be supreme, while there are others that are intended to be subject to control. That this must be so is clear; for if every element within were to assert its own supremacy, our human nature would be

like a house divided against itself. We may conclude with sufficient confidence —

(1) That those are the higher elements in our nature, by the possession of which we are most distinguished from the lower animals; and just as the harmony of the outward world is maintained by man's supremacy over the brute, so the harmony of man's nature is to be preserved by the sovereignty of those elements which are distinctively human over those which we possess in common with the lower animals.

(2) That those are the higher elements in our nature which are least dependent upon our material organism, but upon which it must depend for direction and control if our lives are to deserve the name of human.

(3) That inasmuch as we were made in the image of God, the higher elements of our human nature are those which are most Godlike. As God maintains the harmony of the universe by asserting His own supremacy, so man can only hope for harmony in his own being when the God-like has chief sway within.

2. In the maintenance of this supremacy also lies the only security for our well-being, and even for our safety; for while God has made special provisions to prevent the lower animals from falling a prey to their own incontinence by establishing certain checks, He has not thus hedged round man. He is possessed of a moral freedom, and hence can either, by the right exercise of his faculties, rise to a higher level than the animal can aspire to or can sink to as much a lower level by their abuse. We do the animals an injustice when we speak, e.g., of the intemperate man as a drunken brute. Who ever knew of a brute that was of its own will drunken? So, then, there are certain faculties or elements of our nature which should be supreme, and others which should be under control. Where this order exists, there moral harmony ensues; and this is what we understand by temperance. When it is transgressed, moral anarchy must be the result; and this is what we understand by intemperance.

3. Man's moral nature may be compared to a commonwealth, in which there are ignorant and incapable multitudes who need to be governed with a view to their own good, and also intelligent and able men, who are fit to govern. Now it has sometimes happened that the supreme power has passed into the hands of an ignorant and fanatical mob, and then have followed the worst and most frightful forms of anarchy. Then, again, it has often happened that from amongst the mob there has arisen some single tyrant who, beginning with being the idol of the mob, has gone on to become its most ruthless enemy; and then sometimes follows the last woful sequel of this inversion of the proper order of things — invasion, a foreign thrall, followed ultimately by national extinction. So when these elements of our nature, which ought to be subject to control, are allowed by the frailty of our will to arrogate to themselves an authority to which they have no claim, man becomes subject to a sort of inward mob rule. Then it not unfrequently happens that from the general moral confusion there emerges into an unholy prominence some specific besetting sin which becomes a sort of tyrant, and brings all our powers and faculties under its own grim and terrible sway. Such a tyrant power is drunkenness, or lust, or avarice, when once it lays hold upon man's nature and becomes a confirmed habit. And this miserable condition invites hostile intervention from without. There is an enemy at the gates who finds our divided and self-betrayed nature at his mercy, and who can thus take possession of our being, and in the end, unless we are delivered out of his hands, procure our utter and irremediable ruin.

4. What hope is there under such circumstances that by the mere action of a will already enervated the captive can break his chains and set himself free?

(1) Perhaps the answer may suggest itself, Surely the only chance for such a man lies in appealing to his own self-interest. Let him see that he is injuring himself, and he will most likely be disposed to gather up all his will power for a mighty effort against this tyrant yoke, and, thus reinforced, he may yet prevail. But those who speak thus do not make sufficient allowance for the bewildering influence which a corrupt moral condition exerts upon the understanding, nor for the actually blinding effect of passion. Look at that drunkard. There was a time when he possessed the affections of a devoted wife, a smiling home, a good reputation, and regular and remunerative employment. Look at him now. In his few lucid intervals he knows that he is destroying himself; but it makes no difference. Or take the case of the libertine, or the case of a man whose incontinence lies in his temper, his speech, or his avarice. They are not less obviously opposed to our personal interest. Or again, idleness, sluggishness, or moral cowardice are all alike clearly opposed to our well-being. No, it is easy to forge those chains for ourselves, but who can snap them? Our minds may be on the side of right, but what about that other law which holds its sway within our members?

(2) No, if there be any help at all for the poor spellbound victim it must come from without. Ah! there is one in our midst today ready "to proclaim relief to the captives." Listen to the apostle: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Here is a new law — a law that belongs not to poor enslaved humanity, but to that mysterious and Divine Being who invades and takes possession of our humanity. Look at that balloon as it lies there uninflated; it is subject to the gravitating attraction of earth like any other object around. You may lift it up. for a moment by help of ropes and pulleys, but its rise is dependent upon your willpower, and as soon as this adventitious force is withdrawn it sinks again. But now fill it with hydrogen gas, and you introduce a substance of such relative gravity to the atmosphere that its law is to rise heavenward. Even so, you may lift your moral nature up, as it were by mere willpower, and anon, when the will ceases to be energetic, it sinks again; but let God the Holy Ghost enter the cleansed and consecrated nature, and at once we begin to rise in the moral scale higher and still higher to our proper level as heaven's free men. Years ago, when I had a parish in one of our largest towns, I became very much interested in a member of my congregation who was the victim of insobriety. Many and many were the pledges that he signed, but all seemed vain. We were having a very memorable season of spiritual visitation, and night after night this man attended the services, and was deeply impressed. The last Sunday night arrived. At the close of his thrilling appeal Mr. Moody asked all present who would trust themselves to Christ then and there for salvation to rise and stand up before all while the Christians present were praying for them. At this moment a Christian worker, who was an old acquaintance of the man, saw his friend evidently in great anguish of soul. He crept up to him, and whispered in his ear, "Tom, my boy, why ar'n't you standing up?" "I can't, Jim; I have tried so often. I should only make a fool of the thing if I fell back again." "Tom, my dear fellow, now listen to me. You've prayed and made resolutions, signed pledges, and done everything except what you're asked to do now; that is, trust yourself entirely to Jesus. You've never done that." "You're right, Jim," said the other; "I have never done that. I will trust Him!" and with a sudden decision he rose to his feet; and he found Him trustworthy. From that moment the chain was broken; and five years after Tom passed away,

falling asleep in Jesus.

III. CONCERNING JUDGMENT TO COME.

1. A belief in this may be regarded as a corollary to a belief in the existence of God Himself. If there be a Moral Governor of the universe, we cannot do otherwise than conclude that there is a judgment to come.

(1) There is a very obvious inequality in the way in which punishments are meted out to transgressors in this life. Two persons commit the same sin; the one is detected, the other escapes detection, prospers in the world, and passes in society as a very respectable member of it. Or again, two persons commit the same sin of impurity. The one is a man of high social position and of great wealth; the other, perhaps, some unfortunate girl whose affections he has contrived to entangle. Compare the consequences in the two cases. The one is ruined for life, but the man who made her the thing she is passes himself off as a very respectable gentleman. Surely no man in his senses will say that in the two cases the punishments are equal.

(2) But I can imagine someone rejoicing, "What you say is all very true; but you must take into consideration the man's subjective penalty. The one offender may suffer more in his conscience than the other." Here again the answer is obvious. Is it the greatest sinner that is the greatest inward sufferer? Here are two persons who have both committed the same sin — the one for the first time in his life, the other for the nine hundred and ninety-ninth. Is it not too obvious to need to be stated that the sufferings of the hardened offender are as nothing compared with those induced by a first offence? Sin is not adequately punished by its outward results in this world; and it is not the greatest offender that suffers the most severe inward penalty. I remember once applying the argument in a homely way to a navvy. When I began to speak to him about his soul and the wisdom of beginning to think about his salvation, he broke out with, "Well now, look here, sir; I don't hold with you parsons. You talk about hell, and tell us that we're to be punished over there. Now, my idea is that we get knocked about in this life bad enough. I don't think a man will suffer all that here and then be damned afterwards." "Well," I said, "what do you expect to become of you when you die?" "Oh," he said, "I don't know I Maybe that will be the end of me. Anyhow, I don't see any reason why I should suffer more than I do down here." I replied, "Now I will put a case to you. Here is a man, we will suppose, under whom you work, who keeps you at it early and late. He grinds down your payment to the last sixpence; he gets out of you whatever he can, and gives you as little as he can in return. He drives in his carriage and pair, while you go on slaving away on wages that scarcely suffice to keep body and soul together. Money flows in on him; he is returned to Parliament. By and by he becomes My Lord So-and-so; and while he, hard-hearted tyrant as he is, lives in luxury, you still go on toiling and slaving away for him, at the slenderest possible remuneration, till after spending forty or fifty years in his service you die in poverty and are carried to a pauper's grave. Now, do you think it is likely if there be a God at all that you and he shall fare exactly alike in the next world?" "No, sir," said he, with considerable warmth; "if there's a God in heaven, he ought to suffer for it." His own common sense told him that if there were a Moral Governor of the universe He must lay a heavy hand in judgment upon the successful oppressor of the poor; and the common sense of all men is here on the side of religion.

2. Now, when I turn to revelation, I find not only the statement that there shall be such a judgment, but also indications of some of its more prominent characteristics.

(1) It will be according to the deeds done in the body — not the professions made or the appearances exhibited.

(2) It will be according to privilege. There are large numbers of persons who plume themselves on having been baptized; but the question is, Have you ever realised the spiritual benefit of which baptism is the symbol? Are you not aware that while that blessed ordinance increases your responsibility, it must also enhance your condemnation unless you respond to the obligations that it imposes? Or again, on the other hand, there are those who pride themselves upon being evangelical Christians and strong Protestants. But better far that you had been a heathen in Central Africa than a nominal Christian, familiar with evangelical doctrine, but a stranger to the power of Divine grace.

(3) It will be according to the opportunities and possibilities which have fallen to our lot in life. To whom much has been given, of him much shall be required.

(4) It will bring to light the secret things of darkness and reveal the counsels of every man's heart, and then shall everyone have praise (or blame) of God according as his life's work has been.

(5) It will depend upon the presence or absence of our name in "the Lamb's Book of Life." What the specific penalty in each particular case may be I will not presume to say. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" I know that it will be exactly what the sin deserves, neither more nor less. Perhaps some of you are saying, "How shall I know that my name is written there?" That question is not hard to answer. If the Lamb's own life has been through faith received into your heart, you may be sure that your name is written in the pages of the Book of Life. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

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

1.1 Peace

Isaiah 26:3-4

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Peace not from nature, But from God

Isaiah 26:3-4

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

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

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Peculiar But Not Eccentric

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,...

The phrase employed in our version, "peculiar people," has no doubt tended to suggest and foster exceedingly erroneous ideas of what God expects His people to be. It certainly does not mean a people who affect all kinds of peculiarities. Not only is this phrase associated with some of the most extraordinary exhibitions of fanaticism that have been witnessed in modern times, but I apprehend that there are not a few earnest and even devoted Christians whose minds have been more or less warped and their lives distorted by a misapprehension of the true significance of the phrase here used. There are some good people whose religion, to the casual observer at any rate, seems mainly to consist in making themselves very extraordinary, and they are disposed to claim that others should copy their peculiarities if they desire to follow the Lord fully. Such persons need to be reminded that God does not seek for an eccentric people, but for a people whose essential singularity lies in the fact that they are His. Be true to your calling as espoused to Christ, and this will save you from having to attempt the solution of many otherwise perplexing questions. You will not then have to ask, as too many Christians do, "How far may I go in the direction of worldly conformity without actually forfeiting my religion?" Can you conceive a loyal and devoted bride making any such inquiry, "How far may I go in the way of associating with those who are the enemies and detractors of my affianced husband, who have done all that they could to wrong him, and rob him, and injure him? How far shall I be justified in choosing such persons for my friends and companions, and in sharing in their pursuits and pleasures where his name is never mentioned except in scorn? What length may I go in this direction without altogether forfeiting his affections, and bringing my relations with him to an abrupt termination?" Pity the bridegroom who has such a bride in prospect! But such a bride the Lord's will never be. We need not court peculiarity; without going out of our way to make ourselves ridiculous or absurd, those of us who live right out for Christ will make themselves peculiar enough in a world that does not live for Christ at all. The man who counts all things dung and dross that he may win Christ, will be a very peculiar person in a world that counts Christ dung and dross so that it may win its own pleasures and gratifications.

(W. H. M. H. Aitken.)

1.1 Perfection Through Suffering

Hebrews 2:10

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory...

The presence of evil in this earth, and of all the sorrow and suffering that flows from evil, naturally appears to be the one great imperfection that mars the economy of the world. Here, however, the sacred writer boldly faces the mystery, and dares to speak of this great and all-pervading imperfection as the necessary condition of a higher perfection — a perfection so high and glorious as to justify all that has seemed inexplicable in bringing it about. We cannot for a moment doubt that God, being omnipotent, could if He willed bring evil to a summary end. But if He could crush out all evil, and yet does not do so, it is clear that some purpose of benevolence and love higher than would be answered by this procedure must actuate Him to adopt the course that He does. Now we ourselves are in a position to notice that the presence and operation of evil in one form or another calls forth, or perhaps we should say contributes to form, qualities and characteristics such as are not within our own observation and experience otherwise produced. If a man's temper should never be tried, we cannot see how he can learn self-control; unless a man be exposed to danger or to opposition, how shall he develop courage? If he never has a trial or a pain, how can he become patient? Or we might illustrate the subject thus: Mere exclusion from the conditions of trial and temptation will not transform human character, although it may change human conduct. Suppose that an habitual drunkard migrated to locality where intoxicants could not be obtained, he would become outwardly sober certainly, but would he be a sober man in the moral sense of the word? Supposing that a quarrelsome man were banished to a Juan Fernandez, he would certainly live in peace because he had no one to quarrel with; but are you sure he would not pick a quarrel with the captain of the ship that carried him back to England? No; our observation shows us that something more is needed than mere seclusion from evil to make us truly good. Indeed, it teaches us more than this. It would lead us to conclude that contact with evil in some form or another would seem to be necessary in order to develop the highest form of character. Are any of us disposed to ask, Why cannot the highest form of good be otherwise produced? It is enough to answer that God, so far as we know, invariably works through means. Further, we observe in Nature that each end is the product of certain particular means, or specific combinations of means, and of no other, and reverence and piety lead to the conclusion that in each case the means are the best that could be chosen. But if this be so in the physical world, why should it not be so in the moral? And there rises up before the Divine consideration the vision of the One absolutely perfect Man, who was, in the Father's foreknowledge, the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. And this highest type is the product of the triumph of militant good over opposing evil; the ideal Man is perfected by suffering. Here, at any rate, the means have produced the end. Hence our text, we observe, speaks of something that we might almost call a Divine necessity; at any rate, it contains a distinct reference to the eternal fitness of things, to the fixed operation of the laws of causation in the spiritual as in the natural world. And yet, lest this should be taken to imply the existence of

some superior necessity to which even God Himself is subject — lest we should fall into the old Pagan notion that fate is stronger than Deity, and that God is the creature rather than the Creator of universal law, the writer attaches to this very reference to the eternal fitness of things one of the most sublime declarations in all literature of the place that God holds in the universe He has made. "It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." Let us dwell upon these two revelations of the Divine. All things are for God. He is the great final cause of all that is. "Thou hast created all things," cry the blessed spirits in the Land of Vision, "and for Thy pleasure they are and were created." It is manifest that if God Himself existed antecedently to all creation, all creation must exist for Him. And this implies that the potentialities, as well as the original actualities, of life were for Him. He must surely have known what He was calling into existence, and what possibilities would be involved for good or evil when He said, "Let us make man." And we ourselves are for Him. The prime object of our existence is not to obtain gratification for ourselves, but to answer His purpose concerning us. I am persuaded that one great secret of holiness lies in the recognition of this truth, and of all that is implied in it — I exist for God. In this new view of life, and in the acceptance of God instead of self as our centre of reference, lies the very essence of self-denial. We deny ourselves when, instead of asking, What do I like, we inquire, "Lord, what wouldest Thou have me to do?" And the second revelation is scarcely less important. "By Him are all things." He is the efficient as well as the final cause in His great universe of all that He designs to be eternal, and of all that contributes to what is eternal. This suggests to our minds the thought, that not only are the ages bound together by one great purpose, but more than this, God must be the best judge of the means by which that great purpose is to be subserved. And if He employs suffering as a means towards this end (and no doubt He is most reluctant to employ such a means), it must be because He sees this to be the means most suited to the end aimed at, indeed the only means that can bring about the specific results desired. Now it is obviously of the greatest practical moment that we should bear in mind that "of Him are all things" in our own personal experience. It is not the devil that is allowed to shape the features of the Christian's lot. Though he may be the agent in inflicting such sufferings, there is a deeper love underneath that permits them all for the promotion of a higher good. But if all things are for God, and we ourselves are for Him — if He is to derive a special gratification and satisfaction from our perfection — Then may we not boldly affirm that all things are for us? and may we not confidently trust Him with the selection of means towards the great end that He has in view? It is this thought that will arm us to face trials without apprehension, and keep us from forfeiting the blessings of suffering by yielding to a murmuring spirit. Stoics might teach us to endure tribulation, and Epicureans might advise us to do our best to escape tribulation; but who had ever before thought of the possibility of glorying in tribulation? But the true Christian glories in it. He glories in it because it is a means towards an end. It is one of the "all things" that are of God, and that contribute to what God designs. We glory in that triumphant power of Divine grace which renders even evil the minister of good, and converts what we most shrink from rote the means of inducing what we most desire. But the most surprising part of the text certainly is that in which Christ is represented as being submitted to the same means of development as ourselves in this respect. And our text affirms that it was in accordance with the eternal fitness of things that He should be perfected by suffering like the rest. If God's method of operation is this, that He produces ends by definite and appropriate means, why should we expect Him to depart from it in a particular ease? If the very highest form of human

perfection could be induced, without any employment of means — and painful and unpleasant means — such as we are subjected to, would there not have been ground for the conclusion that these means were in themselves unnecessary? Surely with such premises, it would be difficult for us to draw any other conclusion than that the infliction of all this suffering was gratuitous, and therefore unkind. But Christ came to vindicate the Father's character and ways. Above all He came to deepen our sense of the Father's love and benevolence, and therefore it behoved Him to submit to the established law, and to make the highest use of the means which a Father's love has appointed for the training and perfecting of man. Jesus Christ is not any grander, any more glorious, in the moral sense of the word, even when He sits on the throne, than He was when He hung in anguish, faint and dying, on a felon's cross. We can guess at His perfection up yonder in the glory; we can see it on the cross. And it is just the sort of perfection that sanctified sorrow and suffering amongst ourselves is known, in some degree at any rate, to produce. Self-control in its highest form; self-effacement that seems wonderful in its completeness, even in Him of whom we have learnt to expect whatever is highest and noblest; courage that took measure beforehand of all that was to come, and yet never flinched; obedience that would not, that did not, fail when the consequence was torture and death; patience that continued to endure when relief at any moment was within His reach; faith that would not doubt the Father's love, though all that He was suffering seemed to contradict it; hope that looked on through the horrors of the present to the joy that was set before Him; magnanimity that despised the shame; benignant pity that pleaded for His very murderers; and, above all, changeless and unconquerable love that many waters could not quench nor floods drown — these were amongst the characteristic perfections that have shone upon the world from Calvary, and are shining still. And these are all of them such as sorrow and suffering contribute to form; indeed, it is easy to see that some of these characteristics could not have existed, otherwise than potentially, even in the perfect Man, had He not been exposed to suffering. But it may be asked, How could Jesus Christ be perfected when He was never imperfect? Perfection may be regarded as either relative or absolute. Absolute perfection is the attribute of God, and belonged to Christ in His eternal Godhead from all eternity. But, again, there is such a thing as relative perfection — a perfection, that is to say, that is relative not only to the object and its ideal, but to the conditions to which it is for the time being submitted. There never was a time, then, when Jesus Christ was relatively imperfect. As a mere child no doubt He was all that a child could be; and as a young man I question not, though we know actually nothing of His youth, He presented to His contemporaries a perfect model of youthful manhood. But, as we have seen, there are certain forms of manly and, perhaps I should say, Godlike virtue that are only brought forth to perfection, so far as we know, by trial and suffering; and Jesus Christ could not be the absolutely Perfect Man until these characteristics had been by suffering acquired. For example, we are taught that He learned obedience by the things that He suffered. Now there never was a time when Jesus Christ was disobedient; but obedience, to be perfect, must be submitted to test. You cannot call a child obedient if his obedience has never cost him anything, nor do you know that he will obey when the trial comes unless he has been already put to the test. In this sense, and in this sense only, Christ learnt obedience by the things that He suffered. Alas! the words apply very differently to many of us! We disobey, and we suffer for it, and perhaps suffer severely, and then we begin to think that perhaps obedience is the truer wisdom. But He, on the other hand, learned the habit of obedience without ever tasting the bitter fruits of disobedience. His sufferings came in the path of obedience, and instead of deflecting Him from it confirmed Him in it.

His own brethren did not believe on Him. Here were trials at home harder to bear than poverty and want. But from this form of suffering He learned to stand alone, to be the less dependent on man, and the more in the society of His Father; while instead of His affections and sympathies being shrivelled and blighted by this unfavourable atmosphere they seem to have flowed forth all the more freely towards all who felt their value and responded to their advances. Yet another sorrow sprang from the attitude assumed towards Him by the religious world. It is never pleasant to be regarded as a heretic by those who represent a dominant and intolerant orthodoxy. I have known cases in which men have become embittered against and estranged from their fellow-Christians for life because of what they have suffered through practical excommunication. But where we may miss the lesson, Christ learned it. On the one hand, He learnt from all this how little trust was to be reposed in the theories and systems of men. But look again, and observe how all through His ministry He suffered from the contradiction of sinners against Himself, and this suffering contributed to His perfection in two ways. It seems to have deepened and strengthened the intensity of His hatred against sin, and to have taught Him the necessity of using great plainness, and even in some cases severity of speech in convicting sinners, while it also produced in Him a wonderful patience in dealing with sinners. Did He, could He, suffer from temptation, and was He perfected by this also? The writer of this Epistle says so in so many words. We know how much of severe pain temptation often causes; how it sometimes seems as if we were so circumstanced that it must needs lie pain to resist, and probably not less but greater pain to yield. He never had, it is true, a fallen nature, and a bias towards evil such as we have; and many feel as if that must needs have rendered it impossible for Him to be tempted as we are. But are we able to judge how much this advantage may have been compensated by the special trials that belonged to the unique position that He occupied? Who shall alarm that the urgent demands of such an appetite as hunger, aggravated to a scarcely conceivable intensity by the pains of a forty days' fast, were more easy to deny than the cravings of abnormally-developed lust in the manhood of a confirmed sensualist? And this is only one example out of many that should suffice to prove the reality of the sufferings to which He was exposed by temptation. Where is there another in human history whose temptation was so severe as to wring blood-drops from the agonising body? Never say that Jesus's temptations were no thing to yours, because He was innocent when you are impure, unless you have passed through such an agony and bloody sweat as fell to His lot in Gethsemane. But here as elsewhere suffering perfected the Man. He learnt how Divine power — the power of the Eternal Spirit — can master and triumph over the strongest claims of nature; and thus through suffering He rose to the very culminating-point of true self-mastery, and was able to lay Himself upon the altar a whole burnt sacrifice. Yes, the self-control of Jesus Christ differs from all other instances of it in these particulars: First, He seems to have been able to take the measure of His sufferings before they occurred — an experience which is happily impossible to us; and, second, all the while that He was enduring them He knew perfectly well that He had only to express a wish and His sufferings would have been at an end. Thus His obedience was made perfect, and with His obedience His human character. The means produced the end with Him that it might produce the self-same end with us; and from the moment of His perfection by suffering He consecrated suffering as a minister of the Divine purpose, so that His followers might no longer shrink from it and tremble at it, but rather glory in it as a conquered foe that has become our friend.

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

1.1 Purging Out the Old Leaven

1 Corinthians 5:7-8

Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened...

A friend once described to me this process as he saw it in a carpenter's shop in Nazareth. The carpenter would not allow him to witness the search in the house lest his presence should defile the home; but he allowed him to enter the shop and witness the search there. The man went about the work with a will; he was evidently thoroughly in earnest; he girded up his loins as if he had a day's work before him, and then proceeded to search with the utmost zeal. Carefully and conscientiously he turned over every board, he moved all his tools, he swept out the whole place, he opened every drawer, looked into every cupboard; there was not a crevice or a cranny in the wall that was not inspected lest there might be a tiny crumb of leaven anywhere in the shop. As he drew towards the close of his search my friend suddenly heard him utter an exclamation of horror, and looking round he saw him standing as though he had seen something most alarming. If he had found a viper or a cockatrice he could not have been more horrified than he seemed to be. What was it? In the last corner that he had visited, under some shavings, he had come across a little canvas bag, and in this little bag there were a few crumbs of leavened bread; one of the workmen had left it on some former occasion. It was enough; it defiled the whole place. With the utmost possible gravity and solemnity, and with a most anxious expression of countenance as though it were a most critical and important business, the man took hold of two pieces of wood, and using them as a pair of tongs he raised up the bag, and holding it off at arm's length, marched out of the shop and dropped the leavened crumbs, bag and all, into the centre of a fire that he had burning outside ready for such a contingency, and so he purged out the old leaven.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Redemption by the Substitutionary Death of Christ

Galatians 1:4-5

Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:...

In one of the back courts of Paris a fire broke out in the dead of night. The houses were built so that the higher stories overhung the foundation. A father, who was sleeping with his children in the top garret, was suddenly awakened by the flames and smoke. The man sprang out of bed and vaulted to the window of the opposite house. Then placing his feet firmly against the window sill, he launched his body forward and grasped the window of the burning house, and shouting to his eldest boy he said, "Now, my boy, make haste; crawl over my body." This was done. The second and third followed. The fourth, a little fellow, would only do so after much persuasion: but as he was passing on he heard his father say, "Quick! quick! quick! I cannot hold out much longer," and as the voices of friends were heard announcing his safety, the hold of the strong man relaxed, and with a heavy crash fell a lifeless corpse into the court below. So Jesus in His own sacred body provides a bridge whereby we may cross the chasm between us and God. The way home is through the rent veil, the crucified flesh, of our Immanuel.

(W. H. M. H. Aitken.)

1.1 Repentance not Mere Sorrow for Sin

Acts 3:19-21

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken.)

1.1 Repentance, a Change of Mind

Acts 3:19-21

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

The original "a change of mind" or "an after-thought." Now that is exactly what the Holy Spirit produces in the convicted soul. "There is," says the wise man, "a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Now it is the work of the Holy Ghost to dispel this false view of our way, and to bring us to see things as they really are; and when we yield to His convicting influences, the light of truth flashes into our soul, and we come to ourselves. Now we see things from an entirely different point of view, and cry out against ourselves — against our folly and our sin. "What a fool I have been!" cries the awakened and repentant soul. "So many years I have lived in this world, and yet have I never really begun to live at all! My whole past has been a wasted existence. I have been simply exercising my faculties in furthering my own destruction!" The first step in a real repentance is taken when we open our eyes to see things as in the light of the Holy Ghost, when we escape from the long delirium of a life lived under the influence of the great deceiver, and thus undergo a change of mind with respect to God and to sin, and the value of things seen and things eternal.

(W. Hay Aitken.)

1.1 Rescure the Perishing

Luke 10:29-37

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

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

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

1.1 Saved

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:...

There was, some years ago, a shipwreck on the Cornish coast. The wind was blowing an awful gale; no lifeboat was near, but a pilot boat, with a brave crew, put out to rescue the perishing. The ship was on a sand bank, and the pilot boat got alongside her, and as the waves ran higher and higher, the sailors, one after another, sprang from the ship on to the deck of the boat, till there was but one left on the sinking vessel, and just as he was in the act of springing, a tremendous billow struck the ship on her broadside; she heeled over, and the returning wave swept the pilot boat back to a considerable distance. At that moment a scream was heard from the stern of the pilot boat. A hoary-headed man, with tears starting from his eyes, and agony depicted on his countenance, was heard to cry out, "Captain, for God's sake, save my boy I save my boy!" It was his only son who was in the sinking ship. And as his cry rose, there was another voice to meet it; from the sinking vessel there came back a shout clear and strong amidst the tumult of the tempest, "Never mind, father; thank God, I am saved." They were the last words he ever spoke. Another moment the mighty billows swept him away, and his soul was in eternity, in the very bosom of its God. Could you have said what that young man said? Could you have said, "Thank God, I am saved"? Perhaps you say, "No, I could not." Then don't sleep tonight until you can. What! may you have it tonight? Yes, the gift is at your door. "How am I to have it?" Trust Jesus for it. Take that poor weary soul of yours, and lay it in His hand.

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Saved by Grace

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:...

It is a very important word surely, that word "saved." It brings before our minds the most solemn consideration that we can possibly be occupied with. Nothing is nearer to us than our own souls; hence there is nothing more important than that we should not lose those souls of ours. Some of us love our money dearly, but what is money to our soul? Some of us love our friends very dearly, but we shall have to part company with them. Some of us love the pleasures of life dearly. What is it to be "saved"? Before we can answer that question, we must ask another: What is it to be in danger? If I were to meet one of you strolling along the road, and rushed up to you with frantic eagerness, and seized you by the arm, and said, "My dear friend, do let me save you!" you would think I had come out of a lunatic asylum, and would wish that I were back there again. Nobody in his senses would address his neighbour in that way, under such circumstances. But supposing we were at Brighton together, and I was walking along the Esplanade, and, looking out to sea, saw you in a little cockle shell boat, tossing about on the waves, and, by and by, I saw that boat go over, and you sinking in the sea; and suppose I stripped off my clothes, and sprang into the water, and swam out to you, and as I drew near, you heard me shout, "Will you let me save you?" would you be astonished at my asking you the question, under such circumstances. Then that brings before us this conclusion — we only want a Saviour when we are in danger. Before the Lord Jesus Christ is of any use to us as a Saviour, we must endeavour to realize what our danger is. Let us, then, try and discover what it arises from. It is not a pleasant thing to think that we are in danger, is it? There is one way of getting away from the sense of danger, that is to trifle with God's truth, and persuade ourselves that danger is not danger. We flatter ourselves that all is safe, when all the time, in the sight of God, we are in a state of terrible danger. Now, I want to point out to you that, so far from that making matters better, it only makes them worse. If I was wandering out near some of your cliffs, on a night dark as pitch, so that I could not see my hand before my face, I should be in a state of great danger. If I knew that there were sharp precipices descending to the sea, three or four hundred feet, I should be on the look out for them, feeling my way carefully with a walking stick, if I had one, doing all I could to avoid falling over the precipices and being dashed to pieces. But supposing I did not know that there were any precipices in the neighbourhood, and I said to myself, "I have only to walk along this moor, and, sooner or later, I shall get to the place I want to reach," how should I walk then? Although it was dark, I should step out bravely; if I had only so much as a single star to direct me, or a light in the distance, I should steer my course by it, and I should go on, probably, till I came to the edge of the precipice, and, taking a false step, should go over. Do you not see that if we are in danger it is far better for us to know that we are in danger than to think that we are in safety? Now, I cannot help thinking that there are some of us in this double danger: first of all, we are in danger because we are sinners; and, in the second place, we are in danger because we do not think that we are sinners; or, if we think that we are sinners at all, we think so little about it that we really do not feel "the exceeding sinfulness of sin," and

therefore do not tremble at the thought of what sin must bring. And what does our danger proceed from? It proceeds from the fact that sin has entered our nature. Let us look at a consumptive patient. He is walking down the lane with a brisk step, and is not so very unhealthy looking. You ask him how he is. "Oh," he says, "he is not so particularly bad; he has got a cold, but he is going to shake it off." You look at him carefully; you are a doctor, and you know about such things; you see the hectic flush on his cheek, a certain appearance in his complexion that alarms you: there is a ring in his cough that seems to tell of something fatally wrong. What is the matter with him? He is in terrible danger, he does not know it, but he is none the less in danger. What is it makes him in danger? A disease has taken hold of his body. Somewhere in the lungs there is a formation taking place; he cannot see it, but its effects begin to manifest themselves. There is a poison within the blood, so to speak, and the man is doomed; in all probability, in the course of a few months, you will see him laid on a bed of languor and wretchedness, and in a few months more he will be carried to his grave, a wasted corpse, the terrible disease having done its work! Now, sin is a disease of the soul. The question is not whether the disease has been largely developed, or whether it is only just beginning to develop itself! the point is, Is the disease there? Has it begun its fatal work? If it has, then you are in terrible danger. If I were drowning off Brighton sands, and a man came along the Parade, with a multitude of medals of the Royal Humane Society on his breast, indicating the number of lives he had saved; if I cried out to him, "Come and help me!" and he replied, "Oh! I am a saviour, I have saved lots of people," I should say, "Save me; yea are of no use to me unless you save me; I am drowning; don't talk of how many you have saved, but save me. Then suppose he said, Hope on; perhaps I will think about it by and by," and then went on and left me drowning, would that be any considerable consolation to me? Suppose he had said, "Perhaps, by and by, when you have gone under water three or four times more, and lost all consciousness, and you think you are dying, I will take it into consideration whether I will save you," would that be a comfort to me? Would you like to have such a saviour as that? Now, when I have this terrible disease of sin upon me, what I want is a Saviour who will save me now, who will bring me into a state of conscious salvation, or safety — for that is the meaning of the word in plain English. Can we get such a Saviour? We can. The Saviour revealed in the gospel is a Saviour who comes down to me, and lays hold of me as I am sinking in the jaws of death, and puts me in a position of safety, so that I can look round triumphantly, and say as the apostle said, "Being justified by faith, I have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Now I come back to the old question. We have seen what the danger is, and we have seen what the salvation is; now we come to ask — How is a man to be saved? What is it that will save him? The apostle makes a very clear statement here — "By grace are ye saved." What does "grace" mean? There is not a child here who does not know. By favour, by God's free kindness towards us. We do not deserve any favour, do we? If you knew a man who had been robbing and injuring you, trampling on your rights, and rebelling against your will, that is not the man you would choose to do a favour to, naturally. Well, that is just how we have treated God; we have been robbing Him of all that He has most a claim to; robbing Him of our time, of our money, of our influence; rebelling against His laws, turning our back upon His love, playing the part of base ingrates against His mercy. We have no claim upon God's favour. "Now," says the apostle, "the grace of God which brings salvation to every man hath appeared." Now, I want you to know, dear friends, that that "grace" floods this sin-stricken world like a glorious tide. Wherever it reaches a human heart, it brings salvation to our very door. There is not one of you who is not included in this assertion of the apostle, "The grace

of God, which bringeth salvation to every man, hath appeared." You may bring the biggest nugget of gold in the world to my door; there it may be outside on a wheelbarrow, and I may be inside dying of starvation; the nugget will do me no good if I do not take it in: if I do not turn it into money, and apply it to the satisfaction of my wants, I shall be as badly off as if the nugget had never been presented to me at all. The glorious gift of salvation is brought to our doors, and the question is, Have we taken it into our hearts? Now, my brother, God will either give you salvation, or else you shall never have it; it shall be His free gift, accepted by you for nothing, or else it shall never be yours; so if you are going to purchase it by your tears, your repentance, your good works, your good resolutions, or your faith — if you come and offer God such terms, you will simply have to go empty away. It is an insult to a man to offer him money in payment for a gift, is it not! Supposing I were to go home to Lord Chichester tonight, and he were to make me a handsome present; suppose he said, "That splendid clock, worth a couple of hundred guineas, is to be yours, if you will accept it," and suppose I put my hand into my pocket, and said, "My lord, I should like to pay something towards it, will you accept sixpence?" How would he feel? It would be a great insult to him, would it not? If I received it gratefully, and thanked him for it, I should be pleased, and he would be pleased; I should be the gainer, and he would have the pleasure of making me a handsome present; but if I insisted on paying my sixpence, it would make a mess of it all; probably he would be offended with me, and I with him, and we should part enemies instead of friends. That may serve to bring before you how ridiculous it is to try and buy God's salvation with anything. If you pay so much as a single tear for your salvation, it spoils the whole arrangement. Do I mean that you are not to shed tears? No, no. By all means, if God has given you oceans of tears, shed them, but not to purchase salvation. If God has given you all the sorrow and penitence that ever racked the human heart, there is no objection to that, but do not offer it for salvation. If God gives you the strongest faith that ever moved in the human soul, exercise it, but do not bring it in payment for salvation. That is wholly and solely the gift of God. Is it not a glorious gift?

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Savour of Death or of Life

2 Corinthians 2:15-16

For we are to God a sweet smell of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:...

In thought stand near those three crosses on Calvary, and see how near to each other are blessing and cursing. As you gaze on that sacred, awful scene, how plainly are revealed to you life and death. Now, wherever the gospel message is made known the effect will be the same as on Calvary — to some it will be the savour of life unto life, and to others the savour of death unto death.

I. Let us look at THE TWO SIDES OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE. The word gospel we associate with all that is lovely, tender, merciful. Now, all this is quite true; but it is not the whole message. Honestly read your Bibles, and you will find that it makes known to you salvation and damnation — heaven and hell. The gospel message is, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

II. Now, consider THE DOUBLE WORKING OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE. The gift of God must be either accepted or rejected; there is no alternative. Thus was it in the days of the apostles; their preaching was either a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. But there are some who would raise objections to the gospel because it is thus the savour of death as well as of life. Better, say they, not to preach the gospel at all. To them we reply, Because some abuse God's greatest gift, would it be better that the gift had never been offered? Because fire sometimes destroys, would it be better that a fire never were kindled?

(James Aitken.)

1.1 Self-Denial

Luke 9:23

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 Self-Destruction, - God Salvation

Hosea 13:9

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Self-Mastery

1 Corinthians 9:27

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others...

1. The simple etymological sense of the term is "I strike under the eye." The figure is that of a pugilistic encounter. Paul imagines to himself his body as rising up against his higher nature; and against this foe he directs his well-aimed blows; not to destroy or even mutilate it, but to render it what it always ought to be — the obedient slave of the inner nature.

2. But, it may be asked, does the apostle teach us that the body is the source of all inward evil? On the contrary, no man exalts the human body more. He represents it as the temple of the Holy Ghost. "Members of Christ." He prays that our body, as well as our spirit and soul, may be preserved faultless. How, then, are we to understand the phrase? — whence this mysterious collision?

3. St. Paul is here speaking of his life's work, in pursuing which he makes a discovery which all of us have to make sooner or later — that he who would conquer a world must be ready to conquer himself. In vers. 4-6 St. Paul indicates three special respects in which he had turned aside from the reasonable demands of nature for his work's sake. "Have we not power to eat and to drink?" — that is to say, he might have secured for himself a comfortable competence. "Have we not power to lead about a sister?" &c. He might have surrounded himself with all the pleasures of domestic life. "Have not Barnabas and I power to forbear working?" It certainly did seem reasonable that one who worked so hard for souls should be saved from the weariness of physical toil. And what had he to say to these natural and reasonable demands? Nothing but his work, and the will of God in that work. And when he found nature urging, as nature will, her demands for some degree of consideration, just as our Lord discovered Satan in the person of the disciple who dissuaded Him from the Cross; so the apostle discovered a foe in his own flesh, when that flesh shrank from the path of self-denial, and, smiting his antagonist down, he consigned it to its own proper place; from henceforth thou art to dictate thy terms no longer; thou art slave, and not master!

4. And now for our practical lesson. We, too, are striving for the mastery in a world which has been devastated by evil. Do we not also find that our bodies rise up and resist the claims made on them by the work which has to be done?

(1) It may be perhaps, with us, rather in little things that the conflict has to be waged. You know that there are sick and poor to be visited. Love for souls, and for God, would prompt you to set forth; but it is a cold wintry day. How the body pleads, Sit still; another day will do as well. Or perhaps it is so small a matter as rising from your bed in the morning sufficiently early to give yourself time for prayer and the study of God's Word; or it is your time for prayer in the evening, after the busy day of toil; or it is that you have a call to visit the haunts of wretchedness and misery, where everything is repulsive. These are occasions on which we too have to arm our right

hand with spiritual power, and to smite our body down, forcibly reminding it of its true position.

(2) Or perhaps the body asserts itself not so much in forbidding the painful as suggesting the pleasant — now appealing to our lower appetites with suggestions of indulgences. The mind that is taken up in any degree with the thought, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? &c., is making provision for the flesh, and in doing so is unconsciously resigning its true supremacy. The same thing is true of those higher forms of gratification which none the less have the body as their subject. There is no harm in enjoying the pleasures of the eye, or of the ear, but as soon as we give ourselves over to it, it becomes guilty. If God throws an innocent pleasure in our way, we are not called upon to suspect the gift; but when we go out of our way to pursue the pleasurable, the higher part of our nature is yielding itself as the slave of the lower.

5. How did St. Paul smite his body down, and reduce it into the condition of a slave? This much surely is obvious — a man is no match for himself! He lets us into the secret by giving us a practical direction: "If ye," he says, "through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." All turns upon this. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh."

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 Self-Seeking Involves a Cross Equally with Self-Abnegation

Luke 9:24

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

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

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

1.1 Seperation Ending in Union

Genesis 45:4

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 St. Paul and St. James on Faith

James 2:14-26

What does it profit, my brothers, though a man say he has faith, and have not works? can faith save him?...

St. Paul meets the legalist; St. James the Antinomian.

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

1.1 Suffering Working Perfection

Colossians 1:24

Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake...

Just as a certain amount of heat in the furnace is required to produce certain definite effects upon the metal, so it would seem as though a certain definite amount of suffering, recognized by the infinite wisdom of God, were necessary to work out the perfection of that body of which Christ is the Head. As we each cheerfully and thankfully bear our share, what a joy to think that, along with the Head, we are contributing in our measure to the perfecting of the whole.

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

1.1 The Agony of Sin

John 3:14-15

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

What a moment of agony and terror it must have been as all around unfortunate victims were being attacked with these messengers of death. Young and old, rich and poor; for with them there was no respect of persons. On all sides you might see the Israelites writhing in mortal pains. You might hear the mother's agonized screams as the poisonous reptile fastened its fangs in her darling's breast. See that strong man tottering along; he has just been bitten. A moment ago he was in full health and strength, but now the deadly venom is flowing through his veins, and he is a dead man already. In this terrible emergency the people cried unto God, and Moses was instructed to make a serpent of brass and set it on a pole, and whosoever looked on this should live.

(W. M. H. Aitken.)

1.1 The Atonement a Necessity

2 Samuel 14:14

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

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

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

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 The Attitude of Reuben

Judges 5:12-22

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 The Blessed Hope of Grace

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,...

Grace teaches us, not only by referring us to the great facts of the past, but also by setting before our awakened hope the sublime and crowning event of the future, and in this respect also she exhibits the superiority of her teaching to that which law could offer. Under the law the future could hardly be contemplated without terror; for who could feel so secure of his legal righteousness as to be able to look forward to that day without a misgiving? We cannot entertain such happy anticipations with respect to the future unless we are quite sure of our own relations to God in the present. Let us put a case. If our Queen were about to make a progress through this realm, and if it was understood that, as soon as she reached the city of York, of one dozen felons confined in the prison yonder, six were to be taken out and promptly executed at the moment of her arrival, while six should be liberated; and if of those twelve felons no single one knew for certain whether he were one of the six that were to be set free, or of the six that were to be executed, is it conceivable under such circumstances that any of those felons would long for and entreat Her Majesty's speedy advent? Would it not be far more conceivable that they would all, if they were permitted, petition her to defer her visit, and, if possible, to abandon it? Not otherwise must it be with us, as we look forward to this dread event of the future, unless we know that by the saving grace of God we are prepared for it. But while our attitude towards this great event of the future may serve as a test of the reality or unreality of our religion, it may also be employed by the true Christian as a gauge of his spiritual condition. Do we really love His appearing? Is it a subject much in our thoughts? Does it cheer us, or does it make us uncomfortable to think of it? How apt are even those who have known something of the grace of God to take root, as it were, here upon earth, instead of living as strangers and pilgrims! But the love of Christ's appearing is not only a test of our spiritual health and progress, it may also largely contribute to the promotion of these. The truth is the life and the hope act and react upon each other. Personal godliness must ever strengthen and intensify our hope; but then again our rejoicing in hope will ever stimulate our desires after growth in grace. What the effect of Advent light upon our daily lives must needs be is indicated by numerous passages of Scripture. "We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." It is not difficult to understand in how many ways we may be favourably affected in our present personal experience by the thought of this blessed hope. Surely much of the gloomy despondency or depression that frequently paralyses our spiritual activities might be more easily mastered if we only lived more in the Advent light, cheering our hearts with the anticipations of coming glory. But the thought of this blessed hope does more than cheer us amidst the vicissitudes of life; it also tends to strengthen our faith, and thus to invigorate our whole spiritual experience; for while we dwell upon the thought of the complete victory that Christ is one day to win, the thought will naturally suggest itself to our minds, as we return to the consciousness of the present from the hopes of the future, Cannot He who will one day conquer the world

conquer even now our old nature? Thus the very contemplation of these glorious prospects in the future proves a source of strength as well as of cheer in the present. But most of all, the thought of this blessed hope is specially designed to induce watchfulness. "Therefore be ye also ready," cries our blessed Lord; "for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." One other benefit likely to arise from the thought of the glorious appearance of our Saviour, and affecting our conduct and character, suggests itself here. Surely we cannot fail to find in this prospect a mighty stimulus to our zeal. The time is short. Soon the Master will come to take account of His servants. Fain would we be able to say when He appears, as He was able to say to His Father, "I have finished the work that Thou gavest Me to do." But if this habit of looking for that blessed hope is likely to be productive of so many advantages in our present experience, it may be asked, How is such a habit to be formed? Strangers passing through a hostile land cannot but look forward to a change in their position. Grace teaches us then to love the Lord's appearing, by reminding us that we are already citizens of the heavenly kingdom, in the revelation of which we are to find a full satisfaction, which cannot be ours amidst the hostile influences of the house of our pilgrimage. We long for the moment when the power of the usurper shall be overthrown, and our King receive the homage which is His due from all, just as a Hushai or Ittai must have longed for the restoration of David, and the downfall of the odious traitor Absalom. Nor does the expectation of the true Christian end even here. He cannot forget that human history is to be crowned by "the marriage of the Lamb." In that mysterious event of the future the destiny of the creature is to be attained, and the pleasure of the Creator in His own work is to be fulfilled. But it is Grace, and Grace alone, that bids us cherish such hopes as this. Law might train a servant, but could not prepare a bride. To sum up, we may say that Grace teaches us to love Christ's appearing by revealing to us the mystery of our spiritual union with Him, from which there arises a certain identity of interests, and consequently of desires. As He is, so are we in this present world, "despised and rejected of men"; where He is, there in Him we are in the world of glory — seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, accepted of the Father in the Beloved. As He shall be, such shall we be by and by, when He appears in His kingdom. "We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." Surely it is indeed "a blessed hope," and every one that hath it must needs "purify himself, even as He is pure." We see then that while our hope becomes bright and real just in so far as we walk soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, so the cultivation of this blessed hope helps us and stimulates us thus to live.

(W. H. M. H. Aitken.)

1.1 The Blessing and the Curse

Jeremiah 17:5-8

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

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

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 The Brazen Serpent

John 3:14-15

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 The Centurion's Faith

Luke 7:1-10

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 The Christian a Debtor not to the Flesh, But to the Spirit

Romans 8:12

Therefore, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

You take a wild briar from the hedge, and plant it in your garden; upon that briar you graft the choicest rose, and the result is — what? not two distinct identities, the briar flourishing as a briar, and the rose as a rose, nor the briar being completely absorbed into the rose, but two distinct natures forming one individuality, of which one represents the original individuality of the briar, while the other the imparted nature of the rose. This original individuality is only to be allowed to express itself through the imparted nature. All self-assertion on the part of the original briar stock, as distinct from the new nature engrafted upon it, is to be rigorously repressed. Neglect this process of repression, and the briar may make shoots below the graft; and as these shoots develop themselves the rose nature begins to lose ground, and suffers in foliage and flower, until, if the process be only allowed to go far enough, the rose is extinguished, the old briar is supreme. Yet observe: the briar itself is not repressed; it is allowed to develop itself in accordance with the laws of its own nature, but only through the rose. None of its personal rights or functions are to be interfered with; it is not to be robbed of the enjoyment of full vital vigour; but all this is to go to the production of a flower worthy of your garden, instead of the scanty and quickly-fading bloom of the hedge-rose. What is it that produces the standard rose? Not the rose without the briar; not the briar without the rose, but the rose and the briar united in one. In that standard rose, Christian, behold a picture of thyself if Christ is formed in thee! Thy individuality is not to be repressed; no healthy function of thy nature is to be laid aside. Yet is it necessary that you should be prepared to mortify the deeds of the body, or the old nature may assert itself apart from all reference to the new. "Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth." Do you ask how? I reply that the same Spirit which has already introduced the new nature, and united Himself, provides the pruning-knife. "We are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." We are debtors, not to the old briar-stock apart from the rose, for what did that ever bear that was worth gathering? what fruit had we but those things whereof we are now ashamed? the end of those things was death. But we are debtors, not only to that God whose sovereign love has made us what we are; not only to that Saviour who has redeemed us from the slavery of sin; not only to that Spirit who has condescended to make our body His temple; but we owe it to our new selves — that self into which the new Adam has been grafted, and wherein the new Adam claims to have His way; we owe it to that sense of harmony which pervades the once distracted elements of our nature; to that calm which has taken the place of our former disquietude; to that joy which has already furnished us with a foretaste of heaven; that we should be true to the instincts of our new life, and to the laws of our renovated nature! To forget this solemn debt is to turn our backs on all that makes life profitable, is to give ourselves over to spiritual bankruptcy; to recognise it and pay it with loyal and grateful devotion, is to secure boundless resources of infinite wealth. "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die"; and he who dies is stripped of all: "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the

deeds of the body, ye shall live"; and he who thus lives, lives in the enjoyment of all.

(W. Hay Aitken, M.A.)

1.1 The Christian's Walk and its Object

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Furthermore then we beseech you, brothers, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus...

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S WALK.

1. You young Christians have just got a walking power. There was a time when you thought you could stand, and you tried, but fell helplessly by the wayside. But Jesus of Nazareth passed by and said, "Wilt thou be made whole." You responded in faith, and like the man at the Gate Beautiful you found a new energy and walked and leaped and praised God.

2. This new power was given you to enable you to realize that "they that wait upon the Lord shall...walk and not faint." The sun may be very hot, and you ready to give way, but remember this promise; and remember it when the goal of the journey seems a great way off. Don't be discouraged.

3. Paul had given these Christians directions how to walk. He did not leave them to wander about in the darkness. We, too, have directions. Look up the word "walk" in your concordance. We are to —

(1) "Walk by faith." We do not behold the form of Jesus leading us on to victory, nor is our reward visible, but we apprehend both by Faith.

(2) "Walk in the Spirit," opposed to which is "walking after the flesh," by worldly considerations, and a desire for gratification.

(3) "Walk in wisdom." Do not give unnecessary offence, or obtrude your religion in a disagreeable way. The perfect Christian is a perfect gentleman.

(4) "Walk honestly," or rather honourably. There is a certain unaffected dignity that belongs to the friend of God, and commands the respect of men. The child of the heavenly royal household cannot stoop to social meannesses, or commercial sharp practices.

(5) "Walk circumspectly," i.e., accurately. Be particular about little things, little vanities, self-indulgences, worldlinesses, sins of tongue and temper. There are some who have only a vague, not an accurate notion of what a Christian's walk ought to be; others walk timorously always expecting to make mistakes. Some strike out wildly never thinking of where they are going; others go painfully as though they were walking on egg shells or glass bottles. Let us avoid these two mistakes — not to allow ourselves to be so bound and hampered as to lose our spiritual liberty; but not to disregard trifles which put together make such a great thing in the end.

II. THE MOTIVE. "To please God." We shall not walk rightly without a right motive. God looks at that as well as at the effect.

1. What are you going to live for? To be happy? To get to heaven? You may get both, but these are not what you were sent into the world for.

2. If you want to find out what should be the object of your life, look at Jesus. From first to last He lived simply to please the Father. He came to do the Father's will, and He did it.

(1) You may do a man's will because you are his servant paid to do it, and therefore your duty to do it, or because he is your friend and you delight to do it. Between these two classes of motives lies the difference between the law and the gospel.

(2) There are two ways of seeking to please God, We often notice in earthly relationships that there is less of conscious anxiety to please where love and confidence are strongest, while on the other hand strenuous efforts to please are frequently the results of misgivings as to the disposition of the person they are designed to please. The same may be said of our relationship towards God. There are some who really wish to please Him, and yet say, "I wonder whether this or that has pleased Him." But the blessedness of the Christian position is this, that we are accepted in the Beloved so that He can regard us with complacency in order that we may go on to please Him.

3. Let the thought of pleasing God ever take precedence of the thought of pleasing ourselves and others.

4. You are pleasing God much if you are trusting Him much. To doubt Him is to cast a reflection on His changeless love.

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

1.1 The Circumstances of the Vision

Isaiah 6:1-13

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 The Consecrated Body

Romans 12:1

I beseech you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God...

The body is —

I.THE SEAT OF OUR ANIMAL PROPENSITIES. These are not necessarily criminal. They are only so when they cease to be subordinate to God. When we are living in His power, the question will not be, Is this self-indulgence right, or wrong? but, Does it interfere with the work of the Holy Spirit within me, and the fulfilment of the mind of God in my life?

II.THE SEAT OF OUR SENSUOUS EXPERIENCES. Is the love of music to be indulged, or may we take long journeys for pleasure? Surely none of these things are wrong in themselves; but with the child of God the question is not, How shall I most gratify my sensuous propensity? but, How most please God?

III.THE SEAT OF OUR PHYSICAL SENSIBILITIES — those which are acted upon by the sense of pain, pleasure, lassitude,etc. A duty has to be done, but it is a hot day, and we have some approach to a headache, and we do not feel disposed to do it. What is it will enable us to rise above that? Why, to be filled with the Spirit, and then the body will present itself to God's service joyfully.

IV.OUR MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE PHYSICAL WORLD. Now, it is not a bad thing that we should have to do with the physical world; but what effect is our bodies producing upon this world? Is it the better for us? Is "Holiness to the Lord" written upon the very vessels of our households? If we are filled with the Spirit of God, our bodies will be the medium through which this world will be continually affected by Him,etc.

V.THE MEDIUM THROUGH WHICH WE HOLD INTERCOURSE WITH MANKIND. Now, what is the nature of that influence? If we are filled with the Holy Spirit, it will be a revelation of Christ. In these bodies we should carry about the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ. The tone of our voice, the line of our conduct, the look of our eye, everything about us, will speak of Christ.

VI.THE VEIL WHICH CONCEALS THE THINGS UNSEEN. Strip off these bodies, and in a moment we are landed in the presence of invisible realities. There is only this between me and eternity, between me and God. Now, that is something for which to be thankful. If it were not for this veil it would be impossible for me to fulfil the work of my probation. At the same time, the devil employs it as a means of deadening our spiritual sensibilities. When the Holy Spirit has free course within our being, then the veil becomes almost transparent. There are times when God draws so near to us that it seems more like seeing than thinking, more like touching than simply contemplating.

(W. Hay Aitken, M.A.)

1.1 The Crossing of the Jordan

Joshua 3:14-17

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 The Cry of the Penitent

Jeremiah 31:18-21

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 The Denial of Worldly Lust

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,...

All things in outward nature have their element, and our moral nature must have its element, in which to live, and move, and have its being. Beasts live on earth, birds fly in air, fishes swim in water; but each of these animal organisms requires its own element, and no amount of education will make a fish enjoy fresh air. Even so the ungodly man has this world for his element, even as the true believer has God for his element. The ungodly is of the earth earthy; he receives the world's spirit; he enters into its mind; he forms his character in accordance with its genius; he submits to its dictates; he measures everything by its standard. He lives in the world, and is of the world, just as the true believer lives in God, and is of God. He is one with the world, and the world with him. He is represented by the world; for he is in the world, just as the Christian is in Christ, and the world lives in him, just as Christ lives in the heart of His own people, forming its own nature within him, and conforming him to its character. Yes, the child of the world will always be like the world that he makes his god. You remember what the Psalmist says about the gods of the heathen. "Their idols are silver and gold, the works of men's hands." Then he goes on to add the startling assertion, "They who make them are like unto them; so are all they that put their trust in them." And "they that make them are like unto them" — not only do we become the slaves of that which we have created, but we also become assimilated to the creation of our own perversity. I mean to say that those who live in the world and for the world become worldly; and if that sounds but a little thing to some ears, let me say that, if my observation have not failed me, "worldly" means hollow-hearted, empty-headed, frivolous, selfish, sordid, incapable of realising the true dignity of our own nature, insensible to higher motives, heedless of grave responsibilities, unreal, conventional, hypocritical, false, deceiving and deceived. Shall I give an example of what I mean? There are scores of mothers in our land who are at this moment quite prepared to sell their daughters to the highest bidder. The question with them is not "What is the moral character?" — far less "What is the religious character of the man that shall marry my daughter?" — but "How many thousands a year has he? What will be his position in society?" I only mention that as one of the many instances that could be given of the hollowness and heartlessness of the worldly life; because we see it here conquering and paralysing one of the very strongest and purest instincts of nature — a mother's love. So the world goes on, getting hollow and hollow. The very conversation of the worldling is suggestive of the havoc which the spirit and genius of worldliness have made in the man's true character. What is worldly conversation for the most part but an exhibition of littleness and frivolity? It never seems to get below the surface. Men of the world know nothing of the fellowship of heart with heart. Just think how impossible it would be for two such persons to discuss with each other their inner life and heart experiences. Oh, empty, hollow, world, is this man's best substitute for God! Now the apostle affirms that we have denied worldly lust as well as ungodliness. We have renounced and repudiated it forever. But here rises the question, How have the world and worldly lust been thus denied? or how are we to deny it? and

how are we to be freed from it? Various answers to this inquiry meet us from different quarters. "Turn your back upon the world," says the ascetic. "Wander into the depths of the desert. Shut yourself up in an eremite's cave, or hide yourself within a monastic enclosure." But even so, how shall I be sure that I may not carry a little world of my own along with me? How shall we get rid of the world's bondage? or how shall we deny this worldly lust, and rise above it? "Despise it," says the cynic. "Be indifferent to all considerations of pain and pleasure. Never mind what the world thinks of you. Rejoice in being peculiar." May not our Diogenes be creating for himself a greater conqueror, or a greater tyrant, in his own inflated self-consciousness, than ever was an Alexander or a Xerxes? No; we want a better answer than this. Again I ask, "How am I to deny worldly lust?" It is all round me. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world hath been crucified to me, and I unto the world." That is the answer. Grace had taught St. Paul that lesson. He did not learn it on Sinai, but at Calvary. "There was a time when thou didst think well of the world, wast elated by her blandishments, wast alarmed at the thought of her frown. Thou didst value her good opinion, and didst shrink above everything else from forfeiting it; thou wast attracted by her glitter, and blinded by her display. But now, behold the world is revealed as a traitress and a usurper, a rebel against Infinite Benevolence, and a deceiver of all her deluded votaries; for in her judgment theirs is revealed. Child of God, the world is crucified to thee. There she hangs, represented in the great Victim of her malice under the ban of God's wrath, blighted with a curse, blasted by the dread thunderbolt from the hand of Omnipotent Justice. Thou seest her now exposed to shame and everlasting contempt. Nor canst thou make a cunning compromise between thy God and her whom thou seest crucified yonder; for there can be no compromise between a condemned culprit and his judge, No: 'If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him'; for the friendship of the world is enmity towards God. And even that is not all," Grace goes on to say. "By that same Cross thou, too, art crucified unto the world. To the world He is a despised, rejected outcast, crucified outside the camp; and as He is, so art thou in this present world. Surely thou canst not refuse to bear His reproach, to whom thou owest thy all of dignity and honour. But even this is not all. Thou art crucified unto the world; 'for thou art dead, and thy life is hid with Christ in God.' Thy old worldly life has been forfeited; but through death and resurrection thou hast been born again as a citizen of the New Jerusalem. Thou art raised up into the heavenly places in Christ Jesus; and now thou art not of the world, as He is not of the world. Art thou content to accept the privileges of the Atonement? Thou rejoicest to accept them. Then understand that one of the privileges of the Atonement is, that thou shouldst be separated, by the very terms of the Atonement, from thy old relationship to a God-resisting world — a world which has presented itself to the hearts of its children as a substitute for the Being to whom it owed its origin." Can we conceive it possible for a true believer to address his Saviour thus: "O Lord, I desire to escape hell, and I understand that Thy Atonement has been made in order that I may escape it; but I understand also that Thy Atonement had in view several other objects, about which I have no concern. I gather that it was also designed to save me from sin; but about that I am indifferent, so long as I escape sin's consequences. I will accept the immunity from condemnation. I will be very glad to know that the doors of hell are shut in my face, and that the doors of heaven are opened. But further than this I have no desire; indeed, were I to accept more, the consequences to myself might not be pleasant." It is, perhaps, impossible to conceive of such language in the lips of any true child of God; yet I fear that such words describe only too accurately the attitude assumed by too many who think themselves Christians indeed. They seek to retain

sufficient religion to enable them to entertain the hope of heaven; but they cover this over so skilfully with a cloak of worldly conformity, that they are hardly suspected by their acquaintance and friends of possessing any religion at all. Such Christians attempt to lead a double life in religious society; they can talk as well as any one on religious subjects, and may pass with strangers for earnest and decided Christians; but amongst the citizens of the world they assume quite a different manner, and can be as flippant and frivolous and insincere as any with whom they associate. Yes; it must be one thing or the other — the world or God; we cannot choose both. If we decide to choose the world and seek a substitute for God, then let us get the very best substitute we possibly can find. Do you select money for your substitute? If it be pleasure you select, then live for pleasure. Our choice lies between the two; but ere we decide for the world, let us remember the solemn sentence uttered by inspired lips, but amply confirmed by daily observation, "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof." If we make choice of it, we cannot keep it; if we decline to deny it, it will soon deny us.

(W. H. M. H. Aitken.)

1.1 The Engrafted Word

James 1:21-22

Why lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word...

It is only in the apprehension of what we really are that the Word begins to be engrafted. We may have correct theories about the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the mischief that it works; but it is when we see ourselves in the mirror, and discern what sin has done for us, that God's view of sin begins to be ours, and we shrink from it and long to be saved from it, as if it really were what "the Word" represents it as being — a terrible and fatal disease, a very plague-spot in the soul. You shall see two persons going out of the same church, after having listened to the same sermon. They are both, we will say, sinners, and unforgiven sinners; but the one is full of admiration of all that he has heard. "What a magnificent sermon! I never heard anything more scathing than his denunciation of sin. How he did show it up! I really think he is the most impressive preacher I ever listened to." And the other slips away in silence like one ashamed; his whole life rises up in witness against him. The preacher's voice has seemed to thunder in his ear, "Thou art the man!" His self-complacency is rent to shreds; he feels, like the publican, as though he could not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven. He retreats into the solitude of his own chamber, and casts himself upon his knees with a cry of anguish, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" What is it that makes the two to differ? In the one case the Word has been heard, and only heard; and in the other case it has been implanted. In both cases the mirror has been presented; but in the one case the man has been content with a glance, and then straightway has forgotten what manner of man he was; while the other has looked boldly and resolutely into the glass, until his inmost conscience has been roused and his very heart appalled by what he has seen there. The image still haunts him; he cannot escape from it. His self-esteem is levelled in the dust; he has seen his natural face in the glass, and he has really discovered what manner of man he is.

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

1.1 The Epiphany and Mission of Grace

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,...

To this important statement the apostle is led up by the consideration of certain very homely and practical duties which fall to the lot of Christians in various walks of life, and these matters he refers to as "the things pertaining to sound doctrine." He has a word of practical counsel for several distinct classes of persons; for he knows the wisdom of being definite. In the connection indicated by that little word "for" we have both an introduction to, and a striking illustration of, the great truth that the passage is designed to set forth. It is the gospel with its wondrous revelation of grace that is to provide us with new and high incentives bo a life of practical virtue and holiness. It is because we are not under the law, but under grace, that the righteousness of the law is to be fulfilled in us. To destroy the works of the devil, and to restore and perfect the grandest work of God on earth, was indeed an undertaking worthy of such conditions as the Incarnation and the atonement. The apostle speaks of grace itself before he proceeds to indicate the effects of grace, and of the first grand object and work of grace before he proceeds to enlarge upon its ulterior effects. He begins with the assertion that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation to all men hath appeared." In these opening words, first our attention is invited to this central object, the grace of God, then to the fact of its epiphany or manifestation, and then to its first most necessary purpose and mission — the bringing of salvation within the reach of all men.

I.ALL TRUE AND EVANGELICAL RELIGION MUST HAVE ITS COMMENCEMENT IN THE APPREHENSION OF DIVINE GRACE, AND THEREFORE IT IS OF NO SMALL IMPORTANCE THAT WE SHOULD ENDEAVOUR CLEARLY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS DENOTED BY THE WORD. Divine grace, we may say, is the child of love and the parent of mercy. The essential love of the great Father's heart takes definite form, and accommodates itself to our need; reveals itself in facts, and presents itself for our acceptance; and then we call it grace. That grace received rescues from the disastrous effects of sin; heals our inward diseases, and comforts our sorrows; and then we call it mercy. But grace does not exhaust itself in the production of mercy any more than love exhausts itself in the production of grace. The child leads us back to the parent; the experience of mercy leads us back to that "grace wherein we stand"; and the enjoyment of grace prepares us for the life of love, and for that wondrous reciprocity of affection in which the heavenly Bridegroom and His Bride are to be bound together forever. Thus of the three mercy ever reaches the heart first; and it is through accepted mercy that we apprehend revealed grace; similarly it is through the revelations of grace that we learn the secret of eternal love. And as with the individual so with mankind at large. Mercy, swift-winged mercy, was the first celestial messenger that reached a sin-stricken world; and in former dispensations it was with mercy that men had most to do. But if former dispensations were dispensations of mercy, the present is preeminently the dispensation of grace, in which it is our privilege not only to receive mercy, but to apprehend the attitude of God towards us from which the mercy flows. But let us remember that though specially

revealed to us now, the grace of God towards humanity has existed from the very first. The Lamb was slain in the Divine foreknowledge before the foundation of the world. But the grace of God has in it a further and higher object than the mere provision of a remedy for human sin — than what is merely remedial. God has purposed in His own free favour towards mankind to raise man to a position of moral exaltation and glory, the very highest, so far as we know, that can be occupied or aspired to by a created intelligence. Such is the destiny of humanity. This is the singular favour which God designs for the sons of men. God's favour flows forth to other intelligences also, but not to the same degree, and it is not manifested after the same fashion. This eternal purpose of God, however, which has run through the long ages, was not fully revealed to the sons of men until the fulness of time arrived. It was revealed only in parts and in fragments, so to speak. From Adam to John the Baptist every man that ever went to heaven went there by the grace of God. The grace of God has constantly been in operation, but it was operating in a concealed fashion. Even those who were the subjects of Divine grace seem scarcely to have known how it reached them, or in what manner they were to be affected by any provision that it might make to meet their human sins. Before the full favour of God could be revealed to mankind it would seem to have been necessary first of all that man should be put under a disciplinary training, which should induce within him a conviction of the necessity for the intervention of that favour, and dispose him to value it when it came. Grace, we have already said, is the child of love and the parent of mercy. We discover now that the love of God is not a passive, inert possibility, but a living power that takes to itself definite form, and hastens to meet and overcome the forces of evil to which we owe our ruin.

II. But further, the apostle not only calls our attention to Divine grace, but he proceeds to state with great emphasis THAT IT HAS APPEARED OR BEEN MADE MANIFEST. We are no longer left in doubt as to its existence, or permitted to enjoy its benefits without knowing whence they flow. In order to be manifested, the grace of God needed not only to be affirmed, but to be illustrated, I may say demonstrated, and then only was man called upon to believe in it. It might have been written large enough for all the world to see, that God was love. It might have been blazoned upon the starry heavens so that every eye might have read the wondrous sentence, and yet I apprehend we should have been slow to grasp the truth which the words contain, had they not been brought within reach of our finite apprehension in concrete form in the personal history, in the life, in the action, in the sorrow, in the death of God's own Son. When I turn my gaze towards the person of Christ I am at liberty to doubt God's favour towards me no longer. I read it in every action, I discover it in every word. Here is the first thought that brings rest to the heart of man. It has been demonstrated by the Incarnation and by the Atonement, that God's attitude on His side towards us is already one of free favour — favour toward all, however far we may have fallen, and however undeserving we may be in ourselves. You often hear people talking about making their peace with God. Well, the phrase may be used to indicate what is perfectly correct, but the expression in itself is most incorrect, for peace with God is already made. God's attitude towards us is already an assured thing. We have no occasion to go about to ask ourselves, "How shall we win God's favour?" It is possible for a person to be full of friendly intentions to me, and yet for me to retain an attitude of animosity and enmity towards him. That does not alter his character towards me, or his attitude towards me; but it does prevent me from reaping any benefit from that attitude. And so, I repeat, the only point of uncertainty lies in our attitude towards God, not in His attitude towards us.

III. Thus the apostle affirms that THIS GRACE OF GOD "BRINGETH SALVATION TO EVERY MAN." Yes, God's free favour, manifested in the person of His own blessed Son, is designed to produce saving effects upon all. God makes no exception, excludes none. All are not saved. But why not? Not because the grace of God does not bring salvation to every man, but because all men do not receive the gift which the grace of God has brought to them. There are necessarily two parties to such a transaction. Before any benefit can accrue from a gift there must be a willingness on the one side to give, and a willingness on the other side to receive, and unless there be both of these conditions realised no satisfactory result can ensue. Here then is a question for us all: What has the grace of God, which is designed to have a saving effect upon all men, done for us? Has it saved us, or only enhanced our condemnation? Now we maintain that the enjoyment of the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins is needed before our experience can assume a definitely Christian form. The first thing that grace does is to bring salvation to me; and until I accept this I am not in a position to accept her other gifts. Grace cannot teach until I am in a position to learn, and I am not in a position to learn until I am relieved from anxiety and fear as to my spiritual condition. Go into yonder prison, and set that wretched felon in the condemned cell to undertake some literary work, if he is a literary man. Put the pen into his hand, place the ink and the paper before him. He flings down the pen in disgust. How can he set to work to write a history or to compose a romance, however talented or gifted he may be by nature, so long as the hangman's rope is over his head and the prospect of a coming execution staring him in the face? Obviously the man's thoughts are all in another direction — the question of his own personal safety preoccupies his mind. Give him that pen and paper to write letters which he thinks may influence persons in high quarters with a view to obtaining a reprieve, and his pen will move quickly enough. I can understand his filling up reams of paper on that subject, but not on any other. Is it likely that a God who has shown His favour towards us by the gift of His own Son should desire to keep us in uncertainty as to the effects of that grace upon our own case? Does not the very fact, that it is grace that has brought salvation to us, render it certain that it must be in the mind of God that we should have the full enjoyment of it? Let us rather ask, how can we obtain this knowledge of salvation, this inward conviction that all is well? The answer is a very simple one. Grace brings salvation within our reach as something designed for us. Not to tantalize us by exciting desires destined never to be realised, but in order that we may have the full benefit of it — the free favour of God has brought salvation within our reach to the very doors of our hearts. Surely we dishonour God when we for a moment suppose that He does not intend us to enjoy the blessing which His grace brings to us. All the deep and precious lessons that grace has to teach are, we may say, simply so many deductions from the first great object lesson — Calvary. It is through the Cross of Christ that the grace of God hath reached a sinful world; it is on the Cross that grace is revealed and by that Cross that its reality is demonstrated. But we may also add that it is in the Cross that grace lies hidden. Yes, it is all there; but faith has to search the storehouse and examine the hidden treasure, and find out more and more of the completeness of that great salvation which the grace of God has brought within our reach; nor shall we ever know fully all that has thus been brought within our reach until we find ourselves saved at last with an everlasting salvation — saved from all approach of evil or danger into that kingdom of glory which grace has opened to all believers.

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

1.1 The Excuses

Luke 14:16-24

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 The Eye of God

Genesis 16:13-14

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

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

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

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

(W. Hay Aitken, M. A.)

1.1 The Far Country

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons:...Luke 15:11-32

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

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

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

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

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

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

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