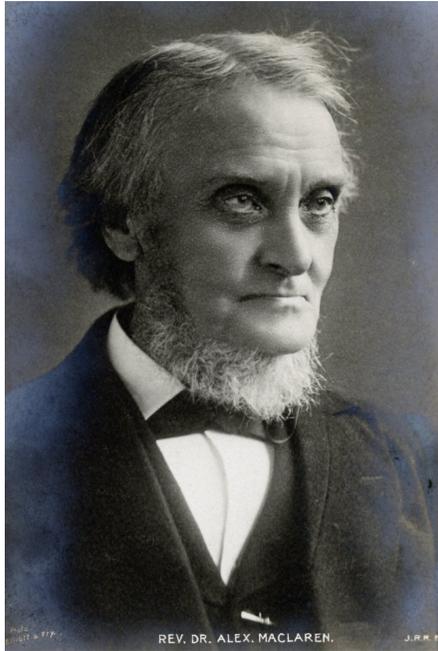


EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Volume 16



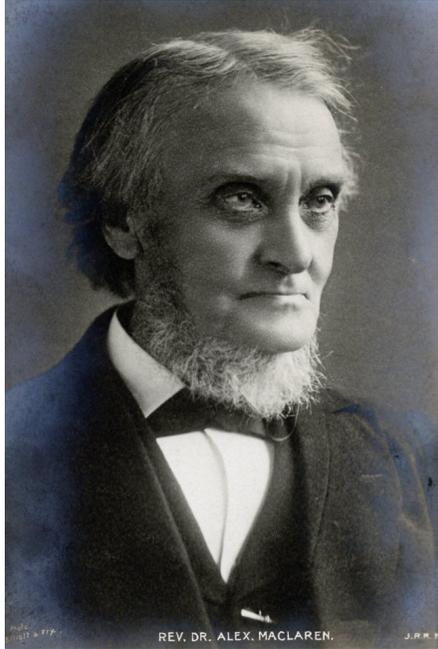
by

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.
(1826-1910)

PHILEMON, HEBREWS, JAMES, 1 PETER

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PHILEMON

Philemon 1:19--OWING OURSELVES TO CHRIST

I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto Me even thine own self beside.’
— Philemon 1:19.

THE incomparable delicacy of this letter of Paul’s has often been the theme of eulogium. I do not know that anywhere else in literature one can find such a gem, so admirably adapted for the purpose in hand. But beyond the wonderful tenderness and ingenuity born of right feeling and inbred courtesy which mark the letter, there is another point of view from which I have been in the habit of looking at it, as if it were a kind of parable of the way in which our Master pleads with us to do the things that He desires.

The motive and principles of practical Christianity are all reducible to one — imitation of Jesus Christ. And therefore it is not fanciful if here we see, shining through the demeanour and conduct of the Apostle, some hint of the manner of the Master.

I venture to take these words as spoken to each Christian soul by a higher and greater voice than Paul’s. ‘I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto Me even thine own self besides.’

I. The first thing upon which I touch is our transcendent debt.

The Christian teacher may say to the soul which by his ministrations has been brought back to God and to peace in a very real sense: Thou owest thyself to me.

And the bond which knits any of us, dear brethren, of whom that is true to one another, is one the tenderness of which cannot be

overestimated. I hope I am speaking to some hearts to whom my words come with a power greater than their intrinsic force deserves, because this sacredest of all human ties has, by God's mercy, been established between us.

But I pass from that altogether to the consideration of the loftier thought that is here. It is a literal fact that all of you Christian people, if you are Christians in any real sense, do owe your whole Selves to Jesus Christ.

Does a child owe itself to its parent? And has not Jesus Christ, if you are His, breathed into you by supernatural and real communication a better life and a better self, so that you have to say: 'I live, yet not I, but Jesus Christ liveth in me.' And if that be so, is not your spiritual being, your Christian self, purely and distinctly a gift from Him?

Does a man who is lying wrestling with mortal disease, and who is raised up by the skill and tenderness of his physician, owe his life to the doctor? Does a man who is drowning, and is dragged out of the river by some strong hand, owe himself to his rescuer? And is it not true that you and I were struggling with a disease which in its present form was mortal, and would very quickly end in death? Is it not true that all souls separated from God, howsoever they may seem to be living, are dead: and have not you been dragged from that living death by this dear Lord, so that, if you have not perished, you owe yourselves to Him?

Does a madman, who has been restored to self-control and sanity, owe himself to the sedulous care of him that has healed him? And is it not true, paradoxical as it sounds, that the more a man lives to himself the less he possesses himself; and that you have been delivered, if you are Christian men and women, from the tyranny of lust and passions, and from the abject servitude to the lower parts of your nature, and to all the shabby tyrants, in time and circumstance, that rob you of yourself; and have been set free and made sane and sober, and your own masters and your own owners, by Jesus Christ?

To live to self is to lose self, and when we come to ourselves we depart from ourselves; and He who has enabled us to rule our own mutinous and anarchic nature, and to put will above passions and tastes and flesh, and conscience above will, and Christ above conscience has given us the gift which we never had before, of an assured possession of our own selves.

So, in simplest verity, as the Deliverer from the death that slays us, as the Restorer to us of the power of self-control and ownership, and as the Granter to us of a new and better life, which becomes the very self of our selves, and the heart of *our* being, Jesus Christ has given to us this great gift, and can look each of us in the face and say: 'I made thee.' The Eternal Word is Creator. 'I redeemed thee; I dwell in thee; I am thy better self, and thou owest to Me thine own self besides.'

II. Now for a word, in the next place, as to the all. comprehending obligation which is based upon this debt.

If it be true that by the sacrifice of Himself. Christ has given us ourselves, what then? Why, then, dear brethren, the only adequate response to that gift, made ours at such cost to the Giver, is to give our selves hack wholly to Him who gave Himself wholly to us. Christ can only buy me at the cost of Himself. Christ only wants myself when He gives Himself. In the sweet commerce of that reciprocal love which is the foundation of all blessedness, the only equivalent for a heart is a heart. As in our daily life, and in our sweet human affections, husband and wife, and parent and children, have nothing that they can barter the one with the other except mutual interchange of self; so Jesus Christ's great gift to me can only be acknowledged, adequately responded to, when I give myself to Him.

'I give Thee all, I can no more, Poor though the offering be, '

must be the only language that can satisfy that infinite hunger of the divine human heart over us which prompted the death upon Calvary

and made it, in His eyes who paid it, the only price to pay for the recompense of our love.

O brethren, surely when those majestic lips bend themselves into the utterance, 'Thou owest Me thine own self besides,' surely, surely, the answer that will spring to all our lips is: 'We live not to ourselves, but to Thee.'

And if I might for a moment dwell upon the definite particulars into which such an answer will expand itself, I might say that this entire surrender of self will be manifested by the occupation of all our nature with Jesus Christ. He is meant to be the food of my mind as truth; He is meant to be the food of my heart as love; He is meant to be the *Lord* of my will as supreme Commander. Tastes, inclinations, faculties, hopes, memories, desires, aspirations, they are all meant as so many tendrils by which my many-fingered spirit can twine itself round Him, and draw from Him nourishment and peace. Not that He demands that we should cease to exercise these faculties of ours upon other objects which He Himself has provided, but that in all the lower reaches and ranges of our mental and spiritual occupations, in all our human loves and efforts and desires, there should blend the thought of Him. Just as a beam of light, if it struck down on us *now*, would disperse none of the motes which would be revealed dancing in its path, so the love of Christ and the occupation of our whole nature with Him, would give a glory to the lesser objects to which our other faculties and desires may turn. If we loved one another in Him we should find each other worthier of our love. If we pursued truth and study and knowledge in Him we should find the knowledge easier and more blessed. If all our hopes, desires, and efforts were illuminated by a reference to Himself, then they would all flash up into beauty and power.

And again, this entire self-surrender should maul lest itself in an utter and absolute submission to, and conformity with, His will. The slave has no will but his master's. That is degradation and

blasphemy when it is tried to be enforced or practised as between two men; but it is honour and dignity and blessedness when it is practised as to Christ. Submit! submit! Obey! obey! Let your wills be held in suspense until His is manifested; and when it is, then cheerfully take what He sends, If His hand comes blighting and blasting, bow! If His hand comes pointing and directing, follow! The surrender of self must be accomplished in the region of the will And when I can say, 'Not my will, but Thine be done,' then, and in that measure, I can say, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,'

Again, this entire surrender will manifest itself in the devotion of our whole being to His name and glory. Words easily spoken! words which if they were truly transmuted, into life by any of us would revolutionise our whole nature and conduct! To serve Him, to make Him the End for which we live; to try, as our highest purpose, to spread His sweet name, and to advance His Kingdom — theoretically that is what you Christian men and women say you are doing, by the profession that you make. Practically, I wonder how many of the people who owe themselves to Jesus Christ have never, in all their lives, done a thing for the simple purpose of honouring and glorifying His name.

And further, this entire surrender of self will manifest itself in regard not only to our being and our acting, but to our having. I do not want to dwell upon this point at any length, but let me remind you, dear friends, that a slave has no possessions of his own. And you and I, if we are our own owners are so only because we are Christ's slaves. Therefore we have nothing. In the old, bad days the slave's cottage, his little bits of chattels, the patch of garden ground with its vegetables, and the few coins that he might have saved by.. selling these, they all belonged to his master because he belonged to his master. And that is true about you and me, and our balance at our bankers' and our houses and our possessions of all sorts.

We say we believe that; do we administer these possessions as if we did believe it? Oh, if there came into our hearts, and kept there, the gush of thankfulness which is the only reasonable answer to the great rush of sacrificing love which Christ has poured upon us, there would be no more difficulties about money in regard of Christian enterprise. Jesus is 'worthy to receive riches.' Let us see to it that, being His slaves we do not hide away what He has given us from the service of Him to whom it belongs.

And *now*, dear brethren, all that sacrifice of which have been speaking, while it is the plainest practical Christianity, and the only kind of life that corresponds to the facts of our relation to Jesus Christ, is a terrible contrast and a sharp rebuke to the average type of Christian among us. I do not want, God knows, I do not want to scold. And I know that if such surrender as my text implies is painful to any man, it is not worth the making; but I beseech you, Christian people, as I would plead with mine own self, to take these simple, threadbare thoughts into your hearts and consciences until it shall become pain to you to keep back, and a joy to surrender, all that you have to the Lord to whom we owe ourselves.

III. Lastly, and one word, about the repayment. Jesus Christ stops in no man's debt. There is an old story in one of the historical books of the Old Testament about people who, in the middle of a doubtful negotiation, were smitten by conscience, and drew back from it. But one of them, with commercial shrewdness, remembered that a portion of their capital was already invested, and he says, 'What shall we do for the thousand talents that we have given, and are now sacrificing at the bidding of conscience?' And the answer was: 'The Lord is able to give thee much more than these.' That is true of all sacrifices for Him. He has given us abundant wages beforehand. What we give is His before it was ours. It remains His when it is called ours. We but give Him back His own. There is really nothing to repay, yet He repays, in a hundred ways. He does so by giving us a keen joy in the act of surrender.

That is fifty thousand times greater than the joy of keeping — or rather the difference between the two is not a question so much of quantity as of quality. What I give to Him I have; like a stone dropped into a stream, if the sun be shining and the ripples glancing, it looks far bigger, and any colour upon it is far brighter there, than when it lay in my hand. So all that is given to Jesus Christ comes back upon a man transformed and glorified, and when we give ourselves to Him, weak and sinful, He renders us back saints to ourselves. The joy of surrender is the sweetest of all the joys that a man has. ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive,’ and Christ bestows ourselves upon ourselves that we may have some portion of that joy.

And with it come other gladnesses. There is not only the joy of surrender, and the enhanced possession of all which is surrendered, but there is the larger possession of Himself which comes always as the issue of a surrender of ourselves to Him. When we thus yield He comes into our souls. It is only our self-engrossment that keeps Him out of our hearts; and when our hearts bow, they open: and when we give ourselves to Him it is possible for Him, in larger measure to give Himself to us. If you want to be assured of your gospel, live by it. If you want to have more of certitude of possessing His promises, try the experiment of yielding to His love. If you want more of Christ, give yourselves more to Him.

And as for the future, I need say little about that. There is a future, the overwhelming magnitude of whose recompense of reward shall beggar our loftiest anticipations, and surprise us with its greatness as well as shame us with the consciousness which it awakens that our poor, stained service is far overpaid by it. Such reaping from such sowing will make the joy of the harvest a wonder and a rapture. Who hath first given to Jesus, and it shall be recompensed to him again?

And now I beseech you to listen to your Saviour appealing to you with the tender word: 'I have given to thee Myself; and therein I have given to thee thyself. Now what dost thou give to Me?'

HEBREWS

Hebrews 2:1—DRIFTING

'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.' — Hebrews 2:1.

'LET them slip'; that conveys a vivid picture of a man holding some treasure with limp fingers, and allowing it to drop from his nerveless grasp. But, striking as that picture is, the one which is really expressed by the original word is more striking still. The Revised Version correctly renders, instead of, 'we should let them slip,' 'we drift away from them'; and that is the real meaning. 'Drifting' is the thing to be afraid of. Just as some boat, not made fast to the bank, certainly glides down stream so quietly and with so little friction that her passengers do not know that they are moving until they come up on deck, and see new fields around them, so the 'things which we have heard,' and to which we ought to be moored or anchored, we shall drift, drift, drift away from, and, in nine eases out of ten, shall not feel that we are moving, till we are roused by hearing the noise of the whirlpools and the falls close ahead of us; and look round and see a strange country. 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest, haply, we should drift away from them.'

I. So my text suggests, first, our danger.

We are in danger of drifting unconsciously from the anchorage of our faith— namely, the great words which we have heard. The currents that are brought to bear upon us run as strong as do any that

are marked on charts and are the terror of sailors, and they need as careful steering and as great engine-power to resist them. Let us try to think of one or two of them.

There is the current of years. Time changes us all; and there is many a professing Christian who all unconsciously has slid away from his early better self, and is not now as devout a man — or with his life as completely under the influence of Christ and His gospel as he was in the early days. He keeps up appearances, but they are deceptive, and years have carried him down the stream and away from his old self.

There is the current of familiarity with the truth—It is a sad illustration of the weakness of human nature that we all tend to think that the familiar is commonplace, and that it is almost impossible for us, without a very specific and continuous effort, to keep up as fresh and deep an interest in a truth that we have believed all our days as in one that comes to us with the attraction of novelty. It has been well said that the most certain truths too often lie ‘in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with exploded errors.’ We all know how silently and unconsciously we lose our hold of the things that we think to be most surely believed among us; and whilst we fancy that we are grasping them they are gone from us just because we had never doubted, and always ‘believed’ them. Conjurers will tell you that if you press a coin in a man’s palm and shut the hand quickly, he does not know for a moment or two whether the coin remains there or not. There are many of us who have closed our hands on the precious gold coin of the gospel, and it has been filched away from us, and we do not know that it has been until we open our hand and see the empty palm. We drift away by time and by familiarity.

Then there is constantly acting upon us the current of the continual pressure of our daily cares and anxieties and duties and joys. All these in their minuteness and their multiplicity tend to weaken our possession of, and to carry us away from, the great central truths of

the gospel. A snowflake is a very tiny thing, but when the air is full of them, minute as they are, their white multitudes will bring death and a grave to the creatures on which they fall. And so the thousand trifles of our daily lives are all acting upon us, whether we know it or not, to absorb interest and attention and effort, and to Withdraw all three from ‘the truths which we have heard.’ You may remember the story of the man in the Old Testament who had a prisoner put into his hands, with an injunction to guard carefully against his escape; and how, as he naively says, ‘As thy servant was busy here and there, lo! he was gone. I had so many other things to do, on this side and that, and in front and behind, that I could not always keep my eyes on him; and he slipped through my fingers, and showed a clean pair of heels, and that is all I know. I never knew that he had gone until I came to look for him in an interval of my business, and found his fetters were empty.’

Ah, dear friends, that is the history of the decline and fall of many a professing Christian’s Christianity: ‘Thy servant was busy here and there doing his day’s work’ — the legitimate things that we are bound to *do*, and which are not meant to be occasions for withdrawing our hold of the truths of the gospel, but for deepening it. We are busied about them. and that which was committed to our care slips away, and we never know it.

Yes, and it is not only ‘secular’ work that does that. It may be done by what is called Christian work too. I believe, for my part, that much as one rejoices in the continual calls for service and activity that are addressed to the Christian Church to-day, there is a distinct danger that there shall be so much work that there is no time for solitude, for contemplation, for reviewing and deepening our communion with Jesus Christ. And I sometimes feel as if I would like to say to all Sunday-school teachers, and visitors, and Christian Endeavourers, and all the host of ‘Christian workers’: ‘Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile,’ and then you will be ready for better work. At all events, it is quite possible— if

we may so use a phrase which is, perhaps, done violence to in such a use — to water other people's vineyards, and leave our own vines to die for want of tending and irrigation.

There are other currents as well, about which I need not say much here, but no doubt they are running very strong to-day, all round us: tides of opinion and ways of thinking about the gospel which will rob us, if we do not take care, of the simplicity and depth of our faith in that Saviour. I just specify these four currents: time, familiarity, work, and the prevalent tone of the people round about us — all these forces are continually operating on the Christian men and women of this day, and in many cases are doing their deadly work.

II. So let me say that, secondly, my text suggests our security. 'Let us give the more earnest heed.' Just because these forces are in operation, therefore there is more need that the vessel shall be very safely moored to the strong post on the quay, than there would be if it was lying in a tideless harbour where the water was motionless. 'The more earnest heed' — if we know the danger we have gone a long way to escape it. If we will open our eyes to the fact that all about us there are thieves lurking and waiting to steal away our possessions, then we shall have done something towards securing the possessions. As in Christ's parable, there are light-winged flocks of birds filling the air about us, and ready to pounce down upon the seed the moment the sower's back is turned, and with a dig and a peck to pick it up, and then with glancing whirl of the wings to be off, bearing away their prey out of sight and out of shot. If we realise that that is the condition of things, we shall have boys with clappers in the field to keep off the birds, at all events. If we have a clear sight of the fact that the world is full of thieves, we shall be likely to get strong locks to our doors, and bars to the windows, and not go to sleep, lest the house should be broken into.

But let me say a word or two about what we ought to do. 'Let us give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard.' That

word 'give heed' suggests that there must be a concentration of attention, and a distinct effort of will in the way of resisting the tendencies. If you hold a thing slackly it goes out of your hands. If you have flung a careless bight of the rope round the post, and then lie down to sleep, the force of the stream will do the rest. There must be resistance to the continually acting tendencies, or they will become facts and realities. I have already suggested in the previous remarks what seems to me to be the great thing wanted in our present average Christian character, and that is the honest occupation of mind and heart with the truths of the gospel. We read newspapers, books, and magazines of all sorts, and we do not read our Bibles as our fathers used to do. There are many professing Christian people who do not make the Word of God familiar by daily and prayerful perusal; and there are many who do not understand much more about the whole majestic orb of divine truth than the one bit of it that they beheld at first, when they turned from darkness to light. That Jesus Christ is your Saviour is, in one sense, the whole gospel, but that is no reason for your not trying to understand all that is involved in, and all that flows from, that great truth, and all on which it rests as upon rock pillars. If we had more honest occupation of thought with, and more quiet feeding like a ruminant animal upon, the truths of the gospel, we might bid defiance to all the currents to sweep us away.

There is another thing by which we may hold ourselves fast moored to these truths — that is, by bringing them habitually to bear upon and to shape and dominate the little things of our daily lives. One way by which we can freshen up the most familiar, common, place truth is by acting on it. If you will do that, you will find that the old truths have sap and vitality in them yet. People talk about 'toothless commonplaces.' Take the commonplaces of your Christian profession, and conscientiously try to shape your lives by them; and take my word for it, you will find that they are not toothless. There is a bite in them. If a man wants to be confirmed in his creed, let him make it the law of his conduct. So if we will meditate upon the truth,

and if we will live the truth, we may snap our fingers at all the currents that seek to draw us away from it.

III. And now one last word. — My text suggests the reasons for this exhortation.

You will notice that it begins with a ‘therefore,’ and that ‘therefore’ sums up all that has gone before in the epistle; and it is further expanded by a ‘for’ which follows. And what are the reasons thus suggested? I have no time to enlarge on them, and I do not know that they need it.

They are three, and the first of them is the dignity of the speaker. The writer has just been demonstrating the superiority of the Son by whom ‘God hath, in these last times, spoken unto us,’ over all former ministers and messengers of His Word, and over all angels before His throne. And he says, because such august lips have spoken, ‘Let us give earnest heed to the things which we have heard.’ For ‘if the words spoken by angels’ demanded attention, how much more the word spoken ‘in these last times unto us by the Son,’ ‘whom He hath appointed heir of all things.’ That is reason number one.

Reason number two is the steadfastness of the truth. I have been working perhaps till it is threadbare the metaphor underlying my text; I come back to it for a moment more. What is the good of a strong cable, which is my faith, unless it is wrapped round a strong post? Why should I give heed to a truth, unless it is an irrefragable and undeniable and important truth? And so says this writer, it is worth your while to give your whole attention to these truths, and to grapple yourselves to them with hooks of steel, for they stand fast, The word spoken by angels was steadfast, but the word of the gospel was at the first spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed by them that heard it. He fixed the post; they hammered it in; there it stands. You may hold on to it, and if your tackle does not give, nothing will sweep you away.

And reason number three is, what we lose if we let our moorings there slip. 'For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received its just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect...' — not *reject*; not *fight against*, simply 'neglect' — 'so great salvation,' and so let ourselves be drifted away from the things which we have heard?

Hebrews 2:8, 9—MANHOOD CROWNED IN JESUS

'We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus.' — Hebrews 2:8, 9.

ONE of our celebrated astronomers is said to have taught himself the rudiments of his starry science when lying on the hill-side, keeping his father's sheep. Perhaps the grand psalm to which these words refer had a similar origin, and may have come from the early days of the shepherd king, when, like those others of a later day, he abode in the field of Bethlehem, keeping watch over his flock by night. The magnificence of the Eastern heavens, with their 'larger constellations burning,' filled his soul with two opposite thoughts — man's smallness and man's greatness. I suppose that in a mind apt to pensive reflections, alive to moral truths, and responsive to the impressions of God's great universe, the unscientific contemplation of any of the grander forms of nature produces that double effect. And certainly the grandest of them all, which is spread over our heads, little as we dwellers in cities can see the heavens for daily smoke and nightly lamps, forces both these thoughts upon us. They seem so far above us, they swim into their stations night after night, and look down with cold, unchanging beauty on sorrow, and hot strife, and shrieks, and groans, and death. They are so calm, so pure, so remote, so eternal. Thus David felt man's littleness. And yet — and yet, bigness is not greatness, and duration is not life, and the creature that knows God is highest. So the consciousness of man's separation from, and superiority to these silent stars, springs up strong and victorious over the other thought. Remember that, in

David's time, the nations near, who were believed to be the very centre of wisdom, had not got beyond the power of these impressions, but on Chaldean plains worshipped the host of heaven. The psalm then is a protest against the most fascinating, and to David's age the most familiar form of idolatry. These great lights are not rulers, but servants; we are more than they, because we have spirits which link us with God.

Then, kindling as he contemplates man as God meant him to be, the poet bursts into rapturous celebration of man's greatness in these respects — that he is visited by God, capable of divine communion, and a special object of divine care; that he is only lower than the loftiest. and that but in small degree and in one specific respect. because they, in their immortal strength, are not entangled in flesh as we; that over all others of God's creatures on earth he is king.

'Very fine words,' may be fairly said; 'but do they correspond to facts? What manhood are you talking about? Where is this being, so close to *God*, so lowly before Him, so firmly lord of all besides?' That is the question which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews deals with in our text. He has quoted the psalm as an illustration of his thesis that Christ, and we in Christ, are exalted above angels, and then he proceeds to admit that, as a matter of fact, men are not what David describes them as being. But the psalm is not, therefore, an exaggeration, nor a dream, nor a mere ideal of the imagination. True, as a matter of fact, men are not all this. But as a matter of fact Jesus Christ is, and in His possession of all that the psalm painted our possession is commenced and certified. It is an ideal picture, but it is realised in Jesus, and having been so in Him, we have ground to believe that it will be so in us. We see not yet all things put under man — alas no, but-we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour; and as He tasted death for every man, so in His exaltation He is prophecy and pledge that the grand old words shall one day be fulfilled in all their height and depth.

The text, then, brings before us a threefold sight. It bids us *look around*, and if that sadden us, it bids us look up, and thence it bids us draw confidence to *look forward*. There is an estimate of present facts, there is a perception by faith of the unseen fact of Christ's glory, and there follows from that the calm prospect for the future for ourselves and for our brethren. Let us deal with these considerations in order.

I. Look at the sight around us.

'We see not yet all things put under man.' Where are the men of whom any portion of the psalmist's words is true? *Look* at them — are these the men of whom he sings? Visited by God I crowned with glory and honour! having dominion over the works of His hands! Is this irony or fact?

Let consciousness speak. Look at ourselves. If that psalm be God's thought of man, the plan that He hangs up for us His workmen to build by, what a wretched thing my copy of it has turned out to be! Is this a picture of me? How seldom I am conscious of the visits of God; how full I am of weaknesses and imperfections — the solemn voice within me tells me at intervals when I listen to its tones. On my brow there gleams no diadem; from my life, alas! there shines at the best but a fitful splendour of purity, all striped with solid masses of blackness. And as for dominion over creatures, how superficial my rule over them, how real their rule over me! I can tame animals or slay them; I can use the forces of nature for my purposes; I can make machinery, and bid the lightning do my errands and carry messages, the burden of which is mostly money, or power, or sorrow. But all these, and the whole set of things like them, are not ruling over God's creation. That consists in using all for God, and for our own growth in wisdom, strength, and goodness; and he only is master of all things who is servant of God. 'All are yours, and ye are Christ's.' If so, what are most of us but servants, not lords, of earth and its goods? We fasten our very lives on them, we

tremble at the bare thought of losing them, we give our best efforts to get them — we say to the fine gold, ‘Thou art my confidence.’ We do not possess them, they possess us: and so, though materially we may have conquered the earth (and wonderfully proud of it we are now), spiritually, which is the same as to *say really*, the earth has conquered us.

The same impression of human incompleteness is made by all the records of human lives which we possess. Go into a library, and take down volume after volume—the biographies and autobiographies of the foremost men, the saints and sages whom we all reverence. Is there one on whose monument the old psalm could truthfully be written? Are not the honest autobiographies what one of the noblest of them is called, ‘Confessions’? Are not the memoirs the stories of flawed excellence, stained purity, limited wisdom? There are no perfect men in them — no men after the pattern of David’s words. Or if some enthusiastic admirer has drawn a picture without shadows, we feel that it is without life or likeness; and we look for faults and limitations that we may be sure of brotherhood.

And if we take a wider range, and listen to the sad voice of history chronicling the past, where in all her tragic story of bright hopes brought to nothing, of powers built up by force and rotted down by pride and selfishness, of war and wrong, of good painfully sought, and partially possessed, and churlishly treasured, and quickly lost — where on all her blotted pages, stained with tears, and sweat, and blood, do we find a record that verifies the singer’s rapture, and shows us men like this of the Psalm?

Or let observation speak. Bring Before your minds, by an exercise of imagination vivifying and uniting into one impression, the facts which we all know of the social and moral condition — to say nothing now of the religious state — of any country upon earth. Think of the men in all lands who are helpless, hopeless, full of animal sins and lusts, full of stupid ignorance. Take our psalm and

read it in some gaol, or in a lunatic asylum, or at the door of some gin-palace, or at the mouth of a court in the back streets of any city in England, and ask yourselves, ‘Are these people, with narrow foreheads and villainous scowls, with sodden cheeks and foul hands, the fulfilment or the contradiction of its rapturous words?’ Or think of naked savages, who look up to bears and lions as their masters, who are stunted by cold or enervated by heat, out of whose souls have died all memories beyond yesterday’s hunger, and all hopes greater than a full meal to-morrow — and say if these are God’s men. So little are they like it that some of us are ready to say that they are not men at all.

What then? Are we to abandon in despair our hopes for our fellows, and to smile with quiet incredulity at the rhapsodies of sanguine theorists like David? If we are to confine our view to earth — yes. But there is more to see than the sad sights around us. All these men — these imperfect, degraded, half-brutified men — have their share in our psalm. They have gone out and wasted their substance in riotous living; but from the swine-trough and the rags they may come to the best robe and the feast in the father’s house. The veriest barbarian, with scarcely a spark of reason or a flickering beam of conscience, sunken in animal delights, and vibrating between animal hopes and animal fears rote him may belong the wondrous attributes: to be visited by God, crowned with glory and honour, higher than all stars, and lord of all creatures.

It sounds like a wild contradiction, I know: and I do not in the least wonder that people pressed by a sense of all the misery that is done under the sun, and faintly realising for themselves Christ’s power to heal their own misery and cleanse their own sins, should fling away their Bibles, and refuse to believe that ‘God hath made of one blood all nations of men,’ and that Christ has a message for the world. I venture to believe both the one and the other. I believe that though angels weep, and we should be smitten with shame, at the sight of what man has made of man, and we of ourselves, yet that

God will be true though every man fail Him, and will fulfil unto the children the mercy which He has promised to the fathers. 'All the promises of God in Christ are yea,' And so against all the theories of the desperate school, and against all our own despondent thoughts, we have to oppose the sunny hopes which come from such words as those of our text. Looking around us, we have indeed to acknowledge with plaintive emphasis, 'we see not yet all things put under Him' — but, looking up, we have to add with triumphant confidence that we speak of a fact which has a real bearing on our hopes for men — 'we see Jesus.'

II. So, secondly, look upwards to Jesus.

Christ in glory appears to the author of this epistle to be the full realisation of the psalmist's ideal. Our text deals only with the exalted dignity and present majesty of the ascended Lord; but before touching upon that, we may venture, for a moment, to dwell upon the past of Christ's life as being also the carrying out of David's vision of true manhood. We have to look backward as well as upward if we would have a firm hope for men. The ascended Christ upon the throne, and the historical Christ upon the earth, teach us what man may be, the one in regard to dignity, the other in regard to goodness.

Here *is* a fact. Such a life was verily once lived on earth; a life of true manhood, whatever more it was. In it we may see two things: first, we may see from His perfect purity what it is possible for man to become; and second, we may see from His experience who said, 'The Father hath not left Me alone, because I do always the things which please Him,' how close a fellowship is possible between the human spirit that lives for and by obedience, and the Father of us all. The man Christ Jesus was visited by God, yea, God dwelt with Him ever; whatever more He was — and He was infinitely more — He was also our example of communion, as He was our example of righteousness.

And that life is to be our standard. I refuse to take other men, the highest, as specimens of what we may become. I refuse to take other men, the lowest, as instances of what we are condemned to be. Here in Jesus Christ is the type; and, albeit it is alone in its beauty, yet it is more truly a specimen of manhood than the fragmentary, distorted, incomplete men are who are found everywhere besides. Christ is the power to conform us to Himself, as well as the pattern of what we may be. He and none lower, He and none beside, is the pattern man. Not the great conqueror, nor the great statesman, nor the great thinker, but the great Lover, the perfectly good — is the man as God meant him to be. As it has been said, with pardonable extravagance, ‘Aristotle was but the rubbish of an Adam,’ so in sober truth we may affirm that the noblest and fairest characters, approximating as they may to the picture in the psalm, and giving us some reason to hope that more is possible for us than we sometimes think, are after all but fragments of precious stones as compared with that one entire and perfect chrysolite, whose unflawed beauty and completeness drinks in, and flashes forth, the whole light of God. He is not ashamed to call us brethren.

Therefore, if we would know what a man is, and what a man may become, let us not only look inward to our own faults, nor around us at these broken bits of goodness, but let us look back to Christ, and be of good cheer. We hear and see more than enough of men’s folly, stupidity, godlessness, and sin. Nevertheless — we see Jesus. Let us have hope.

But turn now to the consideration of what is more directly intended by our text, namely, the contemplation of Christ in the heavens, ‘crowned with glory and honour,’ as the true type of man. What does Scripture teach us to see in the exalted Lord?

It sets before us, first, a perpetual manhood. The whole force of the words before us depends on the assumption that, in all His glory and dominion, Jesus Christ remains what He was on earth, truly and

properly man. There is a strong tendency in many minds to think of Christ's incarnation and humanity as transitory. I do not mean that such a conception is thrown into articulate form as a conscious article of belief, but it haunts people none the less, and gives a feeling of unreality and remoteness to what the Scripture says of our Lord's present life. Many believers in the eternal existence and divinity of our Lord think of His incarnation much after the fashion in which heathendom conceived that the gods came down in the likeness of men — as if it were a mere transitory appearance, the wearing of a garb of human nature but for a moment. Whereas the Biblical representation is that for evermore, by an indissoluble union, the human is assumed into the divine, and that 'to-day and for ever' He remains the man Christ Jesus. Nor is a firm grasp of that truth of small importance, nor is the truth itself a theological subtlety, without bearing upon human interests and practical life. Rather it is the very hinge on which turn our loftiest hopes. Without it, that mighty work which He ever carries on, of succouring them that are tempted, and having compassion with us, were impossible. Without that permanent manhood, His mighty work of preparing a place for us, and making heaven a home for men because a Man is its Lord, were at an end. Without it, He in His glory would be no prophecy of man's dominion, nor would He have entered for us into the holy place. Grasp firmly the essential, perpetual manhood of Jesus Christ, and then to see Him crowned with glory and honour gives the triumphant answer to the despairing question that rises often to the lips of every one who knows the facts of life, 'Wherefore hast Thou made all men in vain?'

Again, we see in Jesus, exalted in the heavens, a corporeal manhood. That thought touches upon very dark subjects, concerning which Scripture says little, and no other voice says anything at all. The resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ are our great reasons for believing that man, in his perfect condition, has body as well as spirit. And that belief is one chief means of giving definiteness and reality to our anticipations of a future life. Without the belief of a

corporeal manhood, the unseen world becomes vague and shapeless, is taken out of the range of our faculties altogether, and soon becomes powerless to hold its own against the pressure of palpable, present realities. But we see Jesus — ascended up on high in man's body. Therefore He is somewhere now. Heaven is a place as well as a state; and however, for the present, the souls that sleep in Jesus may have to 'wait for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body,' and, being unclothed, may be wrapped about with Him and rest in His bosom, yet the perfect men who shall one day stand before the Lord, shall have body and soul and spirit — like Him Who is a man for ever, and for ever wears a human frame.

Further, we see in Jesus transfigured manhood. Once when He was on earth, as some hidden light breaks through all veils, the pent-up glory of the great 'God with us' seemed to stream through His flesh, and tinge with splendour even the skirts of His garments. 'He was transfigured before them,' not as it would appear by light reflected from above, but by radiance up-bursting from within. And besides all its other lessons, that solemn hour on the Mount of Transfiguration gave some small hint and prelude of the possibilities of glory that lay hidden in Christ's material body, which possibilities become realities after (though not, in His case, by) death; when He ascended up on high, beautiful and changed, being clothed with 'the body of His glory.' For Him, as for us, flesh here means weakness and dishonour. For us, though not for Him, flesh means corruption and death. For Him, as for us, that natural body, which was adequate to the needs and adapted to the material constitution of this earth, must be changed into the spiritual body correspondent to the conditions of that kingdom of God which flesh and blood cannot enter. For us, through Him, the body of humiliation shall be changed into likeness of the body of His glory. We see Jesus, and in Him manhood transfigured and perfected.

Finally, we see in Jesus sovereign manhood. The psalmist thought of man as crowned with glory and honour, as having dominion over the

works of God's hands. And here is his thought embodied in far higher manner than ever he imagined possible. Here is a man exalted to absolute, universal dominion. The sovereignty of Jesus Christ is not a metaphor, nor a rhetorical hyperbole. It is, it we believe the New Testament writers, a literal, prose fact. He directs the history of the world, and presides among the nations. He is the prince of all the kings of the earth. He wields the forces of nature, He directs the march of providence, He is Lord of the unseen worlds, and holds the keys of death and the grave. 'The government is upon His shoulders,' and upon Him hangs 'all the glory of His Father's house.' Angels served Him in His lowliness, and strengthened Him in His agony they watched His grave, and when He ascended on high, the multitudes of the heavenly hosts, even thousands of angels, were the chariot of the conquering Lord. Angels are His servants now, and all do worship Him. He holdeth the stars in His right hand, and all creatures gather obedient round His throne. His voice is law, His will is power. He says to this one 'Go,' and he goeth; He rebukes winds and seas, diseases and devils, and they obey; to all He says, 'Do this,' and they do it. He speaks, and it is done. 'On His head are many crowns.' Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ — and, seeing Jesus, we see man crowned with glory and honour.

III. Finally, then, look forward.

Though it be only too true that the vision seems to tarry, and that weary centuries roll on, and bring us but so little nearer its accomplishment; though the fair promise, at which the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, seems to have faded away; though the hope of the psalmist is yet unfulfilled; though the strain of a yet higher mood, proclaiming peace on earth, which later shepherds of Bethlehem heard from amid the silent stars, has died away, and the war shout lives on; still, in the strength which flows from seeing Jesus exalted, we can look for a certain future, wherein men shall be all that God proposed, and all that their

Saviour is. Rolling clouds hide the full view, but through them gleams the lustrous walls of the city which hath the foundations. We look forward, and we see men sharing in Christ's glory, and gathered together round His throne.

Christ is the measure of man's capacities. He is the true pattern of human nature. Christ is the prophecy and pledge of man's dominion. From Christ comes the power by which the prophecy is fulfilled, and the pattern reproduced in all who love Him. Whosoever is joined to Him receives into his soul that spirit of life in Christ which unfolds and grows according to its own law, and has for its issue and last result the entire conformity between the believing soul and the Saviour by whom it lives. It were a poor consolation to point to Christ and say, 'Look what man has become and may become,' unless we could also say, 'A real and living oneness exists between Him and all who cleave to Him, so that their characters are changed, their natures cleansed, their future altered, their immortal beauty secured.' He is more than pattern, He is power; more than specimen, He is source; more than example, He is redeemer. He has been made in the likeness of sinful flesh, that we may be in the likeness of His body of glory. He has been made 'sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.' His exaltation, if it were ever so much a fact, and ever so firmly believed, yields no basis for hope as to any beyond Himself, but on one supposition. To see man exalted and his glory ensured in Christ's, the glory of Christ must be connected, as is done in our text, with His tasting death for every man. When I know that He has died for me, and for all my brethren who sit in darkness, and hear each other groan as the poison shoots through their veins, then I can feel that, as He has been in the likeness of our death, we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.

Brethren, the Cross, and the Cross alone, certifies our participation in the Crown. Unless Jesus Christ have and exercise that wondrous power of delivering from sin and self, and of quickening to a new

life, which He exercises only as Sacrifice and Saviour, there were nothing which were more irrelevant to the hopes of man's future than the story of His purity and of His dominion. What were all that to men writhing with evil? What hope for single souls or for the world in the knowledge that He was good, or in the belief that He had gone up on high? If that were all, what would it all matter? The lack-lustre eyes that have grown wan with waiting will have no light of hope kindled in them by such a gospel as that. But bid them look, languid and weary as they are, to Him who is lifted up, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish — that vision will give to the still loftier sight of Christ on the throne its true meaning, as not a barren triumph for Himself alone, but as victory for us — yea, our victory in Him. If we can say, 'God, who is rich in mercy for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together,' then we can add, 'and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Jesus Christ,'

And what wonderful hopes, dimly discerned indeed, but firmly founded, we have a right to cherish, if what we see in Jesus we may predict for His brethren! We shall be like Him in all these points to which we have already referred. We, too, shall have a corporeal manhood transfigured and glorified. We, too, shall have perfect union and communion with the Father. We, *too*, shall be invested with all the unknown prerogatives which are summed up in that last promise of His, beyond which nothing more glorious can be conceived, 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne.' Then the ancient word will be fulfilled in manner beyond our dreams, 'Thou hast put all things under his feet.' Who can tell what accessions of power, what new faculties, what new relations to an external universe, what new capacity of impressing a holy will upon all things, what new capability of receiving from all things their -most secret messages concerning God their Maker, may be involved in such words?

We see darkly. The hopes for the future lie around us as flowers in some fair garden where we walk in the night, their petals closed and their leaves asleep, but here and there a whiter bloom gleams out, and sweet, faint odours from unseen sources steal through the dewy darkness. We can understand but little of what this majestic promise of sovereign manhood may mean. But the fragrance, if not the sight, of that gorgeous blossom is wafted to us. We know that 'the upright shall have dominion in the morning.' We know that to His servants authority over ten cities will be given. We know that we shall be 'kings and priests to God.' The fact we know, the contents of the fact we wait to prove. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.' Enough that we shall reign with Him, and that in the kingdom of the heavens dominion means service, and the least is the greatest.

We, too, shall be exalted above all creatures—far above all principality and power, even as Christ is Lord of angels. What that may include, we can but dimly surmise. Nearness to God, knowledge of His heart and will, likeness to Christ, determine superiority among pure and spiritual beings. And Scripture, in many a hint and half-veiled promise, bids us believe that men who have been redeemed from their sins by the blood of Christ, and have made experience of departure and restoration, are set to be the exponents of a deeper knowledge of God to powers in heavenly places, and, standing nearest the throne, become the chorus leaders of new praises from lofty beings who have ever praised Him on immortal harps. They who know sin, who remember sorrow, who learned God by the Cross of Christ, and have proved His forgiving and sanctifying grace, must needs have a more wondrous knowledge, and be knit to Him by a tenderer bond than the elder brethren who never transgressed His commandments. The youngest brother of the king is nearer to him than the oldest servant who stands before his face. Our brother is Lord of all, and His dominion is ours.

But we can speak little, definitely, about such matters. It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord. This confidence, which can be certain, though it be not accurate, should satisfy our minds without curious detail, and should quiet our hearts however they be tempted to cast it away. Many enemies whisper to us doubts. The devil tempted first to sin by insinuating the question, ‘Shall ye surely die?’ The devil often tempts now to sin by insinuating exactly the opposite doubt, ‘Can it be that you will live?’ It seems to us often incredible that such hopes of immortal life should be true about such poor creatures, such wretched failures, as we feel ourselves to be. It seems often incredible that they should have any connection with men such as we see them on the average to be. We are tempted, too, in these days, to think that our psalm belongs to an exploded school of thought, to a simple astronomy which made the earth the centre of the universe, and conceived of moon and stars as tiny spangles on the hem of light’s garment. We are told that science lights us to other conclusions as to man’s place in creation than such as David cherished. No doubt it does as to man physically considered. But the answer to my own evil conscience, to the sad inferences from man’s past and present, to the conclusions which are illegitimately sought to be extended from man’s material place in a material universe to man’s spiritual place as an immortal and moral being, lies in that twofold sight which we have been regarding— Christ on the cross the measure of man’s worth in the eyes of God, and of man’s place in the creation; Christ on the throne the prophecy of man’s dignity, and of his most sure dominion.

When bordering on despair at the sight of so much going wrong, so much ignorance, sorrow, and vice, so many darkened understandings and broken hearts, such wide tracts of savagery and godlessness, I can look up to Jesus, and can see far, far away — the furthest thing on the horizon — like some nebula, faint, it is true, and low down, but flickering with true starry light — the wondrous vision of many souls brought into glory, even a world redeemed.

When conscious of personal imperfection and much sin, no thought will bring peace nor kindle hope but this, that Christ has died to bring me to God, and lives to bring me to glory. Then, dear brethren, ‘behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.’

Behold Jesus entered within the veil for us. Look away from the imperfect men, the partial teachers, the incomplete saints, the powerless helpers around you, to Him, the righteous, the wise, the strong. Look at no man any more, as the hope for yourself, as the pattern for your life, save Jesus only. The gaze will feed your triumphant hope, and will make that hope a partial reality. Here you will be visited by God, here you will in some degree have all things for yours, if you are Christ’s. Here, from far beneath, look up through the heavens to Him who is ‘made higher than’ them all.

And hereafter, from the supreme height and pinnacle of the throne of Christ, we shall look down on sun, moon, and stars that once shone so far above us; and conscious that His grace has raised us up on high, and put all things under our feet, shall exclaim with yet deeper thankfulness and more reverent wonder: ‘What is man, that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?’

Hebrews 2:10—CHRIST’S PERFECTING BY SUFFERING

‘It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bribing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.’ — Hebrews 2:10.

IT does not ‘become’ us to be hasty or confident in determining what ‘becomes’ God. We had need to know the divine nature more perfectly, and the bearings of His actions more comprehensively and clearly than we do, before it can be safe to reject anything on the ground that it is unworthy of the divine nature. Perhaps we have not quite got to the bottom of the bottomless; perhaps men’s conceptions do not precisely constitute the standard to which God is

bound to conform. It is unsafe to pronounce that a given thing is unworthy of Him. It is much safer to pronounce that a given thing is worthy of Him.

And that is what the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews does here, venturing upon ground on which the New Testament seldom enters, viz., the vindication of the doctrine of a suffering Christ, on the ground of its being congruous with the divine nature that He should suffer. Especially would such a thought be appropriate and telling to the audience to whom it was originally addressed. 'We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block,' says Paul And that doctrine of a suffering Messiah was the thing that stood in the way of the Jewish reception of the gospel, more perhaps than anything besides. So here we have the writer turning the tables upon the people, who might oppose it, on the ground of that discord and incongruity, and asserting that the whole of the sufferings of Jesus Christ do entirely harmonise with, are worthy of, and 'become' the supreme and absolute sovereignty of the God 'for whom are all things, and by whom are all things.'

There are three points, then, to which I desire to turn. There is first, the great sweep of the divine purpose. There is, secondly, the apparently paradoxical method of effecting it; and there is, finally, the assertion of the entire congruity between that method and the divine nature.

I. First of all, then, regard for a few moments the great sweep of the divine action in the gift of Christ as it is set forth here.

It is bringing many sons unto glory, wherein there lies, of course, a metaphor of a great filial procession, being led on through all changes of this lower life, steadily upwards into the possession of what is here called 'glory.' The same metaphor colours the other expression of our text, 'the Captain of our salvation.'

For the word translated ‘Captain, which only occurs some four times in Scripture, literally means one who leads, or begins any course or thing; and hence comes to mean a commander, or a prince, as it is twice translated; and then again, with a very easy transition from the notion of leading to that of origination, it comes to mean ‘cause’ or ‘author,’ as it is once translated. The conception of ‘author’ is the dominant one here, but it is also coloured by the prolongation of the metaphor in the previous clause. This great procession of sons up into glory, which is the object and aim of God’s work, is all under the leadership of Him who is the Captain, the foremost, the Originator, and, in a profound sense, the Cause, of their salvation.

So, then, we have before us the thought that God brings, and yet Christ leads, and God’s bringing is effected through Christ’s leadership. Then we have other thoughts, upon which time will not allow me to dwell. Let me just indicate them to you for your own expansion.

Look at the extent of the divine act. ‘Many’ is used not in contrast to ‘all,’ as if there was proclaimed here a restricted application of Christ’s work in the divine idea; but ‘many’ is in opposition to ‘few,’ or, perhaps, in opposition to the One. There is One Leader, and there is an indefinite number of followers. The Connotation of the word ‘ many’ is the idea of uncounted number. This great procession, with its long and interminable files, sweeps onward under the guidance of the one Captain. So wide as to be universal is the sweep of God’s purpose to bring the ‘many,’ a ‘multitude that no man can number,’ into the possession of His glory.

Then, note, the relationship which the members of that great company possess. The many are being brought as ‘sons’ under the leadership of the one Son. That opens out into the broad thought that the loftiest conception of God’s end in redemption is the making the ‘many’ like the One, and the investing of them all with every privilege and dignity which belongs to their Leader.

Then note, further, the end of the march. This great company stretching numberless away beyond the range of vision, and all exalted into the dignity of sons, is steadfastly pressing onwards to the aim of fulfilling that divine ideal of humanity, long since spoken in the psalm, which in its exuberant promises sounds liker irony than hope. 'Thou crownest Him with glory and honour.' They are not only steadily marching onwards to the realisation of that divine ideal, but also to the participation of the glory of the Captain who is the 'brightness of the Father's glory;' as well as 'the express image of His person.' So again, the underlying thought is the identity, as in fate here, so in destiny hereafter, of the army with its Leader. He is the Son, and the divine purpose is to make the 'many' partakers of His Sonship. He is the realisation of the divine ideal We see not yet all things put under man, but we see Jesus, and so we know that the ancient hope is not the baseless fabric of a vision, nor a dream which will pass when we awake to the realities, but is to be fulfilled in every one, down to the humblest private in that great army, all of whom shall partake in their measure and degree in the glory of the Lord.

This, then, being the purpose, — the leading up out of the world into the glory, of a great company of sons who are conformed to the image of the Son — we attain the point from which we may judge of the adaptation of the means to the end. We cannot tell whether a thing is congruous with the nature of the doer of it till we know what the doer intended by the act.

Inadequate conceptions of God's purpose in Christ's mission are sure to lead, as they always have led, to inadequate conceptions of the means to be adopted, and doubts of their congruity with the divine nature. If Christ's mission is only meant to reveal to us a little more clearly truth concerning God and man, if He is only meant to stand before us as the ideal of conduct, and the pattern for our imitation, then there is no need for a Cross, which adds nothing to these; but if He has come to redeem, if He has come to turn slaves

into sons, if He has come to lift men up from the mud and earthliness of their low and sensuous careers, and to set them upon the path that will lead them to share in the glory of God, then there is something more needed than would be adequate for the work of a Teacher howsoever wise, or than would be required for the work of an Example however beautiful and fair. The Cross is surplusage if Christ be a prophet only; it is surplusage and an incongruity if Christ be simply the foremost of the pure natures that have walked the earth, and shown the beauty of goodness. But if Christ has come to make men sons of God, by participation of His sonship, and to blanch and irradiate their blackness by the reflection and impartation of His own flashing glory, then it 'became Him, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.'

II. That leads me to the next point that is here, viz., the paradox of the method adopted to carry out this divine purpose.

Of course, I do not need to explain, I suppose, that the 'perfecting through sufferings,' which is here declared to take effect upon our Lord, does not mean the addition of anything to, or the purging away of anything from, His moral nature. You and I are refined by suffering; which purges out our dross, if we take it rightly. You and I are ennobled by suffering, which adds to us, if we rightly accept it, that which without it we could never possess. But Christ's perfecting is not the perfecting of His moral character, but the completion of His equipment for His work of being the Captain of our salvation. That is to say, He Himself, though He learned obedience by the things that He suffered, was morally perfect, ere yet one shadow of pain or conflict had passed across the calm depths of His pure spirit. But He was not ready for His function of Leader and Originator of our salvation until He had passed through the sufferings of life and the agonies of death. Thus the whole sweep of Christ's sufferings, both those which preceded the Cross, and especially the Cross itself,

are included in the general expression of my text; and these equipped Him for His work.

So we learn this lesson, the Captain who comes to make the soldiers like Himself can only accomplish His purpose by becoming like the soldiers. The necessity for our Lord's sufferings is mainly based in the text here upon the simple principle that He who is to deliver men must be a Man. The leader must have no exemption from the hardships of the company. If He is to be a leader, He and we must go by the same road. He must tramp along all the weary path that we have to tread. He must experience all the conflicts and difficulties that we have to experience. He cannot lift us up into a share of His glory unless He stoops to the companionship of our grief. No man upon a higher level can raise one on a lower, except on condition of Himself going down, with His hand at any rate, to the level from which He would lift. And no Christ will be able to accomplish the Father's design, except a Christ that knows the fellowship of our sufferings, and is made conformable unto our death. Therefore because 'He took not hold to help angels, but the seed of Abraham, it behoved Him to be made in all things like unto His brethren.' And when the soldiers are weary on the march, footsore and tired, they bethink themselves 'Headquarters were here yesterday.'

'We can go through no darker rooms Than He went through before.'

And where He has stretched Himself on the cold ground and bivouacked, we need not be ashamed or afraid to lie down. The Captain of our salvation has gone through and shared all our hardships, and plodded with bleeding feet over every inch of the ground over which He would lead us.

Again, we learn the necessity of His suffering in order to His sympathy. Before He suffers, He has the pity of a God; after He suffers He has learnt the compassion of a man. And though in the fight the general seems to have gone up the hill, and left the army to

struggle in the plain, He has gone like Moses to the mount to lift all-powerful bands of intercession, and bearing in His heart tender compassion, a fellow-feeling of our pains. No Christ is worth anything to me, suffering and bleeding and agonising here, unless He be a Christ of whom I know that His heart is full of sympathy because Himself has felt the same, and that He has learnt to run to the help of the miserable, because He Himself is not ignorant of misfortune.

Then we learn, further, the necessity of the Captain's suffering in order to emancipate us from the dominion of the evil that He bears. No doctrine of identification with our common infirmities, or sympathy in regard of our daily trials is adequate to explain, or to reach to the depths of this paradox of a crucified Commander. We need another thought than that, and it lies in this. 'He Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree.' The necessity for knowing all our condition and sharing it was not the only necessity that brought Christ to suffer and to die. But upon Him was gathered the whole mass and Blackness of human sin, and in His separation from the Father, and in the outward fact of death, He bare our miseries, and by His stripes we were healed. No Christ is enough for me a sinner except a Christ whose Cross takes away the Burden and the penalty of my transgression. And thus 'it became Him to make the Captain of salvation perfect through suffering,' else the design of making men His sons and sharers of His glory could never come to pass.

III. Therefore, lastly, mark the harmony between the loftiest conception of the divine character and nature and these sufferings of Jesus.

The writer dwells upon two aspects of God's relation to the universe. 'It became Him for whom are all things, and *by* or through whom are all things.' That is to say, the sufferings and death of the Christ, in whom is God manifest in the flesh, are worthy of that lofty nature to the praise and glory of which all things contribute. The

Cross is the highest manifestation of the divine nature. The paradox remains that a dying man should more worthily set forth the deep heart of God, and should therefore more completely realise the divine purpose that all things should be for His glory, than all besides can do. Creation witnesses of Him, providence witnesses of Him, these marvellous spirits of ours proclaim His praise, but the deep heart of God, like some rich fruit, if I may so say, is cleft open by the Cross, and all its treasures laid bare, as they are displayed nowhere besides. So the purpose — which may be so stated as to be only Almighty selfishness, but which is really the expression of Almighty love — the purpose of God that all creation should redound to His honour, and be ‘for Him,’ reaches its end through the suffering of Jesus Christ, and in Him, and in His death God is glorified. ‘It became Him, for whom are all things, to perfect through suffering the Captain of our salvation.’

Another aspect, closely connected with this, lies in that other clause. Christ’s sufferings and death are congruous with that Almighty power by which the Universe has sprung into being and is sustained. His creative agency is not the highest exhibition of His power. Creation is effected by a word. The bare utterance of the divine will was all that was needed to make the heavens and the earth, and ‘to preserve the stars from wrong.’ But the bare utterance of will is not enough here. If men are to be brought to glory, they cannot be brought by the mere desire of God to bring them, or by the mere utterance of His will that they should be brought. This work needs a process, needs that something should be done. This work needs the humiliation, the suffering, the death, resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God, of the Captain of our salvation and the Prince of our life.

So though by Him are all things, if we would know the full sweep and Omnipotence of His power, He points us away from creation, and its ineffectual fires that pale before this brighter Light in which His whole self is embodied, and says, ‘There, *that* is the arm of the

Lord made bare in the sight of all the nations.’ Omnipotence has made the world, the Cross has redeemed it. From that Cross there come the loftiest conceptions of Him for whom all things are, but for whom men are not, unless the Cross has won them; by whom are all things, but by whom men are, through more wondrous exercise of divine power, when they are redeemed by the precious blood, than when they were made by the creative fiat.

Therefore, brethren, listen to God saying, ‘I have set Him for a witness to the people, for a Leader and a Commander to the people,’ and see to it that you enlist in this Captain’s army, and follow His banners and trust in His Cross, that your sufferings may be His, and the merit of His may be yours, and that in His sonship you may be sons, and the flashings of His glory may change your earthliness from glory to glory, into the image of the Son, made perfect through suffering and crowned with glory and honour, which He parts among all His soldiers.

Hebrews 2:11-13—THE BROTHERHOOD OF CHRIST

‘... He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12. Saying, I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee. 13. And again. I will put My trust in Him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given Me.’ — Hebrews 2:11-13.

NOT ashamed to call them brethren. Why should He be? It is no condescension to acknowledge the fact of brotherhood, any more than it is humility to be born. And yet there is One who had to empty and humble Himself in becoming man; and for whom to call men His brethren is a depth of unimaginable condescension. We would say that a prince was not ashamed to call his subjects his friends, and to eat and drink with them, but we should not say it of a subject. This word ‘ashamed’ is meaningless in the present connection unless there underlies it the lofty conception of Christ’s person which is enfolded in the first chapter of this epistle. If He be,

and only if He is, the ‘brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of His person,’ is it condescension in Him to enrol Himself amongst our fraternity.

The writer selects three Old Testament passages which he thinks exhibit in prophetic outline the Messiah as claiming brotherhood with men. If the writer had known the gospels, he could have found other words that would have been even more weighty, such as ‘Behold My mother and My brethren’; but probably he was ignorant of them; or possibly, writing to Jews, he may have felt that to use their own manner of exposition was the best way of reaching them.

It would lead us into discussions altogether unsuited to the pulpit to examine the relevance of these three prophetic quotations. My object is a different one. The three citations from the Old Testament, which are adduced in my text as proofs that the Messiah identifies Himself with His brethren, deal with three different aspects of our Lord’s manhood; and if we take them altogether, they afford, if not a complete, yet a *very* comprehensive answer to the question why God became man. It is from that point of view that I desire to consider them here.

There are, then, three points here; (1) Christ’s assumption of manhood in order to show God to men (2) Christ’s assumption of manhood in order to show the pattern of a godly life to men; and (3) Christ’s assumption of manhood in order to bring men into the family of sons.

I. First, then, here we have the declaration or manifestation of God as the great object of Christ’s brotherhood with us, ‘Saying, I will declare Thy name unto My brethren.’

Where do these words come from? They come from that psalm, the first words of which rang out from His lips amidst the darkness of eclipse upon the Cross, ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’ The psalm, springing directly from the heart of David, and

expressing to his consciousness, I suppose, solely his own feelings in the midst of his own trials and humiliations, has yet been so moulded into language a world too wide for the writer's sorrows, and so corresponding in minute and singular details, with the historical facts of Christ's passion and death, that we cannot fail to perceive shimmering through the words of the earthly King 'who won His throne through persecutions and trials, the august figure of the loftier and true King, of whom the sovereign of Israel was, ex-officio, a type and a prophecy. Just as David felt that he, as monarch, must be the brother of his subjects, and that the meaning of his reign and of his deliverance was the declaration of the name of God to his brethren, so our King can only be King if He be brother; and the inmost purpose of His brotherhood and of His monarchy is that He may manifest to men the name of the Father.

What is that 'name'? The syllables by which men call Him? Surely not. But the name of the Lord is the manifest character of God; and therefore the only possible way of declaring Him is not by words but by acts. A person can only be revealed by a person. God can only be shown to men by a life. Words will never do it; they may represent men's thinkings, but they never can certify God's fact. Words will never do it, they may suggest hopes, fears, peradventures; but unless we have a living Person whose deeds on the plain level of human history, and in this solid world of ours, are the manifestation of God, our thoughts of Him will neither be solid with certainty nor sweet with comfort. It must be a human life which is more than a human life, but yet is thoroughly and altogether man, that to men can manifest God. Our highest conceptions of the divine nature must be in the form Of man. Between the little sphere of the dewdrop and the great sphere of the sun that is reflected prismatically in it, there is absolute identity in the laws that shape their round. So limited humanity has such an analogy with unlimited divinity as that, in the mirror of manhood, the brilliancy and ineffable brightness of the Godhead can be manifested. That life, the life of Jesus Christ, is the making visible for men of the glory of the invisible God.

And what is the substance of the declaration? Men point us to His miracles, to the omniscience, to the power, to the other attributes of majesty, unlike to, and contradictory, of the attributes of finite humanity, and they say that these are the glory of God. Not so! That is a vulgar conception: high above all such as these towers the moral perfectness which is manifested in the purity of Jesus Christ. But when we have passed through what I may call the physical attributes revealed in the miracles which are the outer court, and the moral attributes of righteousness and stainlessness, which are the holy place, there is yet a veil to be lifted, and an inner sanctuary; and in it, there is nothing but a Mercy-seat, and a Shekinah above it. Which, being translated into plain English, is just this, the new-thing in Christ's declaration of the name of the Father is the love of God therein manifested. Other means of knowing Him give us fragmentary syllables of His name, and men do with the witness of nature, and the ambiguous witness of history, and the witness of our own intuitions, what antiquarians do with the broken, inscribed blocks which they find in ruins, piece them together, and try to make a sentence out of them. But the whole name is in Christ.

God ' who hath spoken in divers manners' elsewhere, hath spoken the whole syllables of His manifest character in His Son. And this is the shining apex of all; the last utterances of Scripture, the culmination of all the long procession of self-manifestation — 'God is love.' You can only learn that when you look on your brother Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Dear brethren, more and more is it becoming certain, as the tendencies of modern thought unfold themselves, that we are brought to this fork in the road —

Christ or nothing! Either God manifest in Him, or no manifestation of God at all Theism or Deism has not substance enough to sustain the assaults of the modern scientific spirit. Unless 'the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father He hath declared Him,' no

man hath seen God at any time, or can see Him. It is Christ or darkness. Either the Father revealed in Him, or a God spelled with a little 'g,' who is an unverifiable and unnecessary hypothesis, or 'a stream of tendency not ourselves that makes for righteousness'; or a vague somewhat concerning whom we only know that He cannot be known. The cultivated mind of England has to make its choice this day between these two. And when we come back to Christ, declaring the name of the Father unto His brethren, the nebulous, doleful grey that veiled the sky disappears, and we feel the sun again, and regain a God whom we can love because He has an ear and a heart and a hand; a God of whom we can be sure, a God concerning whom we have not to say 'I think'; 'I hope'; 'I fear'; 'perhaps'; but a God whom we can know, and 'to know whom is life eternal.'

II. So much, then, for the first of the thoughts here. Secondly, we have Christ's brotherhood represented as intended to show to men the pattern of the religious life. 'I will put my trust in Him.'

These words came probably from the eighth chapter of the book of Isaiah, where the prophet, like the king in the former narrative, speaking altogether his own feelings, and with no consciousness of any prophetic or typical reference, expresses his personal dependence upon God. Our writer sees in Isaiah, as the chief of the prophetic order, which order in its totality was a prophecy or type of Jesus Christ, a dim shadow of Jesus, in so far as the prophet, though filled with the consciousness of a divine inspiration, and knowing that he stood before his brethren to make known to them the name of God, did not yet thereby feel himself absolved from the necessity of personal dependence and reliance on Him. And, says our writer, as it was with that foremost of the prophets, so is it with Him who is the Prophet by eminence. He, too, in His manhood and in His office of declaring the name of the Father, feels that for Him personally there must be the same faith in God which others exercise.

Now that is the point to which I want to turn for m moment. Jesus Christ is the object of our faith. Yes! but Jesus Christ is the example of our faith too. You orthodox people, who believe in the divinity of our Lord and Saviour, are far too much afraid of fronting such thoughts as this. They are not so familiar to us as they ought to be. We do not believe in His thorough manhood, some of us, nor in His real divinity, but in strange amalgam of the two, each destroying, to s certain extent, the quality of the other. And so the men who do know their own mind, and who know His simple manhood, will make wild work of the beliefs of some of those who call themselves orthodox believers.

A perfect manhood must needs be a dependent manhood. A reasonable creature who does not live by faith is either God or devil: Jesus Christ's perfect manhood, sinless, stainless, did not absolve Him from, but obliged Him to, a life of continual dependence upon God; His divinity did not, in the smallest measure, interfere with the reality of the faith which, as man, He exercised, and which was the same in kind as ours.

His perfect manhood modifies and perfects His faith. In Him dependence had no relation to a consciousness of sinfulness, as it must have in us, but in Him it had relation to a consciousness of need of a continual derivation of life and power from the Father; His faith being the faith of a perfect manhood, was a perfect faith. Our hands tremble as they hold the telescope that looks into the far-off unseen. His hand was steady. Our faith wavers and is interrupted, an intermittent fountain. His was a perennial flow. His perfect faith issued in perfect results in His life; in a perfect obedience, 'I do always the things that please Him,' and in a perfect communion. Like two metal plates of which the surfaces are so true that when you bring them into contact they adhere, that perfect nature of Jesus Christ's, by the exercise of its perfect faith, clung in unbroken fellowship to the Father — 'He hath not left me alone, because I do always the things that please Him.'

And thus, dear brethren, our brother does not stand above us only to show us God, but comes down amongst us to show us men. Out of His example of faith we may take both shame and encouragement — shame when we consider the awful disparity between our wavering and His fixed faith; encouragement when in Him we see what humanity has in it to become, and what by the path of faith it may become. The staff that He leaned on He has bequeathed to us. The shield that He carried in the conflict in the wilderness, when He said, ‘Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,’ and which He bore undinted by all the fiery darts through His earthly course, He has bequeathed to us His followers. The Captain, the Emperor, was once in the arena, and there He struggled. He, the Captain of the faith, the Leader of the hosts of believers, conquered because He said ‘I will put my trust in Him’; and He has left us the same weapon for ours, that we, too, may conquer. ‘This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.’

III. Lastly, we have our Lord’s manhood represented here as the means by which He brings us into a family of sons. ‘And again, behold, I and the children which God hath given Me.’

These words come from the immediate neighbourhood of the last quotation. In their original application the prophet regards his own family, and the little knot of disciples who had been drawn to him, as being associated with him in his prophetic office, set for ‘signs and wonders,’ and the salt of the nation, which without them was rotting to dissolution. So our writer sees in the prophet’s humility, which associates in his office, and admits to its prerogatives, the children to whom he had given natural life, and the little ones who through him had received spiritual life, the dim foreshadowing of that great Saviour who by His becoming our Brother, makes us God’s children.

For it is to be noticed that the unity referred to in the word 'children,' in this last quotation, does, not apply to the same sphere as the unity referred to in the former word 'brethren' 'Brethren' referred to the kindred which consisted of the common possession of humanity; 'children' refers to the kindred, consisting in the common possession of spiritual life. Thus, in this last quotation of our text we have presented the other side of Christ's Incarnation and its effects. Here we have to deal, not so much with His becoming us, as with our becoming like Him.

The words open out into thoughts which I can only specify without attempting to enlarge upon them. Jesus Christ has become our Brother, that from Him we may each of us draw a life, stored in Him, though having its source in God, which will make us His brethren, and God's children.

The central blessing of the gospel is the communication to every trustful heart of an actual divine life which comes from Christ. Do not be satisfied with any more superficial conception of what God gives us in His Son than this, that He gives us a spark of Himself, that He comes into us through Christ, and bestows upon our deadness a real, mystical, spiritual life, which will unfold itself in forms worthy of its kindred, and like unto its source.

For that gift of the life there is more than Incarnation needed. There is Crucifixion needed. The death of Death by death gives Death his death; and then, and then only, can He give us who were dead His life. The box must be broken, though it be alabaster very precious, that through its lustrous surface there may shine lambent the light of the indwelling spirit; the body must be broken, that the house may be filled with the odour of the ointment. Christ dies and life escapes from Him as it were, and passes into the world.

That life is a life of sonship. The children are God's children, being Christ's brethren. They are brought into a new unity; and the one

foundation of true brotherhood amongst men is the common possession of a common relation to the One Divine Father.

And that life which leads thus to sonship leads likewise to a marvellous participation in the offices, functions and relations of the Christ who bestows it. Just as the prophet gathered his children and disciples into a family, and gave them to partake in his prophetic office, in his relation to God, and to the world, so Christ gathers us into oneness with Himself; having become like us, He makes us like Him and invests us with a similar relationship to the Father. Being the Son, He gives us the adoption of sons, and lays upon our shoulders the responsibilities and the honours of a similar relation to the world, making us kindled 'lights' derived from Himself the fontal source, making us, in our measure and degree, sons of God and Messiahs for the world.

This oneness of life — which thus leads to a participation in sonship, an identity of function, and of interest — remains for ever. If we love and trust Christ, He will never leave us until He 'presents us faultless before the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy.'

So, dear friends, it all comes to this; there is one way to know God and only one. 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' All else is darkness. There is one life, noble, pure, worthy of humanity, and only one: the life of trust in Christ, who is at once the object and pattern of our faith; and believing in whom we believe in the Father also. There is but one fountain of life opened in the graveyard of this world, and that is in the Son, drinking of whom there shall be in us a fountain springing up to life everlasting. There is but one way by which we can become sons of God, through the elder Brother, who grudges the prodigal neither the ring nor the feast, but Himself has provided them both. So listen to Him declaring the name; say, 'I will put my trust in Him'; for you trust God when you have faith in Christ; and then be sure that He will give you of His own life; that He will invest you with the spirit of adoption and the standing of

sons, that He will keep His hand about you, and never lose you. ‘Them whom Thou hast given Me, I have kept,’ He will say at last, pointing to us; and there we shall stand, ‘no wanderer lost, a family in Heaven,’ whilst our brother presents us to His Father and ours, with the triumphant words — ‘Behold I and all the children whom Thou hast given Me.’

Hebrews 2:17—WHAT BEHOVED CHRIST

"Wherefore In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren." —

Hebrews 2:17.

I BRING these words: ‘It behoved Him,’ into connection with similar words in an earlier verse of the chapter, on which I was lately preaching: ‘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 sufferings.’

In the latter words the sufferings of Jesus Christ and His consequent perfecting for His work of Messiah are considered, in an aspect somewhat unusual with scripture writers, as being in accordance with the divine nature, and worthy of God. ‘He, by whom are all things,’ had no other way of electing His highest purpose of redemption than through the sufferings of Jesus Christ. ‘He, for whom are all things,’ could win men to be for Him only through these sufferings. And so the paradox of the Cross was worthy of God and like Him. In my text the same series of historical facts, the life of Jesus Christ and His death, considered as a whole, are regarded not as worthy of God, but as that which ‘behoved’ Christ, ‘It behoved’ is stronger than ‘it became.’ The one phrase points to the conformity of the thing in question with God’s character and nature; the other declares that the thing in question has in it a moral necessity or obligation, and that Christ’s assimilation to His fellows, especially in all the ills that flesh is heir to, was laid upon Him as a

necessity, in view of His purpose of redemption and the helping of His fellows.

So then we have here, in the words which I have read, and in the context, three thoughts on which I touch now. First of all, the completeness of Christ's assimilation to us, especially in regard to suffering; second, Christ's sufferings as necessary for the fulfilment of Christ's design; and lastly and more especially, Christ's sufferings as indispensable for His priestly office. Now look at these three things briefly.

I. Note, first of all, the emphasis of that expression, 'it behoved Him to be made in all things like unto His brethren.' And observe that the 'all things' here, concerning which our Lord's likeness to mankind is predicated, are not the ordinary properties of human nature, but emphatically and specifically man's sorrows.

That will appear, I think, if you notice that my text is regarded as being a consequence of our Lord's incarnation for the help of His fellows. 'He laid not hold upon angels, but He laid hold upon the seed of Abraham.' *Wherefore*, 'in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.'

Now, if the likeness here be the possession of true manhood, then my text is mere tautology, and it would simply be saying, 'He became a man, wherefore it behoved Him to become a man.' The same conclusion is, I think, fairly to be deduced from the last words of our chapter, where the fact of His suffering being tempted, is stated as His preparation to help, and as His qualification as a merciful and faithful High Priest. That is to say, the 'all things' of which our Lord became partaker like us His brethren, are here the whole mass — in all its variety of pressure and diversity of nauseousness and bitterness — the whole mass of human sorrow which has ever made men's hearts bleed and men's eyes weep.

Christ, in His single manhood, says the writer, gathered unto Himself every form of pain, of misery, of weariness, of burden, which can weigh upon and wear out a human spirit; and no single ingredient that ever made any man's cup distasteful was left out, in that dreadful draught which He emptied to the dregs ere He passed the chalice to our lips, saying, 'Drink ye all of it.'

This is the great lesson and blessed thought of our text that no suffering soul, no harassed heart, no lonely life, has ever been able to say, 'Ah! I have to bear this by myself, for Jesus Christ never knew anything like this.' All the pain and sorrow of adverse circumstances, that try some of us, He knows who had 'not where to lay His head'; who was a poor man all His days, to whom the women had to minister of their charity, and who depended upon others for His sustenance in life, and for ceremonies, and a grave in death. The sorrows that belong to a physical frame overwrought and crushed by excessive toil; the sorrows of weakness, of sickness, the pains of death — He understands them all. The sorrows that come from our relations to our fellows, whether they be the hopeless, quiet tears that fall for ever upon broken affections and lost loves, or whether they be the bitter griefs that come from unrequited affections and unappreciated aims, and benefits flung back, and hearts tortured by ingratitude — He knows them all. And the loftier and less selfish, more impersonal, griefs that make so large a portion of the weight and heaviness of the noblest spirits, they all cast their shadows across His pure soul, and the shadow was the deeper and the darker because of the very purity of the soul on which it fell. Purity is ever sad in the presence of foulness; and love is ever sorrowful when bowed with the burden of another's sorrow; and both these sources of pain and grief, which diffuse their bitterness through the lives of the best men, weighed in all their gravity upon Him who felt the world's sorrow and the world's sin as a personal grief because His soul was perfectly unselfish, perfectly pure, perfectly united to God, and therefore perfectly clear-sighted. All the miseries of all men forced themselves into and filled Christ's

heart, Dear brother! you and I have but a drop given to us; He drank the whole cup. Our natures are not capable of sorrow as varied, as deep, as poignant as the sorrow of Jesus Christ; but for each of us surely the assurance comes with some subtle power of consolation and strength, 'In all their afflictions He was afflicted'; and none of us can ever meet a sorrow with whose face Christ was not familiar, and which He Himself has not conquered for us.

II. So that brings me to the next point suggested here, viz., our Lord's varied, all-comprehensive sorrow was a necessity imposed upon Him by the purpose which He had in view.

The context gives us that assertion in distinct language. Adopting the improved and accurate rendering of the Revised Version of the previous verse, we read, 'Verily not of angels doth He take hold, but He taketh hold of the seed of Abraham; wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.'

Now the word rendered here, 'taketh hold,' is the same word which is employed in the narrative of a very striking incident in the gospels, where the Apostle Peter is ready to sink in the water; and Jesus Christ 'stretched forth His hand and *caught* him.' And that story may serve as an illustration for us of the meaning of the writer here. Here we are all, the whole race of us, exposed to the pelting of the pitiless storm, and ready to sink beneath the waters, and Jesus Christ stretches forth His strong, gentle hand and lays hold of our tremulous and feeble fingers, and keeps us up above the surges which else would overwhelm us.

Now, says my text, no man can help another unless he stand by the side of, and on the level *of*, that other. 'He taketh hold, not of angels, but of the seed of Abraham'; and, therefore, He must have a hand like theirs, that can grasp theirs, and which theirs can grasp. Unless the Master had Himself been standing on the heaving surges, and Himself been subjected to the beating of the storm, He could not have revived and held up the sinking disciple.

And so our Lord's bitter suffering, diffused through life and concentrated on the Cross, was no mere necessary result of His humanity, was not simply borne because, being a Teacher, He must stand to His principles whatever befell Him because of them; but it was a direct result of the purpose He had in view, that purpose being our redemption. Therefore to say, 'It behoved Him to be made in all things like unto His brethren,' is but to declare that Christ's sufferings were no matter of physical necessity, but a matter of moral obligation. He must indeed suffer. But *why* must He? 'It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren'; but why was it obligatory upon Him so to take the bitter bread that we eat, and to drink the water of tears that we drink? For one reason, and for one reason only, because He loved us and willed to save us.

So I beseech you to feel that underlying the bitter necessity which my text speaks about there is the voluntary endurance of Jesus Christ. Ah! we do not think enough about the necessity, all through His life, for a continual repetition of the great act of self-surrender of which His incarnation was the first consequence. At the beginning of His earthly career He emptied Himself, out of love to us; and step by step, and moment by moment, all through His life, there was the continual repetition of the same act. Each one of His sufferings was the direct result of His will at the moment to perfect the work which He came to do. At any instant He might have abandoned it; and that He did not was solely owing to His perennial love. For His own determination to save and succour us was the one cord that bound this sacrifice to the horns of the altar. The Man Christ, at every moment of His life, gave Himself; and as each fresh billow of sorrow rolled above His bowed and compliant head, it rolled because He still willed to save and help His fellows.

This voluntary submission of our Lord to all the sufferings which befell Him because of His determination to come to the help of His brethren ought to make us feel how that whole life of His was one pure efflux of infinite and unspeakable love; and we ought to see in

it the gift which ‘became’ the divine mercy indeed, but which also ‘behoved’ the Man Jesus, to the end that all our sorrows may be comforted and all our evil taken away.

We know not, nor ever can know, by what mysterious process the Son learned obedience by the things which He suffered, nor can we understand how it was that the High Priest, who would never have become the High Priest had He not been merciful, became yet more merciful by His own experience of human sorrow. But this we know, that somehow the pity, the sympathy of Christ, was deepened by His own life; and we can feel that it is easier for men to lay hold of His sympathy when they think of His sufferings, and to be sure that because in all points He was tempted like as we are, ‘He is able to succour them that are tempted.’ Comfort drops but coldly from lips that have never uttered a sigh or a groan; and for our poor human hearts it is not enough to have a merciful God far off in the heavens. We need a Christ who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ere we can come boldly to the Throne of Grace, assured of there finding grace in time of need.

III. Lastly, we have here the specification of the main purpose of our Lord’s sorrows — ‘that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things appertaining to God to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.’

That defines more closely what He has to *do*, *if* He is to help us, and what He does do when He takes hold of the seed of Abraham. There are but two remarks that I would make on this part of my subject. The one is — let us learn what is the true nature of Christ’s help. It is the help of a priest who comes to offer a sacrifice which takes away the burden and the guilt of sin from the world.

Christ’s help is not merely the help of a wise Teacher. Men do not want only teaching. Their need goes far deeper than that. Christ’s help is not only the help of One who declares to His fellows what God is. Men’s needs go deeper than that. Christ’s help is not merely

the help of One who sets forth in sweet attractive colours the beauty of holiness and the charm of purity. Men's needs go deeper than that. We do not only need to know what God is, we need to have our relation to God altered. We do not only need to be told what we ought to do, we need that the past shall be cancelled, and the fatal bias and tendency towards evil within ourselves be taken away. Christ is not the Helper whose help goes down to the depths and the roots of men's necessity, unless He is Priest as well as Prophet and King. He comes to *do* something as well as to *say* something; comes to alter *our* relations to God, as well as to declare God's heart to us. In a word, we must say even to Christ, 'Vain is Thy help, and impotent is Thy grasp, unless Thou dost bring by Thy sufferings reconciliation for the sins of the people.'

And then, notice again how here we have Christ's priestly office extended over His whole life of suffering. The popular representations of the gospel, and the superficial grasp of it which many good people have, are accustomed to draw a broad line of demarcation between Christ's life and Christ's death, and to concentrate the whole of the sacrificial and expiatory character of His work in His death only. My text goes in the other direction. It says that all that long-drawn sorrow which ran through the whole life of Jesus Christ, whilst it culminated in His death, was His sacrifice for the sins of the world. For all sorrow, according to scriptural teaching, is the fruit of sin; and the sinless Christ, who bore the sorrows which He had not earned, in bearing them bore them away.

And though the shell of them and the outward appearance of them may be left, the inward reality and the bitterness of them is gone. It is exactly in reference to the ills of life as it is in reference to the other penalty of sin which consists in death. The outward fact continues, the inward nature is altered. For he who can say, 'Christ my Lord suffered for me,' finds that sorrows become solemn joys, and all things work together for good.

The Cross is the climax of His sacrifice, but His whole life is sacrifice and expiation, because His whole life is the life of a sinless ‘Man of sorrows acquainted with grief.’

So, then, we have to look to Him, in all the meek endurance of His life, and in all the mysterious darkness of His death, not merely as the pattern of patience, as the Teacher of the sanctity of sorrow, as the first of the martyrs; but we have to look to Him, and to feel that ‘the Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all.’

Brother, He became like us in our sorrows that we might become like Him in His gladness. Each of us, singly, was in His mind and in His heart when He bowed Himself to the flood of sorrows, and yielded His soul to the Cross of shame. So let us stretch out our poor hands to Him who reaches His tender omnipotent one across the billows, and grasping the hands with the print of the nails, we shall find that we have exchanged portions, and that He who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows has bestowed upon us His gladness, and crowned us with the glory of the blessedness which He had with the Father before the world was.

Hebrews 3:1—CONSIDER JESUS

‘... Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.’ —

Hebrews 3:1

THE kinds of consideration enjoined in these two exhortations are somewhat different. The former of them is expressed by a word which means fixed attention and close scrutiny. It is employed, for instance, by our Lord in His injunctions to *consider* the ravens and the lilies, and by Peter in his account of his vision of the great sheet let down from heaven, upon which, when he had fixed his eye, he *considered*. Such a fastened gaze of awakened interest and steady

contemplation, the writer would have all who are partakers of the heavenly calling to direct upon Jesus.

The other exhortation refers to a specific kind of contemplation. The word might almost be rendered 'compare,' for it means to weigh one thing in relation to another. It is the contemplation of comparison which is meant. What or whom is the comparison to be drawn between? Jesus, as the Leader of the great host of the faithful, and ourselves. The main point of comparison is to be found in the difficulties of the Christian life. Think what he has borne and what you have to bear; how He bore it and where, having borne it, He is now. The Captain has sustained the whole brunt of the assault and has conquered. Think of Him and be brave, and lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees.

So, then, throwing these two injunctions together, we may regard them as impressing upon us an all-important exercise of mind and heart, without which there can be no vigorous Christian life, and which, I fear me, is woefully neglected by the average Christian to-day.

I. I ask you to think first of this gaze of the Christian soul 'Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.'

I have said that the word implies an awakened interest, a fixed and steady gaze; and that is almost the Alpha and the Omega of the Christian life. So to live in the continual contemplation of Jesus our Pattern and our Redeemer is the secret of all Christian vitality and vigour. There must be no languid look, as between half-opened eyelids, as men look upon some object in which they have little interest, but there must be the sharpened gaze of interested expectancy, believing that in Him on whom we look there lie yet undiscovered depths, and yet undreamed-of powers, which may be communicated to us.

There must be not only the sharpened look of contemplation, but there must be a very considerable protraction of the gaze. You will never see Jesus Christ if you look at Him only by snatches for a moment, and then turn away the eye from Him, any more than a man who comes out from some brilliantly lighted and dazzling room into the darkness, as it at first appears, of the midnight heavens, can see their glories. The focus of the eye must be accommodated to the object of vision, before there can be any real sight of Him. We must sit before Him, and be content to give time to the gaze, if we are to get any good out of it. Nobody sees the beauties of a country who hurries through it in an express train. These passing glances, which are all that so many of us can spare for the Master, are of little use in revealing Him to us. You do not feel Mont Blanc unless you sit and gaze and let the fair vision soak into your souls, and you cannot understand Jesus Christ, nor see anything in Him, unless you deal with Him in like fashion.

But if there be this steady and protracted contemplation of the Lord, then, amidst all the bustle of our daily life, and the many distractions which we all have to face, there will come sudden flashes of glory and the clouds will lift often, and let us see the whole white range in its majesty and sublimity. They who know what it is to come apart into a solitary place, and rest awhile with Him, will know what it is to bear the vision with them amid all the distractions of duty and the noise of the world.

There is no way by which we can bring an unseen person to have any real influence upon our lives except by the direction of our thoughts to Him. So if you professing Christian men and women will give your thoughts and your affections and the run of your minds to everything and everybody rather than to your Master, there is no wonder that your religion is of so little use to you, and brings so little blessing or power or nobleness into your lives. The root of weakness lies in the neglect of that solemn and indispensable duty to *consider Jesus, in patient contemplation and steadfast beholding.*

Now such thoughts as these, as to the relation between the protracted gaze and a true realisation of the Master's presence, cast light upon such a question as the observance of the Sunday. I do not care to insist upon anybody keeping this day sacred for devout purposes unless he is a

Christian man. I would not talk about the *obligation*, but about the *privilege*., And this I say, that unless you have a reservoir you will have empty pipes, and the water supply in your house will fail And unless you Christian men and women use this blessed breathing time, which is given to us week after week, in order to secure that quiet, continuous contemplation of the Master, which is almost impossible for most of us amidst the rush and hurry of the week day, your religion will always be a poor thing.

I know, of course, that we may be taunted with concentrating and clotting, as it were, devout contemplations into one day in seven, and then leaving all the rest of the week void of Christ, and may be told how much better is worship diffused through all life. But I am sure that the shortest way to have no religion at all is to have it only as a diffused religion. If it is to be diffused it must first be concentrated; and no man will carry Jesus Christ with him throughout the distractions of daily life who does not know what it is to be often in the secret place of the Most High, there in the silence of fixed spirit, to 'consider Jesus Christ.'

Then let me remind you, too, that such a gaze as this is not to be attained without decisive effort. You have to cut off sidelights; just as a man will twist up a roll of paper and put it to his eye and shut Out everything on either side, if he wants to see the depth of colour in a picture. So we have to look away from much if we would look unto Christ, and to be contented to be blind to a great deal that is fascinating and dazzling, if we would be clear sighted as to the things that are far off. The eye of nature must be closed if the eye of the Spirit is to be opened. And if we are to see the things that are, we

must resolutely shut out the false glories of the things that only do appear. For these are perishable, and the others are real and eternal.

II. Secondly, notice here a little more particularly the object of the Christian gaze.

We may dwell briefly in this connection upon the predicates of our Lord in these two verses. According to the true reading of the first of them we are to consider *Jesus*. The first thing that is to rivet our interested and continuous contemplation is the manhood of the Lord. That name Jesus is never used in this epistle, and seldom in any part of the New Testament, without the intention of especially emphasising the humanity of Christ. It is that fair life, as it is unrolled before us in the pages of the Gospels, to which we are to look for illumination, for inspiration, for pattern and motive of service, and for all companionship in suffering and victory in warfare. 'Consider Jesus,' our Brother, the Man that has lived our life and died our death.

Note that we have to consider Him in His offices, 'the Apostle and High Priest of our profession.' This is the only instance in scripture in which the name 'Apostle' is given to our Lord. And of course it is here employed not in its technical, but in its wider and etymological sense. It means 'one who is sent.' The contrast floating in the writer's mind is apparently between Jesus and Moses; the two men both of whom, though in different fashion, were God's messengers to found a polity. Perhaps another contrast is floating in his mind, such as he has drawn out at length in the first chapter of this great epistle, between those by whom 'at sundry times and in divers manners God spake unto the fathers'; and Him 'by whom in these last days, He has, once for all, spoken unto us.' Possibly there is also a contrast between Jesus Christ the Lord of the angels, and the ministering spirits *who*, the previous context tells us, 'are sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation' The name thus lifts Christ above Moses, prophets, angels, and sets Him on a

pedestal, as the sole and single Revealer of the will of God to the world. The Father sanctified and sent Him into the world to be the one communicator of His perfect Name. The completeness and uniqueness of our Lord's revealing mission are expressed in that title.

The other side of what is needful for communion between God and man is expressed in the other designation, 'the High Priest.' Two things go to make complete communion — God's revelation to us and our approach to God. Christ is the Agent of both. As the subsequent context — where this idea of High Priest is more fully developed — distinctly shows, the main ideas connected with it in the writer's mind here, are intercession and sympathy. So on the one hand, as Apostle, He brings God to us; and on the other hand, as Priest, He brings us to God; and makes the golden link by which heaven and earth are united, and God tabernacles with man.

It is this Christ — not merely in His manhood, but in that manhood interpreted as being the medium of all revelation possible to the world, and as being, on the other hand, the medium of all the access that sinful men can have to God — it is this Christ whom we are to consider, not merely in the sweetness and gentleness and holiness of His lovely Manhood as recorded in the gospels, but in these mighty offices of which that Manhood was the discharge and the expression, whereby God dwells with man, and sinful men can dwell with God.

We hear a great deal in these days about Christianity being Christ and not doctrines. I say, too, Christianity is Christ, but I say it is the Christ whom these great truths proclaim to us that we have to grasp. And it is not enough to consider Jesus from a mere humanitarian point of view, nor will the consideration of Him be peace and power and holiness and life to men, unless they consider Him as the 'Apostle and High Priest of their profession.'

And again, we have to consider not only the Manhood in itself, and the offices which that Manhood discharges, but also the sorrows through which it passes. That is the force of the second of my two texts. We have to think of that Lord, who is the *Leader* of all the great host of the faithful, whose praises have been sung in the magnificent roll-call of the eleventh chapter; and to turn away from their lesser struggles, and paler beauties, and less complete victories. We have to think of what Jesus Christ bore, of what was laid upon Him, of how He bore it, and of how He has been exalted now to the right hand of God. Compare our difficulties and trials with His, and think that these are the pattern for us; and that we have to tread the path which He trod. Then consider how insignificant ours are in comparison with His. The whole fury of the tempest broke upon Him. It is only the tail of the storm that comes to us. The whole force of the blow was sustained unflinching by the steadfast Christ. It is only the blunt sword which has glanced off His strong shoulder to smite us.

'We need not seek a resting place Where He we loved had none.'

And if we will 'consider Him that endured,' sorrow and difficulty and opposition in our Christian life will dwindle into a very little thing, and will become a token that as is the Master so is the servant.

III. Lastly, notice the blessings of this gaze.

First, let us consider Him for calmness amidst a world full of noise and confusion. We live in a time and in a city where life is very crowded; and the pressure of every day is almost more than some of us can bear. There is no relief from the continual agitation about trifles, from the hurry and bustle of this community and this country, as continuous, and in the truest point of view as aimless and insignificant as the running of ants upon an ant hill — except we live in the daily contemplation of Jesus Christ. Nothing will quiet a man like that. It gives a certain sense of remoteness, and a very positive conviction of insignificance, to what else is intrusively and

obtrusively near, and fallaciously appears to be important to us. Christ's voice quiets the storm.

'On my soul

Looks Thy fair face and makes it still.'

If you would have inward calmness, without which life is busy slavery, 'consider Jesus.'

Again, that gaze will help us to a fixed confidence amidst the fluctuations of opinion. We live in a day of unrest, when the foundations are being re-investigated, and the Tree of Life can scarcely grow because men are digging it up to look at its roots. Let us try to remember that the vital centre of all is Jesus, that faith is independent of criticism, and that if we can realise His presence in our lives in these great capacities of which I have been speaking, and as the Companion of our difficulties who has trodden the same path that we have to tread, then we can look very quietly upon all the unsolved questions which are important in their place, but which, however they are answered, do not touch that central fact and our possible relation to Him. 'Consider Jesus,' and then you will be able to say, 'The things which can be shaken are removed that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.' Ceremonies, churches, creeds, have all of them a human element, which will go. The divine Christ is the permanent in Christianity.

I might turn the word of my text in another direction for a moment, though it is a digression. After unbelieving theories have done their worst, I would say to the men who advocate them, 'Consider Christ.' *Look* at that fair vision. Where did it come from? Account for Him on any hypothesis but the truth of these four gospels. Account for His influence in the world on any hypothesis but His divine mission. You may talk till Doomsday, but you have to reckon with Jesus Christ, and to explain Him. Until you do, you have not established your negations. The reef on which so many goodly ships

of unbelief have struck, and where their hulls lie broken and covered with the drifting sands of oblivion, is waiting for many a flaunting theory of today. 'Consider Christ.' That shatters anti-supernatural religion.

And, last of all, let us do it for diligence in service and patience in suffering. If we lay that fair image upon our hearts, it will lead to love, and love will make us toil in His service. If the sensitive plate be laid in the sunshine it will receive the image of the sun. If we consider Him, thereby, and not without such consideration, shall we become like Him.

As for our suffering and toils and difficulties, how they dwindle, and how easy patience is when we think of Him! Simon the Cyrenian had to carry the Cross after Christ, but we have only to carry a very little, light one, when compared with that which He bore and which bore Him. We compare our suffering with His, and are silent. We have to think of what He deserved and we deserve, and the blush comes to our cheeks. We have to remember how He bore, and how we have borne, and we are ashamed of our fretfulness and petulance. We have to think of Him at the right hand of God. The poor fighters in the arena can lift their eyes to the place where the Emperor sits between the purple curtains, and with the flashing axes of the guard round Him, and remembering that He, throned there, was once wrestling here as we are, and that we shall be throned with Him, the thought will make us bear the blows, and run the race, and face the lions.

So, dear brother, the sure means of calmness amidst agitation, of confidence amidst the fluctuations of a restless age, of strenuous warfare, of diligent service, and patient endurance, lies here in the consideration of Christ. If we try to keep Him before our eyes life will be blessed. The secret of joy and peace on earth is the consideration of the Master by faith, and to see Him as He is will be the heaven of heaven. Here, the condition of holiness, joy, peace,

power, is ‘consider Jesus’; and yonder the Charter of new felicities and new capacities will be, ‘Behold the Lamb.’ If we set Him at our right hand we shall not be moved, and shall walk in the light of His countenance on earth, and He will set us at His right hand in the heavens, where His servants shall serve Him and see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads.

Hebrews 3:6—CONFIDENCE AND REJOICING OF HOPE

‘... If we hold fast the confidence and the reining of the hope firm unto the end.’— Hebrews 3:6.

TWO of the favourite thoughts of this letter are included in these words. There are none of the New Testament writers who give so frequent and earnest warnings against the danger of falling away from the Christian profession as does the writer of this letter, and there are none of them who set the power and the blessedness of hope as a Christian virtue in so many attractive lights. The reason for the prominence of these two thoughts in the letter is, of course, largely the circumstances of the persons to whom it was addressed. They were Hebrew Christians, in constant danger of being drawn away from their Christian profession by the seductions of Judaism—the system from which they had passed, and which still exercised a power over them. These peculiarities, of course, have ceased to operate with regard to us, but the lessons contained in the words are of permanent value.

Note, then —

I. The characteristics of the Christian life as set forth here.

They are two, confidence and rejoicing. Now the word which is translated ‘confidence’ literally means frank, outspoken speech, and comes to mean, secondarily, the boldness which finds expression in such speech. It is employed here, not without some reminiscence of its original meaning, but mainly in that secondary meaning which is

expressed partially, and only partially, by the word in our translation, 'confidence.' A terrified Christian is an anomaly; a timid Christian is a monster. If he is a true Christian he ought to be elevated by his Christianity high above fears of all sorts and to walk so unembarrassed and unhedged in by dread and nervous anxieties and sorrows and apprehensions that his tongue is not tied, but that he can speak out all that is in him, both to God and to man. And then the other word rendered 'rejoicing' is in the original even more emphatic than that rendering. It means 'boasting' or 'glorying,' and conveys the notion of a triumphant exultation which finds words coming to it naturally and irrepressibly, and cannot but speak out its gladness and triumph.

So these two qualities, courage and exultation, are the very key-notes and marks of Christian men and women, who live up to their privileges and understand what it is that they say they believe. What is there for a man to be afraid of if he has God at his back and heaven in front of him?

Circumstances? My own weak heart? Temptations? Of course there is a wholesome fear of all these which is beneficial because it sobers us and makes us watchful, and which he is a fool who flings away? 'Be not high-minded, but fear' is only the other side of the exhortation. 'Cast not away courage,' for the fear which apprehends danger and acknowledges weakness is the usher that leads in the Confidence that creates boldness, and will not be afraid. 'What time I am afraid' — and I shall often be — 'I *will* trust in Thee,' and then I may fling all fear behind my back and walk dreading nought.

Dear brethren, do we recognise it to be our duty to be brave? Does it ever enter into our minds that courage is part of the Christian character, and do we set ourselves to cultivate it accordingly?

But we have also to take into account the natural expression of this courageous temper which lies in the word — viz., frank outspokenness to God. There are a great many of us who never turn

our hearts inside out to God. Although we call ourselves Christians our prayers do not closely fit our real feelings. We pray about the things that we think it proper to pray about: about the things which we have always been in the habit of hearing good people pray about, whether we much care to have them or not. And these little annoyances that buzz about us like mosquitoes and fret so much of our lives, we never say a word to Him about *them*. No wonder that *our* hollow prayers are unanswered. If we were bolder with the boldness that this text tells us is our duty, we should turn ourselves inside out to God, and say, 'Search me, O Lord; try me and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.'

And then, if in anything like the degree in which the facts of the case warrant all Christian people in having it, we had that courage, there would go along with it a wonderful slitting of the cords that tie our tongues to one another about our faith. What an extraordinary thing it is that so many professing Christians have no sort of compulsion to tell anybody what they are, and do not feel as if there was any necessity laid upon them to speak to others of the Saviour that they have found! Why, if the vessel is full it will run over and light *will* radiate and heat will pour itself out. If there be life in the heart the blood will be pumped through the veins. And so, if we had the courage of our profession we should all be eloquent in the right times and places and to the right persons in the praise of the Master. Courage and a triumphant exulting joy are the marks and signs of a true Christian.

Put that picture side by side with what we see in others, and with what we ourselves are and do. Many of us have got the length of thinking that it is a sign of grace to be sad and timid, and anxious and afraid to say, 'I know in whom I have believed.' And there are very few of us who have got the length of walking in the light; and 'always,' as the Apostle says, being 'confident' and bold. That unbroken courage is within reach of us all, and the hand that grasps

it is the hand of unfaltering faith or confidence. The foundation of this Christian courage and triumphant exultation.

Both the chief words in the text, I believe, are intended to be qualified by that expression, 'of the hope,' which follows the last of them. The confidence is the confidence 'of the hope,' and so is the 'rejoicing.' That is to say, the ground upon which there can be reared this fair structure of a Christian life all radiant and exultant with courage and triumph is the great hope which Christ sets before us, and which in Himself is brought into contact with our hearts and minds. The hope of the gospel is the basis upon which the courage and the exultation rest.

When a vessel is sunk at sea, how do they float it again? They take great *caissons*, and fasten them to the sunken hull, and pump them full of air, and their buoyancy lifts it up from the ocean bed, and brings it up into the sunshine again. Fasten your sunken and sad hearts to that great hope that floats upon the surface, and it will lift you from the depths, and bring you into the sunshine. Think of the hope which you and I profess to have! How can sorrow and dumpish dismality live in the presence of such a solid and radiant thing? What would become of our anxieties, real and deep as they are? What would become of our domestic sorrows, painful and heartrending as they are for some of us, if once we walked in the sunshine of that perpetual hope? Who cares about the rough stones, and the sharp, jagged thorns upon the road, or even much about the blood upon his naked feet, when he can see the prize hanging yonder at the winning-post? If we had that immortal crown, and that blessed peaceful hope that 'we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is,' always blazing as a reality at the end of every dirty alley down which we have to go, and every dreary road along which we have to travel, how the dirt and the dreariness would be forgotten, and we should 'press toward the mark' with courage and with triumph! Think and realise to yourselves, dear friends, the contents of your hope, if you are Christian people — fellowship with Jesus Christ,

the knitting of all broken ties that it will be for our joy and peace to have re-knit; the absence of all trouble that has served for discipline; the rod being broken when the child has grown to be a man; the rest and peace, the wisdom and power, the larger service and closer fellowship with the dear Lord, which are waiting certainly for every one of us. And *then*, if you can, grumble about the road, or be sad or cast down 'by reason of the greatness of the way.' 'We are saved by hope'; and if only we can make real to ourselves the facts which hope based upon Christ reveals as absolute certainties for us all, the clouds will scatter and the darkness will pass before the shining of the true Light.

III. Lastly, the effort that is needed to keep hold of the hope.

The writer uses very emphatic words. He not only speaks about *holding it fast*, but about doing so unto 'the end,' duplicating, as it were, the idea of effort in the grasp, and declaring that that effort is to be continuous until the time when hope is lost in fruition. Now I need not remind you — we can all remind ourselves if we think — of the many outward difficulties and hindrances that rise to the vigour and vitality of this Christian hope. These may be so dealt with by us that they become subservient to its vitality and vigour, but by reason of our weakness, they often draw us away from Christ, and become distractions instead of helps. These are perpetually at work in order to make the Christian hope less vivid, to blur the outlines and dim the colours of the picture which it paints. Our own weaknesses and worldlinesses and clinging loves that twine themselves round creatures of earth, make it hard for us to soar in devout contemplation high enough to leave the mists below and see the blue and the sun. We are all short-sighted in spiritual matters, and cannot see the things that are afar off, and the fact that they are far off makes them unreal to many of us. Therefore, unless there be constant effort directed to retain the vividness of our impression of the things that are unseen, the vulgar, intrusive, flashing brightnesses of the poor, paltry present will dim them all to our eyes.

Whilst, then, there is constant need for effort, and without it we shall certainly lose our apprehension of the unseen blessedness, to hope in which is our very life, a great deal can be done by making direct efforts to cultivate these graces of which I have been speaking, and that from which they come. Though by no means altogether so, it is very much a matter of will and resolution whether Christian people shall be brave and exultant, or whether they shall go mourning all their days, and never taking up the privileges which they possess. If you were to say every morning, 'Now I am going to try to-day to keep myself up on the high level, the overhead railway, and to travel there,' you would find it possible to do it. A man cannot make himself glad by saying, 'Now I am determined I *will* be glad,' but the moods and changing emotions of our Christian life which reposes upon facts that do not change, are very largely under our own control, and it is generally our own fault if we find our confidence oozing out at our finger-ends, and an unnameable and vague sadness, of which we scarcely know the cause, wrapping our souls like a chill November mist. One honest and vigorous resolution would rend the mist, in nine cases out of ten, and we should find that it was all the product of the undrained ditches in our own hearts.

But whilst a great deal can be done by a dead lift of resolution, and by governing our feelings and keeping a tight hand upon our emotions, far more can be done by the simpler, and in some respects easier, and certainly more effectual, way of keeping our eyes fixed upon the Person and the facts on which our hope is grounded, and from which our courage flows. That is to say, look at Jesus Christ, and keep by His side, and look into His eyes until you can see love gleaming in them, and touch His pierced hands until you can feel the power trickling from His fingers into your weakness, and rest on the assurances of His faithful word until the unseen and far-off good that He has promised is more real than the little goods close beside you. You can cultivate hope most effectually by gazing upon the things unseen, and above all, on the Person who 'is our Hope.' If

only we will keep ourselves By faith, love, aspiration, communion of thought, and feeling, and desire, near to Him, He will stand beside us, and repeat to us the old word that was so frequent upon His lips, ‘Fear not,’ and courage will come. He will say, too, as He did in the hour of deepest sorrow, ‘These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full’; and our triumphant exultation will rise like water in a reservoir when a pure river flows into it. He will say, too, ‘What and where I am, there shall also My servant be’; and the living hope that comes from union with Him will make us victors over all ‘that is at enmity with joy,’ and all that is sad, frowning, threatening, and perilous in our present life.

So, dear brethren, we are saved by Hope, and this Hope that we have ‘has passed within the veil’ with our great High Priest, and there we can anchor our souls and fear not shipwreck, but ride out every storm.

Hebrews 3:7, 8—HEAR HIS VOICE

‘Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts...’ — Hebrews 3:7, 8.

WHOSE voice? The writer of the psalm from which these words are quoted meant God’s. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in quoting them, means Christ’s. And the unhesitating transfer, without explanation or apology, of a sacred saying of the Old Testament from God to Christ is a plain indication, especially considering that the writer was a Jew addressing Jews, of what he and they believed about Christ’s divinity. His voice was God’s voice, to be listened to with equal deference, and capable of bringing the same result.

‘To-day’; when is to-day? The writer of the psalm meant his own epoch; the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews means his. And the unhesitating transfer of the words from one period to another rests on the principle that there is a continuous voice of God sounding

through all the ages, to which each generation in turn has the privilege of listening, and the responsibility of not turning away. So we are not only permitted, but obliged, to bring down the 'go-day' to our Own period, and to believe that God's voice in Christ is speaking to us individually as truly and directly as if it had never been uttered to any of the men of the past. One more remark by way of introduction. 'If ye *will* hear His voice' conveys the idea of volition. The writer of the epistle had no such intention. He did not mean to say, 'If ye *want to* hear God's voice, open your ears.' But he uses the 'if' as it is often employed in Scripture, not go express doubt, but simply to cast a statement into the form of a supposition. The meaning is really substantially equivalent to 'as often as.' Instead of 'will' we get the meaning much better when we read, with the Revised Version 'shall.' 'To-day, if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'

Now if that be the connection and the meaning of the words before us, there are three things that I want to press upon you from them. First, that Jesus Christ is speaking to you; second, that there is a danger of steeling your hearts against Him; third, that it is wise to listen to-day.

I. That Jesus Christ is speaking to you.

The readers of this letter, certainly, and its writer, probably, never heard Jesus Christ in His earthly utterances; but as the letter says, in another place, 'He now speaketh from heaven.' The writer was sure that to these people, who had never heard a syllable of the Lord's earthly sayings, that pleading, infinitely sweet and persuasive voice was ever coming. And, as I said, his bold transference of the ancient words to his own generation involves a principle which compels us to transfer them equally unhesitatingly from the generation of apostles and early Christians to our own prosaic and commonplace times. Jesus Christ, dear friends, is speaking to every one of us, direct and straight, as He spoke to the men of those days.

He speaks to us by His recorded earthly utterances. Oh, if people would read the gospels as they ought to be read — with the conviction that there was nothing in Christ's words, local, temporary, or peculiar to the individuals to whom they were primarily addressed — how different they would be to us all! His own declaration is true about all His utterances, 'What I say unto you' — the little group gathered round Me here, — 'I say unto all' — those dim and distant multitudes away out to the very ends of the earth, and down through the ages, I speak to them all.

He stands and says to me, and to thee, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Dear brother, straight to you, as if winged like an arrow from the heavens, comes this call of the Lord, 'If any man thirst' — and surely that is general enough to take us all in — 'let him come unto Me and drink.'

We are putting no violence on the Lord's words by thus asserting their direct aim at every human heart. For I believe, for my part, that the love and individualising knowledge of Jesus Christ are divine; and that each of us has his own place in that loving heart; and that to each of us He spoke when He spoke unto all. So if you will rightly use the record that you have, you will hear in it Christ speaking to you.

He speaks to us by one another. I do not believe in sacerdotal authority, nor in apostolic succession, nor in any mystical sacredness attaching to any form of the preacher's office; but I do believe that the humblest and rudest of men who turns to another and says, 'Brother, Jesus Christ is thy Saviour; wilt thou not let Him save thee?' is speaking Christ's words. 'He that heareth you, heareth Me.' That is no bestowment of superhuman and magical authority on either apostles or clergy, hut it is the declaration which I am trying to enforce, that every lip that is opened to proclaim the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord derives all its power and all its music, if there be any, from the inspiration of Christ Himself. The body of a

violin is but meant to reverberate the sound; it is His hand that is drawn across the strings. All Christian teachers are the sounding-boards and reverberators of the music that He has made. They are but like wind instruments; the breath that is blown through them is the breath of Christ Himself. Alas! that the instrument is so often out of tune, and so poorly reproduces the infinite sweetness of the pleading tones of Him into whose lips grace was poured. But He does speak, and speaks even through such poor instruments as me.

He speaks to you deep down in that solemn voice that sometimes wakes within, and rebukes and restrains and directs. If it be true, and true it is, that the eternal Word of God is the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, it is tenfold more true — if I may so say — that consciences like ours, which have been saturated with the more or less, direct influences of Christian morality all our days, are to be taken as His voice.

And *so*, I beseech you, discern Christ's words, and not the mere historical record of what a dead Man once said in the past — of which criticism may make more or less havoc — but Christ's living words, springing fresh from His lips, and meant for you, in the words of the gospels. Hear His utterances, and not men's poor faltering transcription and translation of them, in the words which my fellows and I may chance to speak to you.

And hear His voice in that august monitor which you carry within, to warn and to impel, a spur to all lingering good, and a check upon all rampant evil.

II. Notice the danger of steeling the heart against Him.

One would have thought that the last thing possible was that there should be a pleading God and a refusing man; that there should be a God manifest in Jesus Christ, beseeching us to accept the loftiest gifts, and that men should turn away from the beseeching. Old legends tell us how mystic music put motion into sticks and stones,

and made the trees of the wood clap their hands. But men's hearts mysteriously and tragically remain stolidly deaf against that voice. It, always has been so. Of old, Wisdom cried in the high places of the city; and even her queenly majesty, and gentle persuasions, and infinitely desirable gifts, gained her no hearing, and her last word was, 'I have called and ye have refused.' The Incarnate Wisdom came upon earth, not to cry nor lift up His voice in the streets, but to appeal with gentleness and searching power to men, and He had to turn away from His temple and say, 'Thou knewest not the time of Thy visitation.' All that have had the best and highest things to say to the world have had the same experience. 'If a man prophesy of wine and strong drink,' speaking words that excite and offer to gratify sense and appetite, 'he shall be the prophet of this people,' and the God-messenger has to stand and say, 'All day long have I stretched out my hands to a disobedient and a gainsaying people.' A result so uniform must have deep-lying causes.

I do not intend to enter upon these now. I wish to say a word or two rather about the 'how' than about the 'why' of this strange fact, and to warn you, dear friends, against the courses by which so many of us, and you and I in our time, no doubt, have often stopped our ears against Christ's voice.

Simple occupation with all sorts of other things will effectually do it, Great is the power of preoccupation, magical is the power of indifference. A man can resolve not to attend to almost anything, however imperative and urgent may be its appeals to him. They used to beat drums and blow trumpets in the market-places of the towns when John Wesley and the early Methodists went into them in order to prevent the preacher's voice from being heard. And you and I know but too well — do we not? — what it is to busy ourselves with such a clamant crowd of occupations that Christ's voice gets smothered and stifled. Go into a factory and you can see that two men are talking to one another, because their lips are moving, hut you cannot hear a word they say for the whirl of the spindles and the

clatter of the looms. And there are a great many of us that silence Jesus Christ in that fashion. We see His mouth move, and we make the more noise at our business, and so manage to harden our hearts. Do not, as soon as you go out of these doors, let the rattle of the world come in to deafen the ears of your conscience to the pleadings of your Saviour.

You can harden your hearts very effectually by neglecting to do what you know you ought to do. You can kill a plant if you persistently pick off the buds, and prevent it from flowering. You can kill your consciences in the same fashion. There is nothing which makes a man so receptive of further communications from his Lord as obedience to what He has already heard, and he who says, 'Thy servant heareth,' will never have to say in vain, 'Speak, Lord!' The converse is true. There is nothing that so hinders a man from knowing what Christ would have him do as to know that He would have him do something which He will not do. You can take the bell off the rock if you like. That will contribute to your sleeping on the voyage, and you will be troubled by no intrusive ringings until the bow is amongst the white breakers and the keel grinding on the black rocks. You can harden your hearts thus by neglecting your convictions.

You can do it by wilfully fighting them down. And I am sure that there are men and women here who know what it is to do that. Take a lump of raw cotton, and put it under sufficient pressure, and you can make it as compact as a bullet. So you can take your hearts, and by dint of determined resistance, and bringing all manner of pressure to bear upon them, you can squeeze and squeeze and squeeze till you squeeze all generous impulses and lofty thoughts and wishes to be better, and convictions of duty, clean out of them, and leave them no bigger than a walnut, and as hard as a cannon-ball. You *can* do it; do not risk it, It is possible by plunging yourselves into a deliberate course of exciting and intoxicating evil to shake off impressions so as to laugh at them. 'Take a hair of the dog that bit you' is the

devil's prescription. I dare say there are people who know what it is, in order to get rid of themselves, or rather I should say of Christ speaking in themselves, to plunge more desperately into some absorbing course of evil. That is the Nemesis of all wrongdoing, that as it continues the delight of it diminishes and the necessity for it increases, to bury remembrances, to drown reflections, to get rid of self. And so as chemists can liquify oxygen you can freeze down your hearts if you will into a solid mass, impervious to anything but the retributive blow that will shatter it.

Beware! 'Since ye hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'

III. Lastly, notice the wisdom of listening to-day. Now, as I have said, the 'to-day' of my text was the epoch of the generation which the writer was addressing; and in one very blessed sense 'to-day' for each of us is the whole period of our earthly lives, during which sounding on for ever will be the pleading of Jesus Christ's voice. And so men say, 'It is never too late to mend.' Yes, perfectly true; but is not the other side as true: It is never too soon to mend? Whilst the 'to-day' of my text, thank God, lasts as long as the day of life, there is a very real sense in which the more ordinary meaning of it is applicable to this matter. I do not need to remind you how in all regions of life there is nothing more deleterious to character nor more fatal to success than the habit of putting off doing plain duty. In your business you are trained to promptitude. The man that does not let grass grow under his feet in ordinary matters will be half way on his journey whilst another man is thinking of getting his boots on. And promptitude is no less important — in some aspects it is even more so-in regard to listening to the voice of Jesus Christ, and obeying His commandments. So I want to plead with you, dear friends, to that effect. 'That thou doest do quickly,' if it be a right thing. 'That thou doest drop quickly,' if it be a wrong thing. But let there be no hesitation in regard of the one course or the other. As Elijah said, 'How long halt ye between two opinions?' or in the very picturesque word of the original, 'How long do you hobble along

upon both knees,' resting now upon one and then upon the other. 'If the Lord be God,' then plain common sense says 'follow Him'; 'if Baal, then follow Him.'

And this is the more needful, because impressions or convictions stirred by the voice of Christ are apt to be very evanescent. They are delicate; they require prompt fixing, or they fade off the sensitive plate. They are like the images of a dream — very clear at the moment we wake, ten minutes afterwards irrecovetable. Do not trifle with what may be a fleeting inclination to eternal duty.

And they are very hard to reproduce. I am sure I am speaking to some who were once on the verge of taking Christ for their Saviour, and then something within said, 'Yet a little more sleep and a little more slumber,' and the disposition has never come back again. Felix sent for Paul many a time after the first time, and talked with him, but he never 'trembled' any more, but talked comfortably with his prisoner about the possibility of screwing a ransom out of him. I say nothing about other reasons for prompt action, such as that every moment makes it harder for a man to turn to Jesus Christ as his Saviour. The dreadful power Of habit weaves chains about him, thin at first as a spider's web, solid at last as an iron fetter. Associations that entangle, connections that impede grow with terrible rapidity. And if it is hard for you to turn to your Lord now, it will never be easier, and will certainly be harder.

And, dear friends, 'to-day' — how long is it going to last? Of course I know that all the deepest reasons for your being a Christian remain unaffected if you were going to live in the world for ever. And, of course, I know that the gospel of Jesus Christ is as good to live by as it is to die by. But, notwithstanding, common sense says that if our time here is so uncertain as we know it to be, there is no time to put off. You and I have to die, whether we find a convenient season for it or not. And perhaps we have to die before we find Felix's

‘convenient season’ to send for Paul or Paul’s Master. So in the narrowest sense of the word, ‘To-day... harden not your hearts.’

But I dare say some of you, and especially some of you young people, may be kept from accepting Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and serving Him, by a vague disinclination and dread to make so great a change. I beseech you, do not give a feather’s weight to such considerations. If a change is right, the sooner it is made the better. The shrinking all passes when it is made, just as a bather recovers himself when once his head has been plunged beneath the water.

And some of you may be kept back because you know that there are sins that you will have to unveil if you become Christians. Well, do not let that keep you back either. Confession is healing and good and sweet to the soul, if it is needful for repentance. Sins that men have a right to know hurt as long as they are hid, and cease to hurt when they are acknowledged, like the fox beneath the Spartan boy’s robe, that gnawed when it was covered up, and stopped biting when it was revealed.

So, dear friends, you hear Christ speaking to you in His Word, in His servants, in the depths of your hearts. He speaks to you of a dying Saviour, of His infinite love, of His perfect sacrifice, of a complete salvation, a cleansed heart, a blessed life, a calm death, an open heaven for each if we will take them. See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.’

Hebrews 3:13—THE LIES OF THE TEMPTRESS

The deceitfulness of sin. — Hebrews 3:13.

THERE is a possible reference here, in this personification of Sin, as leading men away by lies, to the story of the First Temptation. There, the weapons of the Tempter were falsehoods. There was a lie about the unlawfulness of the suggested act, insinuated rather than boldly spoken, ‘Hath God said, ye shall not eat?’ There was a lie

about its disadvantages, ‘Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.’ There was a lie about its ultimate consequences, ‘Ye shall not surely die.’ And these three falsehoods are typical of the methods which sin employs to draw us away from the path of right.

The writer of this letter does not leave us in much doubt as to what he means by sin, for he includes in it not only gross outward acts, but goes a great deal deeper, and in the verse before my text, all but defines it as being ‘an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.’ Whether it come in the form of gross breaches of the common laws of morality, or whether it come in more refined but not less dangerous forms, everything by which my heart goes away from God is sin; and every such thing gains its power over me by dangling before my credulous eyes a series of falsehoods.

So then my purpose is just to try to unrip some of these lies, and see what is inside of them. The deceitfulness ‘of sin’ tells lies about the bait; — lies about the hook that it hides; lies about the criminality of the act to which she would draw us; and, lastly, lies about the possibilities of deliverance. Let me touch on each of these in order.

I. First, then, my text suggests to me Sin’s lies about the bait.

The old story is typical, and may stand as a well-developed specimen of the whole set of evil deeds. ‘When she saw that it was pleasant to the eye, and good for food, and a thing to be desired,’ then the inflamed desire, perceiving the attainable object, went straight at it. And that is the history of all the evil that we do. It is either for the sake of winning a desirable object, or for the sake of avoiding some undesirable issue; we never do the wrong thing, and go away from God, except under a delusion that we shall be better and happier when we have got the desired thing than we should be without it.

Now I do not mean to say for a moment that there is not a very solid reality in the pleasurable results of a great many wrong things. If a

man chooses to sin to gratify sense, he does get the sensuous enjoyment out of it. The food that is stolen will stay hunger, and be sweet upon the palate, just as much as that which is the product of honest industry. The things which tempt our desires we may get; and there will be no illusion at all about the reality and solidity of the pleasure. But there is another question to be asked. You have got the thing you wanted; have you — what then? Are you much the better for it? Are you satisfied with it? Was it as good as it looked when it was not yours? Is it as blessed now that you have stretched your hand across the flames of Hell and made it your own as it seemed when it danced there on the other side? Is not the giant painted on the canvas outside the caravan a great deal bigger than the reality inside, when you go in to look at him? Is there anything that we have got by doing wrong for it, howsoever it may have satisfied the immediate impulse in obedience to whose tyrannous requirements we were stirred up to grasp it, which is worth, in solid enjoyment, what we gave for it? Having attained the desire, do we not find that it satisfies not us, but only some small part of us? If I might so say, we are like those men that old stories used to tell about that had swallowed some loathly worm. We feed the foul creeping thing within us, but ourselves continue hungry. We cannot slake our thirst out of empty cups, however jewelled. Besides, sin's pleasures are false, because along with them all comes an after tang that takes the sweetness out of them. Like the prophet's book, they may be honey on the lip, but bitter as gall when swallowed. Some foul-tasting preparation of naphtha is put into spirits of wine to keep people from drinking it. The cup that sin brings to you, though it may be fiery and intoxicating, has got the nasty naphtha in it too. And you taste both the one and the other.

There is only one thing that promises less than it performs, and which can satisfy a man's soul; and that is cleaving to God. Go to Him, let nothing draw you away from Him. Let us hold by Him in love, thought, obedience; and the lies that tempt us to our destruction will have no power over us; and we shall possess joys

that neither pall nor end, nor leave behind them a bitterness upon the lips. 'Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.' Better what Christ offers in the cup which

He drank *off*, whereof, though the taste may be bitter at first, what remains is His own joy, perpetual and full

II. Again, note the lies about the hook.

The old story lends itself to us as a kind of general expression to which all the falsehoods of sin may be reduced. 'Ye shall not surely die.' I suppose that if any man had clear before him at the moment of any temptation, howsoever fiery and strong, the whole sweep of the consequences that are certainly involved in his yielding to it, he would pause on the edge, and durst not do it. But sin suppresses facts; and here are a few of the barbed points which she hides. She does not tell you anything about outward consequences. I have been speaking about gross forms of sin. I wish I could believe that there is no man among my hearers to whom dehortations from them are appropriate, but I fear that in a great city like this there are never gathered as many men and women together as are here, without there being some whose sin lies in the direction of sensuous passion and animal indulgence. And I beseech such to remember the hook as well as the bait, and to think of the outward consequences in broken constitutions, poisoned blood, enfeebled frames, damaged reputations, loss of faculty, position, prospects, and a thousand other things, which hang round about the path of the profligate man. Every year there come into Manchester young men who fancy they can play the game and not pay the stakes.

Every month, I was going to say, there drop out of this great city, bankrupt in reputation, ruined in health, driven from positions of hopes and profit, the heart-break of their families, and a curse to themselves, young fellows that listened to such words as I am speaking to them now, and went away and said: 'We will chance it! It is exaggerated.' Yes, it would be, if I said that this was true about

the whole circle of evil-doers, but it is not exaggerated, if you remember that a definite percentage of all the young profligates of Manchester, year by year, go away to die, with their 'bones full of the iniquity of their youth.' Did Pleasure show you that hook when she dangled her bait before your eyes?

She suppresses the action of conscience. There is nothing more awful than the occasional swiftness and completeness of the revulsion of feeling between the moment before and the moment after. While yet escape from the temptation was possible, the thing looked so fascinating, so all-desirable; and the next moment, when the thing is done, and can never be undone, and you have got round to the back of it, it looks so hideous and threatening. Conscience lulled, or at least unheard during the hubbub of the clamant voices of the passions that yelled to be fed, lifts up her solemn voice sometimes, the moment that they are silent, gnawing the poisoned portion that is thrown to them, and speaks. Did Pleasure tell you about that hook when she dangled the bait before your eyes?

She suppresses the action of sin upon character. We do not perceive how all our deeds, even the small and apparently transitory and incidental, are really linked together in an iron net-work of cause and effect, so as that every one of them lives on and on, in more or less perceptible and distinct effects upon our characters. You cannot do a wrong thing, 'departing from the living God,' without thereby leaving an indelible mark upon your whole spiritual and moral nature. Loftier aspirations die out of you, the incapacity for better actions is confirmed, and that awful, mysterious thing that we call 'habit' comes in to ensure that once done, twice will be probable, and twice done, thrice and innumerable times more will be almost certain.

There is nothing more mystical and solemn about our lives than the way in which unthought of and trifling deeds harden themselves into habits, and dominate us, whether we will or no. And so the sin

which once stood in front of us with a smile and tempted us, because it was desirable, afterwards comes behind us with a frown, and is a taskmaster with a whip. Instead of being drawn from before by anticipated delight, we are driven from behind by tyrannous habit, and commit the old sin, not because we expect pleasure, but to get away from misery. The flowery fetters become iron, and the evil once done gets to be our master, and we are held and bound in the chain of our sins. And more than that, there is the necessity for perpetual increase, heavier doses, more pungent forms of evil, in order to titillate the increasing insensitiveness of the nature. You take a tiger cub into your house when it is little; it is prettily striped, graceful in its motions, playful and affectionate; and it grows up, and when it is big, it is the master of you, if it is not the murderer of you! Do not you take the little sin into your hearts. It will grow, and its claws will grow, and its ferocity will grow.

And now all these consequences suggest the last of sin's suppressions that I would specify.

They all make a future retribution a probable thing. And that future retribution is a plain and necessary inference from any belief at all in a God and in a future life. But the tempting sin has nothing to say about that future judgment, or if it has, has only this to say: 'Ye shall not die.' Is it not strange that it is almost impossible to get many of you — reasonable, farsighted, prudent men and women as you are, in regard to ordinary things— to look that fact fairly in the face? You are like sailors who get into the spirit-room in a ship when she is driving on the rocks, and as long as you can get the momentary indulgence, never mind about what is coming.

But you cannot 'jump the life to come.' 'Let no man deceive you with vain words; because of these things the wrath of God *is coming* upon the children of disobedience.' And so, dear brethren, let me plead with you.

Weak my words are ‘I know, to break down the walls with which we surround ourselves.’ But oh, let me try to get within the defences, and plead with you not to let wishes, inclinations, and earthly tastes make you so short-sighted; but take into view *all* the consequences of your actions, and then tell me, if, regard being had to the whose duration of their results, anything is so wise as to love and serve and cleave to God who dwells in Christ, and in whom is our portion and our all ‘It is an evil thing and a bitter to depart from the living God.’

III. Then notice again, the lies as to the criminality of the deed.

Once more the old story avails us. ‘Hath God said Ye shall not eat?’ is the insinuated suggestion that creeps into most men’s minds. I suppose that the number of us who, with clear eyes, knowing the thing at the moment that we do it to be wrong, do yet resolve that, wrong as it is, it shall be done, is comparatively few. I suppose that by far the majority simply ignore the question of right or wrong, when the question of pleasant and desirable comes to be canvassed. Before the committal — as I was saying a moment ago — we have an awful power of silencing our consciences. Just as housebreakers carry some drugged meat for the house-dogs when they intend to break into some lonely farmhouse, so we are all adepts in applying gentle phrases to our own evil, while if the same thing is done by anybody else we shall flame up in indignation, as David did when Nathan told him about the man and his one ewe lamb. Therefore it comes to this— do not you trust to instinctive utterances of inclination calling itself conscience. Remember that you can bribe conscience to say anything but that it is right to do wrong. You will get it to say anything that you teach it about what is wrong and what is not. And therefore you must find a better guide than conscience. You have to enlighten it and educate it and check it, and keep it wakeful and suspicious, as the price of purity.

The same set of lies about the criminality of our actions operates with still greater effect after the committal. I was speaking a moment or two ago about the sudden waking of conscience when the deed is done. But there is a worse thing than that, and that is when conscience does not wake. That is the condition, I have no doubt, of many people listening to me now. 'She wiped her mouth and said I have done no harm.' You can muffle the bell so that there will come no sound. You can sear your hand, if you once press a hot iron upon it; and you can make the cuticle of your conscience, if I may so say, just as insensitive by the same process. So then, my friend, do you take care that you do not thus darken the light that is in you, till it becomes darkness. And remember also that your knowing nothing against yourself does not prove you to be blameless. There is nothing harder than to drive home the consciousness of sinfulness. I can fancy what is passing in some, as they listen to me now. Some of you refer all that I am saying to that other man in the corner there, whom it will fit so well. Some of you are saying to yourselves, 'Oh yes, I admit it all in a general way'; but not summoning up in your mind any of the evils which cling and cleave to you individually. And some of you are trying to break the force of what I am saying by theories about responsibility, and how a man is the creature of circumstances and the like; or by pleading in arrest of judgment your better side: 'I am a respectable man. Nobody can find any fault with me. I am a good father, a good husband, an honest tradesman, a man of my word, a cultured gentleman perhaps, a student, a man abhorring gross sin, and so forth; and your words have nothing at all to do with me.' Ah! have they not? 'Departing from the living God'; that is the sin that I am talking about, brother — not going and getting drunk stealing, wallowing in the sty of sensualism; not the mere external acts. The kernel of all sin is living to ourselves. That is what I want to lay upon all your consciences. And that is the hardest of all results for even the most earnest and pleading words to effect, in the minds of

the respectable, self-complacent, gospel-hardened people that come and fill these pews.

IV. So the last word that I wish to say is in reference to the falsehoods of sin in regard to the deliverance therefrom.

These other lies, like bubbles, sometimes burst. The first of them, about the pleasures, generally bursts as soon as the thing is done. The others about the pains and the criminality often disappear when pricked by some thought of God and contact with Him. But the repertory of the deceiver is not empty yet. And she can turn her hand and bring out another set of lies, in order to retain her dominion. For the sin that said to you before you did it: 'There is no harm in it; you do not need to do it again; it is only just once and it will be done with,' says to you after you have done it, when you begin to feel that it was wrong, and try to shake off its guilt and power: 'You have done it now! You never can get away any more. The thing is past, and neither in regard to its consequences nor in regard to its power will you ever escape from it. What you have written you have written. You are mine!' And so she lays her iron claw upon the man and holds him.

Some of us put that into a philosophical principle, and say that in this great system of rigid interlocking of cause and effect, the idea of forgiveness and of a new beginning of life is impossible and absurd. Some of us that cannot talk in that strain, yet know what it is to have to say: 'There is no hope! I have loved evil, and after it I must yet go.'

So sin lies to us just as she lied before. And I have to come now with the message that, of all her falsehoods none is more false and fatal than the falsehood that a sinful man cannot turn from his evil; conquer all his transgression; begin a new happy, clean life; and be sure of forgiveness from His Father in Heaven. 'Jesus Christ, the faithful and true witness,' has died that it may be possible to bring to us pure and true promises of lasting and satisfying blessedness, and

to avert from each of us, if we will trust in the power of His blood, the worst and penal consequences of our transgression, and if we will trust in the power of His imparted Spirit, to make our future altogether unlike our past, and deliver us from the habit and entail of our sins. So, dear friend, these two stand before you. On one side the Sorceress with a smile on her lips, a lie on her tongue, and a knife in her sleeve. Do not go into her house. ‘The dead are there; and her guests are in the depths of Hell.’ On the other side stands Jesus Christ who has died to ‘redeem our souls from’ her ‘deceit and violence’; and trusting in whom we may all say: ‘My soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken and I am escaped.’

Hebrews 3:14—A MOMENTOUS ‘IF’

‘We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.’ — Hebrews 3:14.

ONE of the great characteristics of this remarkable letter to Hebrew Christians is the frequency and earnestness of its warnings against apostasy. Over and over again we find these recurring, and in fact we may say that the whole letter is written in order to guard against that danger.

The circumstances in which the persons to whom it was originally addressed found themselves largely explain that emphasis laid upon their danger of forsaking Christ. For they had to face what was perhaps the greatest trial to which faith was ever exposed, in the entire dissolution and violent extinction of the whole Jewish system which the prescription of uncounted centuries, in addition to the direct voice of God Himself, had consecrated. And they were to ‘hold fast by their confidence,’ though it seemed as if heaven and earth were being swept away. No wonder that there was danger of their becoming ‘of those that drew back to perdition,’ when such convulsions were uprooting the pillars on which their whole habits of thought and action had rested.

But, dear brethren, though our lot is cast in quieter times, the continual tendencies of our nature, and the continual stress of circumstances, make the exhortation of my text quite as important and as fitting for us. ‘Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward,’ must ever ring in the ears of Christ’s disciples. And in these words of our text we have set forth very strongly and beautifully —

I. The necessity that is laid upon every believing heart.

‘Hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.’ Now what is meant by ‘the beginning of our confidence’? It may mean either of two things — I am inclined to believe that it means Both. The outward fact, from which our confidence took its Beginning as its ground foundation, or to use learned words, the objective fact manifested to us in the gospel which tells of the incarnate dying and raised Christ, is the beginning of all true confidence. On it, and on it alone, can there be built a solid, rational assurance that can give an account of itself, and face the facts of the present and the future. And if my text be understood from that point of view, then the exhortation is to keep a firm hold of the initial truth that first of all stirred faith in our trembling hearts and breathed a tranquil assurance over our troubled consciences. Keep a firm grasp of the elementary initial truths which at first drew you to the Master.

But then, on the other hand, not excluded by this interpretation, but rather inextricably interwoven with it, is the other possible meaning of the text. ‘Hold fast the beginning of your confidence’ — the initial act on your parts. What was it, Christian man, that first breathed a little light air of hope through the stagnant calm of indifference in your heart? That new hope was the consequence of two simple but mighty acts — repentance and trust in Jesus Christ. From these two inward dispositions there sprung, like a rainbow over a cataract, the quivering, painted bow of hope.

Confidence is born of penitence and faith. ‘Hold fast the beginning of your confidence,’ and ever reiterate the two initial acts from which it flowed.

These two will be reiterated in proportion as our understandings and our hearts grasp the initial fact which, first of all, evoked them.

Now this exhortation, thus comprehensively understood, goes upon the understanding that in that elementary gospel there lies all that a man needs, and it goes also on the understanding that in these two primary acts of the Christian life, repentance and faith, there lie the seeds of all the growths and progresses which it may afterwards attain. In the first word that made these Hebrews Christians, there lay, like the leaves of the beech wrapped up in their tiny brown sheaths, in germ and miniature, and needing only sunshine and dew to open them out, all that their understandings needed for enlightenment, their wills for command, their hearts for their home — all that their hope could paint, all that their love could sigh for. The elements of this science, spoken first, are in one sense its last results. The Alpha is the Omega, and holds in itself all the alphabet — ay, and all the words and books that will be made out of the alphabet. *For* in that truth, ‘God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish,’ there lie the beginnings, the *‘Principia,’* of all knowledge of moral and spiritual matters that a saint can learn or an angel can apprehend. There needs but development; there needs but the commentary of experience and of life in order to bring out of ‘the beginning of your confidence’ everything that heart and will and mind can need.

And this exhortation goes also on the other understanding that any advance— and advance there must be, for the very word ‘begin’ implies continuance and progress — that any advance which is to be according to the true law of the Christian system must not be away from, but deeper into that which we apprehended at first. I believe in

the advance of Christian thought through the centuries. I believe in the advance of Christian knowledge as well as character in the individual. But I believe that the advance consists in getting to understand more and more of the fulness which lies in the earliest word, and that whosoever construes Christian progress in the sense of leaving behind, as beggarly elements, the truths of a Christ divine, incarnate, dying, raised again, ruling, and coming again to judge, and of a Divine Spirit imparted by that Christ — whosoever supposes that these things are elements to be left far in the rear — will find that his progress is retrogression and not advance. The beginning of the confidence must be continued, and the continuance consists in plunging ourselves more deeply into the beginning.

But, dear brethren, is it not the case that a tragical number of so-called Christians have lost the very conception, not only of progress, but of holding fast by the initial fact and the initial act? I have no doubt there are some of you professing to be Christians, members no doubt of Christian churches, who not only have not advanced one step from the place that they stood in when, as they suppose, they were first of all converted, but who are not nearly as much under the influence of God's truth in Jesus Christ as they were at that far away day, twenty, thirty, or forty years ago. They have made no advance; they have not held their ground. The beginning of their confidence has been like some of those abortive shoots that trees and shrubs are seduced to put out by the warmth of a mild October, nipped by November frost, and destined never to bear any fruit. The message comes to such with immense and convicting power: 'Hold fast the beginning of your confidence.'

No man on this side of heaven, however deep his devotion, long his career, consistent his conduct, and progressive his piety, is beyond the need for the injunction. My text says, very emphatically, 'to the end.' There have been ships wrecked at the harbour-mouth, and which have gone to pieces with the loss of all hands, on the bar. And as John Bunyan saw long ago, a door opens down to the depths, at

the very gate of the Celestial City. So that we can never relax our watchfulness nor our effort to retain what we had, and to continue to practise what we did, long ago. Let me say a word about

II. The hindrances that He in the way of obeying this exhortation.

The Christian life is not different from all other courses of conduct in regard to this characteristic, that it is apt, unnoticed either by the man himself *or* by onlookers, to slide off its original foundations. All great causes, begun in enthusiasm, are apt to lose their first impulses, and to be actuated at last by little more than use and wont. The deadening influence of habit comes in all our life, and in our religious life just as much as in any other department.

No doubt there are aspects in which it is seen to be a good thing that we should have the stay of a formed habit, instead of having, for each act, to find a fresh and distinguishable impulse towards good. But the evil that goes with bringing life under the sway of habit is no less real than the good. And we are all apt to drop into a complacent taking for granted that the old energy lasts; and that our religious life is bottomed on the old foundations, and that it yields to and is guided by the old motives, when all the while an entire change has come over the man, and what he used to do from fresh impulse he now does as a matter of routine. Is not that true about all of us in some parts of our lives, and about the religious life and acts of many of us? And do we not need to break up this custom, which 'lies upon us with a weight heavy as frost and deep almost as life,' and to go back to the original impulse and the initial fact which brought about the impulse, and while we fight against the evil of habit, to get all the good out of it that it can yield? Again, of course, there must be many changes in a man's attitude to the truth, in proportion as it becomes familiar to him. Wonder goes, excitement must necessarily pass, emotion will cool. A fire crackles when it is newly lit, but when it is well burnt up it glows with a steady and unspluttering heat. And so it is by no means all loss if we leave behind us our early

agitations and keep our ancient confidence. Emotion is meant to consolidate into principle, and there will be pure gain if it does. But for all that, there is a danger of familiarity with the truth making us indifferent to the truth, and of repeated exercise of the act of penitence or of faith making the act not less emotional — that it *must* become — but less deep and real; and then there is nothing but loss.

Further, besides these necessary changes in the accompaniments of our confidence, there is the continual operation of our own wayward and feeble natures slackening the grasp that we have of Christ, and enfeebling the practice of the initial repentance and faith. And besides these there are the continual enemies that we carry within ourselves, and the continual operation of externals, which the writer of this letter sets forth in another striking image, when he tells us that we must ‘give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard, lest at any time we should drift away from them.’ Yes, the current of life, legitimate duties and occupations, our daily business, our daily joys, and the good and pleasant things which God has bestowed upon us, acting upon us like the pressure of a stream upon a boat not made fast to the bank, tend to sweep us silently down the river. And if the boatman is lying asleep in the bottom of it he will find, when he awakes and opens his eyes, that he is surrounded by strange objects, and that those that he saw before he went to sleep are away far up the stream and out of sight. This unconscious, silent drift, drift, drift is sweeping away hundreds of Christian men from the firm moorings on the bank there, and unless we each make a continuous effort to retain it, we shall lose our hold of ‘the beginning of our confidence.’

I need not say more than a word about the last thought suggested by the text.

III. The large, blessed result of holding fast the beginning of our confidence.

‘We are made partakers of Christ,’ says the writer. He uses very remarkable language on which we can but touch lightly. I may point out that the words may either mean — and it is difficult to say which of the two things they do mean — either partakers of Christ, as if all of us together sat round that sacred board, and shared the common meal which Christ presents to us, or they may mean partakers with Christ, as if we were each of us partners with Him in the possession of all that He possesses. The difference is merely one of representation, the idea presented is substantially the same in both cases. It is this: we receive Jesus Christ and all that He has and all that He is on condition of faithfully holding fast by the beginning of our confidence. Not as though we did not possess Him until the end came. The writer is not saying anything so doleful as that. The initial act gives a real possession of Jesus. Observe the language of my text. It almost sounds inconsistent with itself, inasmuch as in the first clause it says, ‘We have become,’ if we render the Greek accurately, ‘We have become "partakers,"’ as if the partaking were an accomplished fact; and then goes on as if it were one lying still in the future and contingent. That is to say, the initial, feeblest, most rudimentary, most unintelligent grasp of Christ as Saviour and Friend brings a participation in Him in proportion to its depth and its comprehension of Him. But that participation is capable of indefinite increase, and the way to get more of Christ is to reiterate the initial act and to keep a firm grasp of the first facts, ‘To him that hath shall be given; and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.’

Hebrews 4:3—THE REST OF FAITH

‘We which have believed do enter into rest....’ — Hebrews 4:3.

‘Do enter’ — but on a hundred gravestones you will read ‘He entered into rest’ on such and such a day, as a synonym for ‘He died.’ It is strange that an expression which the writer of this Epistle takes pains to emphasise as referring to a present experience should,

by common consent, in popular use, have been taken to mean a future blessing. If nominal Christians had found more frequently that their faith was strong enough to produce its natural effects, they would not have so often misunderstood our writer. He does not say, 'We, when we die, shall enter into rest,' but 'We who have believed do enter.'

It is a bold statement, and the experience of the average Christian seems to contradict it. But if the fruit of faith is repose; and if we who say we have faith are full of unrest, the best thing we can do is not to doubt the saying, but to look a little more closely whether we have fulfilled its conditions. 'We which have believed do enter into rest.'

I. So, then, the first thing to be noted here is the present rest of faith.

I say 'faith' rather than 'belief,' because I wish to emphasise the distinction between the Christian notion of faith, and the common notion of belief.

The latter is merely the acceptance of a proposition as true; and that is not enough to bring rest to any soul, though it may bring rest to the understanding. It is a great pity, though one does not quite see how it could have been avoided, that so frequently in the New Testament, to popular apprehension, the depth of the meaning of that one requirement of faith is obscured because it is represented in our version by the word 'believe,' which has come to be appropriated to the mere intellectual act.

But if you will notice that the writer of this Epistle uses two other words as interchangeable with 'belief,' you will understand the depth of his meaning better. Sometimes he speaks of our 'confidence' — by which he means precisely the same thing. Sometimes he speaks of our 'obedience' — by which he means precisely the same thing. So there is an element of voluntary submission implied, and there is an element of outgoing confidence

implied in the word. And when he says, 'We which have believed do enter into rest,' he does not mean 'We which acknowledge that

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world, But we who, acknowledging, let our hearts go out to Him in trust, and our wills bow down before Him in obedience and submission. We thereby do enter into rest.' Carry with you these two thoughts, then — 'confidence' and 'obedience' — as indispensable elements in the New Testament conception of faith, and then you can understand the great saying of my text.

Trust brings rest, for the trust which grasps Jesus Christ, not only intellectually, but with the reliance of the whole nature upon Him to do for me that which my understanding believes that He will do — that trust brings rest because it sweeps away, as the north wind does the banded clouds on the horizon, all the deepest causes of unrest. These are our perverted relation to God, and the alienation of our hearts from Him.

Brother! there is no rest deep as life which does not flow from rejoicing confidence in Christ's great sacrifice by which the innermost source of conflict and disturbance in our souls has been dealt with. Most of us are contented if there be a superficial appearance of calm, like the sunny vineyard on the slopes of a volcano, whilst-in the heart of it sulphurous fires are bubbling and boiling, and will burst out some day. What is the worth of a tranquillity which only survives on condition of our ignoring the most patent and most operative fact in our lives? It is only when you shuffle God out of your consciousness, and when you wink hard so as not to see the facts of your own moral condition and sinfulness, or when you sophisticate yourself into illogical and unreasonable diminution of the magnitude and gravity of your sins, that some of you know a moment's rest. If the curtain were once drawn aside, and we were brought face to face with the realities of heaven and the realities of our own characters, all this film of apparent peace would

break and burst, and we should be left to face the trouble that comes whenever a man's relation with God is, consciously to himself, perverted and wrong. But trust brings rest; rest from the gnawing of conscience, rest from the suspicion of evil consequences resulting from contact with the infinite divine righteousness, rest from all the burden of guilt, which is none the less heavy because the man appears to be unconscious of it. It is there all the same. 'We which have believed do enter into rest,' because our trust brings about the restoration of the true relation to God and the forgiveness of our sins.

Trust brings rest, because it casts all our burdens on another. Every act of reliance, though it does not deliver from responsibility, delivers from anxiety. We see this even when the object of our trust is but a poor creature like ourselves. Husbands and wives who find settled peace in one another; parents and children; patrons and protected, and a whole series of other relationships in life, are witnesses to the fact that the attitude of reliance brings the actuality of repose. A little child goes to sleep beneath its mother's eye, and is tranquil, not only because it is ignorant but because it is trustful. So if we will only get behind the shelter, the blast will not blow about us, but we shall be in what they call on the opposite side of the Tweed, in a word that is music in the ears of some of us — a 'lown place,' where we hear not the loud winds when they call. Trust is rest; even when we lean upon an arm of flesh, though that trust is often disappointed. What is the depth of the repose that comes not from trust that leans against something supposed to be a steadfast oak, that proves to be a broken reed, but against the Rock of Ages? We which have 'believed do enter into rests'

Trust brings repose, because it effects submission. The true reason for our restlessness in this world is not that we are 'pelted by the pitiless storm' of change and sorrow. A grief accepted loses most of its power to sadden, and all its power to perturb. It is not outward calamities, but a rebellious will that troubles us. The bird beats itself

against the wires of its cage, and wounds itself, whereas if it sat still in its captivity it might sing. So when we trust we submit; and submission is the mother of peace. There is no other consolation worth naming for our sorrows, except the consolation that comes from submission. When we accept them, lie still, let him strike home and kiss the rod, we shall be at rest.

Trust brings repose, because it leads to satisfied desires. We are restless because each object that we pursue yields but a partial satisfaction, and because all taken together are inadequate to our needs. There is but one Person who can fill the heart, the mind, the will, and satisfy our whole nature. No accumulation of things, be they ever so precious, even if they are the higher or more refined satisfactions of the intellect, can ever satisfy the heart. And no endless series of finite persons is sufficient for the wants of any one of the series, who, finite as he is, yet needs an infinite satisfaction. It must be a person that shall fill all the cavities and clefts of our hearts, and, filling them, gives us rest. 'My soul thirsteth for *God*,' though I misinterpret its thirst, and, like a hot dog upon a road, try to slake my thirst by lapping at any puddle of dirty water that I come across in my path. There is no satisfaction there. It is in God, and in God only, that we can find repose.

Some of us may have seen a weighty acknowledgment from a distinguished biologist lately deceased which strikes me as relevant to this thought.

Listen to his confession: 'I know from experience the intellectual distractions of scientific research, philosophical speculation, and artistic pleasures, but am also well aware that even when all are taken together, and well sweetened to taste, in respect of consequent reputation, means, social position, etc., the whole concoction is but as light confectionery to a starving man It has been my lot to know not a few of the foremost men of our generation, and I have always observed that this is profoundly true.' That is the testimony

of a man who had tried the highest, least material forms of such a trust. And I know that there is an 'amen' to it in every heart, and I lift up opposite to all such experiences the grand summary of Christian experience: 'We which have believed do enter into rest.'

II. Note, secondly, the energy of work which accompanies the rest of faith.

There is a good deal said in the context — a difficult context, with which we are not concerned at present, about the analogy between a man's rest in God and God's own rest. That opens wonderful thoughts which I must not be tempted to pursue, with regard to the analogy between the divine and the human, and the possible assimilation, in some measure, of the experiences of the creature with those of the Creator. Can it be that, between a light kindled and burning itself away while it burns, and fire which burns and is not consumed, there is any kind of correspondence?

There is, however dim the analogy may be to us. Let us take the joy and the elevation of that thought, 'My peace I give unto you.'

But the main point for which I refer to this possible analogy is in order to remind you that the rest of God is dealt with in Scripture as being, not a cessation from work, but the accomplishment of a purpose, and satisfaction in results. 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,' said Jesus Christ. And modern speculation puts the same thought in a more heathenish fashion when it says 'preservation is continual creation.' Just as God rests from His creative work, not as if either needing repose or holding His hand from further operation, but as satisfied with the result; just as He rests in work and works in rest, so Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of God in eternal indisturbance and repose, in token that He has fulfilled His work on earth. But He is likewise represented as standing at the right hand of God in attitude to help His servants, and as evermore working with them in all their toils.

In like manner we shall much misconceive the repose of faith, if we do not carry with us the thought that that repose is full of strenuous toil. Faith brings rest. Yes! But the main characteristic of Christian faith is that it is an active principle, which sets all the wheels of holy life in more vigorous motion, and breathes an intenser as well as calmer and more reposeful activity into the whole man. The work of faith is quite as important as the rest of faith. It works by love, and the very repose that it brings ought to make us more strenuous in our toil. We are able to cast ourselves without anxiety about ourselves, and with no distraction of our inner nature, and no weakening of power in consequence of the consciousness of sin, or of unconscious sin — into the tasks which devolve upon us, and so to do them with our might. The river withdrawn from all divided channels is gathered into the one bed that it may flow with power, and scour before it all impurities. So the man who is delivered from restlessness is quickened for work, and even ‘in his very motion there is rest.’ It is possible to blend together in secret, sweet, indissoluble union these two partial antitheses, and in the midst of the most strenuous effort to have a central calm, like the eye of the storm which whirls in its wild circles round a centre-point of perfect repose. It is possible, at one and the same time, to be dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, and feeding our souls with that calm that broods there, and to be up to the ears in business, and with our hands full of pressing duties. The same faith which ushers us into the quiet presence of God in the centre of the soul, pushes us into the forefront of the battle to fight, and into the world’s busy workshop to labour.

So the rest which is Christian is a rest throbbing with activity; and, further, the activity which is based on faith will deepen repose, and not interrupt it. Jesus Christ distinguished between the two stages of the tranquillity which is realised by His true disciples, for He said ‘Come unto Me... and I will give you rest’ — the rest which comes by approach to Him in faith from the beginning of the approach, rest resulting from the taking away of what I have called the deepest

cause of unrest. There is a second stage of the disciples' action and consequent peace; 'Take My yoke upon you... and ye shall *find* rest' — not 'I will *give*' this time — 'ye shall find' — in the act of taking the yoke upon your necks — 'rest to your souls.' The activity that ensues from faith deepens the rest of faith.

III. Lastly, to consider the future perfecting of the present rest.

In a subsequent verse the writer uses a different word from that of my text to express this idea; and it is rather unfortunate for the understanding of the progress of the thought that our version has kept the same expression in both cases. 'There remaineth therefore a *rest* to the people of God' — which follows a few verses after my text — had better have been rendered, 'There remaineth the keeping of a Sabbath to the people of God'; although probably the writer is pointing to the same facts there as in my text, yet he introduces a metaphor which conveys more clearly than the text does the idea of an epoch of rest following upon a week of toil.

So I may venture to say that the repose of faith which is experienced here, because the causes of unrest are taken away, and a new ally comes into the field, and our wills submit, and our desires are satisfied, is but the germ of that eternal Sabbath day to which we look forward. I have said that the gift spoken of here is a present thing; but that present thing bears in all its lineaments a *prophecy* of its own completion. And the repose of a Christian heart in the midst of life's work and worry is the best anticipation and picture, because it is the beginning, of the rest of heaven.

That future, however it may differ from this present, and how much it differs none know except those who are wrapt in its repose, is in essence the same. Yonder, as here, we become partakers of rest through faith.

There, as here, it is trust that brings rest. And no change of bodily environment, no change of the relations between body and spirit, no

transference of the man into new conditions and a new world will bring repose, unless there is in him a trust which grasps Jesus Christ. Faith is eternal, and is eternally the minister of rest. Heaven is the perfecting of the highest and purest moments of Christian experience.

So, Christian men and women, the more trust the more rest. And if it be so that going through this weary world you have but little confirmation of the veracity of the great saying of my text, do not fancy that it is a mistake.

Look. to your faith and see that *it* is deepened.

And let us all, dear friends, remember that not death but faith brings present repose and future perfecting. Death is not the porter that opens the gate of the kingdom. It is only the usher that brings us to the gate, and the gate is opened by Him ‘who openeth and no man shutteth; and who shutteth and no man openeth.’ He opens to them who have believed, and they enter in and are saved. ‘Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.’

Hebrews 4:9, 10—ENTRANCE INTO GOD’S REST

‘There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. 10. For He that is entered into His rest, He also hath ceased from His own works, as God did from His.’ — Hebrews 4:9, 10.

WE lose much of the meaning of this passage by our superficial habit of transferring it to a future state. The ground of the mistake is in the misinterpretation of that word ‘remaineth’; which is taken to point to the ‘rest,’ after the sorrows of this life are all done with. Of course there is such a rest; but if we take the context of the passage, we cannot but recognise this as the truth that is taught here, that faith, and not death, is the gate to participation in Christ’s rest —

that the rest remained over after Moses and Judaism, but came into possession under and by Christ.

For the main scope of the whole passage is the elucidation of one of the points in which the writer asserts the superiority of Christ to Moses, of Christianity to Judaism. That old system, says he, had in it for its very heart a promise of rest; but it had only a promise.

It could not give the thing that it held forth. It could not, by the nature of the system. It could not, as is manifest from this fact — that years after they had entered into possession of the land, years after the promise had been first given, the Psalmist represents the entrance into that rest as a privilege not yet realised, but waiting to be grasped by the men of day whose hearts were softened to hear God's voice. David's words clearly, to the mind of the writer of the epistle, show that Canaan was not the promised 'rest.' David treats it as being obtained by obedience to God's Word; and as not yet possessed by the people, though they had the promised land. He treats it as then, in his own 'day,' still but a promise, and a promise which would not be fulfilled to his people if they hardened their hearts. All this carries the inference that the Mosaic system did not give the 'rest' which it promised. Hence, says the author of the Hebrews, that 'rest' held forth from the beginning, gleaming before all generations of the Jewish people, but to them only a fair vision, remains unpossessed as yet, but to be possessed. God's word has been pledged. He has said that there shall be a share in His rest for His people. The ancient people did not get it. What then? Is God's promise thereby cancelled? 'They could not enter in because of unbelief,' but the unbelief of man shall not make the faith of God without effect. Therefore, as the eternal promise has been given, and they counted themselves unworthy, the divine mercy which will find some to enter therein, and will not be balked of its purposes, turns to the Gentiles; and the 'rest' provided for the Jews first, but unaccepted by them, remains for all who believe to partake.

And, still further, the writer establishes the principle that the rest promised to the Jew remains yet to be inherited by the Christian, on a second ground: ‘For,’ says he, in the tenth verse of the chapter, ‘for He that is entered into His rest, He also has ceased from His own works, as God did from His.’ How is that a proof? It is not a proof that there is a rest for us, if you interpret it as people generally do. But it is so if you give to it what seems to be the correct interpretation — by referring it to Christ and Christ’s heavenly condition. ‘He that has entered into His rest — that is Jesus Christ, ‘He has ceased from His own works’ — His finished work of redemption — ‘as God did from His’ His finished work of creation. And there is the great proof that there is a rest for us: not only because Judaism did not bring it, but because Christ hath gone up on high. We have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens. Christ our Lord has entered into His rest — parallel with the divine tranquillity after Creation. And seeing that He possesses it, certainly we shall possess it if only we hold fast by Him. ‘There remains a rest’ — proved by the fact that Christ hath gone into it, and carrying the inference, ‘Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.’

We find here, then, three main points. First, the divine rest, God’s and Christ’s. Secondly, this divine rest, the pattern of what our life on earth may become. And lastly, this divine rest, the prophecy of what our life in heaven shall assuredly be.

I. In the first place, then, we have here the divine rest. ‘He hath ceased from His own works, as God did from His.’ The writer is drawing a parallel between God’s ceasing from His creative work and entering into that Sabbath rest when He saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good; and Christ’s ceasing from the work of redemption, and passing into the heavens to the Sabbath of His everlasting repose.

I need not dwell at any length upon a matter which, after all speech, remains for us but very dimly intelligible — the rest of God. ‘My rest’ — that rest belongs necessarily to the Divine Nature. It is the deep tranquillity of a nature self-sufficing in its infinite beauty, calm in its everlasting strength, placid in its deepest joy, still in its mightiest energy; loving without passion, willing without decision or change, acting without effort; quiet, and moving everything; making all things new, and itself everlasting; creating, and knowing no diminution by the act; annihilating, and knowing no loss though the universe were barren and unpeopled. God is, God is everywhere, God is everywhere the same, God is everywhere the same infinite, God is everywhere the same infinite love and the same infinite self-sufficiency; therefore His very Being is rest. And yet that image that rises before us, statuesque, still in its placid tranquillity, is not repellent nor cold, is no dead marble likeness of life. That great ocean of the Divine Nature which knows no storm nor billow, is yet not a tideless and stagnant sea.

God is changeless and ever tranquil, and yet He loves. God is changeless and ever tranquil, and yet He wills. God is changeless and ever tranquil, and yet He acts. Mystery of mysteries, passing all understanding I And yet He says, ‘They shall enter into My rest!’ Now I believe, and I hope you believe, that the rest of Christ is like the rest of God, even in respect of this Divine and Infinite Nature. ‘He hath ceased from His works, as God did from His.’ Jesus Christ is ‘the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.’ Whatsoever you can predicate of the settled tranquillity, and stable, necessary, essential repose of a divine nature, *that* you can predicate of Christ our Redeemer, of Christ the Son of God.

But still further. Besides that deep and changeless repose which thus belongs to the Divine Nature, there is the other thought which perhaps comes more markedly out in the passage before us — that of a rest which is God’s tranquil ceasing from His work, because God has perfected His work. When we read in the Old Testament,

that at the end of the creative act, God rested upon the Sabbath day, and blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, of course the thought that comes into view is not that of a divine nature wearied with toil and needing repose, but that of a divine nature which has fully accomplished its intent, expressed its purpose, done what it meant to do, and rests from its working. Because it has embodied its ideal in its work. It is the proclamation, 'This creation of Mine is all that I meant it to be — finished and perfect'; not the acknowledgment of an exhaustion of the creative energy which needs to reinvigorate its strength by repose after its mighty effort. The rest of God is the expression of the perfect divine complacency in the perfect divine work.

And, in like manner, as after that creative act there came the Sabbath, when He saw that it was all very good, and the morning stars sang together for joy;—so after the mightier new-creative act of redemption, the Christ, who is divine, ceased and held His hand, not because Bethlehem and Calvary had wearied Him, not because after pain He needed rest, not because the Cross had tasked His powers, and His suffering had strained His nature; but because all that had to be done was done, and He knew it—because redemption was completed. The Sabbath on which God rested from His work, and the new Sabbath on which Christ rose from the dead, the conqueror of death, the destruction of sin, are parallel in *this*, that in either case the work was done, that in either case the Doer needed no repose after His finished task. And just as God, full of all the energy of being, operated unspent after creation, needed not that rest for His refreshment, but took it as the pledge and proclamation to the universe that all was done; so Christ, unwearied and unwounded from His dreadful close and sore wrestle with sin and death, sprung from the grave to the skies, and rests — proclamation and token to the world that His work is finished, that the Cross is enough for the race for ever more, that all is complete, and man's salvation secured. As God hath ceased from His works, Christ hath ceased from His.

Still further: this divine tranquillity — inseparable from the Divine Nature, the token of the sufficiency and completeness of the divine work — is also a rest that is full of work. When Christ was telling the Jews the principles of the Sabbath day, He said to them: ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.’ The creative act is finished and God rests; but God, in resting, works; even as *God, in working, rests*. Preservation is a continued creation. The energy of the divine power is as mightily at work here now sustaining us in life, as it was when He flung forth stars and systems like sparks from a forge, and willed the universe into being. God rests, and in His rest, up to the present hour and for ever, God works. And, in like manner, Christ’s work of redemption, finished upon the Cross, is perpetually going on. Christ’s glorious repose is full of energy for His people. He intercedes above. He works on them, He works through them, He works for them. The rest of God, the divine tranquillity, is full of work.

There, then, is a parallel: the rest of the Father, who ceased from His work of creation, and continueth His work of preservation, is parallel with that of the Son, who ceased from His work of sacrifice, and continueth His work of intercession and of sanctifying. These two are one. ‘My rest’ is the rest of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Father. That still communion and that everlasting repose are a prophecy for our lives, brethren. The ancient promise, long repeated, has come sounding down through the echoing halls of the centuries, and rings in our ears as fresh as when first it was spoken, ‘There remaineth a rest for the people of God,’ they shall enter into the stillness and the secret of His tranquillity!

II. Then, in the second place, the text gives us, The rest of God and of Christ as the pattern of what our earthly life may become.

Like Christ, like God — can it be? It *can* be, with certain differences; but oh! the differences drop into insignificance when we think of the resemblances. Whether a man is capable of knowing

absolute truth or not, he is capable of coming into direct and personal contact with the absolute Reality, the Truth of Truth. And whether here below we can know anything about God as He is or not, this at all events the New Testament teaches us, that we can come to be like Him — like Him in the substance of our souls; like Him — copy of His perfections; like Him — shadow and resemblance of some of His attributes. And here lies the foundation for the belief that we can ‘enter into His rest.’ We cannot possess that changeless tranquillity which knows no variations of purpose or of desire, but we can possess the stable repose of that fixed nature which knows one object, and one alone. We cannot possess that energy which, after all work, is fresh and unbroken; but we can possess that tranquillity which in all toil is not troubled, and after all work is ready for yet greater service. We cannot possess that unwavering fire of a divine nature which burns in love without flickering, which knows without learning, which wills without irresolution and without the act of decision; but we can come to love deeply, tranquilly, perpetually, we can come to know without questioning, without doubts, without darkness, in firm confidence of stable assurance, and so know with something like the knowledge of Him who knows things as they are; and we can come to will and resolve so strongly, so fixedly, so wisely, that there shall be no change of purpose, nor any vacillation of desire. In these ways, in shadow and copy, we can resemble even the apparently incommunicable tranquillity which, like an atmosphere that knows no tempests, belongs to and encircles the throne of God.

But, still further: faith, which is the means of entering into rest, will — if only you cherish it — make your life no unworthy resemblance of His who, triumphant above, works for us, and, working for us, rests from all His toil. Trust Christ! is the teaching here. Trust Christ! and a great benediction of tranquil repose comes down upon thy calm mind and upon thy settled heart. Trust Christ! and so thy soul will no longer be like ‘the sea that cannot rest,’ full of turbulent wishes, full of passionate desires that come to nothing, full of

endless meanings, like the homeless ocean that is ever working and never flings up any product of its work but yeasty foam and broken weeds; — but thine heart shall become translucent and still, like some land-locked lake, where no winds rave nor tempests ruffle; and on its calm surface there shall be mirrored the clear shining of the unclouded blue, and the perpetual light of the sun that never goes down. Trust Christ! and rest is thine — rest from fear, rest from toil and trouble, rest from sorrow, rest from the tossings of thine own soul, rest from the tumults of thine own desires, rest from the stings of thine own conscience, rest from seeking to work out a righteousness of thine own. Trust Christ, cease from ‘thine own works,’ forsake thine own doings, and abjure and abandon thine own righteousness; and though God’s throne be far above thee, and the depth of that Being be incommunicable to and uncopyable by thee, yet a divine likeness of His still, and blessed, and unbroken repose shall come down and lie — a solid and substantial thing — on thy pure and calmed spirit. ‘There remaineth a rest for the people of God.’ Say then, my Lord rests and my Father: I Will trust Him; I will rest in the Lord, and He shall keep me in perfect peace, because my mind is stayed on Him.

III. Finally: This divine rest is not only a pattern of what our earthly life may become, but it is a prophecy of what our heavenly life shall surely be.

I have said that the immediate reference of the passage is not to a future state. But that does not exclude the reference, unless, indeed, we suppose that the Christian’s life on earth and his condition in heaven are two utterly different things, possessing no feature in common. The Bible presents a directly reverse notion to that. Though it gives full weight to all the differences which characterise the two conditions, yet it says, There is a basis of likeness between the Christian life on earth and the Christian life in heaven, so great as that the blessings which are predicated of the one belong to the other. Only here they are in blossom, sickly often, putting out very

feeble shoots and tendrils; and yonder transplanted into their right soil, and in their native air with heaven's sun upon them, they burst into richer beauty, and bring forth fruits of immortal life. Heaven is the earthly life of a believer glorified and perfected. If here we by faith enter into the beginning of rest, yonder through death with faith, we shall enter into the perfection of it.

We cannot speak wisely of that future when we speak definitely of it. All that I suggest now as taught us by this passage is, that heaven will be for us, rest in work and work that is full of rest. Our Lord's heaven is not an idle heaven. Christ is gone up on high, having completed His work on earth, that He may carry on His work in heaven; and after the pattern and likeness of His glory and of His repose, shall be the repose and glory of the children that are with Him. He rests from His labours, and His works do follow Him. He sitteth at the right hand of God 'expecting' — waiting patiently and in the confidence of assured triumph, 'till His enemies become His footstool.' But yet the dying martyr saw his Lord standing, not sitting, ready to help, and bending over him to welcome; and though He has ascended, and left the work of spreading the gospel to be done on earth, 'the Lord works with us' from His throne, nor is untouched by our troubles, nor idle in our toils. All the rest of that divine tranquillity, is rest in rapid, vigorous, perpetual motion. Ay, it is just as it is with physical things: the looker-on sees the swiftest motion as the most perfect rest. The wheel revolves so fast that the eye cannot discern its movements. The cataract foaming down from the hillside, when seen from half-way across the lake, seems to stand a silent, still, icy pillar. The divine work, because it is such work, is rest — tranquil in its energy, quiet in its intensity; because so mighty, therefore so still! That is God's heaven, Christ's heaven.

The heaven of all spiritual natures is not idleness. Man's delight is activity. The loving heart's delight is obedience. The saved heart's delight is grateful service. The joys of heaven are not the joys of passive contemplation, of dreamy remembrance, of perfect repose;

but they are described thus, 'They rest not day nor night.' 'His servants serve Him, and see His face.'

Yes, my brother, heaven is perfect 'rest.' God be thanked for all the depth of unspeakable sweetness which lies in that one little word, to the ears of all the weary and the heavy laden. God be thanked, that the calm clouds which gather round the western setting sun, and stretch their unmoving loveliness in perfect repose, and are bathed through and through with unflashing and tranquil light, seem to us in our busy lives and in our hot strife like blessed prophets of our state when we, too, shall lie cradled near the everlasting, unsetting Sun, and drink in, in still beauty of perpetual contemplation, all the glory of His face, nor know any more wind and tempest, rain and change. Rest in heaven — rest in God! Yes, but work in rest! Ah, that our hearts should grow up into an energy of love of which we know nothing here, and that our hands should be swift to do service, beyond all that could be rendered on earth, — that, never wearying, we should for ever be honoured by having work that never becomes toil nor needs repose; that, ever resting, we should ever be blessed by doing service which is the expression of our loving hearts, and the offering of our grateful and greatened spirits, joyful to us and acceptable to God, — that is the true conception of 'the rest that remaineth for the people of God.' Heaven is waiting for us — like God's, like Christ's — still in all its work, active in all its repose. See to it, my friend, that your life be calm because your soul is fixed, trusting in Jesus, who alone gives rest here to the heavy laden. Then your death will be but the passing from one degree of tranquillity to another, and the calm face of the corpse, whence all the lines of sorrow and care have faded utterly away, will be but a poor emblem of the perfect stillness into which the spirit has gone. Faith is the gate to partaking in the rest of God on earth. Death with faith is the gate of entrance into the rest of God in heaven.

Hebrews 4:11—MAN’S SHARE IN GOD’S REST

‘Let us labour therefore to enter into that feint, lest any man fall after the mine example of unbelief.’ — Hebrews 4:11.

WITH this simple, practical exhortation, the writer closes one of the most profound and intricate portions of this Epistle. He has been dealing with two Old Testament passages, one of them, the statement in Genesis that God rested after His creative work; the other, the oath sworn in wrath that Israel should not enter into God’s rest. Combining these two, he draws from them the inferences that there is a rest of God which He enjoys, and of which He has promised to man a share; that the generation to whom the participation therein was first promised, and as a symbol of that participation, the outward possession of the land, fell by unbelief, and died in the wilderness; that the unclaimed promise continued to subsequent generations and continues to this day. All the glories of it, all the terrors of exclusion, the barriers that shut out, the conditions of entrance, the stringent motives to earnestness, are one in all generations. Surface forms may alter; the fundamentals of the religious life, in the promise of God, and the ways by which men may win or miss it, are unchangeable.

And so the reiterated appeal comes to us with its primeval freshness, saying, after so long a time, ‘Today, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.’

We have, then, in the words before us, these three things — the rest of God; the barriers against, and the conditions of, entrance; and the labour to secure the entrance.

I. Note then, first, the rest of God.

Now it is quite possible that the Psalmist, in the passage on which our text foots itself, may have meant by ‘My rest’ nothing more than repose in the land, which rest was God’s since He was the giver of

it. But it seems more probable that something of the same idea was floating in his mind, which the writer of this Epistle states so expressly and strongly — viz., that far beyond that outward possession there is the repose of the divine nature in which, marvellous as it may seem, it is possible for a man, in some real fashion, to participate.

What, then, is the rest of God? The ‘rest’ which Genesis speaks about was, of course, not repose that recruited exhausted strength, but the cessation of work because the work was complete, the repose of satisfaction in what we should call an accomplished ideal.

And, further, in that august conception of the rest of God is included, not only the completion of all His purpose, and the full correspondence of effect with cause, but likewise the indisturbance and inward harmony of that infinite nature whereof all the parts co-operant to an end move in a motion which is rest.

And, further, the rest of God is compatible with, and, indeed, but another form of, unceasing activity. ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,’ said the Master; though the works were, in one sense, finished from the foundation of the world.

Now can we dare to dream that in any fashion that solemn, divine repose and tranquillity of perfection can be reproduced in us? Yes! The dewdrop is a sphere, as truly as the sun; the rainbow in the smallest drop of rain has all the prismatic colours blended in the same harmony as when the great iris strides across the sky. And if man be made in the image of God, man perfected shall be deiform, even in the matter of his apparently incommunicable repose. For they who are exalted to that final future participation in His life will have to look back, too, upon work which, stained as it has been in the doing, yet, in its being accepted upon the altar on which it was humbly laid, has been sanctified and greatened, and will be an element in their joy in the days that are to come. ‘They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them’ — not for accusation,

nor to read to them bitter memories of incompleteness, but rather that they may contribute to the deep repose and rest of the heavens. In a modified form, but yet in reality, the rest of God may be possessed even by the imperfect workers here upon earth.

And, in like manner, that other aspect of the divine repose, in the tranquillity of a perfectly harmonious nature, is altogether, and without restriction, capable of being reproduced, and certain in the future to be reproduced in all them that love and trust Him, when the whole being shall be settled and centred upon Him, and will and desires and duty and conscience shall no more conflict. 'Unite my heart to fear Thy name,' is a prayer even for earth. It will be fully answered in heaven, and the souls made one through all their parts shall rest in God, and shall rest like God.

And further, the human participation in that divine repose will have, like its pattern, the blending without disturbance of rest with motion. The highest activity is the intensest repose. Just as a light, whirled with sufficient rapidity, will seem to make a still circle; just as the faster a wheel moves the more moveless it seems to stand; just as the rapidity of the earth's flight through space, and the universality with which all the parts of it participate in the flight, produce the sensation of absolute immobility. It is not motion, but effort and friction, that break repose; and when there is neither the one nor the other, there will be no contrariety between activity and rest; but we shall enjoy at once the delights of both without the wear and tear and disturbance of the one or the languor of the other.

This participation by man in the rest of God, which has its culmination in the future, has its germ in the present. For I suppose that none of the higher blessings which attach to the perfect state of man, as revealed in Scripture, do so belong to that state as that their beginnings are not realised here. All the great promises of Scripture, except those which may point to purely physical conditions, begin to be fulfilled here in the earnest of the inheritance. And so, though toil

be our lot, and work against the grain, beyond the strength, and for merely external objects of passing necessity., may be our task here, and the disturbance of rest through sorrows and cares is the experience of all, yet even here, as this Epistle has it, ‘we who have believed do enter into rest.’ The Canaan of the Jew is treated by the writer of this Epistle as having only been a symbol and outward pledge of the deeper repose to which the first receivers of the promise were being trained, if they had been faithful, to look forward and aspire; and the heaven that awaits us, in so far as it is a place and external condition, is in like manner but a symbol and making manifest to sense of the spiritual verity of union with God and satisfaction and rest in Him.

II. So look, secondly, at the barriers against, and the conditions of, entrance into that rest.

My text says, ‘Lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.’ Now it is to be observed that in this section, of which this is the concluding hortatory portion, there is a double reason given for the failure of that generation to whom the promise was addressed to appropriate it to themselves; and that double representation has been unfortunately obscured in our Authorised Version by a uniform rendering of two different words. Sometimes, as here in my text, we find that the word translated ‘unbelief’ really means *disobedience*; and sometimes we find that it is correctly translated by the former term. For instance, in the earlier portions of the section, we find a warning against ‘an evil heart of unbelief.’ The word there is correctly translated, Then we find again, ‘To whom He ‘sware in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest; but unto them that believed not,’ where the word ought rather to be ‘them that were disobedient.’ And in the subsequent verse we find the ‘unbelief’ again mentioned. So there are not one but two things stated by the writer as the barriers to entrance — unbelief and its consequence and manifestation as well as root, disobedience.

And the converse, of course, follows. If the barrier be a shut door of unbelief, plated with disobedience, like iron upon an oak portal, then the condition of entrance is faith, with its consequence of submission of will, and obedience of life.

Notice the important lessons that are given by this alternation of the two ideas of faith and unbelief, obedience and disobedience. Disobedience is the root of unbelief. Unbelief is the mother of further disobedience. Faith is submission, voluntary, within a man's own power. If it be not exercised the true cause lies deeper than all intellectual ones, lies in the moral aversion of his will and in the pride of independence, which says, 'Who is Lord over us?' Why should we have to depend upon Jesus Christ? And as faith is obedience and submission, so faith breeds obedience, and unbelief leads on to higher-handed rebellion. The two interlock each other, foul mother and fouler child; and with dreadful reciprocity of influence the less a man trusts the more he disobeys, the more he disobeys the less he trusts.

But, then, further, note the respective influence of these two — faith and unbelief; and the other couple, obedience and disobedience, in securing entrance to the rest. Now I desire to bring into connection with this duality of representation, which, as I have said, pervades this section of our letter, our Lord's blessed words, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn' of Me 'and ye shall find rest.' There again, we have the double source of rest, and by implication the double source of unrest. For the rest which is given, and the rest which is found, that which ensues from coming to Christ, and that which ensues from taking His yoke upon us and learning of Him, are not the same. But the one is the rest of faith, and the other is the rest of obedience.

So, then, consider the repose that ensues from faith, the unrest that dogs unbelief. When a man comes to Christ, then, because Christ

enters into him, he enters into rest. There follow the calming of the conscience and reconciliation with God, there is the beginning of the harmonising of the whole nature in one supreme and satisfying love and devotion. These things still the storm and make the incipient Christian life in a true fashion, though in a small measure, participant of the rest of God.

People say that it is arbitrary to connect salvation with faith, and talk to us about the 'injustice' of men being saved and damned because of their creeds. We are not saved for our faith, nor condemned for our unbelief, but we are saved in our faith, and condemned in our unbelief. Suppose a man did not believe that prussic acid was a poison, and took a spoonful of it and died. You might say that his opinion killed him, but that would only be a shorthand way of saying that his opinion led him to take the thing that did kill him. Suppose a man believes that a medicine will cure him, and takes it, and gets well. Is it the drug or his opinion that cures him? If a certain mental state tends to produce certain emotions, you cannot have the emotions if you will not have the state. Suppose you do not rely upon the promised friendship and help of some one, you cannot have the joy of confidence or the gifts that you do not believe in and do not care for. And so faith is no arbitrary appointment, but the necessary condition, the only condition possible, in the nature of things, by which a man can enter into the rest of God. If we will not let Christ heal our wounds, they must keep on bleeding; if we will not let Him soothe our conscience, it must keep on pricking; if we will not have Him to bring us nigh, we must continue far off; if we will not open the door of our hearts to let Him in, He must stop without. Faith is the condition of entrance; unbelief bars the door of heaven against us, because it bars the door of our hearts against Him who is heaven.

And then, in like manner, obedience and disobedience are respectively conditions of coming into contact or remaining untouched by the powers which give repose. Submission is

tranquillity. What disturbs us in this world is neither work nor worry, but wills unconformed to our work, and unsubmissive to our destiny. When we can say, 'Thy will be done,' then some faint beginnings of peace steal over our souls, and birds of calm sit brooding even on the yet heaving deep. The ox that kicks against the pricks only makes its hocks bloody. The ox that bows its thick neck to the yoke, and willingly pulls at the burden, has a quiet life. The bird that dashes itself against the wires of its cage bruises its wings and puts its little self into a flutter. When it is content with its limits, its song comes back. Obedience is repose; disobedience is disturbance, and they who trust and submit have entered into rest.

III. Now, lastly, a word about the discipline to secure the entrance.

That is a singular paradox and bringing together of opposing ideas, is it not, Let us labour to enter into rest? The paradox is not so strong in the Greek as here, but it still is there. For the word translated 'labour' carries with it the two ideas of earnestness and of diligence, and this is the condition on which alone we can secure the entrance, either into the full heaven above, or into the incipient heaven here.

But note, if we distinctly understand what sort of toil it is that is required to secure it, that settles the nature of the diligence. The main effort of every Christian life, in view of the possibilities of repose that are open to it here and now, and yonder in their perfection, ought to be directed to this one point of deepening and strengthening faith and its consequent obedience.

You can cultivate your faith, it is within your own power. You can make it strong or weak, operative through your life, or *only* partially, by fits and starts. And what is required is that Christian people should make a business of their godliness, and give themselves to it as carefully and as consciously and as constantly as they give themselves to their daily pursuits. The men that are diligent in the Christian life, who exercise that commonplace, prosaic, pedestrian,

homely virtue of earnest effort, are sure to succeed; and there is no other way to succeed. You cannot go to heaven in silver slippers. But although it be true that heaves is a gift, and that the bread of God is given to us by His Son, the old commandment remains unrepealed, and has as direct and stringent reference to the inward Christian life as to the outward. 'In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread,' though it be at the same time bread that is given thee. And how are we to cultivate our faith? By contemplating the great object which kindles it. Do you do that? By resolving, with fixed and reiterated determinations, that we will exercise it. 'I will trust and not be afraid.' Do you do that? By averting our eyes from the distracting competitors for our interest and attention, in so far as these might enfeeble our confidence. Do you do that? Diligence; that is the secret — a diligence which focuses our powers, and binds our vagrant wills into one strong, solid mass, and delivers us from languor and indolence, and stirs us up to seek the increase of faith as well as of hope and charity.

Then, too, obedience is to be cultivated. How do you cultivate obedience? By obeying — by contemplating the great motives that should sway and melt, and sweetly subdue the will, which are all shrined in that one saying. 'Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price,' and by rigidly confining our desires and wishes within the limits of God's appointment, and religiously referring all things to His supreme will. If thus we do, we shall enter into rest.

So, dear friends, the path is a plain enough one. We all know it. The goal is a clear enough one. I suppose we all believe it. What is wanted is feet that shall run with perseverance the race that is set before us. The word of my text which is translated 'labour,' is found in this Epistle in another connection, where the writer desires that we should show 'the same *diligence* to the full assurance of hope unto the end.' It is also caught up by one of the other apostles, who says to us, 'Giving all *diligence*, add to your faith' the manifold virtues of a practical obedience, and so 'the entrance shall be

ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.’ A more authoritative voice points us to the same strenuous effort, for our Lord has said, ‘Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you,’ and when the listeners asked Him what works He would have them do, He answered, bringing all down to one, which being done would produce all others, ‘This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.’

So if we labour to increase our faith, and its fruits of obedience, with a diligence inspired by our earnestness which is kindled by the thought of the sublimity of the reward, and the perils that seek to rob us of our crown, then, even in the wilderness, we shall enter into the Promised Land, and though the busy week of care and toil, of changefulness and sorrow, may disturb the surface of our souls, we shall have an inner sanctuary, where we can shut our doors about us and enjoy a foretaste of the Sabbath-keeping of the heavens, and be wrapped in the stillness of the rest of God.

Hebrews 4:16—THE THRONE OF GRACE

‘Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.’ — Hebrews 4:16.

IN the context are three great exhortations which bear a very remarkable and distinct relation to each other: ‘Let us labour to enter into rest’; ‘Let us hold fast our profession’; Let us come boldly to the throne of grace.

It is a hard thing to labour to enter into rest. How is it to be done? The second exhortation helps us to answer, ‘Let us hold fast our profession,’ which being translated into other words, is this: our true way of labour is to cling in faith to Him whom we acknowledge; but knowing the weakness of our own hearts, and how they waywardly

fluctuate and pass away from the one confidence and happiest trust, it is with profound wisdom that the ultimate injunction is held out for the foundation of all — ‘Let us come to the throne of grace.’ There we get the strength that will enable our slack and benumbed fingers to grasp again the thing we hold. There we shall get that fresh grip of Christ which will quicken us for the labour of entering into rest. And so this portion of exhortation interposed between the doctrinal and theological parts of this letter is addressed to every one in the Christian profession. I ask you, then, to look at this exhortation, which covers the whole ground of Christian duty and strength.

Now, first, here is a very remarkable and beautiful expression — ‘the throne of grace.’ Grace, of course, as I do not need to explain, is the New Testament word for the undeserved favour and loving regard of God to man considered as weak, sinful, and unworthy; it is love which has its own motive, apart from any regard to worthiness in the object upon which it falls. Grace is its own real impulse and motive, and grace is set in Scripture as the opposite of desert; it is of grace, not of works, and so forth. It is set as the antagonist of sin and unrighteousness and all evil, and so runs up to the idea that it expresses the unmerited, self-originated, loving regard of God to us poor miserable creatures, who, if dealt with on the ground of right and retribution, would receive something very different indeed. But my text says the throne of grace is the throne of God. I wonder if it is too picturesque to take that word grace here as a kind of synonym of God?

Think of the figure that was in the writer’s mind, as being that grace itself was the occupant of the throne, that there she sits, regal, sovereign, enthroned in the heart of the universe, queen of all things, and giving from her full and generous hand to every creature all that which the creature requires. And then if we take the more prosaic notion — which perhaps is the safer one — and think that the metaphor is not that grace is queen and sovereign, but only that the

throne is based and established, as it were, in grace, out of which this undeserved love flows in broad, full streams. Even if we take the metaphor thus, we come to the same thought, that whatever else there may be in the divine nature, the ruling sovereign element in Deity is unmerited love and mercy and kindly regard to us poor, ignorant, sinful creatures, which keeps pouring itself out over all the world. God is King, and the kingly thing in God is infinite grace.

Then we can scarcely but bring into connection with this grand idea the other phases which the Old Testament gives to the same thought. Read such words as these: — ‘Justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne’ — ‘God sitteth on the throne of His holiness’ — ‘The throne of Thy glory.’ Yes, the throne of justice and of judgment. White and sparkling— cold and repellent. The throne of glory — flashing and dazzling, coruscating and blinding, glittering and shimmering — ready to smite the diseased eye. The throne of Thy holiness. Yes, lofty, far up there, towering above us in its pure completeness, and we poor creatures, being ourselves blinded and dazed, and far away from Him, down amidst the lowlands and materialities, and all that majesty in the heavens — the justice and judgment, the holiness and glory — all that is only the envelope and wrappage, the living centre and heart of it is a pure, lambent glow of tenderness, and the throne is truly the throne of grace. The ‘throne’ gives us all ideas of majesty, sovereignty, dominion, infinitude, greatness. The thought that it is ‘the throne of grace’ sheathes all these in the softest, tenderest, most blessed folds of love — unmerited, free, spontaneous — simply because He is God, and not on account of any goodness in us.

Bearing in mind this great conception of true love, ruling, dominant, the sovereign element in the divine nature, let us ask, How do we reach it? Are we warranted in believing it? Read the verses that come before: ‘For we have not a High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.’ Turn that doctrinal statement into a

statement of principle and it just comes to this: that our certitude that God's throne is a throne of love and grace, is all involved in, dependent upon, and built upon, the work of Christ, the High Priest of our profession. That is to say, not 'thank God' that His work makes God's throne a throne of grace — that is not the teaching of the Scripture — but that He, as High Priest, and, therefore, as the revealer to us of God as He is, shows us in His life and death, in the gentleness of His character, in the tenderness of His compassion, in the depth of His sympathy on earth, in the tenderness that touched the little children in their innocence and the harlots in their filth, and in the death He died upon the Cross for the sake of the world — the very heart of God is cut open, as it were, and the two halves fall apart as when we cut some rich fruit to lay bare the inmost pulp. God is manifested to us, God declares Himself to us, in the sympathy of the humanity, in the life, in the death upon the Cross; and the Priest, in His sacrifice, and by His sacrifice, shows us that between the cherubim throned above the mercy-seat shimmers the Shekinah of power, with its white centre of love and peace. And then, on the other side, that same great thought of the priesthood of Christ influences this conception of the throne of God in another fashion still; for, as it seems to me, there is no understanding of the depth and meaning of the work of Jesus Christ, our Lord, unless we heartily accept this, that His great sacrifice for us, in which mainly He is the Priest of our profession, is the means and channel and medium and condition through which all the love of God expresses itself to the world, and has communicated to sinful man all His goodness and all His pity and His tenderness, supplying all our necessities, and is all things to us through Christ our Lord. Seen through Him the throne is white with tenderness; flowing through Him from the throne proceeds the river of the water of life, and so, in both ways, the throne of grace is such by reason of the priesthood of Christ.

Look for a moment, in the next place, at the temper and disposition with which we come to this throne. 'Let us come boldly.' Now

boldly is a somewhat incongruous word; it neither conveys the original, nor does it correspond to our sense of propriety. The thought would be far more beautiful and far more naturally represented by a more literal translation — ‘Let us come with frank confidence’ to the throne of grace. The word literally means, if we go to the etymology of it, speaking everything. You can easily understand how naturally that becomes an expression for the unembarrassed, unrestrained full out-pouring of a heart. You cannot pour out your heart in the fullest confidence to a person you do not respect, but if you get with some one you entirely trust, how swiftly the words flow. and how very easy it is to tell out the whole heart. Just so with this great word of the writer of this Epistle, descriptive of the temper and disposition with which men are to go to God — with confidence, full, cheerful, and unembarrassed, and which expresses itself in full trust, exactly as one of the old Psalms says — ‘Ye people, pour out your heart before Him.’ Yes, let it all flow out, just as you would do to husband or wife, or lover, or friend, or the chosen companion to whom we can tell everything. Ah, but there is no such person — there is nobody, not a soul, could stand the turning inside out of a man! There is no one able to do it to another, even supposing the other could bear it! But my text says ‘come,’ and is so gentle in its love, so strong in its grace, sweetly wooing us to the freest and frankest outpourings of all our hearts before the throne. Let us then come with confidence, because Jesus’ work as our High Priest is in the writer’s mind. You remember the vision in the Revelation where the seer beholds the angel coming with a censer, and he takes incense from off the golden altar, and he goes on to say, that this much incense was offered in the censer with prayers of saints. That is a picturesque and graphic representation of this same idea; my poor cry, the devotions of my trembling, unfaithful heart, the halting, limping approach of my sluggish spirit, these go along with, and are offered through, that Great High Priest. ‘Let the much incense of Thy prayer On my behalf ascend.’ Truly

we have a loving High Priest; let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace.

Let us not use as a mere empty form those words ‘for Christ’s sake,’ but let us remember that these words do hold the very secret of all acceptable approach to God, and that’ no man cometh to the Father but by Me. There is reason enough, God knows, in your heart and mine, and in our poor, miserable, wretched, conventional, formal chatterings called prayers, for diffidence and distrust. Well, then, let us fully look that fact in the face, entertain untremblingly the fullest consciousness of the insufficiency and unworthiness of all we *do*, and all we are, and all we feel, and all we seek, and then wrenching ourselves away as it were from the contemplation of our own selves, which only land us in diffidence and despair, let us turn to Him, that we may have boldness and confidence in our access to the feet of Him who is our Great High Priest, passed into the heavens, and who now sits on the ‘throne of grace.’

And now, lastly, a word about the issue and result of this confidence of access to the throne of grace, the throne of spontaneous love. ‘That we may obtain mercy,’ says the writer, ‘and find grace to help in time of need.’ It is noteworthy, I think, to consider that the writer here is evidently thinking, not about a communion with God which is not prayer, but a communion with God which, on our side, is the lifting up of an empty hand, and on His side the bestowing a large, full gift. There is no fellowship with God possible on the footing of what people call ‘disinterested communion.’ No, we have always to go to Him to get something from Him. The question is, What do we expect to get? My text tells us, not the temporal blessings, not the answers to foolish desires, not the taking away of thorns in the flesh, but mercy and grace to help — inward and spiritual blessings. But what are these? Well, I don’t know whether it is too nice or too microscopic criticism to say that I seem to see a difference between obtaining mercy and finding grace. I take it grace is used in what I call its secondary sense, not meaning so much the love of God

unmerited, but rather signifying the consequences of that love in the gifts bestowed upon us, and you know that is a usage of the word common in the New Testament, thus making the word into a plural, ‘graces’ — the manifold gifts that love bestows upon us. So that, I take it, this word is here used in the secondary sense, and if that be so, we may shape a difference between the two phrases, ‘obtaining mercy’ and ‘finding grace.’

I do not think I can put that better than by using a metaphor. The one expresses the heart of God, the other expresses the hand of God. We may obtain mercy as a suppliant coming boldly, confidently, frankly, with faith in the Great High Priest, to the throne of grace. There we get the full heart of God. I stand before Him in my filth, in my weakness, with conscience gnawing at me in the sense of many infirmities, many a sin and shortcoming and omission, and on the throne, if I may so say, is a shoot of tender love from God’s heart to me, and I get for all my weakness and sin pity and pardon, and find mercy of the Lord in that day. And then in getting the full heart of God, with all its divine abundance and pardoning grace and tender, gracious pity, I get, of course, the full hand of God to obtain mercy, and find grace, the bestowment of the needful blessings, the obtaining of grace in time of need, the right grace No blunders in the equipment with which He supplies us. He does not give me the parcel that was meant for you; there is no error in the delivery. He does not send His soldiers to the North Pole equipped for warfare in Africa. He does not give this man a blessing that the man’s circumstances would not require. *No*, no; blessed be God, He cannot err. We fall back upon the words that precede my text, ‘And there is no creature concealed from His sight, for all things are naked, and open to the eyes Of Him to whom we must give an account.’ That may be, and is terrible, unless we take it along with the other word, ‘We have not a

High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weakness.’ We see a divine omniscience shining upon us through the merits of the great

High Priest, full of light and hope, and because all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him who is our High Priest; therefore the right grace will be most surely given to me to help me in time of need, or, as the words may perhaps be more vigorously and correctly translated, find grace for timely aid, grace punctually and precisely at the very nick of time, at the very exact time determined by heaven's chronometer, not by ours. It will not come as quickly as impatience might think it ought, it will not come so soon as to prevent an agony of prayer, it will not come in time enough for our impatience, for murmuring, for presumptuous desires; but it will come in time to do all that is needed. Ah, and it will come before Peter has gone below the water, though not until Peter has felt the cold waves rise to his knees, and has cried out, 'Lord, save me, I perish.' 'Master, he whom Thou lovest is sick,' and He abode still two days in the same place where He was, and when He came, 'Lord, if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died.' 'Said I not unto thee, that if thou didst believe thou shouldest see the glory of God.' 'God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved, the Lord shall help her, and that right early.' You remember the narrative of that great final battle on the plains of Waterloo. For long weary days brave men died by the thousands — the afternoon of the last day was wearing rapidly away, the thin red living line getting thinner and thinner, the squares smaller and smaller at each returning charge — but at last, just before the daylight faded, just before endurance could do no more, there comes old Blucher at last and gives the order, and the whole line bore down upon the enemy and scattered them. Ah, help came at the right time, not so soon but that the courage of our brave soldiers had been tested, but before despair had settled upon the ranks, and in time for a great and perfect victory. Oh, my friends, 'Let us come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace for every time of need.'

Through waves and clouds and storms He gently clears thy way;

Wait thou His time — thy darkest night Shall end in brightest day.'

Hebrews 5:7—GETHSEMANE

Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared.' — Hebrews 5:7.

WE may take these great and solemn words as a commentary on the gospel narrative of Gethsemane. It is remarkable that there should be here preserved a detail of that agony which is not found in our Gospels. The strong crying and tears find no record in our evangelists, and so it would appear as though the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was not altogether dependent upon them for his knowledge of Christ's life. In any case here we have independent witness to the story of Christ's passion, and a very instructive hint as to the widespread and familiar knowledge of the story of our Lord's suffering, which existed at the very early date of this Epistle in the churches, so that it could be referred to in this far-off allusive way with the certainty that hearers would distinctly understand what the writer was speaking about. So we get a confirmation of the historical veracity of the narrative that is preserved in our Gospel. But the value of such words as these is their bearing upon far deeper things than that. They point to Gethsemane as showing us Christ, as the companion of our sorrows and supplications, as a pattern of our submissive, devout resignation, and as a lesson for us all how prayer is most truly answered.

First, then, take that great thought of my text, the Christ as being our companion in sorrow and in supplication. 'In the days of His flesh — when He bore what I bear — in the days of His flesh He offered prayer and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death.' Now I do not dwell at any length upon the additional contribution to the vividness and solemnity of the picture given us in the detail of the text before us, but I want to

refer for one moment, and I will do it as reverently as I can, to the unapproachable narrative, and to make this one remark about it, that all the three evangelists who are our source of knowledge of that scene in the garden of Gethsemane employ strange, and all but unexampled, words in order to express the condition of our Saviour's spirit then. Matthew, for instance, uses a word which, in our Bible, is translated 'He began to be very heavy.' Only once besides, as far as I know, is it employed in scripture, and it seems to mean something like 'On the very verge of despair.' And then Mark gives us the same singular expression, adding to it another one which is translated, 'sore amazed.' It has been suggested that a more adequate rendering would be 'began to be appalled,' and another suggestion has been, that it might be adequately rendered with the phrase 'that He began to be out of Himself.' Then comes Luke, with his word, which we have translated into English as 'agony.' And then there come Christ's own strange words, 'My soul is encompassed with sorrow almost up to the point of death.' That is not a proverb; I take that to be a literal fact that one more pang and the physical frame would have given way. Now, I do not point to these things in any spirit of curious investigation. I feel, I hope, 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' And yet I cannot help feeling that there is a tendency nowadays to say too little about the Gospel story of Christ's sufferings; it is a reaction, no doubt, and prompted by good motives; it is a reaction from the preaching of a former time, when men used these sacred narratives of our Lord's last days in the coarsest possible manner, and the climax of it is that horrible kind of preaching that Roman Catholic preachers used to indulge in — Passion sermons. And yet I cannot but feel that we are in danger of going to the other extreme and losing much by not sufficiently dwelling on the facts.

Then there is another point.. What is the meaning of that-what is the explanation of all the passion, and paroxysm of agony, and fear. and bloody sweat, and horror-stricken appeal? Is it not a very, very

unheroic picture that? Is it not strangely unlike the spirit in which many men and women, who drew all courage from Christ, have gone to their death? Is not the servant above his master here, if you will think of a Latimer at the stake, or of many a poor unknown martyr that went to his death as to his bed, and set that side by side with the shrinking of Christ? Well, dear brethren, I know the attempt to explain the flood of sorrow, of dread, and horror of great darkness that wrapt the soul of Jesus Christ in these last moments, on psychological principles, and say it is a pure and lofty end, shrinking from death; but it seems to me the only explanation of it all is the good old one: ‘The Lord hath made to meet upon Him the iniquity of us all.’ And so with the weight of the sins and the sorrows of the world, He began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

And then, passing on, let me deal with the matter from another point of view, and remind you that, whatsoever there may be all His own and beyond that reach of common humanity, experienced in the solemn and awful hour, yet it is also the revelation of a companionship that never fails us in all our struggles, tears, and prayers. Oh, how different that makes our passage through the lonely experience of our human life! There are times in every life when all human affection and all human voices fail in the presence of a great sorrow, and when you feel that you must tread this path alone. Although loving hands are stretched out to me through the darkness, and have grasped my own and helped me to stand, yet nothing will still the aching of the solitary heart except the thought of a Christ who has suffered it all already, and who, in the days of His flesh, offered up, with strong crying and tears, His prayer unto Him that was able to save.

You remember the old Roman story — grand in its heroic simplicity — of the husband and the wife resolved to escape from the miseries of a tyrant- ridden world by suicide — which to them was less criminal than it is to us— and the wife first of all struck the dagger into her own heart, and drawing it out, embruied with her own blood,

hands it to her husband, with the dying words ‘Paetus! it is not painful.’ The sharp edge that strikes into your heart, brethren, has cut into Christ’s first, and the blade tintured with His blood inflicts only healing wounds upon us. He is our priest because He has gone before us on every road of sorrow and loss, and is ready to sustain us when it comes to our turn to tread it.

And so turn for a moment to the other conception that is here, viz., that the same solemn scene shows us Christ as being, not only our companion in sorrow and supplication, but our pattern of submissive reverence. The language of my text needs just one word of explanation in order to show where this lies. You observe it reads, ‘And was heard in that He feared.’ Now, these last words, ‘in that He feared,’ have always received two varying expositions, and, I suppose, always will receive them. The text fairly allows one or the other. They may either mean, ‘He was heard or delivered from the thing He dreaded’ — which you know is not true — or they may mean that He was heard by reason of His reverence and submission, or, if we may use such a word — a word that is not Scriptural and very modern — was heard because of His piety. And I suppose the latter was distinctly the meaning in the writer’s mind. Christ’s prayer was, ‘If it be possible,’ and His second prayer was, ‘If this cup may not pass from Me Thy will be done.’ He felt the reluctance of the flesh to enter upon the path of suffering, the perfectly natural human shrinking from all that lay before Him. But that shrinking never made His purpose falter, nor made Him lose His son-like dependence upon the Father’s will and submission to the Father’s will. And so there come out of that, large lessons that I can only just touch for a moment.

And the first of them is this: let us learn and be thankful for the teaching, that resignation, submission to all the burdens and pains and struggles and sorrows which life brings to us, does not demand the suppression of the natural emotions and affections of the flesh.

Christ recoiled from the cup, but Christ's submission was perfect. And so for us there are two ways.

Inclination and duty will often draw us two different ways. Tastes and weaknesses will often suggest one thing, and the high sense of the path we ought to travel upon will suggest another. But the inclination must never be allowed to mount up into the region of the will and to make our purpose falter, or make us abandon that which we feel will be the rough path—Then there will be no sin in the fact that the flesh shrinks, as shrink it must, from the thing which duty demands we should do. Christ, the example of a perfect resignation, is an example of a will that mastered flesh. That is full of encouragement and strength to us in our time of need and conflict.

And then there is the other side of the same thought Not only does there often come into our life the struggle of duty and inclination, but there comes into our life sometimes the other struggle between submission and sorrow. In like manner there is no sin in the tear, there is no sin in the strong crying. It is meet that when His hand is laid heavy upon my heart, my heart should feel the pressure; it is meet that I should take into my consciousness and into my feeling the pain; and then it is meet that if I cannot do anything more — and I don't think we can — I should at least try through my tears to say, 'Not my will, but Thine'; and if I cannot do anything more, at least, 'I was dumb, I opened not my mouth because Thou didst it.'

And the last point I touch upon is this, that according to the teaching of this commentary upon that solemn scene, our Lord in it sets before us the lesson of what the true answer to prayer is. 'He prayed unto Him that was able to save Him from death,' and says my text: 'He was heard.' Was He? How was He heard? He was heard in this. There appeared unto Him an angel from heaven strengthening Him. He was heard in this because His prayer was not 'Let this cup pass,' but His prayer was, 'Thy will be done,' and God's will was done.

And so there comes out the true heart of all true prayer, ‘Thy will be done.’ And the true answer that We get is, not the lifting away of the burden, but the breathing into our hearts strength to bear it, so that it ceases to be a burden. Let us make our prayers not petulant wishes to get our own way, but lowly efforts to enter into God’s way and make His will ours, so shall come to us peace and strength, and a power adequate to Our need. The cup will be sweetened, and our lips made willing to drink it.

Christ was heard, and Christ was crucified.

Learn the lesson that if, in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, we make our requests known unto God, whatsoever other answer may be sent, or not sent, the real and highest answer will surely be sent, and the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 6:7—A FIELD WHICH THE LORD HATH BLESSED

‘The earth, which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God. — Hebrews 6:7.

THIS is a kind of parable or allegory in which echoes of many scriptures are gathered up. The comparisons of the process of forming character to the growth of a plant, of divine influences to the rain, of the discipline of life to husbandry, of holy deeds to fruit, are common to all languages; and recall many sayings of lawgiver and prophets, as well as many of the parables of our Lord. Especially there seems to be allusion here to the two parables of the Sower and the field that brought forth wheat and tares. But the old illustrations appear here with a somewhat new setting. The writer extends his vision beyond the fact of growth and fruitfulness to that

which precedes it and to that which follows it. For fruitfulness there must be the drinking in of the rain from heaven. And if there be fruitfulness, there will be God's blessing.

Then, further, in His estimate there are only two kinds of soil, one which bears wholesome fruits, and on which falls the perpetual dew of heaven's benediction, the other which brings forth thorns and briars, and on which fall the lightnings of a curse that burns it and its miserable crop. Both soils are typical of professing Christians; in one or other of them each of us finds His likeness.

I. So then consider, first, the eager reception of divine influences.

In these Eastern lands all that is wanted to turn the desert into a paradise is irrigation. In the human heart what is wanted to bring forth fruit is, first, the reception of God's gifts and help. That goes dead in the teeth of a great deal of what we call 'culture,' and for want of believing it, and acting on it, much of the so-called culture is only elaborate vanity. It is no use trying to grow fruits in the desert until, as the men who made the Suez Canal did, you first of all bring the 'sweet water,' and then you will get your garden. Productivity, to use long words, begins with receptivity. You must first take in what God sends upon you before you can bring forth what God asks from you. The earth that 'drinketh in the rain' is the earth 'that bringeth forth the fruit.'

What is this rain that cometh oft, the reception of which is the indispensable preliminary to all true fruitfulness? If there be, as I suppose there is, some echo and reminiscence here of Isaiah's word about 'the rain coming down and the snow from heaven,' then the metaphor points to 'the Word of God that goeth forth out of His mouth.' And though I by no means take that to be the exclusive or even the principal application of the symbol, I cannot help dwelling upon that view for a moment. And in that aspect it comes to be this, if a Christian man wants to be fruitful let him begin by receiving, with interest and attention, into his heart the truth in God's word.

One main reason for the defects of our modern Christianity is that the average Christian man cares so little about his Bible; and has no real deep grip of, nor absorbed interest in, the great truths that it sets forth. No man gets any good out of a book or of a truth to which he does not attend with awakened interest and quickened curiosity. Look how you read your newspapers, and how interested you are in some trashy fiction, and contrast that with the way in which you read your Bibles. Do you drink in this Word, do you long to know more of the deep harmonies, of the profound mysteries, of the flashing illumination which it brings to all hearts that long for it? Can you say 'I have desired Thy testimonies more than all hidden riches'? My brother, there will be but few and shrivelled and immature fruits upon our lives unless they are 'planted by the rivers of water,' that is to say, as the psalm interprets it, unless we 'meditate on His law day and night.'

But there is a wider application to be given, as I take it, to the figure. The rain 'which cometh oft upon' the fruit-bearing earth, is a symbol for the whole sum of divine influences affecting mind, heart, conscience, will, and the whole inner man. From God there is ever streaming down upon His world, and especially upon His Church, spiritual influences reducible to no external agency, which find their way into the inmost heart. These come, not like the inadequate symbol of my text, in occasional showers, but they come rather as the rays come from the sun, by continual pulsating outwards, and perpetual efflux. So the prime requisite for fruit-bearing is the eager reception of all God's influences upon our spirits.

I venture to put what I have to say about this matter into four simple precepts. Desire them; expect them; welcome them; use them. So we shall drink them in.

Desire them. If there is a continual flowing out from God, by reason of His very nature, of these gracious influences to enlighten and to strengthen and to purify, then to desire them is to possess them, and

without desiring them there is no possession. The heart opens when it desires, and the water finds its way, as is the nature of water, into the narrowest chink that it meets as it flows. Wherever there is a tiny crack there will be a little stream, and the wider the opening the fuller the blessing. Desire brings God; and they whose hearts are opened are they whose hearts are filled. Do you want the rain that comes down? Have you any wish to be made any better than you are. Would it be inconvenient to you if there came to you the efflux of the divine power, that would make you ashamed of your present Christianity, and would lift you up into heights of consecration, of daily honesty, and transparent business purity which perhaps do not mark you at present?

Dear brethren, if many Christian people would be honest with themselves they would more often find out that, in spite of all their prayers, which come from their, teeth outwards, they do not want more of God's influences, and would feel it extremely inconvenient to be laid hold of by a sanctifying power that should deliver them from the sins that they like.

Desire, and you possess.

Expect and you will get. God cannot disappoint, and never did disappoint, expectations which turn to Him with the consciousness of need and the yearning for supply. But we limit His gifts because we limit our expectations of them; and instead of widening these to the large infinitude of His bestowments, we shrink His bestowments to the miserable narrowness of our expectations. Suppose a king were to send out a proclamation that any man might come to his treasuries, and take away as many sacks full of gold as he liked, and the more the better; do you think he would consider himself most honoured by the man that brought a wagon or by him who brought a basket? We bring our little vessels to the great fountain, and we put it to shame by the smallness of the expectations with which we meet the largeness of the promises. Expect the gift, and the gift will

answer and vindicate — ay! and put to shame — your expectation. Desire them; expect them.

Welcome them. There is a vulgar old proverb that says, ‘Put out your tubs when it is raining.’ Be sure that when the gift is falling you fling your hearts wide for its acceptance. Such welcome will not be given unless there be a profound sense of need, an almost painful consciousness of deficiency and failure, and unless there be above all a firm and confident expectation and faith in His bestowments. If we desired eagerly the coming of the blessing, how our hearts would leap when the blessing came. It should be a tree of life, as the Book of Proverbs says about hopes fulfilled. But alas! alas! the bulk of professing average Christians-of this day are liker the soaked and saturated soil of this summer, which takes in no more of the rain that falls, but lets it stagnate on the surface. Everybody that has ever watered a dry garden knows how the liquid treasure sinks in, and how every particle of earth seems to have a mouth to grasp it, and to make it its own. Do you welcome in that fashion, my brother, God’s gifts so lavishly bestowed upon you, or do you let them lie on the surface stagnating and unprofitable as far as you are concerned? Desire them; expect them; welcome them.

Use them. Because in using them you will use them up, and that will leave room for more; and ‘unto him that hath shall be given.’ And he that has faithfully utilised the smallest measure of God’s gift to him, receives a larger; just as you trust your children with halfpence before you trust them with shillings, and proportion the amount you have put in their hands to what you have seen of the wisdom of their use of the smaller amount.

So, dear friends, to sum it all up, here is the condition of all fruit-bearing. The prime characteristic of a Christian heart ought to be this hungering and thirsting after larger bestowments of God’s influences. Alas! alas! for the professing Christians who are impervious to the rain that comes oft upon them. For God’s gifts are

never inoperative. In countries where the timber has been unwisely felled, and the hillside stripped, the rain has nothing to lay hold of, and nothing to do, and it sweeps down the mountain side in a tawny torrent, bearing away the little superfluous soil that still clings to the rocks, and after a while these stand up gaunt and *bare*, neither sunshine *nor* rain can stimulate vegetation on their naked precipitous face, but only crumble them into slow decay. So either we are welcoming God's influences into our hearts, and turning rain into fruit, or they are denuding the soil still more, and making us yet more infertile. The land that drinketh in the rain bears the fruit; the land that does not is thereby cursed into more barren barrenness.

II. Now note secondly, and only a word about that, the tillage.

My text speaks of 'them for whom' (not as our Authorised Version has it, 'by whom') it is dressed. And possibly there may be a distinction between those, whoever they may be, who are supposed to receive the fruit of the field, and those who carry on the labour of cultivation. If so, we should have a parallel thought to the many both in the Old and in the New Testament which represent God's ministers and messengers as being labourers in His vineyard. But more probably the distinction between the owner and the labourers is neglected in our text, and we are simply to think of the 'dressing' as referring to another department of the divine operations. God not only pours upon us as from above these gracious skyey influences, which are to be received into our hearts, but He deals with us in our daily life, by external providences and discipline. So the text reminds us of 'My Father is the husbandman,' and of Paul's word, 'Ye are God's husbandry,' and the tillage that is here spoken of is the whole sum of the external circumstances of our lives, as contrasted with the rain, that represents the whole sum of the spiritual influences brought to bear upon us within.

There is the true point of view from which to look on life. It is God's husbandry. The ploughshare has a very sharp edge, and it is

dragged with unsparing accuracy in the straight, deep furrow; and it cuts through stiff soil, and sometimes turns up and divides hidden treasures that lie beneath. Nobody likes to have his fallow ground broken up; nobody likes to have the ploughshare of sorrow driven through the little warm nest that lay below the surface; nobody likes the discipline, but it is God's husbandry. If there were no ploughing, if there were no harrows with their cruel multiplied teeth to be dragged clean across quivering hearts, there would not be any harvest. Do not let us misunderstand the meaning of our sorrows. God by them is 'dressing' His own fields, and let us take care that, when we are thinking of the means by which He seeks to promote our fertility, we do not forget to set by the side of the gracious rain that distils from the heavens the better discipline that is exercised upon the earth.

III. Thirdly, note the fruitfulness.

There is only one crop from a man's nature which God dignifies with the name of fruit. The rest, be it what it may, is thorns and thistles. One of the apostles talks about 'the unfruitful fruit of darkness.' Darkness has plenty of work; has it not? There are abundant results, some of them very satisfactory, very beautiful, very desirable, in a number of ways, from the lives of men who do not take in these divine influences. Are we not to call them fruit? Is every human life, except a life of consistent godliness and lowly faith manifested in works, a barren life? So the Bible says. And that cuts very sharp, and goes very deep, and rebukes a great many of us.

Culture is all very well. Refinement, education, business prosperity, taste, affection, etc., are all right in their places. If they come from, and are rooted in, faith in Jesus Christ, and obedience therefore to God's will, they are fruit; if they do not, they are thorns, wild grapes and not true ones. The only thing that a man does that is worth calling fruit, because it is the only thing that will last, and the only thing that corresponds to his capacities and responsibilities, is that

which he does for the sake of, and by the strength of, the dear Lord that loved him, and gave Himself for him. That is fruit; all the rest is sham — nothing but leaves.

Again, notice that great thought, that the deeds of a poor man, who has taken in these divine influences, are a harvest meet for, and acceptable to, the owner; or, to put it into words without metaphor, God delights in, and in some sense feeds upon, the righteous deeds of His children. That great thought is put in many ways and in many places in Scripture. ‘He came, being hungered, seeking fruit,’ on the fig-tree. ‘An odour of a sweet smell’ — another metaphor expressing the same idea — ‘acceptable to God.’ In the old ritual there was the singular institution of what we call the ‘shewbread,’ the ‘bread of the face,’ as the Hebrew means, which was spread before God, and lay there in the sanctuary, typical of the righteous deeds of His children, which were offered up to Him. In the same sense my text speaks of ‘fruit meet for those for whom it is dressed’ — such a crop as corresponds to the desires of the owner, and to the care and husbandry that He has lavished upon His field.

A farmer is proud if the produce of his farm is taken for the royal table. Can there be a loftier conception of the possible greatness of the poorest, lowliest Christian service than this, that it is ‘meet for the Master’s use’; and that even He will find delight in partaking of it? And does not Jesus Christ say the same thing to us in other language when He says from heaven, ‘If any man open the door, I will come in and will sup with him’ — ‘He shall provide the meal, he shall spread the table, and I will partake of that which he brings.’ It is the highest motive that can be brought to bear upon us, to make our deeds, for His dear sake, pure and noble and lofty, that thereby become, in His infinite mercy, not unworthy to be offered to Him, and capable of ministering delight to His heart. And it is a test, too, for if your work is not meet for Christ to accept, it is not meet for you to do.

IV. Lastly, mark the blessing from God.

My text is spoken in immediate connection with the statement of the writer's purpose, to lead his hearers from the elements to the perfection of Christian truth. Such progress he considers the proper result of the earlier stages, and the statement of that principle is embodied in the metaphor of my text. Stripping it of its figure, it comes to this, that in the narrower view righteousness give an insight into truth, and in the wider view, that fruitfulness is rewarded by progress in the Christian life. I have no time, nor is there need, to dwell upon the elements of this blessing from God; let me put what I have to say in just two or three sentences.

The fruitfulness which is the result of the reception of the divine influences has for its consequence the Blessing which is more of these divine influences, therefore more fruitfulness and consequently more work.

Faithfulness in the use of the less leads on to the assured possession of the greater, as is true in all regions of life, as is true as between earth and heaven, and as is true in the growth of the Christian soul here below. And as the reception of the blessing makes capable of a larger blessing, so the larger reception of these divine influences results in larger fruitfulness. The reward of fertility is greater fertility, and that is the highest reward that God can give us for it. It is the reward that makes heaven, for that is a sphere in which, with larger capacities, we shall bring forth nobler results of service and of character. The plant that is here an exotic is taken there into its native *soil*, and spreads a broader branch, and opens a greener leaf, and bends down boughs laden with richer and more abundant fruit, and in the fruit is neither spot nor blemish nor any such thing. The blessing of God is, most of all, the larger communication of His own sweet and precious influences, and consequently the growing fruitfulness which brings growing glory to Him, and growing gladness to ourselves. The reward for work is more work, and a

wider sphere for nobler service. Add to that the consciousness of God's smile reflected in the quiet of an unaccusing conscience, and the tran-quiility that comes from a submissive will and unselfish consecration, and we have at least some of the elements of that 'blessing from God.'

So, dear friends, there is a picture of what is possible for every one of us. We may all make our lives like what the Pentateuch describes the land of Israel as being, 'a land which drinketh in of the water of the rain of heaven, a land which the Lord thy God careth for, for the eyes of the *Lord* thy God are on it continually.' If we receive the influences we shall bring forth the fruit, and we shall get the blessing.

Hebrews 6:9—THE QUEEN AND THE VIRGINS THAT FOLLOW HER

'But, Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you. and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.' — Hebrews 6:9.

THE writer has been describing, in very stern and solemn words, the fate of apostates, and illustrating it by the awful metaphor of the earth which... 'beareth thorns and briars,' and which is, therefore, 'rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.' Then he softens, and knowing that rebukes are never so pointed as when the arrow is feathered by love, he changes his voice. 'But, beloved' — they needed to be assured that all the thundering and lightning did not mean anger, but affection — 'we are persuaded better things of you, and those things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.'

Wherever, then, salvation is, certain other things will also be.

Now, of course, it is clear that the word salvation is not here used to mean the ultimate, complete deliverance from all evil of sorrow or sin, and the ultimate, complete endowment with all good of joy and

holiness, but for that earlier stage of itself — which unfortunately, too often is supposed to be all that is needed, and to be sure to last, if once possessed, whether diligently tended or left neglected — the initial gifts which are received by a convert in the very beginning of his Christian career, viz., the assurance of divine forgiveness, and the establishment of a new relation between him and God. It is that initial and incomplete salvation of which the writer is here thinking. And, he says, it does not come alone. Like a planet set in the heavens, with moons that circle round it; like a diamond set in a cluster of precious stones; like some queen with her train of attendants, when that incipient salvation comes into a soul, it comes accompanied by other blessings that are its natural and necessary attendants and accompaniments.

And what are these? The whole context is full of instruction as to what they are. We can gather them all up into the one metaphor fruitfulness; or to put away the metaphor, we can gather them all up into the one phrase, ‘a holy life.’ That, or these — for the one phrase, ‘a holy life,’ will break up and effloresce into all manner of beautifuleffnesses and goodnesses — are ‘the things that accompany salvation.’

It is plain that the possession of ‘salvation’ is sure to lead to that result. For it is something more than a judge’s pardon; it is a Father’s forgiveness, and even if it were nothing more than forgiveness, it would, as such, set in operation new emotions and aims in the child’s heart and will. God’s forgiveness does not only take away guilt, but breaks the power of sin. But surely the faintest dawn of salvation brings a new life which has affinities for all righteousness and every form of goodness, and brings the forgiven man under the influence of new motives, drawn from his blessed new experience of the ‘mercies of God,’ and strongly impelling him to that grateful, happy yielding of himself as a living sacrifice, from which whatsoever things are lovely and of good report are sure to spring, as naturally as rare exotics will, even in our northern cold,

when the right temperature is maintained in the conservatory. The initial salvation sets us in new relations with God; it puts into us a new life, infantile and needing much care in its feebleness, no doubt, but still capable of growth to power and maturity, and even in infancy like the new-born Hercules, able to strangle the serpents. The initial salvation turns us in a new direction, changes our estimate of things to be pursued and avoided, gives new standards, new aims, new desires, new power to reach these aims, to satisfy these desires. 'If any man be in Christ' — even if he has but this moment entered, and has gone but a step or two in — 'he is a new creature; old things are passed away, all things have become new.' Simultaneous with the rapturous new assurance that God loves and forgives, come the inclination towards, and possibility of, a new life of holiness. It is for the most part an undeveloped possibility, and will need much careful tending, and much fencing off of infantile diseases, and much discipline, before it comes to a 'perfect man' after the pattern of Jesus; but the life is there, and, with fair play, will come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. 'Salvation' never enters alone, but ever is attended by a train of fair virgins.

Now, from this thought of the primacy of salvation and the subordinate place of its certain accompaniments, important practical results follow. One of these is what we Christians need to have perpetually recalled to our minds, namely, that the way to increase our possession of the accompaniments is to increase our possession of the central blessing which they accompany, and therefore that the true course for us to pursue, if we would live that holy life which accompanies salvation, is to seek to increase, first, our possession of those primary experiences that constitute salvation the sense of the divine favour, the consciousness of the forgiving and reconciling love of God, and to strive to increase that faith, by which a fuller tide of salvation will flow into our more widely opened hearts. Begin with that with which God begins; seek to have more of the divine salvation; that is the best way to get more of the graces that

accompany it. Welcome the entrance of the queen, and her train of attendants, in all the variety of their sweet loveliness and feminine graces, will follow her. 'The things that accompany salvation' are best secured by making sure, and increasing our conscious possession of, the salvation which they accompany. To aim at possessing the graces of character which are the results of conscious enjoyment of salvation, without that enjoyment, is like the folly that would begin building a house at the roof-tree. Such graces may be partially produced without 'salvation,' but they are but like artificial flowers in comparison with the sweet children of the dew and sun, and have no fragrance and no life.

But another needful lesson is that the best test and evidence of our being saved, men and women, is our manifesting in our lives these certain attendants on salvation. We should be very sceptical of the genuineness of any profession of being 'saved,' whether made by ourselves or by others, which is not manifestly accompanied by these, its inevitable consequences and attendants. The pure heart, the clean hands, the truth-speaking tongue, the loving disposition, the integrity in business, the control of one's own dispositions and tempers and tastes and appetites, and all these other fair traits of character which are the constituents of a holy life, the manifold rays which melt into the one white light of holiness — these things are the only tokens for the world, and the principal tests for myself, of the reality of my salvation. They are not the only tests for us. Thank God, Christian men do not need to take only the indirect method of determining the genuineness of their faith and love by examining their outward lives. They can say, 'I have felt, I know and Thou knowest, that I love Thee.' As to others, our only way of knowing whether the watch is going, is to note whether the hands are travelling round the dial, but for ourselves, we may have direct consciousness of our emotions, being, as it were, inside the watch case and aware of its working. Yet, since we can hoodwink ourselves about our inward state, and inspection of ourselves is always difficult, and its results apt to be biased by what we wish to

find within, we have all much need to check our judgments of ourselves, especially in regard to our faith and love, which are the conditions of our possessing salvation, by the test of our actions, which we are less liable to misconstrue, and which will often tell us unwelcome, but wholesome truth. We shall be wise if we habitually test our Christian emotion by our conduct in the rough road of daily life, and if we gravely suspect the depth and genuineness of all feeling, however sweet and lofty it seems, which does not come out into action. If our Christian experience is worth anything, it will drive the wheels of self-sacrificing duty. It takes tons of pitchblende to make a drachm of radium, and it needs much experience of the possession of salvation, and many precious and secret inward emotions in order to produce the life of self-sacrifice which is the ultimate test of the worth of our religion. If these certain accompaniments are wanting, or are sparse and lacking in radiance in our lives, it is high time that we asked ourselves very seriously what the worth to us is of a salvation that does not produce in us ‘the things that accompany salvation.’

But the text suggests another thought to which we may now turn. It is that where these accompaniments of initial salvation are present, further salvation will follow. The whole of the context, including my text itself, goes upon the principle that whilst a holy life, or, to put it into other words, ‘good works,’ is, or are, the accompaniments of the initial salvation, they are the causes of a fuller salvation. For look what follows, and look what preceded our text. ‘The earth which drinketh in the rain’ — that is step number one and that drinking in of the rain is the initial act of faith which opens thirstily for the entrance of the initial salvation. Then follows — ‘and bringeth forth herbs’ — that is the second step, and corresponds to the holy life of which I have been speaking; and finally comes ‘receiveth a blessing from God,’ which corresponds to a fuller salvation. After the text we read: ‘God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love’ which implies a promise of rich reward.

That is to say, if we have these accompaniments, and do our very best to make them conspicuous and continuous and more thoroughly the mainsprings of our actions, then we shall receive a fuller salvation, just because we have thus sought to appropriate and redevelop the consequences in our conduct of the partial salvation with which we were started at first. Salvation is a great word which in Scripture is presented in many aspects. Sometimes it is spoken of as a thing in the past experience of the Christian; sometimes it is spoken of as a thing which he is progressively realising throughout his life: 'The Lord added to the Church daily such as were being saved'; sometimes it is spoken of as an experience which is reserved for the future, 'receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of *your* souls,' in that life beyond.

Now, this experience or possession, call it which you like, or state of spirit and heart, which has its roots in the past, and is being developed all through the Christian life, and is to be perfected in the future world, has for one chief cause of its progressive increase in our own consciousness, a holy life. And if we, as good ground, are trying 'to bring forth herbs meet for Him by whom it is dressed,' we shall be like the earth softened by the rain, and smiling with harvest, on which God smiles down in the sunshine of His approval, and which He visits with His benediction. We shall possess a fuller salvation. A firmer grasp of the great truths which bring salvation when received, and of all their consequences of peace and joy, and spiritual elevation and calm, a closer union with Jesus, a larger endowment of the Spirit, will 'follow our faithful attempts to 'perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord,' and so to possess, and to present, more of 'the things that accompany salvation.' Good works are a cause of a fuller salvation.

The most fruitful Christians need to be warned against possible barrenness and apostasy.

‘We are persuaded better things of you, beloved’ — but yet, though persuaded, the writer felt that he must ‘thus speak.’ For we never get beyond the risk of fruitlessness. We never get beyond the need of effort to resist the tendencies that draw us away. We never get beyond the need of warnings. It is always safe for us to look at the field that is bristling ‘with briars and thorns, and is nigh unto cursing.’ Therefore the warning note is sounded, and it is sounded, thank God! in order that what it points to as possible, may never be actual for any of us.

We all need warning, but those of us who, like myself, are set to give it sometimes, have to remember that it loses all its force unless it is manifestly the warning of love. ‘Beloved I persuaded,’ as we are, ‘of better things of you,’ it yet is our solemn duty thus to speak, that thus it may never be with any of you. And it is the less likely to be the case with any of us that we shall bear but ‘thorns and briars,’ the more we remember that it is possible for us all, and will be possible until the very end.

Hebrews 6:11—SURE AND CERTAIN HOPE

‘We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.’ — Hebrews 6:11.

MANY of us have seen a picture in which the artist paints ‘Hope’ as a pale, fragile figure, blind, and bent, wistfully listening to the poor music which her own finger draws from a broken one-stringed lyre. It is a profoundly true and pathetic confession. So sad, languid, blind, yearning, self-beguiled is Hope, as most men know her.

Put side by side with that the figure which an unknown sculptor has carved on one of the capitals of the ducal palace in Venice, where Hope lifts up praying hands and a waiting, confident face to a hand stretched out towards her from a glory of sunbeams. Or set by the side of the picture our own great poet’s picture —

*'Upon her arm a silver Anchor lay, On which she leaned ever, as
befell;*

And ever up to Heaven as she did pray,

Her steadfast eyes were bent, nor swerved other way.'

Who does not feel the contrast between the two conceptions? What makes the difference? The upward look. When Hope is directed heavenwards she is strong, assured, and glad.

My text speaks of the certitude and the blessedness of Christian hope, and of the discipline by which it is to be cultivated.

I. Let us look then, first, at the certainty of Christian hope.

Universal experience tells us that hope means an anticipation which is less than sure. Hopes and fears are bracketed together in common language, as always united, like a double star, one black and the other brilliant, which revolve round a common axis, and are knit together by invisible bands. But if we avail ourselves of the possibilities in reference to the future, which Christianity puts into our hands, our hope may be no less certain than our memory, and even more sure than it. For the grounds on which Christian men may forecast their future as infinitely bright and blessed, as the possession of an inheritance incorruptible, as absolute and entire conformity to the likeness of God, which is peace and joy, are triple, each of them affording certitude.

The Christian hope is builded on no mere projection of our longings into a hypothetical and questionable future. It is no mere deduction from probabilities, from guesses. It is no mere child of a wish, but it rests, immovable, on these three solid pillars — an eternal God to whom all Time is subject, a past fact and a present experience.

It rests upon the eternal God to whom all the future is certain and upon His faithful word, which makes it as certain to us. In the Old

Testament God is 'the Hope of Israel,' and the devout heart's language is, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait; and in His word do I hope.' In the New, Christ is our hope; and, as the context here tells us, the two immutable things, God's promise and His oath, lay the foundation for unshaken confidence.

And not only so, but our hope further rests on a past fact: 'He hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' The one real proof that when we paint heaven we are not painting mist and moonshine is the fact that Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. Men before Him have hoped and feared, and said: 'Perhaps it may be; "I am *afraid* it is," or "I hope it is "'; but there is all the difference in the world between saying, 'A man can possibly live again'; or 'he may probably live again'; or, he will, I *believe*, live again'; and saying, 'a Man has lived again, and having died has risen.' There were many reasons for believing in America before Columbus came back and said, 'I have been there.' And there are many reasons, no doubt, that may incline sanguine spirits and wearied spirits and desiring spirits, and even sin-stricken and guilty spirits, to anticipate a life beyond, which shall be a hope or a dread; but there is only one ground upon which men can say. 'We know that it is not cloud-land, but solid earth'; and that is, that our Brother has come back from the bourne from which 'no traveller returns'; that He thereby has shown us all, not by argumentation but by historical fact, that to die is not to cease to be; that to die draws after it the resurrection of the body. We lift our eyes to the heavens, and though 'the cloud receive Him out of our sight,' hope, which is better than vision, pierces the cloud and travels straight on to the throne whilst He bends from His crowned glory and says: 'Because I live ye shall live also.'

'Our everlasting hopes arise Above the ruinable skies,' and they are built upon no dreams of our own, nor is the music drawn from the lyre by our poor fingers, but they are built on the steadfast word of the eternal God, to whom past, present, and future are one; and they

are built on the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

And then, still further, the Christian hope is based, not only on these two strong pillars, but on a third — namely, on present experience.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, has, in two different places, a very interesting and instructive genealogy, if I might so call it, of Christian hope; and in both places (the fifth and the fifteenth chapters) he traces the hope of the Christian to a double and apparently opposite source. He says: ‘Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.’ And in the similar passage, in the other chapter, he speaks about being filled with ‘joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope.’ So then, there he traces the Christian hope to the present experience of forgiveness, and of access by faith into present grace; or, as he puts it in briefer words in the other place, to the present experience of ‘joy and peace in believing.’

But there is another side to our experience which likewise issues in hope. ‘And not only *so*, but we glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience,’ — brave endurance, and that brave endurance of ours, inasmuch as it is something beyond our own reach and strength, works in us the proof of a divine power operating upon us; and that proof of a divine power operating upon us produces in us hope, and hope ‘makes not ashamed.’ That is to say, the dark as well as the bright side of the Christian. experience, its sorrows as well as its joys, the burdens which have been borne, the trials which we have survived, demonstrate to us that we are not left to fight alone, but that a mighty hand is ever around us, and a gracious arm holding us up, and therefore all these darker and sadder moments of the Christian life do likewise tend towards the enkindling in the spirit of a ‘hope that maketh not ashamed.’

So, both by reason of what we experience of peace and joy, and by reason of what we experience of trial, disaster, difficulty borne, and unwelcome duties done, in the might of God, we are entitled to say — we know that a rest remains, where trouble is done with, and all that was here tendency shall be perfected, and the divine and immortal elements of joy and peace shall enfold themselves completely in our happy experience. You can tell a cedar of Lebanon, though it is not yet bigger than a dandelion, and know what it is coming to. You can tell the infant prince. And the joy and peace of faith, feeble and interrupted as they may be in our present experience, have on them the stamp of supremacy and are manifestly destined for dominion over our whole nature. They are indeed experiences ‘whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that they were born for immortality.’ I have often seen in rich men’s greenhouses some exotic plant grown right up to the roof, which had to be raised in order to let it go higher. The Christian life here is plainly an exotic, growing where it cannot attain its full height, and it presses against the fragile over-arching glass, yearning upwards to the open sky and the throne of God. So, because we can love so much and do love so little, because we can trust thus far and do trust no more, because we have some spark of the divine life in us, and that spark so contradicted and thwarted and oppressed, there must be somewhere a region which shall correspond to this our deepest nature, and the time must come when the righteous, who here shone but so dimly, shall ‘blaze forth like the sun in the Kingdom of the Father.’

Blessed it is that this guiding torch of Christian hope can be kindled from both of these sources. We can light it both with the sunbeams of joy and peace, focused in the burning glass of faith, and with a spark struck by the sharp collision of the hard steel and flint, in the night of sorrow. Thus all the experience of a believing soul is evidence of the certainty of the Christian hope.

Brethren! do not trust yourselves to a hope that is less than certitude, nor grovel along these low levels, concerning which the warning is always to be repeated: 'Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what the day may bring forth,' but aspire and lift your hope to heaven, then you may be sure that 'To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.'

II. Now let me say a word in the next place as to the assurance of the Christian hope.

Certainty is one thing, and assurance is another. A man may have the most firm conviction based upon the most unsubstantial foundation. His expectation may have no roots to it, and yet the confidence with which he cherishes the expectation may be perfect. There may be entire assurance without any certainty; and there may be what people call objective certainty with a very tremulous and unworthy subjective assurance.

But the only temper that corresponds to and is worthy of the absolute certainties with which the Christian man has to deal is the temper of unwavering and assured confidence. Do not disgrace the sure and steadfast anchor by fastening a slim piece of packthread to it that may snap at any moment. Do not build flimsy structures upon the reek and put up upon such a foundation canvas shanties that any puff of wind may sweep away. If you have a staff to lean upon which will neither give, nor warp, nor crack, whatever stress is put upon it, see that you lean upon it, not with a tremulous *finger*, but with your whole hand. The wavering, hesitating, half and half confidence with which a largo number of us grasp the absolute certainties of *our* hope, is a degradation to the hope and a disgrace to the hoper. There is nothing that is worthy of certitude but assurance; and he who knows that his hope is not vain ought to make a conscience of having a response to the outward certainty in the inward unwavering confidence. But so far is that from being the case that there is a type of Christian life, not so common nowadays,

perhaps, as it used to be, which makes a merit of not being sure, and takes it as the sign of Christian humility not to venture on saying, 'I know in whom I have believed and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him.'

O dear friends! these dim expectations, clouded all over with earthly doubts and indifference, those languid hopes with which we lift scarcely interested and almost incredulous eyes to the crown, are the opprobrium of our Christianity, and the weakness of our whole lives.

Be sure of this, that the more certain the assurance of hope, the more calm and sober it will be. It is the element of uncertainty in anticipation that makes it feverish. When it is fully confident and grasps the thing that it knows is coming, the pulse throbs no faster nor more irregularly, though, thank God I far more fully, by reason of the blessed hope. If we want to live in 'sober certainty' of coming bliss, and calmed, and steadied, and made ready for all service, endurance, and suffering, by the brightness of our hope, we must see to it that it is not dim and wavering, but sure and steadfast, certain as God, as the history of Christ, as the present. It is certain. Make it assured.

Let me remind you further that this assured hope is permanent. 'The full assurance unto the end,' my text says. 'Unto the end.' How many a lighthouse that you and I once steered towards is behind us now! As we get older, how many of the aims and hopes that drew us on have sunk below the horizon! And how much less there is left for us people with grey hairs in our heads and years on our backs to hope for, than we used to think there was! But, dear brethren, what does it matter though the sea be washing away the coast on one side the channel if it is depositing fertile land on the other? What does it matter though the earthly hopes are becoming fewer and those few graver and sadder, if the one great hope is shining brighter? Winter nights are made brilliant by keener stars than soft summer evenings

show, and the violet and red and green streamers that fill the northern heavens only come in the late year. So it is well and blessed for us if, when the leaves fall, we see a wider sky; and if, as hope dies for earth, it revives and lives again for heaven. 'The full assurance of hope to the end.'

III. Lastly, note here the culture of this certitude of hope. My text is an exhortation to all Christian people 'to show the same diligence' in order to such an assurance. The same diligence as what? The same diligence as they had shown 'in their work and labour of love towards God's name.' That is to say, the people to whom my Epistle was sent had been extremely diligent and vigorous in what I may call practical Christianity. The writer wants them to be as diligent in reference to the emotional and experimental side of Christianity. Now, that fits a good many of us. The fashionable type of a Christian to-day is a worker. By common consent theology seems put into the background, and by almost as common consent there is comparatively little said about what our fathers used to call, 'experimental religion,' feelings, emotions, inward experiences, but everything is drive, drive, drive at getting people to work. God forbid that I should say one word against that. But 'we desire that ye should show the *same* diligence' as in your mission-halls and schools and various other benevolent operations, in cultivating the emotions and sentiments — yes, and the doctrinal beliefs of the Christian life, or else you will be lop-aided Christians.

Further, did it ever occur to you, Christian people, that your hope was a thing to be cultivated, that you ought to set yourselves to distinct and specific efforts for that purpose? Have you ever done so? How is it to be done? What I was saying a few minutes ago as to its grounds carries the answer to that question. Get into the habit of meditating upon the objects towards which it is directed, and the grounds on which it is built. If you never lift your eyes to the goal you will never be drawn towards it. If you never think about heaven it will have no attraction for you. If you never go over the basis of

your hope your hope will get dim, and there will be little realisation or Hiring power in it. I believe that the great bulk of nominal Christians in England to-day rarely think about their future certainties, and, more rarely still, test their foundation and see that it stands firm. No wonder, then, that hope so seldom lends her light, and that such dim one, to shine upon their paths.

Let me say, lastly, in the matter of practical advice, that this cultivation of the assurance of hope is largely to be effected by pruning the wild luxuriance and earth-ward-stooping tendrils of our hope. The Apostle Peter has a wise word: — ‘Gird up the loins of your mind; be sober, and hope to the end.’ That is to say, the perfection of Christian anticipation and assurance is only possible as the result of effort, and rigid abstinence from many earthly treasures. If you want the tree to grow high, nip the side shoots and the leader will gain strength. If you desire that your hope should ever be vigorous you must be abstinent from, or temperate in, earthly things. Neither love nor hope can serve two masters; and if you are always occupied in forecasting earthly good, you will have little faculty left over, out of which to weave the far fairer fabric of eternal blessedness. If you pluck the wing feathers out of your hope, by your worldliness, by your selfishness, by your sin, it will be like some free forest bird, caught, clipped, and condemned to the barn-yard, only going about there picking up corn, instead of rising to heaven with its song.

Dear brethren, God has given every one of us this great and strange faculty of forecasting the future. Surely He gave it to us for some better purpose than that we should taste our earthly pleasures twice, or be impelled along our worldly course by a series of illusions. If you keep it flown on the low levels of the contingent and the perishable and the temporal, and send it out only to bring you hack tidings from the world, it will play you false; and you will find out that the disappointments of realised hopes are often as bitter as the disappointments of unfulfilled ones.

Do not be slaves of that pale, sad maiden with the blinded eyes and the broken lyre. Do not listen to the singing in your own ears and mistake it for heavenly music. There is one region where your hope can expatiate among certainties. Grasp Christ and you will then lift expectant eyes that will not look in vain to the Hand that reaches to you out of the blaze of the sunbeams, and is laden with blessednesses for the present which are sure promises for the future. The Christian man alone is certain of what he anticipates; and he alone will have to say ‘The half hath not been told me.’ For all others ‘their hope shall be cut off, and their trust shall be as a spider’s web.’

Hebrews 6:12—SLOTHFULNESS AND ITS CURE

‘That ye be not slothful, but followers of Him who through faith and patience inherit the promises.’ — Hebrews 6:12.

THIS is the end of a sentence, and the result of something that has been stated before. What is that? ‘We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.’ Diligence is the opposite of slothfulness, and the former is to be cultivated that the latter may not overtake us. But it is ‘the *same* diligence,’ and that expression raises the question — The same as what? Now the writer has just been praising his readers for ‘their work of faith and labour of love’ which they showed in ministering to the saints. And then he says, in effect, ‘I wish that you took as much trouble to cultivate your own Christian graces as you do to help other people in regard to these outward matters, for then there would be no fear of your becoming slothful, and you would be treading in the steps of those that have gone before, and who now inherit the promises.’

That is to say, there are a good many Christian people who spend a good deal more pains and effort upon the less central and deep things of Christian conduct than they do upon the keeping of the centre and mainspring of all in active operation. Some of us need the

hint — ‘Look after your own Christian graces as diligently as you do after works of benevolence’

I. Note here, then, first, a danger that still threatens all Christians.

The words of my text in our Authorised Version are somewhat inadequately translated, and the first clause would much more truly read, ‘that ye become not slothful’ than that ‘ye be not slothful.’ The same somewhat peculiar word, which is here rendered ‘slothful,’ is employed a little before in the letter, where the writer is excusing himself for not entering upon some deep truths, because he says to his readers, ‘You have become dull of hearing.’ It is the same word that is employed here, and we might paraphrase the meaning somewhat thus: ‘You have become dull of hearing; take care lest you become dull all through. The palsy has begun in your ears, and it will spread to your eyes and your hands and your heart before long, if you do not ‘mind.’ The first sign of a growing torpor and indifference in the Christian life generally lies here — in carelessness in accepting the teaching of Christian truth. The ear becomes dull, and the whole man follows suit, and becomes languid. And this danger of becoming ‘slothful,’ not so much in the sense of not working, as of being dull and torpid, inert, having no feeling, having no active energy in the inner life; half asleep, paralysed — this is the danger that hangs ever over all of us, and is only to be faced victoriously in one way, and that is the way which the writer of this Epistle here points out — namely, by unslumbering diligence and continual watchfulness against the creeping on of this subtle palsy. As surely as friction will stop a train, unless there is the perpetual repetition of the impulse that drives it, as surely as the swing of the pendulum will settle into a vertical position, drawn by the gravitation of the earth, unless the mainspring urges it on moment by moment, so surely will the most vigorous, cheery, active Christian character gradually become duller and duller, until it settles down into a condition indistinguishable from death, except on condition of unslumbering vigilance and constant effort. We are all

tending to become slothful, sluggish, and we may overcome the tendency if, and only if, we set ourselves with all our hearts to do it. If you take a ladleful of molten metal out of a blast furnace, and set it down on the ground and leave it, in half an hour's time there is a scum on the top and its temperature has lowered, I know not how many degrees, and presently all heat will have gone from it. No warmth, no depth of feeling, no firmness of resolution, no joy of clear faith will last of itself. We have to keep the flame alight and alive. 'We desire that every one do use the same diligence that ye become not' — as you certainly will if you do not use it — 'sluggish, or torpid Christians.'

II. The next point here is the way by which that tendency can be victoriously faced and overcome.

It was by 'faith and patience' that all the men of old had reached the true land of promise and entered on the inheritance of the saints in light. And these are still the means by which the ever-present pressure of that tendency to become slothful is to be overcome. Now it is important to remember that in this Epistle 'faith' predominately means that faculty by which we lay hold of the unseen, and realise future blessings as our own. So it is used in the great eleventh chapter, in which the writer, as it were, reads the muster-roll of the heroes of the faith in order to establish his contention that the bond between God's saints and Him has always been one and the same — namely, faith. Of course, that shade of meaning of the word rises up quite naturally from the other aspect in which it is most frequently used in the New Testament — viz., the reliance upon Jesus Christ, for He Himself is for us the revealer of things unseen, and the certifier and assurer of the things hoped for in the future. But the predominant reference of the word in this letter is, as I say, to the attitude of mind by which we grasp the unseen, and make the future blessings which God promises to us our own by anticipation. And, says the writer, that faith which thus stretches out a long arm through the mists to lay hold of the solidities that are beyond the

mists, that faith is the means by which we shall most effectually ward off the tendency to sluggishness and inertness, which will otherwise get the better of us all.

The word here employed for patience is not the ordinary one used for that virtue, which means chiefly perseverance in a given course of conduct in spite of many difficulties, and pressures of sorrows and troubles. But the word employed here is the same which is often rendered 'long-suffering.' This 'patience' is not to be regarded as something added to faith, but rather, it is the characteristic result of faith. The faith which, although the vision tarries, waits, and is not shaken, though many days may pass and we seem little nearer the realisation of our hopes; an obstinate, persistent, long-lasting confidence and realisation of the unseen and future good is what the writer recommends to us here as the sovereign antidote, which by our own efforts we may secure, against the tendency to slumber and to death. By faith which is long-breathed, and can live below the water for a long time, believing in the blue heavens that are above, a faith which is patient, we shall overcome the tendency to torpor, deepening to death, as in the case of a man who goes to sleep in a snowstorm.

So, dear brethren, we come to a very familiar thought rather duty of Christian men and women, systematically and consciously to cultivate for themselves the habit of realising the unseen, living in the presence of the solemn realities yonder. Oh! if we walked through this illusory and passing world of ours with that great white throne and Him who sits upon it ever blazing before us, do you think we would go to sleep then? If we cultivated the sense of belonging to that unseen order of things, and being but lodgers and strangers, passers-by for a night here, should we be able to fall asleep as we do? The man that goes to bed in a hotel, and says, 'I am going away by express train in the middle of the night' does not fall into a very sound sleep. If we realised, as we ought to do, where our affinities are, of what country we are really the citizens, to whom we belong,

and where the things are that really are, then we should find it hard to be slothful and easy to march strenuously on the road that God marks out for us. Cultivate the habit of consciously realising that you are strangers and sojourners here, and ‘declare plainly that you seek a country,’ and seek it, not as those who may, perchance, not succeed in their quest, seek it, not as those do who are looking for a thing that is lost, and perhaps Will never be found, but seek it, as, indeed, the original plainly expresses, as those to whom that land of their search is the land of their nativity to which they belong, their fatherland, the mother-country of them all.

So let us cultivate not only the habit of thus realising the unseen, but of living in the conscious possession, even now, of the great things that God has promised for us. And let us see to it, dear friends, that that faith holds out with patience, and lasts all the long weary days, as they seem to us according to our poor measure of time, which may yet intervene between the present moment and our reaching home. The look-out man at the bow of the ship, as he gazes out on an empty ocean and sees not a sail nor anything but the long wash of the waves running to and indenting the horizon, gets drowsy. But let a little tip of white show itself away out on the blue, and all his senses are alert in a moment. If we clearly and constantly saw where we are going and what is coming to us, the salvation that is ‘being borne’ toward us, we should not sleep any more. Therefore, let us give diligence to cultivate the patient faith which will keep us awake.

III. Lastly, note the encouragement to the effort of faith.

‘Be ye’ imitators of those who through faith and patience — these two graces which yet are one — ‘inherit the promises.’ The writer probably includes among these inheritors the sainted dead of the old Covenant, of whom he says in chapter 2. that they ‘died in faith, not having received the promise,’ and any of the new Covenant who had passed into the other world. And he declares, by the strong language

of my text, which is even stronger in the original by the use of a present participle, the present blessedness of all the departed saints. They do now inherit the promises.

The metaphor is drawn, consciously or unconsciously, from the old story of Israel's possession of the Promised Land, and so suggests all the ideas of rest, of the wanderings being over, of victory, of peace, of society, of each man having his portion of the great land which belongs to all, which that story naturally brings with it, And for us there may come the encouragement of looking to those dear ones that have gone before us, knowing that they 'stand in their lot' in the

Canaan of God, and that we, too, may stand in ours. And so from the thought of their present blessedness in their present inheritance, we may gather cheer, whilst we struggle and tramp along the wilderness road.

And, again, we may gather encouragement not only from the thought of where and how their wanderings have ended, but from the remembrance of the path that they trod. We have no strange road to walk, but one beaten by holy feet from the beginning, and plain for us too. They have passed along the King's highway, and having passed, and having entered into their rest, they remain as witnesses that it is 'the right way to the city of habitation.'

But we have to look higher than to them, and to take for our encouragement not only the pattern of all the pilgrims that have gone before us, but that of the Lord of the march, the 'Breaker,' who is gone up before us, and 'looking off' from the cloud of witnesses, to 'look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith, who trod the road, every step of it, and left footprints not unstained with blood in which we may plant our poor feet, 'having left us an example that we should follow in His steps.'

Hebrews 6:18—FLEEING AND CLINGING

‘We... who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.’

Hebrews 6:18.

THE name of Christian was invented by outsiders. It is very seldom used in the New Testament, and then evidently as a designation by which Christ’s followers were known to others; and not as one employed by themselves. They spoke of each other as ‘disciples,’ ‘believers,’ ‘saints,’ ‘brethren,’ or the like. Sometimes they used more expanded names, of which my text is an example. It sets forth part of the characteristics of those whom the world knew as ‘Christians.’ Now that the name has been adopted by the Church and has lost a good deal of its original force in many minds, this description may serve to teach what is one essential feature in the description of a Christian. He is one Who has ‘fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before’ him. That strikes a good many off the list, does it not? Not birth, nor baptism, nor acceptance of a creed, nor association with a community makes a Christian, but the personal act of fleeing for his life and grasping the horus of the altar.

I confine myself to the plain, evangelical teaching, the acceptance in heart and life of which makes a man a Christian, whilst nothing else does. I want to ask you *all-or*, rather, I pray, that my poor words may help you to ask yourselves, and not rest till you have answered the question ‘Have I, thus, my very own self, fled for refuge to the hope that is set before me?’ An old divine said, ‘Preachers should preach, not for sharpening wits, but for saving souls.’ And that is what I want, God helping me, to try to do.

I. First of all, then, let me put a plain statement, and you will forgive the sharpness of the form in which I put it, because I want it to stick — You need a refuge.

There is nothing sadder than the strange power which men have of blinking the great facts of their own condition and of human life. I know few things that seem to me more tragic, and certainly none that are more contemptible, than the easy-going, superficial optimism, or the easy-going superficial negligence, with which hosts of people altogether slur over, even if they do not deny, the plain fact that every man and woman of us stands here in this world, though compassed by many blessings, and in the enjoyment of much good, and having many delights flowing into our lives, and being warranted in laughter and mirth, — still stands like an unsheltered fugitive in the open, with a ring of enemies round about that may close in upon him. Self-interest seems often to be blind, and in many, I am sure, of my hearers, it is blind to the plainest and largest truths' with reference to themselves, their necessities, and their conditions. Ah, dear friends! after all that we say about the beauty, and the brightness, and the joyfulness of life, and the beneficence of God, we live in a very stern world. There are evils that may come, and there are some that certainly will come. You young people — thank God for it, but do not abuse it — are buoyant in hope, and take short views, and are glad, where older folk who have learned what life is generally have sober estimates of its possibilities, and our radiant visions have toned down into a very subdued grey. Sorrow, disappointment, broken hopes, hopes fulfilled *and* disappointed — and, that is worst of all — losses, inevitable partings when the giant-shrouded figure of Death forces its way in at the rose-covered portal, in spite of the puny effort of Love to keep it out, sicknesses, failures in business, griefs of many kinds that I cannot touch, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, and all the ills that flesh is heir to, these lie wafting somewhere on the road for every one of us. Are you going to stand in the unsheltered plain, a mark for all these? Do you think you can front them in your own strength? Are you able, calmly and soberly, remembering the possibilities that lie in the black clouds over your head, to say, 'Pour on! I will endure?' Nay, verily; you need a refuge.

You carry your own worst danger buttoned up in your own waistcoats and gowns; you hear about with you in your hearts, in your passions, in your desires, a vase of combustibles amidst the sparks of a volcano, so to speak. And any one of these that fill the air may drop into it, and bring about a conflagration. No man that has measured himself, the irritability of his nerves, the excitability of his passions, the weakness of his will, and its ugly trick of going over to the enemy at the very critical moment of the fight, But, if he is a wise man, will say, 'I need something stronger than myself to fall back upon, I need some damp cloth or other to be laid over the magazine of combustibles in my heart. I need a refuge from myself.'

You carry — no matter whence it came, or how it was developed; that is of no consequence, you have got it — you carry a conscience that is not altogether silent in any man, I suppose, and that certainly is not altogether dead in you. Its awful voice speaks many a time in the silence of the night, and in the depth of your own heart, and tells you that there are evil things in your past, and a page black in your biography which you can do nothing to cancel or to erase the stains from, or to tear out. 'What I have written I have written.' And so long as memory holds her place and conscience is not shattered altogether, there needs no other hell to make the punishment of the evildoer. You need a refuge from the stings of the true indictments of your own consciences.

Your conscience is a prophet. It is not, nowadays, fashionable to preach about the Day of Judgment — more's the pity, I think. We say that every one of us shall give an account of ourselves to God. Have you ever tried to Believe that about yourself, and to realise what it means? Think that all, down to the cozy depths that we are ashamed to look at ourselves, will be spread out before the 'pure eyes and perfect judgment of the all-judging' God. O brother! you will need a refuge 'that you may have boldness before Him in the Day of Judgment.' These things that I have been speaking about, external ills, ungoverned self, the accusations of conscience, which

is the voice of God, and that future to which we are all driving as fast as we can — these, things are truths. And, being truths, they should enter in, as operative facts, into your lives. My question is, have they done so?

You need a refuge; have you ever calmly contemplated the necessity? Oh I do not let that dogged ignorance of the facts bewitch you any longer. Do not let the inconsequent levity that cannot see an inch beyond its nose hide from you the realities of our own condition. People in the prisons, during the September massacres of the French Revolution, used to amuse themselves — although the tumbrils were coming for some of them to-morrow morning, and the headsman was waiting for them — used to amuse themselves as if they were free, and got up entertainments with a ghastly mockery of joy. That is something like what some of us do. One has seen a mule going down an Alpine pass, ambling quite comfortably along, with one foot over a precipice, and a thousand feet to fall if it slips. That is how some of us travel along the road. Sheep will nibble the grass, stretching their stupid necks a little bit further to get an especially succulent tuft on the edge of the cliffs, with eight hundred feet and a crawling sea at the bottom of it to receive them if they stumble. Do not be like that. ‘Be ye not as the horses or the mules that have no understanding,’ but look the facts in the face, and do not be content till you have acted as they prescribe.

II. You have the refuge that you need.

The writer of this Epistle describes it in my text as being ‘the hope set before us.’ *Now*, by ‘hope’ there, he obviously means, not the emotion, but the object upon which it is fixed. For it is something ‘set before’ him — that is to say, external to him, and on which, when it *is* set before him, he can lay an appropriating hand, so that by the hope here is meant the thing hoped for. That, of course, is a very common usage, in which we transfer the name of a feeling to the thing that excites it. So people talk about such and such a thing

being their ‘dread.’ Or, affection gives its own name to its objects, and speaks about or to them as my love, my joy, my delight, in token of the completeness with which the heart has gone out to, and rests on, the thing which is thus identified, transported, as it were, with the emotion which grasps it. In like manner here it is the thing that Christians have laid hold of which is called ‘the hope set before us.’ In the context — that thing set Before men as the object of hope is the great and faithful promise of God, confirmed by His oath long ago, to the ancient patriarchs, the promise of divine blessings and of a future inheritance. And, says the writer, away down here, in the very latest ages, we have the very same solid substance to grasp and cling to that Abraham of old had. For God said to him, ‘Blessing I will bless thee,’ and He says it to us; and that is a ‘refuge.’ God said to him, ‘Thou shalt have a land for an inheritance,’ and He says it to us, and that is a refuge. The presence of God, and the promise of a blessed inheritance, are the elements of the hope of which the writer is speaking. Then, in his rapid way, he crowds figure upon figure, and, not content with the two of my text, the asylum and the strong stay, he adds a third, and likens this hope to the anchor of the soul, giving steadfastness and fixity to the man who clings, being in itself ‘sure’ so that it will not break, and ‘steadfast’ so that it will not drag. He goes on to say that this object of hope enters ‘into that within the veil.’ But notice that in the very next verse he speaks of some one else who entered within the veil — viz., Jesus Christ. So, as in a dissolving view, you have, first the figure of Hope, as the poets have painted her, calm and radiant and smiling; and then that form melts away, and there stands instead of the abstraction Hope, the person Jesus Christ. Which, being translated into plain words, is just this, the refuge is Christ, Christ, our hope. Mark, further, how the writer describes our Lord there as our forerunner and priest.

Now that exposition of the context opens out into important thoughts. Jesus Christ is our hope and refuge, because He is our priest. Ah, dear brethren! all other enemies and ills are tolerable, and a man may make shift to bear them all without God, though he will

bear them very imperfectly, but the deepest need of all, the most threatening enemy of all, can only be dealt with and overcome by the gospel which proclaims the priest whose death is the abolition of death, whose sacrifice is the removal of sin, who 'has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, and by whose stripes we are healed.' I pray you to recognise this fact, that there is no other way by which Christ can be a refuge and the hope of the world, than by His first dealing triumphantly with the fact of sin, which is the tap-root of all sorrows. It is because that dear Lord has died for every one of us, because in Him we have 'redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins'; because, with Him on our side, we need not fear the accusations of conscience, nor have a fearful looking for of judgment, that He, and He only, is the refuge for the whole of this sinful world. Is He *your* refuge? and do you know Him as your priest? The acceptance and sufficiency of His sacrifice is witnessed by the fact that He has entered within the veil, and because thus He has entered He is for us our only hope, our all-sufficient refuge.

I need not remind you, I suppose, too, how utterly different all the inevitable ills and sorrows of this mortal life become when we lay hold on Him, and find shelter there. 'A man shall be a refuge from the storm and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.' We can bear sickness, and sorrows, and disappointments and failures and partings and all grief, and the arrow-heads are blunted, or, at all events, the poison is wiped off the barbs when we have Christ for our refuge and our friend.

And because He is our forerunner, and has passed within the veil, as the context says so impressively, 'for us,' we are emancipated, further, from the fear of death; and the dread of what lies beyond, and are emboldened to lift even eyes that weep tears of penitence and a face that is suffused with the blush of conscious unworthiness; and to behold within the veil the pledge of our entrance there in the person of Jesus Christ. So, brethren, for all the ills that flesh can

bear, for all that sin entails, for the gnawings of our own conscience, and for the judgments of future retribution, we can betake ourselves to that Saviour and say with quiet confidence, 'I have made the Lord my refuge, no evil shall befall me, nor any plague come nigh my dwelling.'

III. Lastly, I have said, you need a refuge. You , have the refuge you need. Let me put my last word into, not a command, but an entreaty — flee to it.

The writer, as I have occasion to remark, Mends two vivid metaphors here, the one of a fugitive unsheltered in the open, surrounded by foes, the other of a man grasping some strong stay. Look at the two pictures.

'Fled for refuge.' There probably is an allusion here to the Israelitish institution of the cities of refuge for the manslayer. But whether there be or not, the scene brought before us is that of a man flying for his life with the pursuer clattering at his heels, and his lance-point within a yard of the fugitive's back. Grass will not grow under that man's feet; he will not stop to look at the flowers by the road. The wealth of South Africa, if it were spread before him, would not check his headlong flight. It is a race for life. If he gets to the open gate he is safe. If he is overtaken before he reaches it he is a dead man. The moment he gets within the portal the majesty of law compasses him about, and delivers him from the wild justice of revenge.

Surely, the urgency of flight and the folly of the hesitation and delay that mark some of us are vividly brought out by the metaphor. 'By and by,' kills its tens of thousands. For one man 'that says,' I am not a Christian, and, what is more, I never intend to be,' there are a dozen that say, 'Tomorrow! tomorrow!' 'Let me sow my wild oats as a young man; let me alone for a little while. I am busy at present; when I have a convenient season I will send for Thee' What would have become of the man-slayer if he had curled himself up in his

cloak, and lain down beside his victim, and said, 'I am too tired to run for it?' He would have been dead before morning.

A rabbi's scholar, as the Jewish traditions tell us, once said to him, 'Master! when shall I repent?' 'The day before you die,' said the Rabbi. The scholar said, 'I may die today.' Then said the Rabbi, 'Repent to; day.' 'Choose you this day' whether you will stand unsheltered out there, exposed to the pelting hustling of the pitiless storm, or will flee to the refuge and be saved.

Look at the other picture, 'to lay hold of the hope.' Perhaps the allusion is to the old institution of sanctuary, which perhaps existed in Israel, and at any rate was well known in ancient times. When a man grasped the horns of the altar he was safe. If so, the two metaphors may really blend into one; the flight first, and then the clutching to that which, so long as the twining fingers could encompass it, would permit no foe to strike the fugitive. This metaphor speaks of the fixity of the hold with which we should grasp Jesus Christ by our faith. The shipwrecked sailor up in the rigging, with the wild sea around him, and the vessel thumping upon the sand, will hold on, with frozen fingers, for hours, to the shrouds, knowing that if he slips his grasp the next hungry wave will sweep him away and devour him. And so you should cling to Jesus Christ, with the consciousness of danger and helplessness, with the tight grasp of despair, with the tight grasp of certain hope. Brother! have you fled; do you grasp?

I remember reading of an inundation in India, when a dam, away up in a mountain gorge, burst at midnight. Mounted messengers were sent down the glen to gallop as hard as they could, and rouse the sleeping villagers. Those who rose and fled in an instant were in time to reach the high ground, as they saw the tawny flood coming swirling down the gorge, laden with the wrecks of happy homes and many a corpse. Those who hesitated and dawdled were swept away by it. My message to you, dear friends, is, 'Escape for thy life; look

not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain. Escape to the mountains lest thou be consumed.’

Hebrews 6:19—THE ANCHOR OF THE SOUL

‘Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast and which entereth into that within the veil.’ — Hebrews 6:19.

THERE is something very remarkable in the prominence given by Christianity to hope as an element in the perfect character. The New Testament is, one may say, full of exhortations to ‘hope perfectly.’ It is regarded as one of the three virtues which sum up all Christian goodness. Nay! In one place the Apostle Paul lays upon it the whole weight of our salvation, for he says ‘we are saved by hope.’

Now this great prominence given to the exercise of this faculty seems to correspond with the will of God as expressed in our nature, for man is a creature obstinate in his hope. But it seems to be strangely at variance with the value of hope as attested by experience; for who does not know that most hopes are false; and that whether they be disappointed or fulfilled, they betray.

The world is full of complaints of the fallacies of hope. Poets and moralists are sure of a response when they touch that chord; and it sometimes seems to us as if elaborate provision were made in our nature for deluding us into activity and tempting us along toll-some paths, to gather a handful of mist at the end, and then to say in our bitterness, ‘All is vanity and vexation of spirit.’

But yet ‘God never sends mouths but He sends meat to feed them’; and if there be in a man a faculty so obstinate and strong as this, there must be somewhere a reality which it can grasp; and, grasping, can be freed from all its miseries and mistakes.

So my text tells us where that is, and tells us further how ennobling and steady an ally of all great and blessed things hope is in a man,

when it is rightly fixed on the right objects. The metaphor of my text is unique in Scripture, though it be common in other places. Only here do we find the familiar thought that hope is ‘the anchor of the soul.’ I take that metaphor as the guiding thought in my words now; and ask you to consider the anchor; the anchorage, or holding-ground; the cable; and the steadfastness of the ship so anchored in all storms.

I. Consider, then, first, the force of this metaphor of the anchor.

Now it seems to me that the very figure requires us to suppose that hope here means, not the emotion but the object on which it is fixed. The same interpretation is necessarily suggested by the context; for the previous verse speaks about ‘a hope *set before* us,’ and about our ‘*laying hold* upon it.’ So that here, at all events, the hope is something external to ourselves which is proposed to us, and which we can grasp.

An anchor is outside the ship; and that which steadies us cannot be a part of ourselves, must be something external to us, on which our fluttering and mutable emotions can repose and be still.

Nor is it at all unusual, either in Scripture or in common speech, that we should employ the name of the emotion to express the object which the emotion grasps. For instance, people say to one another, ‘my love,’ ‘my comfort,’ and we talk about God as ‘our fear’ and ‘our dread,’ and Scripture speaks of Christ as our hope; in all which phrases the person who excites the emotion is described by the name of the emotion.

And so, I take it, is the ease here. The hope which we possess, and which, outside of us, we being fastened to it, makes us steadfast and secure, is, at bottom, Jesus Christ Himself. This hope, says my text, ‘has entered within the veil.’ Well I read on. ‘Whither the Forerunner is for us entered.’ When He passed within the veil our hope passed within it, and went with Him.

For He is not only the foundation, but He is the substance of our hope. He is the thing hoped *for*, and in the deepest interpretation, all our future is the personal Christ; and every blessed anticipation that can fill a human heart with gladness is summed up in this, ‘that I may be found in Him,’ and made partaker of that Saviour whom to possess is fruition and eternal life. He is the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, and entering within the veil

Notice further the characteristics ascribed to this anchor and hope. ‘Sure and steadfast.’ These two words express diverse qualities of the hope. A sure anchor is one which does not drag. It is not too light for the ship that rides by it. It has found a firm ground, its flukes are all right, and it belch. It does not deceive. The ship’s crew may trust to it.

An anchor which is steadfast, or, as the original word might be rendered, ‘firm,’ is one that will not break, but is strong in its own substance, made of good tough iron, so that there is no fear of the shank snapping, whatever strain may be put upon it. We may then say, generally, that this object of the Christian hope is free from all the weaknesses and imperfections which cleave and cling to other objects. Take just a sentence or two in illustration of that.

Our earthly hopes, what are they? Only the products of our own imaginations, or the reflection of our wishes projected on the dim screen of the future, with no more substance in them than the shadows from a magic-lantern thrown on to the sheet. Or even if they be the reasonable result of calculation, they still have no existence. But there, says my text, is a hope which is a real thing, and has a present existence. It has ‘entered into that within the veil,’ as the literal anchor is dropped through the depths of the sea and lost to sight, so by an incongruous and yet forcible blending of metaphor the text tells us this anchor is carried aloft, into the azure depths, and there lost to sight, is fastened as it were to the very throne of God. All the universe being the temple, and a thin veil being stretched

between us in the outer court and that Holy of Holies, the Christ, who is our *hope, has passed with..* in the veil, and is verily there, separated from us and yet close by. A veil is but a thin partition. We can hear the voices on the other side of a woollen curtain, we can catch the gleams of light through it, A touch will draw it aside. So we float in the midst of that solemn unseen present which is to us the future; and all the brightest and grandest objects of the Christian man's anticipation have a present existence and are real; just on the other side of that thin curtain that parts us from them. A touch, and it rattles on its rings and we stand in the blaze of the fruition This hope is not an imagination, not the projection of wishes upon the dim curtain of the future, not the child of calculation, but a present reality within arm's length of us all.

Then, again, earthly hopes are less than certainties. This one is a certainty, We may make the future as sure as the past. Hope may be as veracious as memory. It is not so with our ordinary anticipations; we all feel that when we say we hope we are admitting an element of dread as well as of hope into our anticipations. And so, however hope may smile there is always a touch of terror in her sweet eyes. As one of our great poets has described her, she carries a jewelled cup of richest wine, but coiled at the bottom of it a sleeping serpent. Possibilities that it may be otherwise are an integral part of all the uncertain hopes of earth, make it a torture often, and always dim its lustre and its gladness.

But certitude is a characteristic of the Christian hope. It is 'sure,' as my text has it, and we can say, not, 'I trust it may,' but, 'I know it will.' Is it not something to be able to look forward into the dim unknown, and to feel that whilst much there is mercifully hidden, far more and that the best in the future is manifest as history, and certain as the fixed past. To the Christian resting upon Christ it is no presumption, but the simplest duty to feel 'to-morrow,' and the to-morrow after that, and all the to-morrows, including the unsetting day of eternity 'shall be as yesterday, and much more abundant.'

Then again, earthly hopes, whether disappointed or fulfilled, betray, or rather, I might say, are disappointed even whilst they are fulfilled. We paint the future as if it contained but the one thing on which for the time being we have set our hopes. And we do not remember that when we reach the accomplishment of the expectation, life will have a great many other things in it than the fulfilled expectation, and all the old commonplaces, and annoyances, and imperfections will still be there. So ever, the thing chased is more than the thing won. Like some bit of sea-weed, as long as it lies there in the ocean moving its filmy fronds to the wave, it expands and is lovely. Grasp it, and draw it out, and it is a bit of ugly slime in your hand. So possession never realises the dream of hope.

But here, the half hath not been told us. 'Eye hath not seen it,..., neither hath entered into the heart of man,' in his loftiest anticipations, the transcendent realisation of the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him.

II. And now turn to the other points in this text. Look at the anchorage, or holding-ground, that is to say, the reasons or the grounds on which these great objects become objects of hope to us.

Why is it that I may without presumption, and that I must, unless I would fall beneath my obligations, expect to be for ever like Jesus Christ? Why, here is the anchorage. 'God willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation.' Or, to put it into other words, God's solemn utterance of His will guaranteed to us by God's putting all the majesty of His own being into pawn for the fulfilment of His promise is the ground on which we rest. There is the anchorage. Nothing can touch that. If we cleave to Jesus Christ we have anchored ourselves in the fastnesses of the divine nature. We have struck the roots of our hopes deep into the very being of God; and all that is majestic, all that is omnipotent, all

that is tender, all that is immutable in Him goes to confirm to my poor heart the astounding expectation that whatsoever Christ is I shall become, and that wheresoever Christ is there will also His servant be. Oh! how this rock- foundation on which we may build makes all the other foundations upon which men rest their ruinable hopes seem wretched and transitory. Cursed be the man — and he is cursed, that is, wretched and miserable in the act— ‘Cursed be the man that maketh flesh his arm, and whose hope is in man. Blessed be the man whose hope is in the Lord his God, and whose trust the Lord is.’ This anchorage is safe in all weathers, and none that ever sheltered there have been driven on the iron-bound leeward rocks.

III. Again, still keeping the metaphor of the text, notice the cable.

The anchor is of no use unless it be fastened by a strong hawser or chain. All the faithfulness of the divine nature, and all the grandeur of the promises which Christ gives and is, are naught to us unless we attach ourselves to them by setting our hopes there. I have been speaking to you about the vanity, the disappointing misery of earthly hope. Those show that the obstinate faculty which, in spite of them all, persists is as plainly meant to be attached to Jesus Christ as the great iron chain that you see lying on the deck is obviously intended to be the anchor-chain. You are able to anticipate the future, and God has given you the ability in order that it may grapple you to your Lord and Master, by whom alone you will be lords of the future, and it be filled with peace. To do that, to attach yourselves thus to Jesus Christ by a persistent and triumphant hope is not an easy thing.

It means, first of all, detachment. You must get away from these lower and earthly anticipations of the paltry and immediate future on this side the grave, which fill so much of your onward gaze, if your eye is to see clearly that nobler future further ahead which is its legitimate and its only object. The habit of Christian hope needs diligent cultivation and strenuous effort. I think that there are few

things that Christian men and women need to be exhorted to more earnestly than this that they should not waste upon the mean anticipations of to-morrow that wonderful faculty by which they may knit themselves to the most glorious and blessed realities in the remotest future. The wings of hope were given, not that we might flutter near the earth, but that we might rise to God. The clear eye that looks before was given us not that we should limit our vision to the near, but that we might send it forward to the most distant horizon. Do not let yourselves be so absorbed by anticipations of what you are going to do and where you are going to be tomorrow that you have no leisure to think of what you are going to do and where you are going to be through the eternities. We run our eyes along the low levels of earth, and we too seldom lift them to the great white summits that ring round the little plain on which our day is passed. Christian men and women, you are saved by hope. Live in the continual contemplation of that blessed future, and Him who makes it; and, according to the old exhortation *sursum corda*, 'up with your hearts' and your hopes, and fasten them to the anchor of your souls which hath entered within the veil.

IV. And now, lastly, a word as to the steadfastness of the ship that rides in any storm by thin anchor.

Hope is not usually a masculine faculty, nor one that on the whole is the ally of the stronger and nobler virtues. It does no doubt impel to action, and he that has ceased to hope has ceased to strive; but also, and quite as often, its effect is to disturb and flutter rather than to steady, to make impatient, to unfit for persistent application and toilsome service, to set the blood dancing through the veins, so that the hand can scarcely be kept steady. But this 'Christian *hope*, if we rightly take the measure of it, and understand it, is an ally of all great, steadfast, calm, patient virtue.

For one thing it will put all the present in its true subordination. Just as when a man's eye is fixed upon the reddening dawn of the

morning sky, all the trees and objects between him and it are toned down into one uniform blackness, so when we have that great light shining beyond the earthly horizon all the colours of the objects between us and it will be less garish, and they will dwindle into comparative insignificance. It is not so hard to bear sorrow when the light of a great hope makes the endurance but for a little moment, and the exceeding and eternal weight of glory more conspicuous than it. It is not so hard to do duty when a great hope makes action for the time sublime, and makes difficulties dwindle and hardships sweet. It is not so hard to resist temptations when temptations have had their dazzling light dimmed by the greater brightness of the hope revealed.

He that has anchored himself to Christ may be calm in sorrow and triumphant over temptation. Whatsoever winds may blow he may ride safe there, and however frowning may be the iron-bound rocks a cable's length off, if he has cast out his anchor at the stern he may quietly wait for the day in the assurance that no shipwreck is possible for him. Your hope will be the ally of all, dignity, patience, victory, will steady the soul and make it participant, in some measure, of its own steadfastness and security.

And just as sailors sometimes send the anchor ahead that they may have a fixed point towards which to warp themselves, so, if our anchor is that Christ who has passed into the heavens, He will draw us, in due time, whither He Himself has gone. A calm steady hope fixed upon the enthroned Christ, our fore-runner, and the pattern of what we shall be if we trust Him, will make us steadfast and victorious in all our sorrows, Burdens, changes, and temptations. Without it life is indeed as 'futile then as frail,' and our only 'hope of answer' to its torturing problems, or of 'redress' of its manifold pains is 'Behind the veil, behind the veil.' Such a hope knits us to the true stay of our souls, and is a cord not easily Broken. As for men's hopes fixed on earth, they are fragile and filmy as the spiders'

webs, which, in early autumn mornings, twinkle dewy in every copse, and are gone by midday.

My brother! you have this great faculty; what do you do with it, and where do you fix it? You have a personal concern in that future, whether you think about it and like it or not. What is your hope for that future, and what is the ground of your hope? Let me beseech you, fasten the little vessel of your life to that great anchor, Christ, who has died, and who lives for you. And then, though the thread between you and Him be but slender and fragile, it will not be a dead cable, but a living nerve, along which His own steadfast life will pour, making you steadfast like Himself, and at last fulfilling and transcending your highest hopes in eternal fruition of His own blessedness.

Hebrews 7:2—RIGHTEOUSNESS FIRST, PEACE SECOND

‘First being, by interpretation, King of righteousness, and after that also King Salem, which is, King of peace.’ — Hebrews 7:2.

THAT mysterious, shadowy figure of the priest-king Melchizedec has been singularly illuminated and solidified by recent discovery. You can see now in Berlin and London, letters written fourteen centuries before Christ, by a king of Jerusalem who describes himself almost in the very words which the Old and the New Testaments apply to Melchizedec. He says that he is a royal priest or a priestly king. He says that he derived his royalty neither from father nor mother, nor by genealogical descent; and he says that he owes it to ‘the great King’ — possibly an equivalent to the ‘Most High God’; of whom Melchizedec is in Scripture said to have been a worshipper. The name of the letter-writer is not Melehizedec, but the fact that his royalty was not hereditary, like a Pharaoh’s, may explain how each monarch bore his own personal appellation, and not one common to successive members of a dynasty.

And are not the names of King and city significant — ‘King of righteousness... King of peace’? It sounds like a yearning, springing up untimely in those dim ages of oppression and strife, for a royalty founded on something better than the sword, and wielded for something higher than personal ambition. Such an ideal at such a date is like a summer day that has wandered into a cold March.

But the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews imposes a meaning not only on the titles, but on their sequence, of course therein he is letting a sanctified imagination play round a fact, and giving to it a meaning which is not in it. None the less in that emphatic expression ‘*first* King of righteousness, and *after that* also King of peace,’ he penetrated very deeply into the heart of Christ’s reign and work, and echoed a sentiment that runs all through Scripture. Hearken to one psalmist: ‘The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.’ Hearken to another: ‘Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.’ Hearken to a prophet: ‘The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.’ Hearken to the most Hebraistic of New Testament writers: ‘The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace.’ Hearken to the central teaching of the most Evangelical, if I may so say, of New Testament writers: ‘Being justified’ — made righteous ‘by faith, we have peace with God.’ So the ‘first’ and the ‘after that’ reveal to us the very depth of Christ’s work, and carry in them not only important teaching as to that, but equally important directions and guides for Christian conduct; and it is to this aspect of my text, and this only, that I ask your attention now.

The order which we have here, ‘first of all King of righteousness, and after that King of peace,’ is the order which I shall try to illustrate in two ways. First, in reference to Christ’s work on the individual soul; second, in reference to Christ’s work on society and communities.

First, then, here we have laid down the sequence in which

I. Christ comes with His operations and His gifts to the soul that clings to Him.

First ‘righteousness... after... peace.’ Now I need not do more than in a sentence remind you of the basis upon which the thoughts in the text, and all right understanding of Christ’s work on an individual, repose, and that is that without righteousness no man can either be at peace with God or with himself. Not with God — for however shallow experience may talk effusively and gushingly about a God who is all mercy, and who loves and takes to His heart the sinner and the saint alike; such a God drapes the universe in darkness, and if there are no moral distinctions which determine whether a man is in amity or hostility with God, then ‘the pillared firmament itself is rottenness, and earth’s base built on stubble.’ *No*, no, brethren; it sounds very tender and kindly; at bottom it is the cruellest thing that you can say, to say that without righteousness a man can please God. The sun is in the heavens, and whether there be mist and fog down here, or the bluest of summer skies, the sun *is* above. But its rays coming through the ethereal blue are warmth and blessedness, and its rays cut off by mists are dim, and itself turned into a lurid ball of fire. It cannot be — and thank God that it cannot — that it is all the same to Him whether a man is saint or sinner.

I do not need to remind you that in like manner righteousness must underlie peace with oneself. For it is true to-day, as it was long generations *ago*, according to the prophet, that ‘the wicked is like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters throw up mire and dirt,’ and, on the other hand, the promise is true still and for ever; ‘O that thou hadst hearkened unto me, then had thy peace been like a river,’ because ‘thy righteousness’ will be ‘like the waves of the sea.’ For ever and ever it stands true that for peace with God, and for a quiet heart, and a nature at harmony with itself, there must be righteousness.

Well, then, Jesus Christ comes to bring to a man the righteousness without which there can be no peace in his life. And that is the meaning of the great word which, having been taken for a shibboleth and ‘test of a falling or a standing Church,’ has been far too much ossified into a mere theological dogma, and has been weakened and misunderstood in the process.

Justification by faith; that is the battle-cry of Protestant communities. And what does it mean? That I shall be treated as righteous, not being so? That I shall be forgiven and acquitted? Yes, thank God! But is that all that it means, or is that the main thing that it means? *No*, thank God! for the very heart of the Christian doctrine of righteousness is this, that if, and as soon as, a man puts his trembling trust in Jesus Christ as his Saviour, then he receives not merely pardon, which is the uninterrupted flow of the divine love in spite of his sin, nor an accrediting him with a righteousness which does not belong to him, but an imparting to him of that new life, a spark from the central fire of Christ’s life, ‘the new man which, after *God*, is created in righteousness and true holiness.’ Do not suppose that the great message of the gospel is merely forgiveness. Do not suppose that its blessed gift is only that a man is acquitted because Christ has died. All that is true. But there is something more than that which is the basis of that other, and that is that by faith in Jesus Christ, I am so knit to Him — ‘He that is joined to the Lord’ being ‘one spirit’ — as that there passes into me, by His gift, a life which is created after His life, and is in fact cognate and kindred with it.

No doubt it is a mere germ, no doubt it needs cultivating, development, carefully guarding against gnawing insects and blighting frosts. But the seed which is implanted, though it be less than the least of all seeds, has in itself the promise and the potency of triumphant growth, when it will tower above all the poisonous shrubs and undergrowth of the forest, and have the light of heaven resting on its aspiring top. Here is the great blessing and distinctive characteristic of Christian morality, that it does not say to a man:

‘First aim after good deeds and so grow up into goodness,’ but it starts with a gift, and says, ‘Work from that, and by the power of that. "I make the tree good,"’ says Jesus to us, ‘do you see to it that the fruit is good.’ No doubt the vegetable metaphor is inadequate, because the leaf is wooed from out the bud, and ‘grows green and broad, and takes no care,’ but that effortless growth is not how righteousness increases in men. The germ is given them, and they have to cultivate it. First, there must be the impartation of righteousness, and then there comes to the man’s heart the sweet assurance of peace with God, and he has within him ‘a conscience like a sea at rest, imaginations calm and fair.’ ‘First, King of righteousness; after that, King of peace.’

Now if we keep firm hold of this sequence, a great many of the popular objections to the gospel, as if it were merely a means of forgiveness and escape, and a system of reconciliation by some kind of forensic expedient, fall away of themselves, and a great many of the popular blunders that Christian people make fall away too. For there are good folks to whom the great truth that ‘God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing to them their trespasses,’ and welcoming them to all the fulness of an overflowing love, has obscured the other truth that there is no peace for a Christian man continuous through his life, unless equally continuous through his life are his efforts to work out in acts the new nature which he has received.

Thus my text, by the order in which it places righteousness and peace, not only illuminates the work of Christ upon each individual soul, but comes with a very weighty and clear direction to Christian people as to their course of conduct. Are you looking for comfort? Is what you want to get out of your religion mainly the assurance that you will not go to hell? Is the great blessing that Christ brings to you only the blessing of pardon, which you degrade to mean immunity from punishment? You are wrong. ‘First of all, King of righteousness’ — let that which is first of all in His gifts be first of

all in your efforts too; and do not seek so much for comfort as for grace to know and to do your duty, and strength to ‘cast off the unfruitful works of darkness,’ and to ‘put on the armour of light.’ The order which is laid down in my text was laid down with a different application, by our Lord Himself, and ought to be in both forms the motto for all Christian people. ‘Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things’ — comfort, sense of reconciliation, assurance of forgiveness, joyful hope, and the like, as well as needful material good — ‘shall be added unto you.’

And now, secondly, my text gives the order of.

II. Christ’s work in the world, and of His servant’s work after Him.

Of course, our Lord’s work in the world is simply the aggregate of HIS work on individual souls. But for the sake of clearness we may consider these two aspects of it somewhat apart. In regard to this second part of my subject, I would begin, as I began in the former section, by reminding you that the only basis on which harmonious relations between men in communities, great or small, can be built, is righteousness, in the narrowest sense of the word, meaning thereby justice, equal dealing as between man and man, without partiality or class favouritism. Wherever you get an unjustly treated section or order of men, there you get the beginnings of war and strife. A social order built upon injustice, just in the measure in which it is so built, is based upon a quicksand which will suck it down, or on a volcano which will blow it to pieces. Injustice is the grit in the machine; you may oil it as much as you like with philanthropy and benevolence, but until you get the grit out, it will not work smoothly.

There is no harmony amongst men unless their association is based and bottomed upon righteousness.

Jesus Christ comes into the world to bring peace at the far end, but righteousness at the near end, and therefore strife. The herald angels sang peace upon earth. They were looking to the deepest and ultimate issues of His mission, but when He contemplated its immediate results He had to say, 'Suppose ye that I bring peace on earth? I tell you nay, but rather division.' He rode into Jerusalem 'the King, meek, and having salvation,' throned upon the beast of burden which symbolised peace. But He will come forth in the last fight, as He has been coming forth through all the ages, mounted on the white horse, with the sword girt upon His thigh in behalf of meekness and righteousness and truth. Christ, and Christianity when it keeps close to Christ, is a ferment, not an emollient. The full and honest application of Christ's teaching and principles to any society on the face of the earth at this day is bound to result in agitation and strife. There is no help for it. When a pure jet of water is discharged into a foul ditch, there will be much uprising of mud. Effervescence will always follow when Christ's principles are applied to existing institutions. And so it comes to pass that Christian men, in the measure in which they are true to their Master, turn the world upside down. There will follow, of course, the tranquillity that does follow on righteousness; but that is far ahead, and there is many a weary mile to be trod, and many a sore struggle to be undertaken, before the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and strife ends for ever.

Now, if this be so, then in this necessary characteristic of Christ's operation on the world, viz., disturbance arising from the endeavour to enthrone righteousness where its opposite has ruled 'there results very plainly important teaching as to the duties of Christ's servants to take their full share in the fight, to be the knights of the Holy Ghost, the champions of righteousness. The Church ought to lead in the van of all assaults on hoary wrongs or modern forms of unrighteousness in municipal, political, national life. And it is the disgrace of the Church that so largely it leaves that contest to be waged by men who make no pretence to be Christians.

There is, unfortunately, a type of Christian thinking and life, of which in many respects one would speak with all sympathy and admiration, which warns the Christian Church against casting itself into this contest, in the alleged interest of a superior spirituality and a loftier conception of Evangelical truth. I believe, as heartily as any man can — and I venture to appeal to those who hear me Sunday by Sunday, and from year to year, whether it is not so — that the preaching of Jesus Christ is the cure for all the world's miseries, and the banishment of all the world's unrighteousness; but am I to be told that the endeavour to apply the person and the principles of Jesus Christ, in His life and death, to existing institutions and evils, is *not* preaching Christ? I believe that it is, and that the one thing that the Church wants to-day is not less of holding up the Cross and the Sacrifice, but more of pointing to the Cross and the Sacrifice as the cure of all the world's evils, and the pattern for all righteousness.

It is difficult to do, it is made difficult by our own desire to be what the prophet did not think a very reputable position, 'at ease in Zion.' It is also made difficult by the way in which, as is most natural, the world, meaning thereby godless, organised society, regards an active Church that desires to bring its practices to the test of Christ's word—Muzzled watchdogs that can neither bark nor bite are much admired by burglars. And a Church that confines itself to theory, to what it calls religion, and leaves the world to go to the devil as it likes, suits both the world and the devil. There was once a Prime Minister of England who came out of church one Sunday morning in a state of towering indignation because the clergyman had spoken about conduct. And that is exactly how the world feels about an intrusive Church that *will* push its finger into all social arrangements, and say about each of them, 'This must be as Christ commanded.'

Brethren! would God that all Christian men deserved the name of 'troublers of Israel.' There was once a prophet to whom the men of his day indignantly said, 'O sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself in thy scabbard, rest and be still.'

And the answer was the only possible one, ‘How can it be quiet, seeing that the Lord hath appointed it?’ If you and I are Christ’s servants, we shall follow the sequence of His operations, and seek to establish righteousness first and then peace.

The true Salem is above.

‘My soul, there is a country Afar beyond the stars.’

There ‘sweet peace sits crowned with smiles.’ The swords will then be wreathed with laurel and men ‘shall learn war no more,’ for the King has fought the great fight, ‘and of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end... in righteousness and justice, from henceforth even for ever.’ Let us take Him for ‘the Lord our righteousness,’ and we shall blessedly find that ‘this Man is our peace.’ Let us take arms in the Holy War which He wages, and we shall have peace in our hearts whilst the fight is sorest. Let us labour to ‘be found in Him... having the righteousness which is of God by faith,’ and then we shall ‘be found in Him in peace, without spot, blameless.’

Hebrews 7:26—THE PRIEST WHOM WE NEED

‘Such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate sinners, and made higher than the heavens.’ — Hebrews 7:26.

‘IT *became* Him to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings.’ ‘In all things it *behoved* Him to be made like unto His brethren.’ ‘Such an High Priest became us.’ In these three sayings Of this Epistle the historical facts of the gospel are considered as corresponding to or in accordance and congruity with, respectively, the divine nature; Christ’s character and purpose; and man’s need. I have considered the two former texts in previous sermons, and now I desire to deal with this latter. It asserts that Jesus Christ, regarded as the High Priest, meets the deepest wants of every

heart, and fits human necessity as the glove does the hand. He is the answer to all our questions, the satisfaction of all our wants, the bread for our hunger, the light for our darkness, the strength for our weakness, the medicine for our sickness, the life for our death. 'Such a High Priest became us.'

But the other side is quite as true. Christianity is in full accordance with men's wants, Christianity is in sharp antagonism with a great deal which men suppose to be their wants. Men's wishes, desires, readings of their necessities and conceptions of what is in accordance with the divine nature, are not to be taken without more ado as being the guides of what a revelation from God ought to be. The two characteristics of correspondence and opposition must both unite, in all that comes to us certified as being from God. There is an 'offence of the Cross'; and Christ, for all His correspondence with the deepest necessities of human nature, and I might even say just by reason of that correspondence, will be 'to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness.' If a message professing to be from God had not the discord between man's expectations and its facts, a message so like a man's would bear upon its front the evidence that it was of man. If a message professing to be from God had not the correspondence with man's deepest wants, a message so unlike men would bear upon its front the evidence that it was not of God.

So then, remembering the necessary complementary thought to this of my text that 'such a high priest became us,' there are two or three considerations springing from the words that I desire to suggest.

I. The first of them is this — we all need a priest, and we have the priest we need in Jesus Christ.

The outstanding fact in reference to human nature in this connection is that it is a sinful nature. We have all departed from the path of rectitude and have nourished desires and tastes and purposes which do not rend us apart from God, and between us and Him do

interpose a great barrier. Our consciences need a priest, or rather they say 'Amen' to the necessity born of our sins, that there shall stand between us and God 'a great High Priest.' I need not elaborate or enlarge upon this matter. The necessity of Christ's sacerdotal character, and the adaptation of that character to men's deepest wants, are not only to be argued about, but we have to appeal to men's consciences, and try to waken them to an adequate and profound sense of the reality and significance of the fact of transgression. If once a man comes to feel, what is true about him, that he is in God's sight a sinful man; to regard that fact in all its breadth, in all its consequences, in all its depth, there will not want any more arguing to make him see that a gospel which deals primarily with the fact of sin, and proclaims a priest whose great work is to offer a sacrifice, is the gospel that he needs.

In fair weather, when the summer seas are sunny and smooth, and all the winds are sleeping in their caves, the life-belts on the deck of a steamer may be thought to be unnecessary, but when she strikes on the black-toothed rocks, and all about is a hell of noise and despair, then the meaning of them is understood, When you are amongst the breakers you will need a life-buoy. When the flames are flickering round you, you will understand the use and worth of a fire-escape, and when you have learned what sort of a man you are, and what that involves in regard of your relations to God, then the mysteries which surround the thought of the high priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ will be accepted as mysteries, and left where they are, and the fact will be grasped with all the tendrils of your soul as the one hope for you in life and in death.

I do not care to argue a man out of his imperfect apprehensions, if he have them, of the mission and work of Jesus Christ. But oh, dear friends! you for whose blood I am in some sense responsible, let me plead with you this one thought — you have not taken the point of view from which to judge of the gospel until you have stood in the perfect rectitude of heaven and contrasted your blackness with its

stainless purity, and its solemn requirements; and have looked all round the horizon to see if anywhere there is a means by which a sinful soul can be liberated from the dragon's sting of conscience, and from the crushing burden of guilt, and set upon a rock, emancipated and cleansed. We need a priest because we are sinful men, and sin means separation in fact and alienation in spirit, and the entail of dreadful consequences, which, as far as Nature is concerned, cannot be prevented from coming. And so sin means that if men are to be brought again into the fellowship and the family of God, it must be through One who, being a true priest, offers a real sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

The new science of comparative religion has been made by some of its adepts to bear witness unfavourably to the claims of Christianity. A far truer use of it would be this — Wherever men have worshipped, they have worshipped at an altar, there has been on it a sacrifice offered by a purged hand that symbol seal moral purity. And all these are witnesses that humanity recognises the necessity which my text Affirms has been met in Christ. Some people would say 'Yes! and your doctrine of a Christ who is sacrifice and priest, has precisely the same origin as those altars, many smoking with sacrifices to tyrannical gods.' But to me the relation between the faiths of the world and the gospel of Christ, in reference to this matter, is much rather this, that they proclaim a want, and that Christ brings the satisfaction of it; that they with one voice cry, 'Oh! that I knew where I might find Him! How shall a man be just with God?' and that the Cross of Christ answers their longings, and offers the means by which we may draw nigh to God. 'Such a High Priest became us.'

II. We may take another consideration from these words, viz. — We need for a priest a perfect man, and we have the perfect priest whom we need, in Jesus Christ.

The writer goes on to enumerate a series of qualities by which our Lord is constituted the priest we need. Of these five qualities which follow in my text, the three former are those to which I now refer. 'He is holy, harmless, undefiled.'

Now I do not need to spend time in discussing the precise meaning of these words, but a remark or two about each of them may perhaps be admissible. Taken generally, these three characteristics refer to the priest's relation to God, to other men, and to the law of purity. 'He is holy'; that is to say, not so much morally free from guilt as standing in a certain relation to God. The word here used for 'holy' has a special meaning. It is the representative of an old Testament word, which seems to mean 'Devoted to God in love.' And it expresses not merely the fact of consecration, but the motive and the means of that consecration, as being the result of God's love or mercy which kindles self-surrendering love in the recipient. Such is the first qualification for a priest, that he shall be knit to God by loving devotion, and have a heart throbbing in unison with the divine heart in all its tenderness of pity and in all its nobleness and loftiness of purity.

And, besides being thus the earthly echo and representative of the whole sweetness of the divine nature, so, in the next place, the priest we need must, in relation to men, be harmless — without malice, guile, unkindness; a Lamb of God, with neither horns to butt, nor teeth to tear, nor claws to wound, but gentle and gracious, sweet and compassionate; or, as we read in another place in this same letter, 'a merciful High Priest in things pertaining to God.' And the priest that we need to bridge over the gulf between us sinful and alienated men and God, must not only be one knit to God in all sympathy, and representing His purity and tenderness amongst us; nor must the priest that we need by reason of our miseries, our sorrows, our weaknesses, our bleeding wounds, our broken hearts, be only a priest filled with compassion and merciful, who can lay a gentle hand upon our sore and sensitive spirits, but the priest that we men,

spattered and befouled with the mire and filth of sin, which has left deep stains upon our whole nature, need, must be one ‘undefiled,’ on whose white garments there shall be no speck; on the virgin purity of whose nature there shall be no stain; who shall stand above us, though He be one of us, and whilst ‘it behoves Him to be made in all points like unto His brethren,’ shall yet be ‘without blemish and without spot.’

‘It behoved Him to be made like unto HIS brethren.’ The priest of the world must be like the world. My text says, ‘Yes! and He must be absolutely unlike the world.’ Now, is this not a strange thing — this is a digression, but it may be allowed for one moment — is it not a strange thing that in these four little tracts which we call gospels, that might all be printed upon two sides of a penny newspaper, you get drawn; with such few strokes, a picture which harmonises, in a possible person, these two opposite requirements, the absolute unlikeness and the perfect likeness?

Think of how difficult it would be if it was not a copy from life, to draw a figure with these two characteristics harmonised. What geniuses the men must have been that wrote the gospels, if they were not something much simpler than that, honest witnesses who told exactly what they saw! The fact that the life and death of Jesus Christ, as recorded in Scripture, present this strange combination of two opposite requirements in the most perfect harmony and beauty, is in my eyes no contemptible proof of the historical veracity of the picture which is presented to us. If the life was not lived I, for one, do not believe that it ever could have been invented.

But that, as I said, has nothing to do with my present subject. And so I pass on just to notice, in a word, how this assemblage of qualifications which, taken together, make up the idea of a perfect man, is found in Jesus Christ for a certain purpose, and a purpose beyond that which some of you, I am afraid, are accustomed to

regard. Why this innocence; this God- devotedness; this blamelessness; this absence of all selfish antagonism?

Why this life, so sweet, so pure, so gentle, so running over with untainted and ungrudging compassion, so conscious of unbroken and perfect communion and sympathy with God? Why? That He might, 'through the Eternal Spirit, offer Himself without spot unto God'; and that by His one offering He might perfect for ever all them that put their trust in Him.

Oh, brother! you do not understand the meaning of Christ's innocence unless you see in it the condition of efficiency of His sacrifice. It is that He might be the priest of the world that He wears this fine linen clean and white, the righteousness of a pure and perfect soul.

I beseech you, then, ponder for yourselves the meaning of this admitted fact. We all acknowledge His purity. We all adore, in some sense of the word, His perfect manhood. If the one stainless and sinless man that the world has ever seen had such a life and such a death as is told in these gospels, they are no gospels, except on one supposition. But for it they are the most despairing proclamation of the old miserable fact that righteousness suffers in the world. The life of Christ, if He be the pure and perfect man that we believe Him to be, and not the perfect priest offering up a pure sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, is the most damning indictment that was ever drawn up against the blunders of a Providence that so misgoverns the world.

'He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.' And, therefore, when we look upon His sufferings, in life and in death, we can only understand them and the relation of His innocence to the divine heart when we say: 'Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him. He hath put Him to grief,' 'by His stripes we are healed. Such a priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled'; the sacrificial Lamb, without blemish and without spot.

III. Lastly, my text suggests that we need a priest in the heavens, and we have in Christ the heavenly priest whom we need.

The two last qualifications for the priestly office included in my text are, 'separate from sinners; made higher than the heavens.' Now, the 'separation' intended, is not, as I suppose, Christ's moral distance from evil-doers, but has what I may call a kind of half-local signification, and is explained by the next clause. He is 'separate from sinners' not because He is pure and they foul, but because having offered His sacrifice He has ascended up on high.

He is 'made higher than the heavens.' Scripture sometimes speaks of the living Christ as at present in the heavens, and at others as having 'passed through' and being 'high above all heavens'; in the former case simply giving the more general idea of exaltation, in the latter the thought that He is lifted, in His manhood and as our priest, above the bounds of the material and visible creation, and 'set at the right hand of the Majesty on high.'

Such a priest we need. His elevation and separation from us upon earth is essential to that great and continual work of His which we call, for want of any more definite name, His intercession. The High Priest in the heavens presents His sacrifice there for ever. The past fact of His death on the Cross for the sins of the whole world is ever present as an element determining the direction of the divine dealings with all them that put their trust in Him. That sacrifice was not once only offered upon the Cross, but is ever, in the symbolical language of Scripture, presented anew in the heavens by Him. No time avails to corrupt or weaken the efficacy of that blood; and He has offered one sacrifice for Sins for ever. Such a priest we need, to-day, presenting the sacrifice which, today, in our weakness and sinfulness, we require.

We need a priest who in the heavens bears us in His heart. As His type in the Old Testament economy entered within the veil with the blood; and when he passed within the curtain and stood before the

Light of the Shekinah, had on his breast and on his shoulders, — the home of love, the seat of strength — the names of the tribes, graven on flashing stones, so our priest within the veil has your name and mine, if we love Him, close by

His heart, governing the flow of His love, and written on His shoulders, and on the palms of His pierced hands, that all His strength may be granted to us. ‘Such a priest became us.’

And we need a priest separated from the world, lifted above the limitations of earth and time, wielding the powers of divinity in the hands that once were laid in blessing on the little children’s heads. And such a priest we have. We need a priest in the heavens, whose presence there makes that strange country our home; and by whose footstep, passing through the gates and on to the golden pavements, the gate is open for us, and our faltering poor feet can tread there. And such a priest we have, passed within the veil, that to-day, in aspiration and prayer; and to-morrow in reality and person, where He is, there we may be also. ‘Such a priest became us.’

We need no other; we do need Him. Oh, friend! are you resting on that sacrifice? Have you given your cause into His hands to plead? Then the great High Priest will make you too His priest to offer a thank-offering, and Himself will present for ever the sacrifice that takes away your sin and brings you near to God. ‘It is Christ that died, yea I rather, that is risen again’; and whose death and resurrection alike led on to His ascension to the right hand of God, where for ever ‘He maketh intercession for us.’

Hebrews 8:1, 2—THE ENTHRONED SERVANT CHRIST

‘We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; 2. A minister of the sanctuary.’ — Hebrews 8:1, 2.

A LITTLE consideration will show that we have in these words two. strikingly different representations of our Lord's heavenly state. In the one He is regarded as seated 'on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty.' In the other He is regarded as being, notwithstanding that session, a 'minister of the sanctuary'; performing priestly functions there. This combination of two such opposite ideas is the very emphasis and force of the passage. The writer would have us think of the royal repose of Jesus as full of activity for us; and of His heavenly activity as consistent with deepest repose. Resting He works; working He rests. Reigning He serves; serving He reigns. So my purpose is simply to deal with these two representations, and to seek to draw from them and from their union the lessons that they teach.

I. Note, then, first, the seated Christ.

'We have a high priest who' — to translate a little more closely — 'has *taken His seat* on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.' 'Majesty' is a singular expression or periphrasis for God. It is used once again in this letter, and seems probably to have been derived by the writer from the Rabbinical usage of his times, when, as we know, a certain misplaced, and yet most natural, reverential or perhaps superstitious awe, made men unwilling to name the mighty name, and inclined rather to fall back upon other forms of speech to express it.

So the writer here, addressing Hebrews, steeped in Rabbinical thought, takes one of their own words and speaks of God as the 'Majesty in the heavens'; emphasising the idea of sovereignty, power, illimitable magnificence. 'At the right hand' of this throned personal abstraction, 'the Majesty,' sits the Man Christ Jesus.

Now the teaching, both of this Epistle to the Hebrews and of the whole New Testament, in reference to the state of our exalted Lord, is that His manhood is elevated to this supreme dignity. The Eternal Word who was with the Father in the beginning, before all the

worlds, went back to ‘the glory which He had with the Father.’ But the new thing was that there went, too, that human nature which Jesus Christ indissolubly united with divinity in the mystery of the lowliness of His earthly life. An ancient prophet foretold that ‘in the Messianic times there should spring from the cut-down stump of the royal house of Israel a sucker which, feeble at first, and in strange contrast with the venerable ruin from which it arose, should grow so swiftly, so tall and strong, that it should become an ensign for the nations of the world; and then, he adds, ‘and His resting-place shall be glory.’ There was a deeper meaning in the words, I suppose, than the prophet knew, and we shall not be chargeable with forcing New Testament ideas upon Old Testament words which are a world too narrow for them, if we say that there is at least shadowed the great thought that the lowly manhood, sprung from the humbled royal stock, shall grow up as a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness, and be lifted to find its rest and dwelling-place in the very central blaze of the divine glory. We have a High Priest who, in His manhood, in which He is knit to us, hath taken His seat on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

Then, again, remember that whilst in such representations as this we have to do with realities set forth under the symbols of time and place, there is yet a profound sense in which that session of Jesus Christ at the right hand of God proclaims both the localisation of His present corporeal humanity and the ubiquity of His presence. For what *is* ‘the right hand of God’?

What is it but the manifestation of His energies, the forthputting of His power? And where is that but everywhere, where He makes Himself known? Wheresoever divine activity is manifested, there is Jesus Christ. But yet, though this be true, and though it may be difficult for us to hold the balance and mark the dividing line between symbol and reality, we are not to forget that the facts of Christ’s wearing now a real though glorified body, and of His visible corporeal ascension, and the promise of a similar visible

corporeal return to earth at the end of the days seem to require the belief that, above all the heavens, and filling all things, as that exalted manhood is, there is yet what we must call a place, wherein that glorified body now abides. And thus both the awful majestic idea of omnipresence, and the no less majestic idea of the present localisation in place of the glorified Christ, are taught us in the text.

And what is the deepest meaning of it all? What means that majestic session at ‘the right hand of the throne’? Before that throne ‘angels veil their faces.’ If in action, they stand; if in adoration, they fall before Him.

Creatures bow prostrate. Who is He that, claiming and exercising a power which in a creature is blasphemy and madness, *takes His seat* in that awful presence? Other words of Scripture represent the same idea in a still more wonderful form when they speak of ‘the throne of God and of the Lamb,’ and when He Himself speaks from heaven of Himself as ‘set down with My Father on His throne.’

If we translate the symbol into colder words, it means that deep repose, which, like the divine rest after creation, is not for recuperation of exhausted powers, but is the sign of an accomplished purpose and achieved task, a share in the sovereignty of heaven, and the wielding of the energies of deity — rest, royalty, and power belong now to the Man sitting at the right hand of the throne of God.

II. Note, secondly, the servant Christ.

A minister of the sanctuary; says my text. Now the word employed here for ‘minister,’ and which I have ventured variously to translate servant, means one who discharges some public official act of service either to God or man, and it is especially, though by no mean, exclusively, employed in reference to the service of a ministering priest.

The allusion in the second portion of my text is plainly enough to the ritual of the great day of atonement, on which the high priest once a year went into the holy place; and there, in the presence of God throned between the cherubim, made atonement for the sins of the people, by the offering of the blood of the sacrifice. Thus, says our writer, that throned and sovereign Man who, in token of His accomplished work, and in the participation of deity, sits hard by the throne of God, is yet ministering at one and the same time within the veil, and presenting the might of His own sacrifice.

Put away the metaphor and we just come to this, a truth which is far too little dwelt upon in this generation, that the work which Jesus Christ accomplished on the Cross, all sufficient and eternal as it was in the range and duration of its efficacy, is not all His work. The past, glorious as it is, needs to be supplemented by the present, no less wonderful and glorious, in which Jesus Christ within the veil, in manners all unknown to us, by His presence there in the power of the sacrifice that He has made, brings down upon men the blessings that flow from that sacrifice. It is not enough that the offering should be made. The deep teaching, the whole reasonableness of which it does not belong to us here and now to apprehend, but which faith will gladly grasp as a fact, though reason may not be able to answer the question of the why or how, tells us that the interceding Christ must necessarily take up the work of the suffering Christ. Dear brethren, our salvation is not so secured by the death upon the Cross as to make needless the life beside the throne. Jesus that died is the Christ 'that is risen again, who is even at, the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.'

But, beyond that, may I remind you that my text, though not in its direct bearing, yet in its implication, suggests to us other ways in which the rest of Christ is full of activity. 'I am among you as He that serveth' is true for the heavenly glory of the exalted Lord quite as much as for the lowly humiliation of His life upon earth. And no more really did He stoop to serve when, laying aside His garments,

He girded Himself with the towel, and wiped the disciples' feet, than He does to-day when, having resumed the garments of His glorious divinity, and having seated Himself in His place of authority above us, He comes forth, according to the wonderful condescension of His own parable, to serve His servants who have entered into rest, and those also who still toil. The glorified Christ is a ministering Christ. In us, on us, for us He works, in all the activities of His exalted repose, as truly and more mightily than He did when here He helped the weaknesses and healed the sicknesses, and soothed the sorrows and supplied the wants, and washed the feet, of a handful of poor men.

He has gone up on high, but in His rest He works. He is on the throne, but in His royalty He serves. He is absent from us, but His power is with us.

The world's salvation was accomplished when He cried, 'It is finished'! But 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,' and they who saw Him ascend into the heavens, and longingly followed the diminishing form as it moved slowly upward, with hands extended in benediction, as they turned away, when there was nothing more to be seen but the cloud, 'went everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.'

So then, let us ever hold fast, inextricably braided together, the rest and the activity, the royalty and the service, of the glorified Son of Man.

III. And now, in the last place, let me point to one or two of the practical lessons of such thoughts as these.

They have a bearing on the three categories of past, present, future. For the past a seal, for the present a strength, for the future a prophecy.

For the past a seal. If it be true — and there are few historical facts the evidence for which is more solid or valid — that Jesus Christ really went up into the heavens, and abode there, then that is God's last and most emphatic declaration, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' The trail of light that He leaves behind Him, as He is borne onwards, falls on the Cross, and tells us that it is the centre of the world's history. For what can be greater, what can afford a firmer foundation for us sinful men to rest our confidence upon, than the death of which the recompense was that the Man who died sits on the throne of the universe?

Brethren! an ascended Christ forces us to believe in an atoning Christ. No words can exaggerate, nor can any faith exalt too highly, or trust too completely, the sacrifice which led straight to that exaltation. Read the Cross by the light of the throne. Let Olivet interpret Calvary, and we shall understand what Calvary means.

Again, this double representation of my text is a strength for the present. I know of nothing that is mighty enough to draw men's desires and fix solid reasonable thought and love upon that awful future, except the belief that Christ is there. I think that the men who have most deeply realised what a solemn, and yet what a vague and impalpable thing the conception of immortal life beyond the grave is, will be most ready to admit that the thought is cold, cheerless, full of blank misgivings and of waste places, in which the speculative spirit feels itself very much a foreigner. There is but one thought that flashes warmth into the coldness, and turns the awfulness and the terror of the chilling magnificence into attractiveness and homelikeness and sweetness, and that is that Christ is there sitting at the right hand of God. Foreign lands are changed in their aspect to us when we have brothers and sisters there; and our Brother has gone whither we too, when we send our thoughts after Him, can feel that our home is, because there He is. The weariness of existence here is only perpetuated and intensified

when we think of it as prolonged for ever. But with Christ in the heavens, the heavens become the home of our hearts.

In like manner, if we only lay upon our spirits as a solid reality, and keep ever clear before us, as a plain fact, the present glory of Jesus Christ and His activity for us, oh! then life becomes a different thing, sorrows lose their poison and their barb, cares become trivial, anxieties less gnawing, the weights of duty or of suffering less burdensome; and all things have a new aspect and a new aim. If you and I, dear friends, can see the heavens opened, and Jesus on the throne, how petty, how unworthy to fix our desires, or to compel our griefs, will all the things here below seem. We then have the true standard, and the littlenesses that swell themselves into magnitude when there is nothing to compare them with will shrink into their insignificance. Lift the mists and let the Himalayas shine out; and what then about the little molehills in the foreground, that looked so big whilst the great white mass was invisible? See Christ, and He interprets, dwindles, and yet ennobles the world and life.

Lastly, such a vision gives us a prophecy for the future. There is the measure of the possibilities of human nature. A somewhat arrogant saying affirms, 'Whatever a man has done, a man can do.' Whatever that Man is, I may be. It is possible that humanity may be received into the closest union with divinity, and it is certain that if we knit ourselves to Jesus Christ by simple faith and lowly, obedient love, whatever He is He will give to us to share. 'Even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father on His throne,' is His own measure of what He will do for the men who are faithful and obedient to Him.

I do not say that there is no other adequate proof of immortality than the facts of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. I do not know that I should be far wrong if I ventured even on that assertion. But I do say that there is no means by which a poor sinful soul will reach the realisation of the possibilities that open to it, except faith

in Jesus Christ. If we love Him, anything unreasonable and impossible is more reasonable and possible than that the Head shall be glorified and the members Left to see corruption. If I am wedded to Jesus Christ, as you all may be if you will trust your souls to Him and love Him, then God will take us and Him as one into the glory of His presence, where we may dwell with and in Christ, in indissoluble union through the ages of eternity.

My text is the answer to all doubts and fears for ourselves. It shows us what the true conception of a perfect heaven is, the perfection of rest and the perfection of service. As Christ's heaven is the fulness of repose and of activity, so shall that of His servants be. 'His servants shall serve Him' — there is the activity — 'and see His face' — there is the restful contemplation — 'and His name shall be in their foreheads' — there is the full participation in His character and glory.

And so, dear brethren, for the world and for ourselves, hope is duty and despair is sin. Here is the answer to the question, Can I ever enter that blessed land? Here is the answer to the question, Is the dream of perfected manhood ever to be more than a dream? 'We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus,' and, seeing Him, no hope is absurd, and anything but hope is falling beneath our privileges. Then, dear friends, let us look unto Him who, 'for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the Throne of God.'

Hebrews 8:5—THE TRUE IDEAL

'See (saith He) that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.' — Hebrews 8:5.

I DO not intend to deal with the original bearing of these words, nor with the use made of them by the writer of Hebrews. Primarily they refer to the directions as to the Tabernacle and its furniture, which are given at such length, and with such minuteness, in Leviticus, and

are there said to have been received by Moses on Sinai. The author of this Epistle attaches an even loftier significance to them, as supporting his contention that the whole ceremonial worship, as well as the Temple and its equipment, was a copy of heavenly realities, the heavenly sanctuary and its altar and priest. I wish to take a much humbler view of the injunction, and to apply it, with permissible violence, as a maxim for conduct and the great rule for the ordering of our lives. 'See that thou,' in thy shop and office, and wherever thou mayst be, 'make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.' A far-reaching, high-soaring commandment, not to be obeyed without much effort, and able to revolutionise the lives of most of us.

There are three points in it: the pattern, its universal applicability, and the place where we get to see it.

I. The pattern. — The difference between noble and ignoble lives is very largely that the one has — and seeks, however partially and interruptedly, to follow — an ideal and the other has not. Or, to put it into plainer words, the one man regulates his life according to momentary inclinations and the obvious calls of sense, business and the like, and the other man has, far ahead and high up, a great light burning, to which he is ever striving to attain. The one has an aim to which he can only approximate, and the other largely lives from hand to mouth, as circumstances and sense, and the recurring calls of material necessities, or temptations that are put in his way every day, may dictate. And so, the one turns out a poor creature, and the other — God helping him — may turn out a saint. Which are you? Which we are depends very largely on the clearness with which we keep before us — like some great mountain summit rising above the mists, and stirring the ambition of every climber to reach the peak, where foot has never trod — the ideal, to use modern language, or to fall back upon the good old-fashioned Bible words, 'the pattern shewed to us.'

You know that in mountain districts the mists are apt to gather their white folds round the summits, and that often for many days the dwellers in the plains have to plod along on their low levels, without a glimpse of the calm peak. And so it is with our highest ideal. Earth-born mists from the undrained swamps in our own hearts hide it too often from our eyes, and even when that is not the case, we are like many a mountaineer, who never lifts an eye to the sacred summit overhead, nor looks higher than his own fields and cattle-sheds. So it needs an effort to keep clear before us the pattern that is high above us, and to make very plain to ourselves, and very substantial in our thoughts, the unattained and untrodden heights. 'Not in vain the distance' should 'beckon.' 'Forward, forward, let us range,' should always be our word. 'See that thou make all things after the pattern,' and do not rule your lives according to whim, or fancy, or inclination, or the temptations of sense and circumstances.

To aim at the unreachd is the secret of perpetual youth. No man is old as long as he aspires. It is the secret of perpetual growth. No man stagnates till he has ceased to see, or to believe in great dim possibilities for character, as yet unrealised. It is the secret of perpetual blessedness. No man can be desolate who has for his companion the unreachd self that he may become. And so artist, poet, painter, all live nobler lives than they otherwise would, because they live, not so much with the commonplace realities round them, as with noble ideals, be they of melody or of beauty, or of musical words and great thoughts. There should be the same life with, and directed towards, attaining the unstrained in the moralist, and above all in the Christian.

But then, do not let us forget that we are not here in our text, as I am using it in this sermon, relegated to a pattern which takes its origin, after all, in our own thoughts and imaginations. The poet's ideal, the painter's ideal, varies according to his genius. Ours has taken solidity and substance and a human form, and stands before us, and says: 'If any man serve Me, let him follow Me.' 'See that thou make

all things according to the pattern,' and be thankful that we are not left to our own thoughts, or to our brethren's teachings, or to abstract ideas of the true and the beautiful and the good for our pattern and mould of life, but that we have the law embodied in a Person, and the ideal made actual, in our Brother and our Saviour. There is the joy and the blessedness of the Christian aim after Christian perfection. There is something unsubstantial, misty, shadowy, in an ideal which is embodied nowhere. It is ghost-like, and has little power to move or to attract. But for Christians the pattern is all gathered into the one sweet, heart-compelling form of Jesus, and whatever is remote and sometimes cold in the thought of an unattained aim, changes when we make it *our* supreme purpose to be like Jesus Christ. Our goal is no cold, solitary mountain top. It is the warm, loving heart, and companionable purity and perfectness of our Brother, and when we can, even in a measure, reach that sweet resting-place, we are wrapped in the soft atmosphere of His love.

We shall be like Him when we see Him as He is; we grow like Him here, in the measure in which we do see Him, even darkly. We reach Him most surely by loving Him, and we become like Him most surely by loving Him, for love breeds likeness, and they who live near the light are drenched with the light, and become lights in their turn.

There is another point here that I would suggest, and that is

II. The universal applicability of the pattern — 'See that thou make *all* things.' Let us go back to Leviticus. There you will find page after page that reads like an architect's specification. The words that I have taken as my text are given in immediate connection with the directions for making the seven-branched candlestick, which are so minute and specific and detailed, that any brass-founder in Europe could make one to-day 'after the pattern.' So many bowls, so many knops, so many branches; such and such a distance between

each of them; and all the rest of it — there it is, in most prosaic minuteness. Similarly, we read how many threads and fringes, and how many bells on the high priest's robe. Verse after verse is full of these details; and then, on the back of them all, comes, 'See that thou make all things according to the pattern.' Which things are a parable — and just come to this, that the minutest pieces of daily life, the most commonplace and trivial incidents, may all be moulded after that great example, the life of Jesus Christ.

It is one of the miracles of revelation that it should be so. The life of Jesus Christ, in the fragmentary records of it in these four Gospels, although it only covered a few years, and is very imperfectly recorded, and in outward form was passed under conditions most remote from the strange complex conditions of our civilisation, yet fits as closely as a glove does to the hand, to all the necessities of our daily lives. Men and women, young men and maidens, old men and children, professional men and students, women in their houses, men of business, merchants, and they that sail the sea and they that dig in the mine; they may all find directions for everything that they have to do, in that one life.

And here is the centre and secret of it. 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.' Therefore that which is the law for Jesus is the law for us, and the next verse goes on; 'he that loveth hie life shall lose it,' and the next verse hammers the nail farther in: 'If any man serve Me, let him follow Me.' — Take that injunction and apply it, in all the details of daily life, and you will be on the road to reproduce the pattern.

But remember the 'all things.' It is for us, if we are Christian people, to bring the greatest principles to bear on the smallest duties, 'Small duties?' 'Great' and 'small' are adjectives that ought never to be tacked on to 'duty.' For all duties are of one size, and while we may speak, and often do speak, very mistakenly about things which we vulgarly consider 'great,' or superciliously treat as 'small,' the fact

is that no man can tell what is a great thing, and what is a small one. For the most important crises in a man's life have a strange knack of leaping up out of the smallest incidents; just as a whisper may start an avalanche, and so nobody can tell what are the great things and what the small ones. The tiniest pin in a machine drops out, and all the great wheels stop. The small things are the things that for the most part make up life. You can apply Christ's example to the least of them, and there is very small chance of your applying it to the great things if you have not been in the way of applying it to the small ones. For the small things make the habits which the great ones test and require.

So 'thorough' is the word. 'See that thou make all things according to the pattern.'

I remember once going up to the roof of Milan Cathedral, and finding there stowed away behind a buttress — where I suppose one man in fifty years might notice it, a little statuette, as completely chiselled, as perfectly polished, as if it had been of giant size, and set in the facade for all the people in the piazza to see. That is the sort of way in which Christian men should carve out their lives. Finish off the unseen bits perfectly, and then you may be quite sure that the seen bits will take care of themselves. 'See that thou make *all* things' — and begin with the small ones — 'according to the pattern.'

Lastly,

III. Where we are to see the pattern. — 'Shewed to thee *in the mount.*' Ay, that is where we have to go if we are to see it. The difference between Christian men's convictions of duty depends largely on the difference in the distance that they have climbed up the hill. The higher you go, the better you see the He of the land. The higher you go, the purer and more wholesome the atmosphere. And many a thing which a Christian man on the low levels thought to be perfectly in accordance with 'the pattern,' when he goes up a

little higher, he finds to be hopelessly at variance with it. It is of no use to lay down a multitude of minute, red-tape regulations as to what Christian morality requires from people in given circumstances. Go up the hill, and you will see for yourselves.

Our elevation determines our range of vision. And the nearer, and the closer, and the deeper is our habitual fellowship with God in Christ, the more lofty will be our conceptions of what we ought to be and do. The reason for inconsistent lives is imperfect communion, mad the higher we go on the mountain of vision, the dearer will be our vision. On the other hand, whilst we see 'the pattern' in the mount, we have to come down into the valley to 'make' the 'things.' The clay and the potter's wheels are down in Hinnom, and the mountain top is above. You have to carry your pattern- book down, and set to work with it before you. Therefore, whilst the way to see the pattern is to climb, the way to copy it is to descend. And having faithfully copied what you saw on the Mount of Vision, you will see more the next time you go back; for 'to him that hath shall be given.'

Hebrews 8:10 — I. THE ARTICLES OF THE NEW COVENANT: GOD'S WELTING ON THE HEART

'I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts.'
— Hebrews 8:10.

WE can scarcely estimate the shock to a primitive Hebrew Christian when he discovered that Judaism was to fade away. Such an earthquake might seem to leave nothing standing. Now, the great object of this Epistle is to insist on that truth, and to calm the early Hebrew Christians under it, by showing them that the disappearance of the older system left them no *poorer* but infinitely richer, inasmuch as all that was in it was more perfectly in Christ's gospel. The writer has accordingly been giving his strength to showing that, all along the line, Christianity is the perfecting of Judaism, in its Founder, in its priesthood, in its ceremonies, in its Sabbath. Here he

touches the great central thought of the covenant between God and man, and he fall back upon the strange words of one of the old prophets. Jeremiah had declared as emphatically as he, the writer, has been declaring, that the ancient system was to melt away and be absorbed in a new covenant between God and man. Is there any other instance of a religion which, on the one side, proclaims its own eternal duration — ‘the Word of the Lord endureth for ever’ — and on the other side declares that it is to be abrogated, antiquated, and done away? The writer of the Epistle had learned from sacred lips than Jeremiah’s the same lesson, for the Master said at the most solemn hour of His career, ‘This is the blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’

These articles of the New Covenant go very deep into the essence of Christianity, and may well be thought. fully pondered by us all, if we wish to know what the specific differences between the ultimate revelation in Jesus Christ, and all other systems are. The words I have read for my text are the first of these articles.

I. Let us try to ascertain what exactly is the meaning of this great promise.

Now it seems to me that the two clauses which I have read for my text are not precisely parallel, but parallel with a difference. I take it, that ‘mind’ here means very much what we make it mean in our popular phraseology, a kind of synonym for the understanding, or the intellectual part of a man’s nature; and that ‘heart,’ on the other hand, means something a little wider than it does in our popular phraseology, and indicates not only the affections, but the centre of personality in the human will, as well as the seat of love. So these two clauses will mean, you see, if we carry that distinction with us, two things — the clear perception of the will of God, and the coincidence of that will with our inclinations and desires.’ In men’s natural consciences, there is the law written on their minds, but alas! we all know that there is an awful chasm between perception and

inclination, and that it is one thing to know our duty, and quite another to wish to do it. So the heart of this great promise of my text is that these two things shall coincide in a Christian man, shall cover precisely the same ground; as two of Euclid's triangles having the same angles will, if laid upon each other, coincide line for line and angle for angle. Thus, says this great promise, it is possible — and, if we observe the conditions, it will be actual in us — that knowledge and will shall cover absolutely and exactly the same ground.

Inclination will be duty, and duty will be inclination and delight. Nothing short of such a thought lies here.

And how is that wonderful change upon men to be accomplished? 'I will put, I will write.' Only He can do it. We all know, by our own experience, the schism that gapes between the two things. Every man in the world knows a vast deal more of duty than *any* man in the world does. The worst of us has a standard that rebukes his evil, and the best of us has a standard that transcends his goodness, and, alas! often transcends his inclination.

But the gospel of our Lord and Saviour comes armed with sufficient power to make this miracle an actuality for us all.

For it comes, does it not, to substitute for all other motives to obedience, the one motive of love? They but half understand the gospel who dwell upon its sanctions of reward and punishment, and would seek to frighten men into goodness by brandishing the whip of law before them, and uncovering the lid that shuts in the smoke of a hell. And they misinterpret it almost as much, if there be any such, who find the chief motive for Christian obedience in the glories of the heavenly state. These are subordinate and legitimate in their secondary place, but the gospel appeals to men, not merely nor chiefly on the ground of self-interest, but it comes to them with the one appeal, 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments.' That is how the law is written on the heart. Wherever there is love, there is a

supreme delight in divining and in satisfying the wish and will of the beloved. His lightest word is law to the loving heart; his looks are spells and commandments. And if it is so in regard of our poor, imperfect, human loves, how infinitely more so is it where the heart is touched by true affection for His own infinite love's sake, of that 'Jesus' who is 'most desired!' The secret of Christian morality is that duty is changed into choice, because love is made the motive for obedience.

And, still further, let me remind you how this great promise is fulfilled in the Christian life, because to have Christ shrined in the heart is the heart of Christianity, and Christ Himself is our law. So, in another sense than that which I have been already touching, the law is written on the heart on which, by faith and self-surrender, the name of Christ is written. And when it becomes our whole duty to become like Him, then He being throned in our hearts, our law is within, and Himself to His 'darlings' shall be, as the poet has it about another matter, 'both law and impulse.' Write His name upon your hearts, and your law of life is thereby written there.

And, still further, let me remind you that this great promise is fulfilled, because the very specific gift of Christianity to men is the gift of a new nature which is 'created in righteousness and holiness that flows from truth.' The communication of a divine life kindred with, and percipient of, and submissive to, the divine will is the gift that Christianity — or, rather, let us put away the abstraction and say that Christ — offers . to us all, and gives to every man who will accept it.

And thus, and in other ways on which I cannot dwell now, this great article of the New Covenant lies at the very foundation of the Christian life, and gives its peculiar tinge and cast to all Christian morality, commandment, and obligation.

But let me remind you how this great truth has to be held with caution. The evidence of this letter itself shows that, whilst the

writer regarded it as a distinctive characteristic of the gospel, that by it men's wills were stamped with a delight in the law of God, and a transcript thereof, he still regarded these wills as unstable, as capable of losing the sharp lettering, of having the writing of God obliterated, and still regarded it as possible that there should be apostasy and departure.

So there is nothing in this promise which suspends the need for effort and for conflict. Still 'the flesh lusteth against the spirit.' Still there are parts of the nature on which that law is not written. It is the final triumph, that the whole man, body, soul, and spirit is, through and through, penetrated with, and joyfully obedient to, the commandments of the Lord. There is need, *too*, not only for continuous progress, effort, conflict, in order to keep our hearts open for His handwriting, but also for much caution, lest at any time we should mistake our own self-will for the utterance of the divine voice. 'Love, and do what thou wilt,' said a great Christian teacher. It is an unguarded statement, but profoundly true as in some respects it is, it is only absolutely true if we have made sure that the 'thou' which 'wills' is the heart on which God has written His law.

Only God can do this for us. The Israelites of old were bidden 'these things which I command thee this day shall be on thy heart,' and they were to write them on their hand, and on the frontlet between their eyes, and on their doorposts. The latter commands were obeyed, having been hardened into a form; and phylacteries on the arm, and scrolls on the lintel, were the miserable obedience which was given to them. But the complete writing on the heart was beyond the power of unaided man. A psalmist said, 'I delight to do Thy will, and Thy law is within my heart.' But a verse or two after, in the same psalm, he wailed, 'Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up. They are more than the hairs of my head.'

Therefore my heart faileth me.' One Man has transcribed the divine will on His will, without blurring a letter, or omitting a clause. One Man has been able to say, in the presence of the most fearful temptations, 'Not My will, but Thine, be done.' One Man has so completely written, perceived, and obeyed the law of His Father, that, looking back on all His life, He was conscious of no defect or divergence, either in motive or in act, and could affirm on the Cross, 'It is finished.' He who thus perfectly kept that divine law will give to us, if we ask Him, His spirit, to write it upon our hearts, and 'the law of the spirit of life which was in Christ Jesus shall make us free from the law of sin and death.'

II. Now, secondly, note the impassable gulf which this fulfilled promise makes between Christianity and all other systems.

It is a *new* covenant, undoubtedly-an altogether new thing in the world. For whatever other laws have been promulgated among men have had this in common, that they have stood over against the Will with a whip in one hand, and a box of sweets in the other, and have tried to influence desires and inclinations, first by the setting forth of duty, then by threatening, and then by promises to obedience. *There* is the inherent weakness of all which is merely law. You do not make men good by telling them in what goodness consists, nor yet by setting forth the bitter consequences that may result from wrongdoing. All that is surface work. But there is a power which says that it deals with the will as from within, and moves, and moulds, and revolutionises it. 'You cannot make men sober by act of parliament,' people say. Well! I do not believe the conclusion which is generally drawn from that statement, but it is perfectly true in itself. To tell a man what he ought to do is very, very little help towards his doing it. I do not under-estimate the value of a clear perception of duty, but I say that, apart from Christianity, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, that clear perception of duty is like a clear opening of a great gulf between a man and safety, which only makes him recoil in despair with the thought, 'how can I ever leap across *that?*' But the

peculiarity of the gospel is that it gives both the knowledge of what we ought to be; and with and in the knowledge, the desire, and with and in the knowledge and the desire, the power to be what God would have us to be.

All other systems, whether the laws of a nation, or the principles of a scientific morality, or the solemn voice that speaks in our minds proclaiming some version of God's law to every man- all these are comparatively impotent. They are like bill-stickers going about a rebellious province posting the king's proclamation. Unless they have soldiers at their back, the proclamation is not worth the paper it is printed upon. But Christianity comes, and gives us that which it requires from us. So, in his epigrammatic way, St. Augustine penetrated to the very heart of this article when he prayed, 'Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt.'

III. Note the freedom and blessedness of this fulfilled promise.

Not to do wrong may be the mark of a slave's timid obedience. Not to wish to do wrong is the charter of a son's free and blessed service. There is a higher possibility yet, reserved for heaven — not to be able to do wrong. Freedom does not consist in doing what I like — that turns out, in the long run, to be the most abject slavery, under the severest tyrants. But it consists in liking to do what I ought. When my wishes and God's will are absolutely coincident, then and only then, am I free. That is no prison, out of which we do not wish to go. Not to be confined against *our wills*, but voluntarily to elect to move only within the sacred, charmed, sweet circle of the discerned will of God, is the service and liberty of the sons of God.

Alas! there are a great many Christians, so-called, who know very little about such blessedness. To many of us religion is a burden. It consists of a number of prohibitions and restrictions and commandments equally unwelcome. 'Do not do this,' and all the while I would like to do it. 'Do that,' and all the while I do not want to do it. 'Pray, because it is your duty; go to chapel, because you

think it is God's will; give money that you would much rather keep in your pockets: abstain from certain things that you hunger for; do other things that you do not at all desire to do, nor find any pleasure in doing.' That is the religion of hosts of people. They have need to ask themselves whether their religion is Christ's religion. Ah! brethren! — 'My yoke is easy and My burden light; not because the things that He bids and forbids are less or lighter than those which the world's morality requires of its followers, but because, so to speak, the yoke is padded with the velvet of love, and inclination coincides, in the measure of our true religion, with the discerned will of God.

IV. Lastly, one word about the condition of the fulfilment of this promise to us.

As I have been saying, it is sadly far ahead of the experience of crowds of so-called Christians. There are still great numbers of professing Christians, and I doubt not that I speak to some such, on whose hearts only a very few of the syllables of God's will are written, and these very faintly and blotted. But remember that the fundamental idea of this whole context is that of a covenant, and a covenant implies two parties, and duties and obligations on the part of each. If God is in covenant with you, you are in covenant with God. If He makes a promise, there is something for you to do in order that that promise may be fulfilled to you.

What is there to do? First, and last, and midst, keep close to Jesus Christ. In the measure in which we keep ourselves in continual touch with Him, will His law be written upon our hearts. If we are for ever twitching away the paper; if we are for ever flinging blots and mud upon it, how can we expect the transcript to be clear and legible? We must keep still that God may write. We must wait habitually in His presence. When the astronomer wishes to get the image of some far-off star, invisible to the eye of sense, he regulates the motion of his sensitive plate, so that for hours it shall continue

right beneath the unseen Beam. So we have to still our hearts, and keep their plates — the fleshy tables of them — exposed to the heavens.

Then the likeness of God will be stamped there.

Be faithful to what is written there, which is the Christian shape of the heathen commandment — ‘Do the duty that lies nearest thee; so shall the next become plainer.’ Be faithful to the line that is ‘written,’ and there will be more on the tablet to-morrow.

Now this is a promise for us all. However blotted and blurred and defaced by crooked, scrawling letters, like a child’s copy-book, with its first pot-hooks and hangers, our hearts may be, there is no need for any of us to say despairingly, as we look on the smeared page, ‘What I have written I have written.’ He is able to blot it all out, to ‘take away the hand-writing’ — our own — ‘that is against us, nailing it to His Cross,’ and to give us, in our inmost spirits, a better knowledge of, and a glad obedience to, His discerned and holy will. So that each of us, if we choose, and will observe the conditions, may be able to say with all humility, ‘Lo! I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, *I* delight to do Thy will, yea! Thy law is within my heart.’

Hebrews 8:18—II. THEIR GOD, MY PEOPLE

‘I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people.’ — Hebrews 8:18.

Two mirrors set over against each other reflect one another and themselves in each other, in long perspective. Two hearts that love, with similar reciprocation of influence, mirror back to each other their own affections. ‘I am thine; thou art mine,’ is the very mother-tongue of love, and the source of blessedness. All loving hearts know that. That mutual surrender, and, in surrender, reciprocal possession, is lifted up here into the highest regions. ‘I will be their

God, they shall be My people.’ That was the fundamental promise of the Mosaic dispensation, laid at Sinai — ‘Ye shall be unto Me a people for a possession.’ All through the Old Testament we find it re-echoed; and yet the interpenetration of God and the people was imperfect and external in that ancient covenant.

So the writer here, falling back upon the marvellous prophecy of Jeremiah, regards this as being one of the characteristics of Christianity, that what was shadowed in Israel’s possession of God and God’s possession of Israel, is, in substance, blessedly and permanently realised in the relations of God to Christian souls, and of Christian souls to God.

Not only is there this mutual possession, as expressed by the two halves of my text, but each half, when cleft and analysed, reveals the necessity for a similar reciprocity. For God’s giving of Himself to us is nothing to us without our taking of God for ours; and, in like manner, our giving of ourselves to God, would be all incomplete, unless in His strange love, He stooped from amidst the praises of Israel to accept the poor gifts that we bring.

So the duality of my text breaks up into a double dualism, and we have God giving Himself to us, and His gift realised in our acceptance of Him for ours; and then we have our giving of ourselves to God, and the gift realised and ratified in His acceptance of us for His. And to these four points, briefly, I wish to turn.

I. ‘I will be to them a God.’ That is God’s gift of Himself to us.

The words go far deeper than the necessary divine relation to all His creatures. He is a God to every star that burns, and to every worm that creeps, and to every gnat that dances for a moment. But there is a closer relation, and more blessed than that. He is a God to every man that lives, lavishing upon him manifestations of His divinity, and sustaining him in life. But besides these great and wondrous universal relations which spring from the very fact of creative power

and creatural independence, there is a tenderer, a truer relationship of heart to heart, of spirit to spirit, which is set forth here as the prerogative of the men who trust in Jesus Christ. The special does not contradict or deny the universal, the universal does not exclude the special — ‘I will be a God to them,’ in a deeper, more blessed, soul-satisfying, and vital sense than to others around them.

And what lies in that great promise passes the wit of man and the tongues of angels fully to conceive and tell. All that lies in that majestic monosyllable, which is shorthand for life, and light, and all perfectness, lived in a living person who has a heart, that word *God* — *all* that is included in that name, God will be to you and me, if we like to have Him for such. ‘I will be a God to them’ — then round about them shall be cast the bulwark of the everlasting arm and the everlasting purpose. ‘I will be a God to them’ — then in all dark places there will be a light, and in all perplexities there will be a path, and in all anxieties there will be quietness, and in all troubles there will be a hidden light of joy, and in every circumstance life will be saturated with an almighty presence, which shall make the rough places plain and the crooked things straight. ‘I will be a God to them’ — then their desires, their hungerings after blessedness, their seekings after good, need no longer roam open-mouthed and empty, throughout a waste world where there is only scanty fodder enough to keep them from expiring but never food enough to satisfy them; but in Him longings and hopes will all find their appropriate satisfaction. And there will be rest in God, and whatsoever aspirations after loftier goodness may have to be cherished, and whatsoever base hankerings still lingering have to be fought, the strength of a present God will enable us to aspire, and not to be disappointed, and to cast ourselves into the conflict, and be ever victorious. ‘I will be to them a God,’ is the same as to say that everything which my complex nature can require I shall find in Him.

It says, too, that all that Godhood, in all the incomprehensible sweep of its attributes, is on my side, if I will. They tell us that there are

rays in the spectrum which no eye can see, but which yet have mightier chemical and other influences than those that are visible. The spectrum of God is not all visible, but beyond the limits of comprehension there lie dark energies which are full of blessedness and of power for us. 'I will be to them a God.' We can understand something of what that name signifies; and all that is enlisted for us. There is much which that name signifies that we do not understand, and all that, too, is working on our side.

Now, remember, that this giving of God to us by Himself is all concentrated in one historical act. He gave Himself to us, when He spared not His only begotten Son. My text is one of the articles of the New Covenant. And what sealed and confirmed all the articles of that Covenant? The blood of Jesus Christ, It was when 'God spared not His own Son,' and when the Son spared not Himself, on that Cross of Calvary, that there came to pass the ratifying and filling out and perfecting of the ancient, typical promise, 'I will be to them a God.' *There* was the unspeakable gift in which God was given to humanity.

II. And now we have to take the giving God and make Him our God.

I need not do more than just glance for a moment at that thought, for it is familiar enough to us all. Here is a treasure of gold lying in the road.

Anybody that picks it up may have it; the man who does not pick it up does not get it, though it is there for him to lay his fingers on. Here is a river flowing past your door. You may put a pipe into it, and bring all its wealth and refreshment into your house, and use it for the quenching of your thirst, for the cleansing of your person, for the cooking of your victuals, for the watering of your gardens. And here is all the fulness of God welling past us, but Niagara may thunder close by a man's door, and he may perish of thirst. 'I will be

to them a God.’ What does that matter if I do not turn round and say: ‘O Lord! Thou art my God’? Nothing!

Beggars come to your door, and you give them a bit of bread, and they go away, and you find it flung into the mud round the corner. God gives us Himself. I wonder how many of us have tossed the gift over the first hedge, and left it there. Yet all the while we are dying for want of it, and do not know that we are.

Brethren! you have to enclose a bit of the prairie for your very own, and put a hedge round it, and cultivate it, and you will get abundant fruits. You have to translate ‘their’ into the singular possessive pronoun, and say ‘mine,’ and put out the hand of faith, and make Him in very deed yours.

Then, and only then, is this giving perfected.

III. In the third place, we have to give ourselves to God.

We begin — as our text, profoundly, with all its simplicity, begins — with an act of God to us. He enters into loving relations with me, and it is only when I am melted and encouraged by the perception and reception of these relations that there comes the answering throb in my heart. The mirror in our spirit has the other one reflected upon it; then it flings back its own reflection to the parent glass. God comes first with the love that He pours over us poor creatures, and when ‘we have known and believed the love that God hath to us,’ then, and only then, do we throb back the reflected, ay, the kindred love. For love is the same thing in the divine heart and in my heart. In the other bonds that unite men to God, what is man’s corresponds to what is God’s. My faith corresponds to His faithfulness.

My dependence corresponds to His sufficiency. My weak clinging answers to His strong grasp; my obedience to His commanding. But my *love* not only corresponds to, as the concave does to the convex, but it assimilates to; and is the likeliest thing in the creature to, the

love of the Creator. And so there is a parallel, wonderful and blessed, between the giving love which says 'I will be to them a God,' and the recipient love which responds, 'We are to Thee a people.'

Remember, *too*, that not only is there this general resemblance, but that our love manifests itself to God — I was going to say, just as God's love manifests itself to us, though, of course, there are differences that I do not need to touch upon here, in the act of self-surrender. He gave Himself to us, Ay! and we may use another form of speech still more emphatic, and say, He gave up Himself. For, surely, difficult as it may be for us to keep our footing in those lofty heights where the atmosphere is so rare, the gift of Jesus Christ was surrender; when the Father spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.

And, brethren, what is the surrender of the man who, receives the love of God? In what region of my nature is that giving up of myself most imperative and blessed? In my will. The will is the man, The centre-point of every human being is. the will, and it is no use for us to talk about our having given ourselves to God, in response and in thankfulness to His gift of Himself to us, unless we come and say ' Lord! not my will, but Thine'; and bow ourselves in un-reluctant and constant submission to His commandments, and to all His will. Brethren, we give ourselves to God when, moved by His giving of Himself to us, we yield up our love to Him, and love never rests until it has yielded up its will to the beloved. He, indeed, gives, asking for nothing; but He gives in a still deeper sense, asking for everything; and that everything is myself. And I yield myself to Him in the measure in which I set my thankful love upon Him, and then bow myself as His servant, in humble consecration to Himself, with all my heart and soul and mind and strength.

IV. Lastly, God takes us for His.

‘They shall be My people.’ That is wonderful. It is strange that we can imitate God, in a certain fashion, in the gift of self; but it is yet more strange and blessed that God accepts that gift, and counts it as one of His treasures to possess us. One of the psalmists had a deep insight into the miracle of the divine condescension when he said ‘He was extolled with my tongue.’ Strange that the loftiest of creatures should be lifted higher by the poor tremulous lever of *my* praises! and yet He is so. He takes as His, such poor creatures, full of imperfection, and tremulous faith, and disproved love, as you and I know ourselves to be, and He says ‘My people.’ ‘They shall be Mine,’ My jewels, says He, ‘in the day which I make.’ Oh, brethren! it sometimes seems to me that it is more wonderful that God should take me for His, than that He should give me Himself for mine.

Have you given yourself to Him? Have you begun where He begins, taking first the gift that is freely given to you of God, even Jesus Christ, in whom God dwells, and who makes all the Godhead yours, for your very own?

Have you taken God for yours, by faith in that Lord’ who loved me, and gave Himself for me?’ And then smitten by His love and having the chains of self melted by the fire of His great mercy, have you said, ‘Lo! truly I am Thy servant. Thou hast loosed my bonds?’ Dear brethren, you never own yourselves till you give yourselves away; and you never will give yourselves to God, to be His, unless with all your heart and strength you cling to the rock-truth, that God has given Himself to every man who will take Him, in Jesus Christ, to be that man’s God for ever and ever.

Hebrews 8:11—III. ‘ALL SHALL KNOW ME’

‘They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest.’ — Hebrews 8:11.

IN former sermons I have tried to bring out the force of the preceding two articles of 'the New Covenant' These two were the substitution of inward inclination and impulse for the rigid bonds of an external commandment, and the substitution of a real, spiritual, mutual possession of God and His people for the mere outward relationship that existed between Israel and Jehovah-My text is the third article of the New Covenant, It lays hold, like the other two, of something that characterised the ancient dispensation, declares its imperfection, recognises its prophetic aspect, and asserts that all which the former merely shadowed and foretold is accomplished in Jesus Christ.

In old days there had been some direct communication between God and a chosen few, the spiritual aristocracy of the nation, and they spake the things that they had heard of God to the multitude who had had no such communication. My text says that all this is swept away, and that the prerogative of every Christian man is direct access to, communication with, and instruction from, God Himself. The text has two things in it; the promise, which is the essence of it, and a consequence which is deduced from that promise, and sets forth its results in a graphic manner. 'They all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest'; that is the real promise. 'They shall no more teach every man his neighbour saying, 'Know the Lord,' is but a result thereof.

I. Now, I ask you to look with me at what this great promise means.

'They shall know Me.' Perhaps I can best explain what I take it to mean by commencing with an analogy or two which may help us to apprehend what is the significance of these words. We all know the difference between hearsay and sight. We may have read books of travel, and tell of some scene of great natural beauty or historic interest, and may think that we understand all about it, but it is always an epoch when our own eyes look for the first time at the snowy summit of an Alp, or for the first time at the Parthenon on its

rocky height. We all know the difference between hearsay and experience. We read books of the poets that portray love and sorrow, and the other emotions that make up our throbbing, changeful life; but we need to go through the mill ourselves before we understand what the grip of the iron teeth of the harrow of affliction is, and we need to have had our own hearts dilated By a true and blessed affection, before we know the sweetness of love. Men may tell us about it, but we have to feel it ourselves before we know.

To come still closer to the force of my text, we all know the difference between hearing about a man and making his acquaintance. We may have been told much about him, and be familiar with his character, as we think, but, when we come face to face with him, and actually for ourselves experience the magnetism of his presence, or fall under the direct influence of his character, then we know that our former acquaintance with him, by means of hearsay, was but superficial and shadowy. ‘I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eyes see thee.’ Can you say that? If so, you understand my text — ‘They shall no more teach every man... his brother, saying, Know the Lord, and make acquaintance with Him’ as if He were a stranger — for ‘all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest.’

There is all the difference between knowing *about* God and knowing God; just the difference .that there is between dogma and life, between theology and religion. We may have all articles of the Christian creed clear in our understandings, and may owe our possession of them to other people’s teaching; we may even, in a sense, believe them, and yet they may be absolutely outside of our lives, and it is only when they pass into the very substance of our being, and influence the springs of our conduct — it is only then that we know God.

Now, I maintain that this acquaintance with Him is what is meant in our text. It may not include any more intellectual propositions about

Him than a man had before he knew Him, but it has turned doctrines into fact, and instead of the mere hearsay and traditional *religion*, which is the only religion of millions, it has brought the true heart-grasp of Him, which is the only thing worth calling a knowledge of God. For let me remind you that, whilst we may know a science or proposition by the exercise of our understandings in appropriate ways, that is not how we know people. And God is a person, and to know Him does not mean to understand *about* Him, but to be on speaking terms with Him, to have a familiar acquaintance with Him, to ‘summer and winter’ with Him, and so, by experience, to verify the things that before were mere doctrines. Now, at least the large majority of you call yourselves believers in Christianity. I want you to ask yourselves, and I would ask myself, whether my religion is knowing *about* God or knowing Him; whether it is all made up of a set of truths which I assent to, mainly because I am not sufficiently interested in them to contradict them, or whether these truths have become the very substance of my life. I do not believe in a religion without a dogma — I was going to say, I believe still less in a dogma without religion; and that is the Christianity of hosts of professing Christians. It is as useless as are the dried seeds that rattle in the withered head of a poppy in the autumn, or as the shrivelled kernel that sounds in the hollowness of a half-empty nut.

Remember, dear brethren, that to know God is to become acquainted with Him, and that only on the path of such familiar, friendly, loving intercourse and communion with Him, can men find the confirmation of the truths about Him which make up the eternal revelation of Him in the gospel. ‘We know’ — that is a valid certainty, arising from experience, and it has as good a right to call itself knowledge as have the processes by which men come to be sure about the physical facts of this material universe. Nay! I would even go further, and say that the fact that such a continual stream of witnesses, through all the generations, have been able to say, ‘I have tasted and I have seen that God is good,’ is to be taken into account by all impartial searchers after truth. And if men want to square their

creeds with all the facts of humanity, let them not omit, in their consideration of the claims of Christian evidence, this fact, that from generation to generation men have said, and their lives have witnessed to its truths, 'We know in whom we have believed, and that He is able to keep us. We know that we are of God. Dear brethren! the whole case for Christianity cannot be appreciated from outside. 'Taste and see.' My text shows us the more true way. If we will accept that covenant we shall know the Lord in the depths of our hearts.

II. Notice how far this promise extends.

They all, from the least to the greatest, shall know; There is to be no distinction of rank or age, or endowment, which shall result in some of the people of God having a position from which any of the others are altogether shut out.

The writer is, of course, contrasting in his mind, though he does not express the contrast, the condition of things of old, when, as I said, the spiritual aristocracy of the nation received communications which they then imparted to their fellows. In the morning dawn the highest summits catch the rays first, but as the sun rises it floods the lower levels, and at mid-day shines right down into the depths of the cavities. So the world is now flooded with the light of Christ; and all Christian men and women, by virtue of their Christian character, do possess the unction from the Holy One, in which lie the potency and the promise of the knowledge of all things that are needful to be known for life and godliness. This is the true democracy of the gospel-the universal possession of the life of Christ through the Spirit.

Now, if that be so, then it is by no means a truth to be kept simply for the purpose of fighting against ecclesiastical or sacerdotal encroachments and denials of it, but it ought to be taken as the candle of the Lord, by each of us, and in the light of it we ought to search very rigidly, and very often, our own Christian character and

experiences. You, dear brethren, with whom I am most closely associated here, you professing Christians of this congregation — do you know anything about that inward knowledge of God which comes from friendship with Him, and speaks irrefragable certainties in the heart which receives it? ‘If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His.’ If you owe all your knowledge *of*, and your faith in, the great verities of the gospel, and the loving personality of God, to the mere report of others, if you cannot verify these by your own experience, if you cannot say, ‘Many things I know not; you can easily puzzle me with critical and philosophical subtleties, but this one thing I do know, that whereas I was blind, now I see’ — if you cannot say that, I pray you, bethink yourselves whether your religion is not mainly a form, and how far it has any life in it at all.

But whilst thus the great promise of my text, in its very blessedness and fulness, does carry with it some solemn suggestions for searching self-examination, it also points in another direction. For consider what it excludes and what it permits, in the way of brotherly help and guidance. It certainly excludes on the one hand, all assumption of authority over the consciences and the understandings of Christian people, on the part either of churches or individuals, and, it makes short work of all claims that there continues a class of persons officially distinguished from their brethren, and having closer access to God than they. The true understanding of these words of my text, the recognition of the universality of the knowledge of God in all Christian people, has great revolutionary work yet to do amongst the churches of Christendom. For I do not know that there are any of them that have sufficiently recognised this principle. Not only in a church where there is a priesthood and an infallible head of the Church on earth, nor only in churches that are bound by human creeds imposed on them by men, but also in churches like ours, where there is no formal recognition of either of these two errors, the practical contradiction of this article of the New Covenant is apt to creep in. It

is a great deal more the fault of the people than of the priest, a great deal more the fault of the congregation than of the pastor, when they are lazily contented to take all their religion at second-hand from him, and to shuffle all the responsibility off their own shoulders on to his. If my text obliges me, and all men who stand in my position, to say with the Apostle, 'Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy,' it obliges you, dear brethren, to take nothing from me, or any man, on our bare words, nor to exalt any of us into a position which would contradict the great principle of my text, but yourselves, at first hand, to go to God, and get straight from Him the teaching which He only can give. Dominion and subjection, authority and submission to men, in any part of the church are shut out by such words as these.

But brotherly help is not shut out. If a party of men are climbing a hill, and one is in advance of his fellows, when he reaches the summit he may look down and call to those below, and tell them how fair and wide the view is, and beckon them to come and give them a helping hand up. So, because Christian men vary in the extent to which they possess and utilise the one gift of knowledge of God, and some of them are in advance of the others, it is all in accordance with the principle of my text that they that are in advance should help their brethren, and give them a brotherly hand. Not as if my brother's word can give me the inward knowledge of God, but it may help me to get that knowledge for myself. We — I speak now as a member of the preaching class — we can but do what the friend of the bridegroom does; he brings the bride to her lover, and then he shuts the door and leaves the two to themselves. That is all that any of us can do. You must yourself draw the water from the well of salvation. We can only tell you, 'there *is* the well, and the water is sweet.'

III. Lastly, the means by which this promise is fulfilled.

I have already pointed out, in previous sermons, that the conception of the gospel as a new covenant was endorsed by Jesus Christ Himself in words which tell us how all these blessings that are set forth in this context are secured and brought to men, when in the institution of the Lord's Supper, He spoke of 'the New Covenant in His blood.' So I set first and foremost, above all other means, this one great truth, that all this inward knowledge of God, which is the prerogative of every Christian man, is made possible and actual for any of us, only by and through the mission, and especially the death, of Jesus Christ our Lord. For therein does He set forth God to be known as nothing else but that supreme suffering and supreme self-surrender upon the Cross, ever can do or has done. We know God as He would have us know Him, only when we see Jesus suffering and dying for us; and then adoringly, as one in the presence of a mystery into which he can but look a little way, Bay that even there and then 'he that hath seen that Christ hath seen the Father.'

Jesus Christ's Mood, the seal of the Covenant, is the great means by which this promise is fulfilled, inasmuch u in that death He sweeps away all the hindrances which bar us out from the knowledge of God. The great dark wall of my sin rises between me and my Father. Christ's blood, like some magic drops upon a fortification, causes all the black barrier to melt away like a cloud; and the access to the throne of God is patent, even for sinful creatures like us. The veil is rent, and by that blood we have access into the holiest of all.

Christ is the source of this knowledge of God, inasmuch, further, as by His mission and death there is given to the whole world, if it will receive it, and to all who exercise faith in His name, the gift of that Divine Spirit who teaches to our inmost spirit the true knowledge of His Son.

And so, dear brethren, since it is in the incarnate and dying Christ that all knowledge of God is brought to men, that all possibility of friendship and communion between men and God is rooted, and that

the Divine Spirit who leads us into the deep things of God is granted to each of us, there follows the plain conclusion that the one way by which every man and woman on earth may find him and herself included within that ‘all, from the least to the greatest,’ is simply trust in Christ Jesus, in whom, in whose life, in whose death, God is made known, our alienation is swept away, and the Spirit of God, the Divine Teacher, is granted to us all.

Only, remember that my text stands in close connection with the preceding articles of this covenant, and that to delight in the law of the Lord is the sure way to know more of the Lord. One act of obedience from the heart will teach us more of God than all the sages can. It is more illuminating simply to do as He willed than to read and think and speculate and study. ‘If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the teaching.’ And mutual possession of God by us, and of us by God, leads to fuller knowledge. To possess God is to love Him; and ‘he that loveth knoweth God, yea! rather is known of God.’

So, dear brethren, do not be content with traditional religion, with a hearsay Christianity. ‘Acquaint now thyself with Him,’ and be at peace. Oh! there is nothing sweeter to a true preacher of Christ and His salvation than that those to whom he preaches should be able to do without him. It is my business to point you away from myself, however much I prize your love and confidence, as I ought to do; and to beseech you, for your own soul’s sake, that you would by faith in Christ attain that knowledge of the only true God which He is sent to give. Then you will be able to say, ‘Now, we believe not because of thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is, indeed, the Christ, the Saviour of the world.’

Hebrews 8:12—IV. FORGIVENESS THE FUNDAMENTAL BLESSING

‘For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.’ — Hebrews 8:12.

WE have been considering, in successive sermons, the great promises preceding my text, which are the articles of the New Covenant. We reach the last of them in this discourse. It is last in order of enumeration because it is first in order of fulfilment. The foundation is dug down to and discovered last, because the stones of it were laid first. The introductory ‘for’ in my text shows that the fulfilment of all the preceding great promises depends upon and follows the fulfilment of this, the greatest of them. Forgiveness is the keystone of the arch. Strike it *out*, and the whole tumbles into ruin. Forgiveness is the first gift to be received from the great cornucopiae of blessings which the gospel brings for men. The writer is tracing the stream upwards, and therefore he comes last to that which first gushes out from the divine heart. All these previous promises of delight in the law of the Lord, mutual possession between God and His people, knowledge of God which is based upon love, are consequences of this final article, ‘I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their iniquities will I remember no more.’

I. So, then, we remark, first, that forgiveness deals with man’s deepest need.

It is fundamental, because it grapples with the true evil of humanity, which is not sorrow, but is sin. All men have ‘come short of the glory of God,’ and that fact, the fact of universal sinfulness, is the gravest fact of man’s condition; for it affects his whole nature, and it disturbs and perverts all his relations to God. And so, if men would rightly diagnose the disease of humanity, they must recognise something far deeper than skin-deep symptoms, and discover that it is sin which is the source of all human misery and sorrow. To deal with humanity and to forget or ignore the true source of all the misery in the world — namely, the fact that we ‘have all sinned and come short of the glory of God’ — is absurd. ‘Miserable comforters are ye all,’ if pottering over the patient, you apply ointment to pimples when he is dying of cancer. I know, of course, that a great

deal may be done, and that a great deal is to-day being done, to diminish the sum of human wretchedness; and I am not the man to say one word that shall seem to under-estimate or pour cold water upon any of these various schemes of improvement — philanthropic, social, economic, or political; but I do humbly venture to say that any of them, and all of them put together, if they do not grapple with this fact of man's sin, are dealing with the surface and leaving the centre untouched. Sin does not come only from ignorance, and therefore it cannot be swept away by knowledge. It does not come only from environment, and therefore it cannot be taken out of human history by improvement of circumstances. It does not come from poverty, and therefore economical changes will not annihilate it. The root of it lies far deeper than any of these things. The power which is to make humanity blessed must dig down to the root and grasp that, and tear it up, and eject it from the heart of man before society can be thoroughly healed.

Now, what does Christianity do with this central part of human experience? My text tells us partly, and only partly, 'I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.' Of course, the divine oblivion is a strong metaphor for the treatment of man's sins as non-existent. It is the same figure, in a somewhat different application, as is found in the great promise, 'I will cast their sins behind My back into the depths of the sea.' It is the same metaphor as is suggested in a somewhat different application, by the other saying, 'Blessed is the man whose sin is covered.' And the fact that underlies the metaphors of forgetfulness or burying in the ocean depths, or covering over so as to-be invisible, is just this, that God's love flows out to the sinful man, unhindered by the fact of his transgression.

If Christian people, and doubters about Christian truth, would understand the depth and loftiness of the Christian idea of forgiveness, there would be less difficulty felt about it. For pardon is

not the same thing as the removal of the consequences of wrongdoing. It is so in regard of the mere outward judicial: procedure of nations, but it is not so in the family. A father often pardons, and says that he does so before he punishes, and it is the same with God. The true notion and essence of forgiveness, as the Bible conceives it, is not the putting aside of consequences, but the flow of the Father's heart to the erring child.

Sin is a great black dam, built up across the stream, but the flood of love from God's heart rises over it, and pours across it, and buries it beneath the victorious, full waters of the 'river of God.' Here is a world wrapped in mist, and high above the mist the unbroken sunshine of the divine love pours down upon the upper layer, and thins and thins and thins it until it disappears, and the full sunshine floods the rejoicing world, and the ragged fragments of the mist melt into the blue. 'I have blotted out as a cloud thy sins and as a thick cloud thy transgressions,' The outward consequences of forgiven sin may have to be reaped. If a man has lived a sensuous life, no repentance, no forgiveness, will prevent the drunkard's hand from trembling, or cure the corrugations of his liver. If a man has sinned, no divine forgiveness will ever take the memory of his transgressions, nor their effects, out of his character. But the divine forgiveness may so modify the effects as that, instead of past sin being a source of torment or a tyrant which compels to future similar transgressions, pardoned sin will become a source of lowly self-distrust, and may even tend to increase in goodness and righteousness. When bees cannot remove some corruption out of the hive they cover it over with wax, and then it is harmless, and they can build upon it honey-bearing cells. Thus it is possible that, by pardon, the consequences which must be reaped may be turned into occasions for good.

But the act of the divine forgiveness does annihilate the deepest and the most serious consequences of my sin; for hell is separation from

God, the sense of discord and alienation between Him and me; and all these are swept away.

So here is the foundation blessing, which meets man's deepest need. And be sure of this, that any system which cannot grapple with that need will never avail for the necessities of a sinful world. Unless our new evangelists can come to us with as clear an utterance as this of my text, they will work their enchantments in vain; and the world will be the old, sad, miserable world, after all that they can do.

II. This forgiveness is attained through Christ, and through Him only.

I have tried to show in former sermons, that the whole of these promises of what our writer calls 'the New Covenant,' are, as our Lord Himself said, sealed 'in His blood.' And that is especially true in reference to this promise of forgiveness. It is in Christ Jesus, and in Christ Jesus alone, that that pardon which my text speaks of is secured to men.

I need not dwell upon the Scriptural statements to this effect, but I desire to emphasise this thought, that the Christian teaching of forgiveness is based upon the conception of Christ's work and especially of Christ's death, as being the atonement for the world's sin. It is because, and only because, 'He bore our sins in His own body on the tree,' that the full-toned gospel proclamation can be rung out to men, that God 'remembers their transgressions no more.' Unless that foundation be firmly laid in the New Testament conception of the meaning and power of the death of Christ, I know not where there is a basis for the proclamation to man of divine forgiveness.

Of course, my text itself does show that the very common misrepresentation of the New Testament evangelical teaching about this matter is a misrepresentation. It is often objected to that teaching that it alleges that Christ's sacrifice effected a change in the

divine heart and disposition, and made God love men whom He did not love before. The mighty 'I will' of my text makes no specific reference to Christ's death, and rather implies what is the true relation between the love of God and the death of Jesus Christ, that God's love was the originating cause, of which Christ's death was the redeeming effect. 'He so loved the world that He gave His... Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should... have eternal life.' And no wise evangelical teacher ever has asserted, or does assert, anything else than that the mission of Jesus Christ is the consequence, and not the cause, of the Father's love to sinful men.

But that being kept distinctly in view, I suppose I need not remind you how, like the strand that runs through the cables of the Royal Navy, the red thread of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the whole world runs through the whole of the New Testament. It is fashionable nowadays to say that no theory of the atonement is needed in order that men should receive the benefit Christ's work. That is partially true, in so far as that no human conceptions will exhaust the fulness of that great work, nor can penetrate to all its depths. But it is not true, as I humbly take it, inasmuch as if a man is to get the forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ, he must have this theory, that 'Christ died for *our sins* according to the Scriptures.' And that is the teaching of the whole New Testament.

I need not remind you how all Paul's writing is saturated with it, but I may remind you that to people who were very lynx-eyed critics of him and of his teaching, he said, about that very statement that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures — 'whether it were they or I, so we preach.' And his appeal to the consensus and unanimity of the apostles is amply vindicated by the documents that still remain. We are told that there are types of teaching in the New Testament. There are, and very beautifully they vary, and very harmoniously they blend. But there are no diversities in regard to this matter. If Paul says, 'In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of our sins,' Peter says, 'He bare our

sins in His own body on the tree'; and John says, 'He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but also for the sins of the whole world.' And if, as I believe, the Book of the Revelation is his, the vision that John saw in the heavens was the vision of 'a Lamb as it had been slain'; and the song which he heard rising from immortal lips was of praise unto Him that 'hath loosed us from our sins by His own blood.'

'So they preached.' God grant that it may be true of all of us; 'so we Believe.' For; Brethren, this clear, certain statement of the gospel of forgiveness through Jesus Christ is the characteristic glory of the whole revelation. Without it, apart from Him and His Cross, I do not know how the hope of forgiveness can be more than dim and doubtful I know not how any man that has once felt the grip of evil on his inclinations, and the responsibility and guilt which he has drawn down upon his head by his transgressions, can find a firm footing for his assurance of pardon, apart from the Cross of Jesus Christ. Without that, the divine forgiveness is but a peradventure, sometimes a hope, sometimes an illusion. The men that reject Christianity for the most part proclaim the gospel of despair. 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,' in such a sense as to annihilate the possibility of pardon. But in Christ we understand that we may reap these fruits, and yet be pardoned. 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them, and tookest vengeance of their inventions.' Forgiveness apart from Christ stands, as it seems to me, in no intelligible relation to the divine character. And, apart from Christ, forgiveness is apt to dwindle down, and to be degraded into mere lazy tolerance of evil, and to make God a good-natured, indifferent Sovereign, who does not so very much mind whether His subjects do His will or not.

But when we can say, 'He died for my sins,' then we can see that the divine righteousness and the divine love are but two names for one thing, and forgiveness lifts us into a region of higher purity. Christianity alone teaches the loftiest ideal of human righteousness,

the loftiest conception of the divine character, the absolute inflexibility of the divine law and withal full, free pardon. It stands alone in the sombre aspect under which it contemplates humanity, and the boundless hope of its possibilities which it entertains. It stands alone in that forgiveness is the means to higher holiness; and in that, pardoning, it heals, and whispers 'Go thy way; sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee.' Therefore is it a gospel; therefore is it the New Covenant in His blood.

III. Lastly, this forgiveness is fundamental to all other Christian blessings.

As I have said, the very structure of our text shows that that was the writer's idea. There can be no 'delight in the law of the Lord,' which is the first of the articles of the New Covenant, until there is the taking away of the sin which deepens aversion to God's law, and until the Lawgiver has become beloved for the sake of His received forgiveness. Then we shall delight in the law when we love the lips that proclaim it, because before they issued commandments they decreed absolution, and declared 'Neither do I condemn thee.'

Forgiveness precedes the second of these covenant blessings — viz., mutual possession between God and His people. For so long as there remains unforgiven sin in a man's heart, it comes like a film of atmospheric air or grains of dust between two polished metal plates, forbidding their adhesion; and only when it is taken away will they come together and abide united. It lies at the foundation of, and must precede, all that true knowledge of God, which is the third of the articles of the covenant, and is a consequence of love and communion. 'For how can two walk together except they be agreed?' Until my sin is taken from me the eyes of my soul are dim; and I know not God in deep reciprocal possession and continual love. And so with all other of the blessings and the hopes which Christian men are entitled to cherish by reason of this covenant of God's changeless love.

I need not dwell upon them, but I would leave with you these thoughts. A Christianity which does not begin with the proclamation of forgiveness is impotent. Again, a Christianity which does not base forgiveness on Christ's sacrifice is also impotent. The history of the Church shows that preachers and teachers and churches that do not know what to say when a poor soul comes to them and asks, 'What must I do to be saved?' are of no use, or next to none. The man in whom there are devils says to such maimed representations of the gospel, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?' and leaps upon them, and overcomes them. The whole experience of the past demonstrates that. And so one laments the vagueness and the faltering in proclaiming this truth so common in this day. Brethren, I, for my part, believe that the only type of Christianity which will win men's hearts is that modelled on the pattern of the New Testament teaching, which begins with the fact of sin, and, having dealt with that, then goes on to bestow all other blessings.

But do not forget another thing, that a Christianity which does not build holiness, delight in God's law, conscious possession of Him and possession by Him, and deep, blessed knowledge of Him, on forgiveness, is woefully imperfect. And that is the Christianity of a great many of us. Here is the first round of the ladder: 'I will remember their iniquities no more.' Put your foot upon that and then begin to ascend; and do not stop till you have reached the top, whence His face looks down, and whence you can step on to the stable standing-ground beside His very throne. Begin with forgiveness, and all these blessings: shall be added unto you, if you keep the covenant of your God.

Hebrews 9:11-14, 24-28—THE PRIEST IN THE HOLY PLACE

'But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; 12. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place,

having obtained eternal redemption for us, 13. For if the blood of hells and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: 14. How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 24. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: 25. Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others: 26. (For then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world) but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: 28. So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.’ — Hebrews 9:11-14, 24-28.

SPACE forbids attempting full treatment of these pregnant verses. We can only sum up generally their teaching on the priesthood of Jesus.

I. Christ, as the high priest of the world, offers Himself. Obviously verse 14 refers to Christ’s sacrificial death, and in verse 26 His ‘sacrifice of Himself’ is equivalent to His ‘having suffered.’ The contention that the priestly office of Jesus begins with His entrance into the presence of God is set aside by the plain teaching of this passage, which regards His death as the beginning of His priestly work. What, then, are the characteristics of that offering, according to this Writer? The point dwelt on most emphatically is that He is both priest and sacrifice. That great thought opens a wide field of meditation, for adoring thankfulness and love. It implies the voluntariness of His death. No necessity bound Him to the Cross. Not the nails, but His, love; fastened Him there. Himself He would not save, because others He would save. The offering was ‘through

the Eternal Spirit,' the divine personality in Himself, which as it were, took the knife and slew the human life. That sacrifice was 'without blemish,' fulfilling in perfect moral purity the prescriptions of the ceremonial law, which but clothe in outward form the universal consciousness that nothing stained or faulty is worthy to be given to God. What are the blessings brought to us by that wondrous self-sacrifice? They are stated most generally in verse 26 as the putting away of sin, and again in verse 28 as being the bearing of the sins of many, and again in verse 14 as cleansing conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Now the first of these expressions includes the other two, and expresses the blessed truth that, by His death, Jesus has made an end of sin, in all its shapes and powers, whether it is regarded as guilt or burden, or taint and tendency paralysing and disabling. Sin is guilt, and Christ's death deals with our past, taking away the burden of condemnation. Thus verse 28 presents Him as bearing the sins of many, as the scapegoat bore the sins of the congregation into a land not inhabited, as 'the Lord made to meet' on the head of the Servant 'the iniquities of us all.' The best commentary on the words here is, 'He bare our sins in His own body on the tree.' But sin has an effect in the future as in the past, and the death of Christ deals with that, So verse 14 parallels it not only with the sacrifice which made access to God possible, but with the ceremonial of the red heifer,' by which pollution from touching a corpse was removed. A conscience which has been in contact with 'dead works' (and all works which are not done from 'the life' are so) is unfit to serve God, as well as lacking in wish to serve; and the only way to set it free from the nightmare which fetters it is to touch it with 'the blood,' and then it will spring up to a waking life of glad service. 'The blood' is shed to take away guilt; 'the blood' is the life, and, being shed in the death, it can be transfused into our veins, and so will. cleanse us from all sin. Thus, in regard both to past and future, sin is put away by the sacrifice of Himself. The completeness of His priestly work is further attested by the fact, triumphantly dwelt on in the lesson, that it is done once

for all, and needs no repetition, and is incapable of repetition, while the world lasts.

II. Christ, as the high priest of the world, passes into heaven for us. The priest's office of old culminated in his entrance into the Holy of Holies, to present the blood of sacrifice. Christ's priesthood is completed by His ascension and heavenly intercession. We necessarily attach local ideas to this, but the reality is deeper than all notions of place. The passage speaks of Jesus as 'entering into the holy place,' and again as entering 'heaven itself for us.' It also speaks of His having entered 'through the greater and more perfect tabernacle,' the meaning of which phrase depends on the force attached to 'through.' If it is taken locally, the meaning is as in chapter 4:14, that He has passed through the [lower] heavens to 'heaven itself'; if it is taken instrumentally (as in following clause), the meaning is that Jesus used the 'greater tabernacle' in the discharge of His office of priest. The great truth underlying both the ascension and the representations of this context is, as verse 24 puts it, that He appears 'before the face of God,' and there carries on His work, preparing a place for us. Further. we note that Jesus, as priest representing humanity, end being Himself man, can stand before the face of God, by virtue of His sacrifice, in which man is reconciled to God. His sinless manhood needed no such sacrifice, but, as our representative, He could not appear there without the blood of sacrifice. That blood, as shed on earth, avails to 'put away sin'; as presented in heaven, it avails 'for us,' being ever present before the divine eye, and influencing the divine dealings. That entrance is the climax of the process by which He obtained 'eternal redemption' for us. Initial redemption is obtained through His death, but the full, perfect unending deliverance from all sin and evil is obtained, indeed, by His passing into the Holy Place above, but possessed in fact only when we follow Him thither. We need Him who 'became dead' for pardon and cleansing; we need Him who is 'alive for evermore' for present participation in His life and present sitting

with Him in the heavenly places, and for the ultimate and eternal entrance there, whence we shall go no more out.

III. Christ, as the high priest of the world, will come forth from the holy place. The ascension cannot end His connection with the world. It carries in itself the prophecy of a return. 'If I go,... I will come again.' The high priest came forth to the people waiting for him, so our High Priest will come. Men have to die, and 'after death,' not merely as following in time, but as necessarily following in idea and fact, a judgment in which each man's work shall be infallibly estimated and manifested. Jesus has died 'to bear the sins of many.' There must follow for Him, too, an estimate and manifestation of His work. What for others is a judgment,' for Him is manifestation of His sinlessness and saving power. He shall be seen, no longer stooping under the weight of a world's sins, but 'apart from sin,' He shall be seen 'unto salvation,' for the vision will bring with it assimilation to His sinless likeness. He shall be thus seen by those that wait for Him, looking through the shows of time to the far-off shining of His coming, and meanwhile having their loins girt and their lamps burning.

Hebrews 10:12—THE ENTHRONED CHRIST

'This man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.' — Hebrews 10:12.

To that tremendous assertion the whole New Testament is committed. Peter, Paul, John, the writer of this book — all teach that the Jesus who died on Calvary now sits at the right hand of God. This is no case of distance casting a halo round the person of a simple teacher, for six weeks after Calvary, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter declared that Jesus, 'exalted at the right hand of God,' had 'shed forth this,' the gift of that Divine Spirit. This is no case of enthusiastic disciples going beyond their Master's teaching, for all the evangelists who record our Lord's trial before the Sanhedrin concur in saying that the turning-point of it, which led to His

condemnation, was the declaration, 'Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power.' The rulers interpreted the assertion to mean an assertion of divinity, and therefore condemned Him to death. Christ was silent, and the silence witnessed that they interpreted His meaning aright. So, then, for good or evil, we have Jesus making the tremendous assertion, which His followers but repeated. Let us try to look at these words, and draw from them some of the rich fulness of their meaning. Communion, calm repose, participation in divine power and dominion, and much besides, are implied in this great symbol. And I desire to dwell upon the various aspects of it for a few moments now.

I. Here we have the attestation of the completeness, the sufficiency, and the perpetuity of Christ's sacrifice.

Look at the context. Mark the strong words which immediately precede the last clause of my text. 'This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.' The writer has just been arguing that all Jewish sacrifice, which he regarded as being of divine- appointment, was inadequate, and derived its whole importance from being a prophetic shadow of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And he points, first, in proof of his thesis, to the entire disparity of the two things — the taking away of sin, and the blood of bulls and of goats. And then he adds a subsidiary consideration, saying in effect, The very fact that day after day the sacrifices are continued, shows that they had no power to do the thing for which they were offered — viz. 'to quiet consciences.' For, if the consciences were quieted, then the sacrifice would cease to be offered. And so he draws a sharp contrast between the priests who stand daily ministering and 'offering oftentimes the same sacrifice,' which by their very repetition are demon-strated to be inadequate to effect their purpose, and Jesus. Instead of these priests standing, offering, and doing over and over again their impotent sacrifices, 'this Man' offered His once. That was enough, and *for ever*. And the token that the one sacrifice was adequate,

really could take away sin, would never, through all the rolling ages of the world's *history*, lose its efficacy, lies here-He sits at the right hand of God.

Brethren, in that session, which the Lord Himself commanded us to believe, is the divine answer and endorsement of the triumphant cry upon the Cross, 'It is finished,' and it is God's last, loudest, and ever-reverberating proclamation to all the world, in all its generations, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

Do you think of Christ's mission and Christ's work as this writer thought of it, finding the vital centre in its sacrificial efficacy, seeing it as being mainly a work caused by, in relation to, and victorious over, man's sin and my sin, and as attested as sufficient for all sin, for the sins of the world, in all generations, by the fact that, having offered it once, the High Priest, as this same writer says in another place, sat at the right hand of God? These two things, the high Scriptural notion of the essential characteristic and efficacy of Christ's work as being sacrificial, and the high Scriptural notion of His present session at the right hand of God; these two things are correlated and bound inseparably together. If you only think of Jesus Christ as being a great teacher, a blessed example, the very flower and crown of immaculate humanity, if you listen to His words, and rejoice over the beauty of His character, but do not see that the thing which He, and He alone, does, is to deal with the tremendous reality of human transgression, and to annihilate it, both in regard of its guilt and of its power, then the notion of His session at the right hand of God becomes surplusage and superstition. But if we see, as I pray God that we may each see for ourselves, that when He came, He 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,' and that even that does not exhaust the significance of His Person, and the purpose of His mission, but that He came 'to give His life a ransom for many,' then, oh! then, when my conscience asks in agony, 'Is there a way of getting rid of my transgressions?' and when my weak will asks, in tremulous indecision, 'Is there a way by which I can

shake off the tyranny of this usurping evil power that has fixed its claws in my character and my habits?' then I turn and look to the Christ enthroned at the right hand of power, and I say, 'This Man has offered one sacrifice for sins for ever'; and there, in that calm session at God's right hand, is the attestation that His sacrifice is complete, is sufficient, and is perpetual.

II. We have here the revelation of our Lord's calm repose.

That is expressed, of course, by the very attitude in which, in the symbol, He is represented. Away down in the Egyptian desert there sit, moulded in colossal calm, two giant figures, with hands laid restfully in their laps, and wide-open eyes gazing out over the world. There they have sat for millenniums, the embodiment of majestic repose. So Christ 'sitteth at the right hand of God' rapt in the fulness of eternal calm. But that tranquillity is parallel with the Scriptural representation of the rest of God after creation, which neither indicates previous exhaustion nor connotes present idleness, but expresses the completion of the work and the correspondence of the reality with the ideal which was in the Maker's mind.

In like manner, as I have been trying to point out to you, Christ's rest means the completeness of His finished work, and carries along with it, as that divine rest after creation does in its region, the conception of continuous activity, for just as little as the continuous phenomena of nature can be conceived of. apart from the immanent activity of the ever-working God, and just as the last word of all physical science is that, beneath the so-called causes and so-called forces there must lie a personal will, the only cause known to man, and preservation is a continuous creation, and the changes in nature are the result of the will of the active God, so the past work of Christ, of which He said, when He died, 'It is finished!' is prolonged into, and carried on through, the ages by the continuous activity of the ever-working Christ. 'He sitteth at the right hand of God'; and to that session may be applied in full truth what He said Himself, in the

vindication of His work on the Sabbath day — ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.’

So the dying martyr looked up in the council chamber, and beyond the vaulted roof saw the heavens opened, and with a significant variation in the symbolical attitude, saw ‘the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ The seated Christ, we might say, had sprung to His feet, in answer to the dying martyr’s faith and prayer, and granted him the vision, not of calm repose, but of intensest activity for his help and sustaining.

The appendix to Mark’s Gospel, in like manner, unites these two conceptions of undisturbed tranquillity and of energetic work. For he says that the Lord ‘was received up into heaven, and sat at the right hand of God, and they went... everywhere preaching the word.’ Then did the Commander-in-chief send His soldiers out into the battlefield, and Himself retire to the safe shelter of the hill? By no means. For the two halves of the picture which look so unlike one another — the Lord seated there, and the servants wandering about and toiling here—are brought together into the one solid reality, ‘they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord’ — seated up yonder — ‘working with them.’ So constant activity is the very essence and inseparable accompaniment of the undisturbed tranquillity of the seated Christ. In other places in Scripture we get the same blending together of the two ideas, as, for instance, when Paul says ‘It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.’ And in like manner, in Peter’s utterance Upon Pentecost, already referred to, you find the same idea. ‘Being at the right hand of God exalted, He hath showed forth this which ye now see and hear.’ So, working with us, working in us, working for us, working through us, the ever active Christ is with His people, and seated at the right hand of God, shares in all their labours, in all their difficulties, in all their warfare.

III. Lastly, we have here the revelation of Christ's participation in divine power and dominion.

There is a very remarkable and instructive variety in the forms of expression conveying this idea in various parts of the New Testament. We read from His own lips, 'seated at the right hand of *power*.' We read usually 'at the right hand of God.' We read in this Epistle 'at the right hand of the Majesty of the Highest,' and also 'at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.' So you see our Lord Himself dwelt mainly on the conception of participation in power. And these other passages which I have quoted deal mainly with the conception of the participation in royal authority and dominion. And these two go together.

Then there is another observation to be made, and that is that this sitting at God's right hand is to be interpreted as purely symbolical. For you cannot localise 'the right hand of God.' That 'right hand' is everywhere, wherever the divine power is working. So that, though I, for my part, believe that the human corporeity of Jesus Christ, with which He ascended into the

heavens, does abide in a locality, it is not that localisation which is meant by this great symbol of my text, but it is the declaration of a state, rather than of a place — participation in the power that belongs to God, and not a session in a given locality.

There is another remark also to be made, and that is that, according to the full-toned belief of the Christian Church when Jesus Christ in His ascension returned to the Father, from whom He had come, He carried with Him this great difference between His then — that is to say, His present — state, and the pre-incarnate state, viz., that now He has carried into unity with the Father the glorified manhood which He assumed on earth, and there is no difference between the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, and the glory in which He now sits. Humanity is thus gathered into divinity.

Now, brethren, I am not going to dwell upon these thoughts, for they go far beyond the powers of my speech; but I am bound by my own conceptions of what Christ Himself has taught us, to reiterate that here we have the plainest teaching, founded on His own express statement, that He is participant of divine fellowship, so close as that it is represented either by being in the bosom of the Father, or by sitting at the right hand of God, and that ‘all power is given unto Him in heaven and on earth,’ so as that He is the Administrator of the universe. The hands that were pierced with the nails, and into one of which was thrust, in mockery, the reed for a sceptre, now carry the sceptre of the universe, and He is ‘King of kings and Lord of lords.’ ‘He sitteth at the right hand of the Throne of the Majesty in the heavens.’

Now all this should have a very strong practical effect upon us. ‘If ye then be risen with Christ, seek the things where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.’ Oh, brethren! if we carried with us day by day into all our difficulties and struggles, and amidst the glittering fascinations and temptations of this earthly life that great thought, and if we kept the heavens open — for we can do so — and keep before our eyes that vision, how small the difficulties, what molehills the mountains, and how void of charm the seducing temptations would then be! Christ seen — like the popular idea of the sunshine streaming down upon a coal fire — puts out the fuliginous flame of earth’s temptations, and dims the kindled brightness of earth’s light. And if we really, and not as a mere dogma, had incorporated this faith into our lives, how different that last moment, and what lies beyond it, would look. I do not know how it may be with others, but to me the conception of eternity is chill and awful and repellent; it seems no blessing to live for ever. But if we people the waste future with the one figure of the living Christ exalted for us, it all becomes different, and, like the sunrise on snowy summits, the chill heights, not to be trodden by human foot, flash up into rosy beauty that draws men’s desires. ‘I go to prepare a place for you’; and He prepares it by being there Himself,

for then, then it becomes Home. ‘And if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you to Myself, that where I am there ye may be also’ — ‘sitting on My throne, as I overcame, and am sat down with My Father on His throne.’

Hebrews 10:14— PERFECTED AND BEING SANCTIFIED

‘By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.’

Hebrews 10:14.

IN the preceding sentence there is another ‘for ever,’ which refers to the sacrifice of Christ, and declares its perpetual efficacy. It is one, the world’s sins are many, but the single sacrifice is more than all of them. It is a past act, but its consequences are eternal, and flow down through all the ages. The text explains wherein consists the perpetual efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice, and the reason why it needs no repetition while the world lasts. It endures for ever, because it has perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

Now, in looking at these words, two things are noteworthy. One is the double designation here of the persons whom Christ influences by His offering, in that they are ‘perfected,’ and in that they are ‘sanctified.’ Another is the double aspect of our Lord’s work here set forth in regard to time, in that it is, in the first part of the sentence, spoken of as a past act whose consequences endure — ‘He *hath* perfected’ — and in the latter part of our text, according to the accurate rendering, it is spoken of as continuous and progressive, as yet incomplete and going on to perfection- For the text ought to read — ‘He hath perfected for ever them that are *being* sanctified.’ So there you have these two things, the double view of what Christ does, ‘perfects’ and ‘sanctifies,’ and the double view of His ‘work, in that in one aspect it is past and complete, and in another aspect it is running on, continuous, and as yet unfinished.

I. First, then, look at the twofold aspect of the effect of Christ's sacrifice.

By it we are 'perfected,' 'sanctified.' Now, these two words, so to speak, cover the same facts, but they look at them from two different points of view. One of them looks at the completed Christian character from the human point of view, and the other looks at it from the divine. For, what does 'perfect' mean in the New Testament? It means, as many a passage might be quoted to show, 'mature,' 'full grown,' in opposition to 'babes in Christ.' This very Epistle uses the two phrases in that antithesis, but the literal meaning of the word is *that which has reached its end*, that which has attained what it was meant to be; and, according to the New Testament teaching, a man is perfected when he has all his capabilities and possibilities of progress and goodness and communion with God made into realities and facts in His life, when the bud has flowered, and the flower has fruited, When capacity is developed, privileges enjoyed, duties attended to, relationships entered into and maintained — when these things have taken place the man is perfect. It is to be observed that there is no reference in the word to any standard outside of human nature. If a man has become all that it is possible for him to be, he is, in the fullest sense, perfect. But Scripture also recognises a relative perfection, as we have already remarked, which consists in a certain maturity of Christian character, and has for its opposite the condition of 'babes in Christ.' So Paul exhorts 'as many as be perfect' to be 'thus minded' — namely, not to count themselves to have apprehended, but to stretch forward to the things which are before, and to press towards the goal which still gleams far in advance.

Consider, *now*, that other description of a Christian character as 'sanctified.'

The same set of facts in a man's nature is thought of in that word, only they are looked at from another point of view. I suppose I do

not need to enlarge upon the fact which, however, I am afraid a great many good people do not realise as they should, that the Biblical notion of ‘saint’ and ‘sanctified’ does not begin with character, but with relation, or, if I might put it more plainly, it does not, primarily and to start with, mean righteous, but ‘belonging to God.’ The Old and the New Testament concur in this conception of ‘sanctity,’ or ‘holiness,’ which are the same thing, only one is a Latin word and the other a Teutonic one — namely, that it starts from being consecrated and given up to *God*, and that out of that consecration will come all manner of righteousness and virtues, beauties of character, and dispositions and deeds which all men own to be ‘lovely... and of good report.’ The saint is, first of all, a man who knows that he belongs to God, and is glad to belong to Him, and then, afterwards, he becomes righteous and pure and radiant, but it all starts with yielding myself to God.

So the same set of characteristics which in the word ‘perfected’ were considered as fulfilling the idea of manhood, as God has given it to us, are massed in this other word, and considered as being the result of our yielding ourselves to Him. That is to say, no man has reached the end which he was created and adapted to reach, unless he has surrendered himself to God. You never be ‘perfected’ until you are ‘sanctified.’

You must begin with consecration, and then holiness of character, and beauty of conduct, and purity of heart will all come after that. It is vain to put the cart before the *horse*, and to try to work at mending your characters, before you have set right your relationship to God. Begin with sanctifying, and you will come to perfecting. That is the New Testament teaching. And there is no way of getting to that perfection except, as we shall see, through the one offering.

II. In the next place notice here the completed work. ‘By one offering He hath "perfected" us, the Christian people of this generation, the Christian people yet to be born into the world, the

men that have not yet learned that they belong to Him, but who will learn it some day. Were they all 'perfected' eighteen centuries ago? In what sense can that perfecting be said to be a past act? Suppose you take some purifying agent, and throw it in at the headwaters of a river, and it goes down the stream, down and down and down, and by degrees purifies it all. If you like to use long-winded words, you can say that 'potentially' the river was purified when the precipitating agent was flung into it, though its waves were still foul with impurity. Or you can put it into plainer English and say that the past act has its abiding consequences, for there has been thrown into the centre of human history, as it were, that which is amply adequate to the 'perfecting' and the 'sanctifying' of every soul of the race. And that is what the writer of this Epistle means when he says 'He hath perfected,' because that sacrifice, like the precipitating agent that I have spoken about, has been flung into the stream of the world's history, and has power to make pure as the dew-drop, or as the water that flows from melting ice, every foul-smelling, darkly dyed drop of the filthy stream.

'By one offering; Now the word that the writer employs there is a very unusual one in Scripture. He has just been using it in a previous verse, where he speaks about 'the offering of the body of Jesus Christ.' Did you ever notice that remarkable expression 'the offering of the *body*,' not as we usually read, the 'blood.' What does that mean? I think it means this, that the writer is contemplating not only the culminating sacrifice of Calvary, but Christ's offering of Himself all through His earthly life; and knitting together in one the life and the death, the totality of His work, as that by which He has 'perfected for ever all them that are being sanctified.' And that, I think, is made quite certain, because he has just been speaking, and the words of my text refer back to the declaration in one of the psalms 'Lo! I come to do Thy will, O God,' as expressing the whole meaning of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That saying of the psalmist was fulfilled not only on the Cross but in all His daily life.

Jesus Christ, then, in His whole manifestation, in His life, but not only in His life; and in His death, but not only in His death, has offered Himself unto God, ‘the Lamb without blemish, and without spot.’ And in that offering culminating in the death upon the Cross, but not confined thereto, there does lie the power which is triumphantly more than adequate to deal with all the foulnesses and sins of the world, and to perfect for ever any man that attaches himself to it. It deals with our guilt as nothing else can. It speaks to our consciences as nothing else can. It takes away all the agony and the pain, or all the dogged deadness, of a seared conscience. It deals with character. In that great offering, considered as including Christ’s life as well as His death, and considered as including Christ’s death as well as His life, you have folded up in indissoluble unity the pattern, the motive, and the power for all righteousness of character; and he reaches the end for which God created him, who, laying his hand on the head of that offering, not only transfers his sins to it, but receives its righteousness into him. By one offering that dealt with guilt, and wiped it all *out*, and that deals with the tyranny of evil, and emancipates us from it, and that communicates to us a new life formed in righteousness after the image of Him that created us, we are delivered from the burden of our sins and perfected, in so far as we lay hold of the power that is meant to cleanse us.

There is no other way of being perfected. You will never reach the point which it is possible for you to attain, and you will never fulfil the purpose for which God made you, unless you have joined yourself by faith to Jesus Christ, and are receiving into your life, and developing in your character, the power which He has lodged in the heart of humanity for redemption and purifying.

III. Now one last word. We have here the continuous and progressive work of Christ, and the growing experience, of Christians.

As I have remarked, the last clause of my text would be more completely rendered if we read, 'them that are being sanctified.' The same idea is set forth by the apostle Paul in that solemn passage in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, where he speaks about the double effect of the gospel upon 'them that are perishing; and on them that are being saved.' In both cases there is a process going on. The same idea is brought out, too, in the other expression in the Acts of the Apostles, about the 'Lord adding to the Church daily,' not, as the Authorised Version has it, 'such as should be saved,' but 'them that were being saved.' We may speak of salvation as past, as all included in the initial act by which we are knit to Jesus Christ through faith, when as guilty sinners we come to Him and cast ourselves on Him. We may speak of salvation as being future, and lying beyond this vale of tears and battlefield of sins and sorrow. But we can speak of it more accurately than in either of these aspects, as a point in the past, prolonged into a line in the present, and running on into the future. For salvation is a process which is going on day by day, if we are right, and which I am afraid is not progressive in a very great many professing Christian people. Perfected, I said, meant full-grown. I wonder about how many of us it would need to be said, 'Ye are babes in Christ, and when for the time ye ought to be teachers ye have need that one teach you which be the first principles of the oracles of God.' Salvation is a progressive process. That is to say, if we are truly joined to Jesus Christ, we are growingly influenced by the powers of His Cross and the gift of His Spirit. There is no limit to that growth. It is like a spiral which goes up and up and up, and in every convolution 'draws nearer to the centre, but never reaches it. Our hearts and spirits are wonderfully elastic. They can take in a great deal more of God than we think they can, or than they ever have taken in. We can receive just as much of that infinite Life into our finite spirits as we will. Let us each strive to get more and more of Jesus Christ in us, that we may know Him, and the 'power of His resurrection, and the

fellowship of His sufferings,' more fully, more deeply, and may keep it more constantly.

Oh, brethren! if we are not ascending the ladder that reaches to heaven, which is Christ Himself, we are descending; and if we are not growing we are dwindling; and if we cannot say that we are being sanctified, we are being made more and more common and profane.

I am not going to say one word about whether absolute perfection or absolute sanctification can be reached in this life. If you and I were many hundreds of miles farther on the road, it would be worth discussing whether we could reach the goal or not. Never mind about the possibilities of abstract and perfect sanctification, we are a good long way off that.

Look after the next step in advance, and leave the ultimate one to take care of itself. Only remember, that whilst Christ's past work has in it perpetual and absolute power to make any man perfect, no man will be sanctified unless he is sanctified by 'faith that is in Me,' and by the effort to work into his life and character the gift of the Divine Spirit and of the life of Christ which he receives by faith. It is 'them that are being sanctified' to whom the large hopes of this great text apply, and who may be sure that one day they will be absolutely perfected.

Hebrews 10:34—A BETTER AND AN ENDURING SUBSTANCE

Knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.' — Hebrews 10:34.

THE words 'in heaven' are probably no part of the original text, but have somehow or other crept in, in order to make more plain what some one supposed to be the reference of these words to the future inheritance of the saints. They, however, rather disturb than help the

writer's thought. He is speaking of a present and not of a future possession. 'Ye have,' and not 'ye shall have,' a better and an 'enduring possession,' not in heaven, but here and now.

But even if these words be expelled from the text as disturbing the writer's thought, there still remains a variation in the reading of some importance. It is a very slight difference of form in the original, but the two meanings between which we have to choose are these: 'Knowing that ye have yourselves as a better and an enduring possession'; or, 'a better and an enduring possession for yourselves.' I am inclined rather to the former of the two, both from external authority and internal congruity, though the choice between them is difficult. But, if we accept this as the meaning of these words, we can gather from them important lessons, of which I ask your consideration.

I. The true possession.

If we adopt the other reading, and take the words to mean that, in so far as we are truly resting on Jesus, we have for ourselves an inheritance or possession better than all external ones, the text will then be pointing to the old thought that God is the true joy and treasure of a man's soul. If, on the other hand, we may venture to adopt the other meaning, there is great depth and beauty in it, representing, as it does, the Christian as having himself as a treasure. It may strike one as strange, but a little consideration will show its truth and perfect harmony with the other thought, that God is the treasure of every soul which is not poor and in need of all things. 'A good man shall be satisfied from himself, says the Book of Proverbs, and that is no arrogant denial of the need for God, but completely accords with the devout acknowledgment, 'All my springs are in Thee.' In the very same chapter as our text we read: 'We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of their souls,' which might be more accurately rendered, 'to the acquisition as their own of their souls.' Remember, too, our

Lord's words: 'In your patience ye shall acquire possession of your souls.' If we take these sayings into account, we need not hesitate to admit that, at all events, there is a great deal to be said for the somewhat remarkable expression in the text.

It just comes to this. No man possesses himself until he has given up himself. We only own ourselves when we have parted with ourselves. Until we have yielded ourselves in acts of dependent faith and rejoicing love and docile obedience unto God, we have no real possession of ourselves. He, and only he, who says, 'I give myself away to Thee,' gets himself back again sanctified, gladdened, ennobled, and on the way to be perfected by his surrender and God's reception.

We own ourselves only on condition of being Christian men. For, under all other circumstances and forms of life, the true self is domineered over and brought into slavery and dragged away from its proper bearings by storms and swarms of lusts and passions and inclinations and ambitions and senses. A man's flesh is his master, or his pride is his master, or some fraction of his nature is his master, and he himself is an oppressed slave, tyrannised over by rebellious powers. The only way to get the mastery of yourselves, to be able to keep a tight hand upon all inferior parts of your nature, and to have that self-command and self-possession without which there is nothing noble in life, is to go to God and say, 'Oh, Lord! I cannot rule this anarchic being of mine. Do Thou take it into Thine hands. Here are the reins: do with me what Thou wilt.' Then you will be your own masters, not till then. Then you will own yourselves; till then, the devil and the world and the flesh, and the poms and prides and passions and lusts and lazinesses that are in your nature will own you. But if we have exercised the faith which casts itself wholly upon God, we therein and thereby win God and our own selves also, and that is one of the meanings of 'saving our own souls.'

Or, to put it in another light, the only things worth calling treasures and possessions are true thoughts that we have learned from God; pure affections that go out to Him; yearning desires after Him, which, in their very yearning, bear the prophecy, and are to a large extent the foretaste, of their own fruition.

These are the things that make a man's treasure. The inner life of obedience, of love, of trust, the conscience cleansed, the will made plastic and docile, the heart filled with all pure and heavenward affections, aspirations that lift us above self and time, and bring us into the sweet and calm light of the Eternal Love whose name is God — these are the possessions which are worth possessing. And he, and only he, has such who has found them in lowly submission of his sinful self to Christ who has died that our spirits might be cleansed and given back unto us.

Brethren, the realisation of this possession of ourselves depends on our faith. Stoics and moralists and lofty souled men in all ages have talked about the true possession of oneself, which comes by self-surrender and annihilation, but Christian faith realises the dream, and they only find the reality who pass towards it through the gate of trust in Jesus Christ. Then, and only then, will the old English poet's lovely picture be fulfilled, and the man's soul

Made free from slavish bands, Of hope to rise, or fear to fall;

*Lord of himself, though not of lands; And having nothing, yet hath
all.'*

II. Note, again, how here we hear asserted the superiority of this possession.

It is 'better' in its essential quality. That does not need many words. Surely these possessions of heart and mind and will and desires all brought into fellowship with and filled by God are things more correspondent with the nature of man and his needs than any accumulation of outward possessions can ever be. And surely it is a

plain piece of prose, and no exaggerated religious enthusiasm, which says, 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee.' Men call it mysticism. It is the very foundation of all true religion. The apprehension of union with God is the one thing that will satisfy the soul; the one thing that we need, without having, we cannot be wholly desolate, however dark may be our path, nor wholly solitary, however lonely may be our lot, nor utterly bereaved, however Blessings may be dragged from our hands; and without which we cannot be at rest, however compassed with stays and succours and treasures and friends; nor rich, however we may have Bursting coffers and all things to enjoy.

The possession which we carry within us is better than any which we can gather round us. 'Surely he is disquieted in vain, he heapeth up treasures' — and the very fact that they need to be 'heaped,' and that that is all that he can do with them, shows the vanity of the disquiet that raked them together. Not what a man has, but what a man is, is his wealth.

And the better treasure is an enduring possession. That is the second element of its excellence. These things, the calm joys, the pure delights of still fellowship with God in heart and mind and will — these things have in them no seed of decay. These cannot be separated from their possessor by anything but his own unfaithfulness. There will never come the time when they shall have to be left behind. Use does not wear these out, but strengthens and increases them. The things which are destined 'to perish with the using' belong to an inferior category. All the best things are intended and destined to increase with the using, and this treasure, the more it is expended the fuller is the coffer, and the more we exercise the love, the communion, the obedience which make our true riches, the more do the riches increase. And then, when all other things drop from their nerveless hands; and 'His glory' — whose glory was in outward things — 'shall not descend after him,' we

shall carry these treasures with us wherever we go, and find that they were the pledge of immortality.

III. My text, lastly, suggests to us the quiet superiority to earthly loss and change which the possession of this treasure involves.

The writer is speaking to Christian men who have endured a great fight of afflictions, and he says of them, 'Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, because you knew that you had this Better and enduring substance.' Joyfully! When you strike away the false props the strength of the real ones becomes more conspicuous. And many and many a time we may experience, unless we waste our discipline and our sorrows, that the surest way to become richer towards God is to lose the earthly stays and supports. But whether that be so or no, he who sits in the centre, and has the light round him, need not mind much what storms are raging without, and he whose inexpugnable fortress is within the depths of God may smile at all the hubbub and confusion down in the valley. If we possess this true treasure which lies at our doors, and may be had for the taking, we shall be like men in some strong fortress, with firm walls, abundant provisions, and a well in the courtyard, and we can laugh at besiegers 'His abiding place shall be the munitions of rooks; his bread shall be given him and his water shall be made sure.' We may be quiet and lofty, infinitely above the fear of chance and change, if we keep the firm hold which we may keep of the enduring riches which God brings with Him into our souls.

Some of you may be in circumstances which make such thoughts as these specially applicable, either because dark days may be threatening, or because the sunshine of prosperity may be dazzling some eyes and making them lose sight of their true wealth. To the one class the thought of my text is gathered up in the warning, 'Charge them that they trust not in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God.' And, to the other class, the text should quicken and consolidate the resolve, 'What time I am afraid I will trust in

Thee. Thou art the strength of my heart, and mine inheritance for ever.’

Hebrews 10:30—HOW TO OWN OURSELVES

‘Them that believe to the saving of the soul.’ — Hebrews 10:30.

THE writer uses a somewhat uncommon word in this clause, which is not altogether adequately represented by the translation ‘saving.’ Its true force will be apparent by comparing one or two of the few instances in which it occurs in the New Testament. For example, it is twice employed in the Epistles to the Thessalonians; in one case being rendered, ‘God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain’ (or, more correctly, to *the obtaining of*) ‘salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ’; and in another, ‘called to the obtaining of glory through Jesus Christ.’ It is employed twice besides in two other places of Scripture, and in both of these it means ‘possession.’ So that, though practically equivalent to the idea of salvation, there is a very beautiful shade of difference which is well worth noticing.

The thought of the text is substantially this — those who believe win their souls; they acquire them for their possession. We talk colloquially about ‘people that cannot call their souls their own.’ That is a very true description of all men who are not lords of themselves through faith in Jesus Christ. ‘They who believe to the gaining of their own souls’ is the meaning of the writer here.

And I almost think that we may trace in this peculiar expression an allusion, somewhat veiled but real, to similar words of our Lord’s. For He said, when, like the writer in the present context, He was encouraging His disciples to steadfastness in the face of difficulties and persecutions, ‘In your patience’ — in your persistent adherence to Me, whatever might draw you away, — ‘ye shall win’ — not merely *possess*, as our Bible has it, and not a commandment, but a promise — ‘in your patience ye shall win your souls.’ Whether that allusion be sustainable or no matters comparatively little; it is the

significant and beautiful thought which underlies the word to which I wish to turn, and to present you with some illustrations of it.

I. First, then, if we *lose* ourselves we *win* ourselves. All men admit in theory that a self-centred life is a blunder. Jesus Christ has all moralists and all thoughtful men wholly with Him when He says, 'He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life shall find it.' There is no such way of filling a soul with enlargement and blessedness and of evolving new powers and capacities as self-oblivion *for* some great cause, for some great love, for some great enthusiasm. Many a woman has found herself when she held her child in her arms, and in the self-oblivion which comes from maternal affections and cares has sprung into a loftier new life. Many a heart, of husband and wife, can set its seal to this truth, that the blessedness of love is that it decentralises the soul, and substitutes another aim for the wretched and narrow one that is involved in self-seeking. And even if we do not refer to these sacred heights of maternal or of wedded love, there are many other noble counterpoises to the do-grading influence of self-absorption, which all men recognise and some men practise. Whoever has once tasted the joy and rapture of flinging himself into some great enthusiasm, and has known how much fuller life is when so inspired than in its ordinary forms, needs no words to convince him that the secret of blessedness, elevation, and power, if it is to be put into one great word, must be put into this one, 'self-oblivion.'

But whilst all these counterpoises to the love of self are, in their measure and degree, great and noble and blessed, not one of them, nor all of them put together, will so break the fetters from off a prisoned soul and let it out into the large place of utter and glad self-oblivion as the course which our text enjoins upon us when it says: If you wish to forget yourselves, to abandon and lose yourselves, fling yourselves into Christ's arms, and by faith yield your whole being, will, trust, purposes, aims, everything — yield them all to

Him; and when you can say, 'We are not our own,' then first will you belong to yourselves and have won your own souls.

There is nothing except that absolute departure from all reliance upon our own poor powers, and from all making of ourselves our centre and aim in life, which gives us true possession of ourselves. Nothing else is comparable to the talismanic power of trust in Jesus Christ. When thus we lose ourselves in Him we *find ourselves*, and find Him in ourselves.

I believe that, at bottom, a life must either spin round on its own axis, self-centred and self-moved, or else it must be drawn by the mass and weight and mystical attractiveness of the great central sun, and swept clean out of its own little path to become a satellite round Him. Then only will it move in music and beauty, and flash back the lustre of an unfading light. Self or God, one or other will be the centre of every human life.

It is well to be touched with lofty enthusiasms; it is well to conquer self in the eager pursuit of some great thought or large subject of study; it is well to conquer self in the sweetness of domestic love; but through all these there may run a perverting and polluting reference to myself. Affection may become but a subtle prolongation of myself, and study and thought may likewise be tainted, and even in the enthusiasm for a great cause there may mingle much of self-regard; and on the whole there is nothing that will sweep out, and keep out, the seven devils of selfishness except to yield yourselves to God, drawn by His mercies, and say, 'I am not my own; I am bought with a price.' Then, and only then, will you belong to yourselves.

II. Secondly if we will take Christ for our Lord we shall be lords of our own souls.

I have said that self-surrender is self-possession. It is equally true that self-control is self-possession; and it is as true about this

application of my text as it was about the former, that Christianity only says more emphatically what moralists say, and suggests and supplies a more efficient means of accomplishing the end which they all recognise as good. For everybody knows that the man who is a slave to his own passions, lusts, or desire is not his own master. And everybody knows that the man who is the sport of circumstance, and yields to every temptation that comes sweeping round him, as bamboos bend before every blast; or the man who is guided by fashion, conventionality, custom, and the influence of the men amongst whom he lives, and whom he calls 'the world,' is not his own master. He 'dare not call his soul his own.'

What do we mean by being self-possessed, except this, that we can so rule our more fluctuating and sensitive parts as that, notwithstanding appeals made to them By external circumstances, they do not necessarily yield to these? He possesses himself who, in the face of antagonism, can do what is right; who, in the face of temptation, will not do what is wrong; who can dare to be in the right with one or two; and who is not moulded By circumstances, howsoever they may influence him, but reacts upon them as a hammer, and is not as an anvil. And this superiority over the parts of my nature which are meant to be kept down, and this assertion of independent power in the face of circumstances, and this freedom from the dominion of cliques and parties and organs of opinion and loud voices round us, this is best secured in its fulness and completeness by the path which my text suggests.

Trust in Jesus Christ, and let Him be your Commander-in-chief, and you have won your souls. Let Him dominate them, and you can dominate them. If you will give your wills into His hands, He will give them back to you and make you able to subdue your passions and desires. Put the reins into Christ's hands and say, 'Here, O Lord, guide Thou the horses and the chariot, for I cannot coerce them, but Thou canst.' Then He will come and bring a new ally in the field, and cast a new weight into the scale, and you will no longer be the

slave of the servile and inferior parts of your nature; nor be kicked about, the football of circumstances; nor be the echo of some other body's views, but you will have a voice of your own, and a will of your own, and a soul of your own, because you have given them to Christ, and He will help you to control them. Such a man — and I verily believe, from the bottom of my heart, such a man only — in the fullest sense, is

'Free from slavish bands, Of hope to rise, or fear to fall;

Lord of himself, though not of lands; And having nothing, yet hath all.'

What does some little rajah, on the edge of our great Indian Empire, do when troubled with rebels whom he cannot subdue? He goes and makes himself a feudatory of the great central power at Calcutta, and then down comes a regiment or two, and makes very short work of the rebellion that the little kingly could do nothing with. If you go to Christ and say to Him, 'Dear Lord, I take my crown from my head and lay it at Thy feet. Come Thou to help me to rule this anarchic realm of my own soul,' you will win yourself.

III. Thirdly, if we have faith in Christ we acquire a better self.

The thing that most thoughtful men and women feel, after they have gone a little way into life, is not so much that they want to possess themselves, as that they want to get rid of themselves — of all the failures and shame and disappointment and futility of their lives. That desire may be accomplished. We cannot strip ourselves of ourselves by any effort. The bitter old past keeps living on, and leaves with us seeds of weakness and memories that sometimes corrupt, and always enfeeble: memories that seem to limit the possibilities of the future in a tragic fashion. Ah, brethren! we can get rid of ourselves; and, instead of continuing the poor, sin-laden, feeble creatures that we are, we can have pouring into our souls the gift most real — though people nowadays, in their shallow religion,

call it mystical — of a new impulse and a new life. The old individuality will remain, but new tastes, new aspirations, aversions, hopes, and capacities to realise them may all be ours, so that ‘if any man be in Christ he is a new creature’; and in barter for the old garment he receives the robe of righteousness. You can lose yourselves, in a very deep and earnest sense, if, trusting in Jesus Christ, you open the door of the heart to the influx of that new life which is His best gift. Faith wins a better self, and we may each experience, in all its fulness and Blessedness, the paradox of the apostle when he *said*, ‘I live’ now, at last, in triumphant possession of this better life: ‘I live’ now — I only existed before — ‘yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.’ And with Christ in me I first find myself.

IV. Lastly, if by faith we win our souls here, we save them from destruction hereafter.

I have said that the word of my text is substantially equivalent to the more frequent and common expression ‘salvation’; though with a shade of difference, which I have been trying to bring Out. And this substantial equivalence is more obvious if you will note that the text is the second member of an antithesis of which the first is, ‘we are not of them which draw back into perdition.’

So, then, the writer sets up, as exact opposites of one another, these two ideas — perdition or destruction on the one hand, and the saving or winning of the soul on the other. Therefore, whilst we must give due weight to the considerations which I have already been suggesting, we shall not grasp the whole of the writer’s meaning unless we admit also the thought of the future. And that the same blending of the two ideas, of possession and salvation in the more usual sense of the word, was implied in the Lord’s saying, of which I have suggested there may be an echo here, is plain if you observe that the version in St. Luke gives the text which I have already quoted: ‘In your patience ye shall win your souls’; and that of St. Matthew, in the same connection, gives, instead, the saying, ‘he that

endureth’ — *which* corresponds with *patience* — ‘he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.’

So, then, brethren, you cannot be said to have won your souls if you are only keeping them for destruction, and such destruction is clearly laid down here as the fate of those who turn away from Jesus Christ.

Now, it seems to me that no fair interpretation can eject from that word ‘perdition,’ or ‘destruction,’ an element of awe and terror. However you may interpret the ruin, it is ruin utter of which it speaks. And I am very much afraid that in this generation eager discussions about the duration of punishment, and the final condition of those who die impenitent, have had a disastrous influence on a great many minds and consciences in reference to this whole subject, by making it rather a subject of controversy than a solemn truth to be pondered. However the controversies be settled, there is terror enough left in that word to make us all bethink ourselves.

I lay it on your hearts, dear friends — it is no business of mine to say much about it, but I lay it on your hearts and on my own; and I beseech you to ponder it. Do not mix it up with wholly independent questions as to what is to become of people who never heard about Jesus Christ. ‘The Judge of all the earth will do right.’ What this verse says applies to people that have heard about Him — that is, to you and me — and to people that do not accept Him — and that is some of us; and about them it says that they ‘draw back unto perdition.’

Now, remember, the alternative applies to each of us. It is a case of ‘either— or’ in regard to us all. If we have taken Christ for our Saviour, and, as I said, put the reins into His hands and given ourselves to Him by love and submission and confidence, then we own our souls, because we have given them to Him to keep, ‘and He is able to keep that which is committed to Him against that day.’

But I am bound to tell you, in the plainest words I can command, that if you have not thus surrendered yourself to Jesus Christ, His sacrifice, His intercession, His quickening Spirit, then I know not where you are to find one foothold of hope that upon you there will not come down the overwhelming fate that is darkly portrayed in that one solemn word.

Oh, brethren! let us all ponder the question, ‘What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?’

Hebrews 11:6—SEEKING GOD

‘He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.’ — Hebrews 11:6.

THE writer has been pointing to the patriarch Enoch as the second of these examples of the power of faith in the Old Covenant; and it occurs to him that there is nothing said in Genesis about Enoch’s faith, so he set about showing that he must have had faith, because he ‘walked with God,’ and pleased Him, and no man could thus walk with God, and please Him, unless he had come to Him, and no man could come to a God in whom he did not believe, and whom he did not believe to be waiting to help and bless him, when he did come. So the facts of Enoch’s life show that there must have been in him an underlying faith. That is all that I need to say about the context of the words before us. I am not going to speak of the writer’s argument, but only of this one aspect of the divine character which is brought out here. ‘He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.’

I. Now a word about the seeking.

Seek?’ Do we need to seek? Not in the way in which people go in quest of a thing that they have lost and do not know where to find. We do not need to search; we do not need to seek.

The beginning of all our seeking is that God has sought us in Jesus Christ, and so we have done for ever with: ‘Oh! that I knew where I might find Him.’ We have done for ever with ‘feeling after Him, if haply we might find Him.’ That is all past. We have to seek, but let us never forget that we must have been found of Him, before we seek Him. That is to say, He must have revealed Himself to us in the fulness and reality and solid certainty of His existence and character, before there can be kindled in any heart or mind the desire to possess Him. He must have flashed His light upon the eye before the eye beholds; and He must have stimulated the desire by the revelation of Himself which comes before all desires, ere any of us will stir ourselves up to lay hold upon God. Ours, then, is not to be a doubtful search, hut a certain seeking, that goes straight to the place where it knows that its treasure is, just as a migratory bird will set out from the foggy and ice-bound shores of the *north*, and go straight through the mists and the night, over continents and oceans, to a place where it never was before, but to which it is led — God only knows how — by some deep instinct, too deep to be an error, and too persistent not to find its resting-place. That is how we are to seek. We are to seek as the flower turns its opening petals to the sunshine, making no mistake as to the quarter of the heaven in which the radiance is lodged. We have to seek, as the rootlet goes straight to the river, knowing where the water is, from which life and sap will come. Thus we have to seek where and what we know. Our quest is no doubtful and miserable hunting about for a possible good, but an earnest desire for a certain and a solid blessing. That is the seeking.

Let us put it into two or three plain words. The prime requisite of the Christian’s seeking after God is as the writer here says, faith, I need not dwell upon that. ‘Must believe that He is’ — yes; of course. We do not seek after negations or hypotheses; we seek after a living Being. ‘And that He is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him’ — yes; if we were not cure that we should find what we wanted, we should never go to look for it. But, beyond all that, let

me put three things as included in, and necessary to, the Christian seeking — desire, effort, prayer. We seek what we desire. But too many of us do not wish God, and would not know what to do with Him if we had Him, and would be very much embarrassed if it were possible for the full blessings which come along with Him, to be entrusted to our slack hands and unloving hearts. Brethren, we call ourselves Christians; let us be honest with ourselves, and rigid in the investigation of the thoughts of our own hearts. Is there a wish for God there? Is there an aching void in His absence, or do we shovel cartloads of earthly rubbish into our hearts, and thus dull desires that can be satisfied only with Him? These are not questions to which any one has a right to expect an answer from another; they are not questions that any Christian man can safely shirk answering to himself and to God. The measure of our seeking is actually settled by the measure of our desire.

Then effort, of course, follows desire as surely as the shadow comes after the substance, because the only purpose of our desires, in the constitution of our nature, is to supply the driving power for effort. They are the steam in the boiler intended to whirl round the wheels. And so for a man to desire a thing that he can do nothing whatever to bring about, is misery and folly. But for a man to desire, and not to work towards fulfilling his desire, is greater misery and greater stupidity. One cannot believe in the genuineness of those devout aspirations that one hears in people's prayers, who get up and wipe the dust off their knees, and go out into the world, and do nothing to bring about the fulfilment of their prayers. There is a great deal of that sort of desire amongst professing Christians in all churches, conventional utterances which are backed up and verified by no corresponding conduct. If we are seeking after God, we shall not let all the seeking effervesce in pious aspirations; it will get consolidated into corresponding action, and operate to keep thought and love directed towards Him, even amidst the trivialities, and legitimate duties, and great things of life. There will be effort to

bring Him into connection with all our work; effort to keep by Him as we go about our daily tasks, if we are truly seeking after God.

And then, desire and effort being pre-supposed, there will come honest prayers, genuine prayers. 'Seek ye the Lord while He may be found,' says the prophet, and immediately goes on to exhort us to 'call upon Him while He is near,' as one and the chief way of seeking Him. He is always near, *closer* to us than friends and lovers, closer to us than our eyes and hands, near in His Son and the Spirit, near to hear and to bless, near and desiring to be nearer, yea to be blended with our being and to dwell in us and we in Him. We have not only to desire His gift, and to work towards it, but to ask for it. Then, if we exercise these three activities of desire, effort, petition, we may truly say: 'When Thou saidst, "Seek ye My face," my heart said unto Thee, "Thy face, Lord! will I seek,"' and may go on, as the psalmist did, to offer the consequent prayer: 'Hide not Thy face from me,' in full assurance that He is found by every seeking soul
So much for the seeking.

II. Now a word about the diligence in seeking.

The writer uses a very strong expression, one word in the original, which is here adequately rendered, 'them that diligently seek Him.' Half-hearted seeking finds nothing. You sometimes say to your children, when you have set them to look for anything, and they come back and say they have not been able to find it, 'You do not know how to seek.' And that is true about a great many of us. Half and half desire, so that one eye is turned on earth, and the other lifted up now and then to heaven, does not bring us much. It will bring a little, but not the fulness of blessing which follows on whole-hearted, continuous, persevering seeking. If you hold a cup below a tap, in an unsteady hand, sometimes it is under the whole rush of the water, and sometimes is on one side, and it will be a long time before you get it filled. There will be much of the water spilled. God pours Himself upon us, and we hold our vessels with unsteady

hands, and twitch them away sometimes, and the bright blessing falls on the ground and cannot be gathered up, and our cup is empty, and our lips parched. Interrupted seeking will find little; perfunctory seeking will find less. Conventional religion brings very little blessing, very little consciousness of the presence of God; and that is why so many who call themselves Christians, and are *so*, in a measure and in a sense, know so little of the joy of being found of God. They have sought but not sought diligently.

Now let us take the rebuke to ourselves, if we need it, and we all need it more or less. It is a very threadbare piece of Christian counsel, to be earnest in our seeking after God, but it is none the less needed because it is threadbare, and it would not be threadbare if it had not been so much needed. ‘They that search *diligently*’ — *which* is the real meaning of the words in the Book of Proverbs rendered, ‘they that seek Me *early*’ — ‘shall find Me.’

III. So this brings me to the last thing here, the Rewarder and the reward.

‘He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.’ The best reward of seeking is to find the thing that you are looking for. So the best reward that God, the Rewarder, gives is when He gives Himself. There are a great many other good things that come to the diligently seeking Christian soul, but the best thing is that God draws near. Enoch sought God, came to God, and so he walked with God. The reward of his coming was continuous, calm communion, which gave him a companion in solitude, and one to walk at his side all through the darkness and the roughnesses, as well as the joys and the smoothnesses, of daily life.

Ah, brethren! there is no reward comparable to the felt presence in our own quiet hearts of the God who has found us, and whom we have found. And if we have that, then He becomes, here and now, the reward of the diligent search, and the reward of it to, day carries in itself the assurance of the perfect reward of the coming time. ‘He

walked with God, and... God took him.’ That will be true of all of us. There is only one seeking in life that is sure to result in the finding of what we seek. All other search — the quest after the chief good — if it runs in any other direction, is resultless and barren. But there is one course, and one only, in which the result is solid and certain. ‘I have never said to any of the seed of Jacob, seek ye My face in vain.’ If we seek He will be found of us, and so be our Rewarder and our reward.

Hebrews 11:7—NOAH’S FAITH AND OURS

‘By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet. moved with fear, In. patrol an ark to the saving of his house.’ — Hebrews 11:7.

THE creed of these Old Testament saints was a very short *one*, and very different from ours. Their faith was the very same. It is the great object of the writer of this Epistle, in this magnificent catalogue of the heroes of the faith, the muster roll of God’s great army, to establish the principle that from the Beginning there has only been one kind of religion, only one way to God and that, however rudimentary and brief the articles of belief in those early days, the faculty by which these far-away believers lay hold on them, and its practical issues, were identical in them and in us, And that is a principle well worth getting into our minds, that the scope of the creed has nothing to do with the essence of the faith.

So we may look at this instance and discern in it. beneath all superficial differences, the underlying identities, and take this dim, half-intelligible figure of Noah, as he stands almost on the horizon of history, as being an example for us, in very vivid fashion, of the true object of faith, its operation in a two-fold fashion, and its vindication.

I. Look first at Noah’s faith in regard to its object. If we think of the incident brought before us in these words, we shall see how the

confidence with which Noah laid hold of a dim future, about which he knew nothing, except Because God had spoken to him, was, at bottom, identical with that great attitude of the soul which we call faith, as it is exercised towards Jesus Christ.

No doubt in this Epistle to the Hebrews, the aspect of faith by which it lays hold of the future and the unseen, is the one on which the writer's mind is mainly fixed. But notice, that whilst the near object, so to speak, to which Noah stretched out his hands, and of which he laid hold, was that coming catastrophe, with its certainties of destruction and of deliverance; there was only one reason why he knew anything about that, and there was only one reason why he knew or believed anything about it, and that was because he believed Him who had told him. So, at bottom, God who had revealed the unseen future to him was the object of his faith. He trusted the Person, therefore he believed in that Person's word, and therefore he had the assured realisation of things not seen as yet; and the future, so dim and

uncertain to unaided eyes, became to him as certain as the past, and expectation as reliable as memory. His faith grasped the invisible things to come, only because it grasped the Invisible Person, who was, is, and is to come, and who lifted for him the curtain and showed him the things that should be. So is it with our faith; whether it lays hold upon a past sacrifice on Calvary, or upon a present Christ dwelling in our hearts, or whether it becomes telescopic, and stretches forward into the future, and brings the distant near, all its various aspects are but aspects of one thing, and that is personal trust in the personal Christ who speaks to us. What he says is a matter of secondary importance in this respect. The contents of God's revelation vary; the act by which man accepts them is always the same.

So the great question for us all is — do we trust God? Do we believe Him, and therefore accept His words, not only with the assent of the

understanding, which of all idle things is the idlest, but do we believe Him, revealing, commanding, promising, threatening, with the trust and affiance of our whole hearts? Then, and then *only*, can we look with quiet certainty into the dim future, which else is all full of rolling clouds, that sometimes shape themselves to our imaginations into the likeness of stable things, but alas! change and melt while we gaze. Only then can we front the solemn future, and say: 'I do not expect only, I know what is there.' My brother, if our faith is worth calling faith at all, it rests so absolutely and confidingly upon God, that His bare word becomes to us the infallible source of certitude with regard to all the shifting hours of time, and to the steadfast day of an eternity, whose change is blessed growth to an un-reached and undeclining noon.

And what was the future that loomed before this man? The coming of a destruction as certain as God, and the coming of a deliverance as complete as His love could make it. Never mind although Noah's outlook related but to a temporary catastrophe, and ours has reference to an eternal condition of things. That is a difference of no real moment. We have what Noah had, a definite, divine utterance, as the source of all our knowledge of what is coming. Both are alike in having two sides, one dark and menacing with a certain destruction, the other radiant and lustrous with as certain a deliverance. And now the question for each of us is, do I so believe God that that future is to me what it was to this man — far more real than these fleeing illusions that lie nearer me?

When Noah walked the earth and saw his contemporaries busy with buying and selling, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage, how fantastic and unreal their work must have seemed to him, when behind them he saw blazing a vision, which he alone of all that multitude believed. Do not let us fancy that we have faith if these near trifles are to us the great realities, and the distance is dim, and unsubstantial, and doubtful, hidden in mist and forgotten. The years that stretched between the divine utterance and its

fulfilment were to this man as nothing, and *for* him the unseen was the reality, and the seen was the shadowy and phantasmal. And that is what faith worth calling the name will always do for men. Ask yourselves the question if your dim apprehension of that future, in either of its aspects, is anything so vivid as the certitude which blazed ever before the eye of this man. One of our old English writers says, 'If the felicities of another world were as closely apprehended as the joys of this, it were martyrdom to live.' That may be an exaggeration, but surely, surely there is something wrong in men who call themselves believers in God and His word, to whom the things seen and temporal are all or nearly all important, and the trifles an inch from their eyes are big enough to shut out heaven and all its stars.

II. Still further, notice Noah's faith in its practical effects.

If faith has any reality in us at all, it works. If it has no effect it has no existence. The writer points out two operations of this confidence in God which, through belief in His word, leads to a realisation of a remote and unseen future. The effects are two-fold; First on Noah's disposition, faith produced appropriate emotion, excited by the belief in the coming deluge; he was 'moved with fear.' Then, secondly, through emotion, faith influenced conduct — he 'prepared an ark.' This is the order in which faith ever works.

If real and strong, it will first affect emotion. By 'fear' here we are not merely to understand, though possibly it is not to be excluded, a dread of personal consequences, but much rather the sweet and lofty emotion which is described in another part of this same book by the same word: 'Let us serve Him with reverence and with godly fear.' It is the fear of pious regard, of religious awe, of reverence which has love blended inseparably with it, and is not merely a tremulous apprehension of some mischief coming to me. Noah had no need for that self-regarding 'fear,' inasmuch as one half of his knowledge of the future was the knowledge of his own absolute safety. But

reverence, the dread of going against his Father's will, lowly submission, and all analogous and kindred sentiments, are expressed by the word.

Such holy and blessed emotion, which has no torment, is the sure result of real faith. Unless a man's faith is warm enough to melt his heart, it is worth very little. A faith unaccompanied by emotion is, I was going to say worse, at any rate it is quite as bad, as a faith which is all wasted in emotion. It is not a good thing when all the steam roars out through an escape pipe; it is perhaps a worse thing when there is no steam in the boiler to escape. It is easy for people that have not any religion to scoff at what they suppose to be the fanatical excess of emotion which some forms of religious belief develop, I, for my part, would rather have the extremest emotion than a dead cold orthodoxy, that believes everything and feels nothing. There is some hope in the one; the other is only fit to be buried. Do not be afraid of feeling which is the child of faith. Be very much more afraid of a religion that leaves your heart beating just exactly at the same rate that it did before you took the truth into it. I am very, very sure that there is no road, between a man's faith and his practice, except through his heart, and that, as the Apostle has it in a somewhat different form of speech, meaning, however, the same thing that I am now insisting upon, 'faith worketh by love.' Love is the path through which creed travels outward to conduct.

So we come to the second and more remote effect of faith. Emotion will lead to action. 'Moved with fear he prepared an ark.' If emotion be the child of faith, conduct is the child of emotion. Noah's faith, then, led him to a line of action that separated him from the men around him; and it led him to a protracted labour in preparation for a remote end, for the coming of which he had no guarantee except what he believed to be God's word.

Commentators calculate that there were a hundred and twenty years between the time of the divine command and the Flood. Think of

how this man, for all that long while, set himself to his task, and how many clever speeches would be made, proving that he was a fool, and how many witty gibes would come showering around his head like hail. But he kept steadily on, on a line of conduct which made him singular, and which had regard only to that result a hundred and twenty years off.

Now, is that what you and I are doing? Does our faith so shape our lives that whatever we are about, there is still regard to that far-off future? If you meet a man in the street, hurrying somewhere to welcome a friend expected to arrive from a far-off land, and you detain him in conversation, as you speak he is impatient, keeps looking over your shoulder down the road to see if there is any sign of his coming. That is how we should be acting here — doing our work and sticking to our tasks, but ever letting expectation and desire carry us onwards to that great future, which has already set out from the throne in Eternity, and is speeding towards us even now. Let that future, dear brethren, stand so clear before each of us, that it shall shape our whole work in the present. We shall mould all our lives with reference to it, if we are wise. For what we make our present, that will our future be. The smaller ends for which men live, and the nearer futures which they struggle *towards*, lose no jot of their worth by being regarded as but means to that far greater end. Rather, time is only redeemed from triviality, when it is seen to be the preparation for eternity, and earth is never so fair and good as when we discern and use it as the vestibule of heaven Never mind being singular. He is the wise man whose vision reaches as far as his existence, and whose earthly life has for the end of its effort, to please Christ and be found in Him.

III. And *so*, lastly, let me point to Noah's faith, in regard to its vindication.

'He condemned the world.' 'The world' thought him wasting life foolishly. No doubt there were plenty of witty and wise things said

about him. ‘Prudent, far-sighted, practical men’ would say, ‘How fanatical! What a misuse of energies and opportunities’; and so forth. And then, one morning, the rain began, and continued, and for forty days it did not stop, and they began to think that perhaps, after all, there was some method in his madness. Noah got into his ark, and still it rained, and I wonder what the wits and ‘practical men,’ that had treated the whole thing as moonshine and folly, thought about it all then, with the water up to their knees. How their gibes and jests would die in their throats when it reached their lips!

And so, my dear friends, the faith of the poor, ignorant old woman that up in her garret lives to serve Jesus Christ, and to win an eternal crown, will get its vindication some day, and it will be found out then which was the ‘practical’ man and the wise man, and all the witty speeches and smart sayings will seem very foolish, even to their authors, when the light of that future shines on them. And the old word will come true once more, that the man who lives for the present, and for anything bounded by Time, will have to ‘leave it in the midst of his days,’ and ‘at his latter end shall be a fool,’ whilst the ‘foolish’ man who lived for the future, when the future has come to the present, and the present has dwindled away into the past, and sunk beneath the horizon, shall be proved to be wise, and shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.

Hebrews 11:9, 10—THE CITY AND THE TENT

‘Dwelling in tabernacles..., for he looked for a city.’ — Hebrews 11:9, 10.

THE purpose of the great muster-roll of the ancient heroes of Judaism in this chapter is mainly to establish the fact that there has never been but one way to God. However diverse the degrees of knowledge and the externals, the essence of religion has always been the same. So the writer of this Epistle, to the great astonishment, no doubt, of some of the Hebrews to whom it was addressed, puts out his hand, and claims, as Christians before Christ,

all the worthies of whom they were nationally so proud. He is speaking here about the three patriarchs. Whether he conceives them to have all lived on the earth at one time or no, does not trouble us at all 'By faith,' says he, 'Abraham sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise,' because, 'he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whom builder' — or rather Architect — 'and maker' — or rather *Builder* — 'is God.'

Now, of course, the writer gives a considerable extension of the meaning to the word 'faith'; and in his use one aspect of it is prominent, though by no means exclusively so — viz., the aspect which looks to the unseen and the future, rather than that which grasps the personal Christ. But this is no essential difference from the ordinary New Testament usage; it is only a variation in point of view, and in the prominence given to an element always present in faith. What he says here, then, is substantially this — that in these patriarched lives we get a picturesque embodiment of the essential substance of all true Christian living, and that mainly in regard of two points, the great object which should fill mind and heart, and the consequent detachment from transitory things which should be cultivated. 'He looked for a city,' and *so* he was contented to dwell in a movable tent. That is an emblem containing the essence of what our lives ought to be, if we are truly to be Christian. Let us, then, deal with these two inseparable and indispensable characteristics of the life of faith.

I. Faith will behold the Unseen City, and the vision will steadfastly fill mind and heart.

As I have remarked, the conception of faith presented in the Epistle is slightly different from that found in other parts of the New Testament. It is

but slightly different, *for*, whether we say that the object of our faith is the Christ, 'Whom having not seen we love; in whom, though

now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice,' or whether we say that it is the whole realm and order of things beyond the grave and above the skies where He is and which He has made our native land, makes in reality very little difference. We come at last to the thought of personal reliance on Him by whose word and by whose resurrection and ascension only we apprehend, and by whose grace and power and love only we shall ever possess that unseen futurity. So we may fairly say that whilst, no doubt, it is true that the living Christ Himself — and no heaven apart from Him, nor any future apart from Him, nor any thing of His, apart from Him, though it be a cross, but the living Christ Himself is the true object of faith, yet that conception of its object includes the view of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the 'city which has the foundations,' should, because it is all clustered round Him who is its King, Be the object that fills our minds and hearts.

I am not going to discuss the details of what this writer supposes to have been the animating principle and aim of that ancient patriarch's life. It matters nothing at all for the power of his example whether we suppose that Abraham looked forward to the realisation of this unseen ideal city in this life or *no*, for the effect of it upon him would be exactly the same whichever of the two alternatives may have been the case. It matters nothing as to whether Abraham believed in the realisation in that land over which he wandered, of the perfect order of things, or whether he had caught some glimpse, which is very unlikely, of it as reserved for a future beyond the grave. In either case, he lived for and by an unseen and future condition of things. It is beautiful to notice how the writer here, in his picturesque and simple words, puts many blessed ideas as to that future.

We may, perhaps, make these a little more clear, but I am afraid we shall make them much more weak, by taking them out of the metaphorical form.

‘The City’ — then there is only one. ‘The *City*’ — then the object of our hope, ought to be, and is, if we understand it aright, a perfect society, in which the ‘sojourners and pilgrims,’ like the patriarch, and his little band of children and attendants, who wandered lonely up and down the world, will all be gathered together at last; and, instead of the solitude of the march, and the undefended weakness of the frail encampment, there will be the conjoined gladness and security of an innumerable multitude. ‘The City’ is the perfection of society, and all of us who live in the world, alone after all communion, and separated from each other by the awful mystery of personal being, and by many another film beside, may hope to understand, as we never shall do here, what the meaning of the little word ‘together’ is when we get there. ‘He looked for the city.’

‘The city which hath the foundations’ — then the object of faith is a stable thing, which knows no fluctuations, feels no changes, fears no assault, can never be subjected to violence, nor ever crumple into dust. ‘The city which’ hath the foundations’ — here and now we have to build, if we build at all, more or less like the foolish man in the Master’s parable, upon sand. It is the condition of our earthly life. We have to accept, and to make the best of it. But, oh! those who have learned most the agony of change and the misery of uncertainty are those who have been best disciplined to grasp at and lay up in their hearts the large consolation and encouragement hived in that designation, ‘the city which hath *the* foundations.’

The city, ‘whose *Architect*’ — *for* the word rendered ‘Builder’ should be so translated — ‘is God.’ It is the accomplishment of His plan, which, in modern language, is called the realisation of His ideal. I like the old-fashioned Biblical language better — ‘the city whose Architect is God.’ He planned, and, of course, there follows upon that ‘whose Maker or actual Builder is’ — the same as the Planner. Architects put their drawings into the hands of rude workmen, and no completed work of man’s hands corresponds to

the fair vision that dawned on its designer when it took definite shape in His mind.

That is another of the laws of our earthly life which we have to make the best of — that we design grand buildings when we begin, and, when we have finished our lives, and look back upon what we have built, it is a mean and incomplete structure at the best. But God's working drawings get built; His plans are all wrought out in an adequate material; and everything that was in the divine mind once exists in outward fact in that perfect future.

So, inasmuch as the city is a state of perfect society, of stability, is planned by God, and brought about by Him at last, it is to be possessed by us on condition of fellowship with Him. Does it not seem to you to be infinitely unimportant whether this old patriarch thought that what he was looking for was to be builded upon the hills and plains of Canaan or not? That he had the vision is the thing. Where it was to be accomplished was of small moment. We do not know where the vision is to be accomplished any more than Abraham did. We do not know whether here, on this old earth, renovated by some cosmic change, or whether in some region in space, though beyond the stars, perfected spirits shall dwell, and it does not matter. That we should have the vision is the main thing. The where, the when, the how of its fulfilment are of no manner of practical importance, and people who busy themselves about such questions, and think that therefore they are cultivating the spirit that my text suggests, make a woful mistake.

But let me press on you, dear brethren, this one simple thought, that the average type of Christian life and experience to-day is wofully lacking in that clear vision of the future. Partly it comes, I suppose, from certain peculiarities in the trend of thought and way of looking at things that are fashionable in this generation. We hear so much about Christianity as a social system, and about what it is going to do in this world, which perhaps it was necessary should be stated

very emphatically, in order to counterpoise the too great silence upon such subjects in past times, that preaching about the future life strikes a hearer as unfamiliar, and probably some Of my audience have been feeling as if I were carrying them into misty regions far away from, and little related to, the realities of life. But, dear brethren, from my heart I believe that one very operative cause of the undeniable feebleness of Christian life, which is so largely manifested round us — and it is for each of us to say whether we participate in it — is due to this, that, somehow or other, there has come in the mind of great masses of Christian people a fading away of that blessed vision of the city, for which we ought to live. You scarcely hear sermons nowadays about the blessedness of a future life. What you hear about it is, how well for this life it is to be a Christian man.

No doubt godliness ‘hath promise of the life that now is,’ and that side of the gospel cannot be too emphatically set forth. But it may be disproportionately presented, as I venture to think that, on the whole, it is being presented now. Therefore there is the more need for consciously endeavouring to cultivate the habit of looking beyond the mists Of the present to the gleaming battlements and spires of the city. Let us polish the glasses of our telescopes, and use them not only for distances on earth’s low levels, but to bring the stars nearer. So shall we realise more of the present good and power of faith, when it is allowed its widest and noblest range.

II. Faith consequently leads to willing detachment from the present order of offerings.

‘He dwelt in tabernacles,’ that is, he lived a nomad life in his tents. He and his son and grandson — three generations of long lived — proved the depth, solidity, and practical power of their faith in the promise of the city by the remarkable persistence of their refusal to be absorbed in the settled population of the land. Recent discoveries have shown us, and discoveries still to be made, I have no doubt,

will show still more, what a highly organised and developed civilisation prevailed in Canaan when these wanderers from the East came into it, with their black camels'-hair tents. They were almost as much out of place, and as noticeably unique, by such a life in Canaan then, as gypsies are in England, and the reason why they would not go into Hebron, or any other of the populous cities which were closely studded in the land, was that 'they looked for the City.' It was better for them to dwell in tents than in houses.

The clear vision of that great future impresses on us the transiency of the present. We shall know that what we live in is but as a tent that is soon to be struck, even while some of our fellow-lodgers may fancy it to be a house that will last for ever.

The illusion of the permanence of this fleeting show creeps over us all, in spite of our better knowledge, and has to be fought against. The world, though it seems to be at rest, is going faster than any of the objects in it which are known to be in motion. We are deceived by the universality of the movement of which all things partake, and to us it seems rest. If there comes friction, and now and then a collision, we find out how fast we are going. And then there come misery, and melancholy, and lamentations about the brevity of life, and the awfulness of change, and all these other commonplaces that are the stock-in-trade of poetasters, but which cut with such surprise and agony into our own hearts when we experience them.

But, brethren, to be convinced of the transiency of life, by reason of the clearness of the vision of the permanence of the heavens, is blessedness and not misery, and is the only way by which a man can bear to say to himself, 'My days are as a hand-breadth,' and not fling down his tools and fall into sadness, from feeling that life is as futile as frail. To recognise that nothing continues in one stay, and to see nothing else that is permanent, is the greatest misery that is laid upon man. But to feel, 'Thou art from everlasting to everlasting, and Thy kingdom endureth through all generations and I belong to it,'

makes us regard with equanimity, and sometimes with solemn satisfaction, the passing away of all the transient, 'that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.' 'He looked for a city'; so, 'he dwelt in tents.'

There is another side to that thought. The clear vision of that permanent future will detach us from the perishable present.

Now many difficult questions arise as to how far Christians should hold aloof from the order of things in which they dwell: and to a very large extent the application of the principle in detail must be left to each man for himself, in the presence of God. But this I am quite sure of, that in this generation the average Christian has a great deal more need to be warned against too great intermingling with than against too great separation from the present world. Abraham sets us an example beautifully comprehensive. He held cordial relations with the people amongst whom he dwelt. He was honoured by them as a prince; he was recognised by them as a servant of God. They knew his bravery. He did not scruple to draw the sword, and to fight in defence, not only of his kinsmen but of his heathen neighbours in Sodom. And yet nothing would induce him to come down from his tent, beneath the terebinth tree of Mamre, in the uplands. Everybody knew that his name was Abraham the Hebrew — the man from the other side. He carried out that name in his life.

Now, I am not going to lay down hard and fast rules — conventional regulations are the ruin of principles. But let us ask ourselves, 'Would anybody call me "the man from the other side," the man who belongs to another set of things altogether than this?' We have to work in the world; to trade in the world; to try to influence the world; to draw many of our enjoyments from it, in common with those who have no other enjoyments than those drawn from it. Of course, there is a great tract of ground common to the men of faith and the men of sense, and I am not urging false aloofness from any occupation, interest, duty, or enjoyment. But

what I say is that, if we have the vision of the city clear before us, there will be no need to tell us not to make our home in Hebron or in Sodom.

Lot went down there when he had his choice — and he got what he wanted, pasturage for his cattle. But he also got what he did not want, destruction, and he lost what he did not care to keep, his share in the city. Abraham stayed on the heights, and up there he kept God, and a good conscience. Probably he did not make so much money as Lot did. Very

likely Lot's flocks and herds were larger than his uncle's. But the one man from his height, through the clear air, could see far away the sparkling of the turrets of the city; and the other, down in the hot, steaming plains of Sodom, could see nothing but Sodom and the mountains behind it, Better to live on the heights with Abraham and God than down below with Lot, and wealth, and subterranean brimstone, and naphtha fires ready to burst forth. 'He looked for the city,' 'he dwelt in tents.'

Hebrews 11:13 — THE ATTACHMENTS AND DETACHMENTS OF FAITH

'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seem them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.' — Hebrews 11:13 (R.V.).

THE great roll-call of heroes of faith in this grand chapter goes upon the supposition that the living spirit of religion was the same in Old and in New Testament times. In both it was faith which knit men to God. It has often been alleged that that great word *faith* has a different signification in this Epistle from that which it has in the other New Testament writings. The allegation is largely true; in so far as the things Believed are concerned they are extremely different; but it is not true in so far as the person trusted, or in so far

as the act of trusting are concerned. These are identical. It was no mere temporal and earthly promise on which the faith of these patriarchs was builded. They looked indeed for the land, but in looking for the land, they looked ‘for the city which hath foundations’; and their future hopes had the same dim haze of ignorance, and the same questions unresolved about perspective and relative distances which our future hopes have; and their faith, whatever were its contents, was fundamentally the same out of a soul casting itself upon God, which is the essence of our faith in the Divine Son in whom God is made manifest. So with surface difference there is a deep-lying absolute oneness in the faith of the Old Testament and ours, in essential nature, in the Object which they grasp, and in their practical effects upon life.

Therefore, these words of my text, describing what faith did for the world’s grey forefathers, have a more immediate bearing upon us than at first sight may appear, and may suggest for us some thoughts about the proper, practical issues of Christian faith in our daily lives.

I. I take two or three of the points which come most plainly out from the words before us, and ask you to notice, in the first place, how faith fills eye and heart with the future.

You will have observed that I have read my text somewhat differently from the form which it assumes in our Authorised Version. Observe that the words ‘And were persuaded of them,’ in our Old Version are a gloss, — no part of the original text. Observe, further, that the adverb ‘afar off’ is intended to apply to both the clauses: ‘Having seen them,’ and ‘embraced them.’ And that, consequently, ‘embraced’ must necessarily be an inadequate representation of the writer’s idea; for you cannot embrace a thing that is ‘afar off’; and to ‘embrace the promises’ was the very thing that these men did not do. The meaning of the word is here not embraced, but *saluted or greeted*; and the figure that lies in it is a very beautiful one. As some traveller topping the water-shed may

see far off the white porch of his home, and wave a greeting to it, though it be distant, while his heart goes out over all the intervening, weary leagues; or as some homeward-bound crew catch, away yonder on the horizon, the tremulous low line that is home, and welcome it with a shout of joy, though many a billow dash and break between them and it, these men looked across the weary waste, and saw far away; and as they saw their hearts went out towards the things that were promised, because they 'judged Him faithful that had promised.' And that is the attitude and the act which all true faith in God ought to operate in us.

So, then, here are two things to think about for a moment. One, Faith's vision; the other, Faith's greeting.

People say, 'Seeing is believing.' I should be disposed to turn the aphorism right round, and to say, 'Believing is seeing.' For there is a clearer insight, and a more immediate, direct contact with the thing beheld, and a deeper certitude in the vision of faith than in the poor, purblind sight of sense, all full of illusions, and which has no real possession in it of the things which it beholds. The sight that faith gives is solid, substantial, clear, certain. If I might so say, the true exercise of faith is to stereoscope the dim ghostlike realities of the future, and to make them stand out solid in relief there before us. And he who, clasping the hand, and if I might so say, looking through the eyes, of God, sees the future, in humble acceptance of His great words of promise, in some measure as God sees it — has a source of knowledge, clear, immediate, certain, which sense with its lies and imperfections, is altogether inadequate even to symbolise. The vision of Faith is far deeper, far more real, far more correspondent to the realities, and far more satisfying to the eye that gazes, than is any of the sight of sense. Do not you be deceived or seduced by talk that assumes to be profound and philosophical, into believing that when you venture your all upon God's word, and doing so say, 'I know, and behold mine inheritance,' you are saying more than calm reason and common-sense teaches us. We have the

thing, and we see it, if we believe Him that in His word shows it to us, Well, then, still further, there is suggested that this vision of faith, with all its blessed clearness and certitude and sufficiency, is not a direct perception of the things promised, but only a sight of them in the promise. And does that make it less blessed? Does the astronomer, who sits in his chamber, and when he would most carefully observe the heavens, looks downwards on to the mirror of the reflecting telescope that he uses, feel that he sees the starry lights less clearly and less really than when he gazes up into the abyss itself and sees *them* there? Is not the reflection a better and a more accurate source of knowledge for him than even the direct observation of the sky would be? And so, if we look down into the promise, we shall see, gleaming and glittering there, the starry points which are the true images adapted to our present sense and power of reception of the great invisible lights above. God be thanked that faith looks to the promises and not to the realities, else it were no more faith, and would lose some of its blessedness.

And then, still further, let me remind you that this vision of faith varies in the measure of our faith. It is not always the same. Refraction brings up sometimes, above the surface of the sea, a spectral likeness of the opposite shore, and men stand now and then upon our southern coasts, and for an hour or two, in some conditions of the atmosphere, they see the low sandhills of the French or the Belgian coast, as if they were at arm's length. So faith, refracting the rays of light that strike from the Throne of God, brings up the image, and when it is strong the image is clear, and when it flags the image 'fades away into the light of common day'; and where there glowed the fair outlines of the far-off land, there is nothing but a weary wash of waters and a solitary stretch of sea.

My brother! do you see to it that this vision of faith is cultivated by you. It is hard to do. The pressure of the present is terribly strong; the chains of sense that hold us are very adamant and thick; but still it is possible for us to cultivate the faculty of beholding, and to

train the eye to look into that telescope that pries into distant worlds, and brings eternal glories near. No pair of eyes can look the one at a thing near, and the other at a thing afar off; at least if they do the man squints. And no soul can look so as to behold the unseen glories if its eye be turned to all these vanities here. Do- you choose whether you shall, like John Bunyan's man with the muckrake, have your eyes fixed upon the straws and filth at your feet, or whether you will look upwards and see the crown that is glittering there just above your head, and ready to drop upon it. 'These all in faith saw the promises.'

Yes! And when they saw them they greeted them. Their hands and their hearts went out, and a glad shout came to their lips as they beheld the fair vision of all the wonder that should be. And so faith has in it, in proportion to its depth and reality, this going out of the soul towards the things discerned. They draw us when we see them.

One of our seventeenth-century prose writers says: — 'Were the happiness of the next world as closely apprehended as felicities of this, it were a martyrdom to live.' It is true. If we see, we cannot choose but love. Our vision will break into desire, and to behold is to yearn after. Oh, Christian men and women! do we know anything of that going out of the soul, in a calm transport of deliberate preference to the things that are unseen and eternal. It is a sharp test of the reality of our Christian profession; do not shrink from applying it to yourselves.

II. And now in the next place, we see here how faith produces a sense of detachment from the present.

'They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.' The writer is, no doubt, referring to the words of Abraham when he stood up before the Hittites, and asked for a bit of ground to lay his Sarah in — 'I am a stranger and a sojourner with you'; and also to Jacob's words to Pharaoh, 'The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years.' These utterances revealed the spirit

in which they looked upon the settled order in the midst of which they dwelt, They felt that they were not of it, but belonged to another.

Now there are two different kinds of consciousness that we are strangers and sojourners here. There is one that merely comes from the consideration of the natural transiency of all earthly things, and the shortness of human life. There is another that comes from the consciousness that we belong to another kingdom and another order. A 'stranger' is a man who, in a given constitution of things, in some country with a settled government, owes allegiance to another king, and belongs to another polity. A 'pilgrim' or a 'sojourner' is a man who is only in the place where he now is for a little while. So the one of the two words expresses the idea of belonging to another state of things, and the other expresses the idea of transiency in the present condition.

But the true Christian consciousness of being 'a stranger and a sojourner' comes, not from any thought that life is fleeting and ebbing away, but from the better and more blessed operation of the faith which reveals the things promised, and knits me so closely to them that I cannot but feel separated from the things that are round about me. Men who live in mountainous countries, be-it Switzerland, or the Highlands, or anywhere else, when they come down into the plains, pine and fade away sometimes, with the intensity of the 'Heimweh,' the homesickness which seizes them. And we, if we are Christians, and belong to the other order of things, shall feel that this is not our native soil, nor here the home in which we would dwell Abraham could not go to live in Sodom, though Lot went; and he and his son and grandson kept themselves outside of the organisation of the society in the midst of which they dwelt, because they were so sure that they belonged to another. Or, as the context puts it, they 'dwelt in tents because they looked for the *City*.' It is only sad, disheartening, cutting the nerve of much activity, destroying the intensity of much joy, drawing over life the

pall of a deep sadness for a man to say, ‘Seventy years are a handbreadth. I am a stranger and a sojourner.’ But it is an ally of all noble, intense, happy living that a man should say, ‘My home is with God. I am a stranger and a sojourner here.’ The one conviction is perfectly consistent with even desperate absorption in present things. ‘Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,’ is quite as legitimate a conclusion from the consciousness of human frailty, as, ‘Let us live for heaven, for to-morrow we die.’ It all depends upon what is the source and occasion of this consciousness, whether it shall make us bitter, and shall make us cling to the perishable thing all the more because it is going so soon, or whether it shall lift us up above all these transient treasures or sorrows and fill our hearts with the glad conviction, ‘I am a citizen of no mean city, and therefore here I am but a stranger.’

My brother! does your faith lessen the bonds that bind you to earth? Does it detach you from the things that are seen and temporal, or is your life ordered upon the same maxims and devoted to the pursuit of the same objects, and gladdened by the same transitory and partial successes, and embittered by the same fleeting and light afflictions which rule and sway the lives that are *rooted* only in earth as the tempest sways the grass on the sandhills? If *so*, what business have we to call ourselves Christians? *If so*, how can we say that we live by faith when we are so blind, and so incapable of seeing afar off, that the smallest trifle beside us blots out from our vision, as a fourpenny piece held up against your eyeball might do the sun itself in the heavens there. True faith detaches a man from this present, If your faith does not do that, look into it and see where the falsity of it is.

III. And, lastly, my text brings out the thought of how this same faith triumphs in the article of death. ‘These all died in faith.’

That is a very grand thought as applied to those old patriarchs, that just because all their lives long God had done nothing for them of

what He had promised, therefore they died believing that He was going to do it. All their disappointments fed their faith. Because the words on which they had been leaning all their lives had not come to a fulfilment, therefore they must be true. That is a strange paradox, and yet it is the one which filled these men's hearts with peace, and which made the dying Jacob break in upon his prophetic swan-song, at the close, with the verse which stands in no relation to what goes before it, or what comes after it. 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.' 'These all died in faith' just because they had not 'received the promises.'

So, dear brethren, for us the end of life may have a faith nurtured by disappointments, made more sure of everything because it has nothing; certain that He calls into existence another world to redress the balance of the old, because here there has been so much of bitterness and weariness and woe. And our end like theirs may be an end beatified by a clear vision of the things that 'no man hath seen, nor can see'; and into the darkness there may come for us, as there came of old to another, an open heaven and a beam of God's glory smiting us on the face and changing it into the face of an angel. And so there may come for us all in that article and act of death, a tranquil and cheerful abandonment of the life which has been futile and frail, except when thought of as the vestibule of heaven. Some men cling to the vanishing skirts of this earthly life, and say, 'I will not let thee go.' And others are able to say, 'Lord, I have waited for Thy salvation.' 'Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.'

'These all died in faith'; and the sorrows and disappointments of the past made the very background on which the bow of promise spanned the sky, beneath which they passed into the Promised Land. 'These all died in faith'; with a vision gleaming upon the inward sense which made the

solitude of death bliss, and with a calm willingness 'to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.'

Choose whether you will live by sense and die in sorrow, or whether you will live by the faith of the Son of God, and die to enter 'the City which hath foundations,' which He has built for them that love Him, and which even now, 'in seasons of calm weather,' we can see shining on the hill top far away.

Hebrews 11:14—SEEKING THE FATHERLAND

'They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a Country.

Hebrews 11:14.

WHAT things? Evidently those which the writer has just been saying that the patriarchs of old 'said,' as stated in the previous words — 'They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon earth.' The writer has in his mind, no doubt, some of the beautiful incidents of the Book of Genesis; especially, I suppose, that very touching one where Abraham is standing up by the side of his dead, in the presence of the sons of Herb, and begs from them for the first time a little piece of land that he could call his Own. He tells them that he is a stranger and a sojourner amongst them, and wants 'the field and the cave that is therein' in which to bury his dead. Or he may be thinking of the no less touching incident, when Jacob, in his extreme old age, tells the King of Egypt that the days of the years of his pilgrimage have been few and evil, not having attained to the years of his father.

The writer points to these declarations, and reads into them what he was entitled to read into them, something more than a mere acceptance of the external facts of the speakers' condition, as wanderers in the midst of a civilisation to which they did not belong. He sees gleaming through the primary force of the words the further hope which the patriarchs cherished, though it was, as it wore, latent in the nearer hope of an earthly inheritance— viz., that of the city

which hath foundations, and the country which they could call their own.

Although the writer is not adducing those patriarchs as being patterns for us, but is only establishing his great thesis that they lived by faith in a future blessing, as we ought to do, still we may take the words of my text, with a permissible amount of violence, as appropriate to all of us who call ourselves Christians. 'They who say *such* things do hereby declare plainly,' and by their lives should declare more plainly still, 'that they are seeking a country.'

I. Note, then, first of all, the remarkable representation here given of that future for which Christians look, as being their native land.

The word of our text is very inadequately rendered in our Authorised Version as merely 'a country.' Fully and etymologically rendered, it would be 'the fatherland.' Whether we choose to adopt that somewhat un-English expression or no, at all events, the idea conveyed is that these men, having come out from Mesopotamia, and being wanderers, in their goat's-hair tents, in the midst of the fenced cities of Canaan, were thereby seeking for a land which was their native land, their home, the place to which they felt that they belonged far more truly than to the land from which they came out, or to the land in which they were for the moment wandering. That is the idea that I would enforce as needful for all true and noble Christian living, the recognition that our true home, the country and the order with which we are connected by all our deepest and most real affinities, the land where, and where only, we shall feel at rest, and surrounded by familiar things and loved persons, is that land which lies beyond the flood.

We do not belong, and should feel that we do not belong, to the place and order where we happen to stand to-day. This present and the order of things here should be for us either like that Aram Naharaim, 'the Syria between the two rivers,' the dust of which Abraham had shaken from off his feet; or it should be like that rotten

though splendid civilisation into the midst of which He came, and of which He sternly refused to enrol Himself as a citizen. Our home is where Jesus Christ is, and there is something profoundly wrong in us unless we feel that that, and not this, is our native soil, and that there, and not here, is the place to which we belong.

Our colonists on the other side of the world, though they have never seen England, talk about 'going home.' And so we, inhabitants of this outlying colony of the great city, ought to look across the flood, and sometimes catch a sight of those bright realms beyond, and always feel that they are really our native land. 'They that say such things declare plainly' that they are not citizens here, but belong yonder.

II. Then, mark again, the other parallel which may be drawn between these men's attitude and ours, in that their whole career was a seeking the true Fatherland.

Again, our translation is inadequate because it does not give the energetic force of the word that is rendered 'seek.' It was not a seeking, on the part of the patriarchs, in the sense of looking for an unseen thing, or searching about to find an undiscovered one. That was all done for them by God.

They had not to seek in that unsatisfactory and disturbing sense, but they had to seek, in the sense of projecting their desires onwards to the blessing that God held out in His hand for them, and letting their faith grasp the promise and their thoughts expatiate in the future, which was as sure to them as the present, because God had made it. The word for *seeking* in the original is very emphatic. It implies the going out of longings and yearnings and thoughts to something which is there, to be grasped and laid hold of.

Thank God we have not to seek our native soil as wanderers who may perchance fail in our quest, and die at last homeless. It is brought to us, and certified to us by the divine veracity, sealed to us

by the divine faithfulness, reserved for us by the divine power, made possible for us by the divine forgiving mercy. But still we have to seek, letting our hearts go out towards that good land, letting our thoughts play about it and become familiar with it, letting our desires tend towards it, and ever, in all the dusty ways of daily life, and amidst all the distractions of monotonous and recurring duties, keeping our heads above the mist and looking into the clear blue, where we may see the vision of the certain future.

The management and discipline of our thoughts is included in that seeking, and I am afraid that that is a part of Christian culture woefully neglected by the average Christian of this day. If we consider the comparative magnitude of the future and the present, and the certain issue of the present in the future, are our thoughts of it such as common-sense would make them? Is that 'land that is very far off' a frequent ordinary subject of contemplation by us, in the midst of the hurry and bustle of our daffy life? Or have we let the glasses of the telescope of hope get all dimmed and dirty; and when we do polish them up, do we use them to look at the stars with, or at the earth and its beauties? Whither do my anticipations of the future tend? Is my hope shortsighted or longsighted? Is it only able to see the things on this side the river, or can it catch any of the glories beyond?

Our fault is not in not living enough in the future, but in the selection of the future in which we live. 'We are saved by hope,' if we rightly direct the hope. We are ruined by hopes when they are cribbed, cabined, and confined to this miserable present. Brother! do you seek your home by the cultivation of the contemplation of it and the desire for it, and so almost emulate the divine prerogative and call things that are not as though they were?

Oh! how different our lives would be if we walked in the light of that great hope, and how different everything here would be if we regarded all here as auxiliary and subsidiary to that.

Above all, if it were true of us, as it ought to be in accordance with our profession of being Christians, that we seek a country, should we think about death as we do? Should we drape it in such ugly forms? Should we shrink from it as most of us, I fear, do as a dread and an enemy and a disaster? No doubt there is, and there always will be. a natural shrinking; but the man who can say that to die is to be with Christ, and who sets that thought ever before him, will be helped over the dark gulf; and the shrinking will be turned, if not into desire at least into calm scorn of the last enemy, the encounter with whom does not diminish his longing to be with his Lord.

These are heights, of Christian feeling so far above most of us that we are tempted to think them unreal and fantastic; but they are the heights to which we should naturally rise, if once we realised the greatness, the blessedness, the certainty of that hidden hope above. Dear friends, if we look onwards to our own end, are we only or chiefly conscious of a cold thrill of recoil and repulsion? Let us ask ourselves if our feeling corresponds to our profession that Christ is our life, and that where He is is our heaven and our hope.

III. Lastly, notice the unmistakable witness of profession and life which we are to bear.

‘They declare plainly.’ They make it absolutely and unmistakably manifest, says the writer, that they seek a country. It did not need that Abraham should stand up before the sons of Heth and say, ‘I am a pilgrim and a sojourner amongst you.’ They all knew it. There was his tent outside the city walls, and a strange life that little tribe of people, he and his followers, lived, wandering up and down the land and refusing to settle ,themselves anywhere. They lived a life unlike that of the people among whom they dwelt, We know that in these early days there were fenced cities, outside the walls of which they dwelt, and there all the evidences of a highly developed and advanced civilisation existing in the land. These patriarchs lived like gypsies in the country, roaming everywhere but rooted nowhere; and

the reason they so lived was that they ‘looked for a city which hath foundations.’

‘Yes! the man, before the eyes of whose faith there is ever shining that permanent state of blessed union with Jesus Christ and of sweet society with all the good, can afford to recognise the things that are seen as transient, as they must be. He will be in no danger of mistaking the fleeting shows for eternal realities. If we are looking for the city we shall dwell in tabernacles; and the more our faith grasps the permanent realities beyond, the more will our experience realise the transitoriness of the things here by our sides.

The very fact that men call themselves Christians is a declaration that they are seeking for a city. Do you act up to your declaration? Is your Christianity a matter of lip or of life? Have you pitched your tents outside the city to confirm your declaration that you do not belong to this community? And do you live as in it, but not of it?

Our outward lives ought to make most distinctly manifest that we are citizens of the heavens, and that will be made manifest by abstinence from a great deal. There are many things, right enough in themselves, which are not expedient, and therefore not right, for a Christian man to do, if they fasten him down to this present. And you will have to cut yourselves loose from a good deal to which otherwise it would be permissible for you to be attached, if you intend to rise towards God; and whatever we do like other people, we shall have to do from a manifestly different temper or spirit.

Two men may engage in precisely the same occupation. For instance, there may be two tellers at one side of a bank counter, or two depositors on the other, doing exactly the same things, and yet one of them may do them so as to ‘declare plainly,’ even in that act, ‘that he is seeking a country,’ and that he is not wholly swallowed up in the love and high estimate of worldly wealth. The motive from which, the end towards which, the help by which, the accompanying thoughts with which, we do our daily, secular work, may hallow it,

and make it express our heavenly-mindedness, as completely as if we went apart on the mountain, and held communion in prayer and praise with God.

We do not want 'plain' declarations by so-called religious acts, still less by religious professions, half as much as we do plain declarations by an obviously Christian way of doing secular things, and living the daily life of men upon earth. Remember the illustration from the conduct of the very men of whom my text speaks. I said that they kept themselves aloof from the civilisation around them. That requires modification to be a full statement of the case. They threw themselves into it, when necessary, with all energy. Lot went down to Sodom because it offered good grazing land. He behaved just as many professing Christians handle the world, going down amongst the slime-pits and the scoundrels for the sake of making a little money out of them — whilst Abraham stopped on the more barren pastures of the hills, with freedom, security, and holiness. When Lot got what he deserved, and was involved in the disaster of the city that he had made his home, Abraham did not say, 'It is a very sad thing, but Lot must get himself out of the difficulty.' He buckled on his sword and armed his followers, turning himself into a soldier for the time being, and promptly gave chase to the robbers, following them all through the night, along the whole length of the Holy Land, and pounced upon them, routing them, as they lay in fancied security, and liberating their prisoner, who was the captive of his own lust and covetousness much more sadly than of the Eastern marauders.

And so, the detachment from the present, which is needful for Christian men, is to be combined with the most energetic discharge of the duties which we owe to ourselves and to those around us, and especially to be combined with the most diligent work for those who have fallen captive to the snares of the world which we, by His mercy, have been able to escape. And he will best manifest, and most plainly declare, that he seeks a country who seeks most

earnestly to hallow all ordinary life, and to do the work, here and now, which God prescribes for him: There is an old story about a question being put to some good man who was fond of playing chess. 'What would you do if, when you were at the chess-board, you were told that Jesus Christ was coming?' 'Finish the game' was the wise answer.

There is another story about a scene in the American House of Representatives in its early time. A great darkness came on during the sitting, and some timid souls began to think that the last day was at hand. The President said, 'Bring candles and let us go on with the debate.' If the Master is coming, we are best found doing our work. Yes! Best doing our work, if it is His work. And all our work may be His if it is done for His sake and in His strength.

Christian. men and women! see to it that there be no ambiguity about your position, no mistaking your nationality, and that in your life, without ostentation, without offensively forcing your religion upon peoples' notice, you declare plainly that you, at any rate, seek your native home.

Hebrews 11:16—THE FUTURE WHICH VINDICATES GOD

'Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He hath prepared for them a city.' — Hebrews 11:16.

THESE are bold words. They tell us that unless God has provided a future condition of social blessedness for those whom He calls His, their life's experience on earth is a blot on His character and administration. He needs heaven for His vindication. The preparation of the City is the reason why He is not 'ashamed to be called their God.' If there were not such a preparation, He had need to be ashamed. Then my text, further, by its first word 'wherefore,' carries our thoughts back to what has been said beforehand; and that is, 'They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly.' Therefore God 'is not ashamed of them,' as the Revised Version has it, with a fuller

rendering, 'to be called their God.' That is to say, the attitude of the men who look ever forward, through the temporal, to the things unseen and eternal, is worthy of their relation with Him, and it alone is worthy. And if people professing to be His, and professing that He is theirs, do not so live, they would be a disgrace to God, and He would be ashamed to own them for His.

So there are two lines of thought suggested by our text; two sets of obligations which are deduced by the writer of this Epistle from that solemn name — 'The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.' The one set of obligations refers to Him; the other to us. There are, then, three things here for *our* consideration — the name; what it pledges God to do; and what it binds men to seek. Let me ask you to look at these three things with me.

I. First of all, then, regard the significance of the name round which the whole argument of our verse turns.

The writer lays hold of that wonderful designation, by which the God of the whole earth knit Himself, in special relationship of unity and mutual possession, to these three poor men — Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he would have us ponder that name, as meaning a great deal more than the fact that these three were His worshippers, and that He was their God, in the sense in which Moloch was the God of the Phoenicians; Jupiter, the god of the Romans; or Zeus of the Greeks. There is a far deeper and sacred relation involved than that. 'The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob' means not only that His name was in some measure known as a designation, and in some measure honoured by external worship, by the patriarchs, but it involved much in regard to Him, and much in regard to them. It is the name which He took for Himself, not which men gave to Him, and, therefore, it expresses what He had made Himself to these men. That is to say, the name implies a direct act of self-revelation on the part of God. It implies condescending approach and nearness of communion. It implies possession, mutual

and reciprocal, as all possession of spirit by spirit must be. It implies still more wonderfully and profoundly that, just as in regard to the relations between ourselves, so, in regard to the loftiest of all relations, God owns men, and men possess God, because, on both sides of the relationship, there is the same love. Other forms of connection between men and God differ from this deepest of all in that the attitude on the one side corresponds to, but is different from, the attitude on the other. If we think of God as the object of trust, on His side there is faithfulness, on our side there is faith. If we think of Him as the object of adoration, on His side there is loftiness, on our side there is lowliness. If we think of Him as the Supreme Governor, His commandment is answered by our obedience. But if we think of Him as ours, and of ourselves as His, the bond is identical on either part. And though there be all the difference that there is between a drop of dew and the boundless ocean, between the little love that refreshes and bedews my heart, and the great abyss of the same that lies, not stagnant though calm, in His, yet my love is like God's, and God's love is like mine. And that is the deepest meaning of the name, 'the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob': — mutual possession based upon common and identical love.

And then, of course, in so far as we are concerned, the name carries with it the most blessed depths of the devout life, in all its sacredness of intimacy, in all its sweetness of communion, in all its perfectness of dependence, in all its victory over self, in all its triumphant appropriation, as its very own, of the common and universal good. It is much to be able to say 'Our God, our help in ages past.' It is more to be able to say 'My Lord and my God.' And that appropriation deprives no other of his possession of God. I do not rob you of one beam of the sunshine when it irradiates my vision. We take in of the common land that which belongs to us, and no other man is the poorer or has the less for his. My God is thy God; and when we each realise our individual and personal relation 'to Him, as expressed by these two little words, then we are able to

say, in close union, 'Our God, the God and Father of us all.' So much, then, for the name.

II. Now a word or two, in the second place, as to what that name pledges God to do.

He is 'not ashamed' of it, 'for He hath prepared for them a city.' Now I do not need to enter at all upon the question as to whether the three patriarchs to whom my text has original reference had any notion of a future life. It matters nothing where .or how they thought that that coming blessing towards which they were ever looking was to be realised. The point of the text is that, in any case, they were servants of a future promised to them by God, as they believed, and that that future shaped their whole life.

Think of what their life was. How all their days, from the moment when Abraham left his home, to the moment when the dying Jacob said, with a passion of unfilled expectancy, which yet had in it no hesitancy or doubt or rebuke, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord,' that future shaped their whole career! And then, if the end of all was that they lay down in the dust and died, having been lured on from step to step by dazzling illusions dangled before them, which were nothing but dreams, what about the God who did it? and what about their relation to Him! Would there be anything in such a God deserving to be worshipped, Might He not be ashamed of 'being called their God' if that was all that they got thereby? God needs the City for His own vindication.

Now that seems to be a daring way of putting it, hut it is only another form of expressing a very plain thought, that the facts of the religious life here on earth are such as necessarily do involve a future of blessedness, and a heaven.

I need not, I suppose, dwell for more than just in a sentence upon the first plain way in which this truth may be illustrated — namely, that nothing but a future life of blessedness, such as we usually connote

by the simple name ‘heaven,’ saves God’s veracity and the truthfulness of His promises. If we believe that the awful silence of the universe has ever been broken by a divine voice; if we believe that God has said anything to men — apart, I mean, from the revelation of Himself made by our nature and in our daily experience — we must believe that He has promised a life to come. And unless such a life do await those who, humbly and with many faults and imperfections, have yet clung to Him as theirs, and yielded themselves to Him as His possession, then

‘The pillared firmament is rottenness, And earth’s base built on stubble.’

Let God be true and every man a lie. Unless there is a heaven, He has flashed before us an illusion like that which has tempted many a wanderer into the bog to perish. He has fooled us with a *mirage*, which at the distance looked like palm-trees and cool, flashing lakes, and when we reach it is only burning sand, strewn with bleached bones of the generations that have been cheated before us. ‘God is not ashamed... for He hath prepared a city.’

But, then, there is another thought, closely con-netted with the preceding, and yet capable of being dealt with separately, and that is that there is a blot ineffaceable on the divine character unless the desires which He Himself has implanted have a reality corresponding to them. That is true, of course, in the most absolute sense, in regard to all the physical necessities and yearnings which the animal nature possesses. In all that region God never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them; and need is the precursor and the prophecy of supply. So it is in regard to the whole creation; so it is in regard to that in us which we share in common with them. Care never irks the full-fed beast. No ungratified desires torture the frame of the short-lived creatures. ‘Foxes have holes, and the birds of air have their roosting-places’; and all beings dwell in an environment absolutely corresponding to their capacities, and fitted to satisfy

their necessities. But amongst 'them stalks the exile of creation, man; blessed, though he sometimes thinks he is cursed, with longings which the world has nothing to satisfy; and with ideals which are never capable of realisation amidst the imperfections and fleetingnesses of time. And is that to be all? If so, then God is a tyrant and not a god, and there is little to love in such a character, and He might be ashamed, if He is not, to have made men like that, so ill-fitted for their abode, and to have bestowed upon them the possibility of imagining that to which realisation shall be for ever denied.

And if that is true in regard of many of the desires of life, apart altogether from religion, it becomes still more manifestly and eminently true in regard of Christian experience and devout emotions. For if there is any one thing which an acceptance of Christianity in the heart and life is sure to do, it is to kindle and make dominant longings, yearnings rising sometimes to pain, which the world is utterly unable to satisfy. Is it ever to be so? Then, oh then, better for us that we should never have known that name; better for us that we had nourished a blind life within our brains; better for us that we had never been born. But 'He hath prepared for them a city,' where wishes shall be embodied, and the ideal shall be reality, and desires shall be fulfilled, and everything that has dwelt, silently and secretly, in the chambers of the imagination shall come forth into the sunlight. Morning dreams are proverbially true. 'We are not of the night, nor of the darkness: we are the children of the day,' and our dreams are one day to pass into the sober certainty of waking bliss.

Then there is another thought still, and that is that it would be a blot ineffaceable on the divine character if all the discipline of life were to have no field in the future on which its results could be manifested. These three poor men were schooled by many sorrows. What were they all for? For the City. And in like manner the facts of our earthly life and our Christian experiences are equally

inexplicable and confounding unless beyond these dim and trifling things of time there lie the sunlit and solemn fields of eternity, in which whatsoever of force, valour, worthiness, manhood, we have made our own here shall expatiate for ever more.

I do not mean that life is so sad and weary that we need to call another world into existence to redress the irlante of the old. I think that is only very partially true, for we are always apt in such considerations to minimise the pleasures on the whole, and to exaggerate the pains on the whole, of the earthly life. But I mean that the one true view of all that befalls us here on earth is discipline; and that discipline implies an end for which it is applied, and a realm in which its results are to be manifested. And if God carefully trains us, passes us through varieties of condition, in order to evolve in us a character conformed to His will; puts us to the long threescore years and ten of the apprenticeship, and then has no workshop in which to occupy us afterwards, we are reduced to a state of utter intellectual bewilderment, and life is an inextricable tangle and puzzle.

You may go into certain prehistoric depots, where you will find lying by thousands flint weapons which have been carefully chipped and shaped and polished, and then, apparently, left in a heap, and never anything done with them. Is the world a great cemetery of weapons prepared and then tossed aside like that? We need a heaven where the faithfulness of the servant shall be exchanged for the joy of the Lord, and he that was faithful in a few things shall be made ruler over many things.

III. And now a word about my last thought; and that is, what this name binds Christian people to seek.

My text in its former part says, 'They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.' If Abraham, instead of stopping under the oak tree at Mature, had gone down into Sodom with Lot, and taken up his quarters there; or if he

had become a naturalised citizen of Hebron, and struck up alliances with the children of Heth, would the Sodomites or the Hebronites or the Hittites have thought any the better of him therefor? As long as he kept apart from them, he witnessed to the promise, and God looked upon him and blessed him. But if, professing to look for ‘the city which hath the foundations,’ he had not been content to dwell in tabernacles, God would have been ashamed of him to be called his God.

Translate that into plain English, and it is this. As long as Christian people live like pilgrims and strangers, they are worthy of being called God’s, and God is glad to be called theirs. And as long as they do so, the world will know a religious man when it sees him, and, though it may not like him, it will at least respect him. But a secularised Church or individuals who say that they are Christians, and who have precisely the same estimates of good and evil as the world has, and live by the same maxims, and pursue the same aims, and never lift their eyes to look at the City beyond the river, these are a disgrace to God and to themselves, and to the religion which they say they profess.

I cannot but feel — and feel, I think, in growing degree — that one main clause of the woful feebleness of our average Christianity is that our hopes and visions of the City which hath the foundations have become dim, and that, to a very large extent, the thoughts of ‘the rest that remaineth for the people of God’ is dormant in the minds of the mass of professing Christian people.

Oh, dear friends! if we will yield to that sweet, strong appeal that is made to us in the frame, and, feeling that God is ours and we are His, will turn our hearts and thoughts more than, alas! we have done, to that blessed hope, Jesus will not be ashamed to call us brethren, nor God be ashamed to be called our God. Let us beware that we are not ashamed to be called His, nor to ‘declare plainly that we seek a country.’

Hebrews 11:24-27—THE FAITH OF MOSES

‘By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the of Pharaoh’s daughter; 25. Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; 26. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. 27. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible. — Hebrews 11:24-27.

I HAVE ventured to take these verses as a text, not with the idea of expounding their details, or even of touching many of the large questions which they raise, but for the sake of catching their general drift. They are the writer’s description of two significant instances in the life of the great Lawgiver of the power of faith. He deals with both in the same fashion. He first tells the act, then he analyses its spring in the state of feeling which produced it, and then he traces that state of feeling to certain external facts which were obvious to the faith of Moses. ‘The Great Refusal,’ by which he flung up his position at the court of Pharaoh, and chose to identify himself with his people, is the one. His flight from Egypt to the solitudes of Horeb is the other. The two acts are traced to the states of feeling or opinion in Moses. The former came from a choice and an estimate. ‘He chose to suffer with the people of God’; and he ‘esteemed the reproach... greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.’ The latter in like manner came from a state of feeling. He ‘forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.’ What underlay the choice, the estimate, the courage? ‘He had respect,’ or more literally and forcibly, ‘he looked away to the recompence of the reward.’ He saw ‘Him who is invisible.’ So, an act of vision which disclosed him a future recompence and a present God was the basis of all. And from that act of vision there came states of mind which made it easy and natural to choose a lot of suffering and humiliation, and to turn away from all the glories and treasures and wrath of Egypt.

That is to say, we have here two things — what this man saw, and what the vision did for his life, and I wish to consider these two. The same sight is possible for us; and, if we have it, the same conduct will certainly follow.

I. Note then, first, what this man saw.

Two things, says the writer. ‘He looked away to the recompense of the reward,’ and he saw God. Now I need not remind you, I suppose, that these two objects of real vision correspond to the two elements of faith which the writer describes in the first verse of our chapter, where he says that it is ‘the substance of things hoped for’; to which corresponds ‘the recompense of the reward,’ and ‘the evidence of things not seen; to which answers Him who is invisible.’

Now, that conception of faith, as having mainly to do with the future and the unseen, is somewhat different superficially from the ordinary notion of faith, set forth in the New Testament, as being trust in Jesus Christ. But the difference is only superficial, and arises mainly from a variety in the prominence given to the elements which both conceptions have in common. For the faith which is trust in Jesus Christ *is* directed towards the unseen, and includes in itself the realisation of the future. And the faith which is vivid consciousness of the invisible world, and realisation of a coming retribution, finds them both most clearly and most surely in that Lord ‘in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice,’ and anticipate the future ‘end of our faith’ even the salvation of our souls.

So we may take these two points that emerge from our text, and look at them as containing for *our* present purpose a sufficient description of what our faith ought to do for us.

There must be, first, then, a vivid and resolute realisation of future retribution. Now, note that this same expression, a somewhat peculiar one, ‘the recompense of the reward,’ is found again in this

letter in directly the opposite reference from that which it has here. In the second chapter of the Epistle we read that ‘every transgression and disobedience shall receive its just recompense of reward.’ Both recompense by punishment and by blessedness are included in the word, so that its meaning is the exact requital of good or evil by a sovereign judge.

And that is the very purpose which faith has for one of its chief functions, to burn in the conviction on our slothful minds — that all that is round about us is at once cause and consequence; that life is a network of issues of past actions, and of progenitors of future ones; that nothing that a man does ever dies; that

*‘Through his soul the echoes roll, And grow for ever and for ever’
that ‘whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.’ Character is
the result of actions. Condition is largely, if not altogether,
dependent upon conduct and upon character. And, just as the
sandstone cliffs were laid down grain by grain by an evaporated
ocean, and stand eternal when the waters have all vanished, so
whatever else you and I are making of, and in, our lives, we are
making permanent cliffs of character which will remain when all the
waves of time have foamed themselves away.*

That process, which is going on moment by moment all through our lives, Christian faith follows beyond the grave. It works right up to the edge of the grave as everybody can see, and many a man’s last harvest of the seed that he sowed to the flesh is his, when laid a Corrupted corpse into his coffin. But does it stop there? The world may say, ‘We know not.’ Christian faith overleaps the gulf and sees the process going on more intensely and unhindered in the life yonder. We are like signalmen in their isolated boxes. They pull a lever, and the points a quarter of a mile away are shifted. The man does not see what he has done, but he has done it all the same. And when his time for travelling comes, he will find that he has determined the course on which he must run by the actions that were done here.

And so, brethren, this conviction, not merely as being a selfish looking for a peaceful and blessed heaven, as some people try to vulgarise the conception, but as being the thrilling consciousness that every deed has its issues, and is to be done, or refrained from, in view of these, this is what is meant by the word of my text: 'he looked away' to the recompense of reward.

Now remember that such a vision clear and definite before a man, substantial and solid and continuous enough to become a formative power in his life, and even to determine its main direction, is only realisable as the result of very special and continuous effort. The writer of the letter employs a singular and a strong word, which I have tried to *English* by the phrase 'looking off unto the recompense.' He turned away by a determined effort of resolution, averting his gaze from other things in order to fix it on the far off thing. One use of the tube of the telescope is to shut out cross lights, and concentrate the vision on the far off object, looked at undisturbed. Unless we can thus shut off on either side these dazzling and bewildering brilliances that dance and flicker round us, we shall never see clearly that solemn future and all its infinite possibilities of sorrow or of blessedness. The eye that is focused to look at the things on the earth cannot see the stars. When the lookout man at the bow wants to make sure whether that white flash on the horizon is a sun-smitten sail or a breaker, he knits his brows and shades his eyes with his hand, and concentrates his steady gaze till he *sees*. And you and I have to do that, or the most real things in the universe, away yonder in the extreme distance, will be problematical and questionable to us. Oh, brother! our Christian lives would be altogether different if we made the resolve and kept it, to fix our gaze on 'the recompense of the reward.'

Then the next thing that this man saw, says my text, was 'Him who is invisible.'

Now I do not suppose that there is any reference there to the miraculous manifestations of a divine presence which were given to the lawgiver, for these came long after the incidents which are being dealt with in my text. True! he saw God face to face amidst the solitudes and the sanctities of Sinai. But that is not at all what the writer is thinking about here. He is thinking about the vision which was given to Moses, in no other fashion than it may be given to us, if we will have it, the sight of God to the 'inward eye, which is the bliss of solitude,' and ministers strength to our lives, in solitude or in society. The conscious realisation of God's presence in our minds and hearts and wills, and the whole trembling and yet rejoicing inner man, aware that God is near, are what is meant by this vision of Him. The realisation of His presence continually, the sight of Him in nature, so that every bush burns with a visible deity, and every cloud is the pillar in which He moves for guidance, the realisation of His presence, in history, in society, operating all changes and working round us, and in us, and on us — this is the highest result of a true religious faith.

And it is worthy to be called *sight*. For not the vision of the eye is the source of the truest certitude, but the vision of the inward spirit. A man may be surer of God than he is of the material universe that he touches and handles and beholds. The vision that a trustful heart has of God is as real, as direct, and, I venture to say, more assured, than the knowledge which is brought to us through sense.

And such a vision ought to be, and will be if we are right, no disturbing or unwelcome thought, but a delight and a strength. A prisoner in a solitary cell sometimes goes mad because he knows that somewhere in its walls there is a peep-hole at which, at any moment, the eye of a gaoler may be on the watch. But the loving heart that yearns after God has nothing but joy in the otherwise awful thought, 'If I take the wings of the morning, Thou art there. If I fly to the uttermost parts of the west, there I meet Thee.' 'If I make my bed in the grave, Thou art there. Thou hast beset me behind and

before.' Brethren, either our ghastliest doubt or our deepest joy is, 'Thou, God, seest me.' 'When I awake I am still with Thee.'

II. And now, secondly, notice what the vision did for this man.

I cannot do more than touch very lightly upon the various points that are involved here. But I would have you notice in general that the writer masses the enemies of a noble life, which Moses overcame by this sight, in three general classes — pleasures, treasures, dangers. The faith of Moses lifted him above ignoble pleasures, saved him from coveting fleeting possessions, armed him against mere corporeal perils. And these three — delights, rules, dangers, may be roughly said to be the triple-headed Cerberus that bars our way. Let us look how the vision will help to overcome them all.

This sight will take the brightness out of ignoble and fleeting pleasures. Moses had the ball at his foot, Jewish legends tell us that the very crown was intended to be placed on his head. However that may be, a life of luxurious ease, of command over men, accompanied by the half deification which in old days hedged a king, were his for the taking; and he turned from them all. He did not choose suffering: but he chose to be identified with the people of God, though he knew that thereby he was electing a life of sorrow and of pain. The world has seen no nobler act than that when he passed through the gates of Pharaoh's palace, the fragments of whose glorious architecture we still wonder at, and housed himself in the dark reed huts where the slaves dwelt.

Now that same spirit, both in regard to choice and to estimate, must be ours, and will be ours, if we have any depth and reality of vision of the recompense and of the invisible God. For if you once let the light of these two solemn thoughts in upon the delights of earth, how poor and paltry, how coarse and ignoble, they look! Did you ever see the scenes of a theatre by daylight? What daubs; what rents; what coarse work! Let the light of the 'recompense' and of God in upon earthly delights, and how they shrivel, and dwindle, and

disappear! Ah, brethren! if we would only bring our earthly desires to the touchstone of these two great thoughts, we should find that many a thing that holds us would slacken its grasp, and the fair forms, with their tiny harps, and their sweet songs that tempt us on the flowery island, would be seen for what they are — ravenous monsters whose guests are in the depths of hell. ‘He had respect to the recompense of the reward,’ and spurned ignoble pleasures. If you see the things that are, you will not be tempted with the things that seem.

And then, further, such a vision will help us to appraise at their true value earthly possessions.. I cannot enter upon the question of what the writer means precisely by that singular phrase, attributing to Moses ‘the reproach of Christ.’ Whether it implies the reproach borne for Christ, or like Christ, or by Christ, all which interpretations are possible, and have been suggested, need not concern us now. The point is that the twofold vision of which the writer is speaking, let in upon worldly possessions, reveals their emptiness and dressiness, as compared with the true riches.

There are old stories of men who in the night received from fairy hands gifts of gold in some cave, and when the daylight came upon them what had seemed to be gold and jewels was a bundle of withered leaves and red berries, already half corrupted and altogether worthless. There are many things that the world counts very precious which are lillie the fairy’s gold. Nothing that can be taken from a man really belongs to him. The only real riches, corresponder with his necessities, are those which, once possessed, are inseparable from his being, the riches of an indwelling God, and of a nature conformed to His.

And that effect of the vision of the unseen and the future, as bringing down to their true value all the wealth of Egypt and of the world, is a lesson which no man needs more than do we whose lives, and habits of thinking, are passed and formed in a commercial

community, in which success means a fortune, and failure means poverty; in which the poor are tempted to look upon the possession of wealth as the only thing to be coveted, and the rich are tempted to look upon it as the one thing to be rejoiced over. Let the light of the future, and of God, ever shine upon your estimates of the worth of the world's wealth.

Lastly, such a vision will arm a man against all perils. I take it that 'forsaking Egypt' in my text refers to Moses' flight to Horeb. Now, in the book of Exodus that flight is traced to his fear. In my text it is traced to his courage. So, then, there may dwell in one heart fearing and not fearing.

There may be dread, as there was with Moses, sufficient to impel him to flight, though not sufficient to induce him to abandon the purpose which made flight necessary. He was afraid enough to shelter himself. He was not afraid enough, by reason of dangers and difficulties, to fling up his mission.

That is to say, the vision will not take away from a man natural tremors, nor will it blind him to real dangers and difficulties, but it will steady his resolve, and make him determined, though he may have to bow before the blast, to yield no jot of his convictions, nor fling away any of his confidence. He will flee to Horeb, if need be, but he will not cease to labour for the redemption of Israel. If we put our trust in God, and live in the continual realisation of future retribution, then, whilst we may prudently adapt our course so as to find a smooth bit of road to walk on, and to avoid dangers which may threaten, we shall never let these either shake our confidence in God, or alter our conviction of what He requires from us.

So I gather up all that I have been trying to say in the one word — the true way to make life noble is the old way, the way of faith. The sight of God, the vision of judgment will make earth's pleasures paltry, earth's treasures dross, earth's dangers contemptible. The way to secure that ennobling and strengthening vision to attend us

everywhere, is to keep near to Jesus Christ, and to fix our hearts on Him. In communion with Him pleasures that perish will woo in vain, and possessions from which we must part will lose their worth, and perils that touch the body will cease to terrify; and through faith ‘we shall be more than conquerors in Him that loved us.’

Hebrews 12:1, 2—THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES AND THEIR LEADER

‘Compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,... looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith,’ — Hebrews 12:1, 2.

WHAT an awful sight the rows above rows of spectators must have been to the wrestler who looked up at them from the arena, and saw a mist of white faces and pitiless eyes all directed on himself! How many a poor gladiator turned in his despair from them to the place where purple curtains and flashing axes proclaimed the presence of the emperor, on whose word hung his life, whose will could crown him with a rich reward!

That is the picture which this text brings before our eyes, as the likeness of the Christian life. We are in the arena; the race has to be run, the battle to be fought, All round and high above us, a mist, as it were, of fixed gazers beholds us, and on the throne is the Lord of life, the judge of the strife, whose smile is better than all crowns, whose downward-pointing finger seals our fate. We are compassed with a cloud of witnesses, and we may see Jesus the author and finisher of faith. Both of these facts are alleged here as encouragements to persevering, brave struggle in the Christian life. Hence we have here mainly two subjects for consideration, namely the relation between the saints who are gone and ourselves, and the encouragement derived from it; and the contrasted relation between Jesus and ourselves, and the encouragement derived from it.

I. The metaphor of the ‘cloud of witnesses’ is perhaps intended to express multitude, and also elevation. It may have been naturally

suggested by the thought of the saints of the Old Testament (of whom the previous chapter has been so nobly speaking) as exalted to heaven, and hovering far above and far away like the pure whitenesses that tower there. Raphael's great Sistine Madonna has for background just such a light mist of angel faces and adoring eyes all turned to the gentle majesty of the Virgin. There may also be blending in the writer's mind such a reference to the amphitheatre as we have already noticed, which certainly exists in the later portion of the context. But we must remember that tempting as it is to a hasty reader to deduce from the words the idea that the saints whose 'warfare is accomplished' look down on our struggles here, there is, at all events, no support to that idea in the word 'witnesses.' It is not used, as often in our speech, as equivalent to spectators, but means here exactly what it does in the previous chapter, namely, attesters or testifiers. They are not witnesses of us, but to us, as we shall see presently. It may, indeed, be that the thought of the heavenly spectators of our Christian course is implied in the whole strain of the passage, and of the imagery borrowed from the arena, which would certainly be incomplete if there were nothing to answer to the spectators, who, whether at Corinth or Rome, made so important a part in the scene.

We shall be going too far, I think, if we dogmatically assert, on the strength of a figure, that this context teaches a positive communion between earth and heaven of such a sort as that they who have 'overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of His testimony,' know about the struggles of us down here in the arena. Still, one feels that such an idea is almost needed to give full force either to the figure or exhortation. It does seem somewhat lame to say, You are like racers, surrounded with a crowd of witnesses, therefore run, only do not suppose that they really see you. If this be so, the glowing imagery certainly seems to receive a violent chill, and the flow of the exhortation to be much choked. Still we can go no further than a modest 'perhaps.'

But even as a 'may be,' the thought of such a knowledge stimulates. As all the thousand eyes of assembled Greece looked on at the runners, and all the dialects of its states swelled the tumult of acclaim which surged round the *victor*, so here the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, the festal gathering on Mount Zion, into relations with which this very chapter says we have come, may be conceived of as sitting, solemn and still, on the thrones around the central throne, and bending not unloving looks of earnest pity on the arena below where they too once toiled and suffered.

It may be that, before their eyes, who have been made wise by death, and who, standing within the 'sanctuary of *God*, understand the end' of life and life's sorrows, are manifest our struggles, as with Weary feet and drooping limbs we blunder on in the race. Surely there is love in heaven, and it may be there is knowledge, and it may be there is care for us. It may be that, standing on the serene shore beside the Lord, who has already prepared a meal for us with His own hands, they discern, tossing on the darkened sea, the poor little boats of us downhearted, unsuccessful toilers, who cannot yet descry the Lord, or the welcome which waits on the beach.

At all events the thought may come with cheer to our hearts, that, whether conscious of one another's mode of being or *no*, they in their triumph and we in our toils are bound together with real bonds. The thought, if not the knowledge, of their blessedness may be wafted down to us, just as the thought, if not the knowledge, of our labour may be in their restful souls. The hope of their tranquil shore may strengthen us that are far off upon the sea, though we cannot see more of it than the dim lights moving about, and catch an occasional fragrance in the air that tells of land, just as the memory of their stormy voyage mingles in their experience with their gladness because the waves be quiet, and God has brought them to their desired haven. Such thoughts may come with encouragement for the conflict, even if we hesitate to assert that the cloud of witnesses is a cloud of spectators. What, then, is the sense in which

these heroes of the faith which the previous chapter has marshalled in a glorious bede-roll, are 'witnesses'? The answer will be found by observing the frequent occurrence of the word, and its cognate words, in that chapter. We read there, for instance, that the elders 'had witness borne to them' (verse 2, Revised Version); that Abel by the acceptance of his sacrifice, 'had witness borne to him that he was righteous,' 'God bearing witness in respect of his gifts' (verse 4, Revised Version); that Enoch 'had witness borne to him that he had been well pleasing unto God' (verse 5, Revised Version), and that the whole illustrious succession 'had witness borne to them through their faith' (verse 39, Revised Version). This witness borne to them by God is, of course, His giving to them the blessings which belong to a genuine faith, whether of conscious acceptance with God, or of inward peace and power, or of outward victory over sorrows and foes. But they become witnesses to us for God by the very same facts by which He makes Himself the witness of their faith, for they therein become proofs of the blessedness of true religion, visible evidences of God's faithfulness, and their histories shine out across the centuries testifying to us in our toils how good it is to trust in the Lord, and how small and transient are the troubles and hindrances that a life of faith meets. The calm stars declare the glory of God, and witness from age to age of His power, which keeps them every one from failing; and these bright names that shine in the heaven of His word proclaim His tender pity, and His rewarding love to all who, like them, fight the good fight. Like the innumerable suns that make up the Milky Way, they melt into one bright cloud that lies still and eternal above our heads and sheds a radiance on our dim struggles. So we have here brought out the stimulus to our Christian race from the faith and blessedness of these saints.

We have their history before us: we know what they were, and we have the 'end of their conversation' — that is, the issue or outcome of their manner of life — as the next chapter says. It was a hard fight, but it ended in victory. They had more than their share of

sorrows and troubles, but ‘the glory dies not, and the grief is past.’ From their thrones they call to us words of cheer, and point us to their tears turned into diamonds, to their struggles stilled in depths of repose, to their wounded brows crowned with light and glory.

They witness to us how mighty and divine a thing is a life of faith. Their human weakness was filled with the power of God. Tremblings and self-distrust and all the ills that flesh is heir to dwelt in them. Black doubts and sore conflicts were their portion. They, too, knew what we know, how hard it is to live and do the right. But they fought through, because a mightier hand was upon them, and God’s grace was breathed into their weakness — and there they stand, victorious witnesses to us, that whosoever will put his trust in the Lord shall have strength according to his need inbreathed into his uttermost weakness, and have One by his side in every furnace, like unto the Son of Man. They witness to us of companions in suffering, and the thought of them may come to a lonely heart wading in dark, deep waters, with the assurance that there is a ford, and that others have known the icy cold, and the downward rush of the stream, and have not been carried away by it. It is not a selfish thought that sometimes brings encouragement to a solitary sufferer, ‘the same afflictions have been accomplished in your brethren.’ It helps us to remember the great multitude who before us have come through the great tribulation and are before the throne. The cloud of witnesses testify how impotent is sorrow to harm, how strong to bless those who put their trust in God.

They witness to us of the faithfulness of God, who has led them, and upheld them, through all their conflicts, and has brought them to His side at last. That wondrous power avails for us, fresh and young, as when it helped the world’s grey fathers. God refers us to their experiences, and summons them as His witnesses, for they will speak good of His name, and each of them, as they bend down from their seats around the arena, calls to us, ‘O love the Lord, all ye His saints. I was brought low and He helped me.’ So that we, taking

heart by their example, can set ourselves to our struggles with the peaceful confidence, 'This God is our God for ever and ever.'

The word rendered 'witnesses' has a narrower meaning in later usage, according to which it comes to signify those who have sealed their testimony with their blood, in which sense it is transferred, untranslated, into English, in 'martyr.' What an eloquent epitome of the early history of the Church lies in that one fact! So ordinarily had the faithful confessor to die for his testimony that the very name had the thought of a bloody death inextricably associated with it. And if we for a moment think of that meaning, and look back to the long series of martyrs from the days of Stephen to the last Malagasy Christian or missionary, what solemn scorn of soft delights, and noble contempt of life itself may be kindled in our souls. Easy paths are appointed to us. We 'have not yet resisted unto blood.' Let us run our smoother race with patience, as we think of those who ran theirs with bleeding feet, and through the smoke of Smithfield or the dust of the arena beheld the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing ready to help, and so went to their death with the light from His face changing theirs into the same image.

But let us not forget that all these witnesses for God were imperfect men, whose imperfections are full of encouragement for us. Look at the names in that great muster-roll — Noah with his drunkenness, Jacob with his craft, Samson with his giant strength and giant passion, Jephtha with his savage faithfulness to a savage vow, David with his too well-known sins, and in them all not one name to which some great evil did not cling.

There are quickly reached limits to the veneration with which we are to regard the noblest heroes and saints, and none of them are to be to us patterns, however we may draw encouragement from their lives, and in some respects follow their faith. Thank God for the shameful stories told of so many of them in the unmoved narrative of Scripture! They were men of common clay. The saints' halo is

round the head of men and women like ourselves. We look at our own sins and shortcomings, and are ready to despair. But we may lift our eyes to the cloud of witnesses and for every evil of ours find a counterpart in the earthly lives of these radiant saints.

Thinking of our own evil we may hopefully say, as we gaze on them, 'Such were some of ye, but ye are washed, and ye are sanctified.' Therefore I will not doubt but that He is able to keep me, even me, 'from falling, and to present me faultless before the presence of His glory.'

II. But we are not left to draw encouragement from the remembrance of men of like passions with ourselves only. The second of these clauses turns our thoughts to the contrasted relations between Christ and us, and the stimulus derived from it. 'Looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.'

Our Lord is here very emphatically set in a place by Himself apart from all that cloud of witnesses, who in their measure are held forth as noble examples of faith. All these, the greatest names of old, are in one class, and He stands above them in a class of which He is the only member. There we see no other man save Jesus only. Whatever be the inference from that fact, the fact itself is plain. He is something to all the fighters in the lists which none of these are. Our eyes may profitably dwell on them, but we have to look higher than their serene seats, even to His throne, and the relation between us and Him is altogether unlike that which binds us to the holiest of these.

The names He bears in this context are noteworthy, 'the author and finisher of faith,' the former being the same word which, in Acts 3:15, is rendered 'prince' (of life), and in this Epistle (Hebrews 2:10), 'captain' (of salvation). Its meaning may perhaps be best given as 'leader.' All these others are the long files of the great army, but Christ is the Commander of the whole array. 'As Captain of the Lord's host am I come up, said the man with the drawn

sword, who stood before Joshua as he brooded outside the walls of Jericho over his task, and that armed angel of the Lord was He *who*, in the fulness of time, took our humanity that He might lead the many sons to glory. Not in order of time, but by the precedence of nature, is He the Leader and Lord of all who live by faith.

He is also the finisher, or more properly the perfecter of faith, inasmuch as He in His own life has shown it in its perfect form and power; inasmuch also as He gives to each of us, if we will have it, grace to perfect it in our lives; and inasmuch as, finally, He crowns and rewards it at last.

One more remark as to the force of the language here may be allowed. The word rendered 'looking' is an emphatic compound, and if full force be given to both its elements, we might read it 'looking away,' that is, turning our eyes from all other, even the grandest of these grand witnesses, to gaze on Christ alone.

All these details serve to bring out the unique position which our *Lord* holds, and the attitude in which we should stand to Him.

Christ is the one perfect example of faith. We are familiar with the rest of His perfect example in regard to other graces of the Christian character, but we dwell less frequently than we ought on Him as having Himself lived a life of faith. Many orthodox believers so believe in Christ's divinity as to weaken their sense of the reality of His manhood, just as, on the other hand, a vivid apprehension of His manhood obscures to many the rays of His divinity. We lose much by not making very real to our minds that Jesus lived His earthly life by faith, that for Him as for us dependence on God, and humble confidence in Him, were the secret of peace, and the spring of power. This very Epistle, in another place, quotes the words of the psalm, 'I will put my trust in Him,' as the very inmost expression of Christ's life, and as one of the ways in which He proves His brotherhood with us. He, too, knows what it is to hang on God; and

is not only in His divine nature the object, but in His true manhood the pattern of our faith.

And His pattern is perfect. In all others, even the loveliest of saints and most heroic of martyrs, the gem is marred by many a streak of baser material, but in Him is the one 'entire and perfect chrysolite.' That faith never faltered, never turned its gaze from the things not seen, never slackened its grasp of the things hoped, nor degenerated into self-pleasing, nor changed its attitude of meek submission. We may look to others for examples, but they will all be sometimes warnings as well, only to Jesus we may look continually and find unsullied purity and perfect faith.

He is more than example. He gives us power to copy His fair pattern. The influence of heroic, saintly lives may be depressing as well as encouraging. Despondency often creeps over us when we think of them. It is not models that we want, for we all know well enough what we ought to be, and an example of supreme excellence in morals or religion may be as hurtful as the unapproachable superiority of Shake-spears or Raphael may to a young aspirant. Perfect patterns will not save the world. They do not get themselves copied. What we want is not the knowledge of what we ought to be, but the will and the power to be it. And that we get from Christ, and from Him alone. He stretches out His hand to hold us up in our poor struggles. His grace and His peace come into our hearts, Looking to Him, His Spirit enters our spirits, and we live, yet not we, but Christ liveth in us. Models will help us little. They stand there like statues on their pedestals, pure marble loveliness; but in Christ the marble becomes flesh, and the lovely perfection has a heart to pity and a strong hand stretched out to help. So let us look away from all others, who can only give us example, to Him who can give us strength. Turn from the circling thrones to the imperial throne in the centre. We are more closely bound to Him who sits on it than to them. Look away from the cloud of witnesses to the sun of our souls, from whom, gazing, we receive warmth and light and life.

They may teach us to fight, but He fights in us. They are patterns of faith. So is He, but He is also its object and its giver.

Christ is the imperial Rewarder of faith. At the last He will give the full possession of all which it has looked and hoped for, and will lift it into the nobler form in which, even in heaven, we shall live by faith. In that region where struggles cease, and sense and sight no longer lead astray, and we behold Him as He is, faith still abides, as conscious dependence and happy trust. It is perfected in manner, measure, and reward. And Christ is the giver of all that perfects it.

Let us, then, turn away our eyes from all beside, and look to Christ. He is the Reward as well as the Rewarder of our faith. As we look to Him we shall gain power for the fight, and victory and the crown. The gladiators in the arena lowered their swords to the emperor, before they fought, with the grim greeting ‘Hail, Caesar! the dying salute thee.’ So, in happier fashion, our Lord, who has Himself fought in the lists where we now strive. Then we shall have strength for the conflict, and when the conflict is drawing to its end and all else swims before our sight, and the din grows faint in our ears, we shall close our eyes in peace; and when we open them again, lo! the bloody field, and the broken sword, and the battered helm, have all disappeared, and we sit, crowned, and palm-bearing, at His side, hailed as victors, and lapped in sweetest rest for ever more!

Hebrews 12:1—THE CHRISTIAN LIFE A RACE

‘Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.’ — Hebrews 12:1.

THE previous clauses of this verse bring before us the runner’s position as ‘compassed about with a cloud of witnesses,’ and his preparation as ‘laying aside every weight and.., sin.’ The text carries us a stage further in the metaphor, and shows us the company of runners standing ready, stripped, and straining at the starting-post, with the long course stretching before them.

The metaphor of the Christian life as a race is threadbare, so far as our knowledge is concerned, but it may be questioned if it has sunk deeply enough into the practice of any of us. It is a very noble one, and contains an ideal of the Christian life which it would do us all good to hold up by the side of our realisation of it. It might stimulate and it would shame us.

What is the special note of that metaphor? Compare with the 'kindred one, equally well-worn and threadbare, of a journey or a pilgrimage. The two have much in common. They both represent life as changeful, continuous, progressive, tending to an end; but the metaphor of the race underscores, as it were, another idea, that of effort. The traveller may go at his Leisure, he may fling himself down to rest under a tree, he may diverge from the road, but the runner must not look askance, must not be afraid of dust or sweat, must tax muscle and lungs to the utmost, if, panting, he is to reach the goal and win the prize, So, very significantly, our writer here puts forward only one characteristic of the race. It is to be 'run with patience,' by which great word the New Testament means, not merely passive endurance, noble and difficult as that may be, but active perseverance which presses on unmoved, ay, and unhindered, to its goal in the teeth of all opposition.

But, whilst that is the special characteristic of the metaphor, as distinguished from others kindred to it, and of the ideal which it sets forth, I desire in this sermon to take a little wider sweep, and to try to bring out the whole of the elements which lie in this well-worn figure. I see in it four things: a definite aim, clearly apprehended and eagerly embraced; a God- appointed path; a steady advance; and a strenuous effort. Now let us ask ourselves the question, Do they correspond to anything in my professing Christian life?

We have here, then

I. A definite aim, clearly apprehended and eagerly embraced.

Most men have aims, definite enough, in regard lower things, and if you ask the average man out of the ruck what he is living for, he will generally be able to answer curtly and clearly, or at any rate his life will show, even if he cannot put it into words. But all these are means rather than ends; 'I am living to make a big business.' 'I am living to make a fortune.' 'I am living to found a family.' 'I am living to learn a science, an art, a profession.' 'I am living for enjoyment,' etc., etc. Yes, and then suppose somebody perks up with the exceedingly inconvenient further question, 'Well, and what then?' *Then*, all that fabric of life-aims rushes down into destruction, and is manifest for what it is-altogether disproportionate to the man that is pursuing it. Such shabby, immediate' aims' are not worth calling so. But my text sets forth far beyond, and far above *them*, the one only goal which it is becoming, which it is natural which it is anything else than ludicrous, if it were not so tragical, that any man should be pursuing. And what is that mark? You can put it in a hundred different ways. Evangelical Christian people generally say salvation, and a great many so-called Evangelical Christian people have a very *low*, inadequate, and selfish idea of what they mean by the word. Let us put it in another form. The only aim that it is worthy of a man to live for, as his supreme and dominant one, is that he shall be completely moulded in character, disposition, nature, heart, and will into the likeness of Jesus Christ, who is the image of God, and that he shall pass into no Nirvana of unconsciousness, but into that blessed union with the divine nature, which is not absorption into it, or the Weakening of the individual, but the making a man tenfold more himself because he lives in God, as the taper plunged into the jar of oxygen, which burns the brighter for its surroundings, and unlike the taper, is unconsumed by burning. Thus the complete development of human character into the divine image, and the complete union of the human with the divine, is the aim that Christianity sets before us.

And that aim it becomes every one of us professing Christians clearly to apprehend, and keep ever in view as the thing to which we

are not merely tending, but to which we are striving. Clearly apprehended, and eagerly embraced, this conception of the purpose of our lives must be if we are not to make them ignoble and conscious or unconscious hypocrisies. But remember that such an aim may be pursued through, and requires for its attainment, all those lower aims and ends which monopolise men's efforts without regard to anything beyond. What we want most is a Christianity which, recognising that great, supreme purpose, follows it persistently and doggedly through all nearer and lesser pursuits. We want our Christian principle to penetrate into all the tissues of our lives, and to bring there healing, purging, and quickening. And if we suppose that the greatest of all aims is contrary to any of these lesser ones, except such of them as are sinful, then we misapprehend both the highest blessedness and good of the nearest objects that are set before us, and still more fatally misapprehend the very genius and intention of that Christianity, which is not unworldliness but the secret of making the world and all its fading sweets subservient to this highest end.

Now, need I say one word as to the nobleness and blessedness of a life which is consistently and thoroughly ordered with a view to this great aim? Think of the unity that thus will be blessedly breathed over all the else bewildering diversity of earthly conditions and occupations. As the moon gathers into one great tidal wave the heaped waters of the shoreless ocean, and mastering currents, and laughing at the opposing powers of the tempest, carries the watery wall round the earth, so the white, pure beam of that aim shining down on the confused welter of our earthly life will draw it all after itself. Think, too, of the power that comes into a life from this unity. A man of one aim is always formidable, and high above all other aims in its absorbing power is this one that a Christian man only deserves his name if he sets and keeps before him. Such a unity will, if I may so say, gather together the whole power of our nature, and bring it into a point, and it will heat it as well as concentrate it. If you take a bit of blunt iron, cold, and try to bore a hole in a ten-inch

plank, you will make little progress; but if you sharpen it to a point, and heat it red-hot, then it will penetrate anything. So my life gathered up into one, and heated, by the very fact of its being concentrated, will pierce through all obstacles, and I shall be strong in the proportion in which ‘this one thing I do,’ and do it through all other things.

I need not remind you, either, of the blessedness which is involved in this unity of aim, clearly apprehended and eagerly embraced, in so far as it will act as a test of all lower pursuits and objects. Wherever there comes a little rill of fresh water down upon the coral reef the creatures that build it die, and the reef disappears, and thus a great aim will kill all lower ones that work in the dark, creeping and crawling, and that are contrary to itself.

Further, this supreme aim is supremely blessed, because it will shine ever before us. There is a blessedness in having an object of pursuit which we never reach. It is better to steer straight to the pole-star, though we never get there, than to creep like the old mariners, from headland to headland, and leave behind us sinking on the backward horizon, purpose after purpose, hope after hope, aim after aim. Better to have it shining ahead.

Let me point out the second idea contained in this metaphor, that of

II. A God-appointed path. The race is ‘set before us.’ Set before us by whom? The course is staked out and determined by the Judge of the games. And that may well be applied in two directions. My duties are appointed by God, and if only we realise that, and bring the thought of His will continually into connection with the smallest of the sets which circumstance, relationships, occupations and the like constitute our duties, how different they all become! It is an entirely different thing to say, ‘Being where I am, I must do so-and-so’; or ‘Right and wrong being what it is, I must do so-and-so; or to say,’ This and that man prescribes ‘so, and-so for me’; and to say. ‘Thou hast prepared a path for us, and ordained that we should walk

therein.' That elevates, that sweetens, that calms us, that smooths the road, makes the rough places plain and the crooked things straight. We want with the clear vision of the aim the equally clear and abiding persuasion that God has appointed the path. A modern thinker said that religion was morality touched by emotion. No, religion is morality transfigured into obedience to the law of God. Bring your duties into connection with His appointment, and they will all be easy; and when the path stretches gloomy before you, and it seems that you are called upon to do some hard thing, say: 'Created unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.'

Then there is the other thought that, as the duties are appointed by Him, so the circumstances are appointed, too. You know what they call an obstacle-race, in which the intention is to accumulate as many difficulties in the course as can be crowded into it; I fancy that is a good deal like the race that is set before all of us, by God's wisdom. There are many fences to be climbed, many barriers to be crept under, many deep ditches to be waded through, many bad bits of road studded with sharp points, through which we have to pick our way. We say as to ourselves, and as to our friends, 'What does it all mean?' And the answer is, 'He has set the race before for our profit that we might be partakers of His holiness.'

Again, we have here the notion of

III. A steady progress. Continual advance is the very salt of the Christian life, and unless there be such progress there is something fatally wrong with the Christianity. An unprogressive Christianity is very apt to become a moribund and then a dead Christianity. Of course that is so because the aim of which I have been speaking is, in its very nature, inaccessible and yet capable of indefinite approximation. 'Alps upon Alps arise.' Neither in regard to the intellectual or spiritual apprehension of the deep things of God, nor in regard to the incorporation of His likeness into itself, will human

nature ever be able to say, 'Lo, I have passed through the land, and know it all.' But an indefinite approximation to an eternally unreached point is a description of a geometrical figure, and it is the description of the Christian life. And, therefore, at no point must we stop, and at no point is it safe for us to say, 'I have apprehended and attained.' Our nature, quite as much as the divine nature towards which we tend, demands this continuous progress, for the human spirit is capable of an indefinite expansion, and the seed of the life kindred to God which is lodged in every believing soul, though it be at the beginning 'less than the least of all,' must grow into a great tree.

Ah, brethren! what a sad contrast to this unbroken progress our lives present to our own consciousness! How many Christian people there are who have almost lost sight of the notion, and have certainly ceased from the practice of an unbroken advance in either of the directions of which I have been speaking, likeness to God or communion with Him! Ask yourselves the question, 'Am I further on than I was this day last year, this day ten years, this day twenty years?' The Japanese gardeners pride themselves on having the secret of dwarfing forest trees, and they will put an oak into a flower-pot; and there it is, only a few inches high, in age a patriarch, in height a seedling. And that is what a great many of you Christian people are doing, dwarfing the tree; even if you are not distorting it. And now the last thing that I point out here is

IV. The strenuous effort, I have already said a word or two about that as being the *differentia*, the special characteristic, of this metaphor. And I may just refer for one moment to the fact that the word rendered here 'race,' and quite rightly so rendered, literally means a contest — 'Let us run the contest that is set before us.' What does that say? Why, just this, that every foot of advance has to be fought; it is not merely 'running,' it is conflict as well. And then, pointing in the same direction, comes the selection in the text, which I have already touched upon, of the one qualification that is

necessary — patient endurance, which suggests antagonism. Opposition — where does the opposition come from? The Apostle asked the Galatians that once. ‘Ye did run well; what did hinder you?’ And the answers are diverse: flowers by the roadside, golden apples flung across the course, siren voices tempting us, the force of gravity holding us back, the pressure of the wind on our faces. Yes, and my own self most of all That is what hinders, and that is what has to be fought against by myself. Effort, effort, effort is the secret of all noble life, in all departments, and it is the secret of advancing Christian life.

Now, let us understand aright the relations between the faith of which the New Testament makes so much and the effort of which this metaphor makes so much. A great many Christian people seem to fancy that faith supersedes effort. Not so! It stimulates and strengthens effort. If I trust, I receive the power to run, but whether I shall really run or not depends on myself. God gives the ability in Jesus Christ, and then we have to use the ability, and to turn it into an actuality. They have invented a movable platform at the Paris Exhibition, they tell me, on which a man steps, and having stepped upon it is lazily carried to his destination in the building without lifting a foot or moving a muscle. And some people seem to think that Christianity is a platform of that sort, a ‘living way,’ on which, if once they get, they may be as idle as they like, and they will reach their journey’s end. Not so! Not so! By faith we enter on the race; through faith we receive the power that will make us able to run and not be weary, and to walk and not faint. But unless *we* run we shall not advance, and unless we advance we shall not attain. Understand, then, that faith is the basis of effort, and effort is the crown of faith. If we will thus trust ourselves to that Lord, and draw from Him the power which He is infinitely willing to give, then the great vision of the prophet will be fulfilled in our case, and we shall find stretching across the low, swampy levels of this world ‘a highway,’ and it shall be ‘a way of holiness, and no ravenous beast shall come up therein, but the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord

shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.’

Hebrews 12:1—WEIGHTS AND SINS

‘Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.’ — Hebrews 12:1

THERE is a regular series of thoughts in this clause, and in the one or two which follow it, ‘Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us — looking unto Jesus.’ That is to say, If we would run well, we must run *light*; if we would run light, we must look to Christ. The central injunction is, ‘Let us run with patience’; the only way of doing that is the ‘laying aside all weights and sin’; and the only way of laying aside the weights and sins is, ‘looking unto Jesus.’

Of course the Apostle does not mean some one special kind of transgression when he says, ‘the sin which doth so easily beset us.’ He is speaking about sin generically — all manner of transgression. It is not, as we sometimes hear the words misquoted, ‘*that* sin which doth *most* easily beset us.’ *All* sin is, according to this passage, a besetting sin. It is the characteristic of every kind of transgression, that it circles us round about, that it is always lying in wait and lurking for us. The whole of it, therefore, in all its species, is to be cast aside if we would run with patience this appointed race. But then, besides that, there is something else to be put aside as well as sin. There is ‘every weight’ as well as every transgression— two distinct things, meant’ to be distinguished. The putting away of both of them is equally needful for the race. The figure is plain enough. We as racers must throw aside the garment that wraps us round — that is to say, ‘the sin that easily besets us’; and then, besides that, we must lay aside everything else which weights us for the race — that is to say, certain habits or tendencies within us.

We have, then, to consider these three points ; — First, There are hindrances which are not sins. Secondly, If we would run, we must put aside these. And lastly, If we would put them aside, we must look to Christ.

In the first place, there are hindrances which are not sins. The distinction which the writer draws is a very important one. Sin is that which, by its very nature, in all circumstances, by whomsoever done, without regard to consequences, is a transgression of God's law. A 'weight' is that which, allowable in itself, legitimate, perhaps a blessing, the exercise of a power which God has given us — is, for some reason, a hindrance and impediment in our running the heavenly race. The one word describes the action or habit by its inmost essence, the other describes it by its accidental consequences. Sin is sin, whosoever does it; but weights may be weights to me, and not weights to you. Sin is sin in whatever degree it is done; but weights may be weights when they are in excess, and helps, not hindrances, when they are in moderation. The one is a legitimate thing turned to a false use; the other is always, and everywhere, and by whomsoever performed, a transgression of God's law.

Then, what are these weights? The first stop in the answer to that question is to be taken by remembering that, according to the image of this text we carry them about *with* us, and we are to put them away from ourselves. It is fair to say then, that the whole class of weights are not so much external circumstances which may be turned to evil, as the feelings and habits of mind by which we abuse God's great gifts and mercies, and turn that which was ordained to be for life into death. The renunciation that is spoken about is not so much the putting away from ourselves of certain things lying round about us, that may become temptations; as the putting away of the dispositions within us which make these things temptations. The other is, of course, included as well; but if we want to understand the true depth of the doctrine of self-denial and self-sacrifice which is taught here, we must remember that the sin and the weights alike lie

within our own hearts— that they are our feelings, not God’s perfect gifts — that they are our abuse of God’s benefits, not the benefits which are given to us for our use. We shall have to see, presently, that By the power which we possess of turning all these outward blessings of God’s hands into occasion for transgression, God’s most precious endowments may become weights — but let us observe that, accurately and to begin with, the text enjoins us to put away what cleaves to us, and is in us, not what is lying round about us.

Then, if it be mainly and primarily, legitimate feelings and thoughts, abused and exaggerated, which make the weights that we are to lay aside, what are the things which may thus become weights? Oh, brethren! a little word answers that. Everything. It is an awful and mysterious power that which we all possess, of perverting the highest endowments, whether of soul or of circumstances, which God has given us, into the occasions for faltering, and falling back in the divine life. Just as men, by devilish ingenuity, can distil poison out of God’s fairest flowers, so we can do with everything that we have, with all the richest treasures of our nature, with the hearts which He has given us that we may love Him with them; with the understandings which He has bestowed upon us, that we may apprehend His divine truth and His wonderful counsel with them; with these powers of work in the world which He has conferred upon us, that by them we may bring to Him acceptable service and fitting offering; and, in like manner, with all the gladness and grace with which He surrounds our life, intending that out of it we should draw ever occasions for thankfulness, reasons for trust, helps towards God, ladders to assist us in climbing heavenward. Ah! and because we cleave to them too much, because we cleave to them not only in a wrong degree but in a wrong manner (for that is the deepest part of the fault), we may make them all hindrances. So, for instance, in a very awful sense is fulfilled that threatening, ‘A man’s foes shall be they of his own household,’ when we make those that we love best our idols, not because we love them too well, but

because we love them apart from God; when instead of drawing from those that are dear to us — our husbands, and wives, and children, and parents, and friends, and every other tender name — lessons of God's infinite goodness, and reasons why our hearts should flow perpetually with love to Him — we stay with them, and hang back from God, and forget that His love is best, His heart deepest, and His sufficiency our safest trust. That is one single instance; and as it is in that sacredest of regions, so is it in all others. Every blessing, every gladness, every possession, external to us, and every faculty and attribute within us, we turn into heavy weights that drag us down to this low spot of earth- We make them all sharp knives with which we clip the wings of our heavenward tendencies, and then we grovel in the dust.

And now, if this be the explanation of what the Apostle means by 'weights'— legitimate things that hinder us in our course towards God — there comes this second consideration, If we would run we must lay these aside. Why must we lay 'them aside? The whole of the Christian's course is a fight. We carry with us a double nature. The best of us know that 'flesh lusts against spirit, and spirit against flesh.' Because of that conflict, it follows that if ever there is to be a positive progress in the Christian race, it must be accompanied, and made possible, by the negative process of casting away and losing much that interferes with it. Yes! that race is not merely the easy and natural unfolding of what is within us. The way by which we come to 'the measure of the stature of perfect men' in Christ, is not the way by which these material bodies of ours grow up into their perfectness. They have but to be nourished, and they grow. 'The blade and the ear, and the full corn in the ear,' come by the process of gradual growth and increase. That law of growth is used by our Lord as a description, but only as a partial description, of the way by which the kingdom of Christ advances in the heart. There is another side to it as well as that, The kingdom advances by warfare as well as by growth. It would Be easy if it were but a matter of getting more and more; but it is not that only. Every step of the road you

have to cut your way through opposing foes. Every step of the road has to be marked with the blood that comes from wounded feet. Every step of the road is won by a tussle and a strife. There is no spiritual life without dying, there is no spiritual growth without putting off 'the old man with his affections and lusts.' The hands cannot move freely until the bonds be broken. The new life that is in us cannot run with patience the race that is set before it, until the old life that is in us is put down and subdued. And if we fancy that we are to get to heaven by a process of persistent growth, without painful self-sacrifice and martyrdom, we know nothing about it. That is not the law. For every new step that we win in the Christian course there must have been the laying aside of something. For every progress in knowledge, there must have been a sacrifice and martyrdom of our own indolence, of our own pride, of our own blindness of heart, of our own perverseness of will. For every progress in devout emotion, there must have been a crucifying and slaying of our earthly affections, of our wavering hearts that are drawn away from God by the sweetness of this world. For every progress in strenuous work for God, there must have been a slaying of the selfishness which urges us to work in our own strength and for our own sake. All along the Christian course there must be set up altars to God on which you sacrifice yourselves, or you will never advance a step. The old legend that the Grecian host lay weather-bound in their port, vainly waiting for a wind to come and carry them to conquest; and that they were obliged to slay a human sacrifice ere the heavens would be propitious and fill their sails, may be translated into the deepest verity of the Christian life. We may see in it that solemn lesson — no prosperous voyage, and no final conquest until the natural life has been offered up on the altar of hourly self-denial. That self-denial must reach beyond gross and undoubted sins. They must be swept away, of course, but deeper than these must the sacrificial knife strike its healing wound. If you would run with patience, 'you must 'lay aside every weight,' as well as 'the sin which so easily besets you.'

So much for the *why*; well, then, how is this laying aside to be performed? There are two ways by which this injunction of my text may be obeyed.

The one is, by getting so strong that the thing shall not be a weight, though we carry it; and the other is that feeling ourselves to be weak, we take the prudent course of put-ting it utterly aside. Or, to turn that into other words: the highest type of the Christian character would be, that we should, as the Apostle says, ‘use the world without abusing it’ — that’ they who possess should be as though they possessed not; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not.’ The noblest style of a Christian would be a man, who exercising all the faculties which God had given him, and enjoying all the blessings wherewith God had surrounded him, walked his Christian course like some of those knights of old, lightly bearing his heavy mail, not feeling it a burden, but strong enough to bear the massive breastplate and to wield the ponderous sword, and fitted for his rough warfare by it all. It would be possible, perhaps, some day for us to come to this — that inasmuch as it is the feelings within us which make the weights, and not the objects without us — we should keep and enjoy the blessings and the gladness that we possess, and yet never thereby be thwarted or stayed in our journey heavenward. It would be the highest condition. I suppose we shall come to it yonder, where there will no longer be any need to maim ourselves that we may ‘enter into life,’ but where all the maimings that were done in this world for the sake of entering into life shall be compensated and restored, and each soul shall stand perfect and complete, wanting nothing.

But, alas! though that course be the highest, the abstract best, the thing for which we ought to strive and try; it is not the course for which the weakness and inaptness of the most of us makes us strong enough. And therefore, seeing that we have a nature so weak and feeble, that temptations surround us so constantly, that so many things legitimate become to us harmful and sinful — the path of

prudence, the safe path, is absolutely and utterly to put them away from us, and have nothing to do with them.

Of course, there are many duties which, by our own sinfulness, we make weights, and we dare not, and we cannot if we would, lay *them* aside. A man, for instance, is born into certain circumstances, wherein he must abide; he has 'a calling whereunto he is called.' Your trade is a weight, your daily occupations are weights. The spirit of this commandment before us is not, 'Leave your plough, and go up into the mountain to pray; Again, a man finds himself surrounded by friends and domestic ties. He dare not, he must not, he cannot, shake himself free from these. There are cases in which to put away the occupation that has become a weight — to sacrifice the blessing that has become a hindrance — to abstain from the circumstances which clog and impede our divine life, is a sin. Where God sets *us*, we *must* stand, if we die. What God has given us to do, we *must* do. The *duties* that in our weakness become impediments and weights, we *must* not leave.

But for all besides these, anything which I know has become a snare to me— unless it be something in the course of my simple duty, or unless it be some one of those relations of life which I cannot get rid of — I must have done with it! It may be sweet, it may be very dear, it may be very near thy heart, it may be a part of thy very being : — never mind, put it away! If God has said to you, There, my child, stand there, surrounded by temptations! — then, like a man, stand to your colours, and do not take these words as if they said I am to leave a place because I find myself too weak to resist — a place in which God, for the good of others or for the good of myself, has manifestly set me. But for all other provinces of life, if I feel myself weak I shall be wise to fly. As Christ has said, 'If thy hand offend thee,' put it down on the block there, and take the knife in the other, 'and cut it off': it is better, it is *better* for thee to go into life with that maimed and bleeding stump, an imperfect man, than with all thy natural capacities and powers to be utterly lost at the last! And some

of us, perhaps, may feel that these solemn lessons apply not only to affection and outward business. I may be speaking to some young man to whom study, and thought, are a snare. I know that I am saying a grave thing, but I do say, In that region too, the principle applies. Better be ignorant, and saved, than wise, and lost. Better a maimed man in Christ's fold, than a perfect man, if that were possible, outside of it.

I know that there is a large field for misconception and misapplication in the settlement of the practical question — Which of my weights arise from circumstances that I dare not seek to alter, and which from circumstances that I dare not leave unaltered? There is a large margin left for the play of honesty of purpose, and plain common-sense, in the fitting of such general maxims to the shifting and complicated details of an individual life. But no laws can be laid down to save us that trouble. No man can judge for another about this matter. It must be our own sense of what harms our spiritual life, and not other people's notions of what is likely to harm either theirs or ours, that guides us. What *by experience* I find does me harm, let me give up! No man has a right to come to me and say, There is a legitimate thing, an indifferent thing; it is not a sin; there is not in it, in itself, the essential element of transgression; but you must forsake it, because it is a weight to other people! To my own master I stand or fall. The commandment is, Have no weights! But the way to fulfil that commandment — whether by rejecting the thing altogether, *or* by keeping it, and yet not letting it be a weight, that is a matter for every one's own conscience, *for* every one's own judgment and practical prudence, guided by the Spirit of God, to determine. The obedience to the commandment is a simple matter of loyalty to Christ. But the manner of obedience is to be fixed by Christian wisdom. And remember that on both sides of the alternative there are dangers. There is danger in the too great freedom which says, I am strong; I can venture to do this thing — another man cannot — and I *will* do it! There is a danger On the other side in saying, We are all weak, and we will forsake all these

things together! The one class of moralists are apt to confound their own unsanctified inclinations with the dictates of Christian freedom. The other class are apt to confound their own narrowness with the commandments of God. The one class are apt to turn their liberty into a cloak of licentiousness. The other class are apt to turn their obligation into a yoke which neither they nor their disciples are able to bear. The Apostle pointed out the evils which these two ways of dealing with things indifferent are apt to foster when he said to those who adopt the one, 'Let not him that eateth *despise* him that eateth not'; and to those who adopt the other 'Let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth.' That is to say, on the one hand, beware of the fancied superiority to the weaknesses and narrowness of your more scrupulous brother, which is prone to creep into the hearts of the more liberal and strong. Remember that perhaps the difference between you is not all in your favour. It may be that what you call over-scrupulous timidity is the fruit of a more earnest Christian principle than yours; and that what you call in yourself freedom from foolish scruples, is only the result of a less sensitive conscience, not of a more robust Christianity. Then for the other class, the lesson is, 'Let not him which eateth not, *judge* him that eateth.' Judge not from the height of your superior self-denial, your brother who allows himself what you avoid. Your besetting sin is self-righteous condemnation of those who perhaps, after all, are wiser as well as wider than you, and who in their strength may be able to walk as near to God on a road, which to you would be full of perils, as you are in the manner of life which you know to be needful for you. Let us all remember, besides, that a thing which to ourselves is no weight, may yet be right for us to forsake, out of true and tender brotherly regard to others who, weaker than we, or perhaps more conscientious than we, could not do the same thing without damaging their spirits and weakening their Christian life. 'Him that is weak in the faith, receive.' Him that is weak in the faith, help. And in all these matters indifferent, which are weights to one and not weights to another, let us remember, first, for ourselves, that

a weight retained is a sin; and let us remember, next, for others, that they stand not by our experience, but by their own; and that we are neither to judge their strength, nor to offend their weakness.

And now, in the last place: This laying aside of every weight is only possible by looking to Christ. That self-denial of which I have been speaking has in it no merit, no worthiness. The man that practises it is not a bit better than the man that does not, except in so far as it is a preparation for greater reception of the spiritual life. Some people suppose that when they have laid aside a weight, conquered a hindrance, given up some bad habit, they have done a meritorious thing. Well, we are strengthened, no doubt, by the very act; but then, it is of no use at all except in so far as it makes us better fitted for the positive progress which is to come after it.

What is the use of the racer betaking, himself to the starting-post, and throwing aside every weight, and then standing still? He puts aside his garments *that he may run*. We empty our hearts; but the empty heart is dull, and cold, and dark: we empty our hearts that Christ may fill them.

That is not all: Christ must have begun to fill them before we can empty them. 'Looking to Jesus' is the only means of thorough-going, absolute self-denial. All other surrender than that which is based upon love to Him, and faith in Him, is but surface work, and drives the subtle disease to the vitals. The man that tries, by paring off an excrescence here, and giving up a bad habit there, to hammer and tinker and cut himself into the shape of a true and perfect man, may do it outwardly. He will scarcely do that, but it is possible he may partially. And then, what has he made himself? 'A whited sepulchre'; outside, — adorned, beautiful, clean; inside, — full of rottenness and dead men's bones! The self that was beaten in the open field of outward life, retires, like a defeated army, behind broad rivers; and concentrates itself in its fortresses, and prepares hopefully for a victorious resistance in the citadel of the heart.

My brother, if you would ‘run with patience the race that is set before you,’ you must ‘lay aside, every weight.’ If you would lay aside every weight, you must look to Christ, and let His love flow into thy soul. Then, self-denial will not be self-denial. It will be blessing and joy, sweet and easy. Just as the old leaves drop naturally from the tree when the new buds of spring begin to put themselves out, let the new affection come and dwell in thy heart, and expel the old. ‘Lay aside every weight’ — ‘looking unto Jesus.’ Then, too, you will find that the sacrifice and maiming of the old man has been the perfecting of the man. You will find that whatever you give up for Christ you get back from Christ, better, more beautiful, more blessed, hallowed to its inmost core, a joy and a possession for ever. For He will not suffer that any gift laid upon His altar shall not be given back to us. He will have no maimed man in His service. So, the hand that is cut off, the eye that is plucked out, the possessions that are rendered up, the idols that are slain — they are all given back to us again when we stand in God’s own light in glory — perfect men, made after the image of Christ, and surrounded with all possessions transfigured and glorified in the light of God. ‘There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.

Hebrews 12:2—THE PERFECTER OF FAITH

‘Set down at the right, hand of the throne of God. — Hebrews 12:2.

ST. LUKE gives us two accounts of the Ascension, one at the end of his Gospel and one at the beginning of the Acts. The difference of position suggests delicate shades of colouring and of distinction in the two narratives, the one is the ending of the sweet intercourse on earth, the other is the beginning of a new era and a different type of companionship. So in that which closes the Gospel, emphasis is put upon our Lord’s ascension as being *parted from*; and all that is told

us is of the final benediction befitting a farewell, and of the uplifted hands, which left upon their minds the last sweet impression of the departing friend. But if we turn to the Acts of the Apostles, where the incident is the same, the whole spirit of the narrative is altered. We see there the beginning of a new era, and so we read nothing about parting, but, instead of the indefinite expression, *He blessed them*, we hear of their promised investiture with a new power, and of there being laid upon them a new obligation — ‘Ye shall be clothed with the Spirit: ye shall be My witnesses.’ And the two men who stand by them, and are only mentioned in the Book of Acts, announce the great thought, that the departing Christ will return, ‘He shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go.’ All in that account has a forward aspect. It is a beginning with a new power, strengthened by a new duty, and having a far- off hope. Thus equipped, these eleven no more feel that their Lord is parted from them, nor that they are abandoned and forlorn; but they cast themselves into their new circumstances, and joyfully take up their new work. So the Ascension of Christ is represented in that second account as being the transition from the earthly to the heavenly life and type of communion with Him, and as the preparation for that great fact which my text enshrines in highly figurative language, as being the sitting at the right hand of the throne of God. The Ascension is no transient fact, it is the beginning of the permanent condition of the Church, and of the permanent present relations between Jesus Christ, God, the Church, and the world. So I desire to turn now to the various characteristics of the present and permanent relationship of Jesus Christ to these three — God, the Church, the world.

And first of all I wish to notice’ we have here the thought of the Enthroned Christ. The attitude of sitting indicates repose. The position at the right hand of the throne of God indicates participation in the divine energies and in the administration of the divine providences. But the point to observe is that the Ascension is declared to be the prerogative of the Man Christ Jesus. And so with

great emphasis and significance, in the verse with a part of which I am now dealing, we have brought together the name of the humanity, the name that was borne by many another Jew in the same era as Jesus bore it, we have brought together the name of the humanity and the affirmation of the divine dignity, 'We see Jesus... set down at the right hand of the throne of God.' And over and over again, not only in this Epistle, But in other parts of Scripture, we have the same intentional, emphatic juxtaposition of the two ideas which shallow thinkers regard as in some sense incompatible — the humanity and the divinity.

Remember, for instance, 'this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go.' And remember the rapturous and wonderful exclamation which broke from the lips of the proto-martyr. 'Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' So then that exaltation and ascension is — according to New Testament teaching, which is not contradicted by the deepest thought of the affinities and resemblances of the divine and the human — the lifting up of the *Man* into the glory which the Incarnate Word had with the Father before the world was. And just as the earthly life of that Incarnate Word has shown how divine a thing a human life here may be, so the heavenly life of the still Incarnate Word shows us what our approximation to, and union with, the divine nature may be, when we are purged and perfected in the Kingdom of God, whither the Forerunner is for us entered.

But further, in addition to this thought, there comes another which is constantly associated with the teaching of this session of the Son of Man at the right hand Of God, namely, that it is *intercessory*. That is a word the history of which will take us far, and I dare not enter upon it now. But one thing I wish to make very emphatic, and that is that the ordinary notion of intercession is not the New Testament notion. We limit it, or tend to limit it, to prayer for others. There is no such idea in the New Testament use of the phrase. It is a great

deal wider than any verbal expression of sympathy and desire. It has to deal with realities and not with words. It is not a synonym for asking for another that some blessing may come upon him; but the intercession of the great High Priest who has gone into the holiest of all for us covers the whole ground of the acts by which, by reason of our deep and true union with Jesus Christ through faith, He communicates to

His children whatsoever of blessing and power and sweet tokens of ineffable love He has received from the Father. Whatsoever He draws in filial dependence from the Divine Father He in brotherly unity imparts to us; and the real communication of real blessing, and not the verbal petitions for forgiveness, is what He is doing there within the veil. 'He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.'

But still further in this great figure of my text, the Enthroned Christ, there lies a wondrous thought which He Himself has given us, 'I go to prepare a place for you.' What activities are involved in that wondrous idea it boots us not to inquire, nor would it become us to say. We know that never could we tread those pure pavements except our robes and our feet had been washed By Him. But that is the consequence of His earthly work, and not of His heavenly and present energy. Perhaps in our ignorance of all that lies behind the veil, we can get little further than to see that the very fact of His presence is the preparation of the place. For that awful thought, that crushing thought, of eternal life under conditions bewilderingly different from anything we experience here, would be no joy unless we could say we shall see Him and be with Him. I know not how it may be with you, but I think that the nearer we come to the end of the earthly life, and the more the realities beyond begin to press upon our thoughts and our imaginations as those with which we shall soon make acquaintance, we feel more and more how unquestionable the misery the thought of eternal life would bring if

it were not for the fact that the world beyond is lighted up and made familiar by the thought of Christ's presence there. Can you fancy some poor clod-hopping rustic brought up from a remote village and set down all in a moment in the midst of some brilliant court? How out of place he would feel, how unhomelike it would appear, how ill at ease he would be; ay, and what an unburdening there would be in his heart, if amongst the strange splendour he detected beneath the crown and above the robes, sitting on the throne, one whom he had known in the far-off hamlet, and who there had taken part with him in all the ignoble toils and narrow interests of that rustic scene. Jesus said, 'I go to prepare a place for you,' and when I lift up my eyes to those far-off realities which overwhelm me when I try to think about them, I say, I am not dazzled by the splendour, I am not oppressed by the perpetuity of it, I do not faint at the thought of unlike conditions, for I shall be the same and He will be with me.

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

And so the Enthroned Christ is preparing a place for us. Ay, brethren, and He is not preparing it for us only when we die, but He is preparing it for us whilst we live; for it is only by faith in Him that we have boldness of access and confidence. And neither for the prayers and desires of Christian men on earth nor for the spirits of just men made perfect hereafter will the eternal golden gates swing open except His hand is on the bolt, and by His power the way into the Holiest is made manifest. And so set your minds as well as your affections on the things above, where Christ is sitting on the right hand of God.

Now, secondly, we have here the *Present Christ*. Matthew, in his Gospel, does not tell of the Ascension, but he preserves the promise, 'Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world,' and that promise is not contradicted, but is realised by the fact of Christ's ascension. He does tell us of the remarkable utterance to Mary on the morning of the Resurrection. 'Touch Me not, for I am not yet

ascended to My Father.’ The implication that we have plainly is, when I am ascended you may touch. And the contact of even her nervous and clutching hand round His feet is less than the touch and the presence for which that departure makes the way. ‘He was parted from them’ is the thought that ends the Gospel.

He was parted for a season that thou mightest receive Him for ever, is the thought that begins the Acts and the history of the Church. And it is true of Him and His relation to us,, and because it is true about Him and about His relation to us, it is also true about all those who sleep in Jesus. Their relation towards the earthly form ceases, and there is an empty place where they once stood.

But there is a presence more real and capable of yielding finer influences, strengthening and sanctifying, than ever came from the earthly presence. It is blessed to clasp hands, it is blessed to link arms, it is blessed to press together the lips; but there is a higher touch than these, and sight is a less clear vision than faith; and they who can pass across the abyss of the centuries and the yet broader and deeper and blacker abyss between earth and heaven, and lay the hand of faith on the hand of Christ, have passed through the veil, that is to say His flesh, and have clasped His real presence. Yes, and the thing that calls itself such, is but a part of the general retrogression of Catholicism to heathenism and materialism. We have the real presence if we have the Christ in our heart by faith. He is present with us; enthroned on high above all heavens, He yet is near the humblest heart, the companion of the lonely, the solace of all that trust Him. ‘He trod the winepress alone,’ in order that none of us need ever live alone or die alone.

And there is another side to this presence. As I have said, He is present with us here, and you and I may be present with Him yonder; for one of the Epistles tells us that, ‘we die with Him that we may live with Him, and that God has quickened us (if we are Christian people) together with Him and made us sit together with

Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.’ Your life, Christian men and women, is in its roots and sources, and ought to be in its flow and course, ‘hid with Christ in God,’ and you should not only seek to realise the presence of the Master with *you*, but to climb to Himself, being present with Him.

Thirdly, this great figure of my text sets before us the working Christ. The attitude of sitting at the right hand of God suggests repose; but that is a repose which is consistent with, and is accompanied by, the greatest energy for continuous operation. You remember, no doubt (although, perhaps, not in its full significance), the great words with which the close of St. Mark’s Gospel points on to the future, ‘So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

And they went everywhere preaching the word.’ The Master gone, the servants left; the Master resting, the servants journeying and toiling. It is like the two halves of Raphael’s great transfiguration picture. The Lord and the three are up there in the amber light, the demoniac boy writhing in his convulsions, and the disciples by him helpless, down here. The gap is great. Yes. ‘They went everywhere preaching the Word, the Lord also working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following.’ There is the true notion of the repose of Christ resting indeed at the right hand of God, yet working with His servants scattered over the face of the earth.

And so in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, the keynote is struck when St. Luke says, ‘The former treatise have I made of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach until the day on which He was taken up’; and *this* treatise, O Theophilus, is the second volume of the one story, the history of all that Jesus Continued both to do and to teach after the day on which He was taken up. Acts of the Apostles? No; Acts of the Ascended Christ — that is the name of the book. Never mind about the apostles. They do come into the foreground; but the writer has little care about them. It is the

Christ who is moving; and so we find it all through the book, the Lord did this, the Lord did that, the *Lord* did the other thing; and the apostles are, I was going to say, the pawns on the chess-board. And so you remember, *too*, that dying Stephen saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. He sprang to his feet, not breaking the eternal repose, to look down and to send down help and sustenance and blessing and good cheer to the man there at the foot of the old wall ready to die for Him.

And that is. the type of the whole history of the Church, I have said that Christ's Ascension is the transition from the lower to the higher form of presence; and it is the transition to the wider form of work. He works for us, on us, in us, and with us, and as the apostle Peter said in expounding the significance of the Day of Pentecost, 'Being to the right hand of God exalted He hath shed forth this,' so the Christ is no longer tired, but is still working, working in us, with us, and for us.

And lastly, the metaphor of my text brings before us the returning Christ, It was not only the angel's message that declared that departure and ascension were not the last that the worker was going to see of Jesus. The necessities of the case, if I may say so, tell us the same message. The Incarnation necessarily involves the Crucifixion; the Crucifixion (if it is what we believe it to be) as necessarily involves the Resurrection, 'for it was not possible that He should be holden of it,' the grim death. The Resurrection and the Ascension are but as it were the initial point, which is produced into the line of His heavenly session. It cannot be that Ascension is the last word to be said The path of the King does not run into a *cul de sac* like that. The world has not done with Jesus Christ. He *is coming*, was the great thought around which all the past clustered. He will come, is the great hope around which all the future hopes for the Church and the world are piled and built, 'He shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go,' corporeally, visibly, locally, in His manhood, in His divinity. 'As He was once offered to bear the

sin of many, so shall He come the second time without sin unto salvation.’ Brethren, that is the hope of the Church, discredited by many unworthy representations and mixed up with a great deal that does not commend it by the folly of those who believe in it; but standing out so distinct and so required by all that is gone before, that no Christian man can afford to relegate the expectation into the region of dimness, or to waver in his faith in it, without much imperilling his conception of his Master, and the blessedness of union with Him. You do not understand the Cross unless you believe in the throne; and you do not understand the throne unless you believe in the judgment-seat. The returning Christ shall judge the world. Brethren! Jesus is enthroned. Do you bow to His command? Do you trust His power? Do you see in Him the pattern of what you may be, and the pledge that you will be it if you put your confidence in your Lord? The enthroned Christ is present. Do you walk in blessed and continuous communion with Him? The enthroned and present Christ is working. Do you trust in His operation, peacefully, for yourself, for the Church, for the world? Do you open your heart to the abundant energies with which He is flooding His Church, and which His Church is so sadly and so much allowing to run to waste? The enthroned, present, working Christ is coming back, and you and I have to choose whether we shall be of ‘the servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching,’ and obeying His command with girt loins and lit lamps, and so will sweep with Him into the festal hall, and sit down with Him, on His throne; or whether we shall wail because of Him, and shrink abashed from the judgment-seat of Christ.

Hebrews 12:4—RESISTING UNTO BLOOD

‘Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.’ — Hebrews 12:4.

‘Ye have not yet resisted’ — then others had done so; and the writer bids his readers contrast their own comparative immunity from

persecution from the fate of such, in order that they may the more cheerfully do the easier task devolved upon them. Who were those others?

If the supposition of many is correct that this Epistle was addressed to the Mother Church at Jerusalem, the fate of Stephen the first martyr, and of James the brother of John, who had 'had the rule over' that Church, may have been in the writer's mind. If the date assigned to the letter by some is accepted, the persecution under Nero, which had lighted the gardens of the Capitol with living torches, had already occurred; and the writer may have wished the Jerusalem Church to Bethink themselves that they had fared better than their brethren in Rome. But whether these conjectures are adopted or no, there is another contrast evidently in the writer's mind. He has Been speaking of the long series of heroes of the faith, some of whom had been 'stoned and sawn asunder,' and he would have the Christians whom he addresses contrast their position with that of these ancient saints and martyrs. And there is another contrast more touching still, more wonderful and impressive, in his mind; for my text follows immediately upon a reference to Jesus Christ, 'who endured the Cross, despising the shame.' So Himself 'had resisted unto blood.' And thus the *writer* bids his readers think of the martyrs in the Mother Church; of the blood that had deluged the Church at Rome; of the slaughtered saints in past generations; and, above all, of the great Captain of their salvation; and, animated by the thoughts, manfully to bear and mightily to resist in the conflict that is laid upon them. 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against Sin.'

I. So then, we have here, to begin with, the permanent condition of the Christian life, as one of Warfare and resistance.

The imagery of the whole context is drawn from the arena. A verse or two before the writer was speaking about the race. Now he slightly shifts his point of view, and is speaking rather about the

wrestling or the pugilistic encounters that were there waged. And his point is that always, and everywhere, however the forms may vary in which the conflict is carried on, there is inseparable from the Christian life an element of effort, endurance and antagonism. That is worth thinking about for a moment. It is all very well to sing of green pastures and still waters, and to rejoice in the blessings, the consolations, the tranquillities, the raptures of Christian experience, and to rejoice in the thought of the many mercies for body and soul which come to men through faith. That is all true and all blessed, but it is only one side of the truth. And unless we have apprehended, and have deduced to practice and experience the other side of the Christian life, which makes it a toil and a pain to the lower self, and a continual resistance, I venture to say that we have no right to the soothing and sweet and tender side of it; and have need to ask ourselves whether we know anything about Christianity at all. It is not given to us merely — it is not given to us chiefly — to secure those great and precious things which it does secure, but it is given to us in order that, enriched and steadied and strengthened by the possession of them, we should be the better fit for the conflict, just as a wise commander will see that his soldiers are well fed before he flings them into the battle.

But then, passing from that, which is only a side issue, let me remind you of what our antagonist is ‘striving against *sin*.’

Now some people would take my text to mean solely the conflict which each of us has to wage with our own evils, meannesses and weaknesses. And some, guided by the context, would take the reference to be exclusively to the antagonisms with evils round about us, and with the embodiment of these in men who do not share Christian views of life or conduct. But I think that neither the one nor the other of these two exclusive interpretations can be maintained. For sin is one, whether embodied in ourselves or embodied in men or in institutions. And we have the same conflict to wage against precisely the same antagonist when we are occupied

in the task of purging ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and when we are occupied in the wider task of seeking to bring every man to recognise the power of Christ's love, and to live in purity by obedience to Him.

And so, the first field on which every Christian is to win his spurs, to prove his prowess, and to exercise his strength is the field within, where the lists are very narrow, and where self wages war against self in daily conflict.

Every man of us carries his own worst enemy inside his own waistcoat. We have all lusts, passions, inclinations, desires, faults, vices, meannesses, selfishnesses, indolences, — a whole host of evils lying there like a nest of vipers within us, and our first task and our lifelong task, is to take the sting and the poison out of these, and to throttle them and to east them out.

And then, and only after that, there comes the next thing — viz., the antagonism in which Christian men must permanently stand to a world which does not sympathise with their views, which is strange to the maxims that rule their lives, and which renders no fealty to the King whom they are sworn to obey. And that antagonism runs out into various forms.

First of all, it is the solemn duty of every Christian to wage war so as to prevent himself from being caught up in the current of godless living which prevails round him. We have to fight to keep ourselves from being harmed by the world and the worldly communities amidst which we dwell What would become of the captain of a ship who did not take care to have his compass corrected so as to neutralise the effects of all the mass of iron in his vessel? You walk as in the wards of a hospital. If you do not take precautions you will catch the disease that is in the air. It is as certain that careless Christian people who do not ever keep on guard against impending and surrounding evil shall be infected by it, as it is certain that if an Englishman goes out, say to the United States, he will come back

with the intonations of our brethren on the other side of the Atlantic slipping unconsciously from his tongue. The first duty, imperative upon Christian people, is to realise that they live in the midst of an order of things that is not in accordance with the Master's principles, and so to beware that they do not catch the infection.

I do not need to say a word about the other form of antagonism, which is equally imperative, and which will prevent us from caring much about the judgments that may be formed of us by the people round us. 'With me it is a very small matter that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment.'

But the resistance against sin, which is the Christian man's merciful warfare in the world, is not completed either by his keeping himself from complicity with surrounding evils or by his refusing to let antagonism divert him from his course. There is something more that is plain duty, and that is, that every Christian should be Christ's soldier in the attempt to get Christ's commandments recognised, and the principles of His word obeyed, in the world.

Society is not organised on Christian principles. You have only to look around you to see that. I do not need to dwell upon the various discordances between the plain teachings of this Book and every community, and every nation, and every individual; but let me remind you that until the Sermon on the Mount is the law for individuals and communities, the Christian man, if he is loyal to his Lord, must be 'striving against sin' in the endeavour to get established Christ's kingdom, which is the kingdom of righteousness. That sermon does not contain all Christian truth, but it is the Magna Charta of an applied Christianity; the laws of the kingdom from the lips of the King Himself.

So, brethren, I come to you with this for my message, that no Christian man is doing his work as Christ's soldier, 'striving against sin,' until he is seeking, with the best of his strength, to get Christ's law, which is righteousness, established on the face of the earth.

Talk of dynamiters and explosives, why, there is explosive power enough in Christianity to shatter to pieces the corruptions which make so large a part of modern social life. But, alas! the Christian Church has too long and too generally been employed in damping down the gunpowder instead of firing it, and seeking to explain away the large and plain commandments of the Master, instead of seeking to apply them.

There is a new spirit springing up around us to-day, for which we should be devoutly thankful, whilst at the same time we must forget that, like all new move-merits, it is apt to be one-sided and exaggerated. Much harm is done, I believe, in many directions by Christian teachers seeking to apply the principles of Christ's commandments to various phases of social iniquity without a clear knowledge of the facts of the case. But that being fully admitted, I still rejoice to believe that Christ's men round about us are waking up, as they never did before, to the solemn obligation laid upon Christian churches, if they are not to perish of inanition and inactivity, to proclaim and seek to have recognised Christ's laws for the individual and Christ's law for the community.

Only remember the limitations and the antecedents about which I have already spoken a word. No man has any business to go crusading among other people until he has cleansed himself. And the first task of the Christian reformer is with his own heart. And again, it is useless to deal with institutions unless you deal with the men who live under them. The main work of the Christian Church must ever be with individuals, and through their improvement the improvement of society will be most fully secured. But the error of many good and earnest men to-day is in thinking that if you set the 'environment,' as they call it, right you will get the men right. It is a mistake. Take a pack of drunken wastrels out of the slums and put them into model lodging-houses, and in a fortnight the lodging-houses will be as dirty, as the sties from which the men were dragged. Mend the men, and then you may hopefully set them in

new environment; mend the men, and society will be mended. And, mend yourselves first, and then you will be able to mend society. Resist your own sin, and then go out to fight with the sin of others.

II. Notice the brunt of the battle which has been borne by others.

I have already said that the immediate context suggests two contrasts between the comparative immunity from persecution of the readers of the letter and certain others.

The first is that suggested by all that glorious muster-roll of heroes and martyrs of the faith which precedes this chapter. And I may say without dealing in rhetoric, or dilating on the subject, that Christian men in this generation may well bethink themselves of what it was that their fathers bore, and did, that has won for them this ease.

I remember an old church, on the slopes of one of the hills of Rome, which is covered over on all its interior walls with a set of the most gruesome pictures of the martyrs. There may be an unwholesome admiration and adoration of these. I think modern Christianity, in its complacency with itself, and this marvellous nineteenth century, of which we are so proud, would be all the better if it went back sometimes to remember that there were times when 'young men and maidens, and old men and children,' had to resist to blood; and when they went to their deaths as joyfully as a bride to the altar.

Ah, brethren I you Nonconformists in this generation, who have an easy-going religion, do not always remember how it was worn. Think of George Fox and the Friends. Think of the early Nonconformists, hunted and harried, their noses slit and ears cropped off, their pillories and exile, and then be ashamed to talk about the difficulties that you have to meet. 'Ye have not resisted unto blood.'

There is a far more touching contrast suggested, and apparently mainly in the writer's mind, because just before he has said,

‘Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners.’ The word that he employs for ‘consider’ might be rendered ‘compare, weigh in the balance,’ Christ’s sufferings and yours. He has borne the heavy end of the Cross of which He lays the light end upon our shoulders. Of course the more mysterious and profound aspects of Christ’s death, in which He is no pattern for us, but the propitiation for our sins, do not come into view in this contrast. They are abundantly treated in the rest of the letter. But here the writer is thinking of Jesus Christ in His capacity of the Prince of sufferers for righteousness’ sake, who could have escaped His Cross if He had chosen to abandon His warfare and His witness. Jesus Christ is a great deal more than that. And the *differentia* of His sufferings and death is not touched by such a consideration. But do not let us forget that He is that, and that whatever else His death is, it stands also as being the very climax of all suffering for righteousness. He is the King of the martyrs as well as the Sacrifice for the world’s sin. Let us turn to Him, and mark the heroic strength of *character*, hidden from hasty observation by the sweet gentleness in which it was enshrined, like the iron hand in a velvet glove.

Let us understand how His pattern is held forth to us, and how the Cross is our example, as well as the ground of all our hope. ‘Ye have not yet resisted ... Consider Him.’

III. And now, lastly, note the lighter warfare incumbent upon us.

The resistance changes its form, but in essence it continues. In old days warfare consisted in men bludgeoning each other, or engaging in hand- grips foot to foot and face to face. Nowadays it is artillery duels — a great deal more scientific, a great deal less coarse; but it is warfare all the same. The world used to burn Christians, to hang them, to stone them. It does not do that now, but it fights them yet. The world has become partially Christianised, and the principles of Christianity have, in a certain imperfect way, infiltrated themselves through the mass, so that the antagonism is not quite as hot as it

once was. And the Church has weakened its testimony and largely adopted the maxims of the world. So why should the world persecute a Church which is only a bit of the world under another name? But let any man for himself honestly try to live a life modelled on Christ's maxims, and let him cast himself against some of the clamant evils round about him, and seek to subdue them, because Christ has bidden him, and he will see whether the old antagonism is not there yet. What a chorus of select epithets will immediately be discharged! 'Impracticable,' 'fanatical,' 'one-sided,' 'revolutionary,' 'sour visaged,' 'Pharisee,' 'hypocrite.' These will be the sweet, smelling flowers in the garland that will be woven Depend upon it, a Christian man who is bent on living out Christianity for himself, and on seeking to apply it around him, will have to fight and endure.

But all that is. as nothing — nothing — to what the front rank had to go through, and went through, joyfully. They fell in the trenches and filled them up, that the rear rank might pass across. They bore sword stabs; we have only to bear pin pricks. Stones were flung at them, as at Stephen outside the wall; handfuls of mud are all that we have to be afraid of.

So, brethren, accept thankfully to-day's form of the permanent conflict, and see that you do uncomplainingly, cheerfully, and thoroughly the task that is laid upon you. And do not think much of the discomforts and annoyances. For us to speak about sacrifices *for* Christ is as if a bargeman on a canal were to dilate on the perils of his voyage in the hearing of an Arctic explorer; or as if a man that went in a first-class carriage to London were to speak to an African traveller about 'the perils of the road.' 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood. Consider Him'; and take up your cross, and follow Him.

Hebrews 12:10—A FATHER’S DISCIPLINE

‘For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit,, that we might be partakers of His holiness.’
— Hebrews 12:10.

FEW words of Scripture have been oftener than these laid as a healing balm on wounded hearts. They may be long unnoticed on the page, like a lighthouse in calm sunshine, but sooner or later the stormy night falls, and then the bright beam flashes out and is welcome. They go very deep into the meaning of life as discipline; they tell us how much better God’s discipline is than that of the most loving and wise of parents, and they give that superiority as a reason for our yielding more entire and cheerful obedience to Him than we do to such.

Now, to grasp the full meaning of these words, we have to notice that the earthly and the heavenly disciplines are described in four contrasted clauses. which are arranged in what students call inverted parallelism — that is to say, the first clause corresponds to the fourth and the second to the third. ‘For a few days’ pairs off with ‘that we might be partakers of His holiness.’ Now, at first sight that does not seem a contrast; but notice that the ‘for’ in the former clause is not the ‘for’ of duration, but of direction. It does not tell us the space during which the chastisement or discipline lasts, but the end towards which it is pointed. The earthly parent’s discipline trains a boy or girl for circumstances, pursuits, occupations, professions, all of which terminate with the brief span of life. God’s training is for an eternal day. It would be quite irrelevant to bring in here any reference to the length of time during which an earthly father’s discipline lasts, but it is in full consonance with the writer’s intention to dwell upon the limited scope of the one and the wide and eternal purpose of the other.

Then, as for the other contrast — ‘for their own pleasure,’ or, as the Revised Version reads it, ‘as Seemed good to them’ — ‘but He for

our profit.' Elements of personal peculiarity, whim, passion, limited and possibly erroneous conceptions of what is the right thing to do for the child, enter into the training of the wisest and most loving amongst us; and we often make a mistake and do harm when we think we are doing good. But God's training is all from a simple and unerring regard to the benefit of His child. Thus the guiding principles of the two disciplines are contrasted in the two central clauses.

Now, these are very threadbare, commonplace, and old-fashioned thoughts; but, perhaps, they are so familiar that they have not their proper power over us; and I wish to try in this sermon, if I can, to get more into them, or to get them more into us, by one or two very plain remarks.

I. I would ask you to note, first, the grand, deep, general conception, here firmly laid hold of, of life as only intelligible when it is regarded as education or discipline.

God corrects, chastens, trains, educates. That is the deepest word about everything that befalls us. Now, there are involved in that two or three very obvious thoughts, which would make us all calmer and nobler and stronger, if they were vividly and vitally present to us day by day.

The first is that all which befalls us has a will behind it and is co-operant to an end. Life is not a heap of unconnected incidents, like a number of links flung down on the ground, but the links are a chain, and the chain has a staple. It is not a law without a law-giver that shapes men's lives. It is not a blind, impersonal chance that presides over it. Why, these very meteors that astronomers expect in autumn to be flying and flashing through the sky in apparent wild disorder, all obey law. Our lives, in like manner, are embodied thoughts of God's, in as far as the incidents which befall in them are concerned. We may mar, we may fight against, may contradict the presiding divine purpose; but yet, behind the wild dance of flashing

and transitory lights that go careering all over the sky, there guides, not an impersonal Power, but a living, loving Will He, not *it*; He, not *they*, men, circumstances, what people call second causes — *He* corrects, and He does it for a great purpose.

Ah! if we believed that, and not merely said it from the teeth outwards, but if it were a living conviction with us, do you not think our lives would tower up into a nobleness, and settle themselves down into a tranquillity all strange to them to-day?

But, then, further, there is the other thought to be grasped, that all our days we are here in a state of pupilage. The world is God's nursery. There are many mansions in the Father's house; and this earth is where He keeps the little ones. That is the true meaning of everything that befalls us. It is education. Work would not be worth doing if it were not. Life is given to us to teach us how to live, to exercise our powers, to give us habits and facilities of working. We are like boys in a training ship that lies for most of the time in harbour, and now and then goes out upon some short and easy cruise; not for the sake of getting anywhere in particular, but for the sake of exercising the lads in seamanship. There is no meaning worthy of us — to say nothing of God — in anything that we *do*, unless it is looked upon as schooling. We all say we believe that. Alas! I am afraid very many of us forget it.

But that conception of the meaning of each event that befalls us carries with it the conception of the whole of this life, as being an education towards another. I do not understand how any man can bear to live here, and to do all his painful work, unless he thinks that by it he is getting ready for the life beyond; and that 'nothing can bereave him of the force he made his own, being here.' The rough ore is turned into steel by being

'Plunged in baths of hissing tears, And heated hot with hopes and fears, And battered with the shocks of doom'

And then — what then? Is an instrument, thus fashioned, and tempered and polished, destined to be broken and ‘thrown as rubbish to the void’?

Certainly not. If this life is education, as is obvious’ upon its very face, then there *is* a place where we shall exercise the faculties that we have acquired here, and manifest in loftier forms the characters which here we have made our own.

Now, brethren, if we carry these thoughts with us habitually, what a difference it will make upon everything that befalls us! You hear men often maundering and murmuring about the mysteries of the pain and sorrow and suffering of this world, wondering if there is any loving Will behind it all.

That perplexed questioning goes on the hypothesis that life is meant mainly for enjoyment or for material good. If we once apprehended in its all- applicable range this simple truth, that life is a discipline, we should have less difficulty in understanding what people call the mysteries of Providence. I do not say it would interpret everything, but it would interpret an immense deal. It would make us eager, as each event came, to find out its special mission and what it was meant to do for us. It would dignify trifles, and bring down the overwhelming magnitude of the so- called great events, and would make us lords of ourselves, and lords of circumstances, and ready to wring the last drop of possible advantage out of each thing that befell us. Life is a Father’s discipline.

II. Note the guiding principle of that discipline.

‘They... as seemed good to them.’ I have already said that, even in the most wise and unselfish training by an earthly parent, there will -mingle subjective elements, peculiarities of view and thought, and sometimes of passion and whim and other ingredients, which detract from the value of all such training. The guiding principle for each earthly parent, even at the best, can only be his conception of what is

for the good of his child; and oftentimes that is not purely the guide by which the parent's discipline is directed. So the text turns us away from all these incompletenesses, and tells us, 'He for our profit' — with no sidelong look to anything else, and with an entirely wise knowledge of what is best for us, so that the result will be always and only for our good. This is the point of view from which every Christian man ought to look upon all that befalls him.

What follows? This, plainly: there is no such thing as evil except the evil of sin. All that comes is good — of various sorts and various complexions, but all generically the same. The inundation comes up over the fields, and men are in despair. It goes down; and then, like the slime left from the Nile in flood, there is better soil for the fertilising of our land. Storms keep sea and air from stagnating. All that men earl evil in the material world has in it a soul of good.

That is an old, old commonplace; but, like the other one, of which I have been speaking, it is more often professed than realised, and we need to be brought back to the recognition of it more entirely than we ordinarily are. If it be that all my life is paternal discipline, and that God makes no mistakes, then I can embrace whatever comes to me, and be sure that in it I shall find that which will be for my good.

Ah, brethren, it is easy to say so when things go well; but, surely, when the night falls is the time for the stars to shine. That gracious word should shine upon some of us in to-day's perplexities, and pains, and disappointments, and sorrows — 'He for our profit.'

Now, that great thought does not in the least deny the fact that pain and sorrow, and so-called evil, are very real. There is no false stoicism in Christianity. The mission of our troubles would not be effected unless they did trouble us. The good that we get from a sorrow would not be realised unless we did sorrow. 'Weep for yourselves' said the Master, 'and for your children.' It is right that we should writhe in palm. It is right that we should yield to the impressions that are made upon us by calamities. But it is not right

that we should be so affected as that we should fail to discern in them this gracious thought — ‘for our profit.’ God sends us many love-tokens, and amongst them are the great and the little annoyances and pains that beset our lives, and on each of them, if we would look, we should see written, in His own hand, this inscription: ‘For your good.’ Do not let us have our eyes so full of tears that we cannot see, or our hearts so full of regrets that we cannot accept, that sweet, strong message.

The guiding principle of all that befalls us is God’s unerring knowledge of what will do us good. That will not prevent, and is not meant to prevent, the arrow from wounding, but it does wipe the poison off the arrow, and diminish the pain, and should diminish the tears.

III. Lastly, here we see the great aim of all the discipline.

The earthly parent trains his *son*, or her daughter, for earthly occupations. These last a little while. God trains us for an eternal end: ‘that we should be partakers of His holiness.’ The one object which is congruous with a man’s nature, and is stamped on his whole being, as its only adequate end, is that he should be like God. Holiness is the Scriptural shorthand expression for all that in the divine nature which separates God from, and lifts Him above, the creature; and in that aspect of the word the gulf can never be lessened nor bridged between us and Him. But it also is the expression for the moral purity and perfection of that divine nature which separates Him from the creatures far more really than do the metaphysical attributes that belong to His infinitude and eternity; and in that aspect the great hope that is given to us is that we may rise nearer and nearer to that perfect whiteness of purity, and though we cannot share in His essential, changeless being, may ‘*walk*’ — as befits our limited and changeful natures— ‘in the light, as He’ — as befits His boundless and eternal being — ‘is in the light.’ That is the only end which it is worthy of a man, being what he is, to propose to

himself as the issue of his earthly experience. If I fail in that, whatever else I have accomplished, I fail in everything. I may have made myself rich, cultured, learned; famous, refined, prosperous; but if I have not at least begun to be like God in purity, in will, in heart, then my whole career has missed the purpose for which I was made, and for which all the discipline of life has been lavished upon me. Fail there, and, wherever you succeed, you are a failure. Succeed there, and, wherever you fail, you are a success.

That great and only worthy end may be reached by the ministration of circumstances and the discipline through which God passes us. These are not the only ways by which He makes us partakers of His holiness, as we well know. There is the work of that Divine Spirit who is granted to every Believer to breathe into him the holy breath of an immortal and incorruptible life. To work along with these there is the influence that is brought to bear upon us by the circumstances in which we are placed and the duties which we have to perform. These may all help us to be nearer and liker to God.

That is the intention of our sorrows. They will wean us; they will refine us; and they will blow us to His breast, as a strong wind might sweep a man into some refuge from itself. I am sure that among my hearers there are some who can thankfully attest that they were brought nearer to God by some short, sharp sorrow than by many long days of prosperity. What Absalom, in his wayward, impulsive way, did with Joab is like what God sometimes does with His sons. Joab would not come to Absalom's palace, so Absalom set his corn on fire; and then Joab came. So God sometimes burns our harvests that we may go to Him.

But the sorrow that is meant to bring us nearer to Him may be in vain. The same circumstances may produce opposite effects. I dare say there are people listening to me now who have been made hard, and sullen, and bitter, and paralysed for good work, because they have some heavy burden or some wound that life can never heal, to

be carded or to ache. Ah, brethren! we are often like shipwrecked crews, of whom some are driven by the danger to their knees, and some are driven to the spirit-casks. Take care that you do not waste your sorrows; that you do not let the precious gifts of disappointment, pain, loss, loneliness, ill-health, or similar afflictions that come into your daily life, mar you instead of mending you. See that they send you nearer to God, and not that they drive you farther from Him. See that they make you more anxious to have the durable riches and righteousness which no man can take from you, than to grasp at what may yet remain, of fleeting: earthly joys.

So, brethren, let us try to school ourselves into the habitual and operative conviction that life is discipline. Let us yield ourselves to the loving will of the unerring Father, the perfect love. Let us beware of getting no good from what is charged to the brim with good. And let us see to it that out of the many fleeting circumstances of life we gather and keep the eternal fruit of being partakers of His holiness. May it never have to be said of any of us that we wasted the mercies which were judgments too, and found no good in the things, that our tortured hearts felt to be also evils, lest God, should have to wail over any of us, ‘In vain have I smitten your children; they have received no correction!’

Hebrews 12:17—ESAU’S VAIN TEARS

‘For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.’ — Hebrews 12:17.

THESE words have been often understood as teaching a very ghastly and terrible doctrine, viz., that a man may earnestly and tearfully desire to repent, and be unable to do so. Such teaching has burdened many a heart, and has put obstacles before many feeble feet in the way of a return to God. It seems to me to be contradicted

by a thousand places of Scripture, and to involve something very much like a contradiction in terms.

The Revised Version, by a very slight change, has dispelled that ugly dream. It has put the clause 'for he found no place of repentance' in a parenthesis. The effect of that is to bring the first and last clauses of the verse more closely together; and to show more clearly that what Esau is represented as seeking, and seeking with tears in vain, is not repentance, but the Father's blessing.

It may not, perhaps, be legitimate, regard being had to the construction of the sentence, to treat the clause in question as a parenthesis, because it is so closely connected with the succeeding clause by the antithesis of 'found' in the one and 'sought' in the other. But although that may be so, I have no doubt whatever that the truth intended to be conveyed by the parenthesis of the Revised Version is the true interpretation of the words before us; and that we are to find here simply the declaration that this man, at a given time of his life; 'would have inherited the blessing,' 'sought it carefully with tears,' and found it not.

Now the words, thus understood, teach a sufficiently grave and solemn lesson, though they do not teach the ghastly, and, as I believe, the erroneous thought that has been drawn from them. And it may be worth our while to consider for a moment the lessons that they do teach, and to try to lay them upon our hearts.

I. I begin then, first, with asking you to look at the history which is held up before us here as a solemn warning.

The character of Esau is a very simple one. In many respects he is much more attractive and admirable than his brother Jacob. He is frank, generous, quick to kindle into anger, but, as the story shows us too, quick to forgive; placable, easily to be entreated; with the wild Arab virtues of chivalry and generosity and bravery; and the vices Belonging to such a character, of almost utter incapacity to

rise beyond the present, and of a great susceptibility to mere material and sensual gratification.

And so he comes in from the field hungry and faint. The pottage smells savoury there, as it smokes in the dish before him. The birthright is a long way off, very unsubstantial, very ideal, and the thing that is nearest him, though it be small, shuts out from his view the far greater thing that lies beyond. Therefore he elects to secure present gratification of a material character, whatever becomes of future satisfaction of a higher and more spiritual nature.

And are you going to throw stones at him for that? Is it such a very unusual thing to find men choosing paths that will yield some modicum of sufficiently hot and sufficiently savoury pottage, whatever becomes of their birthright? Is there nobody here that believes more in wealth than in purity? Is there no young man here who would rather live to make a fortune than to cultivate his own nature into loftiest beauty? Are there none of you that despise the priceless things, the things that have no price in the market because they are beyond all its wealth to purchase? Are there none of us who are such fools that a spoonful of pottage to-day seems to us to be more real and more precious than a whole heaven hereafter?

Esau had a show of reason. He said: 'I am ready to die, and what will my birthright do for me?' Better a thousand times that he, or we, should die as animals that we may live as the sons of God, than that we should buy existence at the price of true life. And so the man of our text is sufficiently like the rest of you, for you to have a fellow feeling to him that should make you wondrous kind, and his faults are nothing at all extraordinary, but only putting in graphic form, and in such disproportion as to be almost absurd, the choice that the mass of men always make between present and future, between the material and the spiritual. And then the story goes on to tell us that, long years afterwards, we do not know how long, he found out what a fool he had been. Perhaps so much as thirty or

forty years elapsed between the moment when he despised his birthright and the other moment that is set before us here. What are the points that come out in the narrative to which our text refers? 'When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father'... and again, 'Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice and wept,' These are the parts of the history which the writer of the Hebrews recalls to his Jewish hearers. There is nothing in them about Esau's vainly seeking for repentance, but there is an account of his passionate weeping and loud entreaties that he yet might obtain a blessing from Isaac's trembling lips. In the story there is no word of his vainly trying to repent, but there is a real repentance in the sense in which alone that word can be employed, in reference to such an incident and upon that plane of things, viz., there is in him a decided and fundamental change of view, of mind, as to the value of the birthright that he had despised, and that is repentance; and there is bitter sorrow for what had passed, and that is repentance; and there is earnest desire that it might be different, and that is a sign of repentance. There is no sign of sorrow for sin, of repentance, in that sense of the word, but if we take the word not in the, religious meaning, but in what may be called its secular significance, there are in Esau's case, as recorded in Genesis, both the elements of a decided alteration of mind and purpose, and of penitence and sorrow for the past.

These, then, are the facts of the story, and these are the facts to which my text appeals, for it begins by saying, as to those to whom the whole narrative was familiar: 'Ye know how that.' Therefore all that follows must find its vindication in the story as it is Written in Genesis.

II. These, then, being the facts, let me now come, in the second place, to deal with the lesson which this story teaches us.

Remember what I have said as to points which come out in the narrative, that the man there seeks with tears for the blessing, that so far from vainly seeking to repent, in the lower sense of the word which alone is appropriate in the present ease, he does repent. Therefore that expression of our text 'he found no place of repentance' does not mean 'he found no place where he could repent,' but it means he found no field on which such repentance as he had could operate — so as to undo that which was past. His repentance did not alter the fixed destination of the blessing. His repentance, his change of mind as to the worth of the thing thrown away, and as to his own conduct in despising it, did not bring the thing back again to him. His tears did not obliterate what was done. He wished that it had been otherwise, but his wishes were vain.

And that is the lesson, my brethren, which this text as it stands is intended to teach us. We are pointed back to that tragic picture of Esau there, weeping, wringing his hands in the wild passion of his uncultured nature, when the blessing, seen to be desirable too late, had vanished from his convulsive grasp. And the lesson that is taught us is just this old solemn one. There may come in your life a time when the scales will fall from your eyes, and you will see how insignificant and miserable are the present gratifications for which you have sold your birthright, and may wish the bargain undone which cannot be undone. You cannot wash out bitter memories, you cannot blot out habits by a wish. Tears will not alter the irrevocable, you cannot avert consequences that fall upon a man, the consequences of a lifetime, by any weeping and wringing of your hands, and by any wish that they might disappear. 'What I have written I have written,' said Pilate, and in tragic sense it is true about many a man who at the end looks back upon many 'a line which dying he would wish to blot,' but which stands ineffaceable, not to be scratched out by any of your penknives, unless you can cut out the substance of the soul on which it is written.

My brother! learn the lesson. You young men and women, do you begin right, that there may not be in your career deeds or a set of the life which one day you may wake to see has been all madness and misery! Oh! it is an awful thing for men to stand looking back upon a past life which to them appears as the vale of Sodom, on the morning after the eruption, did to Abraham as he looked on it from Mature, ‘and lo! the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.’ So foul with slime-pits of boiling bitumen, the indulged lusts of the flesh, and dark with curling smoke-wreaths which tell of infernal fires wasting the fields that might have waved fruitful with harvests, the dark remembrances and blighting habits of sin set on fire of hell, does many a man’s life lie spread out to his gaze.

How fain would he cancel the record, if he could! How fain would he forget and reverse the history! How fain would he bring back his early innocence of these lusts and crimes! In vain! in vain!

The past stands — ‘Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.’ I know, thank God for the knowledge, I know that — as we shall have to say presently — any man, at any moment of his earthly career, may find, if he seeks for it, the mercy of the Lord which bringeth salvation, but I know too that the salvation which comes to a man who has all his life been giving himself up to earth, and limiting his views and moulding his character by the present and its contemptible objects, will not be as large, as full, as blessed in many an aspect, as the salvation which might have been his if at an early stage in his life, with his character still to mould, and his memory still unwritten with evil, he had turned himself to his God, and found peace in the blood of Jesus Christ. Maimed and marred in a thousand ways, having memories which burn and sting, having habits which it will be hard to fight against; with the marks of thee gyves upon his wrists; and his eyes unaccustomed to the daylight, like the prisoner that came out of the Bastille after a lifetime of imprisonment there, and wanted to go back again because he could

not bear freedom and sunshine: so many a man brought to God and saved yet so as by fire, near the end of his days, has to feel that it is not all the same whether a lifetime has been spent in the temple and priestly service, or in the foul haunts of vice and debauchery.

We shall always have as much of God as we can hold, and as much of salvation as we desire; but the tragical thing is that a life spent in living, Esau-like, for the world and for the present, lames our desires and limits our capacities, so that even if such a man afterwards become a Christian, it may be impossible even for the giving God to give us as large a bestowment of His mercy and grace as we might otherwise have possessed.

On the other side it is not to be forgotten 'the publicans and the harlots shall go into the Kingdom of God before *you*,' Pharisees and Sadducees. And there is such a thing as the deep repentance and the passionate trust with which a soul, all spattered and befouled with fleshly sins, may cleave to the Master that may overcome even these disabilities of which I have spoken. But in the main it remains true that even if Esau at the last gets a blessing, he bears away a less blessing than he might have done had his earlier life been different.

III. And now let me turn last of all to what I venture to consider the misapprehension which these words do not teach.

They do not teach that a man may desire to repent with tears and be unable to do so. That, it seems to me, is to assert a staring, stark contradiction, for if a man desire to repent he must have changed his views as to the conduct of which he desires to repent, and that change of View is the repentance which he desires. And if a man desires to repent there must be in him some measure of regret and sorrow for the conduct Of which he desires to repent, considered as sin against God, and that is repentance.

Nor do the words teach, as it seems to me, the cognate thought which has sometimes been deduced from them, that a man may

desire to receive the salvation of His soul from God, and may not receive it. To desire is to possess; to possess in the measure of the desire, and according to its reality. There is no such thing in the spiritual realm as a real longing unfulfilled. 'Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.' And the awful pictures that have been drawn of men weeping because they could not repent, and of men with passionate tears imploring from the Father in heaven the blessing which does not come to them, are slanders upon God and misapprehensions of His gospel. That gospel proclaims that wheresoever and whosoever will ask shall receive, or rather that God has already given, and that nothing but obstinate determination not to possess prevents any man from being enriched with the fulness of God's salvation.

Only remember, dear brethren, it is possible for a man to wish vagrantly, with half his will, to wish in a languid fashion, to wish while he is not prepared to surrender what stands in the way of his wish being gratified. And such wishing as that never got salvation, and never will. There are plenty of people that would like to Be saved as they understand it, and to be sure that they are so, who are not prepared to close with the terms of salvation. It is not wishing of that sort that I am talking about. Heaven may be had for the wishing, but it must be an honest wish, it must Be out-and- out wishing, it must be wishing which actuates the life, it must be wishing which drives you to the Cross of Christ. And then, in the measure of the desire shall be the gift; and the larger the petition, the larger the benediction which comes fluttering down from heaven on to your head and into your heart.

We have all sold our birthright, but we have a Brother in whom we may win it back, the elder Brother of us prodigals, who, instead of grudging us the fatted calf and the festival welcome, Himself has died that they may be ours; and that no penitence may be unavailing, nor any longing be unsatisfied for ever more.

Whatever we are, whatever has been our past, however embruted in sensual vice, however entangled in material gains, we have but to turn ourselves to that gracious Lord our Brother, in whom the Father blesses us with all heavenly blessings, and we shall share in the birthright of His firstborn Son, ‘being heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.’

Hebrews 12:22, 23—WITH WHOM FAITH LIVES

‘Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, 23, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.’ —

Hebrews 12:22, 23.

The magnificent passage of which these words are part sums up the contrast between Judaism and Christianity which this whole Epistle has been illustrating and enforcing. The writer takes the scene on Sinai as expressive of the genius of the former revelation, whose centre was a law which evoked the consciousness of sin, and kindled terror; and which was embodied in sensible and material symbols. Far other and better are the characteristics of the latter revelation. That excites no dread; is given from no flashing mountain with accompaniments of darkness and trumpet blasts and terrible words; and it brings us into contact with no mere material and therefore perishable symbols, but with realities none the less real because they are above sense, and not remote from us though they be.

For, says my text, ‘Ye *are* come,’ not ‘Ye *shall* come.’ The humblest life may be in touch with the grandest realities in the universe, and need not wait for death to draw aside the separating curtain in order to be in the presence of God and in the heavenly Jerusalem.

How are these things brought to us? By the revelation of God in Christ. How are we brought to them? By faith in that revelation. So every believing life, howsoever encompassed by flesh and sense, can thrust, as it were, a hand through the veil, and grasp the realities beyond. The scene described in the first words of my text may verily be the platform on which our lives are lived, howsoever in outward form they may be passed on this low earth; and the companions, which the second part of our text discloses, may verily be our companions, though we ‘wander lonely as a cloud,’ or seem to be surrounded by far less noble society. By faith we are come to the unseen realities which are come to us by the revelation of God in Christ. ‘Ye *are* come unto Mount Zion.’

Now, looking generally at these words, they give us just two things — the scene and the companions of the Christian life. The remainder of the passage will occupy us on future occasions, but for the present I confine myself to the words which I have read. And I shall best deal with them, I think, if I simply follow that division into which they naturally fall, and ask you to note, first, where faith lives, and, second, with whom faith lives.

I. First, then, where faith lives.

‘Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.’ There are two points here which carry us back to the topography of the ancient sacred city. In the literal Jerusalem, Zion was the lofty Acropolis, at once fortress and site of the king’s palace, and round it clustered the dwellings of the city.

The two symbols are thus closely connected, and present substantially the same idea, and perhaps it is pressing a figure too far to find a diversity of meaning in the separate parts of this closely connected whole. But still it seems to me that there is a substantial difference of aspect in the two clauses.

The first thought, therefore, that I would suggest to you is this, that the life of a man who has truly laid hold of Jesus Christ, and so is living by faith, is on its inward side — that is, in deepest reality — a life passed in the dwelling of the great King. All through this letter, the writer is recurring to the thought of access to God, unimpeded and continual, as being the great gift which Jesus Christ has brought to us. And here he gathers it into the noblest symbol. There, lifted high above all the humbler roofs, flash the golden pinnacles of the great palace in which God Himself dwells. And we, toiling and moiling down here, surrounded by squalid circumstances, and annoyed by many cares, and limited by many narrownesses which we often find to be painful, and fighting with many sorrows, and seeming to ourselves to be, sometimes, homeless wanderers in a wilderness, may yet ever more ‘dwell in the house of the Lord, to behold His beauty and to inquire in His temple.’

The privilege has for its other side a duty; the duty has for its foundation a privilege. For if it be true that the real life of every believing soul is a life that never moves from the temple-palace where God is, and that its inmost secret and the spring of its vitality is communion with God, what shall we say of the sort of lives that most of us most often live? Is there any truth in such exalted metaphors as this in reference to us? Does it not sound far liker irony than truth to say of people whose days are so shuttlecocked about by trifling cares, and absorbed in fleeting objects, and wasted in the chase after perishable delights, that they ‘are come unto Mount *Zion*,’ and dwell in the presence of God? Is my ‘life hid with Christ in God’? There is no possibility of Death being your usher, to introduce you into the house of God not made with hands, unless faith has introduced you into it even whilst you tarry here, and unless your habitual direction of heart and mind towards Him keeps you ever more at least a waiter at His threshold, if you do not pass beyond. ‘I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of wickedness.’

My brother! do we so knit ourselves to Him, by heartfelt acceptance of the good news of His loving proximity to us which Jesus Christ brings, as that indeed we have left earth and care and sin at the foot of the mount, with the asses and the servants, and have our faces set to the lofty sweetnesses of our 'Father's house'? 'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house,' and no less blessed are they 'in whose hearts are the ways' that lead to it.

Then let me remind you how Zion contrasts with Sinai, and thus suggests the thought that a true Christian life, based upon faith, has a communion with God which is darkened by no dread, nor disturbed by consciousness of unforgiven sin. We have set against each other the terrors of that theophany on Mount Sinai, attendant on, or rather precedent to, the giving of the law — the mountain wrapped in smoke; in the heart of the wreathing blackness the flashing fire; from out of the midst of it the long-drawn trumpet blasts, the proclamation of the coming of the King; and then the voice which, divine as it was, froze the marrow of the hearers' bones, that they entreated that no words like these should any more fall on their trembling ears.

That is the one picture. The other shows us the mount where the King dwells, serene and peaceful, the clouds far below the horizon; the flashing fire changed into lambent light; the blast of the trumpet stilled; the dread voice changed into a voice 'that speaketh better things' than were heard amidst the granite cliffs of the wilderness.

And so in vivid, picturesque form the writer gathers up the one great contrast between the revelation of which the message was law and its highest result the consciousness of sin and the shrinking that ensued, and the other of which the inmost heart is love, and the issue the attraction of hearts by the magnetism of its grace. The old fable of a mountain of loadstone which drew ships at sea to its cliffs is true of this Mount Zion, which is exalted above the mountains that it

may draw hearts tossing on the restless sea of life to the' fair havens' beneath its sheltering height.

There is no dread, though there is reverence, and no fear, though there is awe, in the approach of those who come through Jesus Christ, and live beneath the smile of their reconciled God and Father. 'Ye are come unto Mount Zion,' the dwelling-place of the living God, from whose lips there will steal into the ears and the hearts of those who keep near Him, gracious words of consolation, so thrilling, so soothing, so enlightening, so searching, so encouraging, that they which hear them shall say, 'Speak yet again, that I may be blessed.'

And then there is the other aspect of this scene where faith lives. 'Ye are come unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.' I need not remind you of how much we hear in this Epistle in reference to that city. It is generally set forth as being yet to come, as being the object of seeking rather than of possession. But the fact is that there are two aspects of it. In one it is future, in the other it is present, The general idea to be attached to it is simply that of the order and social state of those who love and serve God. Here, in this part of my text, we have to deal with the city rather than with its inhabitants. They follow thereafter, but, so far as we can separate between the two, we have just this idea enforced in the words that I am now commenting upon — viz., that the lowliest life, knit, as it seems to be, by so many bonds to the perishable associations and affinities of earth, yet, if it be a life of faith in Jesus Christ, has its true affinities and relationships beyond, and not here. 'We have our citizenship in heaven,' says the Apostle, 'from whence also we look for the Saviour.' And every Christian man and woman is therefore hound to two or three very plain duties.

If you are living by faith, you do not belong to this order in the midst of which you find yourself. See that you keep vivid the consciousness that you do not. Cultivate the sense of detachment

from the present, of not being absorbed by, or belonging to, things which are not coeval with yourself, and from all of which you will have to pass. Cultivate the sense of having your true home beyond the seas; and look to it as emigrants' and colonists in a far-off land do to the old country, as being home. Live by the laws of your own city, and not by those that run in the community in which you dwell. You are under another jurisdiction. The examples, the maxims of low earthly prudence, or even of a somewhat higher earthly morality, are not your laws. You are not bound to do as the people round about you do. 'I appeal unto Caesar.' I take my orders from him. I send my despatches home, and report to headquarters, and if I get approbation thence, it does not matter what the people amongst whom I dwell think about me. Make your investments at home. The Jews invented banking and letters of credit in order that they might the more easily shift their wealth from one land to another as exigencies required. We are strangers where we are. Do not put your property into the country in which you live as an alien, and lock it up there; but remit, as you can do, to the land where you are going, and to which you belong. Home securities are a good deal better than foreign ones. 'Ye are come to the city of the living God.' 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth.'

II. And now let me turn to the other thought herewith whom does faith live.

I need not trouble you with merely expository remarks upon the diversity of arrangements which is possible in the second half of my text. Suffice it to say that just as the scene of the life of faith has been represented in a twofold and yet closely connected form as Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem, so the companions of that life are also represented in a twofold and yet closely connected form.

A slight alteration in the punctuation and order of the words in our text brings out, as it seems to me, the writer's idea. Suppose you put

a comma after ‘innumerable company,’ and substitute for that phrase the original Greek word, so reading ‘and to *myriads*’ and then pause there. That is the general definition, on which follows the division of the ‘myriads’ into two parts; one of which is ‘the general assembly of angels,’ and the other is the ‘Church of the firstborn which are written in heaven.’ So then, of companions for us, in our lonely earthly life, there be two sorts, and as to both of them the condition of recognising and enjoying their society is the same — via, the exercise of faith.

Now the word rendered ‘general assembly’ has a grander idea in it than that. It is the technical word employed in classic Greek for the festal meetings of a nation at their great games or other solemn occasions, and always carries in it the idea of joy as well as of society. And so here the writer would have us think of one part of that great city, the heavenly Jerusalem, as, if I may so say, the dwelling-place of a loftier race of creatures whose life is immortal and pure joy; and that we, even we, have some connection with them. In an earlier part of this letter we read that they are all ‘ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation.’ But here the ministration is not referred to, simply the fact of union and communion.

I am not going to enter at any length upon that subject, concerning which we know but very little. But still it seems to me that our ordinary type of Christian belief loses a great deal because it gives so little heed to the numerous teachings of the New Testament in regard to the reality of the existence of such beings, and of the tie that unites them with lowly believers here. All the servants of the King are friends of one another. And howsoever many they may be, and howsoever high above us in present stature any may tower; and howsoever impossible it be for us to see the glancing and hear the winnowing of their silver wings, as they flash upon errands of obedience to Him, and rejoice to hearken to the voice of His word, there is joy in the true belief that the else waste places of the

universe are filled with those who, in their loftiness, rejoice to bend to us, saying, 'I am thy fellow servant, and of them which worship God.'

Brethren, we have a better face brightening the unseen than any angel face. But just because Jesus Christ fills the unseen for us, in Him we are united to all those of whom He is the *Lord*, and He is *Lord* of men as well as angels. So if the eyes of our hearts are opened, we, too, may see 'the mountain full of chariots of fire and horses of fire round about' the believing soul. And we, too, may come to the joyful assembly of the angels, whose joy is all the more poignant and deep when they, the elder brethren, see the prodigals return.

But the second group of companions is probably the more important for us. 'Ye are come,' says the text, not only to the angelic beings that cluster round His throne in joyful harmony, but also 'to the Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.' And, seeing that the names are in heaven, that means, evidently, men who themselves are here upon earth.

I have not time to dwell upon the great ideas which are here contained in the designation of the community of believing souls; I only remind you that probably the word 'church' is not so much employed here in its distinct ecclesiastical sense (for there are no ecclesiastical phrases in the Epistle to the Hebrews), as with allusion to the assembly of the Israelites beneath Mount Sinai, the contrast with which colours the whole of the context. It means, therefore, in general, simply the assembly of the firstborn. Can there be more than one firstborn in a family? Yes! In this family there can, for it is a name here not pointing to a temporary order, but to dignity and prerogative. The firstborn had the right of inheritance; the firstborn was sanctified to the Lord; the firstborn, by his 'primogeniture, was destined in the old system to be priest and king. All Israel collectively was regarded as the firstborn of the Lord. We, if our

hearts are knit to Him who is preeminently firstborn amongst many brethren, obtain, by virtue of our union with Him, the rights and privileges, the obligations and responsibilities, of the eldest sons of the family of God. We inherit; we ought to be sanctified. It is for us, as the 'first fruits of His creatures,' to bring other men to Him, that through the Church the world may reach its goal, and creation may become that which God intended it to be.

These firstborn have their names written in heaven — inscribed on the register of the great city. And to that great community, invisible like the other realities in my text, and not conterminous with any visible society such as the existing visible Church, all those belong and come who are knit together by faith in the one Lord.

So, dear friends, it is for us to realise, in the midst, perhaps, of loneliness, the tie that knits us to every heart that finds in Jesus Christ what we do. In times when we seem to stand in a minority; in times when we are tormented by uncongenial surroundings; when we are tempted by lower society; when we are disposed to say, 'I am alone, with none to lean upon,' it does us good to think that, not only are there angels in heaven who may have charge concerning us, but that, all over the world, there are scattered brethren whose existence is a comfort, though we have never clasped their hands.

Such, then, is the scene, and such is the society, in which we may all dwell. Christian men and women, do you make conscience of realising all this by faith, by contemplation, by direct endeavours to pierce beyond the surface and shows of things to the realities that are unseen? See to it that you avail yourself of all the power, the peace, the blessing which will be yours in the degree in which your faith makes these the home and companions of your lives.

How noble the lowest life may become, like some poor, rough sea-shell with a gnarled and dimly coloured, exterior, tossed about in the surge of a stormy sea, or anchored to a rock, but when opened all iridescent with rainbow sheen within, and bearing a pearl of great

price! So, to outward seeming, my life may be rough and solitary and inconspicuous and sad, but, in inner reality, it may have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, and have angels for its guardians, and all the firstborn for its brethren and companions.

Hebrews 12:23—FAITH'S ACCESS TO THE JUDGE, AND HIS ATTENDANTS

Ye are come., to God the Judge of an, and to the spirits of Just men made perfect.' — Hebrews 12:23.

THE principle of arrangement in this grand section of this letter is obscure, and I am afraid that I cannot east much, if any, light upon it. We might, at first sight, have expected that the two clauses of our present text should have been inverted, so as to bring all the constituent parts of 'the city of the living God' closely together — viz., 'the angels,' the members of the militant Church on earth, and those of the triumphant Church in heaven; and also to bring together 'God the Judge of *all*,' and 'Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant.' But the arrangement, as it stands in our text, may be compared profitably with that of the preceding verses, which we were considering in the last sermon. There, as here, the allusion to the immediate presence of God passed at once into the reference to the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. And just as there Zion, the palace, was immediately connected with the city of the living God, so here the writer, harking back, as it were, to his original starting-point, no sooner names 'God the Judge' than he passes on to set before us 'the spirits of just men made perfect.' In the earlier clauses we have had the more general reference to the palace and the city around it. Here, if I may so say, we pass within the palace gates, and the writer tells us what we find there. This interweaving of the presence of God with that of the creatures that live in His love witnesses to the great truth that our God dwells in no isolated supremacy, but in the midst of a blessed society; and that the solitary

souls who find their way into His presence have a welcome, not only from Him, but from all their brethren Of His great family.

So the arrangement may not be so inexplicable as, at first sight, it strikes us as being, if it suggests to us the close and indissoluble connection between God Himself and all those who, in every place, whether the place above or the place beneath, call upon the name of Him who is both their God and ours. In dealing with these words, I have simply to consider these two ideas thus set before us.

I. Faith plants us at the very bar of God.

‘Ye are come to God the Judge of all.’ Now, it is to be observed that, more accurately, the words might be rendered, ‘Ye are come to the God of all as Judge’; for the point which the writer wishes to bring out is not so much the general idea of the divine presence, as that presence considered under a specific aspect, and referring to one mode of His action — viz., the judicial. It is further to be noticed that the judgment which is here spoken about is not, as the very language, ‘Ye are come to the Judge; implies, future, but present. The Old Testament, with continual reference to which this letter is saturated, has a great deal more to say about the present continuous judgment which God works all through the ages than about the final future judgment, And, in accordance, not only with the language of our text, which makes *coming* a present thing, but, in accordance also with the whole tone of the Old Testament, we should recognise here, not so much a reference to the final tribunal Before which all mankind must stand (at which the Judge is characteristically represented in the New Testament as being, not God the Father, But Jesus Christ), as to the continual judgment, both in the sense of decision as to character and infliction of consequences, which is being exercised *now* by the God of all.

So, then, the first thought that I would suggest from this idea is, Here is a truth which it is the office of faith to realise continually in our daily lives. Your loving access to God, Christian men and

women, has brought you right under the eye of the Judge, and, though there be no terror in our approach to that tribunal, there ought to be a wholesome awe as the permanent attitude of our spirits, the awe which is the very opposite of the cowering dread which hath torment. He would be a bold criminal who would commit crimes in the very judgment-hall and before the face of his judge. And that must be a very defective Christian faith which, like the so-called faith of many amongst us, goes through life and sins in entire oblivion of the fact that it stands in the very presence of the Judge of all the earth. Oh, if we could rend the veil as death will rend it, and see the things which are, as faith will help us to see them — for it *thins*, if it does not tear, the envious curtain between — would it be possible that we should live the low, mean, selfish, earthly, sinful lives, devoured by anxieties, defaced by stains, depressed by trivial sorrows, which, alas! so many of us do live? ‘Ye are come.., unto God the Judge of all.’ ‘If ye call Him Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.’

Then, again, notice that this judgment of God is one which a Christian man should joyfully accept. ‘The Lord will judge His people,’ says one of the psalms. ‘You only have I known of all the inhabitants of the earth; therefore will I punish you for your iniquities,’ says one of the prophets.

Such sayings represent this present judgment as inevitable, just because of the close connection into which true faith brings a man with his Father in heaven. Inevitable, and likewise most blessed and desirable, for in the thought are included all the methods by which, in providence, and by ministration of His truth and of His Spirit, God reveals to us our hidden meannesses; and delivers us sometimes, even by the consequences which accrue from them, from the burden and power of our sin.

So, then, the office of faith in regard to this continuous judgment which God is exercising upon us because He loves us is, first of all, to open our hearts to it by confession, by frank communion, by referring all our actions to Him to court that investigation. That judgment is no mere knowledge by cold omniscience, such as a heathen conception of the divine eye might make it to be; but just as a careful gardener will go over his rose-trees, and the more carefully the more precious they are in his sight, to pick from each nestling-place at the junction of the leaves with the stem the tiny insects that are sucking out the sap and destroying them, so God will search our hearts in order to pluck from these the crawling evils which, microscopic and tiny as they may be, will yet, in their multitude innumerable, be destructive of our spirits' lives.

It is a *gospel* when we say, 'The Lord will judge His people.' Therefore in many a psalm we have the writers spreading themselves out before God, and beseeching Him to come and search them, and try them, and sift them through His sieve, and know them altogether, in the sure confidence that wheresoever He beholds an evil He will be ready to cure it, and that whosoever spreadeth out his sin before God will be lightened of the burden of his sin.

This merciful judgment, which is, in fact, all directed to the perfecting and sanctifying of its subjects, reaches its end in the measure in which we register its decisions in our consciences. God writes His mind about us on them, and when they speak they are only speaking an echo of the sentence that has been pronounced from that loftier tribunal. Therefore, whosoever professeth himself to be a Christian and does anything, be it great or small, which his conscience rebukes when done, and prohibited before it was done, that man is despising the judgment of God, and bringing down upon himself the condemnation which follows despised judgment. 'If we should judge ourselves we should not be judged.' Reverence your consciences: they are the echo of the Judge's voice; peruse their records; they are the register of the Judge's sentence; and

whosoever that inward voice speaks, bow before it and say, 'Lord! servant heareth.'

And then, further, remember that this judgment is one that demands our thankful acceptance of the discipline which it puts in force. If we knew ourselves we should bless God for our sorrows. These are His special means of drawing His children away from their evil. 'When we are chastened, we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world.' Oh! there would be less impatience, less blank amazement when suffering comes to us, less vain and impotent regrets for vanished blessings, if we saw in all the dealings of our Father's hands the results of His judgment, and believed that it is better for us to be separated, though it be with violence and much bleeding of torn-away hearts, from our idols than that our idolatry should destroy us and mar them. 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.' This judgment is not only the merciful separation of us from our sins, but it is also a judgment on our behalf.

The office of the early Jewish judges was not only the judicial one which we mean by the word, but was much wider, and some trace of that wider idea runs through almost all the Old Testament references to the divine judgment. It comes to mean, not merely a decision adverse or favourable, as the case may be, as to the moral character of its subjects, but it also substantially means pleading their cause, defending their right, intervening for them, and so in many a psalm you will find such petitions as this, 'Judge me, O Lord; for I am poor and needy. Plead my cause against them which rise up against me.' And the same conception of the Judge's office appears in one of our Lord's parables, familiar to us all, in which we are told that 'the Lord will judge His own elect though He bear long with them.'

Thus, another of the blessed thoughts that come out of this conception of our approach to 'the Judge of all' is that we may confidently commit our cause to Him, and leave our vindication in His hands. So, abstinence from self-assertion, from self-vindication,

from vengeance or recompense, patience, courage, consolation, strength, all these virtues will be ours if we understand to whom we come by our faith, and can behold, on the throne of the universe, One who will plead our cause, and undertake for us whensoever we are burdened and oppressed.

II. Secondly, Faith carries us while living to the society of the living dead.

‘The Judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect.’ Immediately on the thought of God arising in the writer’s mind, there rises also the blessed thought of the blessed company in the centre of whom He lives and reigns. We can say little about that subject, and perhaps the less we say the more we shall understand, and the more deeply we shall feel. We get glimpses but no clear vision, as when a flock of birds turn in their rapid flight, and for a moment the sun glances on their white wings; and then, with another turn, they drift away, spots of blackness in the blue. So we see but for a moment as the light falls, and then lose the momentary *glory*, but we may at least reverently note the exalted words here.

‘The spirits of... men made perfect.’ That is to say, they dwell freed from the incubus and limitations, and absolved from the activities, of a bodily organisation. We cannot understand such a condition. To us it may seem to mean passivity or almost unconsciousness, but we know, as another New Testament writer has told us, that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord; and that in some deep, and to us now undiscoverable, fashion, that which the corporeal frame does for men here, immersed in the material world, there the encircling Christ in whom they rest does for them. We know little more, but we have a glimpse of a land of deep peace in which repose is not passivity nor unconsciousness; any more than service is weariness. And there we have to leave it, knowing only this, that it is possible for a man to exist and to be, in a relative

sense, perfected without a body. Then, further, these spirits are 'perfect.'

The writer has said, at the close of the preceding chapter, that the ancient saints 'without us should not be made perfect.' And here he employs the same word with distant reference, as I suppose, to his previous declaration. From which I infer that that old thought is true, that Jesus Christ shot some rays of His victorious and all-reconciling power from His Cross into the regions of darkness, and brought thence those who had been waiting for His coming through many a long age. A great painter has left on the walls of a little cell in his Florentine convent a picture of the victorious Christ, white-robed and banner-bearing, breaking down the iron gates that shut in the dark, rocky cave; and flocking to Him, with outstretched hands of eager welcome, the whole long series from the first man downwards, hastening to rejoice in His light, and to participate in His redemption.

So the ancient Church was 'perfected' in Christ; but the words refer, not only to those Old Testament patriarchs and saints, but to all who, up to the time of the writer's composition of his letter, 'slept in Jesus.' They have reached their goal in Him. The end for which they were created has been attained. They are in the summer of their powers, and full-grown adults, whilst we here, the maturest and the wisest, the strongest and the holiest, are but as babes in Christ.

But yet that 'perfecting' does not exclude progress, continuous through all the ages; and especially it does not exclude one great step in advance which, as Scripture teaches us, will be taken when the resurrection of the body is granted. Corporeity is the perfecting humanity. Body, soul, and spirit, these make the full-summed man in all his powers. And so the souls beneath the altar, clothed in white, and rapt in felicity, do yet wait 'for the adoption, even the redemption of the body.'

Mark, further, that these spirits perfected would not have been perfected there unless they had been made just here. That is the first step, without which nothing in death has any tendency to ennoble or exalt men. If we are ever to come to the perfecting of the heavens, we must begin with the justifying that takes place on earth.

Let me point you to one other consideration, bearing not so much on the condition as on the place of these perfected spirits. It is very significant, as I tried to point out, that they should be closely associated in our text with 'God the Judge of all.' Is there any hint there that men who have been redeemed, who being unjust, have been made just, and have had experience of restoration and of the misery of departure, shall, in the ultimate order of things, stand nearer the throne than unfallen spirits, and teach angels? If the 'just man made perfect,' and not the festal assembly of the angels, that are brought into connection here with 'the Judge of all.' Is there any hint that in some sense these perfected spirits are assessors of God in His great judgment? 'Ye shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel,' seems to point in that direction. But the ground is precarious, and I only point to the words in passing as possibly affording a foothold for a 'perhaps.'

But the more important consideration is the real unity between poor souls here who are knit to Jesus Christ, and the spirits of the just made perfect who stand so close to the judgment seat.

Ah, brethren! we have to alter the meaning of the words 'present' and 'absent' when we come to speak of spiritual realities. The gross localised conceptions that are appropriate to material space, and to transitory time, have nothing to do with that higher religion. It is no mere piece of rhetoric or sentiment to say that where our treasure is, there are our hearts, and where our hearts are there are we.

Love has no localities. It knits together two between whom oceans wide roll; it knits together saints on earth and saints in heaven. To talk of place is irrelevant in reference to such a union; for if our

love, our aims, our hopes be the same, we are together. And if they on the upper side, and we on the lower, grasp each the outstretched hand of the same God, then we are one in Him, and the same life will tingle through our earthly frames and through their perfected spirits. He is the centre of the great wheel whose spokes are light and blessedness; and all who stand around Him are brought into unity by their common relation to the centre.

Our sorrows would be less sorrowful, our loss less utter, if we truly believed that while apart we are still together. Our courage and our hope would rise if we came closer in loving contemplation and believing thought to the present blessedness of those once our fellow-travellers, who, weak as we, have entered into rest. Heaven itself would gain some touch of true attractiveness if we more clearly saw, and more thankfully felt, that there is ‘the Judge of all,’ and there also ‘the spirit of just men made perfect.’

But howsoever great may be the encouragement, the consolation, the quieting that come from them, let us turn away our eyes from the surrounding and lower seats to fix them on the central throne. Let us ever realise that we are ever in our great Judge’s eye. Let us spread out our hearts for His scrutiny and decision, for His discipline if need be. Let us commit to Him our cause, and, in the peace that comes therefrom, we may understand why it was that psalmists of old called upon earth to rejoice and the hills to be glad because He ‘cometh to judge the earth, to judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth.’

Hebrews 12:24—THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT AND ITS SEAT

‘Ye are come.., to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.’ — Hebrews 12:24.

IN previous sermons on the preceding context, we have had frequent occasion to remark on the parallel and contrast between Sinai and Zion, as expressive of the difference between the genius of Judaism and Christianity, which shapes the whole of this section. That contrast and parallel are most obvious at its beginning and here at its close.

In the beginning we had the mountain of the Law, swathed in darkness, lit by flashing flame, contrasted with the sunny slopes of Zion, palace-crowned, and the wild desert set in opposition to the city of peace that clustered round the foot of Zion's Mount. Here at the close we have the key-words of the old revelation laid hold of and applied to the new.

Judaism was a covenant in the form of a law, of which the terms were these: 'Do, and thou shalt live!' The gospel is a covenant in the form of a promise, of which the tenor is 'Believe and live; live and do!' The ancient covenant had Moses for its mediator, passing between the mountain and the plain. The gospel has a better and a truer link of union between God and man than any mere man, however exalted, can be. The ancient system had its sprinkled blood, by which the men on whom it fell entered into the covenant, and were ceremonially sanctified. The new covenant has its blood. An awful voice rolled amongst the peaks of Sinai. That 'blood of sprinkling' speaks too. And then the writer blends with that allusion another, to the voice of the blood of the first martyr, every drop of which cried to God for retribution, and points to the blood of the more innocent Abel, every drop of which appeals to the Father's heart for pardon.

Now it may be said that thus to present Christian truth under the guise of the symbols of an ancient ceremonial and external system is a retrograde step. And some people, who think themselves very enlightened, tell us that the time is past for looking at Christianity from such a point of view. One great man has let himself talk about

‘Hebrew old clothes.’ I am very much mistaken if these old clothes will not turn out to be something like the raiment that the Hebrews wore in the wilderness, ‘which waxed not old for forty years,’ and outlasted a great many suits that other people had cut for themselves. We have only to ponder upon these emblems until they become significant to us, in order to see that, instead of being antiquated and effete, they are throbbing with life, and fit as close to the needs of to-day as ever they did. They came with a special message, no doubt, to these men to whom this letter was first addressed, who were by descent and habit Hebrews, and saturated with the law. But their message is quite as much to you and me; and I desire now simply to bring out the large and permanent meanings which lie beneath them.

I. First, then, note that God’s revelation to us is in the form of a covenant.

Now, of course, when we talk about a covenant or compact between two men, we mean a matter of bargaining on the terms of which both have been consulted, and which has assumed its final form after negotiations and perhaps compromise. But there are necessarily limitations to the transference of all human ideas to divine relations. One such limitation is expressed in the very language of the original. The word rendered ‘covenant’ suppresses the idea of conjunction, and emphasizes that of appointment. By which we are to learn that the covenant which God makes with man is of His own settling and is not the result of mutual giving and taking; that men have nothing to do with the determining of these conditions; that He Himself has made them, and that He is bound by them, not because we have arranged them with Him, but because He has announced them to us. With that limitation we can take the idea and apply it to the relation between God and us, established in the great message of the gospel.

For what is the notion that underlies the old-fashioned, and to some of you obsolete and unwelcome word? Why, simply this, it is a

definite disclosure of God's purpose as affecting you and me, by which disclosure He is prepared to stand and to be bound. It is a revelation, but a revelation that obliges the Revealer to a certain course of conduct; or, if you would rather have a less theological word, it is a system of promise under which God mercifully has willed that we should live. And just as when a king gives forth a proclamation, he is bound by the fact that he gave it forth, so God, out of all the infinite possibilities of His action, condescends to tell us what His line is to be, and He will adhere to it. He lets us see the works of the clock, if I may so say, not wholly, but in so far as we are affected by His action.

What, then, are the terms of this covenant? We have them drawn out, first, in the words of Jeremiah, who apprehended, when he was dwelling in the midst of that eternal system, that it could not be a final system; and next, by the writer of this letter quoting the prophet, who, in the midst of the vanishing of that which could be shaken, saw emerging, like the fairy form of the fabled goddess out of the sea-foam, the vast and permanent outlines of a nobler system. The promises of the covenant are, then, full forgiveness as the foundation of all, and built upon that, a knowledge of God inwardly illuminating and making a man independent of external helps, though he may sometimes be grateful for them; then a mutual possession which is based upon these, whereby I, even I, can venture to say, God is mine, and, more 'wonderful still, I, even I, can venture to believe that He bends down from heaven and says: 'And thou, thou art Mine!' and then, as the result of all — named first, but coming last in the order of nature — the law of His commandment will be So written upon the heart that delight and duty are spelt with the same letters, and His will is our will. These are the elements, or you can gather them all up into one, namely, the promise of eternal *life*— *based* upon forgiveness, operating through the knowledge of God, and issuing in perfect conformity to His blessed will.

If these, then, be the articles of the paction, think for a moment of the blessedness that lies hived in this ancient, and to some of us musty, thought of a covenant of God's. It gives a basis for knowledge. Unless He audibly and articulately and verifiably utters His mind and will, I know not There men are to go to get it. Without an actual revelation from heaven, of other nature, of clearer contents, of more solid certitude than the revelations that may have been written upon the tablets of our hearts, over which we have too often scrawled the devil's message, and over and above the ambiguous articles that may be picked out and pieced together, from reflection upon providence and nature, we need something better and firmer, more comprehensively and more manifestly authoritative, before we are entitled to say, 'Behold! I know that God loves me, and that I may put my trust in Him.' Brethren! I for my part believe that between agnosticism on that side, and the full evangelized faith of the New Testament in a supernatural revelation on this side, all forms of so-called Christianity which shy at the idea of a supernatural 'revelation are destined to have the life squeezed out of them, and that what will be left will be the two logical positions; first, God, if there be a God, never spoke, and we do not know anything about Him; and, second, 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.' If there be a God at all, and if there be in Him any love and any righteousness, it is infinitely more reasonable to suppose that He should have spoken His mind and heart to men, and given them a covenant on which they can reckon, than that He has been from the beginning a dumb God, that never opened His mouth with a word of guidance or of sympathy for the sons of men. Believe that who may; I cannot believe in a pure theism, which has no place for a supernatural revelation.

And then, again, let me remind you how here is the one foothold, if I may so say, for confidence. If God hath not spoken there is nothing to reckon upon. There are perhaps, probabilities if you like,

possibilities, but nothing beyond, and no man can build a faith on a peradventure. There must be solid ground on which to rest; and here is solid ground: 'I make a covenant with you.' 'God is not a man that He should lie, nor the Son of Man that He should repent.' And armed with that great thought that He has verily rent the darkness and spoken words which commit *Him* and assure *us*, we, even the weakest of us, may venture to go to Him, and plead with Him that He cannot and dare not alter the thing that has gone forth out of His mouth; and so, in deepest reverence, can approach Him and plead the necessity of a great *Must* under which He has placed Himself by His own word. God is faithful, the covenant-making and the covenant-keeping God.

II. Secondly, mark that Jesus Christ is the Executor of this covenant.

Moses, of course, was a go-between, in a mere external sense; from the mountain to the plain and from the plain to the mountain, he passed, and in either case simply carried a message bearing God's will to man or man's submission to God. But we have to dig far deeper into the idea than that of a mere outward messenger who carries what is entrusted to him, as an errand boy might, if we are to get the notion of Christ's relation to these great promises, which, massed together, are God's covenant with us.

Observe that the emphasis is here laid on the manhood of the *Lord*. It is *Jesus* who is the 'Mediator of the covenant': and observe, too, that that idea passes into the wider notion of His place as the link uniting God and man. The depth of the thought is only reached when we recognise His divinity and His humanity. He is the ladder with its foot on earth and its top in heaven.

Because God dwells in Him, and the word became flesh, He is able to lay His hand upon both, and to bring God to man and man to God.

He brings God to man. If what I have been saying is at all true, that for all solid faith we must have an articulate declaration of the divine mind and heart, it seems to me to be equally irrefragable that for any such declaration of the divine heart and mind we must have a human vehicle. God speaks through men. It is His highest way of making Himself known to mere men. And Jesus Christ in His Manhood declares God to us. Not by the mere words which He speaks, as a teacher and a wise man, a religious genius and a saint, a philosopher and a poet, a moralist and a judge; but by these, and also by His life, by His emotions of pity and gentleness and patience, and by everything that He does and everything that He endures, He speaks to us of God.

Brethren, where shall a poor man rest his soul outside of the direct or indirect influences of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ? Why I the very men who reject Him to-day, on the plea that they have learnt a nobler conception of God than they can find in Christianity, owe their conception of Him to the gospel which they reject. Where else is there certitude solid enough to resist the pressure of sorrow and of sin; confidence enough to maintain faith in the face of difficulty and conscious evil and death; or energy enough in a creed to make religion an all-controlling influence and an all-gladdening stay except in Jesus Christ? I venture to say, nowhere. Nowhere beyond the limits to which either the river of the water of life has manifestly flowed; or some rills and rivulets from it have crept underground to give strange verdure to some far-off pasture; nowhere else is there found the confidence in the Father's heart which is the property of the Christian man, and the result of the Christian covenant. Jesus Christ brings God to man by the declaration of His nature incarnate in humanity.

And, on the other hand, He brings man to God: for He stands to each of us as our true Brother, and united to us by such close and real bonds as that all which He has been and done may be ours if we join ourselves to Him by faith. And He brings men to God, because in

Him only do we find the drawings that incline wayward and wandering hearts to the Father. And He seals for us that great Covenant in His own person and work, in so far as what He in manhood has done has made it possible that such promises should be given to us. And, still further, He is the Mediator of the covenant, in so far as He Himself possesses in His humanity all the blessings which manhood is capable of deriving from the Father, and He has them all in order that He may give them all. There is the great reservoir from which all men may fill their tiny cups.

Men tell us that they want no Mediator between them and God. Ah, my brother! go down into your own hearts; try to understand what sin is; and then go up as near as you can to the dazzling white light, and try partially to conceive of what God's holiness is, and tell us, Do you think you, as you are, could walk in that light and not be consumed? It seems to me that no man who has any deep knowledge of his own heart, and any, though it be inadequate, yet true, conception of the divine nature, dare take upon his lips that boast that we often hear, 'We need none to come between us and God.'

For me, I thankfully hear Him say, 'No man cometh to the Father but by Me'; and pray for grace to tread in that only way that leadeth unto God.

III. Note the sprinkling of the blood which seals the covenant.

There is an allusion there, as I have already suggested, to the ceremonial at Sinai, when, in token of their entrance into the covenant, the Blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled upon the crowd; and also an allusion to the voice of the blood of the innocent Abel, which 'cried to God from the ground.' The writer has already referred to that in the earlier part of the letter; and here he weaves the two together because, with whatever differences of representation, the substantial meaning of both images is the same. The blood shed establishes the covenant; and the blood sprinkled brings us into it.

If Jesus had not died, there would have been no promises for us, beginning in forgiveness and ending in wills delighting in God's law. It is 'the new covenant in His blood.' The death of Christ is ever present to the divine mind and determines the divine action.

Hence the allusion to the voice, in contrast both to the dread voice that echoed among the grim peaks of Sinai, and to that which, as if each drop had a tongue, called from Abel's innocent blood for retribution. Christ's, too, has a voice, and that an all-powerful one. It cries for pardon with the same authority of intercession as we hear in His wondrous high-priestly prayer: 'Father, I will.'

Further, that sprinkling, which introduced technically and formally these people into that covenant, represents for us the personal application to ourselves of the power of His death and of His life by which we may make all God's promises our own, and be cleansed from all sin. It is 'sprinkled.' Then it is capable of division into indefinitely small portions, and of the closest contact with individuals. That is but a highly metaphorical way of saying that Jesus Christ has died for each of us, that each of us may find acceptance and cleansing, and the inheritance of all the promises, if we put our trust in Him.

For remember, these words of my text are the end of a great sentence, which begins, 'Ye are come.'

Faith is that coming. What did Christ say? 'He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger. He that believeth on Me shall never thirst.' There is His own interpretation of the metaphor. Whosoever trusts Him, comes to Him. If I put my tremulous faith on that dear Lord, though He be on the throne of the universe, and I down here, in this far-away dim corner of His creation, I am with Him where He is, and no film of distance need separate us. If we trust Him we come to Him. If we rest upon Him as our advocate and hope, then the loud voice of our sins will not be heard, accusing-tongued though they be, above the voice of His pleading blood.

And they who come to Christ, therein and thereby, come to all other glorious and precious persons and things in the universe. For, as I have already said, my text is the end of a long sentence, and is last named as being the foundation of all that precedes, and the condition of our finding ourselves in touch with all the other glories of which the writer has been speaking. He that comes to Christ is in the city. He that comes to Christ *is*— not *will* be — in the palace. He that comes to Christ is in the presence of the Judge. He that comes to Christ touches angels and perfected spirits, and is knit to all that are knit to the same Lord. He that comes to Christ comes to cleansing, and enters into the fulness of the promise, and lives in the presence and companionship of his present-absent Lord. If we come to Jesus by faith, Jesus will come at last to us to receive us to Himself; and join us to the choirs of the perfected spirits who ‘have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’

Hebrews 12:25—Hebrews 12:25—REFUSING GOD’S VOICE

See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven. — Hebrews 12:25.

THE writer has finished his great contrast of Judaism and Christianity as typified by the mounts Sinai and Zion. But the scene at the former still haunts his imagination and shapes this solemn warning. The multitude gathered there had shrunk from the divine voice, and ‘entreated that it might not be spoken to them any more.’ So may we do, standing before the better mount of a better revelation. The parallel between the two congregations at the two mountains is still more obvious if we remark that the word translated in my text ‘refuse’ is the same as has just been employed in a previous verse, describing the conduct of the Israelites, where it is rendered ‘entreated.’ It may seem strange that after so joyous and triumphant an enumeration of the glorious persons and things with

whom we are brought into contact by faith, there should come the jarring note of solemn warning which seems to bring back the terrors of the ancient law. But, alas! the glories and blessedness into which faith introduces us are no guarantees against its decay; and they who are 'come unto Mount Zion and the city of the living God,' may turn their backs upon all the splendour, and wander away into the gaunt desert.

I. So we have here, first of all, the solemn possibility of refusal. Now, to gain the whole force and solemnity of this exhortation, it is very needful to remember that it is addressed to professing Christians, who have in so far exercised real faith, as that by it 'they are come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God.' We are to keep that clear, or we lose the whole force and meaning of this exhortation before us, which is addressed distinctly, emphatically, and, in its true application, exclusively to Christian men — 'See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.'

Then, again, it is to be noted that the refusal here spoken about, and against which we professing Christians are thus solemnly warned, is not necessarily entire intellectual rejection of the gospel and its message. For the Israelites, who made the original 'refusal,' to which that against which we are warned is paralleled, recognised the voice that they would not listen to as being God's voice; and just because it was His voice, wanted to hear no more of it. And so, although we may permissibly extend the words before us to include more than is thereby originally meant, yet we must remember that the true and proper application of them is to the conduct of men who, recognising that God is speaking to them, do not want to hear anything more from Him. That is to say, this warning brings to us Christians the reminder that it is possible *for* us so to tamper with what we know to be the uttered will and expressed commandment of God, as that our conduct is tantamount to saying, 'Be silent, O Lord! and let me not hear Thee speak any more to me.' The reason for that refusal, which thus, in its deepest criminality and darkest sin, can

only be made by men that recognise the voice to be God's, lies just here, 'they could not endure that which was commanded.' So, then, the sum of the whole thing is this, that it is possible for Christian people so to cherish wills and purposes which they know to be in diametrical and flagrant contradiction to the will and purpose of God, that obstinately they prefer to stick by their own desires, and, if it may be, to stifle the voice of God.

Then remember, too, that this refusal, which is reality is the rising up of the creature's will, tastes, inclinations, desires, against the manifest and recognised will of God, may, and as a matter of fact often does, go along with a great deal of lip reverence and unconsciously hypocritical worship. These men, from whom the writer is drawing his warning in the wilderness there, said, 'Do not let Him speak! We are willing to obey all that He has to command; only let it come to us through human lips, and not in these tremendous syllables that awe our spirits.' They thought themselves to be perfectly willing to keep the commandments when they were given, and all that they wanted was some little accommodation to human weakness in the selection of the medium by which the word was brought. So we may be wrenching ourselves away from the voice of God, because we uncomfortably feel that it is against our resolves, and all the while may never know that we are unwilling to obey His commandments. The unconscious refusal is the formidable and the fatal One.

It comes by reason, as I have said, fundamentally of the rising up of our own determinations and wishes against His commandments; but it is also due to other causes operating along with this. How can you hear God's voice if you are letting your own yelping dog-kennel of passions speak so loudly as they do? Will God's voice be heard in a heart that is all echoing with earthly wishes, loudly clamant for their gratification, or with sensual desires passionately demanding their food to be flung to them? Will God's voice be heard in a heart where the janglings of contending wishes and earthly inclinations

are perpetually loud in their brawling? Will it be heard in a heart which has turned itself into a sounding-board for all the noises of the world and the voices of men? The voice of God is heard in silence, and not amidst the Babel of our own hearts. And they who, unconsciously, perhaps, of what they are doing, open their ears wide to hear what they themselves in the lower parts of their souls prescribe, or bow themselves in obedience to the precepts and maxims of men-round them, are really refusing to hear the voice of God.

It is not to be forgotten, howsoever, that whilst thus the true and proper application of these words is to Christian men, and the way by which we refuse to listen to that awful utterance is by withdrawing our lives from the control of His will, and dragging away our contemplations from meditation upon His word, yet there is a further form in which men may refuse that voice, which eminently threatened the persons to whom this warning was first directed. All through this letter we see that the writer is in fear that his correspondents should fall away into intellectual and complete rejection of Christianity. And the reason was mainly this, that the fall of the ancient and ramrod system of the old covenant might lead them to distrust all revelation from God, and to cast aside the gospel message. So the exhortation of my text assumes a special closeness of application to us whose lot has been cast in revolutionary times, as was theirs, and who have, in our measure, something of that same experience to go through which made the sharp trial of these Hebrew Christians. To them, solid and permanent as they had fancied them, ancient and God-appointed realities and ordinances were melting away; and it was natural that they should ask themselves, 'Is there anything that will not melt, on which we can rest?' And to us in this day much of the same sort of discipline is appointed; and we, too, have to see, both in the religious and in the social world, much evidently waxing old and ready to vanish away which our fathers thought to be permanent. And the question for us is, Is there anything that we can cling to? Yes! to the 'voice that

speaks from heaven' in Jesus Christ. As long as that is sounding in our ears we can calmly look out on the evanescence of the evanescent, and confidently rely on the permanence of the permanent. And so, brother, though this, that, and the other of the externals of Christianity, in polity, in form, in mode, may be passing away, be sure of this, the solid core abides; and that core lies in the first word of this letter. 'God... hath spoken unto us in His Son.' See that no experience of mutation leads you to falter in your confidence in that voice, and 'see that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.'

II. Again, note the sleepless vigilance necessary to counteract the tendency to refusal.

'See that ye refuse not.' A warning finger is, as it were, lifted. Take heed against the tendencies that lie in yourself and the temptations around you. The consciousness of the possibility of the danger is half the battle. 'Blessed is the man that feareth always,' says the psalm. 'The confident' — by which is meant the presumptuous, and not the trustful — 'goeth on and is punished.' The timid — by which I mean the self-distrustful — clings to God, because he knows his danger, and is safe. If we think that we are on the verge of falling, we are nearer standing than we ever are besides. To lay to heart the reality and the imminence and the gravity of the possibility that is disclosed here is an essential part of the means for preventing its becoming a reality. They who would say 'I cannot turn away because I have come,' have yet to learn the weakness of their own hearts and the strength of the world that draws them away. There is no security for us except in the continual temper of rooted self-distrust, for there is no motive that will drive us to the continual confidence in which alone is security but the persistent pressure of that sense that in ourselves we are nothing, and cannot but fall. I want no man to live in that selfish and anxious dread 'which hath torment,' but I am sure that the shortest *road* to the brave security which is certain of never being defeated is the clear and continual consciousness that

'In ourselves we nothing can, Full soon were we down-ridden; But for us fights the proper Man, Whom God Himself hath bidden.'

The dark underside of the triumphant confidence, which on its sunny side looks up to heaven and receives its light, is that self-distrust which says always to ourselves, 'We have to take heed lest we refuse Him that speaketh.'

If there is any need to dwell upon specific methods by which this vigilance and continuous self-distrust may work out for us our security, one would say — by careful trying to reverse all these conditions which, as we have seen, lead us surely to the refusal. Silence the passions, the wishes, the voices of your own wills and tastes and inclinations and purposes. Bring them all into close touch with Him. Let there be no voice in your hearts till you know God's will; and then with a leap let your hearts be eager to do it. Keep yourselves out of the babble of the world's voices; and be accustomed to go by yourselves and let God speak. Nature seems to be silent to the busy traveller who never gets away from the thumping of the piston of the engine and the rattle of the wheels of the train. Let him go and sit down by himself on the mountain top, and the silence becomes all vocal and full of noises. Go into the lone place of silent contemplation, and so get near God, and you will hear His voice. But you will not hear it unless you still the beating of your own heart. Even in such busy lives as most of us have to live it is possible to secure some space for such solitary communion and meditation if we seriously feel that we must, and are ready to cut off needless distractions. He who thus has the habit of going alone with God will be able to hear His voice piercing through the importunate noises of earth, which drown it for others. Do promptly, precisely, perfectly, all that you know He has said. That is the way to sharpen your ears for the more delicate intonations of His voice, and the closer manifestations of His will. If you do not, the voice will hush itself into silence. Thus bringing your lives habitually into contact

with God's word, and testing them all by it, you will not be in danger of 'refusing Him that speaketh.'

III. Lastly, note the solemn motives by which this sleepless vigilance is enforced.

'If they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth' — or, perhaps, 'who on earth refused Him that spake' — 'much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven.' The clearness of the voice is the measure of the penalty of non-attention to it. The voice that spoke on earth had earthly penalties as the consequence of disobedience.

The voice that speaks from heaven, by reason of its loftier majesty, and of the dearer utterances which are granted to us thereby, necessarily involves more severe and fatal issues from negligence to it.

Mark how the words of my text deepen and darken in their significance in the latter portion. In the first we had simply 'refusal,' or the desire not to hear the voice, and in the latter portion that has solidified and deepened itself into 'turning away from Him.' That is to say, when we once begin, as many professing Christians have begun, to be intolerant of God's voice meddling with their lives, we are upon an inclined plane, which, with a sharp pitch and a very short descent, carries us down to the darker condition of 'turning away from Him.' The man who stops his ears will very soon turn his back and be in flight, so far as he can, from the voice. Do not tamper with God's utterances. If you do, you have begun a course that ends in alienation from Him.

Then mark, again, the evils which fell upon these people who turned away from Him that speaketh on earth were their long wanderings in the wilderness, and their exclusion from the Land of Promise, and final deaths in the desert, where their bleaching bones lay white in the sunshine. And if you and I, dear friends, by continuous and

increasing deafness to our Father's voice, have turned away from Him, then all that assemblage of flashing glories and majestic persons and of reconciling blood to which we come by faith, will melt away, 'and leave not a wrack behind.' We shall be like men who, in a dream, have thought themselves in a king's palace, surrounded by beauty and treasures, and awaken with a start and a shiver to find themselves alone in the desert. It will be loss enough if the fair city which hath foundations, and the palace-home of the king on the mountain, and the joyful assemblage of the angels, and the Church of the firstborn, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and the blood of sprinkling, all pass away from our vision, and instead of them there is nothing left but this mean, vulgar, fleeting world. They *will* pass if you do not listen to God, and *that is* why so many of you have so little conscious contact with the unseen and glorious realities to which faith gives access.

But then there are dark and real penalties to come in another life which the writer dimly shows to us. It is no part of my business to enlarge upon these solemn warnings. An inspired man may do it. I do not think that it is reverent for me to do it much. But at the same time, let me remind you that terror is a legitimate weapon to which to appeal, and unwelcome and unfashionable as its use is nowadays, it is one of the weapons in the armoury of the true preacher of God's Word. I believe we Christian ministers would do more if we were less chary of speaking out 'the terror of the Lord.' And though I shrink from anything like vulgar and rhetorical and sensational appeals to that side of divine revelation, and to what answers to it in us, I consider that I should be a traitor to the truth if I did not declare the fact that such appeals are legitimate, and that such terror is a part of the divine revelation.

So, dear friends, though I dare not dwell upon these, I dare not burke them. I remind you — and I do no more — of the tone that runs through all this letter, of which you have such instances as these, 'If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression

received its just recompense of reward, how shall We escape if we neglect so great salvation?’ and ‘Of how much sorer punishment, think you, shall they be thought worthy who have counted the blood of the Covenant wherewith they were sanctified a common thing?’ ‘See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh,’ for the clearer, the tenderer, the more stringent the beseechings of the love and the warnings of Christ’s voice, the more solemn the consequences if we stop our ears to it. Better to hear it now, when it warns and pleads and beseeches and comforts and hallows and quickens, than to hear it first when it rends the tombs and shakes the earth, and summons all to judgment, and condemns some to the outer darkness to which they had first condemned themselves.

Hebrews 13:5, 6—GOD’S VOICE AND MAN’S ECHO

‘He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. 6. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.’ — Hebrews 13:5, 6.

‘HE hath said’; ‘we may... say.’ So, then, here are two voices; or, rather, a voice and an echo — God’s voice of promises, and man’s answering voice of confidence. God speaks to us that we may speak to Him; and when He speaks His promises, the only fitting answer is to accept them as true in all their fulness fixed confidence.

The writer quotes two passages as from the Old Testament. The first of them is not found *verbatim* anywhere there; the nearest approach to it, and obviously the source of the quotation, occurs in a connection that is worth noting. When Moses was handing over the charge of his people to his successor, Joshua, he said first to the people and then to Joshua, ‘Be strong and of good courage He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee.’ The writer of the Epistle falls back upon these words with a slight alteration, and turns ‘He’ into ‘I,’ simply because he recognised that when Moses spoke, God was speaking through him, and countersigning with His own seal the promise which His servant made in His name. The other passage

comes from the 118th Psalm. So, then, let us listen to the divine voice and the human answer.

I. God's voice of promise.

'He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Now, notice that there is a distinct parallel between the position of the people to whom this Epistle was addressed, and that of the Hebrews to whom the original promise was made. The latter were standing on the verge of a great change. They were passing from under the leadership of Moses, and going under the leadership of the untried Joshua. Is it fanciful to recall that Joshua and Jesus are the same name; and that the difficulty which Israel on the borders of Canaan had to face, and the difficulty which these Hebrew Christians had to encounter, were similar, being in each case a change of leaders — the ceasing to look to Moses and the beginning to take commands from another? To men in such a crisis, when venerable authority was becoming antiquated, it might seem as if nothing was stable. Very appropriate, therefore, and strong was the encouragement given by pointing away from the flowing river to the Rock of Ages, rising changeless above the changing current of human life. So Moses said to his generation, and the author of the Epistle says after him to his contemporaries you may change the leaders, but you keep the one Presence.

This letter goes on the principle throughout that everything which belonged to Israel, in the way of institutions, sacred persons, promises, is handed over to the Christian Church, and we are, as it were, served heirs to the whole of these. So, then, to every one of us the message comes, and comes in its most individual aspect, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Now, 'to leave' and 'to forsake' are identical, and the promise, if we keep to the Authorised Version, is a repetition, in the two clauses, of the same thought. But whilst the two clauses are substantially identical, there is a very beautiful variation in the form in which the one assurance is given in them.

With regard to the first of them, 'I will never leave thee,' both in the Hebrew and in the Greek the word which is employed, and which is translated 'leave,' means the withdrawing of a hand that sustains. And so the Revised Version wisely substitutes for 'leave *thee*,' 'I will never fail thee.' We might even put it more colloquially, and approach more nearly the original expression, if we said, 'He will never drop thee'; never let His hand slacken, never withdraw its sustaining power, but will communicate for ever, day by day, not only the strength, but the conscious security that comes from feeling that great, strong, gentle hand, closing thee round and keeping thee tight. No man 'shall pluck them out of My father's hand.' 'The Lord upholdeth all that fall,' says one Psalm, and another of the psalmists puts it even more picturesquely; 'When I said my foot slippeth, Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up,' To Say 'my foot slippeth,' with a strong emphasis on the 'my' is the sure way to be able to say the other thing: 'Thy mercy held me up.' 'He shall not fall, for the Lord is able to make him stand.' Suppose a man on some slippery glacier, not accustomed to ice-work, as he feels his foot going out from under him, he gets nervous, and nervousness means a fall, and a fall means disaster and sometimes death.

So he grips the guide's hand, and then he can walk. There is Peter, out on the sea that he had presumptuously asked leave to walk on, and as he feels the cold water coming above his ankle, and sees it rising higher and higher, he begins to fear, and his fear makes him heavier, so that he sinks the faster, till the very extremity of need and paroxysm of terror strike out a spark of faith, and faith and fear are strangely blended in the cry: 'Lord, save me.' Christ's outstretched hand answered the cry, and its touch held Peter up, made him buoyant again, and as he rose, the water seemed to sink beneath his feet, and on that heaving pavement, glistening in the moonlight, he walked till he was helped into the boat again. So will God do for us, if we will, for He has said: 'I will never relax My grasp. Nothing 'shall ever come between My hand and thine.' When a nurse or a mother is holding a child's hand, her grip slackens

unless it is perpetually repeated by fresh nervous tension. So all human helps tend to become less helpful, and all human love has its limits. But God's hand never slackens its grip, and we may be sure that, as He has grasped He will hold, and 'keep that which we have committed unto Him.'

But mark the other form of the promise. 'I will never drop thee' — that promises the communication of sustaining strength according to our need: 'nor forsake thee' — that is the same promise, in another shape. The tottering limbs need to be held up. The lonely heart walking the way of life, lonely after all companionship, and which has depths that the purest human love cannot sound, and sometimes dark secrets that it durst not admit the dearest to behold — that heart may have a divine companion. Here is a word for the solitary, and we are all solitary. Some of us, more plainly than others, are called upon to walk a lonely road in a great darkness, and to live lives little apprehended, little sympathised with, by others, or perchance having for our best companion, next to God, the memories of those who are beside us no more. Moses died, Joshua took his place; but behind the dying Moses-buried in his unknown grave, and left far away as the ties crossed the Jordan — and behind the living Joshua, there was the Lord who liveth for ever. 'I will not forsake thee.' Dear ones go, and take half our hearts with them. People misunderstand us. We feel that we dare not open out our whole selves to any. We feel that, just as scientists tell us that no two atoms of the most solid body are in actual juxtaposition, but that there is a film of air between them, and hence all bodies are more or less elastic, if sufficient pressure be applied, so after the closest companionship there is a film. But that film makes no separation between us and God. 'I will not drop thee' — there is the of strength according to our need. 'I will not forsake thee,' there is companionship in all our solitude.

But do not let us forget that all God's promises have conditions appended, and that this one has its conditions like all the rest. Was not the history of Israel a contradiction of that glowing promise

which was given them before they crossed the Jordan? Does the Jew to-day look as if he belonged to a nation that God would never leave nor forsake? Certainly not. And why? Simply because God's promise of not dropping us, and of never leaving us, is contingent upon our not dropping Him, and of our never leaving Him. 'No man shall pluck them out of My Father's hand' No; but they can wriggle themselves out of their Father's hand. They can break the communion; they can separate themselves, and bring a film, not of impalpable and pure atmosphere, but of poisonous gases, between themselves and God. And God who, according to the grand old legend, before the Roman soldier flung his torch into the Holy of Holies, and' burnt up the beautiful house where our fathers praised Him with fire,' was heard saying, 'Let us depart hence,' does say sometimes, when a man has gone away from Him, 'I will go and return to My place until they seek Me. In their affliction, they will seek Me early.'

And now let me say a word about the second voice that sounds here.

II. The human answer, or the echo of the divine voice.

If God speaks to me, He waits for me to speak to Him. My answer should be immediate, and my answer should embrace as true all that He has said to me, and my answer should build upon His great faithful promise a great triumphant confidence. Do we speak to God in the strain in which He speaks to us? When He says, 'I will,' do our hearts leap up with joyful confidence, and answer, 'Thou dost'? Do we take all His promises for our trust, or do we meet His firm 'assurance with a feeble, faltering faith? We turn God's 'verily' into a peradventure, often, and at best when He says to us 'I will,' we doubtfully say 'perhaps He may.' That is the kind of faith, even at its highest, with which the best of us meet this great promise, building frail tabernacles on the Rock of Ages and putting shame on God's faithfulness by our faithlessness. 'He hath said,' and then He pauses and listens, whether we are going to say anything in answer,

and whether when He promises: 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' We are bold to say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man can do unto me.'

Now, I do not suppose that I am' keeping too slavishly to the mere words of the text if I ask you to look at the beautiful sequence of thought in these three clauses which make the response of the man to the divine promise.

There is a kind of throb of wonder in that word. 'The Lord is my helper.' That is the answer of faith to the divine promise, grasping it, never hesitating about it, laying it upon the heart, or on the fevered forehead like a cooling leaf, to subdue the hot pulsations there. And then what comes next? 'I will not fear.' We have the power of controlling our apprehension of peril, but it is Of no use to screw ourselves up to a fictitious courage which consists mainly in the ostrich's wisdom of hiding its head from the danger, and in saying, 'Who is afraid?' Unless we can say 'The Lord is my helper,' it is folly to say, 'I will not be afraid, I will brace myself up, and be courageous to meet these difficulties. That is all right, but it is not all right unless we have laid the right foundation for courage. Having our purged ears opened to hear the great, strong, sweet divine promise, we are able to coerce our terrors, and to Banish them from our minds By the assurance that, whatever comes, God is with us. 'The Lord is my helper' — that is the foundation, and built upon that — and madness unless it is built upon it— is the courage which says to all my fears,' Down, down, you are not to get the mastery over me.' 'I will trust,' says the Psalmist, 'and not be afraid.' Faith is the antagonist to fear, because faith grasps the fact of the divine promise.

Now, there is another thought which may come in here since it is suggested by the context, and that is, that the recognition of God thus, as always With us to sustain us, makes all earthly conditions tolerable. The whole of my text is given as the ground of the

exhortation: ‘Be content with such things as ye have,’ for He hath said, ‘I will never leave thee.’ If Thou dost not leave me, then such things as I have are enough for me, and if Thou hast gone away, no things that I merely have are of much good to me.

And then comes the last stage in our answer to what God says, which is better represented by a slight variation in translation, putting the last words of my text as a question: ‘What can man do unto me?’ It is safe to look at men and things, and their possibly calamitous action upon our outward lives, when we have done the other two things, grasped God and rested in faith on Him. If we begin with what ought to come last, and look first at what man can do unto us, then fear will surge over us, as it ought to do.

But if we follow the order of faith, and start with God’s promise, grapple that to our heart, and put down with strong hand the craven dread that coils round our hearts, then we can look out with calm eyes upon all the appearances that may threaten evil, and say, ‘Come on, Come all, my foot is on the Rock of Ages, and my back is against it, No man can touch me,’ So we may boldly say, ‘What can man do unto me?’

Hebrews 13:8—THE UNCHANGING CHRIST

‘Jesus Christ the mine yesterday, and today, and for ever: — Hebrews 13:8.

How far back does this ‘yesterday’ go? The limit must be found by observing that it is ‘Jesus Christ’ who is spoken of — that is to say, the *Incarnate* Saviour. That observation disposes of the reference of these words to the past eternity in which the eternal Word of God was what He is to-day. The sameness that is referred to here is neither the sameness of the divine Son from all eternity, nor the sameness of the medium of revelation in both the old and the new dispensations, but the sameness of the *human* Christ to all generations of His followers. And the epoch referred to in the

‘yesterday’ is defined more closely if we observe the previous context, which speaks of the dying teachers who have had the rule and have passed away. The ‘yesterday’ is the period of these departed teachers; the ‘to-day’ is the period of the writer and his readers.

But whilst the words of my text are thus narrowly: limited, the attribute, which is predicated of Christ in them, is something more than belongs to manhood, and requires for its foundation the assumption of His deity. He is the unchanging Jesus because He is the divine Son. The text resumes at the end of the Epistle, the solemn words of the first chapter, which referred the declaration of the Psalmist to ‘the Son’ — ‘Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.’ That Son, changeless and eternal by divine immutability, is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Redeemer.

This text may well be taken as our motto in looking forward, as I suppose we are all of us more or less doing, and trying to forecast the dim outlines of the coming events of this New Year. Whatever may happen, let us hold fast by that confidence, ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.’

I. I apply these words, then, as a New-Year’s motto, in two or three different directions, and ask you to consider, first, the unchanging Christ in His relation to our changeful lives.

The one thing of which anticipation may be sure is that nothing continues in one stay. True, ‘that which is to be hath already been’; true, there is ‘nothing new under the sun’; but just as in the physical world the infinite variety of creatures and things is all made Out of a few very simple elements, so, in our lives, out of a comparatively small number of possible incidents, an immense variety of combinations results, with the effect that, while we may be sure of the broad outlines of our future, we are all in the dark as to its particular events, and only know that ceaseless change with characterise it. So all forward looking must have a touch of fear in it,

and there is only one thing that will enable us to front the else intolerable certainty of uncertainty, and that is, to fall back upon this thought' of my text, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

The one lesson of our changeful lives ought to be for each of us the existence of that which changes not. By the very law of contrast, and by the need of finding sufficient reason for the changes, we are driven from the contemplation of the fleeting to the vision of the permanent. The waves of this stormy sea of life ought to fling us all high and dry on the safe shore. Blessed are they who, in a world of passing phenomena, penetrate to the still centre of rest, and looking over all the vacillations of the things that can be shaken, can turn to the Christ and say, Thou who movest all things art Thyself unmoved; Thou who changest all things, Thyself changest not. As the moon rises slow and silvery, with its broad shield, out of the fluctuations of the ocean, so the one radiant Figure of the all sufficient and immutable Lover and Friend of our souls should rise for us out of the billows of life's tossing ocean, and come to us across the seal Brother! let the fleeting proclaim to you the permanent; let the world with its revolutions lead you up to the thought of Him who is the same for ever. For that is the only thought on which a man can build, and, building, be at rest.

The yesterday of my text may either be applied to the generations that have passed, and then the 'to-day' is our little life; or may be applied to my own yesterday, and then the to-day is this narrow present. In either application the words of my text are full of hope and of joy. In the former they say to us that no time can waste, nor any drawing from the fountain can diminish the all-sufficiency of that divine Christ in whom eighteen centuries have trusted and been 'lightened, and their faces were not ashamed.' The yesterday of His grace to past generations: is the prophecy of the future and the law for the present. There is nothing that any past epoch has ever drawn from Him, of courage and confidence, of hope and wisdom, of

guidance and strength, of love and consolation, of righteousness and purity, of brave hope and patient endurance, which He does not stand by my side ready to give to me too to-day, 'As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts,' and the old Christ of a thousand years ago is the Christ of to-day, ready to help, to succour, and to make us like Himself.

In the second reference, narrowing the 'yesterdays' to our own experiences, the words are full of consolation and of hope. 'Thou hast been my Help; leave me *not*, neither forsake me,' is the prayer that ought to be taught us by every remembrance of what Jesus Christ has been to us. The high-water mark of His possible sweetness does not lie in some irrevocable past moment of our lives. We never have to say that we have found a sufficiency in Him which we never shall find any more. Remember the time in your experience when Jesus Christ was most tender, most near, most sweet, most mysterious, most soul-sufficing for you, and be sure that He stands beside *you*, ready to renew the ancient blessing and to surpass it in His gift. Man's love sometimes wearies, Christ's never; man's basket may be emptied, Christ's is fuller after the distribution than it was before. This fountain can never run dry. Not until seven times, but Until seventy times seven — perfection multiplied into perfection, and that again multiplied by perfection once more — is the limit of the inexhaustible mercy of our Lord, and all in which the past has been rich lives in the present.

Remember, too, that this same thought which heartens us to front the inevitable changes, also gives dignity, beauty, poetry, to the small prosaic present. 'Jesus Christ is the same to-day.' We are always tempted to think that this moment is commonplace and insignificant. Yesterday lies consecrated in memory; to-morrow, radiant in hope; but to-day is poverty-stricken and prose. The sky is farthest away from us right over our heads; behind and in front it seems to touch the earth. But if we will only that all that sparkling lustre and all that more than mortal tenderness of pity and of love with which Jesus

Christ has irradiated and sweetened any past is verily here with us amidst the commonplaces and insignificant duties of the dusty today, then we need look back to no purple distance, nor forward to any horizon where sky and earth kiss, but feel that here or nowhere, now or never, is Christ the all-sufficient and unchanging Friend. He is faithful. He cannot deny Himself.

II. So, secondly, I apply these words in another direction. I ask you to think of the relation between the unchanging Christ and the dying helpers.

That is the connection in which the words occur in my text. The writer has been speaking of the subordinate and delegated leaders and rulers in the Church 'who have spoken the word of God' and who have passed away, leaving a faith to be followed, and a conversation the end of which is to be considered. And, turning from all these mortal companions, helpers, guides, he bids us think of Him who liveth for ever, and for ever is the teacher, the companion the home of our hearts, and the goal of our love. All other ties — sweet, tender, infinitely precious, have been or will be broken for you and me. Some of us have to look back upon their snapping; some of us have to look forward. But there is one bond over which the skeleton fingers of Death have no power, and they fumble at that knot in vain. He separates us from all others; blessed be God! he cannot separate us from Christ. 'I shall lose Thee though I die'; and Thou, Thou diest never.

God's changeful providence comes into all our lives, and ports dear ones, making their places empty, that Christ Himself may fill the empty places, and, striking away other props, though the tendrils that twine round them bleed with the wrench, in order that the plant may no longer trail along the ground, but twine itself round the Cross and climb to the Christ upon the throne. 'In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne.' The true King was manifested when the earthly, shadowy monarch was swept away.

And just as, on the face of some great wooded cliff, when the leaves drop, the solemn strength of the everlasting rock gleams out pure, so when our dear ones fall away, Jesus Christ is revealed, 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' 'They tautly were many, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death.' 'This Man continueth ever.' He lives, and in Him all loves and companionships live unchanged.

III. So, further, we apply, in the third place, this thought to the relation between the unchanging Christ and decaying institutions and opinions.

The era in which this Epistle was written was an era of revolution no great that we can scarcely imagine its apparent magnitude. It was close upon the final destruction of the ancient system of Judaism an external institution.

The temple was tottering o its fall, the nation was ready to be scattered, and the writer, speaking to Hebrews, to whom that crash seemed to be the passing away of the eternal verities of God, bids them lift their eyes above all the chaos and dust of dissolving institutions and behold the true Eternal, the ever-living Christ. He warns them in the verse that follows nay text not

to be carried about with divers and strange doctrines, bat to keep fast to the unchanging Jesus. And so these words may well come to us with lessons of encouragement, and with teaching of duty and steadfastness, in an epoch of much unrest and change — social, theological, ecclesiastical— such as that in which our lot is cast. Man's systems are the shadows on the hillside. Christ is the everlasting solemn mountain itself, Much in the popular conception and representation of Christianity is in the act of passing. Let it go; Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. We need not fear change within the limits of His Church or of His world. For change there means progress, and the more the human creations and embodiments of Christian truth crumble and

disintegrate, the more distinctly does the solemn, single, unique figure of Christ the Same, rise before us. There is nothing in the world's history to compare with the phenomenon which is presented by the unworn freshness of Jesus Christ after all these centuries. All other men, however burning and shining their light, flicker and die out into extinction, and but for a season can the world rejoice in any of their beams; but this Jesus dominates the ages, and is as fresh to-day, in spite of all that men say, as He was eighteen centuries ago. They toll us He is losing His power; they tell us that mists of oblivion are wrapping Him round, as He moves slowly to the doom which besets Him in common with all the great names of the world. The wish is father to the thought. Christ is not done with yet, nor has the world done with Him, nor is He less available for the necessities of this generation, with its perplexities and difficulties, than He was in the past. His sameness is consistent with an infinite unfolding of new preciousness and new powers, as new generations with new questions arise, and the world seeks for fresh guidance. 'I write no new commandment unto you'; I preach no new Christ unto you, 'again, a new commandment I write unto *you*, ' and every generation will find new impulse, new teaching, new shaping energies, social and individual, ecclesiastical, theological, intellectual, in the old Christ who was crucified for our offences and raised again for our justification, and remains 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

IV. Lastly, look at these words in their application to the relation between the unchanging Christ and the eternal life of heaven.

The 'for ever' of my text is not to be limited to this present life, but it runs on into the remotest future, and summons up before us the grand and boundless prospect of an eternal unfolding and reception of new beauties in the old earthly Christ. For Him the change between the 'to-day' of His earthly life and the 'for ever' of His ascended glory made no change in the tenderness of His heart, the sweetness of His smile, the nearness of His helping hand. The

beloved apostle, when he saw Him for the first time after He was ascended, fell at His feet as dead, because the attributes of His nature had become so glorious. But when the old hand, the same hand that had been pierced with the nails on the Cross, though it now held the seven stars, was laid upon him, and the old voice, the same voice that had spoken to him in the upper room, and in feebleness from the Cross,' though it was now as the 'sound of many waters,' said to him, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last; I am He that liveth and was dead and am alive for ever more'; John learned that the change from the Cross to the throne touched but the circumference of his Master's Being, and left the whole centre of His love and brotherhood wholly unaffected.

Nor will the change for us, from earth to the close communion of the heavens, bring us into contact with a changed Christ. It will be but like the experience of a man starting from the outermost verge of the solar system, where that giant, planet welters, away out in the darkness and the cold, and travelling inwards ever nearer and nearer to the central light, the warmth becoming more fervent, the radiance becoming more wondrous, as he draws closer and closer to the greatness which he divined when he was far away, and which he knows better when he is beside it. It will be the same Christ, the Mediator, the Revealer in heaven, whom we here dimly saw and knew to be the Sun of our souls through the clouds and mists of earth.

That radiant and eternal sameness will consist with continual variety, and an endless streaming forth of new lustres and new powers. But through all the growing proximity and illumination of the heavens He will be the same Jesus that we knew upon earth; still the Friend and the Lover of our souls.

So, dear friends, if you and I have Him for our very own, then we do not need to fear change, for change will be progress; nor loss, for loss will be gain; nor the storm of life, which will drive us to His

breast; nor the solitude of death, for our Shepherd will be with us there. He will be ‘the same for ever’; though we shall know Him more deeply; even as we shall be the same, though ‘changed from glory into glory.’ If we have Him, we may be sure, on earth, of a ‘to-morrow,’ which ‘shall be as this day, and much more abundant.’ If we have Him, we may be sure of a heaven in which the sunny hours of its unending day will be filled with fruition and ever new glories from the old Christ who, for earth and heaven, is ‘the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.’

Hebrews 13:9—AN ESTABLISHED HEART

‘... It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.’ — Hebrews 13:9.

This saying immediately follows the exhortation with which it is contrasted: ‘Be not carried away with divers and strange doctrines.’ Now, it is quite clear that the unsettlement and moving past some fixed point which are suggested in the word ‘carried away’ are contrasted with the fixedness which is implied in the main word of our text. They who are established, ‘rooted and grounded,’ are not apt to be swept away by the blasts of ‘divers and strange doctrines.’ But there is another contrast besides this, and that is the one which exists between doctrines and grace; and there is a still further subsequent contrast in the words that follow my text, ‘It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats.’

Now I need not trouble you with the question as to what was the original reference of either of these two expressions, ‘doctrines’ and ‘meats,’ or whether they both point to some one form of teaching. What I rather want to emphasise here, in a sentence, is how, in these three principal words of three successive clauses, we get three aspects of the religious life — two of them spurious and partial, one of them sufficing and complete — ‘teachings’; ‘grace’; ‘meats.’ Turned into modern English, the writer’s meaning is that the merely intellectual religion, which is always occupied with propositions

instead of with Jesus Christ, 'Who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever,' is worthless, and the merely ceremonial religion, which is always occupied with casuistries about questions of meats, or external observance of any sort, is as valueless. There is no fixity; there is no rest of soul, no steadfastness of character to be found in either of these two directions. The only thing that ballasts and fills and calms the heart is what the writer here calls 'grace,' that is to say, the living personal experience of the love of God bestowed upon me and dwelling in my heart. You may have doctrines chattered to all eternity, and you may be so occupied about the externals of religion as that you never come near its centre, and its centre is that great thing which is here called 'grace,' which alone has power to establish the man's heart.

So, then, the main theme of these words is the possible stability of a fluctuating human life, the means of securing it, and the glory and beauty of the character which has secured it. Let us turn to then thoughts for a moment.

I. First, then, mark what this writer conceives to be the one source of human stability.

'It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.' Now I have a strong suspicion that a great deal of preaching goes over the heads of the hearers, because preachers have not gauged the ignorance of their auditory, and that, howsoever familiar to the ear the key-words of Christian revelation may be, it by no means follows that there is any definite and clear idea attached to these. So I do not think that it will be a waste of time for just a minute or two to try and put, as plainly as I can, what the New Testament means by this familiar and frequently reiterated word 'grace,' which, I suspect, is oftener pronounced than it is understood by a great many people.

To begin with, then, the root meaning of that word, which runs all through the New Testament, is simply favour, benignity, kindness, or to put all into a better and simpler form, the active love of God.

Now, if we look at the various uses of the expression we find, for instance, that it is contrasted with a number of other things. Sometimes it is set in opposition to sin — sin reigns to righteousness, grace reigns to life. Sometimes it is contrasted with ‘debt,’ and sometimes put in opposition to ‘works,’ as, for instance, by Paul when he says, ‘If it be of works then is it no more grace.’ Sometimes it is opposed to law, as in the same apostle’s words, ‘Ye are not under law, but under grace.’ Now, if we keep these various uses and contrasts in view we just come to this thought, that that active love of God is conditioned, not by any merit on our part — bubbles up from the depths of His own infinite heart, not because of what we are, but because of what He is, transcends all the rigid retributions of law, is not turned away by my sin, but continues to flood the world, simply because it wells up from the infinite and changeless fountain of love in the heart of God.

And then, from this central, deepest meaning of active love manifesting itself irrespective of what we deserve, there comes a second great aspect of the word. The cause gives its name to the effect, and the communicated blessings and gifts which flow to men from the love of God are designated by this great name. You know we have the same kind of idiom in our own tongue. ‘Kindness’ is the disposition; ‘a kindness’ is a single deed which flows from that disposition. ‘Favour’ is the way in which we regard a man; ‘a favour’ is the act or gift which manifests and flows from the regard. The water in the pitchers is the same as the water in the spring. The name of the cause is extended to all the lustrous variety of its effects. So the complex whole of the blessings and gifts which Jesus Christ brings to us, and which are sometimes designated in view of what they do for us, as salvation or eternal life, are also designated in view of that in God from which they come, as being collectively His ‘grace.’

All the gifts that Christ brings are, we may say, but the love of God made visible in its bestowal upon us. The meteor that rushes through

space catches fire when it passes into our atmosphere. The love of God, when it comes into our manifold necessities, is made visible in the large gifts which it bestows upon them.

And then there is a final application of the expression which is deduced from that second one — viz., the specific and individual excellences of character or conduct which result from the communication to men of the blessings that flow to Him from the love of God.

So these three: first the fountain, the love undisturbed and unalterable; second, the stream, the manifold gifts and blessings that flow to us through Christ; and third, the little cupfuls that each of us have, the various beauties and excellences of character which are developed under the fertilising influences of the sunshine of that love—these three are all included in this great Christian word.

There are other phases of its employment in the New Testament which I do not need to trouble you with now. But thus far we just come to this, that the one ground on which all steadfastness and calm tranquillity and settlement of nature and character can be reared is that we shall be in touch with God, shall be conscious of His love, and shall be receiving into our hearts the strength that He bestows. Man is a dependent creature; his make and his relationships to things round him render it impossible that the strength by which he is strong and the calmness by which he is established can be self-originated. They must come from without. There is only one way by which we can be kept from being drifted away by the currents and blown away by the tempests that run and range through every life, and that is that we shall anchor ourselves on God. His grace, His love possessed, and the sufficing gifts *for all* our hungry desires which come through that love possessed, these, and these alone, are the conditions of human stability.

II. And so I come, in the second place, to look at some of the various ways in which this establishing grace calms and stills the life.

We men are like some of the islands in the Eastern Tropics, fertile and luxuriant, but subject to be swept by typhoons, to be shaken by earthquakes, to be devastated by volcanoes. Around us there gather external foes assailing our steadfastness, and within us there He even more formidable enemies to an established and settled peace. We are like men carrying powder through a conflagration; bearing a whole magazine of combustibles within us, upon which at any moment a spark may alight.

How are such creatures ever to be established? My text tells us by drawing into themselves the love, the giving love of God; and in the consciousness of that love, and in the rest of spirit that comes from the true possession of its gifts, there will be found the secret of tranquillity for the most storm- ridden life.

I would note, as one of the aspects of the tranquillity and establishment that comes from this conscious possession of the giving love of God, how it delivers men from all the dangers of being 'carried away by divers strange doctrines.' I do not give much for any orthodoxy which is not vitalised by personal experiences of the indwelling love of God. I do not care much what a man believes, or what he denies, or how he may occupy himself intellectually with the philosophical and doctrinal aspect of Christian revelation. The question is, how much of it has filtered from his brain into his heart, and has become part of himself, and verified to himself by his own experience? So much, and not one hairbreadth more, of the Christian creed is your creed. So much as you have lived out, so much you are sure of because you have not only thought it but felt it, and cannot for a moment doubt, because your hearts have risen up and witnessed to its truth. About these parts of your belief there will be no fluctuation. There is no real and permanent grasp of any parts of

religious truth except such as is verified by personal experience. And that sturdy blind man in the gospels had got hold of the true principle of the most convincing Christian apologetics when he said, 'You may talk as long as you like about the question whether this man is a sinner or not; settle it anyhow you please.

One thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see.' The 'grace' that had come to him in a purely external form established as a foundation axiom for his thinking, that the man who had done that for him was a messenger from God. That is the way by which you will come to a hold worth calling so of Christian truth, and unless you come to it by that hold it does not matter much whether you believe it or deny it all.

But, if there be such a living consciousness of the true possession of God's love giving you these blessings, then with great equanimity and openness of mind you can regard the discussion that may be raging about a great many so-called 'burning' questions. If I know that Jesus Christ died for me, and that my soul is saved because He did, it does not matter very much to me who wrote the Pentateuch, or whether the Book of Jonah is a parable or a history. I can let all such questions—and I only refer to these as specimens—be settled by appropriate evidence, by the experts, without putting myself in a fluster, and can say, 'I am not going to be carried away. My heart is established in grace.'

Still further, this conscious possession of the grace of God will keep a man very quiet amidst all the occasions for agitation which changing circumstances bring. Such there are in every life. Nothing continues in one stay. Thunder-claps, earthquakes, tempests, shocks of doom come to every one of us. Is it possible that amidst this continuous fluctuation, in which nothing is changeless but the fact of change, we can stand fixed and firm? Yes! As they say on the other side of the Border, there is a 'low,' place at the back of the wall. There is shelter only in one spot, and that is when we have God

between us and the angry blast. And oh, brother, if there steal into a man's heart, and be faithfully kept there, the quiet thought that God is with him, to bless and keep and communicate to him all that he needs, why should he be troubled? 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings.' What?

In this world full of evil? Yes. 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings. His heart is fixed; trusting in the Lord.' An empty heart is an easily agitated heart. A full heart, like a full sack, stands upright, and it is not so easy for the wind to whirl it about as if it were empty. They who are rooted in God will have a firm bole, which will be immovable, howsoever branches may sway and creak, and leaves may flutter and dance, or even fall, before the power of the storm. They who have no hold upon that grace are like the chaff which the wind drives from the threshing-floor. The storms of life will sweep you away unless the heart be 'established in grace.'

Further, another form of the stability communicated by that possessed love of God is in regard to the internal occasions for agitation. Passion, lust, hot desires, bitter regrets, eager clutching after uncertain and insufficient and perishable good, all these will be damped down if the love of God lives in our hearts. Oh, brethren, it is ourselves that disturb ourselves, and not the world that disturbs us. 'There is no joy hut calm'; and there is no calm but in the possession of the grace which is the giving love of God.

III. Lastly, my text suggests how beautiful a thing is the character of the man that is established in grace.

The word translated 'good' in my text would be better rendered 'fair,' or 'lovely,' or 'beautiful,' or some such expression conveying the idea that the writer was thinking, not so much about the essential goodness as about the beauty, in visible appearance, of a character which was thus established by grace. Is there anything fairer than the strong, steadfast, calm, equable character, unshaken by the storms of passion, unaffected by the blasts of calamity, un-

devastated by the lava from the hellish subterranean fires that are in every soul; and yet not stolidly insensible nor obstinately conservative, but open to the inspiration of each successive moment, and gathering the blessed fruit of all mutability in a more profound and unchanging possession of the unchanging good? Surely the gospel which brings to men the possibility of being thus established brings to them the highest ideal of fair human character.

So do you see to it that you rectify your notions of what makes the beauty of character. There is many a *poor* old woman in a garret who presents, if not to men, at any rate to angels and to God, a far fairer character than the vulgar ideals which most people have. The beauty of meek patience, of persistent endeavour, of calm, steadfast trust, is fairer than all the 'purple patches' which the world admires because they are gaudy, and which an eye educated by looking at Jesus turns from with disgust, And do you see to it that you cultivate that type of excellence. It is a great deal easier to cultivate other kinds. It is hard to be quiet, hard to rule one's stormy nature, hard to stand 'foursquare to every wind that blows.' But it is possible — possible on one condition, that we drive our roots through all the loose shingle on the surface, 'the things seen and temporal,' and penetrate to the eternal substratum that lies beneath it all.

Then, my brother, if we keep ourselves near Jesus Christ, and let His grace flow into our hearts, then we, too, shall be able to say, 'Because I set Him at my right hand I shall not be moved,' and we may be able to carry, by His grace, even through the storms of life and amidst all the agitations of our own passions and desires, a steady light, neither blown about by tempests without, nor pulsating with alternations of brightness and dimness by reason of intermittent supplies from within, but blazing with the steadfast splendour of the morning star. 'He that believeth shall not make haste.'

Hebrews 13:10, 15—OUR ALTAR

‘We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. 15. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually: — Hebrews 13:10, 15.

‘We have an altar.’ There is a certain militant emphasis on the words in the original, as if they were an assertion of something that had been denied.

Who the deniers are is plain enough. They were the adherents of Judaism, who naturally found Christianity a strange contrast to their worship, of which altar and sacrifice were prominent features.

Just as to heathen nations the ritual of Judaism, its empty shrine, and temple without a God, were a puzzle and a scoff, so to heathen and Jew, the bare, starved worship of the Church, without temple, priest, sacrifice, or altar, was a mystery and a puzzle.

The writer of this letter in those words, then, in accordance with the central theme of his whole Epistle, insists that Christianity has more truly than heathenism or Judaism, altar and sacrifice.

And he is not content with alleging its possession of the reality of the altar, but he goes further, insists upon the superiority, even in that respect, of the Christian system.

He points to the fact that the great sin-offering of the Jewish ritual was not partaken of by the offerers, but consumed by fire without the camp, and he implies, in the earlier words of my text, that the Christian sacrifice differs from, and is superior to, the Jewish in this particular, that on it the worshippers feasted and fed.

Then, in the last words of my text, he touches upon another point of superiority — viz., that all Christian men are priests of this altar, and have to offer upon it sacrifices of thanksgiving.

And so he exalts the purely spiritual worship of Christianity as not only possessed of all which the gorgeous rituals round about it presented, but as being high above them even in regard to that which seemed their special prerogative. So, then, we have three things here — our Christian altar; our Christian feast on the sacrifice; and our Christian sacrifices on the altar. Let us regard these successively.

I. First, then, our Christian altar.

‘*We have,*’ says the writer, with a triumphant emphasis upon the word, ‘*We have an altar*’; ‘though there seems none visible in our external worship; and some of our converts miss the sensuous presentation to which they were accustomed; and others are puzzled by it, and taunt us with its absence.’

Now it is to be noticed, I think, that though in sacrificial religions the altar is the centre-point round which the temple is reared, it is of no moment in itself, and only comes into consideration as being that upon which the sacrifice is offered. So I do not suppose that any specific object was in the mind of the writer as answering to the altar in those sacrificial systems. He was thinking most of the sacrifice that was laid upon the altar, and of the altar only in connection therewith. But if we are not satisfied with such an explanation of the words, there are two interpretations open to us.

One is that the Cross is the altar. But that seems to me too gross and material, and savouring too much of the very error which this whole Epistle is written to destroy — viz., that the material is of moment, as measured against the spiritual. The other explanation is much to be preferred, according to which, if the altar has any special significance, it means the divine-human personality of Jesus Christ, on and in which the sacrifice is offered.

But the main thing to be laid hold of here is, I take it, that the central fact of Christianity is an altar, on which lies a sacrifice. If we are to accept the significance that I have suggested as possible for the

emblem of my text, then the altar expresses the great mystery and gospel of the Incarnation, and the sacrifice expresses the great mystery and gospel of the passion of Christ's life and death, which is the atonement for our sins.

But that possibly is too much of a refinement, and so I confine myself here to the general ideas suggested — that the very living heart of the gospel is an altar and a sacrifice. That idea saturates the whole New Testament, from the page where John the forerunner's proclamation is, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,' to the last triumphant vision in which the Apocalyptic seer 'beheld a Lamb as it had been slain'; the eternal Co-Regnant of the universe, and the mediation through whom the whole surrounding Church for ever worships the Father.

The days are past, as it seems to me, when any man can reasonably contend that the New Testament does not teach — in every page of it, I was going to say — this truth of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Time was when violent contortions and effort were resorted to in order to explain its language as not necessarily involving that significance. But we have got beyond that now, and we oftener hear from deniers this: 'Oh yes! I admit that throughout the New Testament this sacrificial idea is present, but that is only a chip of the old shell of Judaism, and we are above that level of religious thought.'

Now, I am not going to enter upon a discussion, for which neither place nor time are suited; but I will just suggest that the relation between the ancient system of revelation, with its sacrifice, altar, priest, temple, and the new system of Christianity is far more profoundly, and, I believe, far more philosophically, set forth in this Epistle to the Hebrews, as being the relation between shadow and substance, between prophecy and fulfilment, than when the old is contemptuously brushed aside as 'Hebrew old clothes,' with which the true Christianity has no concern. Judaism teas because Christ

was to be, and the ancient ritual (whether modern ideas of the date of its origin be accepted or no) was a God-appointed mirror, in which, the shadow of the coming event was presented. Jesus Christ is all which temple, priest, altar, sacrifice proclaimed should one day be. And just as the relation between Christ's work and the Judaic system of external ritual sacrifices is that of shadow and substance, prophecy and fulfilment, so, in analogous manner, the relation between the altar and sacrifice of the New Testament and all the systems of heathenism, with their smoking altars, is that these declare a want, and this affords its supply; that these are the confession of humanity that it is conscious of sin, separation, alienation, and that need of a sacrifice, and that Christ is what heathenism in all lands has wailed that it needs, and has desperately hoped that it might find.

There are many attempts made to explain on other grounds the universality of sacrifice, and to weaken the force of its witness to the deep necessities of humanity as rooted in the consciousness of sin, but I venture to affirm that all these are superficial, and that the study of comparative religions goes on wrong lines unless it recognises in the whole heathen world a longing, the supply of which it recognises in Jesus Christ and His work. I venture to say that that is a truer philosophy of religion than much that nowadays calls itself by the name.

And what lies in this great thought? I am not going to attempt a theory of the Atonement. I do not believe that any such thing is completely possible for us. But this, at least, I recognise as being fundamental and essential to the thought of my text; 'we have an altar,' that Christ in His representative relation, in His true affinity to every man upon earth, has in His life or death taken upon Himself the consequences of human transgression, not merely by sympathy, nor only by reason of the uniqueness-of His representative relation, but by willing submission to that awful separation from the Father, of which the cry out of the thick darkness of the Cross, 'Why hast

Thou forsaken Me?’ is the unfathomable witness. Thus, bearing our sin, He bears it away, and ‘we have an altar.’

Now notice that this great truth has a distinct teaching for those who hanker after externalities of ritual. The writer of this Epistle uses it for the purpose of declaring that in the Christian Church, because of its possession of the true sacrifice, there is no room for any other; that priest, temple, altar, sacrifice in any material external forms are an anachronism and a contradiction of the very central idea of the gospel. And it seems very strange that sections of Christendom should so have been blind to the very meaning of my text, and so missed the lesson which it teaches, and fallen into the error which it opposes, as that these very words, which are a protest against any materialisation of the idea of altar and sacrifice, should have been twisted to mean by the altar the table of the Lord, and by sacrifice the communion of His body and blood. But so it is. So strong are the tendencies in our weak humanity to grasp at some sensuous embodiment of the truth that the Christian Church, as a whole, has not been able to keep on the lofty levels of my text, and has hungered after some external signs to which it may attach notions of efficacy which attach only to the spiritual sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Thus we have got a strange contradiction, as it seems to me, of the spirit and letter of my text, and of the whole Epistle from which it comes, and there, has crept surreptitiously into, and been obstinately maintained in, large sections of the Christian Church the idea of a sacrificing priesthood, and of a true sacrifice offered upon a material altar. My text protests against all that, and said to these early Christians what it says to us: ‘Go into *your* upper rooms and there offer your worship, which to sense seems so bare and starved. Never mind though people say there is nothing in your system for sense to lay hold of. So much the better. Never mind though you can present no ritual with an altar, and a priest, and a sacrifice. All these are swept away for ever, because once Jesus Christ hath put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Our temple is His body; *our* priest is before the throne. We rear no altar; He has died. Our sacrifice was offered

on Calvary, and henceforward our worship, cleared from these materialities, rises unto loftier regions, and we worship God in the spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh.’

Still further, this truth has a bearing on the opposite pole of error, on those who would fain have a Christianity without an altar. I am not going to say how far genuine discipleship of Jesus Christ is possible with the omission of this article from the creed. It is no business of mine to determine that, but it is my business, as I think, to assert this, that a Christianity without an altar is a Christianity without power; impotent to move the world or to control the individual heart, inadequate to meet the needs and the cravings of men. Where are the decaying Christians? Where are the Christians that have let go the central fact of an incarnate sacrifice for the world’s sin? The answer to the two questions is the same. Wherever you find a feeble grasp of that central truth, or a faltering utterance of it on the part of the preachers, there you find deadness and formality.

Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ’s servants, I was going to say, obey the same law, and that law is, no cross, no crown. If Christ has not died, the world’s sacrifice, He will never reign, the world’s King. If His Cross be an altar it is a throne. If it be not, it is merely a gallows, on which a religious enthusiast, with many sweet and lovable qualities, died a long time ago, and it is nothing to me. ‘We have an altar,’ or else we have no religion worth keeping.

II. Mark here, secondly, our feast on the sacrifice. From this altar, says the writer, the adherents of the ancient system have no right to partake. That implies that those who have left the ancient system have the right to partake, and do partake. Now the writer is drawing a contrast, which he proceeds to elaborate, between the great sacrifice on the Day of Atonement and the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. The former was not, as many other sacrifices were, partaken of by priests and worshippers, but simply the blood was brought within the holy place, and the whole of the rest of the sacrifice

consumed in a waste spot without the camp. And this contrast is in the writer's mind. We have a sacrifice on which we feast. That is to say, the Christ who died for my sins is not only my means of reconciliation with God, but His sacrifice and death are the sustenance of my spiritual life. We live upon the Christ that died for us. That this is no mere metaphor, but goes penetratingly and deep down to the very basis of the spiritual life, is attested sufficiently by many a word of Scripture on which I cannot now dwell. The life of the Christian is the indwelling Christ. For he whose heart hath not received that Christ within him is dead whilst he lives, and has no possession of the one true life for a human spirit, viz., the life of union with God. Christ in us is the consequence of Christ for us; and that Christianity is all imperfect which does not grasp with equal emphasis the thought of the sacrifice or the cross, and of the feast or the sacrifice.

But how is that feeding on the sacrifice accomplished? 'He that eateth Me, even he shall 'live by Me.' He that believeth, eateth. He that with humble faith makes Christ his very own, and appropriates as the nourishment and basis of his own better life the facts of the life and death of sacrifice, he truly lives thereby. To eat is to believe; to believe is to live.

I need not remind you, I suppose, how, though there be no reference in the words of my text, as I have tried to show, to the external rite of the communion of the Lord's body and blood, and though the 'altar' here has no reference whatever to that table, yet there is a connection between the two representations, inasmuch as the one declares in words what the other sets forth in symbol, and the meaning of the feast on the sacrifice is expressed by this great word. 'This is My body, broken for you.' 'This is the new covenant in My blood': 'Drink ye all of it.' 'We have an altar,' and though it be not the table on which the symbols of our Lord's sacrificial death are spread for us, yet these symbols and the words of my text, like the words of His great discourse in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel,

point to the same fact, that the spiritual participation of Christ by faith is the reality of 'eating of Him,' and the condition of living for ever.

III. And now, lastly, my text suggests our Christian offerings on the altar.

'By Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.' What are these offerings? Christ's death stands alone, incapable of repetition, meeting no repetition, the eternal, sole, 'sufficient obligation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.' But there be other kinds of sacrifice. There are sacrifices of thanksgiving as well as for propitiation.

And we, on the footing of that great sacrifice to which we can add nothing, and on which alone we must rest, may bring the offerings of our thankful hearts. These offerings are of a two-fold sort, says the writer. There are words of praise. There are works of beneficence. The service of man is sacrifice to God. That is a deep saying and reaches far. Such praise and such beneficence are only possible on the footing of Christ's sacrifice, for only on that footing is our praise acceptable; and only when moved by that infinite mercy and love shall we yield ourselves, thank offerings to God.

And thus, brethren, the whole extent of the Christian life, in its inmost springs, and in its outward manifestations, is covered by these two thoughts — the 'feast on the sacrifice once offered, and the sacrifices which we in our turn offer on the altar. If we thus, moved by the mercy of God, 'yield ourselves as living sacrifices, which is our reasonable service,' then not only will life be one long thank-offering, but as the Apostle puts it in another place, death itself may become, too, a thankful surrender to Him. For He says, 'I am ready to be offered.' And so the thankful heart, resting on the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ, makes all life a thanksgiving, 'death God's endless mercy seals, and makes the sacrifice complete.' There is one Christ that can thus hallow and

make acceptable our living and our dying, and that is the Christ that has died for us, and lives that in Him we may be priests to God. There is only one Christianity that will do for us what we will need, and that is the Christianity whose centre is an altar, on which the Son of *God, our* Passover, is slain for us.

Hebrews 13:13, 14 —‘WITHOUT THE CAMP’

‘Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, Bearing His reproach. 14. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.’ —Hebrews 13:13, 14

CALVARY was outside Jerusalem. That wholly accidental and trivial circumstance is laid hold of in the context, in order to give picturesque force to the main contention and purpose of this Epistle. One of the solemn parts of the ritual of Judaism was the great Day of Atonement, on which the sacrifice that took away the sins of the nation was borne outside the camp, and consumed by fire, instead of being partaken of by the priests, as were most of the other sacrifices. Our writer here sees in these two roughly parallel things, not an argument but an imaginative illustration of great truths. Though he does not mean to say that the death on Calvary was intended to be pointed to by the unique arrangement in question, he does mean to say that the coincidence of the two things helps us to grasp two great truths—one, that Jesus Christ really did what that old sacrifice expressed the need for having done, and the other that, in His death on Calvary, the Jewish nation, as one of the parables has it, ‘cast Him out of the vineyard.’ In the context, he urges this analogy between the two things.

But a Christ outside the camp beckons His disciples to His side. If any man serve Him, he has to follow Him, and the blessedness, as well as the duty, of the servant on earth, as well as in heaven, is to be where his Master is.

So the writer finds here a picturesque way to enforce the great lesson of his treatise, namely, that the Jewish adherent to Christianity must break with Judaism. In the early stages, it was possible to combine faith in Christ and adherence to the Temple and its ritual. But now that by process of time and experience the Church has learnt better who and what Christ is, that which was in part has to be done away, and the Christian Church is to stand clear of the Jewish synagogue.

Now it is to be distinctly understood that the words of my text, in the writer's intention, are not a general principle or exhortation, but that they are a special commandment to a certain class under special circumstances, and when we use them, as I am going to do now, for a wider purpose, we must remember that that wider purpose was by no means in the writer's mind. What he was thinking about was simply the relation between the Jewish Christian and the Jewish community. But if we take them as we may legitimately do — only remembering that we are diverting them from their original intention — as carrying more general lessons for us, what they seem to teach is that faithful discipleship involves detachment from the world. This commandment, 'Let us go forth unto Him without the camp,' stands, if you will notice, between two reasons for it, which buttress it up, as it were, on either side. Before it is enunciated, the writer has been pointing, as I have tried to show, to the thought that a Christ without the camp necessarily involves disciples without the camp. And he follow, it with another reason, 'here we have no continuing city, but we seek that which is to come.' Here, then, is a general principle, supported on either side by a great reason.

Let me first try to set before you,

I. What this detachment is not.

The Jewish Christian was obliged utterly and outwardly to break his connection with Judaism, on the peril, if he did not, of being involved in its ruin, and, as was historically the case with certain

Judaizing sects, of losing his Christianity altogether. It was a cruel necessity, and no wonder that it needed this long letter to screw the disciples of Hebrew extraction up to the point of making the leap from the sinking ship to the deck of the one that floated. The parallel does not hold with regard to us. The detachment from the world, or the coming out from the camp, to which my text exhorts, is not the abandonment of our relations with what the Bible calls 'the world,' and what we call — roughly meaning the same thing — society. The function of the Christian Church as leaven, involves the necessity of being closely associated, and in contact with, all forms of human life, national, civic, domestic, social, commercial, intellectual, political. Does my text counsel an opposite course? 'Go forth without the camp,' — does that mean huddle yourself together into a separate flock, and let the camp go to the devil? By no means. For the society or world, out of which the Christian is drawn by the attraction of the Cross, like iron filings out of a heap by a magnet, is in itself good and God-appointed. It is He 'that sets the solitary in families.' It is He that gathers humanity into the bonds of civic and national life. It is He that gives capacities which find their sphere, their education, and their increase in the walks of intellectual or commercial or political life. And He does not build up with one hand and destroy with the other, or set men by His providence in circumstances out of which He draws them by His grace. By no means. To go apart from humanity is to miss the very purpose for which God has set the Church in the world. For contact with the sick to be healed is requisite for healing, and they are poor disciples of the 'Friend of publicans and sinners' who prefer to consort with Pharisees. 'Let both grow together till the harvest' — the roots are intertwined, and it is God that has intertwined them.

Now, I know that one does not need to insist upon this principle to the average Christianity of this day, which is only too ready to mingle itself with the world, but one does need to insist that, in so mingling, detachment from the world is still to be observed; and it does need to be taught that Christian men are not lowering the

standard of the Christian life, when they fling themselves frankly and energetically into the various forms of human activity, if and only if, whilst they do so, they still remember and obey the commandment, 'Let us go forth unto Him without the camp.' The commandment misinterpreted so as to be absolutely impossible to be obeyed, becomes a snare to people who do not keep it, and yet sometimes feel as if they were to blame, because they do not. And, therefore, I turn in the next place to consider —

II. What this detachment really is.

Will you let me put what I have to say into the shape of two or three plain, practical exhortations, not because I wish to assume a position of authority or command, but only in order to give vividness and point to my thoughts?

First, then, let us habitually nourish the inner life of union with Jesus Christ. Notice the words of my text, and see what comes first and what comes second. 'Let us go forth unto Him' — that is the main thing: 'Without the camp' is second, and a consequence; 'unto Him,' is primary, which is just to say that the highest, widest, noblest, all-comprehensive conception of what a Christian life is, is that it is union with Jesus Christ, and whatever else it is follows from that. The soul is ever to be looking up through all the shadows and shows, the changes and circumstances, of this fleeting present unto Him, and seeking to be more closely united with Him. Union with Him is life, and separation from Him is death. To be so united is to be a Christian. Never mind about camps or anything else, to begin with. If the heart is joined to Jesus, then all the rest will come right. If it is not, then you may make regulations as many as you like, and they will only be red tape to entangle your feet in. 'Let us go forth unto Him'; that is the sovereign commandment. And how is that to be done? How is it to be done but by nourishing habitual consciousness of union with Him and life in Him, by an habitual reference of all our acts to Him? As the Roman Catholics put it, in

their hard external way, 'the practice of the presence of God' is the keynote to all real, vigorous Christianity. For, brethren, such a habitual fellowship with Jesus Christ is possible for us. Though with many interruptions, no doubt, still ideally is it possible that it shall be continuous and real. It is possible, perfectly possible, that it shall be a great deal more continuous than, alas! it is with many of us.

Depend upon it, this nourishing of an inward life of fellowship with Jesus, so that we may say, 'our lives are hid' — hid, after all vigorous manifestation and consistent action — 'with Christ in God,' will not weaken, but increase, the force with which we act on the things seen and temporal. There is an unwholesome kind of mysticism which withdraws men from the plain duties of everyday life; and there is a deep, sane, wholesome, and eminently Christian mysticism which enables men to come down with greater force, and to act with more decision, with more energy, with more effect, in all the common deeds of life. The greatest mystics have been the hardest workers. Who was it that said, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'? That man had gone far, very far, towards an habitual consciousness of Christ's presence, and it was the same man that said, 'That which cometh upon me daily is the care of all the churches.' The greatest mystic of the Middle Ages, the saint that rode by the lake all day long, and was so absorbed in contemplation that he said at night, 'Where is the lake?' was the man that held all the threads of European politics in his hands, and from his cell at Clairvaux guided popes, and flung the nations of the West into a crusade. John Wesley was one of the hardest workers that the Church has ever had, and was one of those who lived most habitually without the camp. Be sure of this, that the more our lives are wrapped in Christ, the more energetic will they be in the world. They tell us that the branches of a spreading tree describe roughly the same circumference in the atmosphere that its roots do underground, and so far as our roots extend in Christ, so far will our branches spread in the world. 'Let us go forth unto Him, without the camp.'

Again, let me say, do the same things as other people, but with a difference. The more our so-called civilisation advances, the more, I was going to say, mechanical, or at least largely released from the control of the will and personal idiosyncrasy, become great parts of our work. The Christian weaver drives her looms very much in the same fashion that the non-Christian girl who is looking after the next sot does. The Christian clerk adds up his figures, and writes his letters, very much in the same fashion that the worldly clerk does. The believing doctor visits his patients, and writes out his prescriptions in the fashion that his neighbour who is not a Christian does. But there is always room for the personal equation — always! and two lives may be, superficially and roughly, the same, and yet there may be a difference in them impalpable, undefinable, and very obvious and very real and very mighty. The Christian motive is love to Jesus Christ and fellowship with Him, and that motive may be brought to bear upon all life —

‘A servant with this clause Makes drudgery divine.’

He that for Christ's sake does a common thing it outers the fatal region of the commonplace, and makes it great and beautiful. We do not want from all Christian people specifically Christian service, in the narrow sense which that phrase has acquired, half so much as we want common things done from an uncommon motive; worldly things done because of the love of Jesus Christ in our hearts. And, depend upon it, just as, from some unseen bank of violets, there come odours in opening spring, so from the unspoken and deeply hidden motive of love to Jesus Christ, there will be a fragrance in our commonest actions which all men will recognise. They tell us that rivers which flow from lakes are so clear that they are tinged throughout with celestial blue, because all the mud that they brought down from their upper reaches has been deposited in the still waters of the lake from which they flow; and if from the deep tam of love to Jesus Christ in our hearts the stream of our lives flows out, it will be like the Rhone below Geneva, distinguishable from the muddy

waters that run by its side in the same channel. Two people, partners in business, joined in the same work, marching step for step in the same ranks, may yet be entirely distinguishable and truly separate, because, doing the same things, they do them from different motives.

Let me say, still further, and finally about this matter, that sometimes we shall have to come actually out of the camp. The world as God made it is good; society is ordained by God. The occupations which men pursue are of His appointment, for the most part. But into the thing that was good there have crept all manner of corruptions and abominations, so that often it will be a Christian duty to come away from all outward connection with that which is incurably corrupt. I know very well that a morality which mainly consists of prohibitions is pedantic and poor. I know very well that a Christianity which interprets such a precept as this of my text simply as meaning abstinence from certain conventionally selected and branded forms of life, occupation, or amusement, is but a very poor affair. But 'Thou shalt not' is very often absolutely necessary as a support to 'Thou shalt.' If you go into an Eastern city, you will find the houses with their fronts to the street, having narrow slits of windows all barred, and a heavy gate, frowning and ugly. But pass within, and there are flower-beds and fountains. The frowning street front is there for the defence of the fountains and the flower-beds within, from the assaults of foes, and speaks of a disturbed state of society, in which no flowers can grow and no fountains can bubble and sparkle, unless a strong barrier is round them.

And so 'thou shalt not, in a world like this, is needful in order that 'thou shalt' shall have fair play. No law can be laid down for other people. Every man must settle this matter of abstinence for himself. Things that you may do, perhaps I may not do; things that you may not do, I very likely may. 'A liberal Christianity,' as the world calls it, is often a very shallow Christianity. 'A sour Puritanical severity,' as loose-living men call it, is very often plain, Christian morality.

An inconsistent Christian may be hailed as 'a good fellow,' and laughed at behind his back. Samson made sport for the Philistines when he was blind. The uncircumcised do often say of professing Christians, that try to be like them, and to keep step with them, 'What do these Hebrews here?' and God always says to such, 'What dost thou here, Elijah?'

Lastly —

III. Why this detachment is enforced.

'For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.' That translation does not give the full force of the original, for it suggests the idea of a vague uncertainty in the seeking, whereas what the writer means is, not 'one to come,' but *one which is coming*. The Christian object of seeking is definite, and it is not merely future but present, and in process of being realised even here and now, and tending to completion. Paul uses the same metaphor of the city in one of his letters, 'Your citizenship is in heaven.' He says that to the Philippians. Philippi was a colony; that is to say, it was a bit of Rome put down in a foreign land, with Roman laws, its citizens enrolled upon the registers of the Roman tribes, and not under the jurisdiction of the provincial governor. That is what we Christians are, whether we know it or not.' We are here in an order to which we outwardly belong, but in the depths of our being we belong to another order of things altogether. Therefore the essentials of the Christian life may be stated as being the looking forward to the city, and the realising of our affinities to it and not to the things around us. In the measure in which, dear brethren, we realise to what community we belong, will the things here be seen to be fleeting and alive to our deepest selves. 'Here we have no continuing city' is not merely the result of the transiency of temporal things, and the brevity of our earthly lives, but it is much rather the result of our affinity to the other order of things beyond the seas.

Abraham dwelt in tents, because he ‘looked for a airy,’ and so it was better for him to stop on the breezy uplands, though the herbage was scant, than to go with Lot into the vale of Sodom, though it looked Hire the garden of the Lord. In like manner, the more intensely we realise that we belong to the city, the more shall we be willing to ‘go forth without the camp.’ Let these two thoughts dominate our minds and shape our lives; our union with Jesus Christ and our citizenship of the heavenly Jerusalem. In the measure in which they *do*, it will be no sacrifice for us to come out of the transient camp, because we shall thereby go to Him and come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, ‘which hath the foundations.’

Hebrews 13:15, 16—CHRISTIAN SACRIFICE

‘By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. 16. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. —

Hebrews 13:15, 16.

MUCH attention is given now to the Study of comparative religion. The beliefs and observances Of the rudest tribes are narrowly scrutinised, in order to discover the underlying ideas. And many a practice which seems to be trivial, absurd, or sanguinary is found to have its foundation in some noble and profound thought. Charity and insight have both gained by the study.

But, singularly enough, the very people who are so interested in the *rationale* of the rites of savages will turn away when anybody applies a similar process to the ritual of the Jews. That is what this Epistle to the Hebrews does. It translates altar, ritual festivals, priests, into thoughts; and it declares that Jesus Christ’ is the only adequate and abiding embodiment of these thoughts. We are not dressing Christian truth in a foreign garb when we express the substance of its revelation in language borrowed from the ritualistic

system that preceded it. But we are extricating truths, which the world needs to-day as much as ever it did, from the form in which they were embodied for one stage of religion, when we translate them into their Christian equivalents.

So the writer here has been speaking about Christ as by His death sanctifying His people. And on that great thought, that He is what all priesthood symbolises, and what all bloody sacrifices reach out towards, he builds this grand exhortation of my text, which is at once a lofty conception of what the Christian life ought to be, and a directory as to the method by which it may become so. 'By Him let us offer sacrifices continually, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.'

Now, it seems to me that there are here mainly three points to be looked at. First, the basis of; second, the material of; and third, the divine delight in, the sacrifices of the Christian life. And to these three points I ask your attention.

I. First, then, note here the emphatic way in which the one basis of Christian sacrifice is laid down.

Anybody who can consult the original will see, what indeed is partially expressed in our translation, that the position of these two words 'through' (or by) 'Him' underscores and puts great emphasis upon them. There are two thoughts which may be included in them; the one, that Jesus is the Priest by whose mediation we come to God, and the other that He is the sacrifice, on the footing of which we can present our sacrifices. It seems to me, however, that it is the latter idea principally that is in the writer's mind here. And on it I touch lightly in a few words.

Now, let me recall to you, as a world-wide fact which is expressed in the noblest form in the ancient Jewish ritual, that there was a broad line of distinction drawn between two kinds of sacrifices, differing in their material and in their purpose. If I wanted to use

mere theological technicalities, which I do not, I should talk about the difference between sacrifices of propitiation and sacrifices of thanksgiving. But let us put these well-worn phrases on one side, as far as we can, for the moment. Here, then, is the fact that all the world over, and in the Mosaic ritual, there was expressed a double consciousness one, that there was, somehow or other, a black dam between the worshipper and his Deity, which needed to be swept away; and the other, that when that barrier was removed there could be an uninterrupted flow of thanksgiving and of service. So on one altar was laid a bleeding victim, and on another were spread the flowers of the field, the fruits of the earth, all things gracious, lovely, fair, and sweet, as expressions of the thankfulness of the reconciled worshippers. One set of sacrifices expressed the consciousness of sin; the other expressed the joyful recognition of its removal.

Now I want to know whether that world-wide confession of need is nothing more to us than a mere piece of interesting reminiscence of a stage of development beyond which we have advanced. I do not believe that there is such a gulf of difference between the lowest savage and the most cultivated nineteenth-century Englishman, that the fundamental needs of the one, in spirit, are not almost as identical as are the fundamental needs of the one and the other in regard to bodily wants. And sure I am that, if the voice of humanity has declared all the world over, as it has declared, that it is conscious of a cloud that has come between it and the awful Power above, and that it seeks by sacrifice the removal of the cloud, the probability is that that need is your need and mine; and that the remedy which humanity has divined as necessary has some affinity with the remedy which God has revealed as provided.

I am not going to attempt theorising about the manner in which the life and death of Jesus Christ sweep away the barrier between us and God, and deal with the consciousness of transgression, which lies coiled and dormant, but always ready to wake and sting, in human

hearts. But I do venture to appeal to each man's and woman's own consciousness, and to ask, Is there not something in us which recognises the necessity that the sin which stands between God and man shall be swept away? Is there not something in us which recognises the blessedness of the message, 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin'? Oh, brethren! do not fancy that it is a mere theological doctrine of an atonement that is in question. It is the possibility of loving access to God, as made possible through Jesus, and through Him alone, that I want to press upon your hearts. 'Through Him let us offer.'

II. Secondly, notice the light which our text throws upon the material or contents of the Christian sacrifice.

I need not dwell at all, I suppose, upon the explanation of the words, which are plain enough. The writer seems to me to divide the sacrifice of praise, which he prescribes, into two parts, the praise of the lip and the praise of the life.

But before I deal with this twofold distribution of the thought, let me fix upon the main general idea that is expressed here, and that is that the highest notion, the noblest and purest of what a Christian life is, is that it is one long sacrifice. Have we risen to the height of that conception? I do not say, Have we attained to the fulfilment of it? The answer to the latter question one knows only too well. But has it ever dawned upon us that the true ideal of the Christian life which we profess to be living is this — a sacrifice?

Now, that thought involves two things. One is the continuous surrender of self, and that means the absolute suppression of our own wills; the bridling of our own inclinations and fancies; the ceasing obstinately to adhere to our own purposes and conceptions of What is good; the recognition that there is a higher will above us, ruling and guiding, to which we are to submit. Sacrifice means nothing if it does not mean surrender; and surrender is nothing if it is not the surrender of the will. It was a great deal easier *for* Abraham

to take the knife in his hand, and climb the hill with the fixed intention of thrusting it into his son's heart, than it is for us to take the sword of the Spirit in our hands and slay our own wills, and I am here to say that unless we do we have very little right to call ourselves Christians.

But, then, surrender is only half the conception of the sacrifice which has to be accomplished in our whole days and selves. Surrender to God is the full meaning of sacrifice. And that implies the distinct reference of all that I am, and all that I *do*, to Him, as not only commanding, but as being the aim and end of my life. We are to labour on as at His command. You in your counting-houses, and mills, and shops, and homes; and we students in our studies, and laboratories, and lecture-rooms, are to link everything with Him, with His will, and with the thought of Him. What vice could live in that light? What meanness would not be struck dead if we were connected with that great reservoir of electric force? What slothfulness would not be spurred into unhesitating and unceasing zeal if all our work were referred to God? Unless our lives be thus sacrifice, in the full sense of conscious surrender to Him. we have yet to learn what is the meaning and the purpose of the propitiatory sacrifice on which we say that our lives are built.

I need not, I suppose, remind you at any length of how our text draws broad and deep the distinction between the nature and the scope of the fundamental offering made by Christ, and the offerings made by us. The one takes away the separating barrier; the other is the flow of the stream where the barrier had stood. The one is the melting away of the cloud that hid the sun; the other is the flashing of the mirror of my heart when the sun shines upon it. Our sacrifice is thanksgiving. Then there will be no reluctance because duty is heavy. There will be no grudging because requirements are great. There will be no avoiding of the obligations of the Christian life, and rendering as small a percentage by way of dividend as the Creditor up in the heavens will accept. If the offering is a thank-offering,

then it will be given gladly. The grateful heart does not hold the scales like a scrupulous retail dealer afraid of putting the thousandth part of an ounce more in than can be avoided.

*'Give all thou canst, high heaven rejects the lore Of nicely
calculated less or more.'*

Power is the measure of duty, and they whose offering is the expression of their thankfulness will heap incense upon the brazier, and cover the altar with flowers.

Ah, brethren, what a blessed life it would be for us, if indeed all the painfulness and harshness of duty, with all the efforts of constraint and restriction and stimulus which it so often requires, were transmuted into that glad expression of infinite obligation for the great sacrifice on which our life and hopes rest!

I do not purpose to say much about the two classes of sacrifice into which our writer divides the whole. Words come first, work follows. That order may seem strange, because we are accustomed to think more of work than words. But the Bible has a solemn reverence for man's utterances of speech, and many a protest against 'God's great gift of speech abused.' And the text rightly supposes that if there is in us any deep, real, abiding, life-shaping thankfulness for the gift of Jesus Christ, it is impossible that our tongues should cleave to the roofs of our mouths, and that we should be contented to live in silence. Loving hearts must speak. What would you think of a husband who never felt any impulse to tell his wife that she was dear to him; or a mother who never found it needful to unpack her heart of its tenderness, even in perhaps inarticulate croonings over the little child that she pressed to her heart? It seems to me that a dumb Christian, a man who is thankful for Christ's sacrifice and never feels the need to say so, is as great an anomaly as either of these I have described.

Brethren! the conventionalities of our modern life, the proper reticence about personal experience, the reverence due to sacred subjects, all these do prescribe caution and tact and many another thing, in limiting the evangelistic side of our speech; but is there any such limitation needful for the eucharistic, the thanksgiving side of our speech? Surely not. In some monasteries and nunneries there used to be a provision made that at every hour of the four and twenty, and at every moment of every hour, there should be one kneeling figure before the altar, repeating the psalter, so that night and day prayer and praise went up. It was a beautiful idea, beautiful as long as it was an idea, and, like a great many other beautiful ideas, made vulgar and sometimes ludicrous when it was put into realisation. But it is the symbol of what we should be, with hearts ever occupied with Him, and the voice of praise rising unintermittently from our hearts singing a quiet tune, all the day and night long, to Him who has loved us and given Himself for us.

And then the other side of this conception of sacrifice that my text puts forth is that of beneficence amongst men, in the general form of doing good, and in the specific form of giving money. Two aspects of this combination of word and work may be suggested. It has a message for us professing Christians. All that the world says about the uselessness of singing psalms, and praying prayers, while neglecting the miserable and the weak, is said far more emphatically in the Bible, and ought to be laid to heart, not because sneering, godless people say it, but because God Himself says it. It is vain to pray unless you work. It is sin to work for yourselves unless you own the bond of sympathy with all mankind, and live 'to do good and to communicate.' That is a message for others than Christians. There is no real foundation for a broad philanthropy except a deep devotion to God. The service of man is never so well secured as when it is the corollary and second form of the service of God.

III. And so, lastly — and only a word — note the divine delight in such sacrifice.

Ah! that is a wonderful thought, 'With such sacrifices God is well pleased.' Now I take it that that 'such' covers both the points on which I have been dwelling, and that the sacrifices which please Him are, first, those which are offered on the basis and footing of Christ's sacrifice, and, second, those in which word and work accord well, and make one music. 'With such sacrifices God is well pleased.'

We are sometimes too much afraid of believing that there is in the divine heart anything corresponding to our delight in gifts that mean love, because we are so penetrated with the imperfection of all that we can do and give; and sometimes because We are influenced by grand philosophic ideas of the divine nature, so that we think it degrading to Him to conceive Of anything corresponding to our delight passing across it. But the Bible is wiser and more reverent than that, and it tells us that, however stained and imperfect our gifts, and however a man might reject. them with scorn, God will take them if they are 'such' — that is, offered through Jesus Christ. I dare say there are many parents who have laid away amongst their treasures some utterly useless thing that one of their little children once gave them. No good in it at all! No; but it meant love. And, depend upon it, 'if ye, being evil, know how to good gifts' — though they are useless — 'from your children, much more will your heavenly Father accept' your stained sacrifices if they come through Christ.

Dear brethren, my text preaches to us what is the true sacrifice of the true priesthood in the Christian Church. There is one Priest who stands alone, offering the one sacrifice that has no parallel nor second. No other shares in His priesthood of expiation and intercession. But around, and deriving their priestly character from Him, and made capable of rendering acceptable sacrifices through Him, stand the whole company of Christian people. And besides these there are no priesthoods and no sacrifices in the Christian vocabulary or in the Christian Church. Would that a generation that

seems to be reeling backwards to the beggarly elements of an official priesthood, with all its corruptions and degradations of the Christian community, would learn the lesson of my text! ‘Ye’ — all of you, and not any selected number amongst you — ‘ye, all of you are a royal priesthood.’ There are only two sacrifices in the Christian Church: the one offered once for all on Calvary, by the High Priest Himself; the sacrifice of ourselves, by ourselves, thank-offerings for Christ and His name, which are the true Eucharist.

Hebrews 13:20—GREAT HOPES A GREAT DUTY

‘The God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.’ —

Hebrews 13:20.

A GREAT building needs a deep foundation; a leaping fountain needs a full spring. A very large and lofty prayer follows the words of my text, and these are the foundations on which it rests, the abundant source from which it soars heavenward. The writer asks for his readers nothing less than a complete, all-round, and thorough-going conformity to the will of God; and that should be our deepest desire and our conscious aim, that God may see His own image in us, for nothing less can be ‘well-pleasing in His sight.’ But does not such a dream of what we may be seem far too audacious, when we pursue the stained volume of our own lives, and remember what we are? Should we not be content with very much more modest hopes for ourselves, and with a vary partial attainment of them?

Yes, if we look at ourselves; but to look at ourselves is not the way to pray, or the way to hope, or the way to grow, or the way to dare. The logic of Christian petitions and Christian expectations starts with God as the premiss, and thence argues the possibility of the impossible. It was because of all this great accumulation of truths,

piled up in my text, that the writer found it in his heart to ask such great things for the humble people to whom he was writing, although he well knew that they were far from perfect, and were even in danger of making shipwreck of the faith altogether. My purpose now is to let him lead us along the great array of reasons for his great prayer, that we too may learn to desire and to expect, and to work for nothing short of this aim — the entire purging of ourselves from all evil and sin and the complete assimilation to our Lord. There are three points here: the warrant for our highest expectations in the name of God; the warrant for our highest expectations in the risen Shepherd; the warrant for our highest expectations in the everlasting covenant.

I. The warrant for our highest expectations in the name of God.

‘The God of peace’ — the name comes like a benediction into our restless lives and distracted hearts, and carries us away up into lofty regions, above the mutations of circumstances and the perturbations and agitations of our earthly life. No doubt, there may be some allusion here to the special circumstances of the recipients of this letter, for it is clear from the rest of the Epistle that they had much need for the peace of God to calm their agitations in the prospect of the collapse of the venerable system in which they had lived so long. It is obvious also that there were divisions of opinion amongst themselves, so that the invocation of the God of peace may have had a special sanctity and sweetness to them, considering the circumstances in which they were placed. But the designation has a bearing not so much on the condition of those to whom the words are spoken, as upon the substance of the grand prayer that follows it. It is because He is known, to us as being ‘the God of peace’ that we may be quite sure that He will ‘make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight.’

And how does that great name, sweet and strong as it is, bear with it the weight of such an inference as that? Plainly enough because it speaks, first of all, of that which I may call an immanent characteristic of the divine nature. He is the tranquil God, dwelling above all disturbance which comes from variableness and all 'the shadows east by turning'; dwelling above all possibilities of irritation or agitation. And yet that great ocean is not stagnant, but through all its depths flow currents of love, and in all its repose is intensest energy. The highest activity coincides with the supremest rest. The wheel revolves so swiftly that it stands as if motionless.

Then, just because of that profound divine, repose, we may expect Him, by His very nature, to impart His own peace to the soul that seeks Him. Of course, it can be but the faintest shadow of that divine indisturbance which can ever fall, like a dove's wing, upon our restless lives. But still in the tranquillity of a quiet heart, in the harmonies of a spirit all concentrated on one purpose, in the independence of externals possible to a man who grasps God, in the victory over change which is granted to them who have pierced through the fleeting clouds and have their home in the calm blue beyond, there may be a quiet of heart which does not altogether put to shame that wondrous promise: 'My peace I give unto you.' It is possible that they 'which have believed' should 'enter into the rest' of God.

But if the impartation of some faint but real echo of His own great repose is the delight of the divine heart, how can it be done? There is only one way by which a man can be made peaceful, and that is by his being made good. Nothing else secures the true tranquillity of a human spirit without its conformity to the divine will. It is submission to the divine commandments and appointments, it is the casting-off of self with all its agitations and troubles, that secures our entering into rest. What a man needs for peace is, that his relations with God should be set right, that his own nature should be

drawn into one and harmonised with itself, and that his relations with men should also be rectified.

For the first of these, we know that it is ‘the Christ that died,’ who is the means by which the alienation and enmity of heart between us and God can be swept away. For the second of them, we know that the only way by which this anarchic commonwealth within can be brought into harmony and order, and its elements prevented from drawing apart from one another, is that the whole man shall be bowed before God in submission to His will. The heart is like some stormy sea, tossed and running mountains high, and there is only one voice that can say to it, ‘Peace: be still,’ and that is the voice of God in Christ. There is only one power that, like the white moon in the nightly sky, can draw the heaped waters round the whole world after itself, and that is the power of Christ in His Cross and Spirit, which brings the disobedient heart into submissions, and unites the discordant powers in the liberty of a common service: *so*, brethren, if we are ever to have quiet hearts, they must come, not from favourable circumstances, nor from anything external. They can only come from the prayer being answered, ‘Unite my heart to fear Thy name,’ and then our inner lives will no longer be torn by contending passions — conscience pulling this way and desire that; a great voice saying within, ‘you ought!’ and an insistent voice answering, ‘I will not’; but all within will be at one, and then there will be peace. ‘The God of peace sanctify you wholly,’ says one of the apostles, bringing out in the expression the same thought, that inasmuch as He who Himself is supreme repose must be infinitely desirous that we, His children, should share in His rest, He will, as the only way by which that rest can ever be attained, sanctify us wholly. When — and not till, and as soon as — we are thus made holy are we made at rest.

Nor let us forget that, on the other hand, the divine peace, which is ‘shed abroad in our hearts’ by the love of God, does itself largely contribute to perfect the holiness of a Christian soul. We read that

‘the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly,’ and also that ‘the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds,’ and again that the peace of God will sit as umpire in our hearts, detecting evil, judging actions, awarding the prizes. For, indeed, when that peace lies like a summer morning’s light upon our quiet hearts there will be little in evil that will so attract us as to make us think it worth our while to break the blessed and charmed silence for the sake of any earthly influences or joys. They that dwell in the peace of God have little temptation to buy trouble, remorse perhaps, or agitation, by venturing out into the forbidden ground. So, brethren, the great name of the God of peace is itself a promise, and entitles us to expect the completeness of character which alone brings peace.

Then, further, we have here

II. The warrant for our highest expectations in the risen Shepherd.

‘The God of peace who brought again’ — or, perhaps, brought up — ‘from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep.’ Now, it is remarkable that this is the only reference in this Epistle to the Hebrews to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The book is full of references to that which presupposes the Resurrection, namely, the ascended life of Jesus as the great High Priest within the veil, and the fact that only this once is the act of resurrection referred to, confirms the idea, that in the New Testament there is no division of thought between the point at which the line begins and the line itself, that the Ascension is but the prolongation of the Resurrection, and the Resurrection is but the beginning of the Ascension, But here the act, rather than the state into which it led, is dwelt upon as being more appropriate to the purpose in hand.

Then we may notice further, that in that phrase, ‘the great Shepherd of the sheep;’ there is a quotation from one of the prophets, where the words refer to Moses bringing up the people from the Red Sea. The writer of the Epistle adds to Isaiah’s phrase one significant word, and speaks of ‘that great Shepherd,’ to remind us of the

comparison which he had been running in an earlier part of the letter, between the leader of Israel and Christ.

So, then, we have here brought before us Jesus who is risen and ascended, as the great Shepherd of the sheep. Looking to Him, what are we heartened to believe are the possibilities and the divine purposes for each of those that put their trust in Him? Gazing in thought for a moment on that Lord risen from the grave, with the old love in His heart, and the old greetings upon His lips, we see there, of course, as everybody knows, the demonstration of the persistence of a human life through death, like some stream of fresh water holding on its course through a salt and stagnant sea, or plunging underground for a short space, to come up again flashing into the sunshine. But we see more than that. We see the measure of the power, as the Apostle has it, that works in us, 'according to the energy of the might of the power which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead.' As we gaze, we see what may be called a type, but what is a great deal more than a type, of the possibilities of the risen life, as it may be lived even here and now, by every poor and humble soul that puts its trust in Him. The Resurrection of Jesus gives us the measure of the power that worketh in us.

But more than that, the risen Shepherd has risen as Shepherd, for the very purpose of imparting, to every soul that trusts in Him, His own life. And unless we grasp that truth, we shall not understand the place of the Resurrection in the Christian scheme, nor the ground on which the loftiest anticipations are not audacious for the poorest soul, and on which anything beneath the loftiest is, for the poorest, beneath what it might and should aspire to. When the alabaster box was broken, the ointment was poured forth and the house was filled with the odour. The risen Christ imparts His life to His people. And nothing short of their entire perfecting in all which is within the possibilities of human beauty and nobleness and purity, will be the adequate issue of that great death and triumphant Resurrection, and

of the mighty, quickening power of a new life, which He thereby breathed into the dying world. On His Cross, and from His Tomb, and from His Throne, He has set aging processes which never can reach their goal — and, blessed be God! never will stop their beneficent working — until every soul of man, however stained and evil, that puts the humblest trust in Him, and lives after His commandment, is become radiant with beauty, complete in holiness, victorious over self and sin, and is set for ever more at the right hand of God. Every anticipation that falls short of that, and all effort that lags behind that anticipation, is an insult to the Christ, and a trampling under foot of the blood of ‘the covenant wherewith ye are sanctified.’

So, brother, open your mouth wide, and it will be filled. Expect great things; believe that what Jesus Christ came into the world and died to do, what Jesus Christ left the world and lives to carry on, will be done in you, and that you too will be made complete in Him. For the Shepherd leads and the sheep follow — here afar off, often straying, and getting lost or torn by the brambles, and worried by the wolves. But He leads and they do follow, and the time comes when ‘they shall follow the Lamb *whithersoever* He goeth,’ and be close behind Him in all the good pastures of the mountains of Israel ‘We see not yet all things put under Him,’ but we see Jesus and that is enough.

III. The warrant for our highest expectations in the everlasting covenant.

Space will not allow of my entering upon the question as to the precise relation of these final words to the rest of the verse, but their relation to the great purpose of the whole verse is plain enough. It has come to be very unfashionable nowadays to talk about the covenant. People think that it is archaic, technically theological, far away from daily life, and so on and so on. I believe that Christian people would be a great deal stronger, if there were a more

prominent place given in Christian meditations to the great idea that underlies that metaphor,. And it is just this, that God is under obligations, takes on Him by Himself, to fulfil to a poor, trusting soul the great promises to which that soul has been drawn to cleave. He has, if I might use such a metaphor, like some monarch, given a constitution to His people, He has not left us to grope as to what His mind and purpose may be. Across the infinite ocean of possibilities, He has marked out on the chart, so to speak, the line which He will pursue. We have His word, and His word is this: ‘After those days, saith the Lord, I will make a new covenant. I will write My law on their inward parts. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ So the definite, distinct promise, in black and white, so to speak, to every man and woman on the face of the earth, is ‘Come into the bends of the covenant, by trusting Me, and you will get all that I have promised.’

And that covenant is, as my text says, sealed by ‘the blood.’ Which, being turned into less metaphorical English, is just this, that God’s infinite pro- pension of beneficence towards each of us, and desire to clothe us in garments of radiant purity, are, by Christ’s death, guaranteed as extending to, and working their effects on, every soul that trusts Him. What does that death mean if it does not mean that? Why should He have died on the Cross, unless it were to take away sin?

But the blood of the covenant does not mean only the death by which the covenant is ratified. We shall much misapprehend and narrow New Testament teaching, if we suppose that. The ‘blood is the life.’ There is further suggested, then, by the expression, that the vital energy, with which Jesus Christ came from the dead as the Shepherd of the sheep, is the power by which God makes us ‘perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight.’

So, two practical counsels may close my words. See that you aspire as high as God's purpose concerning you, and do not be content with anything short of the, at least, incipient and progressive accomplishment in your characters and lives, of that great prayer. Again, see that you use the forces which, by the Cross and the Resurrection and the Ascension, are set in motion to make that wondrous possibility a matter-of-fact reality for each of us; and whoever you are, and whatever you have been, be sure of this, that He can lift you from the mud and cleanse you from its stains, and set you at His own right hand in the heavenly places. For the name, and the risen Shepherd, and the blood of the everlasting covenant, make a threefold cord, not to be quickly broken, and able to bear the weight of the loftiest hopes and firmest confidence that we can hang upon it.

Hebrews 13:21—GREAT PRAYER BASED ON GREAT PLEAS

Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.' — Hebrews 13:21.

Massive foundations prognosticate a great building. We do not dig deep, and lay large blocks, in order to rear some flimsy structure. We have seen, in a previous sermon, how the words preceding my text bring out certain great aspects of the divine character and work, and now we have to turn to the great prayer which is based upon these. It is a prophecy as well as a prayer; for such a contemplation of what God is and does makes certain the fulfilment of the desires which the contemplation excites. Small petitions to a great God are insults. He is 'the God of peace,' therefore we may ask Him to 'make us perfect,' and be sure that He will. He is the God 'that brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep,' therefore we may ask Him and be sure. He is the God who has

sealed an 'everlasting covenant' with us by the blood of the Shepherd, therefore we may ask Him and be sure.

This prayer is the parting highest wish of the writer for his friends. Do our desires for ourselves, and for those whom we would seek to bless, run in the same mould? How strange it is that Christian people, who believe in the God whom the previous verse sets before us, so imperfectly and languidly cherish the confidence which inspires desires, for themselves and their brethren, such as those of our text this morning! Let us look at these great petitions, then, in the light of the great name on which they are based.

I. And, first, I ask you to consider the prayer which the name excites.

'Make you perfect in every good work.' Now, I need only observe here, in regard to the language of the petition, that the word translated 'make perfect' is not the ordinary one employed for that idea, but a somewhat remarkable one, with a very rich and pregnant variety of significance. For instance, it is employed to describe the action of the fisherman apostles in *mending* their nets. It is employed to describe the divine action which 'by faith we understand' when He 'made the worlds.' It is employed to describe the action which the Apostle commends to one of his churches when he bids them '*restore* such an one in the spirit of meekness.' It is the condition which he described when he desired another of his churches to be '*perfectly joined together, in one mind and in one judgment.*' It is still again the expression employed when he speaks of '*filling up,*' or 'perfecting that which is lacking in their faith.' The general idea of the word, then, is to make sound, or fit, or complete, by *restoring*, by *mending*, by *filling up* what is lacking, and by *adapting* all together in harmonious cooperation. And so this is what Christians ought to look for, and to desire as being the will of God concerning them. The writer goes on to still further deepen the idea when he says, 'make you perfect in every good work' where the

word *work* is a supplement, and unnecessarily limits the idea of the text. For that applies much rather to character than to work, and the ‘make you perfect in every good’ refers rather to an inward process than to any outward manifestation. And this character, thus harmonised, corrected, restored, filled up where it is lacking, and that in regard of all manner of good — ‘whatsoever things are fair, and lovely, and of good report’ — that character is ‘well-pleasing to God.’

So, brethren, you see the width of the hopes — ay! of the confidence — that you and I ought to cherish. We should expect that all the discord of our nature shall be changed into a harmonious co-operation of all its parts towards one great end. We bear about within us a warring anarchy and tumultuous chaos, where solid and fluid, warm and cold, light and dark, calm and storm, contend. Is there any power that can harmonise this divided nature of ours, where lusts and passions, and inclinations of all sorts, drag one away, and duty draws another, so as that a man is torn apart as it were by wild horses? There is one. ‘The worlds’ were harmonised, adapted, and framed together, and chaos turned into order and beauty, and the God of Peace will come and do that for us, if we will let Him, so that the long schism which affects our natures, and makes us say sometimes, ‘I find a law in my members warring against the law of my mind.’ ‘Oh! wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?’ may be changed into perfect harmony, and the ‘bear shall eat straw like the ox, and the lion shall lie down with the lamb; and a little child shall lead them’ — the meekness of a patient love bridling all their ravening passions. It is possible that our hearts may be united to fear His name; and that one unbroken temper of whole-spirited submission may be ours.

Again, we should expect, and desire, and strive towards the correction of all that is wrong, the mending of the nets, the restoring of the havoc wrought in legitimate occupations and by any other

cause. Again; we may strive with hope and confidence towards the supply of all that is lacking, 'In every good' — an all-round completeness of excellence ought to be the hope, and the aim, as well as the prayer, of every Christian. Of course our various perfectings will be various. 'Star differeth from star in glory; and the new man in many respects follows the lines of the old man, and temperament is permanent. But still, whilst all that, is true, and while each shall ray back the divine light and radiance at a different angle, and so with a different hue from that which his neighbour, standing beside him, may catch and reflect, on the other hand the gospel is given to us to correct temperament, and to make the most uncongenial types of grace and excellence ours. It is meant to make it possible that men should 'gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles'; and to correct and fill up what is wrong and what is defective in our natural dispositions, so as that the passionate man may be made meek, and the hesitating man may be made prompt, and the animal man may be sublimed into spirit, and all that is proper to my peculiar constitution and character may be curbed and limited, and much that is not congenial to it may be appropriated and made mine. We are all apt to grow one-sided Christians, and it is our business to try to make ours the things that are lacking in our faith, and to supplement, by the grace of God working in our hearts, the defects of our qualities and the failures of our disposition and temperament. Do not grow like a tree stuck in the middle of a shrubbery, which has only space to put forth branches on one side, and is all lop-sided and awry; but like some symmetrical growth out in the open, equal all round the strong hole, and rising in perfect completeness of harmonious beauty to the topmost twig. that looks up to the sky. God means to make us 'perfect in every good'; to harmonise, to correct, to restore, to perfect us, that we, having all grace, may abound in all good to His glory.

Such is His purpose. Ah, brethren! has not the recognition of that as His purpose alarmingly died out of our minds; and do we live up to the height of this prayer? I would that we should all remember more,

as defining our aims, and animating our courage, and directing our hopes, that 'this is the will of God, even our sanctification'; and that, when faith is dim, and effort burns low, and we are ready to put all such hopes away as a fair dream, we might be stirred to more lofty expectations, and to open our mouths wider by the thought of the God of peace that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlasting covenant'; and ask ourselves what result on us will correspond to that mighty name of the Lord.

II. And so, secondly, note the divine work which fulfils the prayer.

'Working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.' Creation, Providence and all God's works in the world are also through Jesus Christ. But the work which is spoken of here is yet greater and more wonderful than the general operations of the creating and preserving God, which also are produced and ministered through that eternal Word by whom the heavens were of old, and by whom the heavens are still, sustained and administered. There is, says my text, an actual divine operation in the inmost spirit of every believing man.

I suppose that everybody must believe that, who believes in a God having any real connection with His creatures. Surely He is not so imprisoned in His own majesty, or shut out from His own creation, by His own creation, as that He cannot touch the spirits which He has made. And surely we are not so walled up by our own separate individuality as that we cannot, if we will, open the door for Him to come in and dwell with us, and work on us. Surely if there be any reality in the gospel teaching at all there is this in it, that Christ in us, or God in Christ working in us by His divine spirit, is the crown of that hope and blessing of which Christ for us is the beginning and foundation.

I do not want men to think less of the Cross. God forbid! But I do feel, and feel growingly, that the Christianity of this generation has

not a firm hold of this other aspect of Christ's work. Do not think less of what He has done, but, oh I think more of what He is doing. The perspective of our Christian faith is wrong: not that we draw the Cross too large, but that we paint the dove too small. And I would for myself and for you, dear brethren, lay this thought upon our hearts, as a far more important one than the ordinary type of Christian thinking makes it out to be — the present dwelling of God in Christ, through the divine spirit, in the hearts of all who believe, and working there that which is well-pleasing in His sight.

If that has truth, surely these things follow as our plain duty. Expect that operation! Do you? You Christian men and women, do you believe that God will work in your hearts? Some of you do not live as if you did. Desire it! Do you desire it? Do you want Him to come and clear out that stable of filth that you carry about with you? Do you wish Him to come and sift and search, and bring the candle of the Lord into the dusty comers? Do you want to get rid of what is not pleasing in His sight? Would you like Him to come and search you, 'to try you and see if' — ah, it is not an if! — 'there be any wicked way in you, and lead you' — where alas! our feet are often not found — 'in the way everlasting'? Expect it! desire it! pray for it! And when you have got it, see that you profit by it!

God does not work by magic. The Spirit of God which cleanses men's hearts cleanses them on condition, first, of their faith; second, of their submission; and, third, of their use of His gift. If you fling yourselves into the roar of worldly life, the noise of the streets, and the whirring of the looms, and the racket of the children in the nursery, and the buzzing of temptations round about you, and the yelpings for 'food of your own passions, will deafen your ears so as that you will never hear the still, small voice that speaks a present God. If God dwells in us and works in us, let us yield ourselves to the workings and open our hearts to the Guest, and say, 'Into every corner, O Lord, I would that Thou wouldst go, to restore and complete.'

III. Lastly, notice the visible manifestation of this inward work.

Now the writer of our text employs the same word in the two clauses, in order to bring out the idea of a correspondence Between the human and the Divine Worker. ‘To *work* His will, *working* in you that which is well- pleasing in His sight.’

God works in order that you and I may work. Our action is to follow His. Practical obedience is the issue, and it is the test, of having this divine operation in our hearts. There are plenty of people who will talk largely about spiritual gifts, and almost vaunt their possession of such a divine operation. Let us bring them and ourselves to this test: Are you doing God’s will in daily life in the little things? In the monotonous grind of the dusty, level road with never a turn in it, and the same thing to be done to- morrow that was done to-day, and so on for indefinite weeks and months, are you, with the spirit that freshens the monotony, doing God’s will? If so, then you may believe that God is working in you. If not, it is no use talking about spiritual gifts. The test of being filled with the divine operation is that our actions shall be conformed to His will ‘As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.’ That is a pin prick that will empty many a swollen bladder, and bring it down to its real tenuity of substance.

Action is the end of all We get the truth, we get our souls saved, we have all the abundance and exuberance of divine revelation, we have the Cross of Jesus Christ, we have the gift of the Divine Spirit — miracles and marvels of all sorts have been done for the one purpose, to make us able to do what is right in God’s sight, and to do it because it is His will.

This practical obedience to God’s will is the perfection of human conduct. And, on the other hand, a man who does good things without reference to the highest — viz., the will of God — in the doing of them, lacks the fine gold that gilds his deed; and the violet of his virtue is scentless. A good thing may be done without

reference to God — good from the point of view of morality and the self-sacrifice and generosity that are embodied in it. But no good thing reaches its supremest goodness unless it be an act of conscious obedience to God's will.

And this doing of the will of God is perfect blessedness. All things are right for us if we submit to the will of our Father. No storms can blow us out of our course then. 'Thou shalt make a league With the beasts of the field, and the stones of the field shall be at peace with thee,' for all creatures being God's servants, are in covenant with him who does the will of the Lord.

And how are we to do it, brother? The world says, 'cultivate your own nature; correct your faults; strive to fill up your deficiencies.' Christ says, 'Cast away yourselves; and trust to Me; and I will give you new life, and a new spirit. Cultivate that!' If we are to do God's will we must have the spirit of Him who said, 'I come to do Thy will, O Lord; and Thy law is within My heart.' Let us open our hearts to Him; let us seek for Him to enter in. And then,' the God of peace, that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, shall make us perfect in every good; to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.'

JAMES

James 1:4--PATIENCE AND HER WORK

'Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing — James 1:4

IT does not appear from the rest of this letter that the persons to whom it was addressed were under the pressure of any particular trouble or affliction. Seeing that they are 'the twelve tribes which

are scattered abroad,' the width of that superscription makes it improbable that the recipients were undergoing any common experience. It is the more noteworthy, therefore, that at the very outset James gives this exhortation hearing upon trials and troubles. Clearly it is hot, as we often take it to be, a counsel only for the sorrowful, or an address only to a certain class of persons, hut it is a general exhortation applicable to all sorts of people in all conditions of life, and indispensable, as he goes on to say, for any progress in Christian character.

'Let patience have her perfect work' is an advice not only for sad hearts, or for those who may be bowed down under any special present trouble, but for us all. And it is the condition on which it is possible, and without which it is impossible, that any Christian man should be 'perfect and entire, wanting nothing.' So I want you to look with me, first at what is the scope of this counsel; and then at how it can be obtained; and then why it is so important: what — how — why.

I. First, then, what is the meaning of the counsel to 'let patience have its perfect *work*'?

Notice that the very language of the text puts aside the common notion that patience is a passive grace. The 'patience' of my text does '*work*.' It is an active thing, whether that work be the virtues that it produces, or, as is more probable, its own preservation, in unbroken activity. In any case, the patience that James would have us all cultivate is an intensely active energy, and not a mere passive endurance. Of course I know that it takes a great deal of active energy to endure passively. There is a terrible strain upon the nerves in lying still on the operating-table without wincing, and letting the surgeon's knife cut deep without shrinking or screaming. There is much force that goes to standing motionless when the wind is blowing. But, for all that, the mere bearing of trouble by no means covers the whole ground of this royal and supreme virtue to which

my text is here exhorting us. For, as I have often had occasion to say, the conception of 'patience' in the New Testament includes, indeed, that which is generally supposed to be its sole signification — viz., bearing unresistingly and unmurmuring, and with the full consent of a yielding will, whatever pains, sorrows, losses, troubles, or disappointments may come into our lives, but it includes more than that. It is the fixed determination to 'bate not one jot of heart or hope, but still bear up, and steer right onwards,' in spite of all hindrances and antagonisms which may storm against us. It is perseverance in the teeth of the wind, and not merely keeping our place in spite of it, that James exhorts us to here. The ship that lies at anchor, with a strong cable and a firm grip of the flukes in a good holding-ground, and rides out any storm without stirring one fathom's length from its place, exhibits one form of this perseverance, that is patience. The ship with sails wisely set, and a firm hand at the tiller, and a keen eye on the compass, that uses the utmost blast to bear it nearer its desired haven, and never yaws one hairbreadth from the course that is marked out for it, exhibits the other and the higher form. And that is the kind of thing that the Apostle is here recommending to us — not merely passive endurance, but a brave, active perseverance in spite of antagonisms, in the course that conscience, illuminated by God, has bidden us to run.

And if you want instances of it I will give you two 'He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.' All through Christ's life the shadow of the Cross closed His view; and, unflinching, unswerving, unrelenting, unreluctant, He measured every step of the path, and was turned aside by nothing; because 'for that hour He came into the world,' and could not blench because He loved.

I will give you another, lower, and yet like, caught from and kindled by, the supreme example of persistence in duty. 'None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, that I might finish my course with joy.' The Apostle, who was warned on all

sides by voices of prophets, and by tears and by supplications of friends, had his path clearly marked out for him, by his own conscience responsive to the will of God. And that path, whatsoever happened, he was resolved to tread. And that is the temper that my text commands us all to cultivate.

Beautiful and hard as bearing sorrows rightly may be, that is only a little corner of the grace that my text enjoins.

And so, dear friends, will you let me put the two or three words more that I have to say about this matter into the shape of counsel, not for the sake of dictating, but for the sake of giving point to my words? I would say, then, to every man, bear unmurmuring the burdens and sorrows that each of you have to bear. There are some of us, no doubt, who have some special grief lying at our hearts. There are many of us, I doubt not, who know what it is to have for all the rest of our lives a wound that never can be healed, to carry a weight that never can be lessened, and to walk in a darkness that never can be lightened. Irremediable losses and sorrows are the portion of some of my hearers. Let, patience have her 'perfect work'; and bow, bow to that supreme and loving will.

But, beyond that, do not let all your effort and energy be swallowed up in rightly enduring what you may have to endure. There are many of us who make some disappointment, some loss, some grief, the excuse for shirking plain duty. There is nothing more selfish than sorrow, and there is nothing more absorbing, unless we guard against its tendency to monopolise.

Work! Work for others, work for God is our best comforter next to the presence of God's Divine Spirit. There is nothing that so lightens the weight of a lifelong sorrow as to make it the stimulus to a lifelong devotion; and if our patience has its perfect work it will not make us sit with folded hands, weeping for the days that are no more, but it will drive us into heroic and energetic service, in the

midst of which there will come some shadow of consolation or, at least, some blessed oblivion of sorrow.

Again, I would say, on the wider view of the meaning of this great exhortation, let no antagonism or opposition of any sort come between us and the plain path of Christian service and duty. And remember that the patience of my text has to be applied, not only in reference to the unswerving prosecution of the course which God and our own consciences dictate to us in the face of *difficulties*, *sorrows*, and losses, but also to the unswerving prosecution of that same path in the face of the opposite things—earthly delights and pleasures, and the seductions of the world, as well as the darkneses and sorrows of the world. He that lets his endurance have its perfect work will scorn delights as well as subdue sorrows. The clouds darken, but the sun dazzles. It is not only the rocks that threaten Ulysses and his crew, the sirens sit upon their island home, with their harps of gold, and trill their sweet songs, and no man understands what Christian endurance is who has not learned that he has to ‘endure’ in the face of joys as well as in the face of sorrows, and that persistence in the Christian course means that we shall spurn the one and turn our backs upon the other when either of them threaten to draw us aside from the path.

I might gather all that I have to say about this great queenly virtue of perseverance in the face of antagonisms into the one word of the Apostle, ‘I count them but dung that I may win Christ.’ ‘Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those that are before, I press toward the mark.’ ‘Let patience have her perfect work.’

II. And now, secondly, a word as to how this precept may best be carried out. It is a precept. The perfecting of Christian endurance is not a thing that comes without effort. And so the Apostle puts it into the shape of an exhortation or an injunction. He does not specify methods, but I may venture to do so, in a few sentences.

And I put first and foremost here, as in all regions of Christian excellence and effort, the one specific which makes men like the Master — keeping near Him. As the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it, ‘consider’ (by way of comparison) Him that endured, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. ‘Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.’

Oh, brethren! there is nothing that sucks the brightness out of earthly joys when they threaten to interrupt our course, and dazzle our eyes, like turning our attention to Christ, and looking at Him. And there is nothing that takes the poison-sting, and the irritation consequent on it, out of earthly sorrows like remembering the ‘Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.’ Am I to grumble when I think of Him? Shall I make a moan and a mourning for my sorrows when I remember His? Am I to say, ‘O Lord!

Thou hast given me as much as I can manage in bearing this terrible blow which Thou hast aimed at me, without repining against Thee. I cannot do any work because I have got so much to bear’? Are we to say that when we remember how He counted not His life dear to Himself, and bore all, and did all, that He might accomplish the Father’s will? Do not let us magnify our griefs, but measure them by the side of Christ’s. Do not let us yield to our impatience, but rather let us think of Him. Consider Him, and patience will have her perfect work.

Again, let me say, if we would possess in its highest degree this indispensable grace of persistent determination to pursue the Christian course in spite of all antagonisms, we must cultivate the habit of thinking of life, in all its vicissitudes, as mainly meant to make character. That is what the Apostle is saying in the context. He says, ‘Brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations.’ That is a paradox. It bids a man to be glad because he has trouble and is sad. It seems ridiculous, but the next verse solves the paradox: ‘Knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh

patience.’ That is to say — if I rightly understand the meaning of this world in its bearing on myself, the intention of my whole life to make me what God would have me to be, then I shall not measure things by their capacity to delight and please taste, ambitions, desires, or sense, but only by their power to mould me into His likeness. If I understand that the meanings of sorrow and joy are one, that God intends the same when He gives and when He withdraws, that the fervid suns of autumn and the biting blasts of November equally tend to the production of the harvest, that day and night come from the same cause — the revolution of the earth; if I understand that life is but the scaffolding for building character, and that, if I take out of this world, with all its fading sweets and its fleeting sadnesses, a soul enlarged, ennobled by difficulties and by gladnesses, then I shall welcome them both when they come, and neither the one nor the other will be able to deflect me from my course.

And so, lastly, about this matter, I would say bring the future into immediate connection with the present, and that will illuminate the dark places, will minimise the sorrows, will make the crooked things straight and the rough places plain, will prevent joy from being absorbing, and anxiety from being corroding, and sorrow from being monopolising, and will enable us to understand how all that is here is but preparatory and disciplinary for that great and serene future. And so the light affliction, which is but for a moment, will not be so very hard to bear; and the efforts at likeness to Jesus Christ, the consequences of which will last through eternity, will not be so very difficult to keep up; and patience, fed by contemplation of the suffering Christ, and nurtured further by consideration of the purpose of life, and stimulated by the vision of the future to which life here is but the vestibule, will have ‘her perfect work.’

III. And, lastly, Why is this grace so important? James says, with his favourite repetition of the same word, ‘Let her work be perfect,

that ye may be perfect.' Such endurance is indispensable to growth in Christian character.

I do not need to enter, at this stage of my sermon, on the differences between 'perfect' and 'entire.' The one describes the measure of the individual graces belonging to the man; the other describes the completeness of the assemblage of such graces. In each he is 'perfect,' and, having all that belongs to complete humanity, he is 'entire.' That is the ideal to which we have to press.

That is an ideal to which we may indefinitely approximate. There are people now — as there always have been — who are apt to substitute emotion and passivity for effort in the path of Christian perfection. I would take James's teaching. Let your perseverance have her perfect work, and by toil and by protracted effort, and by setting your teeth against all seductions, and by curbing and ruling your sorrows, you will reach the goal. God makes no man perfect without that man's diligent and continuous struggle and toil, toil, indeed, based upon faith; toil, indeed, which receives the blessing, but toil all the same.

Nor need I remind you, I suppose, how, in both the narrower and the wider sense of this word, the perseverance of my text is indispensable to Christian character.

I dare say we all of us know some chronic invalid say, on whose worn face there rests a gleam like that of the Lawgiver when He came down from the mount, caused by sorrow rightly borne. If your troubles, be they great or small, do not do you good they do you harm. There is such a thing as being made obstinate, hard, more clinging to earth than before by reason of griefs. And there is such a thing as a sorrow rightly borne being the very strength of a life, and delivering it from many a sin. The alabaster sheet which is intended to be fitted into the lamp is pared very thin that the light may shine through. And God pares away much of our lives in order that

through what is left there may gleam more clearly and lambently the light of an indwelling God.

There is nothing to be won in the perfecting of Christian character without our setting ourselves to it persistently, doggedly, continuously all through our lives. Brethren, be sure of this, you will never grow like Christ by mere wishing, by mere emotion, but only by continual faith, rigid self-control, and by continual struggle. And be as sure of this, you will never miss the mark if, ‘forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before,’ you ‘let patience have her perfect work,’ and press towards Him who is Himself the Author and Finisher of our patience and of our faith.

James 1:5--DIVINE WISDOM, AND HOW TO GET IT

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.’ — James 1:5.

‘IF any of you *lack*.’ James has just used the same word in the previous verse, and it is to be regretted that the principle upon which our authorised translators went of varying the rendering of identical expressions, masks the repetition here. James has just been telling his brethren that their aim should be to be ‘perfect and entire, *lacking* nothing.’ And that thought naturally suggests the other one of how great the contrast is between that possible completeness and the actual condition of Christians in general. So he gently and courteously puts, as a hypothesis, what is only too certain a fact in those to whom he is speaking; and says, not as he might have done, ‘*since* you all lack,’ but, with gracious forbearance, ‘*if* any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.’

Now, it seems to me that, in this hypothetical exhortation there are three points to be noted, two of them being somewhat unlike what we should have looked for. One is the great deficiency in the average Christian character — *wisdom*; another is the great means of

supplying it — ask; and the third is the great guarantee of the supply — the *giving God*, whose gifts are bestowed on all liberally and without upbraiding.

I. The great deficiency in the average Christian character — wisdom.

Now, that is not exactly what we should have expected to be named as the main thing lacking in the average Christian. If we had been asked to specify the chief defect we should probably have thought of something else than wisdom. But, if we remember who is speaking, we shall understand better what he means by this word. James is a Jew, steeped through and through in the Old Testament. We have only to recall the Book of Proverbs, and what it has to say about ‘wisdom’ and ‘folly,’ by which it means something a great deal deeper and more living than knowledge and ignorance or intellectual strength and feebleness, or practical sagacity and its opposite.

That deeper conception of wisdom which bases it all on ‘the fear of the Lord,’ and regards it as moral and spiritual and not as merely or chiefly intellectual, pervades the whole New Testament. This Epistle is more of an echo of the earlier revelation than any other part of the New Testament, and we may be quite sure that James uses this venerable word with all the associations of its use there, and in all the solemn depth of meaning which he had learned to attach to it, on the lips of psalmists, prophets, and teachers of the true wisdom. If that were at all doubtful, it is made certain by his own subsequent description of ‘wisdom.’ He says that it is ‘from above,’ and then goes on to ascribe all manner of moral and spiritual good to its presence and working on a man. It is ‘pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits.’ You cannot say such glowing things about the wisdom which has its seat in the understanding only, can you? These characteristics must apply to something a great deal more august and more powerful in shaping and refining character.

What, then, does James mean by ‘wisdom’? He means the sum of practical religion. With him, as with the psalmist, sin and folly are two names for the same thing, and so are religion and wisdom. He, and only he, has wisdom who knows God with a living heart-knowledge which gives a just insight into the facts of life and the bounds of right and wrong, and which regulates conduct and shapes the whole man with power far beyond that of knowledge however wide and deep, illuminating intellect however powerful. ‘Knowledge’ is poor and superficial in comparison with this wisdom, which may roughly be said to be equivalent to practical religion.

The use of this expression to indicate the greatest deficiency in the average Christian character, just suggests this thought, that if we had a clear, constant, certain, God-regarding insight into things as they are, we should lack little. Because, if a man habitually kept vividly before him the thought of *God*, and with it the true nature and obligation and blessedness of righteous, loving obedience, and the true foulness and fatalness of sin — if he saw these with the clearness and the continuity with which we may all see the things that are unseen and eternal, if he ‘saw life steadily, and saw it whole,’ if he saw the rottenness and the shallowness of earthly things and temptations, and if he saw the blessed issue of every God-pleasing act — why! the perfecting of conduct would be secured.

It would be an impossibility for him, with all that illumination blazing in upon him, not to walk in the paths of righteousness with a glad and serene heart. I do not believe that all sin is a consequence of ignorance, but I do believe that our average Christian life would be revolutionised if we each carried clear before us, and continually subjected our lives to the influence of, the certain verities of God’s word.

And, brethren, I think that there is a practical direction of no small importance here, in the suggestion that the thing that we want most is clearer and more vivid conceptions of the realities of the Christian revelation, and of the facts of human life. These will act as tests, and up will start in his own shape the fiend that is whispering at our ears, when touched by the spear of this divine wisdom. So, brethren, here is our root- deficiency; therefore instead of confining ourselves to trying to cure isolated and specific faults, or to attain isolated and specific virtues, let us go deeper down, and realise that the more our whole natures are submitted to the power of God's truth, and of the realities of the future and of the present, of Time and Eternity, the nearer shall we come to being 'perfect and entire,' lacking nothing.

II. We have next to note the great means of supplying that great deficiency — 'let him ask.'

The direction might at first sight strike one as being, like the specification of the thing lacking, scarcely what we should have expected. Does James say, If any of you lack 'wisdom,' let him sit down and think? No! 'If any of you lack wisdom,' let him take a course of reading? No! 'If any of you lack wisdom,' let him go to pundits and rabbis, and get it from them? No! 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask.' A strange apparent disconnection between the issue and the means suggested! Very strange, if wisdom lives only up in the head! not so strange if it has its seat in the depths of the human spirit. If you want to learn theology you have to study. If you seek to master any science you have to betake yourself to the appropriate discipline. It is of no use to pray to God to make you a good geologist, or botanist, or lawyer, or doctor, unless you also take the necessary means to become one. But if a man wants the divine wisdom, let him get down on his knees. That is the best place to secure it. 'Let him ask'; because that insight, so clear, so vivid, so constant, and so perfectly adequate for the regulation of the life, is of God. It comes to us from the Spirit of God that dwells in men's hearts.

I believe that in nothing is the ordinary type of Christian opinion amongst us, in this generation, so defective as in the obscurity into which it has pushed that truth, of the Spirit of God as actually dwelling in men's hearts. And that, I believe, is to a large extent the reason why the other truths of Christianity have so little power upon people. It is of little use to hold a Christianity which begins and ends with the fact of Christ's death on the

Cross. It is of less use, no doubt, to hold a Christianity which does *not* begin with that death. But if it ends there, it is imperfect because, as the Apostle put it, our Christ, the Christ who sends wisdom to those who ask it, is the 'Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us,' and sends down His Spirit on us.

And to receive that spirit of wisdom, the one thing necessary is that we should want it. That is all. Nothing more, but nothing less. I doubt very much whether hosts of the average Christian people of this generation do want it, or would know what to do with it if they had it; or whether the gift of a heart purged from delusions, and of eyes made clear always to behold the God who is ever with us, and the real importance of the things around us, is the gift that most of us pray for most. 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask.' It is a gift, and it is to be obtained from that Holy Spirit who dwells and works in all believers. The measure of their desire is the measure of their possession. That wisdom can be had for the asking, and is not to be won by proudly self-reliant effort.

But let us not think that any kind of 'asking' suffices to put that great gift into our hearts. The petition that avails must be sincere, intense, constant, and accompanied by corresponding conduct.

It is not dropping down on your knees for two minutes in a morning, before you hurry out to business, and scrambling over a formal petition; or praying after you have gone to bed at night, and perhaps falling asleep before you get to 'Amen.' It is not asking, and then

not waiting long enough to get the answer. It is not faint and feeble desire, but one presented with continuity which is not shameless importunity, but patient persistence. It must breathe intense desire and perfect confidence in the willingness of the Giver and in the power of prayer.

If our vessels are empty or nearly so, while the stream is rolling its broad, flashing flood past our doors, if we sit shivering beside dying embers while the fire blazes high on the hearth, let us awake to recognise the tragic difference between what we might be and what we are, and let us listen to James's other word, 'Ye have not because ye ask not.' 'If any of you lack wisdom' — and, alas! how many of us *do*, and that how sorely! — 'let him ask of God.'

III. The great guarantee that such petitions shall be answered. James has an arrangement of words in the original which can scarcely be reproduced in an English translation, but which may be partially represented thus: 'Let him ask of the giving God.' That represents not so much the divine giving as an act, but, if I may so say, as a divine habit. It is just what the Prayer-book says, 'His nature and property is to have mercy.' He is the giving God, because He is the loving God; for love is essentially the impulse to impart itself to the beloved, and thereby to win the beloved for itself. That is the very life-breath of love, and such is the love of God. There is a *must* even for that heavenly nature. He *must* bestow. He is the 'giving'; and He is the blessed God because He is the loving and the giving God. Just as the sun cannot but pour out his rays, so the very activity of the divine nature is beneficence and self-impartation; and His joy is to grant Himself to His creature, whom He has made empty for the very purpose of giving all of Himself that the creature is capable of receiving.

But not only does James give us this great guarantee in the character of God, but he goes on to say, 'He giveth to *all* men.' 'I suppose that

all' must be limited by what follows — viz., 'He gives to all who ask.'

'He gives to all men *liberally*.' That is a beautiful thought, but it is not the whole beauty of the writer's idea. The word translated 'liberally,' as many of you know, literally means 'simply, without any by-ends,' or any underlying thought of what is to be gained in return. That is the way in which God gives. People have sometimes objected to the doctrine of which the Scripture is full from beginning to end, that God is His own motive, and that His reason in all His acts is His own glory, that it teaches a kind of almighty and divine selfishness. But it is perfectly consistent with this thought of my text, that He gives simply for the benefit of the recipient, and without a thought of what may accrue to the bestower. For why does God desire His glory to be advanced in the world? For any good that it is to Him, that you and I should praise Him? Yes! good to Him in so far as love delights to be recognised. But, beyond that, none. The reason why He seeks that men should know and recognise His glory, and should praise and magnify it, is because it is their life and their blessedness to do so. He desires that all men should know Him for what He is, because to do so is to come to be what we ought to be, and what He has made us to try to be; and therein to enjoy Him for ever. So 'liberally,' 'simply,' for the sake of the poor men that He pours Himself upon, He gives.

And 'without upbraiding.' If it were not so, who of us dare ask? But He does not say when we come to Him, 'What did you do with that last gift I gave you? Were you ever thankful enough for those other benefits that you have had? What is become of all those? Go away and make a better use of what you have had before you come and ask Me for any more.' That is how we often talk to one another; and rightly enough. That is *not* how God talks to us. Time enough for upbraiding after the child has the gift in his hand! Then, as Christ did to Peter, He says, having rescued him first, 'Oh! thou of little faith; wherefore didst thou doubt?' The truest rebuke of our misuse

of His benefits, of our faithlessness to His character, and of the poverty of our askings, is the largeness of His gifts. He gives us these, and then He bids us go away, and profit by them, and, in the light of His bestowments, preach rebukes to ourselves for the poverty of our askings and our squandering of His gift.

Oh, brethren! if we only believed that He is not an austere man, gathering where He did not straw, and reaping where He did not sow, but a 'giving God!' If we only believed that He gives simply because He loves us and that we need never fear our unworthiness will limit or restrain His bestowments, what mountains of misconception of the divine character would he rolled away from many hearts! What thick obscuration of clouds would he swept clean from between us and the sun! We do not half enough realise that He is the 'giving God.' Therefore, our prayers are poor, and our askings troubled and faint, and our gifts to Him are grudging and few, and our wisdom woefully lacking.

James 1:12--THE CROWN

The crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him. —James 1:12.

MY purpose is to bring out the elements of the blessed life here, by grouping together those New Testament passages which represent the future reward under the metaphor of the 'crown,' and so to gain, if not a complete, at all events a comprehensive view of the elements of the blessedness of the perfected life hereafter.

These passages are numerous. Paul speaks of 'the incorruptible crown,' the reward of the victorious athlete, and of 'the crown of righteousness,' the anticipation of which soothed and elevated his last solitary hours. Peter speaks of the 'crown of glory,' the reward of the faithful elders. James speaks in my text of the 'crown of life' which the man wins who is proved by trial and stands the proof. The martyr Church at Smyrna is encouraged to faithfulness 'unto death'

by the promise of the 'crown of life' from the hands of the Lord of life. The angel of the Church at Philadelphia is stimulated to 'hold fast what thou hast, that no man take thy crown.' The elders 'cast their crowns before the throne.' If we throw all these passages together, and study their combined effect, we shall, I think, get some helpful and stimulating thoughts.

I. I ask you, then, first to look with me at the general idea conveyed by the symbol.

Now the word which is employed in the passages to which we have referred is not that which usually denotes a kingly crown, but that which indicates the garland or wreath or chaplet of festivity and victory. A twist of myrtle or parsley or pine was twined round the brows of the athlete flushed with effort and victory. The laurel is the 'meed of mighty conquerors.' Roses, with violets or ivy, sat upon the brows of revellers. And it is thoughts of these rather than of the kingly tiara which is in the mind of the New Testament writers; though the latter, as we shall see, has also to be included.

So we get three general ideals on which I touch very lightly, as conveyed by the emblem.

The first is that of victory recognised and publicly honoured. So Paul uses the symbol in this sense in both the instances of its occurrence to which we have already referred, the reward of the racer or athlete in the *paloestrum*, and the 'crown of righteousness' which was to follow his having 'fought the good fight, and finished his course.' That implies that the present is the wrestling ground, and that the issues of the present lie beyond the present.

We do not look for flowers on the hard-beaten soil of the arena; and the time of conflict is no time for seeking for delights. If the crown be yonder, then here must be the struggle; and it must be our task 'to scorn delights and live laborious days' if we are ever to find that blessed result and reward of life here. We have, then, the general

idea of victory recognised and publicly honoured by the tumult of acclaim of the surrounding spectators. 'I will confess His name before the angels of God.'

Then there is the other general idea of festal gladness. That, I suppose, is what was present particularly to Peter's mind when he talked about 'the wreath that fadeth not away.' I think that there is in his words a probable reference to a striking Old Testament passage, in which the prophet takes the drooping flowers on the foreheads of the drunkards of Samaria at their feast as an emblem of the swift fading of their delights, and of the impending destruction of their polity. But, says Peter, this wreath fades never. The flowers of heaven do not droop. It is an emblem of the calm and permanent delights which come to those behind whom is change with its sadness, and before whom stretches progress with its blessedness. Festal gladness, society, and the satisfaction of all desires are included in the meaning of the wreathed amaranthine flowers that twine round immortal brows.

But the usage in the Book of the Apocalypse stands upon a somewhat different footing. There are no Gentile images there. We hear nothing about Grecian games and heathen wrestlings in that book; but all moves within the circle of Jewish thought. That the word which is employed for 'the crown,' though it usually meant the victors 'and the feasters' chaplet, sometimes also meant the king's crown of sovereignty, is obvious from one or two of its uses in Scripture. For the 'crown of thorns' was a mockery of royalty, and the 'golden crowns' which the elders wear in the vision are associated with the thrones upon which they sit, as emblems, not of festal gladness or of triumphant emergence from the struggles and toils of life, but as symbols of royalty and dominion. The characteristic note of the promises of the Revelation is that of Christ's servants' participation in the royalty of their Lord. So to the other two general ideas which I have deduced from the symbol we must add for completeness this third one, that it shadows, in some of

the instances of its use at all events, though by no means in all, the royalty so mysterious, by which every one of Christ's 'brethren is like the children of a king,' and all are so closely united to Him that they participate in His dominion over all creatures and things.

Dominion over self, dominion over the universe, a rule mysterious and ineffable which is also service, cheerful and continuous, are contained in the emblem.

So these three general ideas, victory, festal gladness and abundance, royalty and sovereignty, are taught us by this symbol of the crown.

II. Now, secondly, note more particularly the constituent parts of that chaplet of blessedness.

There are two phrases as to these, amongst the passages with which we are now concerned. St. James and the Book of Revelation speak of the 'crown of life,' and Peter speaks of the 'crown of glory.' That is to say, the material of which the garland is composed is no perishable pine or myrtle, but it is woven, as it were, of 'life' on the one hand, of glory on the other. Or, if we do not venture upon such a violent metaphor as that, we can at least say that the crown's life and glory.

Now, as to the first of these — what dim and great thoughts are taught us in it! 'Life,' in the New Testament, does not mean bare existence, but in its highest sense pure and blessed existence in union with God. And such life—full, perfect, continual — is regarded as being in itself the crown and reward of faithful Christian living here below. In our experience life is often a burden, a weariness, a care. If it be a crown, it is a crown of thorns. But yonder, to live will be blessedness; being will be well-being. The reward of heaven will simply be the fact of living in God. Here life comes painfully trickling, as it were, in single drops through a narrow rift in the rock; yonder it will spread a broad bosom, flashing beneath the sunshine. Here the plant grows strugglingly in some

dusty cleft, amidst uncongenial surroundings, and with only occasional gleams of sunlight; its leaves are small, its stem feeble, its blossoms pallid; yonder it will be rooted in rich soil and shone upon by an unclouded sun, and will burst into flowers and forms of beauty that we know nothing of here. Life is the crown.

Then it is a crown of glory. What is glory? The splendour of God's character manifested to His creatures and become the object of their admiration. That is the full meaning of glory in the Old and in the New Testament. And all that is transferred to those who cleave to Him here and are perfected yonder. There will be complete perfection of nature. 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' The inmost and deepest beauty of redeemed and perfected souls will then be capable of being manifested fully. Here it struggles for expression, and what we seem to be, though it is often better, is just as often much worse than we really are. But there we shall be able to show ourselves as what in our deepest hearts we are. For the servants who, girt with priestly vestments, do Him sacerdotal service in the highest temple, have His name blazing upon their foreheads, and shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The redeemed souls, transmuted into the likeness of the Lord, and made visible in the flashing splendour of their gentle radiance, shall be beheld with the wonder with which all other creatures gaze on Him who is the Lord and Source of their purity, and 'if so be that we suffer with Him, we shall be also glorified together.'

But why speak of what we know as little about as the unborn child does of the world, or the caterpillar of its future life when winged and painted and basking in the sunshine? Let us bow before the ignorance which is the prophecy and pledge of the transcendent greatness that lies behind the veil, and say, 'It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord.'

III. Now, thirdly, note the conditions of the crown. These are variously put with a rich variety. Paul speaks, as you remember, of ‘the crown of righteousness,’ by which he means to imply that on impure brows it can never sit, and that, if it could, it would be there a crown of poisoned thorns. None but the righteous can wear it. That is the first and prime indispensable condition. But then there are others stated in the other passages to which we have referred. The wrestler must ‘strive lawfully,’ according to the rules of the arena, if he is to be crowned. The man that is tried must ‘endure his temptation,’ and come out of it ‘proved’ thereby, as gold is tried by the fire. The martyr must be willing to die, if need be, for fidelity to his Master. We must ‘hold fast that which we have’ if we are ever to win that which, as yet, we have not, even the crown that ought to be ours, and so is by anticipation called ours.

But two of the passages to which I have referred add yet another kind of condition and requirement. Paul says, ‘Not to me only, but to all them also that *love* His appearing’; and James here says that the man who is tried will receive the crown ‘which the *Lord* hath promised to them that love Him.’ So it is not difficult to make out the sequence of these several conditions. Fundamental to all is love to Jesus Christ. That is the beginning of everything. Then, built upon that, for His dear sake, the manful wrestling with temptations and with difficulties, long-breathed running, and continual aspiration after the things that are before, fidelity, if need be, unto death, and a grim tenacity of grasp of the truth and the blessings already bestowed. These things are needed. And then as the result of the love that grasps Christ with hooks of flesh, which are stronger than hooks of steel, and will not let Him go, and as the result of the efforts and struggles and discipline which flow from that love to Him, there must be a righteousness which conforms to His image and is the gift of His indwelling Spirit. These are the conditions on which the crown may be ours.

Such righteousness may be imperfect here upon earth, and when we look upon ourselves we may feel as if there were nothing in us that deserves, or that even can bear, the crown to be laid upon our brows. But if the process have been begun here by love and struggling, and reception of His grace, death will perfect it, But death will not begin it if it have not been commenced in life. We may hope that if we have our faces set towards the Lord, and our poor imperfect steps have been stumbling towards Him through all the confusions and mists of flesh and sense, our course will be wonderfully straightened and accelerated when we ‘shuffle off this mortal coil.’ But there is no sanctifying in death for a man who is not a Christian whilst he lives, and the crown will only come to those whose righteousness began with repentance, and was made complete by passing through the dark valley of death.

IV. Lastly, note the giver of the crown.

‘Which the Lord hath promised,’ ‘which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me in that day.’ ‘I will give him a crown of life.’ So Jesus Christ, as Judge, as Brother, as Distributer of the eternal conditions of men, as indwelling in us and making us sharers of all that is His, bestows upon His servants the crown. Yet, let us remember that He does not give it in such a fashion as that the gift may be taken once for all and worn thereafter, independent of Him. It must be a continual communication, all through eternal ages, and right on into the abysses of celestial glories — a continual communication from His ever-opened hand. The energy of a present Christ bestowing at the moment (if there be moments in that dim future) is the condition of the crown’s continued gleaming on brows that have worn it for ages, to which geological periods are but as the beat of a pendulum.

Like the rainbow that continues permanently above the cater-act, and yet at each moment is fed by new spray from the stream, so the

crown upon our heads will be the consequence of the continual influx into redeemed souls of the very life of Christ Himself.

So, dear brethren, all ends as all begins, with cleaving to Him, and drawing from His fulness grace whilst we need grace, and glory when we are fit for glory. Strength for the conflict and the reward of the victory come from the same hand, and are ours on the same conditions. He who covers our heads in the day of battle is He who wreathes the garland on the conqueror's brow and keeps its flowers unfading through eternal ages. 'On His head are many crowns,' which He bestows upon His followers, and all the heaven of His servants is their share in His heaven. If, then, we love Him, if for His dear sake we manfully strive in the conflict, patiently accept the ministry of trial, discipline ourselves as athletes are willing to do for a poor parsley wreath, hold fast that which we have, and by faith, effort, and prayer, receive of His righteousness here, then the grave will be but as the

dressing-room where we shall put off our soiled raiment and on our white robe; and thus apparelled, even we, unworthy, shall hear from Him, 'I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'

James 1:18 --'FIRST-FRUITS OF HIS CREATURES'

'...That we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.' — James 1:18.

ACCORDING to the Levitical ceremonial, the first sheaf of the new crop, accompanied with sacrifice, was presented in the Temple on the day after the Passover Sabbath. No part of the harvest was permitted to be used for food until after this acknowledgment, that all had come from God and belonged to Him. A similar law applied to the first-born of men and of cattle. Both were regarded as in a special sense consecrated to and *belonging* to God.

Now, in the New Testament, both these ideas of ‘the first-born’ and ‘the first-fruits,’ which run as you see parallel in some important aspects, are transferred to Jesus Christ. He is ‘become the first-fruits of them that slept’: and it was no mere accidental coincidence that, in this character, He rose from the dead on the day on which, according to the law, the sheaf was to be presented in the Temple. In His case the ideas attached to the expression are not only that of consecration, but that of being the first of a series, which owes its existence to Him. He makes men ‘the many brethren,’ of whom He is ‘the first-born’; and He, by the overflowing power of His life, raises from the dead the whole harvest of which He is the first-fruits.

Then that which Jesus Christ is, primarily and originally, all those who love Him and trust Him are secondarily and by derivation from Himself. Thus, both these phrases are further transferred in the New Testament to Christian people. They are the ‘first-fruits unto God and the Lamb’; or, as my text has it here, with a qualifying word, ‘a *kind* of first-fruits’; which expresses at once a metaphor and the derivation of the character: They are also ‘the Church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven.’

So, then, in this text we have contained some great ideas as to God’s purpose in drawing us to Himself. And I want you to look at these for a moment or two.

I. First, then, God’s purpose for Christians is that they should be consecrated to Him.

The sheaf was presented before God in the symbolical ceremonial, as an acknowledgment of His ownership of it, and of all the wide-waving harvest. It thereby became His in a special sense. In like manner, the purpose of God in bestowing on us the wondrous gift of a regeneration and new life by the word is that we should be His, yielding to Him the life which He gives, and all that we are, in thankful recognition and joyful consecration.

We hear a great deal about consecration in these days. Let us understand what consecration means. There is an inward and an outward aspect of it. In the inward aspect it means an entire devotion of myself, down to the very roots of my being, to God as Lord and Owner.

Man's natural tendency is to make himself his own centre, to live for self and by self. And the whole purpose of the gospel is to decentralise him and to give him a new centre, even God, for whom, and by whom, and with whom, and in whom the Christian man is destined, by his very calling, to live.

Now, how can an inward devotion and consecration of myself be possible? Only by one way, and that is by the way of love that delights to give. The yielding of the human spirit to the divine is only accomplished through that sweet medium of love. Self-surrender is the giving up of self at the bidding of love to Him to whom my heart cleaves.

The will will yield itself. There will be no murmuring at hard providences; no regrets darkening a whole life and paralysing duty, and blinding to blessings, by reason of the greatest sorrow which He may have sent. The will will yield in submission; the will will yield in obedience. According to the dreadful metaphor of the founder of the Jesuits — dreadful when applied to the relations of a man to a man, but blessed when applied to the relation of a man to God, and of God to man — I shall be in His hands 'like a staff' in the hand of a man, only to be used as He desires.

Consecration means self-surrender; and the fortress of self is in the will, and the way of self-surrender is the flowery path of love.

To take the other metaphor of Scripture, by which the same idea is expressed — the consecration which we owe to God, and which is His design in all His dealings with us in the gospel, will be like that of a priestly offering of sacrifice, and the sacrifice is ourselves.

So much for the inward; what about the outward? All capacities, opportunities, possessions, are to be yielded up to Him as utterly as Christ has yielded Himself to us. We are to live for Him and work for Him; and set, as our prime object, conspicuously and constantly before us, and to be reached towards through all the trivialities of daily duty, and the common-places of recurring tasks, the one thing, to glorify God and to please Him. Consecration means the utter giving of myself away, in the inmost sanctuary of the spirit. And it means the resolute devotion of all that I have and all that I am in the outgoings of daily life to His service and to His praise.

That is what God meant for you and me when He made us Christians; that was His design when He sent His Son. And we thwart and counter-work Him, just in the measure in which we still make ourselves our own centre, our wills our own law, and our well-being our own aim.

Now, remember, such consecration is salvation. For the opposite thing, the living to self, is damnation and hell and destruction. And whosoever is thus consecrated to God is in process of being saved. The relation between the two ideas is not, as it often is put, that you are to be saved that you may be consecrated; but, you are being saved in being consecrated. And the measure in which we have ceased to be devoted to ourselves, and are devoted to Him, is the accurate measure in which we have received the true salvation that is in Jesus Christ.

That consecration is blessedness. There is no joy of which a human spirit is capable that is as lofty, as rare and exquisite, as sweet and lasting, as the joy of giving itself away to Him who has given Himself for us. And such consecration is the true possession of what we give, and the only way of really owning ourselves or our possessions. 'He that loveth himself shall lose himself,' and he that gives himself away to God, a weak, sinful man, gets himself back from God, a hero, strong, and a saint.

Such consecration, which is the root of all blessedness, and the true way of entering into the possession of all possessions, is only possessible in the degree in which we subject ourselves to the influence of these mighty acts which God has done in order to secure it. Our yielding of ourselves to Him is only possible when we are quite sure that He has given Himself to us.

Our love which melts us, and bows us in willing, joy-fill surrender, can only be the echo of His love. The pattern is set us in the Christ, and set us that we may imitate it, and we imitate it in the measure in which we lie exposed to its mighty power. 'He gave Himself for us, that He might purchase for Himself a people for His possession.' My surrender is but the echo of the thunder of His; my surrender is but the flash on the polished mirror which gives back the sunbeam that smites it. We yield ourselves to God, when we realise that Christ has given Himself for us.

Christian men and women, behold your destiny! God's purpose concerning you is that you might be not your own, because you are bought with a price. And measure against that mighty purpose the halting obedience, the reluctant wills, the half-and-half surrender which is no surrender at all, which make up the lives of the average Christians among us, and see whether any of us can feel that the divine purpose is accomplished in us, or that we have paid what we owe to our God.

II. Secondly, my text suggests that God's purpose for Christians is that they should be specimens and beginnings of a great harvest.

The sheaf that was carried into the Temple showed what sun and rain and the sweet skyey influences had been able to do on a foot or two of ground, and it prophesied of the acres of golden grain that would one day be garnered in the barns. And so, Christian men and women to-day, and even more eminently at that time when this letter was written, are meant to be the first small example of a great harvest that is to follow. The design that God had in view in our

being Christianised is that we should stand here as specimens of what He means the world to be, and as witnesses of what He, by the gospel, is able to make men.

If we strip that thought of its metaphor it just comes to this, that if Christianity has been able to take one man, pick him out of the mud and mire of sense and self, and turn him into a partially and increasingly consecrated servant of God, it can do that for anybody.

The little sheaf, though there be but a handful of nodding heads in it, is a sure pledge of the harvest on the great prairie yonder, as yet untilled and unsown, which will yet bear like fruit to His praise and honour.

‘We have all of us one human heart.’ Whatever may be men’s idiosyncrasies or diversities of culture, of character, of condition, of climate, of chronology, they have all the same deep primary wants, and the deepest of them all is concord and fellowship with God. And the path to that is by faith in His dear Son, who has given Himself for us. If, then, that faith in one case has given to a man the satisfaction of that which all men are hungering for, whether they know it or not, and are restless and miserable till they find it, then there is document and evidence that this gospel, which can do that for the individual, can do it for the race. And so the first-fruits are the pledge and the prophecy of the harvest.

What a harvest is dimly hinted at in these words of my text; the ‘first-fruits of His creatures!’ That goes even wider than humanity, and stretches away out into the dim distances, concerning which we can speak with but bated breath; but at least it seems to suggest to us that, in accordance with other teaching of the New Testament, ‘the whole creation’ which ‘groaneth and travaileth together in pain until now,’ will, somehow or other, be brought into the liberty and the glory of the children of God, and, as humble waiters and attenders upon the kings who are the priests of the Most High, will participate in the power of the redemption. At all events, there seem to me to

gleam dimly through such words as those of my text, the great prospects of a redeemed humanity, of a renewed earth, of a sinless universe, in which God in Christ shall be all in all.

The possibility and the certainty of that issue lie in this comparatively humble fact, that some handful of poor men have found in Jesus Christ that which their finding of it in Him manifests to them, is the *elixir* viloe and the hope of the world.

You are meant to be specimens, exhibitions of what God intends for mankind, and of what the gospel can do for the world. Do you think, Christian men and women, that anybody, looking at you, will have a loftier idea of the possibilities of human nature, and of the potentialities of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Because if they will not, then you have thwarted your Father's design when He sent you His Son.

III. Lastly, my text suggests that God's purpose for Christians is that they should help the harvest.

That does not lie in the Levitical ceremonial of the sheaf of the first-fruits, of course. Though even there, I may remind you, that the thing presented on the altar carried in itself the possibilities of future growth, and that the wheaten ear has not only 'bread for the eater but seed for the sower,' and is the parent of another harvest. But the idea that the first-fruits are not merely first in series, but that they originate the series of which they are the first, lies in the transference of the terms and the ideas to Jesus Christ; for, as I pointed out to you in my introductory remarks, when He is called 'the first-fruits of them that slept,' it is implied that He, by His power, will wake the whole multitude of the sleepers; and when it speaks of Him as 'the

first-born among many brethren,' it is implied that He, by the communication of His life, will give life, and a fraternal life, to the many brethren who will follow Him.

And so, in like manner, God's purpose in making us 'a kind of first-fruits of His creatures' is not merely our consecration and the exhibition of a specimen of His power, and the pledge and prophecy of the harvest, but it is that from us there shall come influences which shall realise the harvest of which our own Christianity is the pledge and prophecy. That is to say, all Christian men and women are Christians in order that they may make more Christians.

The capacity, the obligation, the impulse, are all given in the fact of receiving Jesus Christ for ourselves. If we have Him we *can* preach Him, if we have Him we *ought* to preach Him, if we have Him in any deep and real possession, we *must* preach Him, and His words will be like a fire in our bones, if we forbear; and we shall not be able to stay.

'Heaven doth with us as we with torches do, Not light them for themselves.'

What do you get Christ for? To feed upon Him. Yes! But to carry the bread to all the hungry as well.

Do not say you cannot. You can talk about anything that interests you. You can speak about anything that you know. And are your lips to be always closed about Him who has given Himself for you? Do not say that you need special gifts for it. We do need special gifts for the more public and conspicuous forms of what we call preaching nowadays. But any man and any woman that has Christ in his or her heart can go to another and say, 'We have found the Messiah,' and that is the best thing to say.

You *ought* to preach Him. Capacity involves obligation. To have anything, in this world of needy men who are all knit together in the solidarity of one family — to have any anything implies that you impart it. That is the true communism of Christianity, to be applied not only to wealth but to everything, all our possessions, all our knowledge, all our influence. We get them that they may fructify

through us to all; and if we keep them, we shall be sure to spoil them. The corn laid up in storehouses is gnawed by rats, and marred by weevils. If you want it to be healthy, and your own possession of it to increase, put it into your seed-basket; and ‘in the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand,’ and it will come back to thee, ‘seed for the sower and bread for the eater.’

Now this is a matter of individual responsibility. You cannot get rid of it. Every Christian has the obligation laid upon himself, and every Christian man has some sphere in which he can discharge it, and in which, if he discharge it not, he is a dumb dog lying down and loving to slumber. Oh! I wish I could get into you tongue-tied, cowardly Christian men and women who never open your mouths to a soul for the Master’s sake, this conviction, that you are thwarting God’s purposes, and that the blood of souls lies at your door by reason of your guilty silence.

If you believe these things which I have been saying to you, the application follows. ‘The field is the world.’ And neither criticisms about missionary methods nor allegations of the superior claims of the little bit of the field round about your own doors are a sufficient vindication before God, though they may be an excuse before men, for tepid interest in, or indifference to, or lack of help of, any great missionary enterprise.

We have to sow Beside all waters; and if any men in the world were ever debtors both to the Greek and to the barbarian, both to the Englishman and the foreigner, it is the members of this great nation of ours, which, ‘as a nest hath gathered the riches of the nations, and there were none that peeped or muttered or moved the wing.’ We are debtors to the heathen world, Because whether we will or no we come into contact with heathen lands; and whether we take Bibles or not, our countrymen will take rum and gunpowder, and send men to the devil if we do not try to draw them to God. We are debtors to them in a thousand cases by injuries inflicted. We are debtors by

benefits received; and we are debtors most of all because Christ died for them and for us equally.

And so, I beseech you, give us your help, and remember in giving it that ‘God of His own will hath Begotten us by the word of truth, that we should Be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.’

James 1:25--THE PERFECT LAW AND ITS DOERS

‘Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.’ — James 1:25.

AN old tradition tells us that James, who was probably the writer of this letter, continued in the practice of Jewish piety all his life. He was surnamed ‘the Just.’ He lived the life of a Nazarite. He was even admitted into the sanctuary of the Temple, and there spent so much of his time in praying for the forgiveness of the people that, in the vivid language of the old writer, his ‘knees were hard and worn like a camel’s.’ To such a man the Gospel would naturally present itself as ‘a law,’ which word expressed the highest form of revelation with which he was familiar; and to him the glory of Christ’s message would be that it was the perfecting of an earlier utterance, moving on the same plane as it did, but infinitely greater.

Now that, of course, is somewhat different from the point of view from which, for instance, Paul regards the relation of the Gospel and the Law. To him they are rather antitheses. He conceived mainly of the law as a system of outward observances, incapable of fulfilment, and valuable as impressing upon men the consciousness of sin.

But, though there is diversity, there is no contradiction, any more than there is between the two pictures in a stereoscope, which, united, represent one solid reality. The two men simply regard the subject from slightly different angles. Paul would have said that the gospel was the perfection of the law, as indeed he does say that by

faith we do not make void, but establish, the law. And James would have said that the law, in Paul's sense, was a yoke of bondage, as indeed he does say in my text, that the gospel, in contrast with the earlier revelation, is the law of liberty.

And so the two men complement and do not contradict each other. In like manner, the earnest urging of work and insisting upon conduct, which are the keynote of this letter, are no contradiction of Paul. The one writer begins at a later point than the other. Paul is a preacher of faith, but of faith which works by love. James is the preacher of works, but of works which are the fruit of faith.

There are three things here on which I touch now. First, the perfect law; second, the doers of the perfect law; and third, the blessedness of the doers of the perfect law.

I. First, then, the perfect law.

I need not dwell further upon James's conception of the gospel as being a law; the authoritative standard and rule of human conduct. Let me remind you how, in every part of the revelation of divine truth contained in the gospel, there is a direct moral and practical bearing. No word of the New Testament is given to us only in order that we may know truth, but all in order that we may do it. Every part of it palpitates with life, and is meant to regulate conduct. There are plenty of truths of which it does not matter whether a man believes them or not, in so far as his conduct is concerned. Mathematical truth or scientific truth leaves conduct unaffected. But no man can believe the principles that are laid down in the New Testament, and the truths that are unveiled there, without their laying a masterful grip upon his life, and influencing all that he is.

And let me remind you, too, how in the very central fact of the gospel there lies the most stringent rule of life. Jesus Christ is the Pattern, and from those gentle lips which say, 'If ye love Me,

keep My commandments,' law sounds more imperatively than from all the thunder and trumpets of Sinai.

Let me remind you, too, how in the great act of redemption, which is the central fact of the New Testament revelation, there lies a law for conduct. God's love redeeming us is the revelation of what we ought to be, and the Cross, to which we look as the refuge from sin and condemnation, is also the pattern for the life of every believer. 'Be ye imitators of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.' A revelation, therefore, of which every truth, to the minutest fibre of the great web, has in it a directly practical bearing; a revelation which is all centred and focused in the life which is example because it is deliverance; a revelation, of which the vital heart is the redeeming act which sets before us the outlines of our conduct, and the model for our imitation — is a law just because it is a gospel.

Such thoughts as these are needful as a counterpoise to one-sided views which otherwise would be disastrous. God forbid that the thought of the gospel of Jesus Christ as primarily a message of reconciliation and pardon, and providing a means of escape from the frightful consequences of sin, even separation from God, should ever be put in the background! But the very ardour and intensity of man's recognition of that as the first shape which Christianity assumes to sinful men, has sometimes led, and is always in possible danger of leading, to putting all other aspects of the gospel in the background. Some of you, for instance, when a preacher talks to you about plain duties, and insists upon conduct and practical righteousness, are ready to say, 'He is not preaching the gospel.' Neither is he, if he does not present these duties and this practical righteousness as the fruits of faith, or if he presents them as the means of winning salvation. But if your conception of Christianity has not grasped it as being a stringent rule of life, you need to go to school to James, the servant of God, and do not yet understand the message of his brother Paul The gospel is a Redemption.

Yes I God be thanked; but because a Redemption, it is a Law.

Again, this thought gives the necessary counterpoise to the tendency to substitute the mere intellectual grasp of Christian truth for the practical doing of it. There will be plenty of orthodox Christians and theological professors and students who will find themselves, to their very great surprise, amongst the goats at last. Not what we believe, but what we do, is our Christianity: Only the doing must be rooted in belief. In like manner, take this vivid conception of the gospel as a law; as a counterpoise to the tendency to place religion in mere emotion and feeling. Fire is very good, but its best purpose is to get up steam which will drive the wheels of the engine. There is a vast deal of lazy selfishness masquerading under the guise of sweet and sacred devout emotion. Not what we feel, but what we do, is our Christianity.

Further, notice how this law is a perfect law. James's idea, I suppose, in that epithet, is not so much the completeness of the code, or the loftiness and absoluteness of the ideal which is set forth in the gospel, as the relation between the law and its doer. He is stating the same thought of which the Psalmist of old time had caught a glimpse. 'The law of the Lord is perfect; because it 'converts the soul.' That is to say, the weakness of all commandment — whether it be the law of a nation, or the law of moral textbooks, or the law of conscience, or of public opinion, or the like — the weakness of all positive statute is that it stands there, over against a man, and points a stony finger to the stony tables, 'Thou shalt!' 'Thou shalt not!' but stretches out no hand to help us in keeping the commandment. It simply enjoins, and so is weak; like the proclamations of some discrowned king who has no army at his back to enforce them, and which flutter as waste paper on the barn-doors, and do nothing to secure allegiance. But, says James, this law is perfect — because it is more than law, and transcends the simple function of command. It not only tells us what to do, but it gives us power to do it; and that is what men want. The world knows what it ought to do well enough.

There is no need for heaven to be rent, and divine voices to come to tell men what is right and wrong; they carry an all but absolutely sufficient guide as to that within their own minds. But there is need to bring them something which shall be more than commandment, which shall be both law and power, both the exhibition of duty and the gift of capacity to discharge it.

The gospel brings power because it brings life. 'If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness had been by the law.' In the gospel that desideratum is supplied. Here is the law which vitalises and so gives power. The life which the gospel brings will unfold itself after its own nature, and so produce the obedience which the law of the gospel requires.

Therefore, says James further, this perfect law is freedom. Of course liberty is not exemption from commandment, but the harmony of will with commandment. Whosoever finds that what is his duty is his delight is enfranchised. We are set at liberty when we walk within the limits of that gospel; and they who delight to do the law are free in obedience; free from the tyranny of their own lusts, passions, inclinations; free from the domination of men and opinion and common customs and personal habits. All those bonds are burnt in the fiery furnace of love into which they pass; and where they walk transfigured and at liberty, because they keep that law. Freedom comes from the reception into the heart of the life whose motions coincide with the commandments of the gospel. Then the burden that I carry carries me, and the limits within which I am confined are the merciful fences put up on the edge of the cliff to keep the traveller from falling over and being dashed to pieces beneath.

II. Now notice, secondly, the doers of the perfect law.

James has a long prelude before he comes to the doing. Several things are required as preliminary. The first step is, 'looketh into the law.'

The word employed here is a very picturesque and striking one. Its force may be seen if I quote to you the other instances of its occurrence in the

New Testament. It is employed in the accounts of the Resurrection to describe the attitude and action of Peter, John, and Mary as they ‘stooped down and looked into’ the empty sepulchre. In all these cases the Revised Version translates the word as I have just done, ‘stooping and looking,’ both acts being implied in it. It is also employed by Peter when he tells us that the ‘angels desire to look into’ the mysteries of Redemption, in which saying, perhaps, there may be some allusion to the silent, bending figures of the twin cherubim who, with folded wings and fixed eyes, curved themselves above the mercy-seat, and looked down upon that mystery of propitiating love. With such fixed and steadfast gaze we must contemplate the perfect law of liberty if we are ever to be doers of the same.

A second requirement is, ‘and continueth.’ The gaze must be, not only concentrated, but constant, if anything is to come of it. Old legends tell that the looker into a magic crystal saw nothing at first, but, as he gazed, there gradually formed themselves in the clear sphere filmy shapes, which grew firmer and more distinct until they stood plain. The raw hide dipped into the vat with tannin in it, and at once pulled out again, will never be turned into leather. Many of you do not give the motives and principles of the gospel, which you say you believe, a chance of influencing you, because so interruptedly, and spasmodically, and at such long intervals, and for so few moments, do you gaze upon them. Steadfast and continued attention is needful if we are to be ‘doers of the work.’

Let me venture on two or three simple practical exhortations. Cultivate the habit, then, of contemplating the central truths of the gospel, as the condition of receiving in vigour and fulness the life which obeys the commandment. There is no mystery about the way

by which that new life is given to men. James tells us here, in the immediate context, how it is. He speaks of ‘God of His own will begetting us with the *word of truth*’; and of the ‘engrafted word, which,’ being engrafted, ‘is able to save your souls.’ Get that word — the principles of the gospel and the truths of revelation, which are all enshrined and incarnated in Jesus Christ — into your minds and hearts by continual, believing contemplation of it, and the new life, which is obedience, will surely spring. But if you look at the gospel of your salvation as seldom and as superficially and with as passing glances as so many of you expend upon it, no wonder that you are such weaklings as so many of you are, and that you find such a gulf between your uncircumcised inclinations and the commandment of the living God.

Cultivate this habit of reflective meditation upon the truths of the gospel as giving you the pattern of duty in a concentrated and available form. It is of no use to carry about a copy of the ‘Statutes at Large’ in twenty folio Volumes in order to refer to it when difficulties arise and crises come. We must have something a great deal more compendious and easy of reference than that. A man’s cabin-trunk must not be as big as a house, and his goods must be in a small compass for his sea voyage. We have in Jesus Christ the ‘Statutes at Large,’ codified and put into a form which the poorest and humblest and busiest amongst us can apply directly to the sudden emergencies and surprising contingencies of daily life, which are always sprung upon us when we do not expect them and demand instantaneous decision. We have in Christ the pattern of all conduct. But only those who have been accustomed to meditate upon Him, and on the truths that flow from His life and death, will find that the sword is ready when it is needed, and that the guide is at their side when they are in perplexity.

Cultivate the habit of meditating on the truths of the gospel, in order that the motives of conduct may be reinvigorated and strengthened. And remember that only by long and habitual abiding in the secret

place of the Most High, and entertaining the thoughts of His infinite love to us, as the continual attitude of our daily life, shall we be able to respond to His love with the thankfulness which springs to obedience as a delight, and knows no joy like the joy of serving such a Friend.

These requirements being met, next comes the doing. There must precede all true doing of the law this gazing into it, steadfast and continued. We shall not obey the commandment except, first, we have received and welcomed the salvation. There must be, first, faith, and then obedience.

Only he who has received the gospel in the love of it will find that the gospel is the law which regulates his conduct. 'Faith without works is dead'; works without faith are rootless flowers, or bricks hastily and incompletely huddled together without the binding straw.

But, further, the text suggests that the natural crown of all contemplation and knowledge is practical obedience. Make of all your creed deed. Let everything you believe be a principle of action too; your *crendenda* translate into *agenda*. And, on the other hand, let every deed be informed by your creed, and no schism exist between what you are and what you believe.

III. Lastly, note the blessedness of the doers of the perfect law. There is an echo in the words of my text, of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, the form in which the gospel was, perhaps, dearest to this Apostle. He uses the same word — 'Blessed.'

Notice the in; not 'after,' not 'as a reward *for*,' but 'blessed in his deed.' It is the saying of the Psalmist over again, whose words we have already seen partly reproduced in the former portion of this text, *who*, in the same great psalm, says: 'In keeping Thy commandments there is great reward.' The rewards of this law are not arbitrarily Bestowed, separately from the act of obedience, by the will of the Judge, but the deeds of obedience automatically bring

the blessedness. This world is not so constituted as that outward rewards certainly follow on inward goodness. Few of its prizes fall to the lot of the saints. But men are so constituted as that obedience is its own reward. There is no delight so deep and true as the delight of doing the will of Him whom we love. There is no blessedness like that of an increasing communion with God, and of the clearer perception of His will and mind which follow obedience as surely as the shadow does the sunshine. There is no blessedness like the glow of approving conscience, the reflection of the smile on Christ's face.

To have the heart in close communion with the very Fountain of all good, and the will in harmony with the will of the best Beloved; to hear the Voice that is dearest of all, ever saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it'; to feel 'a spirit in my feet' impelling me upon that road; to know that all my petty deeds are made great, and my stained offerings hallowed by the altar on which they are honoured to lie; and to be conscious of fellowship with the Friend of my soul increased by obedience; this is to taste the keenest joy and good of life, and he who is thus 'blessed in his deed' need never fear that that blessedness shall be taken away, nor sorrow though other joys be few and griefs be many.

But, remember, first believe, then work. We must begin where Paul told the Philippian gaoler to begin 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved' — if we are to end where James leads us. Do not begin your building at the roof, but put in the foundations deep in penitence and faith. And then, let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon.

James 1:27--PURE WORSHIP

'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.' — James 1:27.

THIS is a text which is more often quoted and used than understood. The word 'religion' has somewhat shifted its meaning from that which it bore at the time of our translation. We understand by it one of two things. For instance, when we speak of the Mohammedan or the Brahminical religion we mean the body of beliefs, principles, and ceremonies which go to make up an objective whole. When we speak of an individual's religion we generally mean, not that which he grasps, but the act, on his part, of grasping the consciousness of dependence, the attitude of reverence and aspiration and love and its consequences within. But when our translation was made the word meant rather *worship* than religion, or, to use an expression which has been recently naturalised among us, it meant the 'cult' of a God, and that mainly, though not exclusively, by ceremonials, or by oral and verbal praise and petition. Now, it is obvious that that is the meaning of the expression in my text, because otherwise you would have a patently absurd saying. If James meant by 'religion' here what we now mean by it, to say that benevolence and personal purity are religion would be just equivalent to and as absurd as saying that a mother's love is washing and feeding her child, or that anger is a flushed face and a loud voice. The feeling is one thing, the expression of it is another. The feeling is religion, the expression of it is worship. And so if you take the true meaning, not only of the original Greek, but also of the word 'religion' at the beginning of the seventeenth century, then you will understand the passage a little better than some of the people that are so often quoting it do.

For the writer is not talking about religion, but about its expression, 'worship.' And he says that 'true *worship*, pure and undefiled... is to visit the widows and the fatherless in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.' He has been, in the previous verses, striking at various forms of self-deception, such as that a man should conceive himself to be all right, because he listens to the law, and then goes away and forgets it, or that a man should think himself a real worshipper, while he does not bridle his tongue, and then he states the general principle of my text — worship has for its

selectest manifestation and form these two things, beneficence and purity. Now I would deal with these words and seek to point out first

I. The noble ideal of life that is set before us here. You observe that there are two great departments into which all the forms of individual duty are, as it were, swept. To put these into plain words, the one is beneficence, as the sum and substance of all our duties to our fellows, and the other is keeping ourselves pure, as the sum and substance of all our duties to ourselves. Now I would notice, for it strikes me as being remarkable, that duties to other people are put *first*, and duties to ourselves second. I do not know that there is any question of practical morality more difficult for us to settle, with full satisfaction to ourselves, than the relative proportion, in our lives, of care for ourselves, for our own culture, for our own rectification, for our *Own* growth in grace and righteousness, and our obligations to our fellows. It is very hard for us to note how much we ought to give to the definite purpose of trying to make ourselves better, and how much we ought to give to the other purpose of forgetting ourselves, and seeking for the good of other people. But James, although he does not enter into the difficulties which clog the solution of that question for us individually, does seem to think that the first thing to be looked after is other people, and that in looking after such other people we shall be most efficiently keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. And it is so, *for* if we get around us, as it were, an atmosphere of sympathy, of unselfish regard, of unwearied effort for the benefit of other people, it is like the thin film or air that may surround some object, and prevent the fire from reaching it for a moment or two. We shall find that by no means the least powerful detergent to purge from us the spots of the world is an honest and thorough-going flinging of ourselves into the necessities and the sorrows of other people.

But I should like to put in a caution here. I believe that there are a great many good folk in this generation who have their hands so full

of Christian work that they have no time at all for the development of their own Christian character in any other way, and that they lack an intelligent grasp of the principles of the gospel, and many things that would make their work upon *other* people a hundred times better, just because they are so busy helping other folk that they have no time at all to look after themselves. And so the Church as a whole to-day has, as I believe, not too much beneficent and religious machinery, for there never can be too much of that — but too much relatively to the strength of the Church to drive it.

Your engine is too big for your boiler, and to this busy generation, in which ‘Christian worker’ has all but blotted out the conception of ‘Christian thinker’ and ‘Christian scholar,’ I believe that it needs to be preached, not so much ‘Look after other people’ as ‘Do not forget yourself.’ ‘Take heed to thyself, and to thy teaching,’ was good counsel for Paul’s young representative, and it is good counsel for us all. ‘What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.’ ‘Visit the widows and the fatherless in their affliction,’ by all means; and ‘Keep yourselves unspotted from the world.’

I suppose that it is scarcely necessary to remark that James does not mean visiting the widows and fatherless to be taken as a complete statement of our duties to others. He Singles out that one form which sympathy and helpfulness will take, as a typical example of the whole class of actions in which love will express itself. Nor need I do more than say in passing that ‘visiting’ means more than *calling* on — namely, looking after and caring for. The sum of all Christian duties to others, then, is gathered up in hopeful and sympathetic love, and in regard to ourselves James sums them up in what looks, after all, rather an incomplete ideal: ‘Keep yourselves unspotted from the world.’ He does not say with any falsely ascetic twist, ‘Keep yourselves out of the world.’ No! He says, ‘Fling yourselves into it, and when you are in the thickest of the muddy ways, see that no spots and splashes of filth come on your white garments.’ That implies that it is very likely, unless we take very rigid care, that

contact with the external world, and with the aggregate of Godless men which makes the world, in the New Testament sense of the phrase, will infect Christian men and women with evil, even when they are going on with their works of beneficence. And I suppose we all know that that is true.

But here you get a very negative view of the sum of Christian duty, Some people preach 'culture' James says, 'Try to keep yourselves clean.' He realises that there is something more to be done by each of us with ourselves than to develop or draw out and increase that which is in us, that there needs to be another process, and that is to get rid of a great deal that is within us. We must cease to be much of what we are before we can be that which we may be and ought to be. Slay self first that you may live.

Cultivate? Yes! and crucify as well.

Nor does James think any the less nobly of the resulting self, because he says that you will form the noblest character mainly by the way of negation. I know, of course, that that is only one-sided; but do we not all know that by reason of the abounding evil around us, and the proclivities more or less dormant, but existing, to much of that evil, which are in our own hearts, we do need that the law of our life should very largely be cast in the form 'Do not.' Any man who has honestly set himself to the task of moulding his life into the likeness which God would approve, must know that to walk through the wards of an hospital and catch no infection, to stand in a dung-heap and bring away no stench nor foulness clinging to the robes, is as easy as it is to plunge into the world and catch no contagion and no pollution there.

And yet, says James, you have to do that. He sum, up Christian duty in this negative form, that is remarkable, and he flings the whole weight and burden of it on the man himself, that is more remarkable still. And yet we have only to read the rest of the chapter to see that he is not forgetting that there must be a Divine Keeper to keep the

keepers, and that we shall never keep ourselves 'unspotted' unless we trust to Him who has said 'I will keep thy feet from falling.' So we need not wonder at the emphasis that is placed on the human side of the energy that is to be put forth in order to mould men into this character. But I desire to say here what I think some tendencies of good people's opinions in this day do especially need: that we do not get cleansed, hallowed, sanctified, by faith only, but that the office of faith is to bring into our possession the power which will sanctify us if we use our own efforts. 'Having therefore these premises, dearly beloved, let us *cleanse ourselves* from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,' and not trust to faith alone to make us pure.

II. We have here, secondly, the true and pure worship in such a life.

I need not repeat what I have already said at the beginning of these remarks as to the true bearing of the principle laid down here. Only let me remind you that the writer is not flouting, or putting away out of court, other forms of action which are more frequently called worship. True religion, which expresses itself, according to James, most nobly in the worship of life, must express itself by all the other means which men have for expressing their inmost selves, by the worship of words, by symbolical deed, by a ceremonial as well as by the visiting of the widows and the fatherless, and the keeping oneself unspotted from the world. But what is insisted upon here is that of these two ways — both of them equally natural and equally indispensable, if there be any religion to express — in some aspects the higher and the nobler is the dumb worship of a pure and beneficent life. Now, of course, we are accustomed as Nonconformists to think that texts of this sort hit the adherents of a more elaborate, sensuous, and ceremonial form of worship than finds favour in our eyes, very hard, and sometimes to forget that they hit us quite as hard. There may be quite as real ritualists amongst Nonconformists as there are amongst Anglicans or Roman Catholics — I was going to say amongst Quakers — as amongst the adherents of any form of Christian worship. For it is not the

elaboration of the *form*, but it is the existence of it, that tempts men to trust too much to it. And the baldest — to use a modern term of opprobrium — Nonconformist worship may be just as productive of immoral reliance upon it, on the part of those who adhere to it, as the most elaborate and sensuous ceremonial that fills a cathedral with clouds of incense, and calls upon men to worship simply by looking on at a priest performing his miracle. Dear brethren, you and I need the warning as much as anybody ever did. There are people, I have no doubt, who leave their religion in their pews, and lock it up there in the box along with their hymn books, and whose notion of religion is very little more than coming to a so-called ‘place of worship’ and offering up verbal prayers. There creep in insincerity, unreality, unconscious hypocrisy; there creeps in mechanical, perfunctory utterance of the words of praise, or listening to the voice of the preacher. How many of you think about the hymns you sing, and make them the expression of your own feelings? How many of you fancy that you have spent the Sunday rightly when you go to church and listen more or less attentively to what your minister may have to say to you, and then go out and live a life in flat contradiction to the prayers, and the hymns, and the readings, and the preachings in which you have nominally taken part? Oh, Brethren! let us get into reality, and learn more and more than ever we have done that worship does not mean the external act, but the bowing of the spirit before God, and that amidst the many temptations to insincerity, unreality, and dead, fossil formalism, which adhere to all forms of oral and ceremonial worship, there is as much need to-day as ever there was that we should listen to him who says, ‘What hath thy God required of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?’ ‘Lord! Lord! have we not prophesied in Thy name?’ ‘Depart from Me; I never knew you.’

III. And now let me say one last word as to the only possible foundation for such a life.

It is worship, it is the expression of religion, and only when it is the expression of religion will you find beneficence and purity in their highest and noblest forms. There are people that say, 'I do not understand the Psalms; they are far too rapturous and emotional for me. I do not care about Paul and his metaphysical theology. I cannot make much of John and his mysticism. Give me James. That is plain common-sense; that is good practical morality. No clouds of darkness, no fine-spun theories.' Yes, and James has for his fundamental principle that if you want morality you must begin with religion. He believes that visiting the widows and the fatherless in affliction, and keeping oneself unspotted from the world, or, in other words, the highest form of morality, is the body, of which religion is the soul.

I am not going to enter upon that thorny question of the possibility of having an independent theory of ethics without religion, but my point is this — theory or no theory, where will you get the practical power that will work the theory and bring it out of the region of theory into the region of daily life and fact? I know it is extremely narrow, extremely old-fashioned, extremely illiberal, and I believe it is profoundly true. Begin with Jesus Christ and the wish to please Him, and there is the root out of which all these self-regarding and other's regarding graces and beauties will most surely come. I have no doubt that you can make your model of a life without Christianity, though I fancy that a great deal of the model comes from the Christianity. But after you have got it, then one comes and says, 'Well! it is all very pretty — a beautiful model; do you think it will work?' If you want it to work, obtain the fire of the Holy Spirit to get up the steam and then it will work. You must begin with religion if you are to have a vigorous moral life, and your work in the world must be worship if it is to rise to the height of these two great forms of beautiful and noble life, the regard for others and the effort at purity for yourselves.

Do not run away with the perversion of this text which says, ‘I do not frequent churches and chapels; that is not worship. The diffused worship of my life is what God wants.’ Yes, that is what God wants. And you will be most likely to render the diffused worship of a life if you have reservoirs in the life — like Sundays, like hours of private devotion and prayer — from which will flow — and without which I doubt there will not deeply and perennially flow the broad streams of devotion all through your days. ‘Work is worship’ is a monastic motto that is very frequently quoted nowadays. Well, ‘it depends; as they say. Work is worship if there is a reference to God in it, It is not worship unless there is. Brethren, begin where the New Testament begins, with faith in Jesus Christ, and you will end with a worship which harmonises the service of the lip and the service of the life. And if you do not begin so, you may flout the prayers of the Church, and look upon our gatherings together as of very little value, but I doubt extremely whether you will ever have in your life the all-present reference to God which will make common deeds worship, and I doubt whether you will ever succeed either in beneficence to others, or in keeping yourselves unspotted from the world.

James 2:1--FAITH IN HIS NAME

‘The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.’ — James 2:1.

THE rarity of the mention of Jesus in this Epistle must strike every attentive reader; but the character of the references that *are* made is equally noticeable, and puts beyond doubt that, whatever is the explanation of their fewness, lower thoughts of Jesus, or less devotion to Him than belonged to the other New Testament writers, are not the explanation. James mentions Christ unmistakably only three times The first occasion is in his introductory salutation, where, like the other New Testament writers, he describes himself as the slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ’; thus linking the two names in closest union, and proffering unlimited obedience to his

Master. The second ease is that of my text, in which our Lord is set forth by this solemn designation, and is declared to be the object of faith.

The last is in an exhortation to patience in view of the coming of the Lord, to be our Judge.

So James, like Peter and Paul and John, looked to Jesus, who was probably the brother of James by birth, as being the Lord, whom it was no blasphemy nor idolatry to name in the same breath as God, and to whom the same absolute obedience was to be rendered; who was to be the object of men's unlimited trust, and who was to come again to be our Judge.

Here we have, in this remarkable utterance, four distinct designations of that Saviour, a constellation of glories gathered together; and I wish now, in a few remarks, to isolate, and gaze at the several stars — 'the faith of our Lord — Jesus — Christ — the Lord of glory.'

I. Christian faith is faith in Jesus.

We often forget that that name was common, wholly undistinguished, and borne by very many of our Lord's contemporaries. It had been borne by the great soldier whom we know as Joshua; and we know that it was the name of one at least of the disciples of our Master. Its disuse after Him, both by Jew and Christian, is easily intelligible. But though He bore it with special reference to His work of saving His people from their sins, He shared it, as He shared manhood, with many another of the sons of Abraham. Of course, Jesus is the name that is usually employed in the Gospels. But when we turn to the Epistles, we find that it is comparatively rare for it to stand alone, and that in almost all the instances of its employment by itself, it brings with it the special note of pointing attention to the manhood of our Lord Jesus. Let me

just gather together one or two instances which may help to elucidate this matter.

Who does not feel, for example, that when we read ‘let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith,’ the fact of our brother Man having trodden the same path, and being the pattern for our patience and perseverance, is tenderly laid upon our hearts? Again, when we read of sympathy as being felt to us by the great High Priest who can be ‘touched with a feeling of our infirmities, even Jesus,’ I think we cannot but recognise that His humanity is pressed upon our thoughts, as securing to us that we have not only the pity of a God, but the compassion of a Man, who knows by experience the bitterness of our sorrows.

In like manner we read sometimes that ‘Jesus died for us,’ sometimes that ‘*Christ* died for us’; and, though the two forms of the statement present the same fact, they present it, so to speak, from a different angle of vision, and suggest to us different thoughts. When Paul, for example, says to us, ‘If we believe that Jesus died and rose again,’ we cannot but feel that he is pressing on us the thought of the true manhood of that Saviour who, in His death, as in His resurrection, is the Forerunner of them that believe upon Him, and whose death will be the more peaceful, and their rising the more certain, because He, who, ‘forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood likewise took part of the same,’ has thereby destroyed death, and delivered them from its bondage. Nor, with loss emphasis, and strengthening triumphant force, do we read that this same Jesus, the Man who bore our nature in its fulness and is kindred to us in flesh and spirit, has risen from the dead, hath ascended up on high, and is the Forerunner, who for us, by virtue of His humanity, hath entered in thither. Surely the most insensitive ear must catch the music, and the deep significance of the word which says, ‘We see not yet all things put under him (i.e., man), but we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour.’

So, then, Christian faith first lays hold of that manhood, realises the suffering and death as those of a true humanity, recognises that He bore in His nature ‘all the ills that flesh is heir to,’ and that His human life is a brother’s pattern for ours; that, He having died, death hath no more terrors for, or dominion over, us, and that whither the Man Jesus has gone, we sinful men need never fear to enter, nor doubt that we shall enter, too.

If our faith lays hold on Jesus the Man, we shall be delivered from the misery of wasting our earthly affections on creatures that may be false, that may change, that must be feeble, and will surely die. If our faith lays hold on the Man Jesus, all the treasures of the human love, trust, and obedience, that are so often squandered, and return as pain on our deceived and wounded hearts, will find their sure, sweet, stable object in Him. Human love is sometimes false and fickle, always feeble and frail; human wisdom has its limits, and human perfection its flaws; but the Man Jesus is the perfect, the all-sufficient and unchangeable object for all the love, the trust, and the obedience that the human heart can pour out before Him.

II. Christian faith is faith in Jesus Christ.

The earliest Christian confession, the simplest and, sufficient creed, was, Jesus is the Christ. What do we mean by that? We mean, first and plainly, that He is the realisation of the dim figure which arose, majestic and enigmatical, through the mists of a partial revelation. We mean that He is, as the word signifies etymologically, ‘anointed’ with the Divine Spirit, for the discharge of all the offices which, in old days, were filled by men who were fitted and designated for them by outward unction — prophet, priest, and king. We mean that He is the substance of which ancient ritual was the shadow. We mean that He is the goal to which all that former partial unveiling of the mind and will of God steadfastly pointed. This, and nothing less, is the meaning of the declaration that Jesus is the Christ; and that

belief is the distinguishing mark of the faith which this Hebrew of the Hebrews, writing to Hebrews, declares to be the Christian faith.

Now I know, and 'I am thankful to know, that there are many men who earnestly and reverently admire and obey Jesus, but think that they have nothing to do with these old Hebrew ideas of a Christ. It is not for me to decide which individual is His follower, and which is not; but this I say, that the primitive Christian confession was precisely that Jesus was the Christ, and that I, for my part, know no reason why the terms of the confession should be altered. Ah, these old Jewish ideas are not, as one great man has called them, 'Hebrew old clothes'; and I venture to assert that they are not to be discarded without woefully marring the completeness of Christian faith.

The faith in Jesus must pass into faith in Christ; for it is the office described in that name, which gives all its virtue to the manhood. Glance back for a moment to those instances which I have already quoted of the use of the name suggesting simple humanity, and note how all of them require to be associated with this other thought of the function of Christ, and His special designation by the anointing of God, in order that their full value may be made manifest.

For instance, 'Jesus died.' Yes, that is a fact of history. The Man was crucified. What is that to me more than any other martyrdom and its story, unless it derives its significance from the clear understanding of who it was that died upon the Cross? So we can understand that significant selection of terms, when the same Apostle, whose utterances I have already been quoting in the former part of this sermon, varies the name, and says, 'This is the gospel which I declared unto you, how that *Christ* died for our sins according to the Scriptures.'

Again, suppose we think of the example of *Jesus* as the perfect realised ideal of human life. That may become, and I think often does become, as impotent and as paralysing as any other specimen without flaw, that can be conceived of or presented to man. But if

we listen to the teaching that says to us, ‘*Christ* died for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps,’ then the ideal is not like a cold statue that looks down repellent even in its beauty, but is a living person who reaches a hand down to us to lift us to His own level, and will put His spirit within us, that, as the Master is, so may also the servants be.

Again, if we confine ourselves to the belief that the Man named *Jesus* has risen again, and has been exalted to glory, then, as a matter of fact, the faith in His Resurrection and Ascension will not long co-exist with the rejection of anything beyond simple humanity in His person. If, however, that faith could last, then He might be conceived of as filling a solitary throne, and there might be no victory over death for the rest of us in His triumph. But when we can ring out as the Apostle did, ‘Now is *Christ* risen from the dead,’ then we can also say, ‘and is become the first-fruits of them that slept.’

So, brethren, lift your faith in Jesus, and let it be sublimed into faith in Christ. ‘Whom say ye that I am?’ The answer is — may we all from our hearts and from our minds make it! — ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God:

III. Christian faith is faith in Jesus Christ the Lord.

Now, I take it that that name is here used neither in its lowest sense as a mere designation of politeness, as we employ ‘sir,’ nor in its highest sense in which, referred to Jesus Christ, it is not unfrequently used in the New Testament as being equivalent to the ‘Jehovah’ of the Old; but that it is employed in a middle sense as expressive of dignity and sovereignty.

Jesus is Lord. Our brother, a Man, is King of the universe. The new thing in Christ’s return to ‘the glory which He had with the Father before the world was’ is that He took the manhood with Him into indissoluble union with the divinity, and that a man is Lord. So you and I can cherish that wonderful hope: ‘I will give to him that

overcometh to sit with Me on My throne.’ Nor need we ever fear but that all things concerning ourselves and our dear ones, and the Church and the world, will be ordered aright; for the hand that sways the universe is the hand that was many a time laid in blessing upon the sick and the maimed, and that gathered little children to His bosom.

Christ is Lord. That is to say, supreme dominion is based on suffering. Because the vesture that He wears is dipped in blood, therefore there is written upon it, ‘King of kings, and Lord of lords.’ The Cross has become the throne. There is the basis of all true rule, and there is the assurance that His dominion is an everlasting dominion. So our faith is to rise from earth, and, like the dying martyr, to see the Son of Man at the right hand of the majesty of the heavens.

IV. Lastly, Christian faith is faith in Jesus Christ, ‘the Lord of glory.’

Now, the last words of my text have given great trouble to commentators. A great many explanations, with which I need not trouble you, have been suggested with regard to them. One old explanation has been comparatively neglected; and yet it seems to me to be the true one. ‘The Lord’ is a supplement which ekes out a meaning, but, as I think, obscures the meaning. Suppose we strike it out and read straight on. What do we get? ‘The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glory.’

And is that not intelligible? Remember to whom James was writing — Jews. Did not every Jew know what the Shekinah was, the light that used to shine between the Cherubim, as the manifest symbol of the divine presence, but which had long been absent from, the Temple? And when

James falls back upon that familiar Hebrew expression, and recalls the vanished lustre that lay upon the mercy-seat, surely he would be

understood by his Hebrew readers, and should be understood by us, as saying no more and no other than another of the New Testament writers has said with reference to the same symbolical manifestation — namely, ‘The Word became flesh tabernacled among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.’ James’s sentence runs On precisely the same lines as other sentences of the New Testament, For instance, the Apostle Paul, in one place, speaks of ‘Our Lord Jesus Christ, our hope.’ And this statement is constructed in exactly the same fashion, with the last name put in opposition to the others, ‘The Lord Jesus Christ, the Glory.’

Now, what does that mean? This — that the true presence of God, that the true lustrous emanation from, and manifestation of, the abysmal brightness, is in Jesus Christ, ‘the effulgence of His glory and the express image of His person.’ For the central blaze of God’s glory is God’s love, and that rises to its highest degree in the name and mission of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Men conceive of the glory of the divine nature as lying in the attributes which separate it most widely from our impotent, limited, changeable, and fleeting being. God conceives of His highest glory as being in that love, of which the love of earth is kindred spark; and whatever else there may be of majestic and magnificent in Him, the heart of the Divinity is a heart of love.

Brethren, if we would see God, our faith must grasp the Man, the Christ, the Lord, and, as climax of all names — the Incarnate God, the Eternal Word, who has come among us to reveal to us men the glory of the Lord.

So, brethren, let us make sure that the fleshy tables of our hearts are not like the mouldering stones that antiquarians dig up on some historical site, bearing has obliterated inscriptions and ‘fragmentary names of mighty kings of long ago, but bearing the many-syllabled Name written firm, clear, legible, complete upon them, as on some

granite block from the stone-cutter's chisel. Let us, whilst we cling with human love to the Man 'that was born in Bethlehem, discern the Christ that was prophesied from of old, to whom all altars point, of whom all prophets spoke, who was the theme end of all the earlier Revelation. Let us crown Him Lord of All in our own hearts, and let us, beholding in Him the glory of the Father, He in His Light until we are changed into the same image. Be sure that your faith is a full-orbed faith; grasp all the many sides of the Name that is above every name.

And let us, like the apostles of old, rejoice if we are counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name. Let us go forth into life for the sake of the Name, and, whatsoever we do in word or deed, let us do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Glory.

James 2:14-23--FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

'What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works! can faith save him! 15. If a brother or sister Be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16. And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit! 17. Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 18. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. 19. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also Believe, and tremble. 20. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead! 21. Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar! 22. Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect! 23. And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.' — James 2:14-23.

JAMES thrice reiterates his point in this passage, and each repetition closes a branch of his argument. In verse 17 he draws the inference from his illustration of a worthy sympathy which does nothing; in verse 20 he deduces the same conclusion from the speech put into the mouth of an imaginary speaker; in verse 24 he draws it from the life of Abraham. We shall best get hold of the scope of these verse, by taking them three parts separately.

I. Now, most misconceptions of a writer's meaning are due to imperfect definition of terms. James was no metaphysician, and he does not stop to put precisely what he means by 'faith.' Clearly he meant by it the full evangelical meaning of trust when he used it in the earlier part of the letter (James 1:3, 6; 2:1-5). As clearly he here means a mere intellectual belief of religious truth, a barren orthodoxy. If that undeniable explanation of his terminology is kept steadily in view, much of the difficulty which has been found in bringing his teaching into harmony with Paul's melts away at once. There is a distinct difference of tone and point of view between the two, but they entirely agree in the worthlessness of such a 'faith,' if faith it can be called. Probably Paul would not have called it so, but James accepts the 'saying' of the man whom he is confuting, and consents to call his purely intellectual-belief faith. And then he crushes it to atoms as hollow and worthless, in which process Paul would gladly have lent a hand.

We may observe that verse 14 begins with supposing the case of a mere lip 'faith,' while verse 17 widens its conclusion to include not only that, but any 'faith,' however real, which does not lead to works. The logic of the passage would, perhaps, hang better together if verse 14 had run 'if a man have faith'; but there is keen irony as well as truth in the suggestion that a faith which has no deeds often has abundant talk. The people who least live their creeds are not seldom the people who shout loudest about them. The pars-lysis which affects the arms does not, in these cases, interfere with the tongue. James had seen plenty of that kind of faith, both among

Pharisees and Jewish Christians, and he had a holy horror of loose tongues (James 3:2-12). That kind of faith is not extinct yet, and we need to urge James's question quite as much as he did: 'Can that faith save?' Observe the emphasis on 'that' which the Revised Version rightly gives.

The homely illustration of the very tender sympathy which gushes inwards, and does nothing to clothe naked backs or fill empty stomachs, perhaps has a sting in it, Possibly the very orthodox Jewish Christians with whom James is contending were less willing to help poor brethren than were the Gentile Christians.

But, in any case, there is no denying the force of the parallel. Sympathy, like every other emotion, is meant to influence action. If it does not, what is the use of it? What is the good of getting up fire in the furnace, and making a mighty roaring of steam, if it all escapes at the waste-pipe, and drives no wheels? And what is the good of a 'faith' which only rushes out at the escape-pipe of talk? It is 'dead in itself.' Romans 2:17-29 shows Paul's way of putting the same truth. Emotion and beliefs which do not shape conduct are worthless Faith, if it have not works, is dead.

II. The same conclusion is arrived at by another road in verses 18-20. James introduces an imaginary speaker, who replies to the man who says that he has faith. This new interlocutor 'says' his say too. But he is not objecting, as has been sometimes thought, to James, but to the first speaker, and he is expressing James's own thought, which the Apostle does not utter in his own person, perhaps because he would avoid the appearance of boasting of his own deeds. To take this speaker as opposing James brings hopeless confusion,

What does the new speaker say? He takes up the first one's assertion of having 'faith'; he will not say that he himself has it, but he challenges the other man to show his, if he can, by any other way than by exhibiting the fruits of faith, while he himself is prepared

and content to be tested by the same test. That is to say, talk does not prove the possession of faith; the only possible demonstration that one has it is deeds, which are its fruits. If a man has (true) faith, it will mould his conduct. If he has nothing to produce but his bare assertion, then he cannot show it at all; and if no evidence of its existence is forthcoming, it does not exist.

Motion is the test of life. A 'faith' which does nothing, which moves no limb, is a corpse. On the other hand, if grapes grow ruddy and sweet in their clusters, there must be a vine on which they grow, though its stem and root may be unseen. 'What is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh.' True faith will be fruitful. Is not this Paul's doctrine too? Does not he speak of 'faith that worketh by love?' Is it not his principle, too, that faith is the source of conduct, the active principle of the Christian life, and that if there are no results of it in the life, there is none of it in the heart?

But the second speaker has a sharp dart of irony in his quiver (verse 13). 'You plume yourself on your monotheistic creed, do you, and you think that that is enough to make you a child of God's? Well, that is good, as far as it goes, but it does not go very far. You have companions in it, for the demons believe it still more thoroughly than you do; and, what is more, it produces more effect on them than on you. You do nothing in consequence of your belief; they shudder, at any rate — a grim result, but one showing that their belief goes deeper than yours. The arrow gains in point and keenness if we observe that James quotes the very words which are contained in the great profession of monotheism which was recited morning and evening by every Jew (Deuteronomy 6:4, etc.). James seems, in verse 20, to speak again in his own name, and to reassert his main thought as enforced by this second argument.

III. He has been arguing from the very nature of faith, and the relation between it and conduct. Now he turns to history and appeals to Abraham's case. In these verses he goes over the same ground as

Paul does in Romans 5., and there is a distinct verbal contradiction between verse 24 here and

Romans 3:28; but it is only verbal. Are the two apostles writing in ignorance of each other's words, or does the one refer to the other, and, if so, which is the earlier? These are interesting questions, to deal with which satisfactorily would more than exhaust our space.

No doubt the case of Abraham was a commonplace in rabbinical teaching, and both Paul and James had been accustomed to hear his history commented upon and tortured in all sorts of connections. The mere reference to the patriarch is no proof of either writer having known of the other; but the manner of it raises a presumption in that direction, and if either is referring to the other, it is easier to understand Paul if he is alluding to James, than James as alluding to Paul.

Their apparent disagreement is only apparent. For what are the 'works' to which James ascribes justifying power? Verse 22 distinctly answers the question. They are acts which spring from faith, and which in turn, as being its fruits, 'perfect' it, as a tree is perfect when it has manifested its maturity by bearing. Surely Paul's doctrine is absolutely identical with this. He too held that, on the one hand, faith creates work, and on the other, works perfect faith. The works which Paul declares are valueless, and which he calls 'the works of the law,' are not those which James asserts 'justify.' The faith which James brands as worthless is not that which Paul proclaims as the condition of justifying; the one is a mere assent to a creed, the other is a living trust in a living Person.

James points to the sacrifice of Isaac as 'justifying' Abraham, and has in mind the divine eulogium, 'Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me,' but he distinctly traces that transcendent act of an unquestioning devotion to the 'faith' which wrought with it, and was perfected by it. He quotes the earlier divine declaration (Genesis

15:6) as ‘fulfilled’ at that later time, By which very expression is implied, not only that the root of the sacrifice was faith, but that the words were true in a yet higher sense and completer degree, when that sacrifice had ‘perfected’ the patriarch’s faith.

The ultimate conclusion in verse 24 has to be read in the light of these considerations, and then it appears plainly that there is no contradiction in fact between the two apostles. ‘The argument.., has no bearing on St.

Paul’s doctrine, its purport being, in the words of John Bunyan, to insist that "at the day of doom men shall be judged according to their fruit." It will not be said then, Did you believe? but, Were you doers or talkers only?’ (Mayor, *Epistle of St.. James*, LXXXVIII).

No doubt, the two men look at the truth from a somewhat different standpoint. The one is intensely practical, the other goes deeper. The one fixes his eye on the fruits, the other digs down to the root. To the one the flow of the river is the more prominent; to the other, the fountain from which it rises, But they supplement, and do not contradict, each other. A shrewd old Scotsman once criticised an elaborate ‘Harmony’ of the Gospels, by the remark that the author had ‘spent a heap of pains in making four men agree that had never cast [fallen] out.’ We may say the same of many laborious reconciliations of James, the urgent preacher of Christian righteousness, and Paul, the earnest proclaimer that ‘a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.’

James 2:23--GOD’S FRIENDS

He was called the Friend of God. — James 2:23.

When and by whom was he so called? There are two passages in the Old Testament in which an analogous designation is applied to the patriarch, but probably the name was one in current use amongst the people, and expressed in a summary fashion the impression that had

been made by the history of Abraham's life. A sweet fate to have that as the brief record of a character, and to be known throughout the ages by such an epitaph. As many of us are aware, this name, 'the Friend,' has displaced the proper name, Abraham, on the Lips of all Mohammedan people to this day; and the city of Hebron, where his corpse lies, is commonly known simply as 'the Friend.'

'My object in this sermon is a very simple one. I merely wish to bring out two or three of the salient elements and characteristics of friendship as exercised on the human level, and to use these as a standard and test of our religion and relation to God.

But I may just notice, for a moment, how beautiful and blessed a thought it is which underlies this and similar representations of Scripture — viz., that the bond which unites us to God is the very same as that which most sweetly and strongly ties men to one another, and that, after all, religion is nothing more or less than the transference to Him of the emotions which make all the sweetness of human life and society.

Now, I shall try to bring out two or three points which are included in that name, 'the Friend of God,' and to ask ourselves if they apply to our relations to Him.

I. First, friends trust and love one another.

Mutual confidence is the mortar which binds the stones in society together, into a building. It makes the difference between the herding together of beasts and the association of men. No community could keep together for an hour without mutual confidence, even in regard of the least intimate relationships of life. But it is the very life-blood of friendship. You cannot say, 'A.B. is my friend, but I do not trust him.' If suspicion creeps in, like the foul malaria of tropical swamps, it kills all friendship. Therefore 'he was called the Friend of God' is by James deduced from the fact that 'he believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness.' You

cannot make a friend of a man that you do not know where to have. There may be some vague reverence of, or abject reluctant submission to, 'the unknown God,' the something outside of ourselves that perhaps makes for righteousness; but for any vivid, warm throb of friendship there must be, first, a clear knowledge, and then a living grappling of that knowledge to my very heart, by my faith. Unless I trust God I cannot be a friend of God's. If you and I are His friends we trust Him, and He will trust us. For this friendship is not one-sided, and the name, though it may be ambiguous as to whether it means one whom I love or one who loves me, really includes both persons to the compact; and there are analogous, if not identical, emotions in each. So that, if I trust God, I may be sure that God trusts me, and, in His confidence, leaves a great deal to me; and so ennobles and glorifies me by His reliance upon me.

But whilst we know that this belief in God was the very nerve and centre of Abraham's whole character, and was the reason why he was called the friend of God, we must also remember that, as James insists upon here, it was no mere idle assent, no mere intellectual conviction that God could not tell lies, which was dignified by the name of belief, but that it was, as James insists upon in the context, a trust which proved itself to be valid, because it was continually operative in the life. 'Faith without works is dead.' 'And Abraham, our father, was he not justified by works?'

And so the Epistle to the Hebrews, if you will remember, traces up to his faith all the chief points in his life. 'By faith he went out from the land where he dwelt; by faith he dwelt in tabernacles,' in the promised land, believing that it should be his and his seed's; 'by faith' he offered up his son on the altar.

Thus we come to this, that the heavenly and the earthly friend, like friends on the low levels of humanity, love each other because they trust each other, I have said that the words 'My friend' may either mean one whom I love or one who loves me, but that the two things

are in the present connection inseparable. Only let us remember where the sweet reciprocation and interchange of love begins. 'We love Him because He first loved us.' 'When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.' And so we have to turn to that heavenly Friend, and feel that as life itself, so the love which is the life of life, has its beginning in

Him, and that never would our hearts have turned themselves from their alienation, unless there had poured down upon them the attractive outflow of His great love. It was an old fancy that, wherever a tree was struck by lightning, all its tremulous foliage turned in the direction from which the bolt had come. When the merciful flash of God's great love strikes a heart, then all its tendrils turn to the source of the life-giving light, and we love back again, in sweet reverberation to the primal and original love. Dear brethren, I lay upon your heart and mine this thought, that friends trust and love each other. Do we trust and love our God?

II. Friends have frank, familiar intercourse with one another.

Let us turn to the illuminative example in our text, and remember God's frankness with Abraham. 'Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I will do?' Let us cap that-as we can, marvellous and great as the utterance is — by another one, 'I call you not servants, but friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I declare unto you.' So much for God's frankness. What about Abraham's frankness with God? Remember how he remonstrated with Him; how he complained to Him of His dealings; how he persisted with importunity, which would have been presumptuous but for the friendship which underlay it, and warranted the bold words. And let us take the simple lesson that if we are friends and lovers of God, we shall delight in intercourse with Him. It is a strange kind of religion that does not care to be with God, that would rather think about anything else than about Him, that is all unused to quiet, solitary conversation and communion with Him, but it is the religion of, I

wonder, how many of us to-day. He would be a strange friend that never crossed your threshold if you could help it; that was evidently uncomfortable in your presence, and ill at ease till he got away from you, and that when he came was struck dumb, and had not a word to say for himself, and did not know or feel that he and you had any interests or subjects in common. Is that not a good deal like the religion of hosts of professing Christians? 'He was called the friend of God,' and he never, all his days, if he could help it, thought about Him or went near Him!

If we are friends of God, we shall have no secrets from Him. There are very few of those who are dearest to us to whom we could venture to lay bare all the depths of our hearts. There are black things down in the cellars that we do not like to show to any of our friends. We receive them upstairs, in the rooms for company. But you should take God all through the house. And if there is the trust and the love that I have been speaking about, we shall not be afraid to spread out all our foulness, and our meanness, and our unworthy thoughts of, and acts towards, Him, before His 'pure eyes and perfect judgment,' and say, 'Nobody but my best friend could look at such a dunghheap, but I spread it before Thee. Look at it, and Thou wilt cleanse it; look at it, and it will melt away. Look at it, and in the knowledge that Thou knowest, my knowledge of it will be less of a torment, and my bosom will be cleansed of its perilous stuff.'

Tell God all, if you mean to be a friend of His. And do not be afraid to tell Him your harsh thoughts of Him, and your complaints of Him. He never resents anything that a man who loves Him says about Him, if he says it to Him. What He resents — if I might use the word — is our huddling up grudges and murmurings and questionings in our own hearts, and saying never a word to the friend against whom they offend. Out with it all, brethren! Complaints, regrets, questionings, petitions, hot wishes, take them all to Him; and be sure that instead of their breaking, they will, if

spoken, cement the friendship which is disturbed by secrecy on our parts.

If we are God's lovers, He will have no secrets from us. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant.' There is a strange wisdom and insight, sometimes amounting even to prophetic anticipation, which creeps into a simple heart that is knit closely to God. But whether the result of our friendship with Him be such communication of such kinds of insight or no, we may be sure of this, that, if we trust Him, and love Him, and are frank with Him, He will in so far be frank with us, that He will impart unto us Himself, and in the knowledge of His love we shall find all the knowledge that we need.

III. Friends delight to meet each other's wishes.

Let us go back to our story again. The humble, earthly friend of God did as God bade him, substantially all his life, from the day when he made the 'Great Refusal,' and left behind him home and kindred and all, until the day when he went up the sides of Moriah to offer there his son. Abraham met God's wishes because Abraham trusted and loved God.

And what about the Divine Friend? Did He not meet Abraham's wishes? You remember that wonderful scene, which presents, in such vivid and dramatic form, the everlasting truth that the man who bows his will to God, bows God's will to his, when he pleaded for Sodom, and won his case by persistence and importunity of lowly prayer. And these historical notices on both sides are for us the vehicles of the permanent truth that, if we are God's lovers and friends, we shall find nothing sweeter than bowing to His will and executing His commandments. As I dare say I have often said to you, the very mark and signature of love is that it delights to divine and fulfil the desires of the beloved, and that it moulds the will of each of the parties into conformity with the will of the other.

Ah, dear brethren I what a commentary our religion is. upon such thoughts! To how many of us is the very notion of religion that of a prohibition of things that we would much like to do, and of commands to do things that we had much rather not do? All the slavery of abject submission, of reluctant service, is clean swept away, when we understand that friendship and love find their supreme delight in discovering and in executing the will of the beloved. And surely if you and I are the friends of God, the cold words, ‘duty,’ ‘must,’ ‘should,’ will be struck out of our

vocabulary and will be replaced by ‘delight,’ ‘cannot but; ‘will.’ For friends find the very life — I was going to say the voice-of their friendship in mutual obedience.

And God, the heavenly Friend, will do what we wish. In that very connection did Jesus Christ put the two thoughts of friendship with Him and His executing His disciple’s behests; saying in one breath, ‘Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you,’ and in the next, ‘Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.’ This conformity of will, so that there is but one will in, the two hearts, which is the very consummation and superlative degree of human friendship and love, applies as truly to the friendship between man and God.

IV. Friends give gifts to each other.

Let us go back to our story. What did Abraham give God? ‘Forasmuch as he hath not withheld his only son from Me, I know that he fears Me.’ And what does God give to His friends? ‘He that spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up to the death for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?’ Abraham’s gift of his son to God was but a feeble shadow of God’s gift of His Son to men. And if the surrender on the part of the human friend was the infallible token of his love, surely the surrender on the part of the heavenly Friend is no less the infallible sign of His

love to all the world. Generalise these thoughts and they come to this.

If we are God's lovers God will give us Himself, in so far as we can receive Him; and all other gifts in so far as they are good and needful. If we are God's friends and lovers we shall give Him, in glad surrender, our whole selves. And, remember, if you feel that you have separate interests from Him, if you keep things and do not let Him say, 'These are mine'; if you grudge sacrifice, and will not hear of self-surrender, and are living lives centred in, ruled by, devoted to, self, you have little reason to call yourself a Christian. 'Ye are My friends if ye' — not only 'do whatsoever I command you,' but 'if you give yourself to Me.' Yield yourselves to God, and in the giving of yourselves to Him, you will get back yourselves glorified and blessed by the gift. There is no friendship if self shuts out the friend from participation in what is the other's. As long as 'mine' lies on this side of a high wall, and 'thine' on the other, there is but little friendship. Down with the wall, and say about everything 'Ours'; and then you have a right to say 'I am the friend of God.'

V. Lastly, and but a word. Friends stand up for each other.

'I am thy shield; fear not, Abraham,' said God, when His friend was in danger from the vengeance of the Eastern kings whom he had defeated; and all through life the same strong arm was cast around him. Abraham, on his part, had to stand up for God amidst his heathen neighbours.

If we are God's 'friends and lovers He will take up our cause. Be sure that if God be for us, it matters not who is against us. If we are God's friends and lovers we have to take up His cause. What would you think of a man who, in going away to a far-off country, said to some friend, 'I wish you would look after so and so for me as long as I am gone'; and the friend would say 'Yes!' and never give a thought nor lift a finger to discharge the obligation? God trusts His reputation to you Christian people; He has interests in this world that

you have to look after. You have to defend Him as really as He has to defend you. And it is the dreadful contradiction of religious people's profession of religion that they often care so little, and do so little to promote the cause, to defend the name, to adorn the reputation, and to further what I may venture to call the interests, of their heavenly Friend in the world.

Dear brother, looking at these things, can you venture to say that you are a friend of God? If you cannot, what are you? Our relations to men admit of our dividing them into three — friends, enemies, nothings. We may love, we may hate, we may be absolutely indifferent and ignorant. I am afraid the three states cannot be transferred exactly to our relations to God. If not His friend, what are you? Have you only a far-off, bowing acquaintance with Him? Well, then, that is because you have neglected, if you have not spurned, His offered friendship. And, oh! how much you have lost! No human heart is a millionth part so sweet, and so capable of satisfying you as God's. All friendship here has its limits, its changes, its end. God's is boundless, immutable, eternal. All things are the friends of God's friend; and all things are arrayed against him who rejects God's friendship.

I beseech you, let Him woo you to love Him; and yield your hearts to Him. 'If when we were "enemies," we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son,' much more, being friends, all the fulness of His love and the sweetness of His heart will be poured upon us through the living Christ.

James 3:1-15--A WATCH ON THE DOOR OF THE LIPS

'My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. 2; For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. 3. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. 4. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven

of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. 5. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things, Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! 6. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell 7. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind. 8. But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 9 Therewith bless we God, even, the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. 10. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. 11. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place Sweet water and bitter! 12. Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries! either a vine. figs ! so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. 13. Who hi a wise man and endued with knowledge among you! let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.’ — James 3:1-15,

‘THERE is a recurrence to earlier teaching in James 1:19, 26, which latter verse suggests the figure of the bridle. James has drunk deep into Old Testament teaching as to the solemn worth of speech, and into Christ’s declaration that by their words men will be justified or condemned.

No doubt, Eastern peoples are looser tongued than we Westerns are; but modern life, with its great development of cities and its swarm of newspapers and the like, has heightened the power of spoken and printed words, and made James’s exhortations even more necessary. His teaching *here* gathers round several images- the bridle, the fire, the untamed creature, the double fountain. We deal with these in order.

I. No doubt, in the infant Church, with its flexible organisation, there were often scenes very strange to our eyes, such as Paul hints

at in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33, where many voices of would-be teachers contended for a hearing. James would check that unwholesome eagerness by the thought that teachers who do not practice what they preach will receive a heavier judgment than those who did not set up to be instructors. He humbly classes himself with the teachers. The ‘for’ of verse 2 introduces a reason for the advice in verse 1 — since it is hard to avoid falls, and harder in respect to speech than action, it is a dangerous ambition to be a teacher.

That thought leads on to the series of considerations as to the government of the tongue. He who can completely keep it under command is a ‘perfect’ man, because the difficulty of doing so is so great that the attainment of it is a test of perfection. James is like the Hebrew prophets, in that he does not so much argue as illustrate. His natural speech is imagery, and here he pours out a stream of it. The horse’s bridle and the ship’s rudder may be taken together as both illustrating the two points that the tongue guides the body, and that it is intended that the man should guide the tongue. These two ideas are fused together here. The bridle is put into the mouth, and what acts on the mouth influences the direction of the horse’s course. The rudder is but a little bit of wood, hut its motion turns the great ship, even when driven by wild winds. ‘So the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things,’ which boasting is not false, for the whole point of the passage is that that little member has large power.

Is it true, as James says, that it governs our actions as the bridle does the horse, *Or* the rudder the ship? No doubt, many sins go straight from the inner chambers of the heart’s desires out into the world of action without going round by the way of speech; but still, if we think of the immense power of our own words and of others in setting our activities in motion, of the dreadful harvest of sin which has of ten sprung from one tempting word, of the ineffaceable traces of pollution which some vile book leaves in memory and heart, of the good and evil which have been wrought by spoken *or* printed words, and that never more truly than to-day, when a flood of talk

all but drowns the world, we shall not think James exaggerating in the awful weight he gives to speech as the mother of action.

His other point is that this guiding power needs guidance. A firm yet gentle hand touches the rein, and the sensitive mouth yields to the light pressure. The steerman's hand pushes or draws the tiller an inch from or towards him, and the huge vessel yaws accordingly. Speech is often loose. Most men set less careful watch on the door of their lips than of their actions; but it would be wiser to watch the inner gate, which leads from thought to speech, than the outer one, which leads from speech to act. Idle words, rash words, unconsidered words, free-flowing words, make up much of our conversation. 'His tongue ran away with him' is too often true. It is hard but possible, and it is needful, to guide the helm, to keep a tight hand on the reins.

II. The next figure is that of the fire, suggested by the illustration of the small spark which sets a great forest ablaze. Drop a match or a spark from a locomotive or a pipe in the prairie grass, and we know what comes. The illustration was begun to carry on the contrast between the small member and its great results; but James catches fire, and goes off after the new suggestion, 'The tongue is a fire.'

Our space forbids discussing the interpretation of the difficult verse 6, but the general bearing of it is clean. It reiterates under a fresh figure the thought of the preceding verses as to the power of the tongue to set the whole body in motion. Only the imagery is more lurid, and suggests more fatal issues from an unhallowed tongue's influence. It 'defileth the whole body.' Foul speech, heard in schools or places of business, read in filthy books, heard in theatres, has polluted many a young life, and kindled fires which have destroyed a man, body and soul. Speech is like the axle which, when it gets heated, sets the wheel on fire. And what comes of the train then? And what set the axle ablaze? The sulphurous flames from the pit of Gehenna. No man who knows life, especially among young boys

and young men, will think that James has lost the government of *his* tongue in speaking thus.

III. Next comes the figure of the untamable wild beast. We need not pin James down to literal accuracy any more than to scientific classification in his zoology. His general statement is true enough for his purpose, for man has long ago tamed, and still continues to use as tamed, a crowd of animals of most diverse sorts, fierce and meek, noxious and harmless.

But, says James, in apparent contradiction to himself, there is one creature that resists all such efforts. Then what is the sense of your solemn exhortations, James, if 'the tongue can no man tame'? In that case he who is able to bridle it must be more than a perfect man. Yes, James believed that, though he says little about it. He would have us put emphasis on 'no man.' Man's impossibilities are Christ's actualities. So we have here to fall back on James's earlier word, 'If any of you lack,... let him ask of God,... and it shall be given him.' The position of 'man' in the Greek is emphatic, and suggests that the thought of divine help is present to the Apostle.

He adds a characterisation of the tongue, which fits in with his image of an untamable brute: 'It is a restless evil,' like some caged but unsubdued wild animal, ever pacing uneasily up and down its den; 'full of deadly poison,' like some captured rattlesnake. The venom spurted out by a calumnious tongue is more deadly than any snake poison. Blasphemous words, or obscene words, shot into the blood by one swift dart of the fangs, may corrupt its whole current, and there is no Pasteur to expel the virus.

IV. The last image, that of the fountain, is adduced to illustrate the strange inconsistencies of men, as manifested in their speech. Words of prayer and words of cursing come from the same lips. No doubt these hot tempered, and sometimes ferociously religious, Jewish Christians, to whom James speaks, had some among them whose portraits James is drawing here. 'Away with such a fellow from the

earth!' is a strange sequel to 'Blessed be he, the God of our fathers.' But the combination has often been heard since. To Deums and anathemas have succeeded one another in strange union, and religious controversy has not always been conducted with perfect regard to James's precepts.

Of course when the Apostle gibbets the grotesque inconsistency of such a union, he is not to be taken as allowing cursing, if it only keeps clear of 'blessing God.' Since the latter is the primary duty of all, and the highest exercise of the great gift of speech, anything inconsistent with it is absolutely forbidden, and to show the inconsistency is to condemn the act.

Further, the assertion that 'salt water cannot yield sweet' implies that the 'cursing' destroys the reality of the verbal 'blessing God.' If a man says both, the imprecation is his genuine voice, and the other is mere wind.

The fountain is deeper than the tongue. From the heart are the issues of life. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and clear, pure waters will not well out thence unless the heart has been cleansed by Christ entering into it. Only when that tree of life is cast into the waters are they made sweet. When Christ governs us, we can govern our hearts and our lips, and through these our whole bodies and all their activities.

I. PETER

1 Peter i. 1— SOJOURNERS OF THE DISPERSION

'Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered ...'—1 Peter i. 1.

The words rendered 'strangers scattered' are literally 'sojourners of the Dispersion,' and are so rendered in the Revised Version. The Dispersion was the recognised name for the Jews dwelling in

Gentile countries; as, for instance, it is employed in John's Gospel, when the people in Jerusalem say, 'Whither will this man go that we shall not find Him? Will he go to the Dispersion amongst the Greeks?' Obviously, therefore the word here may refer to the scattered Jewish people, but the question arises whether the letter corresponds to its apparent address, or whether the language which is employed in it does not almost oblige us to see here a reference, not to the Jew, but to the whole body of Christian people, who, whatever may be their outward circumstances, are, in the deepest sense, in the foundations of their life, if they be Christ's, 'strangers of the Dispersion.'

Now if we look at the letter we find such words as these—'The times of your ignorance'—'your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers'—'in time past were not a people'—'the time past may suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles'—all of which, as you see, can only be accommodated to Jewish believers by a little gentle violence, but all of which find a proper significance if we suppose them addressed to Gentiles, to whom they are only applicable in the higher sense of the words to which I have referred. If we understand them so, we have here an instance of what runs all through the letter; the taking hold of Jewish ideas for the purpose of lifting them into a loftier region, and transfiguring them into the expression of Christian truth. For example, we read in it: 'Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation'; and again: 'Ye are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices.' These and other similar passages are instances of precisely the same transference of Jewish ideas as I find, in accordance with many good commentators, in the words of my text.

So, then, here is Peter's notion of—

I. What the Christian Life is.

All those who really have faith in Jesus Christ are 'strangers of the Dispersion'; scattered throughout the world, and dwelling

dispersedly in an order of things to which they do not belong, 'seeking a city which hath foundations.' The word 'strangers' means, originally, persons for a time living in an alien city. And that is the idea that the Apostle would impress upon us as true for each of us, in the measure in which our Christianity is real. For, remember, although all men may be truly spoken of as being 'pilgrims and sojourners upon the earth' by reason of both the shortness of the duration of their earthly course and the disproportion between their immortal part and the material things amongst which they dwell, Peter is thinking of something very different from either the brevity of earthly life or the infinite necessities of an immortal spirit when he calls his Christian brethren strangers. Not because we are men, not because we are to die soon, and the world is to outlast us; not because other people will one day live in our houses and read our books and sit upon our chairs, and we shall be forgotten, but because we are Christ's people are we here sojourners, and must regard this as not our rest. Not because our immortal soul cannot satisfy itself, however it tries, upon the trivialities of earth any more than a human appetite can on the husks that the swine do eat, but because new desires, tastes, aspirations, affinities, have been kindled in us by the new life that has flowed into us; therefore the connection that other men have with the world, which makes some of them altogether 'men of the world, whose portion is in this life,' is for us broken, and we are strangers, scattered abroad, solitary, not by reason of the inevitable loneliness in which, after all love and companionship, every soul lives; not by reason of losses or deaths, but by reason of the contrariety between the foundation of our lives, and the foundation of the lives of the men round us; therefore we stand lonely in the midst of crowds; strangers in the ordered communities of the world.

Ah, there is no solitude so utter as the solitude of being the only man in a crowd that has a faith in his heart, and there is no isolating power like the power of rending all ties that true attachment with Jesus Christ has. 'Think not that I am come to bring peace on earth,

but a sword'—to set a man against his own household, if they be not of the household of faith. These things are the inevitable issues of religion—to make us strangers, isolated in the midst of this world.

And now let us think of—

II. Some of the plain consequent duties that arise from this characteristic of the Christian Life.

Let me put them in the shape of one or two practical counsels. First let us try to keep up, vivid and sharp, a sense of separation. I do not mean that we should withdraw ourselves from sympathies, nor from services, nor from the large area of common ground which we have with our fellows, whether they be Christians or no—with our fellow-citizens; with those who are related to us by various bonds, by community of purpose, of aim, of opinion, or of affection. But just as Abraham was willing to go down into the plain and fight for Lot, though he would not go down and live in Sodom, and just as he would enter into relations of amity with the men of the land, and yet would not abandon his black camels'-hair tent, pitched beneath the terebinth tree, in order to go into their city and abide with them, so one great part of the wisdom of a Christian man is to draw the line of separation decisively, and yet to keep true to the bond of union. Unless Christian people do make a distinct effort to keep themselves apart from the world and its ways, they will get confounded with these, and when the end comes they will be destroyed with them.

Sometimes voyagers find upon some lonely island an English castaway, who has forgotten home, and duty, and everything else, to luxuriate in an easy life beneath tropical skies, and has degraded himself to the level of the savage islanders round him. There are professing Christians—perhaps in my audience—who, like that poor castaway, have 'forgotten the imperial palace whence they came,' and have gone down and down and down, to live the fat, contented, low lives of the men who find their good upon earth and not in heaven. Do you, dear brethren, try to keep vivid the sense that you

belong to another community. As Paul puts it, with a metaphor drawn from Gentile instead of from Jewish life, as in our text, 'Our citizenship is in heaven.' Philippi, to the Christian Church of which that was said, was a Roman colony; and the characteristics of a Roman colony were that the inhabitants were enrolled as members of the Roman tribes, and had their names on the register of Rome, and were governed by its laws. So we, living here in an outlying province, have our names written in the 'Golden Book' of the citizens of the new Jerusalem. Do not forget, if I might use a very homely illustration, what parish your settlement is in; remember what kingdom you belong to.

Again, if we are strangers of the Dispersion, let us live by our own country's laws, and not by the codes that are current in this foreign land where we are settled for a time. You remember what was the complaint of the people in Persia to Esther's king? 'There is a people whose laws are different from all the peoples that be upon the earth.' That was an offence that could not be tolerated in a despotism that ground everything down to the one level of a slavish uniformity. It will be well for us Christian people if men look at us, and say, 'Ah, that man has another rule of conduct from the one that prevails generally. I wonder what is the underlying principle of his life; it evidently is not the same as mine.'

Live by our King's law. People in our colonies, at least the officials, set wonderful store by the approbation of the Colonial Office at home. It does not matter what the colonial newspapers say, it is 'what will they say in Downing Street?' And if a despatch goes out approving of their conduct, neighbours may censure and sneer as they list. So we Christians have to report to Home, and have so to live 'that whether present or absent'—in a colony or in the mother country—'we may be well pleasing unto Him.'

Keep up the honour and advance the interests of your own country. You are here, among other reasons, to represent your King, and

people take their notions of Him very considerably from their experience of you. So see to it that you live like the Master whom you say you serve.

The Russian Government sends out what are called military colonies, studded along the frontier, with the one mission of extending the empire. We are set along the frontier with the same mission. The strangers are scattered. Congested, they would be less useful; dispersed, they may push forward the frontiers. Seed in a seed-basket is not in its right place; but sown broadcast over the field, it will be waving wheat in a month or two. 'Ye are the salt of the earth'—salt is *sprinkled* over what it is intended to preserve. You are the strangers of the Dispersion, that you may be the messengers of the Evangelisation.

Lastly, let us be glad when we think, and let us often think, of—

III. The Home in Glory.

That is a beautiful phrase which pairs off with the one in my text, in which another Apostle speaks of the ultimate end as 'our gathering together in Christ.' All the scattered ones, like chips of wood in a whirlpool, drift gradually closer and closer, until they unite in a solid mass in the centre. So at the last the 'strangers' are to be brought and settled in their own land, and their lonely lives are to be filled with happy companionship, and they to be in a more blessed unity than now. 'Fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God.' If we, dwelling in this far-off land, were habitually to talk, as Australians do of coming to England of 'going home,' though born in the colony, it would be a glad day for us when we set out on the journey. If Christian people lived more by faith, as they profess to do, and less by sight, they would oftener think of the home-coming and the union; and would be happy when they thought that they were here but for awhile, and when they realised these two blessed elements of permanence and of companionship, which another

Apostle packs into one sentence, along with that which is greater than them both, 'so shall we ever be with the Lord.'

1 Peter i. 5— BY, THROUGH, UNTO

'... Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.'—1 Peter i. 5.

The Revised Version substitutes 'guarded' for 'kept,' and the alteration, though slight, is important, for it not only more accurately preserves the meaning of the word employed, but it retains the military metaphor which is in it. The force of the expression will appear if I refer, in a sentence, to other cases in which it is employed in the New Testament. For instance, we read that the governor of Damascus '*kept* the city with a garrison,' which is the same word, and in its purely metaphorical usage Paul employs it when he says that 'the peace of God shall keep'—guard, garrison—'your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.' We have to think of some defenceless position, some unwalled village out in the open, with a strong force round it, through which no assailant can break, and in the midst of which the weakest can sit secure. Peter thinks that every Christian has assailants whom no Christian by himself can repel, but that he may, if he likes, have an impregnable ring of defence drawn round him, which shall fling back in idle spray the wildest onset of the waves, as a breakwater or a cliff might do.

Then there is another very beautiful and striking point to be made, and that is the connection between the words of my text and those immediately preceding. The Apostle has been speaking about 'the inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away,' and he says 'it is reserved in Heaven for you who are kept.' So, then, the same power is working on both sides of the veil, preserving the inheritance for the heirs, and preserving the heirs for the inheritance. It will not fail them, and they will not miss it. It were of little avail

to care for either of the two members separately, but the same hand that is preparing the inheritance and making it ready for the owners is round about the pilgrims, and taking care of them till they get home.

So, then, our Apostle is looking at this keeping in three aspects, suggested by his three words 'by,' 'through,' 'unto,' which respectively express the real cause or power, the condition or occasion on which that power works, and the end or purpose to which it works. So these three little words will do for lines on which to run our thoughts now—"by," 'through,' 'for.'

I. In the first place, what are we guarded for?

'Guarded ... unto salvation.' Now that great word 'salvation' was a new and strange one to Peter's readers—so new and strange that probably they did not understand it in its full nobleness and sweep. Our understanding of it, or, at least, our impression of it, is weakened by precisely the opposite cause. It has become so tarnished and smooth-rubbed that it creates very little definite impression. Like a bit of seaweed lifted out of the sunny waves which opened its fronds and brightened its delicate colours, it has become dry and hard and sapless and dim. But let me try for one moment to freshen it for our conceptions and our hearts. Salvation has in it the double idea of being made safe, and being made sound. Peril threatening to slay, and sickness unto death, are the implications of the conditions which this great word presupposes. The man that needs to be saved needs to be rescued from peril and needs to be healed of a disease. And if you do not know and feel that that is *you*, then you have not learned the first letters of the alphabet which are necessary to spell 'salvation.' You, I, every man, we are all sick unto death, because the poison of self-will and sin is running hot through all our veins, and we are all in deadly peril because of that poison-peril of death, peril arising from the weight of guilt that

presses upon us, peril from our inevitable collision with the Divine law and government which make for righteousness.

And so salvation means, negatively, the deliverance from all the evils, whether they be evils of sorrow or evils of sin, which can affect a man, and which do affect us all in some measure. But it means far more than that, for God's salvation is no half-and-half thing, contented, as some benevolent man might be, in a widespread flood or disaster, with rescuing the victims and putting them high up enough for the water not to reach them, and leaving them there shivering cold and starving. But when God begins by taking away evils, it is in order that He may clear a path for flooding us with good. And so salvation is not merely what some of you think it is, the escape from a hell, nor only what some of you more nobly take it to be, a deliverance from the power of sin in your hearts; but it is the investiture of each of us with every good and glory, whether of happiness or of purity, which it is possible for a man to receive and for God to give. It is the great word of the New Testament, and they do a very questionable service to humanity who weaken the grandeur and the greatness of the Scriptural conception of salvation, by weakening the darkness and the terribleness of the Scriptural conception of the dangers and the sicknesses from which it delivers.

But, then, there is another point that I would suggest raised by the words of my text in their connection. Peter is here evidently speaking about a future manifestation of absolute exemption from all the ills that flesh and spirit are heir to, and radiant investiture with all the good that humanity can put on, which lies beyond the great barrier of this mortal life. And that complete salvation, in its double aspect, is obviously the end for which all that guarding of life is lavished upon us, as it is the end for which all the discipline of life is given to us, and as it is the end for which the bitter agony and pain of the Christ on the Cross were freely rendered. But that ultimate and superlative perfection has its roots and its beginning here. And so in Scripture you find salvation sometimes regarded as a thing in

the past experience of every Christian man which he received at the very beginning of his course, and sometimes you have it treated as being progressive, running on continually through all his days; and sometimes you have it treated, as in my text, as laid up yonder, and only to be reached when life is done with. But just a verse or two after my text we read that the Christian man here, on condition of his loving Jesus Christ and believing in Him, rejoices because he here and now 'receives the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul.' And so there are the two things—the incipient germ to-day, the full-foliaged fruit-bearing tree planted in the higher house of the Lord.

These two things are inseparably intertwined. The Christian life in its imperfection here, the partial salvation of to-day demands, unless the universe is a chaos and there is no personal God the centre of it, a future life, in which all that is here tendency shall be realised possession, and in which all that here but puts up a pale and feeble shoot above the ground, shall grow and blossom and bear fruit unto life eternal. 'Like the new moon with a ragged edge, e'en in its imperfections beautiful,' all the characteristics of Christian life on earth prophesy that the orb is crescent, and will one day round itself into its pure silvery completeness. If you see a great wall in some palace, with slabs of polished marble for most of its length, and here and there stretches of course rubble shoved in, you would know that that was not the final condition, that the rubble had to be cased over, or taken out and replaced by the lucent slab that reflected the light, and showed, by its reflecting, its own mottled beauty. Thus the very inconsistencies, the thwarted desires, the broken resolutions, the aspiration that never can clothe themselves in the flesh of reality, which belong to the Christian life, declare that this is but the first stage of the structure, and point onwards to the time when the imperfections shall be swept away, 'and for brass He will bring gold, for iron He will bring silver,' and then the windows shall be set 'in agates, and the gates in carbuncles, and all the borders in pleasant

stones.' Perfect salvation is obviously the only issue of the present imperfect salvation.

That is what you are 'kept' for. That is what Christ died to bring you. That is what God, like a patient workman bringing out the pattern in his loom by many a throw of a sharp-pointed shuttle, and much twisting of the threads into patterns, is trying to make of you, and that is what Christ on the Cross has died to effect. Brethren, let us think more than we do, not only of the partial beginnings here, but of that perfect salvation for which Christian men are being 'kept' and guarded, and which, if you and I will observe the conditions, is as sure to come as that X, Y, Z follow A, B, C. That is what we are kept for.

II. Notice what we are guarded by.

'The *power* of God,' says Peter, laying hold of the most general expression that he can find, not caring to define ways and means, but pointing to the one great force that is sure to do it.

Now if we were to translate with perfect literality, we should read, not *by* the power of God, but *in* the power of God. And whilst it is quite probable that what Peter meant was 'by,' I think it adds great force and beauty to the passage, and is entirely accordant with the military metaphor, which I have already pointed out, if we keep the simple local sense of the word, and read, 'guarded *in* the power of God.' And that suggests a whole stream of Scriptural representations, both in the Old and in the New Testament. Let me recall one or two. 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe.' 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.' 'Israel shall dwell safely,' says one of the old prophets, 'in unwall'd villages, for I will be a wall of fire round about her.' The psalmist said, 'The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him.' And all these representations concur in this one thought, that we are safe, enclosed in God, and that He, by His

power, compasses us about. And so no foe can get at us who cannot break down or climb over the encircling wall of defence. An army in an enemy's country will march in hollow square, and put its most precious treasures, or its weaker members, its sick, its women, its children, its footsore, into the middle there, and with a line of lances on either side, and stalwart arms to wield them, the feeblest need fear no foe. We 'are kept in the power of God unto salvation.'

But do not forget how, far beyond the psalmist and prophet, and in something far more sublime and wonderful than a poetic figure, the New Testament catches up the same phrase, and gives us, as the condition of vitality, as the condition of fertility, as the condition of tranquillity, as the condition of security, the same thing—'in Christ.' Remember His very last words prior to His great intercessory prayer, in which He spoke about keeping those that were given Him in His name. And just before that He said to them, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Me ye shall have peace.' Kept, guarded as behind the battlements of some great fort, which has in its centre a quiet, armoured chamber into which no noise of battle, nor shout of foeman, can ever come. 'In Christ,' though the world is all in arms without, 'ye shall have peace.' 'Guarded in the power of God unto salvation.'

III. Lastly, what we are kept through.

'Through faith.' Now there we come across another of the words which we know so well that we do not understand them. You all think that it is the right thing for me to preach about 'faith.' I daresay some of you have never tried to apprehend what it means. And I daresay there are a great many of you to whom the utterance of the word suggests that I am plunging into the bathos and commonplaces of the pulpit. Perhaps, if you would try to understand it, you would find it was a bigger thing than you fancied. What is faith? I will give you another expression that has not so many theological accretions sticking to it, and which means precisely the same thing—trust. And

we all know that we do not trust with our heads, but with our hearts and wills. You may believe undoubtedly, and have no faith at all, for it is the heart and the will that go forth, and clutch at the thing trusted; or, as I should rather say, at the person trusted; for, at bottom, what we trust is always a person, and even when we 'trust to nature,' it is because, more or less clearly, we feel that somehow or other at the back of nature there is a Will and an Intelligence that are working and trustworthy. However, that is a subject that I do not need to touch upon here. Faith is trust, trust in a Person, trust that, like the fabled goddess rising, radiant and aspiring to the heavens, out of the roll of the tempestuous ocean, springs from the depths of absolute self-distrust and diffidence. There is a spurious kind of faith which has no good in it, just because it did not begin with going down into the depths of one's own heart, and finding out how rotten and hopeless everything was there. My friend, no man has a vigorous Christian faith who has not been very near utter despair. 'Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee.' The zenith, which is the highest point in the sky above us, is always just as far aloft as the nadir, which is the lowest point in the sky at the Antipodes, is beneath us. Your faith is measured by your self-despair.

Further, why is it that I must have faith in order to get God's power at work in me? Many people seem to think that faith is appointed by God as the condition of salvation out of mere arbitrary selection and caprice. Not at all. If God could save you without your faith, He would do it. He does not, because He cannot. Why must I have faith in order that God's power may keep me? Why must you open your window in order to let the fresh air in? Why must you pull up the blind in order to let the light in? Why must you take your medicine or your food if you want to be cured or nourished? Why must you pull the trigger if your revolver is to go off? Unless I trust God, distrusting myself, and the spark of faith is struck out of the rock of my heart by the sharp steel in the midst of the darkness of despair, God cannot pour out upon me His power. There is nothing arbitrary about it. It is inseparable from the very nature of the case. If you do

not want Him, you cannot have Him. If you do not know that you need Him, you cannot have Him. If you do not trust that He will come to you and help you, you will not have Him.

So then, brother, your faith, my faith, anybody's faith is nothing of itself. It is only the valve that opens and lets the steam rush in. It is only the tap you turn to let Thirlmere come into your basins. It is not you that saves yourself. It is not your faith that keeps you, any more than it is the outstretched hand with which a man, ready to stumble, grasps the hand of a stalwart, steadfast man on the pavement by his side that keeps him up. It is the other man's hand that holds you up, but it is your hand that lays hold of him. It is God that saves, it is God that guards, it is God that is able to keep us from falling, and to give us an inheritance among all them that are sanctified. He will do it if we turn to Him, and ask and expect Him to do it. If you will comply with the conditions and not else, He will fulfil His promise and accomplish His purpose. But my unbelief can thwart Omnipotence, and hinder Christ's all-loving purpose, just as on earth we read that 'He could there do no mighty works because of their unbelief.' I am sure that there are people here who all their lives long have been thus hampering Omnipotence and neutralising the love of Christ, and making His sacrifice impotent and His wish to save them vain. Stretch out your hands as this very Peter once did, crying, 'Lord, save, or I perish'; and He will answer, not by word only, but by act: 'According to thy faith be it unto thee.' Salvation, here and hereafter, is God's work alone. It cannot be exercised towards a man who has not faith. It will certainly be exercised towards any man who has.

Help us, O Lord, we beseech Thee, to live the lives which we live in the flesh by the faith of the Son of God. And may we know what it is to be in him, strengthened within the might of His spirit.

1 Peter i. 6— SORROWFUL, YET ALWAYS REJOICING

'Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.'—1 Peter i. 6.

You will remember the great saying of our Lord's in the Sermon on the Mount, in which He makes the last of the beatitudes, that which He pronounces upon His disciples, when men shall revile them and persecute them, and speak all manner of evil falsely against them for His sake, and bids them rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is their reward in Heaven.

Now it seems to me that in the words of my text there is a distinct echo of that saying of Christ's. For not only is the whole context the same, but a somewhat unusual and very strong word which our Lord employs is also employed here by Peter. 'Rejoice and be *exceeding glad*,' said Christ. 'Ye *rejoice greatly*,' said the Apostle, and he is echoing his Master's word. Then with regard to the context; Christ proposes to His followers this exceeding gladness as evoked in their hearts by the very thing that might seem to militate against it—viz., men's antagonism. Similarly, Peter, throughout this whole letter, and in my text, is heartening the disciples against impending persecution, and, like his Lord, he bids them face it, if not 'with frolic welcome' at all events with undiminished and undimmed serenity and cheerfulness. Christ based the exhortation on the thought that great would be their reward in Heaven. Peter points to the salvation ready to be revealed as being the ground of the joy that he enjoined. So in the words and in the whole strain and structure of the exhortation the servant is copying his Master.

But, of course, although the immediate application of these words is to Churches fronting the possibility and probability of actual persecution and affliction for the sake of Jesus Christ, the principle involved applies to us all. And the worries and the sorrows of our daily life need the exhortation here, quite as much as did the martyr's pains. White ants will pick a carcass clean as soon as a lion will, and

there is quite as much wear and tear of Christian gladness arising from the small frictions of our daily life as from the great strain and stress of persecution.

So our Apostle has a word for us all. Now it seems to me that in this text there are three things to be noticed: a paradox, a possibility, a duty. 'In which ye rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' Look at these three points.

I. This paradox.

Two emotions diametrically opposed are to be contained within the narrow room of one disposition and temper. 'Ye greatly rejoice.... Ye are in heaviness.' Can such a thing be? Well! let us think for a moment. The sources of the two conflicting emotions are laid out before us; they may be constantly operative in every life. On the one hand, 'in which ye greatly rejoice.' Now that 'in which' does not point back only to the words that immediately precede, but to the whole complex clause that goes before. And what is the 'which' that is there? These things; the possession of a new life—'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath begotten us again!'—the springing up in a man's heart of a strange new hope, like a new star that swims into the sky, and sheds a radiance all about it—'Begotten unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'; a new wealth—an 'inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away; a new security—guarded by the power of God through faith unto salvation.' These things belong, *ipso facto*, and in the measure of his faith, to every Christian man, a new life, a new hope, a new wealth, and a new security; and in their conjoint action, all four of them brought to bear upon a man's temper and spirit, will, if he is realising them, make him glad.

Then, on the other hand, we have other fountains pouring their streams into the same reservoir. And just as the deep fountains which are open to us by faith will, if we continue to exercise that

faith, flood our spirits with sweet waters, so these other fountains will pour their bitter floods over every heart more or less abundantly and continually. 'Now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' There are confluent streams that one has sometimes seen, where a clear river joins, and flows in the same bed with, one all foul with half-melted ice, and the two run side by side for a space, scarcely mingling their waters. Thus the paradox of the Christian life is that within the same narrow banks may flow the sunny and the turbid, the clear and the dark, the sorrow that springs from earthly fountains, the joy that pours from the heavenly heights.

Now notice that this is only one case of the paradox of the whole Christian life. For the peculiarity of it is that it owns two;—it belongs to, and is exposed to, all the influences of the forces and things of time, whilst in regard to its depths, it belongs to, and is under the influence of, 'the things that are unseen and eternal'; so that you have the external life common to the Christian and to all other people, and then you have the life 'hid with Christ in God,' the roots of it going down through all the superficial soil, and grappling the central rock of all things. Thus a series of paradoxes and perennial contradictions describes the twofold life that every believing spirit lives, 'as unknown and yet well known, as dying and, behold we live, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making rich, as having nothing and yet possessing all things.'

Remember, too, that according to Peter's conception neither of these two sources pours out a flood which obliterates or dams back the other. They are to co-exist. The joy is not to deprive the heaviness of its weight, nor the sorrow of its sting. There is no artificial stoicism about Christianity, no attempt to sophisticate one's self out of believing in the reality of the evils that assail us, or to forbid that we shall feel their pain and their burden. Many good people fail to get the good of life's discipline, because they have somehow come to think that it is wrong to weep when Christ sends sorrows, and wrong to feel, as other men feel, the grip and bite of the manifold trials of

our earthly lives. 'Weep for yourselves,' for the feeling of the sorrow is the precedent condition to the benefit from the sorrow, and it yields 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.'

But, on the other hand, the black stream is not to bank up the sunny one, or prevent it from flowing into the heart, ay! and flowing over, the other. And so the co-existence of the joys that come from above, and the sorrows that spring from around, and some of them from beneath, is the very secret of the Christian life.

II. Further, consider the blessed possibility of this paradox.

Can two conflicting emotions live in a man's heart at once? Rather, we might ask, are there ever emotions in a man's heart that are not hemmed in by conflicting ones? Is there ever such a thing in the world's experience as a pure joy, or as a confidence which has no trace of fear in it? Are there any pictures without shadows? They are only daubs if they are. Instead of wondering at this co-existence of joy and sorrow, we must recognise that it is in full accord with all our experience, which never brings a joy, but, like the old story of the magic palace, there is one window unlighted, and which never brings a sorrow so black and over-arching so completely the whole sky, but that somewhere, if the eye would look for it, there is a bit of blue. The possibility of the paradox is in accordance with all human experience.

But then, you say, 'my feelings of joy or sorrow are very largely a matter of temperament, and still more largely a matter of responding to the facts round about me. And I cannot pump up emotions to order; and if I could they would be factitious, artificial, insincere, and do me more harm than good.' Perfectly true. There are a great many ugly names for manufactured emotions, and none of them a bit too ugly. Peter does not wish you to try to get up feeling to order. It is the bane of some type of Christianity that that is done. You cannot thus manufacture emotion. No; but I will tell you what you

can do. You can determine what you will think about most, and what you will look at most, and if you settle that, that will settle what you feel. And so, though it is by a roundabout way, we can regulate our emotions. A man travelling in a railway train can choose which side of the carriage he will look out at, either the one where the sunshine is falling full on the front of each grass-blade and tree, or the side where it is the shadowed side of each that is turned to him. If he will look out of the one window, he will see everything verdant and bright, and if he will look out at the other, there will be a certain sobriety and dulness over the landscape. You can settle which window you are going to look out at. If the one—'in which ye greatly rejoice.' If the other—'ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' You have seen patterns wrought in black and white, you may focus your eye so as to get white on a black ground, or black on a white ground, just as you like. You can do that with your life, and either fix upon the temptations and the heaviness as the main thing, or you can fix upon the new life, and the new wealth, and the new hope, and the new security as the main things. If you do the one, down you will go into the depths of gloom, and if you do the other, up you will spring into the ethereal heights of sober and Christian gladness.

So then, brethren, this possibility depends on these things, the choice of our main object of contemplation, and that breaks up into two thoughts about which I wish to say a word. The reason why so many Christian people have only religion enough to make them gloomy, or to weight them with a sense of burdens and unfulfilled aspirations and broken resolutions, and have not enough to make them glad, is mainly because they do not think enough about the four things in which they might 'greatly rejoice.' I believe that most of us would be altogether different people, as professing Christians, if we honestly tried to keep the mightiest things uppermost, and to fill heart and mind far more than we do with the contemplation of these great facts and truths which, when once they are beheld and cleaved to, are certain to minister gladness to men's souls. These great truths

which you and I say we believe, and which we profess to live by, will only work their effect upon us, so long as they are present to our minds and hearts. You can no more expect Christian verities to keep you from falling, or to strengthen you in weakness, or to gladden you in sorrow, if you are not thinking about them, than you can expect the most succulent or most nutritive food to nourish you if you do not eat it. As long as Christ and His grace are present in our hearts and minds by thought, so long, and not one moment longer, do they minister to us the joy of the Lord. You switch off from the main current, and out go all the lights, and when you switch off from Christ out goes the gladness.

Then another thing I would point out is that the possibility of this co-existence of joy and of heaviness depends further on our taking the right point of view from which to look at the sources of the heaviness. Notice how beautifully, although entirely incidentally, and without calling attention to it, Peter here minimises the 'manifold temptations' which he does expect, however minimised, will make men heavy. He calls them 'temptations.' Now that is rather an unfortunate word, because it suggests the idea of something that desires to drag a man into sin. But suppose, instead of 'temptations,' with its unfortunate associations, you were to substitute a word that means the same thing, and is free from that association—viz., 'trial,'—you would get the right point of view. As long as I look at my sorrows mainly in regard to their power to sadden me, I have not got to the right point of view for them. They *are* meant to sadden me, they are meant to pain, they are meant to bring the tears, they are meant to weight the heart and press down the spirits, but what for? To test what I am made of, and by testing to bring out and strengthen what is good, and to cast out and destroy what is evil. We shall never understand, even so much as it is possible for us to understand, and that is not very much, of the mystery of pain until we come to recognise that its main purpose is to help in making character. And when you think of your sorrows, disappointments, losses, when you think of your pains and sickness, and all the ills

that flesh is heir to, principally as being 'trials,' in the deep sense of that word—viz., a means of testing you, and thereby helping you, bettering you, and building up character—then it is more possible to blend the sorrow that they produce with the joy to which they may lead. The Apostle adds the other thought of the transitoriness of sorrow, and yet further, the other of its necessity for the growth of humanity. So they are not only to be felt, not only to be wept over, not only to make us sad, but they are to be accepted, and used as means by which we may be perfected. And when once you get occupied in trying to get all the good that is in it out of a grief, you will be astonished to find how the bitterness that was in it was diminished.

We may have the oil on the water, calming, though not ending, its agitation. We may carry our own atmosphere with us, and like the diver that goes down into depths of the sea, and cannot be reached by the hungry water around his crystal bell, and has communication with the upper air, where the light of the sun is, so you and I, down at the slimy bottom, and with the waste of water all around us, which if it could get at us would choke us, may walk at liberty, in peace and gladness. And so, 'though the labour of the olive shall fail and the fig tree not blossom, though the flocks be cut off from the folds and the herd from the stalls,' we may joy in the Lord, and 'rejoice in the God of our salvation.'

III. Now lastly, we have here a duty.

Peter takes it for granted that these good people, who had persecution hanging over them, were still rejoicing greatly in the Lord. He does not feel it necessary to enjoin it upon them. It is a matter of course in their Christian life. And you will find that all through the New Testament this same tone is adopted which recognises gladness as being, on the one hand, an inseparable characteristic of the Christian experience, and on the other hand as being a thing that is a Christian man's duty to cultivate. Now I do not

believe that the most of Christian people have ever looked at the thing in that light at all. If joy has come to them, they have been thankful for it, but they have very, very seldom felt that, if they are not glad, there is something wrong. And a great many of us, I am sure, have never recognised the fact that it is our duty to 'rejoice in the Lord always.' Have you realised it? I do not mean have you tried to get up, as I have been saying, factitious emotions, but have you felt that if you are doing what, as Christian men or women, it is your plain duty to do, there will come into your hearts this joy of the Lord. I have told you why you are not happier Christians, why so many of us have, as I said, only got religion enough to make you gloomy and burdened. It is because you do not think enough about Jesus Christ, and what He has given you, and what He is doing for you and in you. It is because you have not the new life in strong experience and possession, and because you have not the new hope springing in your hearts, and because you have not the new wealth realised often in present possession, and because you have not the new security which He is ready to give you. It is your duty, Christian man and woman, to be a joyful Christian, and if you are not, then the negligence is sin.

It is a hard duty. It is not easy to turn away from that which is torturing flesh or sense or natural desires or human affections, and to realise the unseen. It is not easy, but it is possible. And, like all other difficult things, it is worth doing. For there is nothing more helpful, more recommendatory, of our Christianity to other people, and more certain to tell on the vigour and efficiency of our Christian service, than that we should be rejoicing in the Lord, and living in the possession of the experience of Christ's joy which He has left for us.

There is one other thing I must say. I have been talking about the co-existence of joy and sorrows. In one form or another that co-existence is universal. The difference is this. A Christian man has superficial sorrows and central gladness, and other men have superficial gladness and central sorrow. 'Even in laughter the heart is

sorrowful.' Many of you know what that means—the black aching centre, full of unrest, grimly unparticipant of the dancing delights going on about it, like some black rock that stands up in the midst of a field flooded with sunshine, and gay with flowers. 'The end of that mirth is heaviness.' Better a surface sadness and a core of joy than the opposite, a skin of verdure over the scarcely cold lava. Better a transient sorrow with an eternal joy than the opposite, mirth, 'like the crackling of thorns under a pot,' which dies down into a doleful ring of black ashes in the pathless desert. Choose whether you will have joy dwelling with and conquering sorrow, or unrest and sorrow, darkening and finally shattering your partial and fleeting joys.

1 Peter i. 7— THE TRUE GOLD AND ITS TESTING

'That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory ...'—1 Peter i. 7.

The Apostle is fond of that word 'precious.' In both his letters he uses it as an epithet for diverse things. According to one translation, he speaks of Christ as 'precious to you which believe.' He certainly speaks of 'the precious blood of Christ,' and of 'exceeding great and precious promises,' and here in my text, as well as in the Second Epistle, he speaks about 'precious faith.' It is a very wide general term, not expressing anything very characteristic beyond the one notion of value. But in the text, according to our Authorised Version, it looks at first sight as if it were not the faith, but the *trial* of the faith that the Apostle regards as thus valuable. There are difficulties of rendering which I need not trouble you with. Suffice it to say that, speaking roughly and popularly, the 'trial of your faith' here seems to mean rather the *result of* that trial, and might be fairly represented by the slightly varied expression, 'your faith having been tried, might be found,' etc.

I must not be tempted to discourse about the reasons why such a rendering seems to express the Apostle's meaning more fully, but, taking it for granted, there are just three things to notice—the true wealth, the testing of the wealth, and the discovery at last of the preciousness of the wealth.

I. Peter pits against each other faith that has been tried, and 'gold that perisheth'; he puts away all the other points of comparison and picks out one, and that is that the one lasts and the other does not. Now I must not be seduced into going beyond the limits of my text to dilate upon the other points of contrast and pre-eminence; but I would just notice in a sentence that everybody admits, yet next to nobody acts upon, the admission that inward good is far more valuable than outward good. 'Wisdom is more precious than rubies,' say people, and yet they will choose the rubies, and take no trouble to get the wisdom. Now the very same principles of estimating value which set cultivated understandings and noble hearts above great possessions and large balances at the bankers, set the life of faith high above all others. And the one thought which Peter wishes to drive into our heads and hearts is that there is only one kind of wealth that will never be separated from its possessor. Nothing is truly ours that remains outside of us.

"Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands.'

Nothing that is there whilst I am here is really mine. I do not own it if it is possible that I shall lose it. And so with profound meaning our Lord speaks about 'that which is another's' in comparison with 'that which is your own.' It is another's because it passes, like quicksilver under pressure, from hand to hand, and no man really holds it, but it leaps away from his grasp. And if a man retains it all his days, still, according to the grim old proverb, 'shrouds have no pockets,' and when he dies his hands open, or sometimes they clutch together, but there is nothing inside the palms, and they only close upon themselves. Dear brethren, if there is anything that can be filched

away from us, anything about which it is true that, on the one hand, 'moth and rust'—natural processes—'do corrupt' it, on the other hand, 'thieves break through and steal'—accidents of human conduct can deprive us of it, then we may *call* it ours, but it is not ours. It possesses us, if we are devoted to it as our best good, and fighting and toiling, and sometimes lying and cheating, and flinging the whole fierce energy of our nature into first gripping and then holding it; it possesses us; we do not possess it. But if there is anything that can become so interwoven and interlaced with the very fibres of a man's heart that they and it cannot be parted, if there is anything that empty hands will clasp the closer, because they *are* emptied of earth's vanities, then that is truly possessed by its possessor. And our faith, which will not be trodden in the grave, but will go with us into the world beyond, and though it be lost in one aspect, in sight, it will be eternal as trust, will be ours, imperishable as ourselves, and as God. Therefore, do not give all the energy of your lives to amassing the second-best riches. Seek the highest things most. 'Covet earnestly the best gifts,' and let the coveting regulate your conduct. And do not be put off with wealth that will fail you sooner or later.

II. Note, again, the testing of the wealth.

I need not dwell upon that very familiar metaphor of the furnace for gold, and the fining-pot for silver, only remember that there are two purposes for which metallurgists apply fire to metals. The one is to test them, and the other is to cleanse them, or, to use technical words, one is for the purpose of assaying them, and the other is for the purpose of refining them. And so, linking the words of my text with the words of the previous verse, we find that the Apostle lays it down that the purpose of all the diverse trials, or 'temptations' as he calls them, that come to us, is this one thing, that our faith should be 'tried,' and 'found, unto praise and honour and glory.' The fire carries away the dross; it makes the pure metal glow in its lustre. It burns up

the 'wood, hay, stubble'; it makes the gold gleam and the precious stones coruscate and flash.

And so note this general notion here of the intention of all life's various aspects being to test character is specialised into this, that it is meant to test faith, first of all. Of course it is meant to test many other things. A man's whole character is tested by the experiences of his daily life, all that is good and all that is evil in him, and we might speak about the effect of life's discipline upon a great many different sides of our nature. But here the whole stress is put upon the effect of life in testing and clarifying and strengthening one part of a Christian's character, and that is his faith. Why does Peter pick out faith? Why does he not say 'trial of your hope,' of your 'love,' of your 'courage,' of half a dozen other graces? Why 'the trial of your *faith*'? For this reason, because as the man's faith is, so is the man. Because faith is the tap-root, in the view of the New Testament, of all that is good and strong and noble in humanity. Because if you strengthen a man's trust you strengthen everything that comes from it. Reinforce the centre and all is reinforced. Your faith is the vital point from which your whole life as Christians is developed, and whatever strengthens that strengthens you. And, therefore, although everything that befalls you calls for the exercise of, and therefore tests, and therefore, rightly undergone, strengthens a great many various virtues and powers and beauties in a human character, the main good of it all is that it deepens, if the man is right, his simple trust in God manifested by his trust in and love to Jesus Christ: and so it reinforces the faith which works by love, and thus tends to make all things in life good and fair.

Now if thus the main end of life is to strengthen faith, let us remember that we have to give a wider meaning to the word 'trials' than 'afflictions.' Ah! there is as sharp a trial of my faith in prosperity as in any adversity. People say, 'It is easy to trust God when things are going well with us.' That is quite true. But it is a great deal easier to stop trusting God, or thinking about Him, when

things are going well with us, and we do not seem to need Him so much, as in the hours of darkness. You remember the old story about the traveller, when the sun and the wind tried which could make him take off his cloak; and the sun did it. Some of us, I daresay, have found out that the faith which gripped God when we felt we needed Him, because we had not anything else but Him, is but too apt to lose hold of Him when fleeting delights and apparent treasures come and whisper invitations in our hearts. There are diseases that are proper to the northern, dark, ice-bound regions of the earth. Yes! and there are a great many more that belong to the tropics; as there is such a thing as sunstroke, which is, perhaps, as dangerous as the cramping cold from the icebergs of the north. Some of us should understand what that Scripture means: 'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.' Prosperity, untroubled lives, lives even as the lives of those of the majority of mankind now, have their own most searching trials of faith.

But on the other hand, if there are 'ships that have gone down at sea, when heaven was all tranquillity,' there come also dark and nights of wild tempest when we have to lay to and ride out the gale with a tremendous strain on the cable. Our sorrows, our disappointments, our petty annoyances, and the great irrevocable griefs that sooner or later darken the very earth, are all to be classified under this same purpose, 'that the trial of your faith ... might be found unto praise and honour and glory.' And so, I beseech you, open your eyes to the meaning of life, and do not suppose that you have found the last word to say about it when you say 'I am afflicted,' or 'I am at ease.' The affliction and the ease, like two wheels in some great machine working in opposite directions, fit with their cogs into one another and move something beyond them in one uniform direction. And affliction and ease cooperate to this end, that we might be partakers of His holiness.

I believe experience teaches the most of us, if we will lay its lessons to heart, that the times when Christian people grow most in the

divine life is in their times of sorrow. One of the old divines says, 'Grace grows best in winter'; and there are edible plants which need a touch of frost before they are good to eat. So it is with our faith. Only let us take care that the fire does not burn it up, as 'wood, hay, stubble,' but irradiates it and glorifies it, as 'gold, silver, and precious stones.'

III. Now a word, lastly, about the ultimate discovery.

'Might be found unto praise and honour and glory.' Note these three words, which I think are often neglected, and sometimes misunderstood—'praise, honour, glory.' Whose? People sometimes say 'God's,' since His people's ultimate salvation redounds to His praise; but it is much better to understand the praise as given to the Christians whose faith has stood the testing fires. 'Well done, good and faithful servant'—is not that praise from lips, praise from which is praise indeed? As Paul says, 'then shall every man have praise of God.' We are far too much afraid of recognising the fact that Jesus Christ in Heaven, like Jesus Christ on earth, will praise the deeds that come from love to Him, though the deeds themselves may be very imperfect. Do you remember 'She hath wrought a good work on Me,' said about a woman that had done a perfectly useless thing, which was open to a great many very shrewd objections? But Jesus Christ accepted it. Why? Because it was the pure utterance of a loving heart. And, depend upon it, though we have to say 'Unclean! unclean! We are unprofitable servants,' He will say 'Come! ye blessed of My Father.' Praise from Christ is praise indeed.

'Honour.' That suggests bystanders, a public opinion, if I may so say; it suggests 'have thou authority over ten cities,' and that men will have their deeds round them as a halo, in that other world. As 'praise' suggests the redeemed man's relation to his Lord, so 'honour' suggests the redeemed man's relation to the fellow-citizens of the New Jerusalem. 'Glory' speaks of the man himself as transfigured and lifted up into the light and lustre of communion with, and

conformity to, the image of the Lord. 'Then shall we appear with Him in glory. Then shall the righteous blaze forth like the sun in My heavenly Father's Kingdom.'

'Shall be found.' Ah! there will be many surprises yonder. Do you remember that profound revelation of our Master when He represents those on whom He lavishes His eulogies as the Judge, as turning to Him and saying, 'Lord! when saw we Thee in ... prison and visited thee?' They do not recognise themselves or their acts in Christ's account of them. They have found that their lives were diviner than they knew. There will be surprises there. As one of the prophets represents the ransomed Israel, to her amazement, surrounded by clinging troops of children, and asking, 'These! Where have they been? I was left alone,' so many a poor, humble soul, fighting along in this world, having no recognition on earth, and the lowliest estimate of all its own actions, will be astonished at the last when it receives 'praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.'

1 Peter i. 8— JOY IN BELIEVING

'In Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.'—1 Peter i. 8.

The Apostle has just previously been speaking about the great and glorious things which are to come to Christians on the appearing of Jesus Christ, and that naturally suggests to him the thought of the condition of believing souls during the period of the Lord's absence and comparative concealment. Having lifted his readers' hopes to that great Future, when they would attain to 'praise and honour and glory' at Christ's appearing, he drops to the present and to earth, and recalls the disadvantages and deprivations of the present Christian experience as well as its privileges and blessings. 'Whom having not seen, ye love,' that is a very natural thought in the mind of one

whose love to Jesus rested on the ever-remembered blessed experience of years of happy companionship, when addressing those who had no such memories. It points to an entirely unique fact. There is nothing else in the world parallel to that strange, deep personal attachment which fills millions of hearts to this Man who died nineteen centuries ago, and which is utterly unlike the feelings that any men have to any other of the great names of the past. To love one unseen is a paradox, which is realised only in the relation of the Christian soul to Jesus Christ.

Then the Apostle goes on with what might at first seem a mere repetition of the preceding thought, but really brings to view another strange anomaly. 'In Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' Love longs for the presence of the beloved, and is restless and defrauded of its gladness so long as absence continues. But this strange love, which is kindled by an unseen Man, does not need His visible presence in order to be a fountain of joy unspeakable and full of glory. Thus the Apostle takes it for granted that every one who believes knows what this joy is. It is a large assumption, contradicted, I am afraid, by the average experience of the people that at this day call themselves Christians.

We notice—

I. The All-sufficient Ground or Source of this Glad Emotion.

'In whom,' with all the disabilities and pains and absence, 'yet believing,' you can put out a long arm of faith across the gulf that lies, not only between to-day and eighteen centuries ago, but the deeper and more impassible gulf that lies between earth and heaven, and clasp Christ with a really firm grasp, which will fill the hand, and which we shall feel has laid hold of something, or rather has laid hold of a living person and a loving heart. That is faith. The Apostle uses a very strong form of expression here, which is only very partially represented by our English version. He does not say only

'*in* whom believing,' but '*towards* whom'; putting emphasis upon the effort and direction of the faith, rather than upon the repose of the heart when it has found its object and rests upon Him. And so the conception of the true Christian attitude is that of a continual outgoing of Trust and its child Love; of Desire and its child Possession; and of Expectation and its child Fruition towards that unseen Christ. It is much to believe Him, it is more to believe in Him; it is—I was going to say—most of all to believe towards Him. For in this region, quite as much as, and I think more than, in the one to which the saying was originally applied, 'search is better than attainment.' Our condition must always be that of 'forgetting the things that are behind'; and however much we may realise the union with the unseen Christ in the act of resting upon Him, that must never be suffered to interfere with the longing for the larger possession of myself, and fuller consequent likeness to Him, which is expressed in that great though simple phrase of my text 'believing towards Him.' Such a continual outgoing of effort, as well as the rest and blessedness of reposing on Him, is indispensable for all true gladness. For the intensest activity of our whole being is essential to the real joy of any part of it, and we shall never know the rapture of which humanity, even here and now, is capable until we gather our whole selves, heart, will, and all our practical, as well as our intellectual, powers in the effort to make more of Christ our own, and to minimise the distance between us to a mere vanishing point, 'Believing towards whom ye rejoice.'

That act of trust, however inadequate the object upon which it rests, and however mistaken may be our conceptions of that on which we lean, always brings a gladness which is real, until disappointment disillusionises and saddens us. There is nothing that so sheds peace over the heart as reliance, absolute and quiet, upon some object worthy of trust. It is blessed to trust one another until, as is too often the case, we find that what we thought to be an oak against which we leaned is but a broken reed that has no pith in it, and no possibility of support. So far as it goes, all trust is blessed, but the

most blessed is simple reliance upon, and aspiration after, Jesus Christ. Ever to yearn for Him, not with the yearning of those who have no possession, but with that of those who, having a little, desire to have more, is to bring into our lives the one solid and sufficient good without which there is no gladness, and with which there can be no unmingled sorrow, wrapping the whole man in its ebon folds. For this Christ is enough for all my nature and for the satisfaction of every desire. In Him my mind finds the truth; my will the law; my love the answering love; my hope its object; my fears their dissipation; my sins their forgiveness; my weaknesses their strength; and, to all that I am, what He is answers, as fulness to emptiness, and as supply to need. So, 'believing towards Him, we rejoice.'

But note that the joy is strictly contemporaneous with the faith. Tear away electric wire from the source of energy, and the light goes out instantly. It is as another Apostle says, '*in believing*' that we have 'joy and peace.' And that is why so many of us know little of it. Yesterday's faith will not contribute to to-day's gladness, any more than yesterday's meals will satisfy to-day's hunger. Present joy depends upon present faith, and the measure of the one is the measure of the other.

Notice again—

II. The Characteristics of the Christian Gladness.

'Unspeakable,' and, as the word ought to be rendered, not 'full of glory' but 'glorified.' Unspeakable. Still waters run deep. It is poor wealth that can be counted; it is shallow emotion that can be crammed into the narrow limits of any human vocabulary. Fathers and mothers, parents and children, husbands and wives, know that. And the depths of the joy that a believing soul has in Jesus Christ are not to be spoken. Perhaps it is better that it should not be attempted to speak them.

'Not easily forgiven

Are those, who, setting wide the doors that bar

The secret bridal chambers of the heart,

Let in the day.'

It is in shallow streams that the sunlight gleams on the pebbles at the bottom. The abysses of ocean are dark, and have never been searched by its light. I suspect the depth of the emotion which bubbles over into words, and finds no difficulty in expressing itself. The joy which can be manifested in all its extent has a very small extent. Christian joy is unspeakable, too, because just as you cannot teach a blind man what colour is like, and cannot impart to anybody the blessedness of wedded love, or parental affection, by ever so much talking—and, therefore, the poetry of the world is never exhausted—so there is only one way of conveying to a man what is the actual joy of trusting in Christ, and that is, that he himself should trust Him. We may talk till Doomsday, and then, as the Queen of Sheba said, when she came to Solomon, 'the half hath not been told.'

'He must be loved ere that to you

He will seem worthy of your love.'

It is unspeakable gladness springing from the possession of an unspeakable gift.

'Glorified.' There is nothing more ignoble than the ordinary joys of men. They are too often like the iridescent scum on a stagnant pond, fruit and proof of corruption. They are fragile and hollow, for all the play of colour on them, like a soap bubble that breaks of its own tenuity, and is only a drop of dirty water. Joy is too often ignoble, and yet, although it is by no means the highest conception of what Christ's Gospel can do for us, it is blessed to think that it can take that emotion, so often shameful, so often frivolous, so often lowering rather than elevating, and can lift it into loftiness, and transfigure it, and glorify it and make it a power, a power for good

and for righteousness, and for 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report' in our lives. And that is what trusting towards Christ will do for our gladnesses.

Lastly, in one word, let me lay upon your consciences, as Christian people

III. The Obligation of Gladness.

Peter takes it for granted that all these brethren to whom he is writing have experience of this deep and ennobled joy. He does not say, 'You ought to rejoice,' but he says, 'You do rejoice.' And yet a verse or two before he said, 'Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' So, then, he was not blinking the hard, painful facts of anybody's troubled life. He was not away upon the heights serenely contemptuous of the grim possibilities that lurk down in the dark valleys. He took in all the burdens and the pains and the anxieties and the harassments, and the losses, and the bleeding hearts and the cares that can burden any of us. And he said, in spite of them all, 'Ye rejoice.'

Do you? I am afraid there is no more irrefragable proof of the unreality of an enormous proportion of the Christian profession of this day than the joyless lives—in so far as their religion contributes to their joy—of hosts of us. We have religion enough to make us miserable, we have religion enough to make us uncomfortable about doing things that we would like to do. We are always haunted by the feeling that we are falling so far below our professions, and we are either miserable when we bethink ourselves, or, more frequently, indifferent, accordingly. And the whole reason of such experience lies here, we have not an adequately strong and continued trust in Jesus Christ working righteousness in our lives, nobleness in our characters, and so lifting us above the regions where mists and malaria lie. Let us get high enough up, and we shall find clear sky.

You call yourselves Christians. Does your religion bring any gladness to you? Does it burn brightest in the dark, like the pillar of cloud before the Israelites? 'Greek fire' burned below the water, and so was in high repute. Our gladness is a poor affair if it is at the mercy of temperaments or of circumstances. Jesus Christ comes to cure temperaments, and to enable us to resist circumstances. So I venture to say that, whatever may be our condition in regard to externals, or whatever may be our tendencies of disposition, we are bound, as a piece of Christian duty, to try to cultivate this joyful spirit, and to do it in the only right way, by cultivating the increase of our faith in Jesus Christ. 'Rejoice in the Lord always'; the man who said that was a prisoner, with death looking into his eyeballs. As he said it, he felt that his friends in Philippi might think the exhortation overstrained, and so he repeated it, to show that he recognised the apparent impossibility of obeying it, and yet deliberately enjoined it; 'and again I say, rejoice.'

1 Peter i. 10, 11, 12— CHRIST AND HIS CROSS THE CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSE

'Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently ... the things which are now reported unto you ... which things the angels desire to look into.'—1 Peter i. 10, 11, 12.

I have detached these three clauses from their surroundings, not because I desire to treat them fragmentarily, but because we thereby throw into stronger relief the writer's purpose to bring out the identity of the Old and the New Revelation, the fact that Christ and His sufferings are the centre of the world's history, to which all that went before points, from which all that follows after flows; and that not only thus does He stand in the midst of humanity, but that from Him there ran out influences into other orders of beings, and angels learn from Him mysteries hitherto unknown to them. The prophets prophesy of the grace which comes in the sufferings of Christ and

the glory that should follow, and the same Spirit which taught them teaches the preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They that went before had for their deepest message the proclamation, 'He will come'; they that follow after have for their deepest message, 'He has come.' And angels listen to, and echo, the chorus, from all the files that march in front, and all that bring up the rear, 'Hosanna! Blessed be Him that cometh in the name of the Lord.'

My purpose, then, is just to try to bring before you the magnificent unity into which these texts bind all ages, and all worlds, planting Jesus Christ and His Cross in the centre of them all. There are four aspects here in which the writer teaches us to regard this unity: Jesus and the Cross are the substance of prophecy, the theme of Gospel preaching, the study of angels, and presented to each of us for our individual acceptance. Now, let us look briefly at these four points.

I. First, then, Christ and His Cross is the substance of prophecy.

Now, of course, we have to remember that general statements have to be interpreted widely, and without punctilious adherence to the words; and we have also to remember that great mischief has been done, and great discredit cast, on the whole conception of ancient revelation by the well-meaning, but altogether mistaken, attempts of good people to read the fully developed doctrine of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice into every corner of the ancient revelation. But whilst I admit all that, and would desire to emphasise the fact, I think that in this generation, and to-day, there is a great deal more need to insist upon the truth that the inmost essence and deepest purpose of the whole Old Testament system is to create an attitude of expectance, and to point onwards, with ever-growing distinctness, to one colossal and mysterious figure in which the longings of generations shall be fulfilled, and the promises of God shall be accomplished. The prophet was more than a foreteller, as is being continually insisted upon nowadays. There were prophets who never uttered a single prediction. Their place in Israel was to be the champions of

righteousness, and—I was going to say—the knights of God, as against law and ceremonial and externalism. But, beyond that, there underlie the whole system of prophecy, and there come sparkling and flashing up to the surface every now and then, bright anticipations, not only of a future kingdom, but of a personal King, and not only of a King, but a sufferer. All the sacrifices, almost all the institutions, the priesthood and the monarchy included, had this onward-looking aspect, and Israel as a whole, in the proportion in which it was true to the spirit of its calling, stood a-tiptoe, as it were, looking down the ages for the coming of the Hope of the Covenant that had been promised to the fathers. The prophets, I might say, were like an advance-guard sent before some great monarch in his progress towards his capital, who rode through the slumbering villages and called, 'He comes! He comes! The King cometh meek and having salvation,' and then passed on.

Now, all that is to be held fast to-day. I would give all freedom to critical research, and loyally accept the results of it, so far as these are established, and are not mere hypotheses, with regard to the date and the circumstances of the construction of the various elements of that Old Testament. But what I desire especially to mark is that, with the widest freedom, there must be these two things conserved which Peter here emphasises, the real inspiration of the prophetic order, and its function to point onwards to Jesus. And so long as you keep these truths, as long as you believe that God spoke through prophets, as long as you believe that the very heart of their message was the proclamation of Jesus Christ, and that to bear witness to Him was the function, not only of prophet, but of priest and king and nation, then you are at liberty to deal as you like with mere questions of origin and of date. But if, in the eagerness of the chase after the literary facts of the origin of the Old Testament, we forget that it is a unity, that it is a divine unity, that it is a progressive revelation, and that 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' then I venture to say that the most uncritical, old-fashioned reader of the Old Testament that found Jesus Christ in the Song of Solomon, and in

the details of the Tabernacle, and in all the *minutiæ* of worship and sacrifice, was nearer to the living heart of the thing than the most learned scholar that has been so absorbed in the inquiries as to how and when this, that, and the other bit of the Book was written, that he fails to see the one august figure that shines out, now more and now less dimly, and gives unity to the whole. 'To Him gave all the prophets witness.' And when Peter declared, as he did in my text, that ancient Israel, by its spokesmen and its organs, testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, he is but echoing what he had learned from his Master, who turns to some of us with the same rebuke with which He met His disciples after the Resurrection: 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.' The Old and the New are a unity, and Christ and His Cross are the substance and the centre of both.

II. Note here Christ and His Cross, the theme of Gospel preaching.

If you will glance at your leisure over the whole context from which I have picked these clauses as containing its essence, you will find that the Apostle speaks of the things which the prophets foretold as being the same as 'those which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.' I must not take for granted that you are all referring to your Bibles, but I should like to point out, as the basis of one or two things that I wish to say, the remarkable variety of phrase employed in the text to describe the one thing. First, Peter speaks of it as 'salvation,' then he speaks of it in the next clause as 'the grace that should come unto you.' Then, in the next phrase, he designates it more particularly as 'the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.' Now, if we put these designations together—salvation, grace, Christ's sufferings, the subsequent glory—we come to this, that the facts of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension are the great vehicle which brings to men God's grace, that that grace has for its purpose and its effect man's salvation, and

that these facts are the Gospel which Christian preachers have to proclaim.

Now notice what follows from such thoughts as these. To begin with, the Gospel is not a speculation, is not a theology, still less a morality, not a declaration of principles, but a history of fact, things that were done on this earth of ours, and that the Apostle's Creed which is worked into the service of the Anglican Church is far nearer the primitive conception of the Gospel than are any of the more elaborate and doctrinal ones which have followed. For we have to begin with the facts that Christ lived, died, was buried, rose again from the dead ... ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God. Whatever else the Gospel is, that is the kernel and the basis of it all. Out of these facts will come all manner of doctrines, philosophies of religion, theologies, revelations about God and man. Out of them will come all ethics, the teaching of duty, the exhibition of a pattern of conduct, inspiration to follow the model that is set before us. Out of them will come, as I believe, guidance and light for social and economical and political questions and difficulties. But what we have to lay hold of, and what we preachers have to proclaim, is the story of the life, and eminently the story of the death.

Why does Peter put in the very centre here 'the sufferings of Christ'? That suggests another thought, that amongst these facts which, taken together, make the Gospel, the vital part, the central and the indispensable part, is the story of the Cross. Now what Christ said, not what Christ did, not what Christ was, beautiful and helpful as all that is, but to begin with what Christ bore, is the fact that makes the life of the Gospel. And just as He is the centre of humanity, so the Cross is the centre of His work. Why is that? Because the deepest need of all of us is the need to have our sins dealt with, both as guilt and as power, and because nothing else in the whole story of Christ's manifestation deals with men's sins as the fact of His death on the

Cross does, therefore the sacrifice and sufferings are the heart of the Gospel.

And so, brethren, we have to mark that the presentation of Christian truth which slurs over that fact of the Sacrifice and Atonement of Jesus Christ, has parted with the vital power which makes the story into a gospel. It is no gospel to tell a man that Jesus Christ died, unless you go on to say He 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures.' And it is no gospel to talk about the beauty of His life, and the perfectness of His example, and the sweetness of His nature, and the depth, the wisdom, and the tenderness of His words, unless you can say this is 'the Lamb of God,' 'the Word made flesh,' 'who bare our sins, and carried our sicknesses and our sorrows.' Strike out from the gospel that you preach 'the sufferings of Christ,' and you have struck out the one thing that will draw men's hearts, that will satisfy men's needs, that will bind men to Him with cords of love. 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.' So, wherever you get what they call an ethical gospel which deals with moralities, and does not impart the power that will vitalise moralities, and make them into thankful service and sacrifices, in return for the great Sacrifice; wherever you get a gospel that falters in its enunciation of the sufferings of Christ, and wherever you get a gospel that secularises the Christian service of the Sabbath, and will rather discuss the things that the newspapers discuss, and the new books that the reviewers are talking about, and odds and ends of that sort that are thought to be popular and attractive, you get a gospel *minus* the thing that, in the Old Testament and in the New alike, stands forth in the centre of all. 'We preach Christ crucified'; it is not enough to preach Christ. Many a man does that, and might as well hold his tongue. 'We preach Christ crucified.' And the same august Figure which loomed before the vision of prophets, and shines through many a weary age, stands before us of this generation; ay! and will stand till the end of the world, as the centre, the pivot of human history, the Christ who has died for men. The Christ that will stand in the centre of the development of humanity is the Christ that

died on the Cross. If your gospel is not that, you have yet to learn the deepest secret of His power.

III. Once more, here we have Christ and His Cross as the study of angels.

'Which things the angels desire to look into.' Now, the word that Peter employs there is an unusual one in Scripture. Its force may, perhaps, be best conveyed by referring to one of the few instances in which it is employed. It is used to describe the attitude of Peter and John when they stooped down and looked into the sepulchre. Perhaps there may be a reference in Peter's mind to that incident, when he saw the 'two angels ... sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.' Perhaps, also, there floats in his mind some kind of reference to the outspread wings and bended heads of the brooding cherubim who sat above the Mercy-seat, gazing down upon the miracle of love that was manifested beneath them there. But be that as it may, the idea conveyed is that of eager desire and fixed attention.

Now I am not going to enlarge at all upon the thought that is here conveyed, except just to make the one remark that people have often said, 'Why should a race of insignificant creatures on this little globe of ours be so dignified in the divine procedure as that there should be the stupendous mystery of the Incarnation, and the Death for their sakes?' *Not* for their sakes only, for the New Testament commits itself to the thought that whilst sinful men are the only subjects of the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ, other orders of creatures do benefit thereby, and do learn from it what else they would not have known, of the mystery and the miracle and the majesty of the Divine love. 'To the principalities and the powers in heavenly places He hath made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.' And we can understand how these other orders—what we call higher orders, which they may be or they may not—of being, learn to know God as we learn to know Him, by the manifestation of Himself in

His acts, and how the crown of all manifestations consists in this, that He visits the sinful sons of men, and by His own dear Son brings them back again. The elder brethren in the Father's house do not grudge the ring and the robe given to the prodigals; rather they learn therein more than they knew before of the loving-kindness of God.

Now all that is nowadays ignored, and it is not fashionable to speak about the interest of angels in the success of Redemption, and a good many 'advanced' Christians do not believe in angels at all, because they 'cannot verify' the doctrine. I, for my part, accept the teaching, which seems to me to be a great deal more reasonable than to suppose that the rest of the universe is void of creatures that can praise and love and know God. I accept the teaching, and think that Peter was, perhaps, not a dreamer when he said, 'The angels desire to look into these things.' They do not share in the blessings of redemption, but they can behold what they do not themselves experience. The Seer in the Revelation was not mistaken, when he believed that he heard redeemed men leading the chorus to Him that had redeemed them by His blood out of all nations, and then heard the thunderous echo from an innumerable host of angels who could not say 'Thou hast redeemed us,' but who could bring praise and glory to Him because He had redeemed men.

IV. And now my last point is that Christ and His Cross is, by the Gospel, offered to each of us.

Notice how emphatically in this context the Apostle gathers together his wider thoughts, and focusses them into a point. 'The prophets have inquired and searched diligently ... of the grace that should come to *you*.... To them it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but *unto us* they did minister the things, which are now reported *unto you* by them that have preached the Gospel *unto you*.' And so he would take his wide thoughts, as it were, and gather all together, to a point, and press the point against each man's heart.

Dear brethren, these wide views are of no avail to us unless we realise the individual relation which Christ bears to each one of us. He bears a relation, as I have been saying, to all humanity. All the ages belong to Him. 'He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.' From His Cross there flash up rays of light into the heavens above, and out over the whole rolling series of the centuries, from the beginning to the end. Yes; but from His Cross there comes a beam straight to your heart, and the Christ whom angels desire to look into, of whom prophets prophesy and Apostles proclaim His advent, who is the Lord of all the ages, and the Lover of mankind, comes to thee and says 'I am thy Saviour,' and to thee this wide message is brought. Every eye has the whole sunshine, and each soul may have the whole Christ. His universal relations in time and space matter little to you, unless He has a particular relation to yourself.

And He will never have that in its atoning power, unless you do for yourself and by yourself the most individual and solitary act that a human soul can do, and that is, lay your hand on the head of 'the Lamb ... that takes away the sin of the world,' and put your sins there. You must begin with 'my Christ,' which you can do only by personal faith. And then afterwards you can come to 'our Christ,' the Christ of all the worlds, the Christ of all the ages. Go to Him by yourself. You must do it as if there were not any other beings in the whole universe but you two, Jesus and you. And when you have so gone, then you will find that you have 'come to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly, and Church of the first born.' Christ and His Cross are the substance of prophecy, the theme of the Gospel, the study of the angels. What are they to me?

1 Peter i. 13— HOPE PERFECTLY

'Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.'—1 Peter i. 13.

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

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

Another preliminary remark which I must make is that what is enjoined here has not reference to the duration but to the quality of the Christian hope. It is not 'to the end,' but, as the Margin of the

Authorised and the Revised Version concurs in saying, it is 'hope perfectly.'

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

I. The object of the Christian hope.

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

Now, that is an unusual use of the word, but that it should be employed here, as describing the future great object of the Christian hope, suggests two or three thoughts. One is that that ultimate blessedness, with all its dim, nebulous glories, which can only be resolved into their separate stars, when we are millions of leagues nearer to its lustre, is like the faintest glimmer of a new and better life in a soul here on earth, purely and solely the result of the undeserved, condescending love of God that stoops to sinful men, and instead of retribution bestows upon them a heaven. The grace that saved us at first, the grace that comes to us, filtered in drops during our earthly experience, is poured upon us in a flood at last. And the brightest glory of heaven is as much a manifestation of the

Divine grace as the first rudimentary germs of a better life now and here. The foundation, the courses of the building, the glittering pinnacle on the summit, with its golden spire reaching still higher into the blue, is all the work of the same unmerited, stooping, pardoning love. Glory is grace, and Heaven is the result of God's pardoning mercy.

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

But there is still further to be noticed another great thought that comes out of this remarkable language. The words of my text, literally rendered, are 'the grace that is being brought unto you.' Now, there have been many explanations of that remarkable phrase, which I think is not altogether exhausted by, nor quite equivalent to, that which represents it in our version—viz. 'to be brought unto you.' That relegates it all into the future; but in Peter's conception it is, in some sense, in the present. It is 'being brought.' What does that mean? There are far-off stars in the sky, the beams from which have set out from their home of light millenniums since, and have been rushing through the waste places of the universe since long before men were, and they have not reached our eyes yet. But they are on the road. And so in Peter's conception, the apocalypse of glory, which is the crowning manifestation of grace, is rushing towards us

through the ages, through the spheres, and it will be here some day, and the beams will strike upon our faces, and make them glow with its light. So certain is the arrival of the grace that the Apostle deals with it as already on its way. The great thing on which the Christian hope fastens is no 'peradventure,' but a good which has already begun to journey towards us.

Again, there is another thought still to be suggested, and that is, the revelation of Jesus Christ is the coming to His children of this grace which is glory, of this glory which is grace. For mark how the Apostle says, 'the grace which is being brought to you in the revelation of Jesus Christ.' And that revelation to which he here refers is not the past one, in His incarnate life upon earth, but it is the future one, to which the hope of the faithful Church ought ever to be steadfastly turned, the correlated truth to that other one on which its faith rests. On these two great pillars, rising like columns on either side of the gulf of Time, 'He has come,' 'He will come,' the bridge is suspended by which we may safely pass over the foaming torrent that else would swallow us up. The revelation in the past cries out for the revelation in the future. The Cross demands the Throne. That He has come once, a sacrifice for sin, stands incomplete, like some building left unfinished with rugged stones protruding which prophesy an addition at a future day; unless you can add 'unto them that look for Him will He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.' In that revelation of Jesus Christ His children shall find the glory-grace which is the object of their hope.

So say all the New Testament writers. 'When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory' says Paul. 'The grace that is to be brought unto you in the revelation of Jesus Christ,' chimes in Peter. And John completes the trio with his 'We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him.' These three things, brethren—with Christ, glory with Him, likeness to Him—are all that we know, and blessed be God! all that we need to know, of that dim future. And the more we confine ourselves to these triple

great certainties, and sweep aside all subordinate matters, which are concealed partly because they could not be revealed, and partly because they would not help us if we knew them, the better for the simplicity and the power and the certainty of our hope. The object of Christian hope is Christ, in His revelation, in His presence, in His communication to us for glory, in His assimilating of us to Himself.

'It is enough that Christ knows all,

And we shall be with Him.'

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

II. And now notice the duty of the Christian hope.

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

I do not need to dwell upon that, except just to suggest that such a vividness and continuity of calm anticipation of a certain good beyond the grave is one of the strongest of all motives to the general robustness and efficacy of a Christian life. People used to say a few years ago, a great deal more than they do now, that the Christian expectation of Heaven was apt to weaken energy upon earth, and they used to sneer at us, and talk about our 'other worldliness' as if it

were a kind of weakness and defect attached to the Christian experience. They have pretty well given that up now. Anti-Christian sarcasm, like everything else, has its fashions, and other words of reproach and contumely have now taken the place of that. The plain fact is that no man sees the greatness of the present, unless he regards it as being the vestibule of the future, and that this present life is unintelligible and insignificant unless beyond it, and led up to by it, and shaped through it, there lies the eternal life beyond. The low flat plain is dreary and desolate, featureless and melancholy, when the sky above it is filled with clouds. But sweep away the cloud-rack, and let the blue arch itself above the brown moorland, and all glows into lustre, and every undulation is brought out, and tiny shy forms of beauty are found in every corner. And so, if you drape Heaven with the clouds and mists born of indifference and worldliness, the world becomes mean, but if you dissipate the cloud and unveil heaven, earth is greatened. If the hope of the grave that is to be brought onto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ shines out above all the flatness of earth, then life becomes solemn, noble, worthy of, demanding and rewarding, our most strenuous efforts. No man can, and no man will, strike such effectual blows on things present as the man, the strength of whose arm is derived from the conviction that every stroke of the hammer on things present is shaping that which will abide with him for ever.

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

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

Another element in the perfection of hope is its continuity. That hits home to us all, does it not? Sometimes in calm weather we catch a sight of the gleaming battlements of 'the City which hath foundations,' away across the sea, and then mists and driving storms come up and hide it. There is a great mountain in Central Africa which if a man wishes to see he must seize a fortunate hour in the early morning, and for all the rest of the day it is swathed in clouds, invisible. Is that like your hope, Christian man and woman, gleaming out now and then, and then again swallowed up in the darkness? Brethren! these two things, certainty and continuity, are possible for us. Alas! that they are so seldom enjoyed by us.

III. And now one last word. My text speaks about the discipline or cultivation of this Christian hope.

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

'pulling himself together.' Just as an English workman will draw his belt a hole tighter when he has some special task to do, so Peter says to us, make a definite effort, with resolute bracing up and concentration of all your powers, or you will never see the grace that is hurrying towards you through the centuries. There are abundance of loose, slack-braced people up and down the world, in all departments, and they never come to any good. It is a shame that any man should have his thoughts so loosely girt and vagrant as that any briar by the roadside can catch them and hinder his advance. But it is a tenfold shame for Christian people, with such an object to gaze upon, that they should let their minds be dissipated all over the trivialities of Time, and not gather them together and project them, as I may say, with all their force towards the sovereign realities of Eternity. A sixpence held close to your eye will blot out the sun, and the trifles of earth close to us will prevent us from realising the things which neither sight, nor experience, nor testimony reveal to us, unless with clenched teeth, so to speak, we make a dogged effort to keep them in mind.

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

So, brethren, there is a solemn responsibility laid upon us by the gift of that great faculty of looking before and after. What did God make you and me capable of anticipating the future for? That we might let our hopes run along the low levels, or that we might elevate them and twine them round the very pillars of God's Throne; which? I do not find fault with you because you hope, but because you hope so meanly, and about such trivial and transitory things. I remember I once saw a sea-bird kept in a garden, confined within high walls, and with clipped wings, set to pick up grubs and insects. It ought to have been away out, hovering over the free ocean, or soaring with sunlit wing to a height where earth became a speck, and all its noises were hushed. That is what some of you are doing with your hope, degrading it to earth instead of letting it rise to God; enter within the veil, and gaze upon the glory of the 'inheritance incorruptible and undefiled.'

1 Peter i. 15— THE FAMILY LIKENESS

'As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy, in all manner of conversation.'—1 Peter i. 15.

That is the sum of religion—an all-comprehensive precept which includes a great deal more than the world's morality, and which changes the coldness of that into something blessed, by referring all our purity to the Lord that called us. One may well wonder where a Galilean fisherman got the impulse that lifted him to such a height; one may well wonder that he ventured to address such wide, absolute commandments to the handful of people just dragged from the very slough and filth of heathenism to whom he spoke. But he had dwelt with Christ, and they had Christ in their hearts. So for him to command and for them to obey, and to aim after even so wide and wonderful an attainment as perfecting like God's was the most natural thing in the world. 'Be ye holy as He that hath called you is

holy, and that in all manner of conversation.' The maximum of possible attainment, the minimum of imperative duty!

So, then, there are three things here—the pattern, the field, and the inspiration or motive of holiness.

I. The Pattern of Holiness.

'As He that hath called you is holy.' God's holiness is the very attribute which seems to separate Him most from the creatures; for its deepest meaning is His majestic and Divine elevation above all that is creatural. But here, of course, the idea conveyed by the word is not that, if I may so say, metaphysical one, but the purely moral one. The holiness of God which is capable of imitation by us is His separation from all impurity. There is a side of His holiness which separates Him from all the creatures, to which we can only look up, or bow with our faces in the dust; but there is a side of His holiness which, wonderful as it is, and high above all our present attainment as it is, yet is not higher than the possibilities which His indwelling Spirit puts within our reach, nor beyond the bounds of the duty that presses upon us all. 'As He which hath called you is holy.' Absolute and utter purity is His holiness, and that is the pattern for us.

Religion is imitation. The truest form of worship is to copy. All through heathenism you find that principle working. 'They that make them are like unto them.' Why are heathen nations so besotted and sunken and obstinate in their foulnesses? Because their gods are their examples, and they, first of all, make the gods after the pattern of their own evil imaginations, and then the evil imaginations, deified, react upon the maker and make him tenfold more a child of hell than themselves. Worship is imitation, and there is no religion which does not necessarily involve the copying of the example or the pattern of that Being before whom we bow. For religion is but love and reverence in the superlative degree, and the natural operation of love is to copy, and the natural operation of reverence is the same. So that the old Mosaic law, 'Be ye holy as I am holy,' went

to the very heart of religion. And the New Testament form of it, as Paul puts it in a very bold word, 'Be ye *imitators* of God, as beloved children,' sets its seal on the same thought that we are religious in the proportion in which we are consciously copying and aspiring after God.

But then, says somebody or other, 'it is not possible.' Well, if it were not possible, try it all the same. For in this world it is aim and not attainment that makes the noble life; and it is better to shoot at the stars, even though your arrow never reaches them, than to fire it along the low levels of ordinary life. I do not see that however the unattainableness of the model may be demonstrated, that has anything to do with the duty of imitation. Because, though absolute conformity running throughout the whole of a life is not possible here on earth, we know that in each individual instance in which we came short of conformity the fault was ours, and it might have been otherwise. Instead of bewildering our selves with questions about 'unattainable' or 'attainable,' suppose we asked, at each failure, 'Why did I not copy God *then*; was it because I could not, or because I would not?' The answer would come plain enough to knock all that sophisticated nonsense out of our heads, and to make us feel that the law which puts an unattainable ideal before the Christian as his duty is an intensely practical one, and may be reduced to practice at each step in his career. Imitation of the Father, and to be perfect, 'as our Father in heaven is perfect,' is the elementary and the ultimate commandment of all Christian morality. 'Be ye holy as He that hath called you is holy.'

Then let me remind you that the unattainableness is by no means so demonstrable as some people seem to think. A very tiny circle may have the same centre as one that reaches beyond the suburbs of the universe, and holds all stars and systems within its great round. And the tiniest circle will have the same geometrical laws applied to it as the greatest. The difference between finite and infinite has nothing to do with the possibility of our becoming like God, if we believe

that 'in the image of God created He him'; and that men who have been not only made by original creation in the Divine image, but have been born again by the incorruptible seed of the Word into a kindred life with His, and derived from Him, can surely grow like what they have got, and unfold into actually possessed and achieved resemblance to their Father the kindred life that is poured into their veins.

So every way it is better indefinitely to approximate to that great likeness, though with many flaws and failures, than to say it cannot be reached, and so I will content myself down here, in my sins and my meannesses. No! dear brethren, 'we are saved by hope,' and one prime condition of growth in nobleness is to believe it possible that, by His blessing we may be like Him here on earth in the measure of our perception of His beauty and reception of His grace.

II. Again, notice the field of this Godlike holiness.

'In all manner of conversation.' Of course I do not need to remind you that the word 'conversation' does not mean *talk*, but *conduct*; that it applies to the whole of the outward life. Peter says that every part of the Christian man's activity is to be the field on which his possession of the holiness derived from and like God's is to be exhibited. It is to be seen in all common life. Here is no cloistered and ascetic holiness which taboos large provinces of every man's experience, and says 'we must not go in there, for fear of losing our purity,' but rather wherever Christ has trod before we can go. That is a safe guide, and whatever God has appointed there we can go and that we can do. 'On the bells of the horses shall be written *Holiness to the Lord*.' The horse-bells that make merry music on their bridles are not very sacred things, but they bear the same inscription as flamed on the front of the high priest's mitre; and the bowls in every house in Jerusalem, as the prophet says, shall bear the same inscription that was written on the sacrificial vessels, and all shall belong to Him.

Only, whilst thus we maintain the possibility of exhibiting Godlike holiness in all the dusty fields of common life, let us remember the other side.

In this day there is very little need to preach against an ascetic Christianity. There has been enough said of late years about a Christian man being entitled to go into all fields of occupation and interest, and there to live his Christianity. I think the time is about come for a caution or two to be dropped on the other side, 'Blessed is he that condemneth not himself in the thing which he alloweth.' Apply this commandment vigorously and honestly to trade, to recreation—especially to recreation—to social engagements, to the choice of companions, to the exercise of tastes. Ask yourselves 'Can I write *Holiness to the Lord* on them?' If not, do not have anything to do with them. I wonder what the managers of theatres and music-halls would say if anybody proposed that motto to be put upon the curtain for the spectators to read before it is drawn up for the play. Do you think it would fit? Don't you, Christian men and women, don't you go into places where it would not fit. And remember that 'in all manner of conversation' has two sides to it, one declaring the possibility of sanctifying every creature of God, and one declaring the impossibility of a Christian man going, without dreadful danger and certain damage, into places where he cannot carry that consecration and purity with him.

Again the field is all trivial things. 'In all manner of conversation.' There is nothing that grows so low but that this scythe will travel near enough to the ground to harvest it. There is nothing so minute but it is big enough to mirror the holiness of God. The tiniest grain of mica, upon the face of the hill, is large enough to flash back a beam; and the smallest thing we can do is big enough to hold the bright light of holiness. 'All! Ah! If our likeness to God does not show itself in trifles, what in the name of common sense is there left for it to show itself in? For our lives are all made up of trifles. The great things come three or four of them in the seventy years; the

little ones come every time the clock ticks. And as they say, 'Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves.' If we keep the little things rigidly under the dominion of this principle, no doubt the big things will fall under it too, when they emerge. And if we do not—as the old Jewish book says:—'He that despiseth little things shall fall by little and little.' Whosoever has not a Christianity that sanctifies the trifles has a Christianity that will not sanctify the crises of his life. So, dear brother, this motto is to be written over every portal through which you and I go; and whatsoever we can put our hands to, in it we may magnify and manifest the holiness of God.

III. Now, lastly, note the motive or inspiration of holiness.

The language of my text might read like 'the Holy One who hath called you.' Peter would stir his hearers to the emulation of the Divine holiness by that thought of the bond that unites Him and them. 'He hath called you.' In which word, I suppose, he includes the whole sum of the Divine operations which have resulted in the placing of each of his auditors within the circle of the Christian community as the subjects of Christ's grace, and not only the one definite act to which the theologians attach the name of 'calling.' In the briefest possible way we may put the motive thus—the inspiration of imitation is to be found in the contemplation of the gifts of God. What He has said and done to me, calling me out of my darkness and alienation and lavishing the tokens of His love, the voice of His beseechings, the monitions of His Spirit, the message of His Son, the Incarnate Word, and invitation of God—all these things are included in His call. And all of them are the reasons why, bound by thankfulness, overcome by his forbearance, responding to His entreaties, and glued to Him by the strength of the hand that holds us, and the tenacity of His love, we should strive to 'walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.'

And not only so, but in the thought of the Divine calling there lies a fountain of inspiration when we remember the purpose of the calling. As Paul puts it in one of his letters: 'God has not called us to uncleanness but to holiness.' That to which He summons, or invites (for you may use either word), is holiness like His own. That is the crown of all His purposes for men, the great goal and blessed home to which He would lead us all.

And so, if in addition to the fact of His 'gift and calling' and all that is included within it, if in addition to the purpose of that calling we further think of the relation between us and Him which results from it, so as that we, as the next verse says, call Him who hath called us, 'Our Father,' then the motive becomes deeper and more blessed still. Shall we not try to be like the Father of our spirits, and seek for His grace, to bear the likeness of sons?

My text speaks only of effort, let us not forget that the truest way to be partakers of His holiness is to open our hearts for the entrance of the Spirit of His Son, and possessing that—having these promises and that great fulfilment of them—then to perfect holiness in the fear and love of the Lord.

1 Peter i. 17— FATHER AND JUDGE

'If ye call on Him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.'—1 Peter i. 17.

'If ye call on Him as Father,' when ye pray, say, 'Our Father which art in heaven.' One can scarcely help supposing that the Apostle is here, as in several other places in his letter, alluding to words that are stamped ineffaceably upon his memory, because they had dropped from Christ's lips. At all events, whether there is here a distinct allusion to what we call the Lord's Prayer or no, it is here recognised as the universal characteristic of Christian people that their prayers are addressed to God in the character of Father. So that

we may say that there is no Christianity which does not recognise and rejoice in appealing to the paternal relationship.

But, then, I suppose in Peter's days, as in our days, there were people that so fell in love with one aspect of the Divine nature that they had no eyes for any other; and who so magnified the thought of the Father that they forgot the thought of the Judge. That error has been committed over and over again in all ages, so that the Church as a whole, one may say, has gone swaying from one extreme to the other, and has rent these two conceptions widely apart, and sometimes has been foolish enough to pit them against each other instead of doing as Peter does here, braiding them together as both conspiring to one result, the production in the Christian heart of a wholesome awe. If ye call on Him as Father 'who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear.'

So then, look at this twofold aspect of God's character.

Both these conceptions ought to be present, flamingly and vividly, burning there before him, to every Christian man. 'Ye call Him Father,' but the Father is the Judge. True, the Judge is Father, but Peter reminds us that whatever blessed truths may be hived in that great Name of Father, to be drawn thence by devout meditation and filial love, there is not included in it the thought of weak-minded indulgence to His children, in any of their sins, nor any unlikelihood of inflicting penal consequences on a rebellious child. 'Father' does not exclude 'Judge,' 'and without respect of persons He judgeth.'

'Without respect of persons'—the word is a somewhat unusual New Testament one, but it has special appropriateness and emphasis on Peter's lips. Do you remember who it was that said, and on what occasion he said it: 'Now I perceive that God is no respecter of persons'? It was Peter when he had learned the lesson on the housetop at Joppa, looking out over the Mediterranean, and had it enforced by Cornelius' message. The great thought that had blazed

upon him as a new discovery on that never-be-forgotten occasion, comes before him again, and this unfamiliar word comes with it, and he says, 'without respect of persons He judges.' Mountains are elevated, valleys are depressed and sunken, but I fancy that the difference between the top of Mount Everest and the gorge through which the Jordan runs would scarcely be perceptible if you were standing on the sun. Thus, 'without respect of persons,' great men and little, rich men and poor, educated men and illiterate, people that perch themselves on their little stools and think themselves high above their fellows: they are all on one dead level in the eye of the Judge. And this question is as to the quality of the work and not as to the dignity of the doer. 'Without respect of persons' implies universality as well as impartiality. If a Christian man has been ever so near God, and then goes away from Him, he is judged notwithstanding his past nearness. And if a poor soul, all crusted over with his sins and leprous with the foulness of long-standing iniquity, comes to God and asks for pardon, he is judged according to his penitence, 'without respect of persons.' That great hand holds an even balance. And though the strictness of the judicial process may have its solemn and its awful aspect, it has also its blessed and its comforting one.

Now, do not run away with the notion that the Apostle is speaking here of that great White Throne and the future judgment that for many of us lies, inoperative on our creeds, on the other side of the great cleft of death. That is a solemn thought, but it is not Peter's thought here. If any of you can refer to the original, you will see that even more strongly than in our English version, though quite sufficiently strongly there, the conception is brought out of a continuous Divine judgment running along, all through a man's life, side by side with his work. The judgment here meant is not all clotted together, as it were, in that final act of judgment, leaving the previous life without it, but it runs all through the ages, all through each man's days. I beseech you to ponder that thought, that at each

moment of each of our lives an estimate of the moral character of each of our deeds is present to the Divine mind.

'Of course we believe that,' you say. 'That is commonplace; not worth talking about.' Ah! but because we believe it, as of course, we slip out of thinking about it and letting it affect our lives. And what I desire to do for you, dear friends, and for myself, is just to put emphasis on the one half of that little word '*judgeth*' and ask you to take its three last letters and lay them on your minds. Do we feel that, moment by moment, these little spurs of bad temper, these little gusts of worldliness, that tiny, evanescent sting of pride and devildom which has passed across or been fixed in our minds, are all present to God, and that He has judged them already, in the double sense that He has appraised their value and estimated their bearing upon our characters, and that He has set in motion some of the consequences which we shall have to reap?

Oh! one sometimes wishes that people did not so much believe in a future judgment, in so far as it obscures to them the solemn thought of a present and a continuous one. 'Verily, there is a God that *judgeth* in the earth,' and, of course, all these provisional decisions, which are like the documents that in Scotch law are said to '*precognosce the case*,' are all laid away in the archives of heaven, and will be produced, docketed and in order, at the last for each of us. Christian people sometimes abuse the doctrine of justification by faith as if it meant that Christians at the last were not to be judged. But they are, and there is such a thing as '*salvation yet so as by fire*,' and such a thing as salvation in fulness. Do not let filial confidence drive out legitimate fear.

He '*judges according to every man's work*.' I do not think it is extravagant attention to niceties to ask you to notice that the Apostle does not say '*works*,' but '*work*'; as if all the separate actions were gathered into a great whole, as indeed they are, because they are all the products of one mind and character. The trend and drift, so to

speak, of our life, rather than its isolated actions and the underlying motives, in their solemn totality and unity, these are the materials of this Divine judgment.

Now, let me say a word about the disposition which the Apostle enjoins upon us in the view of these facts.

The Judge is the Father, the Father is the Judge. The one statement proclaims the merciful, compassionate, paternal judgment, the other the judicial Fatherhood. And what comes from the combination of these two ideas, which thus modify and illuminate one another? 'Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.' What a descent that sounds from the earlier verses of the letter: 'In whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.' Down from those heights of 'joy unspeakable,' and 'already glorified,' the apostle drops plump into *this* dungeon: 'Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.' Of course, I need not remind you that the 'fear' here is not the 'fear which hath torment'; in fact, I do not think that it is a fear that refers to God at all. It is not a sentiment or emotion of which God is the object. It is not the reverent awe which often appears in Scripture as 'the fear of God,' which is a kind of shorthand expression for all modes of devout sentiment and emotion; but it is a fear, knowing our own weakness and the strong temptations that are round us, of falling into sin. That is the one thing to be afraid of in this world. If a man rightly understood what he is here for, then the only thing that he would be terrified for would be that he should miss the purpose of his being here and lose his hold of God thereby. There is nothing else worth being afraid of, but that *is* worth being afraid of. It is not slavish dread, nor is it cowardice, but the well-grounded emotion of men that know themselves too well to be confident and know the world too well to be daring and presumptuous.

Don't you think that Peter had had a pretty rough experience in his life that had taught him the wisdom of such an exhortation? And does it not strike you as very beautiful that it should come, of all people in the world, from his lips? The man that had said, 'Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I.' 'Why cannot I follow Thee now?' 'Bid me come to Thee on the water.' 'This be far from Thee, Lord, it shall not be unto Thee'—the man that had whipped out his sword in the garden, in a spasm of foolish affection, now, in his quiet old age, when he has learnt the lesson of failures and follies and sins and repentance, says in effect: 'Remember me, and do not you be presumptuous.' 'Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.' 'If I had known myself a little better, and been a little more afraid of myself, I should not have made such a fool of myself or such shipwreck of my faithfulness.'

Dear friends, no mature Christian is so advanced as that he does not need this reminder, and no Christian novice is so feeble as that, keeping obedient to this precept, he will not be victorious over all his evils. The strongest needs to fear; the weakest, fearing, is safe. For such fearfulness is indispensable to safety. It is all very well to go along with sail extended and a careless look-out. But if, for instance, a captain keeps such when he is making the mouth of the Red Sea where there are a narrow channel and jagged rocks and a strong current, if he has not every man at his quarters and everything ready to let go and stop in a moment, he will be sure to be on the reefs before he has tried the experiment often. And the only safety for any of us is ever to be on the watch, and to dread our own weakness. 'Blessed is the man that feareth always.'

Such carefulness over conduct and heart is fully compatible with all the blessed emotions to which it seems at first antagonistic. There is no discord between the phrase that I have quoted about 'joy unspeakable and full of glory,' and this temper, but rather the two help one another. And such blended confidence and fear are the parents of courage. The man that is afraid that he will do wrong and

so hurt himself and grieve his Saviour, is the man that will never be afraid of anything else. Martyrs have gone to the stake 'fearing not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do,' because they were so afraid to sin against God that they were not afraid to die rather than to do it. And that is the temper that you and I should have. Let that one fear, like Moses' rod, swallow up all the other serpents and make our hearts impervious to any other dread.

'Pass the time of your *sojourning*.' You do not live in your own country, you are in an alien land. You are passing through it. Troops on the march in an enemy's country, unless they are led by an idiot, will send out clouds of scouts in front and on the wings to give timeous warning of any attempted assault. If we cheerily and carelessly go through this world as if we were marching in a land where there were no foes, there is nothing before us but defeat at the last. Only let us remember that sleepless watchfulness is needed only in this time of sojourning, and that when we get to our own country there is no need for such patrols and advance guards and rearguards and men on the flank as were essential when we were on the march. People that grow exotic plants here in England keep them in glass houses. But when they are taken to their native soil the glass would be an impertinence. As long as we are here we have to wear our armour, but when we get yonder the armour can safely be put off and the white robes that had to be tucked up under it lest they should be soiled by the muddy ways can be let down, for they will gather no pollution from the golden streets. The gates of that city do not need to be shut, day nor night. For when sin has ceased and our liability to yield to temptation has been exchanged for fixed adhesion to the Lord Himself, then, and not till then, is it safe to put aside the armour of godly fear and to walk, unguarded and unarmed, in the land of perpetual peace.

1 Peter i. 22— PURIFYING THE SOUL

'... ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren.'—1 Peter i. 22.

Note these three subsidiary clauses introduced respectively by 'in,' 'through,' 'unto.' They give the means, the Bestower, and the issue of the purity of soul. The Revised Version, following good authorities, omits the clause, 'through the Spirit.' It may possibly be originally a marginal gloss of some scribe who was nervous about Peter's orthodoxy, which finally found its way into the text. But I think we shall be inclined to retain it if we notice that, throughout this epistle, the writer is fond of sentences on the model of the present one, and of surrounding a principal clause with subsidiary ones introduced by a similar sequence of prepositions. For instance, in this very chapter, to pass over other examples, we read, 'Kept by' (or in) 'the power of God through faith unto salvation.' So, for my present purpose, I take the doubtful words as part of the original text. They unquestionably convey a true idea, whether they are genuine here or no.

One more introductory remark—'Ye have purified your souls'—a bold statement to make about the vast multitude of the 'dispersed' throughout all the provinces of Asia Minor whom the Apostle was addressing. The form of the words in the original shows that this purifying is a process which began at some definite point in the past and is being continued throughout all the time of Christian life. The hall-mark of all Christians is a relative purity, not of actions, but of soul. They will vary, one from another; the conception of what is purity of soul will change and grow, but, if a man is a Christian, there was a moment in his past at which he potentially, and in ideal, purified his spirit, and that was the moment when he bowed down in obedience to the truth. There are suggestions for volumes about the true conception of soul-purity in these words of my text. But I deal with them in the simplest possible fashion, following the guidance

of these significant little words which introduce the subordinate clauses.

First of all, then, we have here the great thought that

I. Soul purity is in, or by, obedience.

Now, of course, 'the truth'—truth with the definite article—is the sum of the contents of the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ, His life, His death, His Glory. For to Peter, as to us He should be, Jesus Christ was Truth Incarnate. 'In Him were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' The first thought that is suggested to me from this expression—obedience to the truth—is that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is, as its ultimate intention, meant to be obeyed. There are plenty of truths which have no influence on life and conduct, for which all is done that they can demand when they are accepted. But *the* truth is no inert substance like the element which recent chemical discoveries have found, which is named 'argon,' the do-nothing: *the* truth is, as physiologists say, a ferment. It is intended to come into life, and into character, and into the inmost spirit of a man, and grip them, and mould them, and transform them, and animate them, and impel them. The truth is to be 'obeyed.'

Now that altogether throws over two card-castles which imperfect Christians are very apt to build. One which haunted the thoughts of an earlier generation of Christians more than it does the present, is that we have done all that 'the truth' asks of us when we have intellectually endorsed it. And so you get churches which build their membership upon acceptance of a creed and excommunicate heretics, whilst they keep do-nothing and uncleansed Christians within their pale. But God does not tell us anything that we may know. He tells us in order that, knowing, we may be and do. And right actions, or rather a character which produces such, is the last aim of all knowledge, and especially of all moral and religious truth. So 'the truth' is not 'argon', it is a ferment. And if men, steeped to the

eyebrows in orthodoxy, think that they have done enough when they have set their hands to a confession of faith, and that they are Christians because they can say, 'all this I steadfastly believe,' they need to remember that religious truth which does not mould and transform character and conduct is a king dethroned; and for dethroned kings there is a short step between the throne from which they have descended and the scaffold on which they die.

But there is another—what I venture to call a card-castle, which more of us build in these days of indifference as to creed—and that is that a great many of us are too much disposed to believe that 'the truth as it is in Jesus' has received from us all which it expects when we trust to it for what we call our 'salvation,' meaning thereby forgiveness of sins and immunity from punishment. These are elements of salvation unquestionably, but they are only part of it. And the very truths on which Christian people rest for this initial salvation, which is forgiveness and acceptance, are meant to be the guides of our lives and the patterns for our imitation. Why, in this very letter, in reference to the very parts of Christ's work, on which faith is wont to rest for salvation,—the death on the Cross to which we say that we trust, and which we are so accustomed to exalt as a unique and inimitable work that cannot be reproduced and needs no repetition, world without end—Peter has no hesitation in saying that Christ was our 'Pattern,' and that, even when He went to the Cross, He died 'leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps.' So, brethren, the truth needs to be known and believed: the truth needs not only to be believed but to be trusted in; the truth needs not only to be believed and to be trusted in, but to be obeyed.

Still further, another thought following upon and to some extent modifying the preceding one, is suggested here, and that is that the faith, which I have just been saying is sometimes mistakenly regarded as being all that truth calls for from us, is itself obedience. As I have said, the language in the original here implies that there was a given definite moment in the past when these dispersed

strangers obeyed, and, by obeying the truth, purified their souls. What was that moment? Some people would say the moment when the rite of baptism was administered. I would say the moment when they bowed themselves in joyful acceptance of the great Word and put out a firm hand of faith to grasp Jesus Christ. That *is* obedience. For, in the very act of thus trusting, there is self-surrender, is there not? Does not a man depart from himself and bow himself humbly before his Saviour when he puts his trust in Him? Is not the very essence of obedience, not the mere external act, but the melting of the will to flow in such directions as His master-impulse may guide it? Thus, faith in its depth is obedience; and the moment when a man believes, in the deepest sense of the word, that moment, in the deepest realities of his spirit, he becomes obedient to the will and to the love of his Saviour Lord, Who is the Truth as He is the Way and the Life. We find, not only in this Epistle, but throughout the Epistles, that the two words 'disobedience' and 'unbelief,' are used as equivalents. We read, for instance, of those that 'stumble at the word, being disobedient,' and the like. So, then, faith is obedience in its depth, and, if our faith has any vitality in it, it carries in it the essence of all submission.

But then, further, my text implies that the faith which is, in its depth, obedience, in its practical issues will produce the practical obedience which the text enjoins. It is no mere piece of theological legerdemain which counts that faith is righteousness. But, just as all sin comes from selfishness, so, and therefore, all righteousness will flow from giving up self, from decentralising, as it were, our souls from their old centre, self, and taking a new centre, God in Christ. Thus the germ of all practical obedience lies in vital faith. It is, if I might so say, the mother-tincture which, variously combined, coloured, and perfumed, makes all the precious things, the virtues and graces of humanity, which the believing soul pours out as a libation before its God. It is the productive energy of all practical goodness. It is the bottom heat in the greenhouse which makes all the plants grow and flourish. Faith is obedience, and faith produces

obedience. Does my faith produce obedience? If it does not, it is not faith.

Then, with regard to this first part of my subject, comes the final thought that practical obedience works inwards as well as outwards, and purifies the soul which renders it. People generally turn that round the other way, and, instead of saying that to do right helps to make a man right within, they say 'make the tree good, and its fruit good'—first the pure soul, and then the practical obedience. Both statements are true. For every act that a man does reacts upon the doer, just as, whether the shot hits the target or not, the gun kicks back on the shoulder of the man that fired it. Conduct comes from character, but conduct works back upon character, and character is largely the deposit from the vanished seas of actions. So, then, whilst the deepest thought is, be good and you will do good, it is not to be forgotten that the other side is true—do good, and it will tend to make you good. Obedience purifies the soul, while, on the other hand, a man that lives ill comes to think as he lives, and to become tenfold more a child of evil. 'The dyer's hand is subdued to what it works in.' 'Ye have purified your souls,' ideally, in the act of faith, and continuously, in the measure in which you practically obey the truth.

We have here

II. Purifying through the Spirit.

I have already said that these words are possibly no part of the original text, but that they convey a true Christian idea, whether the words are here genuine or no. I need not enlarge upon this part of my subject at any length. Let me just remind you how the other verse in this chapter, to which I have already referred as cast in the same mould as our text, covers, from a different point of view, the same ground exactly as our text. Here there is put first the human element: 'Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth,' and secondly the Divine element; 'through the Spirit.' The human part is

put in the foreground, and God's part comes in, I was going to say, subordinately, as a condition. The reverse is the case in the other text, which runs: 'Kept *in* the power of God *through* faith'—where the Divine element is in the foreground, as being the true cause, and the human dwindles to being merely a condition—'Kept by' (or in) 'the power of God through faith.' Both views are true; you may take the vase by either handle. When the purpose is to stimulate to action, man's part is put in the foreground and God's part secondarily. When the purpose is to stimulate to confidence, God's part is put in the foreground and the man's is secondary. The two interlock, and neither is sufficient without the other.

The true Agent of all purifying is that Divine Spirit.

I have said that the moment of true trust is the moment of initial obedience, and of the beginning of purity. And it is so because, in that moment of initial faith, there enters into the heart the communicated Divine life of the Spirit, which thenceforward is lodged there, except it be quenched by the man's negligence or sin. Thence, from that germ implanted in the moment of faith, the germ of a new life, there issue forth to ultimate dominion in the spirit, the powers of that Divine Spirit which make for righteousness and transform the character. Thus, the true cause and origin of all Christian nobility and purity of character and conduct lies in that which enters the heart at the moment that the heart is opened for the coming of the Lord. But, on the other hand, this Divine Spirit, the Source of all purity, will not purify the soul without the man's efforts. 'Ye have purified your souls.' You need the Spirit indeed. But you are not mere passive recipients. You are to be active co-operators. In this region, too, we are 'labourers together with God.' We cannot of ourselves do the work, for the very powers with which we do it, or try to do it, are themselves in need of cleansing. And for a man to try to purify the soul by his own effort alone is to play the part of the sluttish house-wife who would seek to wipe a dish clean with a dirty cloth. You need the Divine Spirit to work in you, and

you need to use, by your own effort, the Divine Spirit that does work in you. He is as 'rushing, mighty wind'; but, unless the sails are set and the helm gripped, the wind will pass the boat and leave it motionless. He is Divine fire that burns up the dross and foulness; but, unless we 'guard the holy fire' and feed it, it dies down into grey cold ashes. He is the water of life; but, unless we dig and take heed to keep clear the channels, no refreshing will permeate to the roots of the wilting flowers, and there will be dryness, thirst, and barrenness, even on the river's banks.

So, brethren, neither God alone nor man alone can purify the soul. We need Him, else we shall labour in vain. He needs us, else He will bestow His gift, and we shall receive 'the grace of God in vain.'

Lastly, we have here—

III. Purifying ... unto ... love.

The Apostle was speaking to men of very diverse nationalities who had been rent asunder by deep gulfs of mutual suspicion and conflicting interests and warring creeds, and a great mysterious, and, as it would seem to the world then, utterly inexplicable bond of unity had been evolved amongst them, and Greek and barbarian, bond and free, male and female, had come together in amity. The 'love of the brethren' was the creation of Christianity, and was the outstanding fact which, more than any other, amazed the beholders in these early days. God be thanked! there are signs in our generation of a closer drawing together of Christian people than many past ages, alas, have seen.

But my text suggests solemn and great thoughts with regard to Christian love and unity. The road to unity lies through purity, and the road to purity lies through obedience. Yes; what keeps Christian people apart is their impurities. It is not their creeds. It is not any of the differences that appear to separate them. It is because they are not better men and women. Globules of quicksilver will run together

and make one mass; but not if you dust them over. And it is the impurities on the quicksilver that keep us from coalescing.

So then we have to school ourselves into greater conformity to the likeness of our Master, to conquer selfishness, and to purify our souls, or else all this talk about Christian unity is no better than sounding brass, and more discordant than tinkling cymbals. Let us learn the lesson. 'The unfeigned love of the brethren' is not such an easy thing as some people fancy, and it is not to be attained at all on the road by which some people would seek it. Cleanse yourselves, and you will flow together.

Here, then, we have Peter's conception of a pure soul and a pure life. It is a stately building, based deep on the broad foundation of the truth as it is in Jesus; its walls rising, but not without our effort, being builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit, and having as the shining apex of its heaven-pointing spire 'unfeigned love to the brethren.' The measure of our obedience is the measure of our purity. The measure of our purity is the measure of our brotherly love. But that love, though it is the very aim and natural issue of purity, still will not be realised without effort on our part. Therefore my text, after its exhibition of the process and issues of the purifying which began with faith, glides into the exhortation: 'See that ye love one another with a pure heart'—a heart purified by obedience—and that 'fervently.'

1 Peter ii. 4, 5— LIVING STONES ON THE LIVING FOUNDATION STONE

'To Whom coming, as unto a living stone ... ye also, as living stones, are built up.'—1 Peter ii. 4, 5.

I wonder whether Peter, when he wrote these words, was thinking about what Jesus Christ said to him long ago, up there at Cæsarea Philippi. He had heard from Christ's lips, 'Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church.' He had understood very little of what

it meant then. He is an old man now, years of experience and sorrow and work have taught him the meaning of the words, and he understands them a great deal better than his so-called successors have done. For we may surely take the text as the Apostle's own disclaimer of that which the Roman Catholic Church has founded on it, and has blazoned it, in gigantic letters round the dome of St. Peter's, as meaning. It is surely legitimate to hear him saying in these words: 'Make no mistake, it is Jesus Himself on whom the Church is built. The confession of Him which the Father in heaven revealed to me, not I, the poor sinner who confessed it—the Christ whom that confession set forth, He is the foundation stone, and all of you are called and honoured to ring out the same confession. Jesus is the one Foundation, and we all, apostles and humble believers, are but stones builded on Him.' Peter's relation to Jesus is fundamentally the same as that of every poor soul that 'comes to' Him.

Now, there are two or three thoughts that may very well be suggested from these words, and the first of them is this:—

I. Those that are in Christ have perpetually to make the effort to come nearer Christ.

Remember that the persons to whom the Apostle is speaking are no strangers to the Saviour. They have been professing Christians from of old. They have made very considerable progress in the Divine life; they are near Jesus Christ; and yet Peter says to them, 'You can get nearer if you try,' and it is your one task and one hope, the condition of all blessedness, peace, and joy in your religious life that you should perpetually be making the effort to come closer, and to keep closer, to the Lord, by whom you say that you live.

What is it to come to Him? The context explains the figurative expression, in the very next verse or two, by another and simpler word, which strips away the figure and gives us the plain fact—'in Whom believing.' The act of the soul by which I, with all my

weakness and sin, cast myself on Jesus Christ, and grapple Him to my heart, and bind myself with His strength and righteousness—that is what the Apostle means here. Or, to put it into other words, this 'coming,' which is here laid as the basis of everything, of all Christian prosperity and progress for the individual and for the community, is the movement towards Christ of the whole spiritual nature of a man—thoughts, loves, wishes, purposes, desires, hopes, will. And we come near to Him when day by day we realise His nearness to us, when our thoughts are often occupied with Him, bring His peace and Himself to bear as a motive upon our conduct, let our love reach out its tendrils towards, and grasp, and twine round Him, bow our wills to His commandment, and in everything obey Him. The distance between heaven and earth does part us, but the distance between a thoughtless mind, an unrenewed heart, a rebellious will, and Him, sets between Him and us a greater gulf, and we have to bridge that by continual honest efforts to keep our wayward thoughts true to Him and near Him, and to regulate our affections that they may not, like runaway stars, carry us far from the path, and to bow our stubborn and self-regulating wills beneath His supreme commandment, and so to make all things a means of coming nearer the Lord with whom is our true home.

Christian men, there are none of us so close to Him but that we may be nearer, and the secret of our daily Christian life is all wrapped up in that one word which is scarcely to be called a figure, 'coming' unto Him. That nearness is what we are to make daily efforts after, and that nearness is capable of indefinite increase. We know not how close to His heart we can lay our aching heads. We know not how near to His fulness we may bring our emptiness. We have never yet reached the point beyond which no closer union is possible. There has always been a film—and, alas! sometimes a gulf—between Him and us, His professing servants. Let us see to it that the conscious distance diminishes every day, and that we feel ourselves more and more constantly near the Lord and intertwined with Him.

II. Those who come near Christ will become like Christ.

'To Whom coming, as unto a living stone, ye also as living stones.' Note the verbal identity of the expressions with which Peter describes the Master and His servants. Christ is the Stone—that is Peter's interpretation of 'on this *rock* will I build My Church.' There is a reference, too, no doubt, to the many Old Testament prophecies which are all gathered up in that saying of our Lord's. Probably both Jesus and Peter had in mind Isaiah's 'stone of stumbling,' which was also a 'sure corner-stone, and a tried foundation.' And words in the context which I have not taken for consideration, 'disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious,' plainly rest upon the 118th Psalm, which speaks of 'the stone which the builders rejected' becoming 'the head of the corner.'

But, says Peter, He is not only the foundation Stone, the corner Stone, but a *living* Stone, and he does not only use that word to show us that he is indulging in a metaphor, and that we are to think of a person and not of a thing, but in the sense that Christ is eminently and emphatically the living One, the Source of life.

But, when he turns to the disciples, he speaks to them in exactly the same language. They, too, are 'living stones,' because they come to the 'Stone' that is 'living.' Take away the metaphor, and what does this identity of description come to? Just this, that if we draw near to Jesus Christ, life from Him will pass into our hearts and minds, which life will show itself in kindred fashion to what it wore in Jesus Christ, and will shape us into the likeness of Him *from* whom we draw our life, because *to* Him we have come. I may remind you that there is scarcely a single name by which the New Testament calls Jesus Christ which Jesus Christ does not share with us His younger brethren. By that Son we 'receive the adoption of sons.' Is He the Light of the world? We are lights of the world. And if you look at the words of my text, you will see that the offices which are attributed to Christ in the New Testament are gathered up in those

which the Apostle here ascribes to Christ's servants. Jesus Christ in His manhood was the Temple of God. Jesus Christ in His manhood was the Priest for humanity. Jesus Christ in His manhood was the sacrifice for the world's sins. And what does Peter say here? 'Ye are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices.' You draw life from Jesus Christ if you keep close to Him, and that life makes you, in derived and subordinate fashion, but in a very real and profound sense, what Jesus Christ was in the world. The whole blessedness and secret of the gifts which our Lord comes to bestow upon men may be summed up in that one thought, which is metaphorically and picturesquely set forth in the language of my text, and which I put into plainer and more prosaic English when I say—they that come near Christ become as Christ. As 'living stones' they, too, share in the life which flows from Him. Touch Him, and His quick Spirit passes into our hearts. Rest upon that foundation-stone and up from it, if I may so say, there is drawn, by strange capillary attraction, all the graces and powers of the Saviour's own life. The building which is reared upon the Foundation is cemented to the Foundation by the communication of the life itself, and, coming to the living Rock, we, too, become alive.

Let us keep ourselves near to Him, for, disconnected, the wire cannot carry the current, and is only a bit of copper, with no virtue in it, no power. Attach it once more to the battery and the mysterious energy flashes through it immediately. 'To Whom coming,' because He lives, 'ye shall live also.'

III. Lastly:

They who become like Christ because they are near Him, thereby grow together.

'To whom coming, as unto a living stone, ye also, as living stones, are built up.' That building up means not only the growth of individual graces in the Christian character, the building up in each single soul of more and more perfect resemblance to the Saviour,

but from the context it rather refers to the welding together, into a true and blessed unity, of all those that partake of that common life. Now, it is very beautiful to remember, in this connection, to whom this letter was written. The first words of it are: 'To the strangers *scattered abroad* throughout,' etc. etc. All over Asia Minor, hundreds of miles apart, here one there another little group, were these isolated believers, the scattered stones of a great building. But Peter shows them the way to a true unity, notwithstanding their separation. He says to them in effect: 'You up in Bithynia, and you others away down there on the southern coast, though you never saw one another, though you are separated by mountain ranges and weary leagues; though you, if you met one another, perhaps could not understand what you each were saying, if you "come unto the living Stone, ye as living stones are built up" into one.' There is a great unity into which all they are gathered who, separated by whatever surface distinctions, yet, deep down at the bottom of their better lives, are united to Jesus Christ.

But there may be another lesson here for us, and that is, that the true and only secret of the prosperity and blessedness and growth of a so-called Christian congregation is the individual faithfulness of its members, and their personal approximation of Jesus Christ. If we here, knit together as we are nominally for Christian worship, and by faith in that dear Lord, are true to our profession and our vocation, and keep ourselves near our Master, then we shall be built up; and if we do not, we shall not.

So, dear friends, all comes to this: *There* is the Stone laid; it does not matter how *close* we are lying to it, it will be nothing to us unless we are *on* it. And I put it to each of you. Are you built on the Foundation, and from the Foundation do you derive a life which is daily bringing you nearer to Him, and making you liker Him? All blessedness depends, for time and for eternity, on the answer to that question. For remember that, since that living Stone is laid, it is *something* to you. Either it is the Rock on which you build, or the

Stone against which you stumble and are broken. No man, in a country evangelised like England—I do not say Christian, but evangelised—can say that Jesus Christ has no relation to, or effect upon, him. And certainly no people that listen to Christian preaching, and know Christian truth as fully and as much as you do, can say it. He is the Foundation on which we can rear a noble, stable life, if we build upon Him. If He is not the Foundation on which I build, He is the Stone on which I shall be broken.

1 Peter ii. 5— SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES

'... Spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.'—1 Peter ii. 5.

In this verse Peter piles up his metaphors in a fine profusion, perfectly careless of oratorical elegance or propriety. He gathers together three symbols, drawn from ancient sacrificial worship, and applies them all to Christian people. In the one breath they are 'temples,' in the next 'priests,' in the third 'sacrifices.' All the three are needed to body out the whole truth of the relationship of the perfect universal religion—which is Christianity—to the fragmentary and symbolical religion of ancient time.

Christians individually and collectively are temples, inasmuch as they are 'the habitation of God through the Spirit.' They are priests by virtue of their consecration, their direct access to God, their function of representing God to men, and of bringing men to God. They are sacrifices, inasmuch as one main part of their priestly function is to offer themselves to God.

Now, it is very difficult for us to realise what an extraordinary anomaly the Christian faith presented at its origin, surrounded by religions which had nothing to do with morality, conduct, or spiritual life, but were purely ritualistic. And here, in the midst of

them, started up a religion bare and bald, and with no appeal to sense, no temple, no altar, no sacrifice. But the Apostles with one accord declare that they had all these things in far higher form than those faiths possessed them, which had only the outward appearance.

Now, this conception of the sacrificial element in the Christian life runs through the whole New Testament, and is applied there in a very remarkable variety of forms. I have taken the words of my text, not so much to discourse upon them especially. My object now is rather to gather together the various references to the Christian life as essentially sacrificial, and to trace the various applications which that idea receives in the New Testament. There are four classes of these, to which I desire especially to refer.

I. There is the living sacrifice of the body.

'I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye *present*'

—which is a technical word for a priest's action—'your bodies a living sacrifice,' in contrast with the slaying, which was the presentation of the animal victim. Now, that 'body' there is not equivalent to self is distinctly seen when we notice that Paul goes on, in the very next clause, to say, 'and be transformed by the renewing of your *mind*.' So that he is speaking, not of the self, but of the corporeal organ and instrument of the self, when he says 'present your *bodies* a living sacrifice.'

Of course, the central idea of sacrifice is surrender to God; and, of course, the place where that surrender is made is the inmost self. The will is the man, and when the will bows, dethroning self and enthroning God, submitting to His appointments, and delighting to execute His commandments, then the sacrifice is begun. But, inasmuch as the body is the organ of the man's activity, the sacrifice of the will and of self must needs come out into visibility and actuality in the aggregate of deeds, of which the body is the organ

and instrument. But there must first of all be the surrender of my inmost self, and only then, and as the token and outcome of that, will any external acts, however religious they may seem to be, come into the category of sacrifice when they express a conscious surrender of myself to God. 'The flesh profiteth nothing,' and yet the flesh profiteth much. But here is the order that another of the Apostles lays down: 'Yield *yourselves* to God,' and then, 'your members as instruments of righteousness to Him.'

To speak of the sacrifice of the body as a living sacrifice suggests that it is not the slaying of any bodily appetite or activity that is the true sacrifice and worship, but the hallowing of these. It is a great deal easier, and it is sometimes necessary, to cut off the offending right hand, to pluck out the offending right eye, or, putting away the metaphor, to abstain rigidly from forms of activity which are perfectly legitimate in themselves, and may be innocuous to other people, if we find that they hurt us. But that is second best, and though it is better in the judgment of common sense to go into life maimed than complete to be cast into hell-fire, it is better still to go into life symmetrical and entire, with no maiming in hand or organ. So you do not offer the living sacrifice of the body when you annihilate, but when you suppress, and direct, and hallow its needs, its appetites, and its activities.

The meaning of this sacrifice is that the whole active life should be based upon, and be the outcome of, the inward surrender of self unto God. 'On the bells of the horses shall be written, Holiness to the Lord, and every pot and vessel in Jerusalem shall be holy as the bowls upon the altar'—in such picturesque and yet profound fashion did an ancient prophet set forth the same truth that lies in this declaration of our Apostle, that the body, the instrument of our activities, should be a living sacrifice to God. Link all its actions with Him; let there be conscious reference to Him in all that I do. Let foot and hand and eye and brain work for Him, and by Him, and in constant consciousness of His presence; suppress where

necessary, direct always, appetites and passions, and make the body the instrument of the surrendered spirit. And then, in the measure in which we can do so, the greatest cleft and discord in human life will be filled, and body, soul, and spirit will harmonise and make one music of praise to God.

Ah! brethren, these bad principles have teeth to bite very close into our daily lives. How many of us, young and old, have 'fleshly lusts which war against the soul'? How many of you young men have no heart for higher, purer, nobler things, because the animal in you is strong! How many of you find that the day's activities blunt you to God! How many of us are weakened still under that great antagonism of the flesh lusting against the spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we would! Sensuality, indulgence in animal propensities, yielding to the clamant voices of the beast that is within us—these things wreck many a soul; and some of those that are listening to me now. Let the man govern and coerce the animal, and let God govern the man. 'I beseech you that you yield your bodies a living sacrifice.'

II. There is the sacrifice of praise.

Of course, logically and properly, this, and all the others that I am going to speak about, are included within that to which I have already directed attention. But still they are dealt with separately in Scripture, and I follow the guidance. We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews: 'By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise unto God continually—that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks unto His name.' There, then, is another of the regions into which the notion of sacrifice as the very essence of Christian life is to be carried.

There is nothing more remarkable in Scripture than the solemn importance that it attaches to what so many people think so little about, and that is *words*. It even sometimes seems to take them as being more truly the outcome and revelation of a man's character than his deeds are. And that is true, in some respects. But at all

events there is set forth, ever running all through the Scripture, that thought, that one of the best sacrifices that men can make to God is to render up the tribute of their praise. In the great psalm which lays down with clearness never surpassed in the New Testament the principles of true Christian worship, this is declared: 'Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me.' The true offering is not the slaying of animals or the presentation of any material things, but the utterance of hearts welling up thankfulness. In the ancient ritual there stood within the Holy place, and after the altar of burnt-offering had been passed, three symbols of the relation of the redeemed soul to God. There was the great candlestick, which proclaimed 'Ye are the light of the world.' There was the table on which the so-called shewbread was laid, and in the midst there was the altar of incense, on which, day by day, morning and evening, there was kindled the fragrant offering which curled up in wreaths of blue smoke aspiring towards the heavens. It lay smouldering all through the day, and was quickened into flame morning and evening. That is a symbol representing what the Christian life ought to be—a continual thank-offering of the incense of prayer and praise.

Nor that only, brethren, but also there is another shape in which our words should be sacrifices, and that is in the way of direct utterances to men, as well as of thanksgiving to God. What a shame it is, and what a confession of imperfect, partial redemption and regeneration on the part of professing Christians it is, that there are thousands of us who never, all our lives, have felt the impulse or necessity of giving utterance to our Christian convictions! You can talk about anything else; you are tongue-tied about your religion. Why is that? You can make speeches upon political platforms, or you can discourse on many subjects that interest you. You never speak a word to anybody about the Master that you say you serve. Why is that? 'What is bred in the bone comes out in the flesh.' What is deep in the heart sometimes lies there unuttered, but more often demands expression. I venture to think that if your Christianity was deeper, it would not be so dumb. You strengthen your convictions by speech.

A man's belief in anything grows incalculably by the very fact of proclaiming it. And there is no surer way to lose moral and spiritual convictions than to huddle them up in the secret chambers of our hearts. It is like a man carrying a bit of ice in his palm. He locks his fingers over it, and when he opens them it has all run out and gone. If you want to deepen your Christianity, declare it. If you would have your hearts more full of gratitude, speak your praise. There used to be in certain religious houses a single figure kneeling on the altar-steps, by day and by night, ever uttering forth with unremitting voice, the psalm of praise. That perpetual adoration in spirit, if not in form, ought to be ours. The fruit of the lips should continually be offered. Literally, of course, there cannot be that unbroken and exclusive utterance of thanksgiving. There are many other things that men have to talk about; but through all the utterances there ought to spread the aroma—like some fragrance diffused through the else scentless air from some unseen source of sweetness—of that name to which the life is one long thanksgiving.

III. There is the sacrifice of help to men.

The same passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, to which I have already referred, goes on to bracket together the sacrifice of praise and of deeds. It continues thus:—'But to do good and to communicate forget not.' Again I say, logically this comes under the first division.

But still it may be treated separately, and it just carries this thought—your praying and singing praises are worse than useless unless you go out into the world an embodiment and an imitation of the love which you hymn. True philanthropy has its roots in true religion. The service of man is the service of God.

That principle cuts two ways. It comes as a sharp test of their prayers and psalm-singing to emotional Christians, who are always able to gush in words of thankfulness, and it confronts them with the question, What do you do for your brother? That is a question that

comes very close to us all. Do not talk about being the priests of the Most High God unless you are doing the priestly office of representing God to men, and carrying to them the blessings that they need. Your service to God is worthless unless it is followed by diligent, fraternal, wise, self-sacrificing service for men.

The same principle points in another direction. If, on the one hand, it crushes as hypocrisy a religion of talk, on the other hand it declares as baseless a philanthropy which has no reference to God. And whilst I know that there are many men who, following the dictates of their hearts, and apart altogether from any reference to higher religious sanctions, do exercise pity and compassion and help, I believe that for the basing of a lasting, wide, wise benevolence, there is nothing solid and broad except Christ and Him crucified, and the consciousness of having been—sinful and needy as we are—received and blessed by Him. Let the philanthropists learn that the surrender of self, and the fruit of the lips giving thanks to His name, must precede the highest kind of beneficence. Let the Christian learn that benevolence is the garb in which religion is dressed.

'True worship and undefiled ... is this, to visit the widow and the fatherless in their affliction.' Morality is the dress of Religion; Religion is the body of Morality.

IV. Lastly, there is the sacrifice of death.

'I am ready to be offered,' says the Apostle—to be *poured out*, as a libation. And again, 'If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice with you all.' And so may

'Death the endless mercies seal,

And make the sacrifice complete.'

It may become not a reluctant being dragged out of life whilst we cling to it with both our hands. It may be not a reluctant yielding to necessity, but a religious act, in which a man resignedly and

trustfully and gratefully yields himself to God; and says, 'Father! into Thy hands I commit my spirit.'

Ah! brethren, is not that a better way to die than to be like some poor wretch in a stream, that clutches at some unfixd support on the bank, and is whirled away down, fiercely resisting and helpless? We may thus make our last act an act of devotion, and go within the veil as priests bearing in our hands the last of our sacrifices. The sacrifice of death will only be offered when a life of sacrifice has preceded it. And if you and I, moved by the mercies of God, yield ourselves living sacrifices, using our lips for His praise and our possessions for man's help, then we may die as the Apostle expected to do, and feel that by Christ Jesus even death becomes 'an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing unto God.'

1 Peter ii. 9— MIRRORS OF GOD

'... That ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness ...'—1 Peter ii. 9.

The *Revised Version*, instead of 'praises,' reads *excellencies*—and even that is but a feeble translation of the remarkable word here employed. For it is that usually rendered 'virtues'; and by the word, of course, when applied to God, we mean the radiant excellencies and glories of His character, of which our earthly qualities, designated by the same name, are but as shadows.

It is, indeed, true that this same expression is employed in the Greek version of the Old Testament in Isaiah xliii. in a verse which evidently was floating before Peter's mind. 'This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise.'

But even while that is admitted, it is to be observed that the expression here does not merely mean that the audible praise of God should be upon the lips of Christian people, but that their whole

lives should, in a far deeper sense than that, be the manifestation of what the Apostle here calls 'excellencies of God.'

I. Here we get a wonderful glimpse into the heart of God.

Note the preceding words, in which the writer describes all God's mercies to His people, making them 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation'; a people 'His own possession.' All that is done for one specific purpose—'that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness.' That is to say, the very aim of all God's gracious manifestations of Himself is that the men who apprehend them should go forth into the world and show Him for what He is.

Now that aim may be, and often has been, put so as to present an utterly hard and horrible notion. That God's glory is His only motive may be so stated as to mean nearly an Almighty Selfishness, which is far liker the devil than God. People in old days did not always recognise the danger that lay in such a representation of what we call God's motive for action. But if you think for a moment about this statement, all that appears hard and repellent drops clean away from it, and it turns out to be another way of saying, 'God is Love.' Because, what is there more characteristic of love than an earnest desire to communicate itself and to be manifested and beheld? And what is it that God reveals to the world for His own glory but the loftiest and most wondrous compassion, that cannot be wearied out, that cannot be provoked, and the most forgiving Omnipotence, that, in answer to all men's wanderings and rebellions, only seeks to draw them to itself? That is what God wants to be known for. Is *that* hard and repellent? Does that make Him a great tyrant, who only wants to be abjectly worshipped? No; it makes Him the very embodiment and perfection of the purest love. Why does He desire that He should be known? for any good that it does to Him? No; except the good that even His creatures can do to Him when they gladden His paternal

heart by recognising Him for what He is, the Infinite Lover of all souls.

But the reason why He desires, most of all, that the light of His character may pour into every heart is because He would have every heart gladdened and blessed for ever by that received and believed light. So the hard saying that God's own glory is His supreme end melts into 'God is Love.' The Infinite desires to communicate Himself, that by the communication men may be blessed.

II. There is another thing here, and that is, a wonderful glimpse of what Christian people are in the world for.

'This people have I formed for Myself,' says the fundamental passage in Isaiah already referred to, 'they shall show forth My praise.' It was not worth while forming them except for that. It was still less worth while redeeming them except for that.

But you may say, 'I am saved in order that I may enjoy all the blessings of salvation, immunities from fear and punishment, and the like.' Yes! Certainly! But is that all? Or is it the main thing? I think not. There is not a creature in God's universe so tiny, even although you cannot see it with a microscope, but that it has a claim on Him that made it for its well-being. That is very certain. And so my salvation—with all the blessedness for me that lies wrapped up and hived in that great word—my salvation is an adequate end with God, in all His dealing, and especially in His sending of Jesus Christ.

But there is not a creature in the whole universe, though he were mightier than the archangels that stand nearest God's throne, who is so great and independent that his happiness and well-being is the sole aim of God's gifts to him. For every one of us the Apostle means the word, 'No man liveth to himself—he could not if he were to try—and no man dieth to himself.' Every man that receives anything from God is thereby made a steward to impart it to others.

So we may say—and I speak now to you who profess to be Christians—'you were not saved for your own sakes.' One might almost say that that was a by-end. You were saved—shall I say?—for God's sake; and you were saved for man's sake? Just as when you put a bit of leaven into a lump of dough, each grain of the lump, as it is leavened and transformed, becomes the medium for passing on the mysterious transforming influence to the particle beyond, so every one of us, if we have been brought out of darkness into marvellous light, have been so brought, not only that we may recreate and bathe our own eyes in the flooding sunshine, but that we may turn to our brothers and ask them to come too out of the doleful night into the cheerful, gladsome day. Every man that Jesus Christ conquers on the field He sends behind Him, and says, 'Take rank in My army. Be My soldier.' Every yard of line in a new railway when laid down is used to carry materials to make the next yard; and so the terminus is reached. Even so, Christian people were formed for Christ that they might show forth His praise.

Look what a notion that gives us of the dignity of the Christian life, and of the special manifestation of God which is afforded to the world in it. You, if you love as you ought to do, are a witness of something far nobler in God than all the stars in the sky. You, if you set forth as becomes you His glorious character, have crowned the whole manifestation that He makes of Himself in Nature and in Providence. What people learn about God from a true Christian is a better revelation than has ever been made or can be made elsewhere. So the Bible talks about principalities and powers in heavenly places who have had nobody knows how many millenniums of intercourse with God, nobody knows how deep and intimate, learning from Christian people the manifold wisdom which had folds and folds in it that they had never unfolded and never could have done. 'Ye are My witnesses,' saith the Lord. Sun and stars tell of power, wisdom, and a whole host of majestic attributes. We are witnesses that 'He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.' Who was it that said

"Twas great to speak a world from naught,

'Tis greater to redeem?'

'Ye are saved that ye may show forth the praise of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.'

III. Lastly, we have here a piece of stringent practical direction.

All that I have been saying thus far refers to the way in which the very fact of a man's being saved from his sin is a revelation of God's mercy, love, and restoring power. But there are two sides to the thought of my text; and the one is that the very existence of Christian people in the world is a standing witness to the highest glory of God's name; and the other is that there are characteristics which, as Christian men, we are bound to put forth, and which manifest in another fashion the excellencies of our redeeming God.

The world takes its notions of God, most of all, from the people who say that they belong to God's family. They read us a great deal more than they read the Bible. They *see* us; they only *hear* about Jesus Christ. 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image' nor any likeness of the Divine, but thou shalt make *thyself* an image of Him, that men looking at it may learn a little more of what He is. If we have any right to say that we are a royal priesthood, a chosen nation, God's 'possession,' then there will be in us some likeness of Him to whom we belong stamped more or less perfectly upon our characters; and just as people cannot look at the sun, but may get some notion of its power when they gaze upon the rare beauty of the tinted clouds that lie round about it, if, in the poor, wet, cold mistiness of our lives there be caught, as it were, and tangled some stray beams of the sunshine, there will be colour and beauty there. A bit of worthless tallow may be saturated with a perfume which will make it worth its weight in gold. So our poor natures may be drenched with God and give Him forth fragrant and precious, and men may be drawn thereby. The witness of the life which is Godlike

is the duty of Christian men and women in the world, and it is mainly what we are here for.

Nor does that exclude the other kind of showing forth the praises, by word and utterance, at fit times and to the right people. We are not all capable of that, in any public fashion; we are all capable of it in some fashion. There is no Christian that has not somebody to whom their words—they may be very simple and very feeble—will come as nobody else's words can. Let us use these talents and these opportunities for the Master.

But, above all, let us remember that none of these works—either the involuntary and unconscious exhibition of light and beauty and excellencies caught from Him; or the voluntary and vocal proclamations of the name of Him from whom we have caught them—can be done to any good purpose if any taint of self mingles with it. 'Let your light so shine before men that they may behold your good works and glorify'—whom? you?—'your *Father* which is in heaven.'

The harp-string gives out its note only on condition that, being touched, it vibrates, and ceases to be visible. Be you unseen, transparent, and the glory of the Lord shall shine through you.

1 Peter ii. 21— CHRIST THE EXEMPLAR

'For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps.'—1 Peter ii. 21.

These words are a very striking illustration of the way in which the Gospel brings Christ's principles to bear upon morals and duty. The Apostle is doing nothing more than exhorting a handful of slaves to the full and complete and patient acceptance of their hard lot, and in order to teach a very homely and lowly lesson to the squalid minds

of a few captives, he brings in the mightiest of all lessons by pointing to the most beautiful, most blessed, and most mysterious fact in the world's history—the cross of Christ. It is the very spirit of Christianity that the biggest thing is to regulate the smallest duties of life. Men's lives are made up of two or three big things and a multitude of little ones, and the greater rule the lesser; and, my friends, unless we have got a religion and a morality that can and will keep the trifles of our lives right there will be nothing right; unless we can take those deepest truths, make them the ruling principles, and lay them down side by side with the most trivial things of our lives, we are something short. Is there nothing in your life or mine so small that we cannot bring it into captivity and lift it into beauty by bringing it into connection with saving grace? Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example. This is the first thing that strikes me, and I intend it also by way of introduction. Look how the Apostle has put the points together, as though there are two aspects which go together and cannot be rendered apart, like the under side and the upper side of a coin. 'Christ also suffered for us,' and so for us says all the orthodox. 'Leaving us an example'—there protests all the heretics. Yes, but we know that there is a power in both of them, and the last one is only true when we begin with the first. He suffered for us. There, there, my friends, is the deepest meaning of the cross, and if you want to get Christ for an example, begin with taking Him as the sacrifice, for He gave His life for you. Don't part the two things. If you believe Him to be Christ, then you take Him at the cross: if you want to see the meaning of Christ as an example, begin with Him as your Saviour. 'Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow His steps.' These are the words, and what God hath joined together let no man put asunder. With these few remarks I shall deal with the words a little more exhaustively, and I see in them three things—the sufferings of Christ our gain, the sufferings of Christ our pattern, and the suffering of Christ our power to imitate.

And first of all that great proclamation which underlies the whole matter—Christ also suffered for us. The sufferings of Christ are thereby our gain. I shall not dwell on the larger questions which these words naturally open for us, and I shall content myself with some of the angles and side views of thought, and one to begin with is this: It is very interesting to notice how, as his life went on, and his inspiration became more full, this Apostle got to understand, as being the very living and heart centre of his religion, the thing which at first was a stumbling-block and mystery to him. You remember when Christ was here on earth, and was surrounded by all His disciples, the man who actually led antagonism to the thought of a saving Messiah, was this very Apostle Peter. How he displayed his ignorance in the words, 'This shall not be unto Thee, O Lord'; and you remember also how his audacity rose to the height of saying, 'Why cannot I follow Thee now, Lord? I will lay down my life for Thy sake,' so little did he understand the purposes of Christ's suffering and Christ's death. And even after His resurrection we don't find that Peter in his early preaching had got as far as he seems to have got in this letter from which my text is taken. You will notice that in this letter he speaks a great deal about the sufferings of Christ, which he puts side by side and in contrast with God's glorifying of His Son. Christ's cross, which at first had come to him as a rejection, has now come to him in all its reality, and to him there was the one grand thing, 'He suffered for us,' as though he realises Christ in all His beauty and purity, and not only as a beautiful teacher and dear friend. That which at first seemed to him as an astounding mystery and perfect impossibility, he now comes to understand. With those two little words, 'for us,' where there was before impossibility, disappointment, and anomaly, the anomaly vanishes, although the mystery becomes deeper. In one sense it was incomprehensible; in another sense it was the only explanation of the fact. And, my friends, I want you to build one thought on this.

Unless you and I lay hold of the grand truth that Jesus Christ died for us, it seems to me that the story of the Gospel and the story of

the cross is the saddest and most depressing page of human history. That there should have been a man possessed of such a soul, such purity, such goodness, such tenderness, such compassion, and such infinite mercy—if there were all this to do nothing but touch men's hearts and prick and irritate them into bitter enmity—if the cross were the world's wages to the world's best Teacher, and nothing more could be said, then, my friends, it seems to me that the hopes of humanity have, in the providence of God, suffered great disaster, and a terrible indictment stands against both God and man. Oh, yes, the death of Jesus Christ, and the whole history of the world's treatment of Him, is an altogether incomprehensible and miserable thing—a thing to be forgotten, and a thing to be wept over in tears of blood, and no use for us unless we do as Peter did, apply all the warmth of the heart to this one master key, 'for us,' and then the mystery is only an infinitude of love and mercy. What before we could not understand we now begin to see, and to understand the love of God which passeth all understanding. Oh, my friends, I beseech you never think of the cross of Christ without taking those two words. It is a necessary explanation to make the picture beautiful: 'for us,' 'for us'; 'for me, for me.' And then notice still further that throughout the whole of this Epistle the comparative vagueness of the words 'for me' is interpreted definitely. So far as the language of my text is concerned there can be nothing more expressive, more outspoken, or more intelligible, 'Christ also suffered for us,' for our realm. But that is not all that Peter would have us learn. If you want to know the nature of the work, and what the Saviour suffered on the cross for our behalf, advantage, and benefit, here is the definition in the following verse, 'Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins should live unto righteousness.' 'For us,' not merely as an example; 'for us,' not merely for His purity, His beautiful life and calm death; no, better than all that, though a glorious example it is. He has taken away our sins, we are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ; 'for us' in the sense of the words in another part of the

Epistle, 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot,' and if so, we are living examples of what Christ our Saviour has done for the whole world.

There is another point I want to speak about in dwelling on the first part of the text. If you will read this Epistle of Peter at your leisure, you will see that while with Paul both make the cross of Christ the centre of their teaching, Paul speaks more about His death, and Peter more about His sufferings. Throughout the letters of Peter the phrase runs, and the phrase has come almost entirely into modern Christian usage from this Apostle. Paul speaks about the death, Peter speaks of the sufferings. The eye-witness of a Loving Friend, the man who had stood by His side through much of His sufferings (though he fled at last), a vivid imagination of His Master's trials, and a warm heart, led Peter to dwell not only on the one fact of the death, but also on the accompaniments of that awful death, of the mental and physical pain, and especially the temper of the Saviour. I shall not dwell on this, except to make one passing remark on it, viz., that there is a kind of preaching which prevails among the Roman Catholic Church, and is not uncommon to many of the Protestant churches, which dwells unduly on the physical fact of Christ's death and sufferings. I think, for my part, we are going to the other extreme, and a great many of us are losing a very great source of blessing to ourselves and to those whom we influence, because we don't realise and don't dwell sufficiently on the physical and mental sorrows and agony He went through with the death on the cross; and one bad effect of all this is that Christ's atonement has become to be a kind of theological jungle, and I don't know that the popular mind can have in the ordinary way any better means of the deliverance of Christ's cross from this theological maze than a little more frankness and honesty in dwelling on the sorrows and pain of our dear Lord.

Now a word about the second part. The sufferings of Christ as represented here in the text are not only for our gain but our pattern, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps. We are not concerned here about the general principles of Christian ethics, and I don't think I need dwell on them at all as being great blessings to us; and passing from that I would rather dwell on the one specific thought before us—on the beautiful life, the gracious words, the gentle deeds, the wisdom, the rectitude, the tenderness, the submission to the Father and the oblivion to Himself, which characterises the whole life of Jesus Christ, from the very first up to the agony on the cross. We have looked to Him as our gain, and as the head and beginning of our salvation, and now we have to turn from that mysterious and solemn thought and look to Him as an ideal pattern by which our life should be moulded and shaped. 'Leaving us an example.' Just as Elijah's mantle dropped from him as he rose, so Christ in going up to the Father fluttered down on the world a pattern which He had in His sufferings. He goes away, but the pattern abides with us. 'Leaving us an example.' The word used here is translated quite correctly. The word example is a very remarkable and unusual one; it means literally a thing to be retained. You put a copyhead before a child, and tell him to copy it, and trace it over till he retains it; or, to come to modern English, you put the copyhead on the top of a page. What blots, pothooks, and angles you and I make as we are trying to write on the top of the page of life. See, there is the pattern. Lo, another man hath written above, and you are asked to make your life exactly the same, the same angles and the same corners—to make your life in all respects coincide with that. My friends, we shall all have to take our copybooks to the Master's desk some day. There will be a headline there which Christ hath written, and one which we have written, and how do you think we shall like to put the two side by side? My friends, we had better do it to-day than have to do it then. There is the pattern life; the copy is plain. I don't think I need say any more about the other metaphor contained here. The Divine Exemplar has left us the headline that

we should follow His footsteps, and it is a blessed thought to know that we are to follow in His own steps. 'What, cannot I follow Thee now?' said Peter once, and you remember when the Apostle had been restored to his office, the words of the Saviour were—'Feed My lambs; feed My sheep; feed My lambs, follow thou Me.' This is also our privilege. As a guide going across a wet moor with a traveller calls out, 'Step where I step, or else you will be bogged,' so we must tread in the steps of the Saviour, and then we shall come safe on the other side. Tread in His steps, aye, in the steps which are marked with bleeding feet, for 'He suffered and left us an example.' I will just add one word, dear friends, to deepen the thought in its impressiveness, that the cross of Christ is to be the pattern of our lives. It stands alone, thank God, for mighty power in its relation to the salvation of the world, and it stands alone in awful terror. You and I are, at the very worst, but at the edge of the storm which broke in all its dreadful fury over His head; we love to go but a little way down the hillside, while He descended to the very bottom; we love to drink but very little of the cup which He drained the last drop of and held it up empty and reversed, showing that nothing trickled from it, and exclaimed, 'The cup which My Father hath given Me have I drunk.' But although alone in all its mighty power, and though alone in all its awful terror, it may be copied by us in two things—perfect submission to our Maker, and non-resistance and meekness with regard to man. There is only one way of carrying the cross of Christ, which God lays on us all, and that is bowing our back. If we resist, it will crush us, and if we yield we have something to endure; and there is but one thing which enables a man to patiently bear the sorrows and griefs which come to us all, and that is the simple secret, 'Father, not as I will, but Thy will be done.' Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His footsteps, and when we patiently do this the rod becomes a guiding staff, and the crown of thorns a crown of glory.

But my text reminds me that the sufferings of Christ are not only our gain and our pattern, but they are also our power to imitate—the

power to fight the battle for Christ. Example is not all. The world wants more than that. The reason for men's badness is not because they have not plenty of patterns of good. If a copyhead could save the world it would have been saved long ago. Patterns of good are plenty; the mischief is we don't copy them. There are footsteps in abundance, but then our legs are lame, and we cannot tread in them, and what is the use of copies if we have a broken pen, muddy ink, and soiled paper? So we want a great deal more than that. No, my friends, the world is not to be saved by example. You and I know that the weakness and the foolishness of men know a great deal better than the wisest of men ever did, so we want something more. Examples don't give the power nor the wish to get it. Is not that true about you? Don't you feel that if this is all which religion has given you it stops short? The gospel comes and says, 'If you love Christ Jesus because you know that He died for you,' then there will be something else than the copybook. That copy and pattern will be laid to your heart and transferred there. You will not have to go on trying to make a bungling imitation; you will get it photographed on your spirit, and on your character more distinctly and more clearly down to the very minutest shade of resemblance to the Master, and with simple loving trust you will go on from strength to strength glorifying God in your life. They that begin with the cross of Christ, and make the sacrifice their all in all, will advance heavenward joyously; the cross and the sacrifice will be the pattern of your pilgrimage here, and the perfectness of your characters unto the likeness of the Son. The cross is the agency of sanctification as well as the means of forgiveness—saving grace to save us from the world, saving grace to help us everywhere and in everything for our salvation, and saving grace to help us to conquer our self-will, and saving grace to bind us to Him, whose abundant goodness and gratitude no man can tell. If we love Him we shall keep His commandments; if we love them we shall grow in grace, and not else. None else, my brother, my sister, but the Eternal Exemplar stands there as our refuge; and if you want to be filled with this all-

saving grace, deep down to the bottom of His tender heart, if you want to be good, and of pure mind, then you have to begin with that Saviour who died for you, and trust to the cross for your forgiveness. Then listen to Him saying, Any man who comes after Me, let him take up My cross'—take it up, mark—'and follow Me.'

1 Peter iii. 14, 15—HALLOWING CHRIST

'Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.'—1 Peter iii. 14, 15.

These words are a quotation from the prophet Isaiah, with some very significant variations. As originally spoken, they come from a period of the prophet's life when he was surrounded by conspirators against him, eager to destroy, and when he had been giving utterance to threatening prophecies as to the coming up of the King of Assyria, and the voice of God encouraged him and his disciples with the ringing words: 'Fear not their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself, and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread, and He shall be for a sanctuary.' Peter was in similar circumstances. The gathering storm of persecution of the Christians as Christians seems to have been rising on his horizon, and he turns to his brethren, and commends to them the old word which long ago had been spoken to and by the prophet. But the variations are very remarkable. The Revised Version correctly reads my text thus: 'Fear not their fear, neither be troubled, but sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord.'

I. We have first to note the substitution, as a matter of course, without any need for explanation or vindication, of Jesus Christ in place of the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

There is no doubt that the reading adopted in the Revised Version is the true one, as attested by weighty evidence in the manuscripts, and

in itself more probable by reason of its very difficulty. The other reading adopted in Authorised Versions is likely to have arisen from a marginal note which crept into the text, and was due to some copyist who was struck by Peter's free handling of the passage, and wished to make the quotations verbally accurate.

Now, if we think for a moment of the Jew's reverence for the letter of Scripture, and then think again of the Jew's intense monotheism and dread of putting any creature into the place of God, we shall understand how saturated with the belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ, and how convinced that it was the vital centre of all Christian teaching, this Apostle must have been when, without a word of explanation, he took his pen, and, as it were, drew it through 'Lord God' in Isaiah's words, and wrote in capitals over it, 'Christ as Lord.'

What does that mean? Some of us would, perhaps, hesitate to say that it means that He who was all through the growing ages of brightening revelation of old, named 'Jehovah,' is now named Jesus Christ. I believe that from the beginning He whom we call, according to the teaching of the great prologue of John's Gospel, the 'Word of God,' was the Agent of all Divine revelation. But whether that be so or no, whether we have the right to say that the same Person who was revealed as 'Jehovah' is now revealed as 'Jesus Christ,' the 'Word made flesh,' or no, we distinctly fail to apprehend who and what Jesus Christ was to the writer of this epistle, and fail to sanctify Him in our hearts, unless we say: 'To Thee belongeth all that belongs to God.' That is the first great truth that comes out of these words, and I would commend it to any of you who may be hesitating about that Christian fact of the true divinity of Jesus Christ. You cannot strike it out of the New Testament, and if you try to do so you tear the book to pieces, and reduce it to rags and tatters.

Further, mark here what the Apostle means by the Christian sanctifying of Christ.

That is a strange expression. How am I to sanctify Jesus Christ? Well, it is the same word that is used in the Lord's Prayer, and perhaps its use there may throw light on Peter's meaning here. 'Hallowed be Thy name'—explains the meaning of *hallowing* Christ as Lord in our hearts. We sanctify or hallow one who is holy already, when we recognise the holiness, and honour what we recognise. So that the plain meaning of the commandments here is: set Christ in your hearts on the pedestal and pinnacle that belongs to Him, and then bow down before Him with all reverence and submission. Be sure that you give Him all that is His due, and in the love of your hearts, as well as in the thinkings of your minds, recognise Him for what He is, the Lord. Let us take care that our thoughts about Jesus Christ are full of devout awe and reverence. I venture to think that a great deal of modern and sentimental Christianity is very defective in this respect. You cannot love Jesus Christ too much, but you can love Him with too little reverence. And if you take up some of our luscious modern hymns that people are so fond of singing, I think you will find in them a twang of unwholesomeness, just because the love is not reverent enough, and the approaching confidence has not enough of devout awe in it. This generation looks at the half of Christ. When people are suffering from indigestion, they can only see half of the thing that they look at, and there are many of us that can only see a part of the whole Christ: and so, forgetting that He is judge, and forgetting that He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and forgetting that whilst He is manifested in the flesh our brother He is also *God* manifest in the flesh, our Creator as well as our Redeemer, and our Judge as well as our Saviour, some do not enough hallow Him in their hearts as Lord.

Peter had heard Jesus say that 'all men should honour the Son as they honoured the Father.' I beseech you, embrace the whole Christ, and see to it that you do not dethrone Him from His rightful place, or take from Him the glory that is due to His name. For your love will suffer, and become a mere sentiment, inoperative and

sometimes unwholesome, unless you keep in mind Peter's injunction.

But, further, there is included in this commandment, not only what Isaiah said, 'Let Him be your fear and your dread,' but also a reverent love and trust. For we do not hallow Christ as we ought, unless we absolutely confide in every word of His lips. Did you ever think that not to trust Jesus Christ is to blaspheme and profane that holy name by which we are called; and that to hallow Him means to say to Him, 'I believe every word that Thou speakest, and I am ready to risk my life upon Thy veracity'? Distrust is dishonouring the Master, and taking from Him the glory that is due unto His name.

Then there is another point to be noted: 'Sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord.' That is Peter's addition to Isaiah's words, and it is not a mere piece of tautology, but puts great emphasis into the exhortation. What is a man's heart, in New Testament and Old Testament language? It is the very centre-point of the personal self. And when Peter says, 'Hallow Him in your hearts,' he means that, deep down in the very midst of your personal being, as it were, there should be, fundamental to all, and interior to all, this reverential awe and absolute trust in Jesus Christ—an habitual thought, a central emotion, an all-dominant impulse. 'Out of the heart are the issues of life.' Put the healing agent into it, the fountain-head, and all the streams that pour out thence will be purified and sweetened. Deep in the heart put Christ, and life will be pure.

Now, in another part of this letter the Apostle says, 'Ye are a spiritual house.' I think some notion of the same sort is running in his mind here. He thinks of each man's heart as being a shrine in which the god is enthroned, and in which worship is rendered. And if we have Christ in our hearts, then our hearts are temples; and if we 'hallow' the Christ that dwells within us, we shall take care that there are no foul things in that sanctuary. We dishonour the indwelling Deity when into that same heart we allow to come lusts,

foulnesses, meannesses, worldlinesses, passions, sins, and all the crew of reptiles and wild beasts that we sometimes admit there. If we hallow Christ in our hearts, in any true fashion, He will turn out the money-changers and overturn the tables. And if we desire to hallow Him in our hearts, we too, must by His Spirit's help, purge the temple that He may enter and abide.

And so I come to the next point, and that is the Christian courage and calmness that ensue from hallowing Christ in the heart.

The Apostle first puts his exhortation: 'Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled,' and then he presents us an opposite injunction, obedience to which is the only means of obeying the first exhortation. If you do not sanctify Christ in your hearts, you cannot help being afraid of their terror, and troubled. If you do, then there is no fear that you will fall into that snare. That is to say, the one thing that delivers men from the fears that make cowards of us all is to have Christ lodged within our hearts. Sunshine puts out culinary fires. They who have the awe and the reverent love that knit them to Jesus Christ, and who carry Him within their hearts, have no need to be afraid of anything besides. Only he who can say, 'The Lord is the strength of my life' can go on to say, 'Of whom shall I be afraid?' There is nothing more hopeless than to address to men, ringed about with dangers, the foolish exhortations: 'Cheer up! do not be frightened,' unless you can tell them some reason for not being frightened. And the one reason that will carry weight with it, in all circumstances, is the presence of Jesus.

'With Christ in the vessel

I smile at the storm.'

The world comes to us and says: 'Do not be afraid, do not be afraid; be of good courage; pluck up your heart, man.' The Apostle comes and says: 'Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts; and then, and only then, will you be bold.' The boldness which fronts the certain

dangers and calamities and the possible dangers and calamities of this life, without Christ, is not boldness, but foolhardiness. 'The simple passeth on, and is punished,' says the book of Proverbs. It is easy to whistle when going through the churchyard, and to say, 'Who's afraid?' But the ghosts rise all the same, and there is only one thing that lays them, and that is—the present Christ.

In like manner the sanctifying of Jesus Christ in the heart is the secret of calmness. 'Fear not their fear, neither be troubled.' I wonder if Peter was thinking at all of another saying: 'Let not your heart be troubled; neither let it be afraid.' Perhaps he was. At any rate, his thought is parallel with our Lord's when He said, 'Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God, and believe in Me.' The two alternatives are possible; we shall have either troubled hearts, or hearts calmed by faith in Christ. The ships behind the breakwater do not pitch and toss. The little town up amongst the hills, with the high cliffs around it, lies quiet, and 'hears not the loud winds when they call.' And the heart that has Christ for its possession has a secret peace, whatever strife may be raging round it.

'Be not troubled; sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.' Peter leaves out a clause of Isaiah's, though he conveys the idea without reiterating the words. But Isaiah had added a sweet promise which means much the same thing as I have now been saying, when he went on to declare that to those who sanctify the Lord God in their hearts, He shall be for a sanctuary. 'The sanctuary was an asylum where men were safe. And if we have made our hearts temples in which Christ is honoured, worshipped, and trusted, then we shall dwell in Him as in the secret place of the Most High'; and in the inner chamber of the Temple it will be quiet, whatever noises are in the camp, and there is light coming from the Shekinah, whatever darkness may lie around. If we take Christ into our hearts, and reverence and love Him there, He will take us into His heart, and we shall dwell in peace, because we dwell in Him.

1 Peter iv. 1-8— CHRISTIAN ASCETICISM

'Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin. 2. That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. 3. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: 4. Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: 5. Who shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. 6. For, for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. 7. But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. 8. And, above all things, have fervent charity among yourselves; for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.'—1 Peter iv. 1-8.

Christian morality brought two new things into the world—a new type of life in sharp contrast with the sensuality rife on every side, and a new set of motives powerfully aiding in its realisation. Both these novelties are presented in this passage, which insists on a life in which the spirit dominates the flesh, and is dominated by the will of God, and which puts forward purely Christian ideas as containing the motives for such a life. The facts of Christ's life and the prospect of Christ's return to judge the world are here urged as the reason for living a life of austere repression of 'the flesh' that we may do God's will.

I. We have, first, in verses 1 and 2, a general precept, based upon the broad view of Christ's earthly history. 'Christ hath suffered in the flesh.' That is the great fact which should shape the course of all His followers. But what does suffering in the flesh mean here? It does

not refer only to the death of Jesus, but to His whole life. The phrase 'in the flesh' is reiterated in the context, and evidently is equivalent to 'during the earthly life.' Our Lord's life was, in one aspect, one continuous suffering, because He lived the higher life of the spirit. That higher life had to Him, and has to us, rich compensations; but it sets those who are true to it at necessary variance with the lower types of life common among men, and it brings many pains, all of which Jesus knew. The last draught from the cup was the bitterest, but the bitterness was diffused through all the life of the Man of Sorrows.

That life is here contemplated as the pattern for all Christ's servants. Peter says much in this letter of our Lord's sufferings as the atonement for sin, but here he looks at them rather as the realised ideal of all worthy life. We are to be 'partakers of Christ's sufferings' (v. 13), and we shall become so in proportion as His own Spirit becomes the spirit which lives in us. If Jesus were only our pattern, Christianity would be a poor affair, and a gospel of despair; for how should we reach to the pure heights where He stood? But, since He can breathe into us a spirit which will hallow and energise our spirits, we can rise to walk beside Him on the high places of heroic endurance and of holy living. Very beautifully does Peter hint at our sore conflict, our personal defencelessness, and our all-sufficient armour, in the picturesque metaphor 'arm yourselves.' The 'mind of Christ' is given to us if we will. We can gird it on, and if we do, it will be as an impenetrable coat-of-mail, which will turn the sharpest arrows and resist the fiercest sword-cuts.

The last clause of verse 1 is a parenthesis, and, if it is for the moment omitted, the sentence runs smoothly on, especially if the Revised Version's reading is adopted. The purpose of arming us with the same mind is that, whilst we live on earth, we should live according to the will of God, and should renounce 'the lusts of men,' which are in us as in all men, and which men who are not clad in the armour which Christ gives to us yield to.

But what of the parenthetical statement? Clearly, the words which follow it forbid its being taken to mean that dead men do not sin. Rather the Apostle's thought seems to be that such suffering in daily life after Christ's pattern, and by His help, is at once a sign that the sufferer has shaken off the dominion of sin, and is a means of further emancipating him from it.

But the two great thoughts in this paragraph are, that the Christian life is one in which God's will, and not man's desires, is the regulating force, and that the pattern of that life and the power to copy the pattern are found in Christ, the sufferer for righteousness' sake.

II. More specific injunctions, entering into the details of the higher life, follow, interwoven, as in the preceding verses, with a statement of the motives which make obedience to them possible to our weakness. The sins in view are those most closely connected with 'the flesh' in its literal meaning, amongst which are included 'abominable idolatries,' because gross acts of sensual immorality were inseparably intertwined with much of heathen worship. These sins of flesh were especially rampant among the luxurious Asiatic lands, to which this letter was addressed, but they flooded the whole Roman empire, as the works of poets like Martial and of moralists like Epictetus equally show. But New York or London could match the worst scenes in Rome or Ephesus, and perhaps would not be far behind the foul animalism of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lust and drunkenness are eating out the manhood of our race on both sides of the Atlantic, and, if we have 'the same mind' as the suffering Christ, we shall put on the armour for war to the knife with these in society, and for the rigid self-control of our own animal nature.

Observe the strong motives which Peter just touches without expanding. A sad irony lies in his saying that the time past may suffice. The flesh had had enough of time given to it,—had not God a right to the rest? The flesh should have had none; it had had all too

much. Surely the readers had had enough of the lower life, more than enough. Were they not sick of it, 'satisfied' even to disgust? Let us look back on our wasted years, and give no more precious moments to serve the corruptible flesh. Further, the life of submission to the animal nature is characteristic of 'the Gentiles,' and in sharp contrast, therefore, to that proper to Christ's followers. That is as true to-day, in America and England, as ever it was. Indeed, as wealth has increased, and so-called 'civilisation' has diffused material comforts, senseless luxury, gluttony, drunkenness, and still baser fleshy sins, have become more flagrantly common in society which is not distinctively and earnestly Christian; and there was never more need than there is to-day for Christians to carry aloft the flag of self-control and temperance in all things belonging to 'the flesh.'

If we have the mind of Christ, we shall get the same treatment from the world which Peter says that the primitive Christians did from the idolaters round them. We shall be wondered at, just as a heathen stared with astonishment at this strange, new sect, which would have nothing to do with feasts and garlands and wine-cups and lust disguised as worship. The spectacle, when repeated to-day, of Christians steadfastly refusing to share in that lower life which is the only life of so many, is, perhaps, less wondered at now, because it is, thank God! more familiar; but it is not less disliked and 'blasphemed.' A total abstainer from intoxicants will not get the good word of the distiller or brewer or consumer of liquor. He will be called faddist, narrow, sour-visaged, and so on and so on. 'You may know a genius because all the dunces make common cause against him,' said Swift. You may know a Christian after Christ's pattern because all the children of the flesh are in league to laugh at him and pelt him with nicknames.

Further, the thought of Christ as the judge should both silence the blasphemers and strengthen the blasphemed to endure. That judgment will vindicate the wisdom of those who sowed to the spirit

and the folly of those who sowed to the flesh. The one will reap corruption; the other, life everlasting.

The difficult verse 6 cannot be adequately dealt with here, but we may note that introductory 'for' shows that it, too, contains a motive urging to life, 'to the will of God,' and that no such motive appears in it if it is taken to mean, as by some, that the gospel is preached after death to the dead. Surely to say that 'the gospel was preached also (or, even) to them that are dead' is not to say that it was preached to them when dead.

Peter's letter is of late enough date to explain his looking back to a generation now passed away, who had heard it in their lifetime. Nor does one see how the meaning of 'in the flesh,' which belongs to the phrase in the frequent instances of its occurrence in this context, can be preserved in the clause 'that they might be judged according to men in the flesh,' unless that means a judgment which takes place during the earthly life.

We note, too, that the antithesis between being judged 'according to men in the flesh,' and living 'according to God in the spirit' recalls that in verse 2 between living in the flesh to the lusts of men and to the will of God. It would appear, therefore, that the Apostle's meaning is that the very aim of the preaching of the gospel to those who are gone to meet the Judge was that they might by it be judged while here in the flesh, in regard to the lower life 'according to men' (or, as verse 2 has it, 'to the lusts of men'), and, being so judged, and sin condemned in their flesh, might live according to God in their spirits. That is but to say in other words that the gospel is meant to search hearts, and bring to light and condemn the lusts of the flesh, and to impart the new life which is moulded after the will of God.

III. The reference to Christ as the judge suggests a final motive for a life of suppression of the lower nature, —the near approach of the end of all things. The distinct statement by our Lord in Acts i. 7 excludes the knowledge of the time of the end from the revelation

granted to the Apostles, so that there need be no hesitation in upholding their authority, and yet admitting their liability to mistake on that point. But the force of the motive is independent of the proximity of the judgment. Its certainty and the indefiniteness of the time when we each shall have to pass into the other state of being are sufficient to preserve for each of us the whole pressure of the solemn thought that for us the end is at hand, and to enforce thereby Peter's exhortation, 'Be ye therefore of sound mind.'

The prospect of that end will sweep away many illusions as to the worth of the enjoyments of sense, and be a bridle on many vagrant desires. Self-control in all regions of our nature is implied in the word. Our various faculties are meant to be governed by a sovereign will, which is itself governed by the Divine will; and, if we see plain before us the dawning of the day of the Lord, the vision will help to tame the subordinate parts of ourselves, and to establish the supremacy of the spirit over the flesh. One special form of that general self-control is that already enjoined,—the suppression of the animal appetites, especially the abstinence from intoxicants. That form of self-control is especially meant by the second of these exhortations, 'Be sober.' How could a man lift the wine cup to his lips, and drown his higher nature in a flood of drunken riot, if the end, with its solemnities of judgment, blazed before his inner eye? But this self-command is inculcated that we may be fit to pray. These lower appetites will take all desire for prayer and all earnestness in it out of us, and only when we keep the wings of appetites close clipped will the pinions grow by which we can mount up with wings as eagles. A praying drunkard is an impossible monster.

But exhortations to self-control are not all. We have to think of others, as well as of our own growth in purity and spirituality. Therefore Peter casts one swift glance to the wider circle of the brethren, which encompasses each of us, and gives the all-embracing direction, which carries in itself everything. 'Fervent love'

to our fellow-Christians is the counterpoise to earnest government of ourselves. There is a selfishness possible even in cultivating our religion, as many a monk and recluse has shown. Such love as Peter here enjoins will save us from the possible evils of self-regard, and it will 'cover the multitude of sins,'—by which is not meant that, having it, we shall be excused if we in other respects sin, but that, having it, we shall be more desirous of veiling than of exposing our brother's faults, and shall be ready to forgive even when our brother offends against us often. Perhaps Peter was remembering the lesson which he had once had when he was told that 'seventy times seven' was not too great a multitude of sins against brotherly love to be forgiven by it in one day.

1 Peter v. 5— THE SLAVE'S GIRDLE

'... Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.'—1 Peter v. 5.

The Apostle uses here an expression of a remarkable kind, and which never occurs again in Scripture. The word rendered in the Authorised Version 'be clothed,' or better in the Revised Version, 'gird yourselves with,' really implies a little more than either of those renderings suggests. It describes a kind of garment as well as the act of putting it on, and the sort of garment which it describes was a remarkable one. It was a part of a slave's uniform. Some scholars think that it was a kind of white apron, or overall, or something of that sort; others think that it was simply a scarf or girdle; but, at all events, it was a distinguishing mark of a slave, and he put it on when he meant work. And, says Peter, 'Do you strap round you the slave's apron, and do it for the same reason that He did it, to serve.'

So, then, there are three points in my text, and the first is what we have to wear; second, what we have to wear it for; and, third, why we should wear it.

I. What we have to wear.

'Gird yourselves with the slave's apron of humility.' Humility does not consist in being, or pretending to be, blind to one's strong points. There is no humility in a man denying that he can do certain things if he can do them, or even refusing to believe he can do them well, if God has given him special faculties in any given direction. That is not humility at all. But to know whence all my strength comes, and to know what a little thing it is, after all; not to estimate myself highly, and, still further, not to be always insisting upon other people estimating me highly, and to think a great deal more about their claims on me than fretfully to insist upon my due modicum of respect and attention from others, that is the sort of temper that Peter means here.

Now, that temper which may recognise fully any gift that God has given me, its sweep and degree, but that nevertheless takes a true, because a lowly, measure of myself, and does not always demand from other people their regard and assistance, that temper is a thing that we can cultivate. We can increase it, and we are all bound to try specifically and directly to do so. Now, I believe that a great part of the feeble and unprogressive character of so many Christian people amongst us is due to this, that they do not definitely steady their thoughts and focus them on the purpose of finding out the weak points to which special attention and discipline should be directed. It is a very easy thing to say, 'Oh, I am a poor, weak, sinful creature!' It would do you a great deal more good to say, 'I am a very passionate one, and my business is to control that quick temper of mine,' or, 'I am a great deal too much disposed to run after worldly advantage, and my business is to subdue that,' or, 'I am afraid I am rather too close-fisted, and I ought to crucify myself into liberality.' It would be a great deal better, I say, to apply the general confession to specific cases, and to set ourselves to cultivate individual types of goodness, as well as to seek to be filled with the all-comprehensive root of it all, which lies in union with Jesus Christ. We have often to

preach, dear brethren, that the way of self-improvement is not by hammering at ourselves, but by letting God mould us, and to keep the balance right. We have also to insist upon the other side of the truth, and to press the complementary thought that specific efforts after the cultivation of specific virtues and all the more if they are virtues that are not natural to us, for the gospel is given to us to mend our natural tempers—is the duty of all Christian people that would seek to live as Christ would have them.

And how is this to be done? How am I to gird upon myself and to keep—if I may transpose the metaphor into the key of modern English—tightly buckled around me this belt which may hold in place a number of fine articles of clothing?

Well, there are three things, I think, that we may profitably do. Go down deep enough into yourself if you want to cure a lofty estimate of yourself. The top storeys may be beautifully furnished, but there are some ugly things and rubbish down in the cellar. There is not one of us but, if we honestly let the dredge down into the depths, as far down as the *Challenger's* went, miles and miles down, will bring up a pretty collection of wriggling monstrosities that never have been in the daylight before, and are ugly enough to be always shrouded in their native darkness. Down in us all, if we will go deep enough, and take with us a light bright enough, we shall discover enough to make anything but humility ridiculous, if it were not wicked. And the only right place and attitude for a man who knows himself down to the roots of his being is the publican's when 'he stood afar off, and would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, and said, God be merciful to me a sinner.' Ah, dear friends, it will put an end to any undue exaltation of ourselves if we know ourselves as we are.

Further, let us try to cultivate this temper, by looking at God, and having communion with Him. Think of Him as the Giver of anything in us that is good, and that annihilates our pride. Think of

Jesus as our pattern; how that kills our satisfaction in little excellences! If you get high enough up the mountainside, the undulating country which when you were down amongst the knolls showed all variations of level, and where he who lived on the top of one little mound thought himself in a fine, airy situation as compared with his neighbour down in the close valley, is smoothed down, and brought to one uniform level; and from the hilltop the rolling land is a plateau.

I have heard of a child who, when she was told that the sun was ninety-five millions of miles off, asked if that was from the top or the bottom storey of the house! There is about as much difference between the great men and the little, between heroes and the unknown men, as measured against the distance to God, as there is difference in the distance to the sun from the slates and from the cellar. Let us live near God, and so aspiration will come in the place of satisfaction, and the unattained will gleam before us, and beckon us not in vain, and the man that sees what an infinite stretch there is before him will be delivered from the temptations of self-conceit, and will say, 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfected, but I follow after.'

But there is another advice to be given—cultivate the habit of thinking about other people, their excellences, their claims on you. To be always trying to get a footing in a social grade above our own is a poor effort, but there is a sense in which it is good advice—live with your *betters*. We can all do that. A man writes a bit of a book, preaches a sermon, makes a speech—all the newspapers pat him on the back, and say what a clever fellow he is. But let him steep his mind and his heart in the great works of the *great* men, and he finds out what a poor little dwarf he is by the side of them. And so all round the circle. Live with bigger men, not with little ones. And learn to discount—and you may take a very liberal discount off—either the praises or the censures of the people round you. Let us

rather say, 'With me it is a very small matter to be judged of man's judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord.'

There are plenty of hands, foremost among them a black one that is not so much a hand as a claw, ready to snatch the girdle of humility off you! Buckle it tight about you, brother; and in an immovable temper of lowly estimate of yourself live and work.

II. The second thought here is, What we are to wear the apron or girdle for?

The Revised Version makes a little alteration in the reading as well as in the translation of our text, the previous words to which, in the Authorised Version stand, 'Yea, all of you be subject one to another.' There is another reading which strikes out that clause, and adds a portion of it to the first part of my text, which then runs thus: 'Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility to serve one another.' That is what Christian humility is for. The slave put on his garment, whatever it was, when he had work to do.

But perhaps there is a deeper thought here. I wonder if it is fanciful to see in the text one of the very numerous allusions in this epistle to the events in our Lord's Passion. You remember that Jesus laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself, and washed the disciples' feet, and then said, 'The servant is not above His master. I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.' Probably, I think, there floated before the memory of the man who had said, 'Lord, Thou shalt never wash my feet,' and then, with the swift recoil to the opposite pole which makes us love Him so much, hurried to say, 'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head'—some reminiscence of that upper chamber, and of how the Master had girded Himself with the slave's apron, or towel, in order that He might serve the disciples; and then had told them that that was the pattern for all Christian men, and for all Christian living till the very end.

Service coming from humility, and humility manifested in service, are the requirements laid down in the text. Humility is the preparation for service; and service is the test of humility. If a man does not feel himself to be needy and low, he will never be able, and he will never be willing, to help those that are. You must go down if you would lift up. Laces and velvets and the fine feathers that the peacocks of self-conceit in this world strut about in are terribly in the way of Christian work. Rough work needs rough dress; and the only garb in which we shall be able to do the deeds of self-sacrifice that are needed in order to help our brethren is humility, the preparation for all service.

But, further, service is the test of humility. Plenty of people will say, 'I know that I have nothing to boast of,' and so forth; but they never do any work. And there is a still more spurious kind of humility, that of a great many professing Christians (I wonder of how many of us) who, when we ask them for any kind of Christian service, say, 'I do not feel myself at all competent. I am sure I could not take a class in the Sunday School. I do not feel sufficiently master of the subject. I cannot talk. I have no facilities for influencing other people,' and so on. Too many of us are very humble when there is anything to be done, and never at any other time as far as anybody can see; and that sort of humility the Apostle does not commend. It is unfortunately very frequent amongst professing Christians. Christian humility is not particular about the sort of work it does for Jesus. Never mind whether you are on the quarter-deck, with gold lace on your coat and epaulettes on your shoulders as an officer, or whether you are a cabin-boy doing the humblest duties, or a stoker working away down fifty feet below daylight. As long as the work is done for the great Admiral, that is enough; and whoever does any work for Him will never want for a reward. There are some of us who like to be officers, but do not like carrying a musket in the ranks. Humility is the preparation for service, and service is the test of humility.

III. Lastly, why we should wear this girdle.

There is one reason given in my text, which Peter quotes from the Old Testament. 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.' That is often true even in regard to outward life. Providence and man often seem to be in league together to lift up the lowly ones and thwart the proud. If a man walks with his head very high, in this low-roofed world, he is pretty sure to get it knocked against the rafters before he has done. But it is the spiritual region that the Apostle is thinking about, in which the one condition of receiving God's grace is a lowly sense of my own character and nature, which is conscious of sin and weakness, and waits before Him. And the one condition of not receiving any of that grace is to keep a stiff upper lip and a high head. If I think that I am rich, 'and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,' that 'nothing' is exactly what I shall get from God, and if I have need of everything, and know that I have, that 'everything' is what I shall get from Him. 'He resisteth the proud, and He giveth grace to the humble.' On the high barren mountain-tops the dew and the rain slide off and find their way down to the lowly valleys, where they run as fertilising rivers. And the man that is humble and of a contrite heart, 'with that man will I dwell, saith the Lord.' If we gird ourselves with the slave's dress of humility, then we shall one day have to say, 'My soul shall rejoice in the Lord, for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; and He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness; as a bridegroom decketh himself with his ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.'

1 Peter v. 12 — SYLVANUS

'By Sylvanus, our faithful brother, as I account him, I have written unto you briefly.'—1 Peter v. 12 (R.V).

I adopt the Revised Version because, in one or two small points, it brings out more clearly the Apostle's meaning. This Sylvanus is, beyond all reasonable doubt, the same man who is known to us in

the Acts of the Apostles by the name of Silas. A double name was very common amongst Jews, whose avocations brought them into close connection with Gentiles. You will find other instances of it amongst the Apostles: in *Paul* himself, whose Hebrew name was *Saul*; *Simon* and *Peter*; and probably in *Bartholomew* and *Nathanael*. And there is no reasonable doubt that a careful examination of the various places in which Silas and Sylvanus are mentioned shows that they were borne by one person.

Now let me put together the little that we know about this man, because it will help us to some lessons. He was one of the chief men in the church at Jerusalem when the dispute arose about the necessity for circumcision for the Gentile Christians. He was despatched to Antioch with the message of peace and good feeling which the church at Jerusalem wisely sent forth to heal the strife. He remained in Antioch, although his co-deputy went back to Jerusalem; and the attraction of Paul—the great mass of that star—drew this lesser light into becoming a satellite, moving round the greater orb. So, when the unfortunate quarrel broke out between Paul and Barnabas, and the latter went sulkily away by himself with his dear John Mark, without his brethren's blessing, Paul chose Silas and set out upon his first missionary tour. He was Paul's companion in the prison and stripes at Philippi, and in the troubles at Thessalonica; and, though they were parted for a little while, he rejoined the Apostle in the city of Corinth. From thence Paul wrote the two letters to the Thessalonians, both of which are sent in the name of himself and Silas or Sylvanus. There is one more reference to Sylvanus in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, which mentions him as having been associated with Paul in the evangelisation of the church there.

Then he drops out of the book altogether, and we never hear anything more about him, except this one passing reference, which shows us to him in an altogether new relation. He is no longer attached to Paul, but to Peter. Paul was probably either in prison, or,

possibly, martyred. At all events, Sylvanus now stood to Peter in a relationship similar to that in which he formerly stood to Paul. He was evidently acquainted with and known to the churches to whom this letter was addressed, and, therefore, is chosen to carry Peter's message to them.

Now I would suggest, in passing, how Sylvanus' relations to the two Apostles throws light upon the perfectly cordial alliance between them, and how it shatters into fragments the theory which was thought to be such a wonderful discovery some years ago, as to the 'great schism' in the early church between one section, led by Peter, and the more liberal party, headed by Paul. Instead of that, we find the two men working together, and the only division between them was not as to the sort of gospel they preached, but as to the people to whom they preached. This little incident helps us to realise how natural it was for a man steeped in Paul's teaching to attach himself, if circumstances suggested it, to the person who has been said to have been antagonistic in the whole drift of his conceptions of Christianity to that Apostle.

But I do not wish to speak about that now. I take this figure of a man who so contentedly and continually took such a subordinate place—played second fiddle quite willingly all his days, and who toiled on without any notice or record, and ask whether it does not teach one or two things.

I. First, then, I think we may see here a hint as to the worth and importance of subordinate work.

Not a syllable that Silas ever said is recorded in Scripture. He had been a chief man among the brethren when he was in Jerusalem, but, like some other chief men in little spheres, he came to be anything but a chief man when he got alongside of Paul, and found his proper work. He did not say: 'I have always pulled the stroke oar, and I am not going to be second. I do not intend to be absorbed in this man's brilliant lustre. I would rather have a smaller sphere where my light

may not suffer by comparison than be overshadowed by him.' By no means! He could not do Paul's work, but he could endure stripes along with him in the prison at Philippi, and he took them. He could not write as Peter could; it was not his work to do that. But he could carry one of Peter's letters. And so, 'by Sylvanus, a faithful brother, I have written to you.' Perhaps Sylvanus was amanuensis as well as letter-carrier, for I daresay Peter was no great hand with a pen; he was better accustomed to haul nets. At all events, subordinate work was what God had set him to do, and so he found joy in it.

Well, then, is not that a pattern for us? People in the world or in the Church who can do prominent work are counted by units; and those who can do valuable subordinate work are counted by thousands—by millions. 'Those members which seem to be more feeble are the more necessary,' says Paul. It is a great truth, which it would do us all good to lay more to heart.

It is hard to tell what is superior and what is subordinate work. I suppose that in a steam engine the smallest rivet is quite as essential as the huge piston, and that if the rivet drops out the piston-rod is very likely to stop rising and falling. So it is a very vulgar way of talking to speak about A.'s work being large and B.'s work being small, or to assume that we have eyes to settle which work is principal and which subordinate.

The Athenians, who deemed themselves wisest in the world, thought there were few people of less importance than the fanatical Jew who was preaching a strange story about what they knew so little of that they took Jesus and Resurrection to be the names of a pair of gods, one male and one female. But in the eyes that see truly—the eyes of God—the relative importance of Apostle and Stoic was otherwise appraised.

We cannot tell, as the book of Ecclesiastes has it, 'which shall prosper—this or that.' And if we begin to settle which is important work, we shall be sure to make mistakes, both in our judgment about

other people, and in our sense of the obligations laid upon ourselves. Let us remember that when a thing is to be done by the co-operation of a great many parts, each part is as important as the other, and each is indispensable. Although more glory may come to the soldiers who go to the front and do the fighting, the troops miles in the rear, that are quietly in camp looking after the stores and keeping open the lines of communication, are quite as essential to the success of the campaign. Their names will not get into the gazette; there will probably not be any honours at the conclusion of the war showered upon them; but, if they had not been doing their subordinate work, the men at the front would never have been able to do theirs. Therefore, the old wise law in Israel was: 'As his part is that goeth down into the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff; they shall part alike.'

And so it is good for people that have only one talent, and cannot do much, and must be contented to help somebody else that can do more, to remember this pretty little picture of Sylvanus, 'the faithful brother,' contented all his life to be a satellite of somebody; first of all helping Paul, and then helping Paul's brother Peter. Let us not be too lazy, or too proud with the pride that apes humility, to do the little that we can do because it is little.

II. Another lesson which is own sister to that first one, but which may be taken for a moment separately, is, the importance and obligation of persistently doing our task, though nobody notices it.

As I remarked, there is not one word of anything that Sylvanus said, or of anything that he did apart from Paul or Peter, recorded. And for all the long stretch of years—we do not know how many, but a very large number—that lie between this text of mine, where we find him in conjunction with Peter, and that day at Corinth, where we left him with Paul, the Acts of the Apostles does not think it worth while to mention his name. Was he sitting with his hands in his pockets all the while, do you think, doing no Christian work?

Did he say, as some good people are apt to say now, 'Well, I went to teach in Sunday School for a while, and I took an interest in this, that, or the other thing for a bit, but nobody took any notice of me; and I supposed I was not wanted, and so I came away!'

Not he. That is what a great many of us do. Though we sometimes are not honest enough to say it to ourselves, yet we do let the absence of 'recognition' (save the mark) influence us in the earnestness of our Christian work to far too great an extent. And I dare say there are good friends among us who, if they would be quite honest with themselves, would take the hint, and, if I may use such a word, the rebuke, to themselves.

Dear brethren, all the work that any of us do has to become unnoticed after a little while. It will not last. Nobody will know about you or me thirty years after we are dead. What does it matter whether they know anything about us, or say anything about us, or pat us on the back for anything that we do, or recognise our service whilst we live? Surely, if we are Christian men and women, we have a better reason for working than that. '*I will never forget any of their works.*' That ought to be enough for us, ought it not? Whoever forgets, He remembers; and if He remembers, He will not remain in our debt for anything that we have done.

So let us keep on, noticed or unnoticed; it matters very little which it is. There is a fillip, no doubt—and we should not be men and women if we did not feel it—in the recognition of what we have tried to do. And sometimes it comes to us; but the absence of it is no reason for slackening our work. And this man, so patiently and persistently 'pegging away' at his obscure task during all these years which have been swallowed up in oblivion, may preach a sermon to us all.

Only let us remember that he also shows us that unnoticed work is noticed, and that unrecorded services are recorded. Here are you and I, nineteen centuries after he is dead, talking about him, and his

name will live and last as long as the world, because, though written in no other history, it has been recorded here. Jesus Christ's record, the Book of Life, contains the names of 'fellow-labourers' whose names have dropped out of every other record; and that should be enough for us. Sylvanus did no work that Christ did not see, and no work that Christ did not remember, and no work of which he did not, eighteen hundred years since, enter into the enjoyment of the fruit, and which he enjoys up there, whilst we are thinking about him down here.

III. The last thing that I would suggest is—here is an example to us of a character which we can all earn, and which will be the best that any man can get.

A great genius, a wise philosopher, an eloquent preacher, a statesman, a warrior, poet, painter? No! 'A faithful brother.' He may have been a commonplace one. We do not know anything about his intellectual capacity. He may have had very narrow limitations and very few powers, or he may have been a man of large faculty and acquirements. But these things drop out of sight; and this remains—that he was *faithful*. I suppose the eulogium is meant in both senses of the word. The one of these is the root of the other; for a man that is full of faith is a man who may be trusted, is reliable, and will be sure to fulfil all the obligations of his position, and to do all the duties that are laid upon him.

You and I, whether we are wise or not, whether we are learned or not, whether we have large faculties or not, whether we have great opportunities or very small ones, can all equally earn that name if we like. If the perfect judgment, the clear eye, of Jesus Christ beholds in us qualities which will permit Him to call us by that name, what can we want better? 'A faithful brother.' Trust in Christ; let that be the animating principle of all that we do, the controlling power that restrains and limits and stimulates and impels. And then men will know where to have us, and will be sure, and rightly sure,

that we shall not shirk our obligations, nor scamp our work, nor neglect our duties. And being thus full of faith, and counted faithful by Him, we need care little what men's judgments of us may be, and need desire no better epitaph than this—a faithful brother.

1 Peter v. 12— AN APOSTOLIC TESTIMONY AND EXHORTATION

'... I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.'—1 Peter v. 12.

'I have written briefly,' says Peter. But his letter, in comparison with the other epistles of the New Testament, is not remarkably short; in fact, is longer than many of them. He regards it as short when measured by the greatness of its theme. For all words which are devoted to witnessing to the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ, must be narrow and insufficient as compared with that, and after every utterance the speaker must feel how inadequate his utterance has been. So in that word 'briefly' we get a glimpse of the Apostle's conception of the transcendent greatness of the Gospel which he had to proclaim. This verse seems to be a summary of the contents of the Epistle. And if we observe the altered translation of the latter portion of my text which is given in the Revised Version, we shall see that the verse is itself an example of both 'testifying' and exhorting. For the last clause is not, as our Authorised Version renders it, 'Wherein ye stand'—a statement of a fact, however true that may be—but a commandment, 'In which stand fast.' And so we have here the Apostle's all-sufficient teaching, and this all-comprehensive exhortation. He 'witnesses' that this is the true grace of God, and because it is, he exhorts, 'stand fast therein.' Let us look at these two points.

I. Peter's testimony.

Now there is a very beautiful, though not, to superficial readers, obvious, significance in this testimony.

'This is the true grace of God.' What is meant by '*this*'? Not merely the teaching which he has been giving in the preceding part of the letter, but that which somebody else had been giving. Now these churches in Asia Minor, to whom this letter was sent, were in all probability founded by the Apostle Paul, or by men working under his direction: and the type of doctrine preached in them was what people nowadays call Pauline. And here Peter puts his seal on the teaching that had come from his brother Apostle, and says: 'The thing that you have learned, and that I have had no part in communicating to you, *this* is the true grace of God.' If such be the primary application of the words (and I think there can be little doubt that it is), then we have an interesting evidence, all the stronger because unobtrusive, of the cordial understanding between the two great leaders of the Church in apostolic times; and the figments that have been set forth, with great learning and little common sense, about the differences that divided these great teachers of Christianity, melt away into thin air. Their division was only a division of the field of labour. 'They would that I should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision.' All the evidence confirms what Paul says, 'Whether it were they or I, so we preach, and so' all the converts 'believed.' Thus it is not without significance and beauty that we here see dimly through the ages Peter stretching out his hands to Paul's convert, and saying, 'This—which my beloved brother Paul taught you—this is the true grace of God.'

But, apart altogether from that thought, note two things; the one, the substance of this witness-bearing; and the other, Peter's right to bear it. As to the substance of the testimony; 'grace' which has become a threadbare word in the minds of many people, used with very little conception of its true depth and beauty of meaning, is properly love in exercise towards inferior and sinful creatures who deserve something else. Condescending, pardoning, and active love, is its proper meaning. And, says Peter, the inmost significance of the gospel is that it is the revelation of such a love as being in God's heart.

Another meaning springs out of this. That same message is not only a revelation of love, but it is a communication of the gifts of love. And the 'true grace of God' is shorthand for all the rich abundance and variety and exuberant manifoldness and all-sufficiency of the sevenfold perfect gifts for spirit and heart which come from faith in Jesus Christ. The truths that lie here in the Gospel, the truths which glow and throb in this letter of Peter's, are the revelation and the communication to men of the rich gifts of the Divine heart, which will all flow into that soul which opens itself for the entrance of God's word. And what are these truths? The main theme of this letter is Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, that was slain. 'Ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.' He dwells upon Christ's innocence, upon Christ's meekness; but most of all upon the Christ that died, 'whom, having not seen, we love, and in whom, though unseen, we, believing, receive the end of our faith'—and the end of the gospel—'even the salvation of our souls.'

Thus, dear brethren, this gospel, the gospel of the Divine Christ that died for our sins, and lives to give His Spirit to all waiting hearts; this is the true grace of God. It is very needful for us to keep in view always that lofty conception of what this gospel is, that we may not bring it down to the level of a mere theory of religion; nor think of it as a mere publication of dry doctrines; that we may not lose sight of what is the heart of it all, but may recognise this fact, that a gospel out of which are struck, or in which are diminished, the truths of the sacrifice of Christ and His ever-living intercession for us, is not the true grace of God, and is neither a revelation of His love to inferior and sinful men, nor a communication of His gifts to our weakness. Let us remember Peter's witness. This—the full gospel of incarnation, sacrifice, resurrection, ascension, and reign in glory, and return as Judge—this, and nothing else, 'is the true grace of God.' And this gospel is not exalted to its highest place unless it is regarded as such by our waiting and recipient hearts.

Further, what right had this man to take this position and say, 'I testify that this is the true grace of God'? He was no great genius; he did not know anything about comparative religion, which is nowadays supposed to be absolutely essential to understanding any one religion. He was not a scholar or a philosopher. What business had he to bring in his personality thus, as if he were an authority, and say, '*I testify that this is the true grace of God!*'

Well there are two or three answers: one peculiar to him and others common to all Christian people. The one peculiar to him is, as I believe, that he was conscious, and rightly conscious, that Jesus Christ had bestowed upon him the power to witness, and the authority to impose his testimony upon men as a word from God. In the most inartificial and matter-of-course way Peter here lets us see the apostolic conception of apostolic authority. He had a right—not because of what he was himself, but because of the authority which Christ had conferred on him—to say to men, 'I do not ask you to give heed to me, Peter. I myself also am a man (as he said to Cornelius), but I call on you to accept Christ's word, spoken through me, His commissioned messenger, when *I testify*, and through me Christ testifies, that this is the true grace of God.'

Now no one but an apostle has the right to say that; but we Christian people have a right to say something like it, and if we have not apostolic authority, we may have what is very nearly as good, and sometimes as powerful in its effect upon other people, and that is authority based on personal experience. If we have plunged deep into the secrets of God, and lived closely and faithfully in communion with Him, and for ourselves have found the grace of God, His love and the gifts of His love, coming into our lives, and ennobling, calming, elevating each of us; then we, too, have a right to go to men and say, 'Never mind about me; never mind about whether I am wise or foolish, I do not argue, but I tell you I have tasted the manna, and it is sweet. I have drunk of the water, and it comes cool and fresh from the rock. One thing I know, that whereas

I was blind, now I see. I believed, and therefore have I spoken, and on the strength of my own tasting of it, I testify that this, which has done so much for me, is the true grace of God.' If we testify thus, and back up our witness with lives corresponding, some who are wholly untouched by a preacher's eloquence and controversialists' arguments, will probably be led by our attestation to make the experiment for themselves. 'Ye are My witnesses,' says God. He did not say, 'Ye are my advocates.' He did not bid us argue for Him, but He bid us witness for Him.

II. Further, notice Peter's exhortation.

According to the right rendering the last clause is, as I have already said, 'in which stand fast.' The translation in the Authorised Version, 'in which ye stand,' gives a true thought, though not the Apostle's intention here. For, as a matter of fact, men cannot stand upright and firm unless their feet are planted on the rock of that true grace of God. If our heels are well fixed on it, then our goings will be established. It is no use talking to men about steadfastness of purpose, stability of life, erect independence, resistance to antagonistic forces, and all the rest, unless you give them something to stand upon. If you talk so to a man who has his foot upon shifting sands or slippery clay; the more he tries the deeper will he sink into the one, or slide the further upon the other. The best way to help men to stand fast is to give them something to stand upon. And the only standing ground that will never yield, nor collapse, nor, like the quicksand with the tide round it, melt away, we do not know how, from beneath our feet, is 'the grace of God.' Or, as Dr. Watts says, in one of his now old-fashioned hymns:—

'Lo! on the solid Rock I stand,

And all beside is shifting sand.'

However, that is not what the Apostle Peter meant. He says, 'See that you keep firmly your position in reference to this true grace of

God.' Now I am not going to talk to you about intellectual difficulties in the way of hearty and whole-souled acceptance of the gospel revelation—difficulties which are very real and very widespread in these days, but which possibly very slightly affect us; at least I hope so.

But whilst these slay their thousands, the difficulties that affect us all in the way of keeping a firm hold on, or firm standing in (for the two metaphors coalesce) the gospel, which is the true grace of God, are those that arise from two causes working in combination. One is our own poor weak hearts, wavering wills, strong passions, unbridled desires, forgetful minds; and the other is all that army and babel of seductions and inducements, in occupations legitimate and necessary, in enjoyments which are in themselves pure and innocent, in family delights, in home engagements, in pursuits of commerce or of daily business—all that crowd of things that tempt us to forget the true grace and to wander away in a foolish and vain search after vain and foolish substitutes.

Dear brethren, it is not so much because there are many adversaries in the intellectual world as because we are such weak creatures ourselves, and the world around us is so strong against us, that we need to say to one another and to ourselves, over and over again, 'Stand ye fast therein.' You cannot keep hold of a rope even, without the act of grasping tending to relax, and there must be a conscious and repeated tightening up of the muscles, or the very cord on which we hang for safety will slip through our relaxed palms. And however we may be convinced that there are no hope and no true blessedness for us except in keeping hold of God, we need that grasp to be tightened up by daily renewed efforts, or else it will certainly become slack, and we shall lose the thing that we should hold fast. So my text exhorts us against ourselves, and against the temptations of the world, which are always present with us, and are far more operative in bringing down the temperature of the Christian Church,

and of its individual members, than any chilling that arises from intellectual doubts.

And how are we to obey the exhortation? Well, plainly, if 'this' is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, 'the true grace of God' which alone will give stability to our feet, then we 'shall not stand fast' in it unless we make conscious efforts to apprehend, and comprehend, and keep hold of it in our minds as well as in our hearts. May I say one very plain word? I am very much afraid that people do not read their Bibles very much now (or if they do read them, they do not study them), and that anything like an intelligent familiarity with the whole sweep of the great system (for it is a system) of Divine truth, evolved 'at sundry times and in divers manners' in this Word, is a very rare thing amongst even good people. They listen to sermons, with more or less attention; they read newspapers, no doubt; they read good little books, and magazines, and the like; and volumes that profess to be drawn from Scripture. These are all right and good in their place. But sure I am that a robust and firm grasp of the gospel, 'which is the grace of God,' is not possible with a starvation diet of Scripture. And so I would say, try to get hold of the depth and width of meaning in the Word.

Again, try to keep heart and mind in contact with it amidst distractions and daily duties. Try to bring the principles of the New Testament consciously to bear on the small details of everyday life. Do you look at your day's work through these spectacles? Does it ever occur to you, as you are going about your business, or your profession, or your domestic work, to ask yourselves what bearing the gospel and its truths have upon these? If my ordinary, so-called secular, avocations are evacuated of reference to, and government by, the Word of God, I want to know what of my life is left as the sphere in which it is to work. There is no need that religion and daily life should be kept apart as they are. There is no reason why the experience of to-day, in shop, and counting-house, and kitchen, and study, should not cast light upon, and make more real to me, 'the

true grace of God.' Be sure that you desire, and ask for, and put yourself in the attitude of receiving, the gifts of that love, which are the graces of the Christian life. And when you have got them, apply them, 'that you may be able to withstand in the evil day; and, having done all, to stand.'

1 Peter v. 13— THE CHURCH IN BABYLON

'The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you ...'—1 Peter v. 13.

We have drawn lessons in previous addresses from the former parts of the closing salutations of this letter. And now I turn to this one to see what it may yield us. The Revised Version omits 'the church,' and substitutes 'she'; explaining in a marginal note that there is a difference of opinion as to whether the sender of the letter is a community or an individual. All the old MSS., with one weighty exception, follow the reading 'she that is in Babylon.' But it seems so extremely unlikely that a single individual, with no special function, should be bracketed along with the communities to whom the letter was addressed, as 'elected together with' them, that the conclusion that the sender of the letter is a church, symbolically designated as a 'lady,' seems the natural one.

Then there is another question—where was Babylon?

An equal diversity of opinion has arisen about that. I do not venture to trouble you with the arguments *pro* and *con*, but only express my own opinion that 'Babylon' means Rome.

We have here the same symbolical name as in the Book of Revelation, where, whatever further meanings are attached to the designation, it is intended primarily as an appellation for the imperial city, which has taken the place filled in the Old Testament

by Babylon, as the concentration of antagonism to the Kingdom of God.

If these views of the significance of the expression are adopted we have here the Church in Rome, the proud stronghold of worldly power and hostility, sending its greetings to the scattered Christian communities in the provinces of what is now called Asia Minor. The fact of such cordial communications between communities separated by so many contrarities as well as by race and distance, familiar though it is, may suggest several profitable considerations, to which I ask your attention.

I. We have here an object lesson as to the uniting power of the gospel.

Just think of the relations which, in the civil world, subsisted between Rome and its subject provinces; the latter, with bitter hatred in their hearts to everything belonging to the oppressing city, having had their freedom crushed down and their aspirations ruthlessly trampled upon; the former, with the contempt natural to metropolitans in dealing with far-off provincials. The same kind of relationship subsisted between Rome and the outlying provinces of its unwieldy empire as between England, for instance, and its Indian possessions. And the same uniting bond came in which binds the Christian converts of these Eastern lands of ours to England by a far firmer bond than any other. There was springing up amidst all the alienation and hatred and smothered rebellion a still incipient, but increasing, and even then strong bond that held together Roman Christians and Cappadocian believers. They were both 'one in Christ Jesus.' The separating walls were high, but, according to the old saying, you cannot build walls high enough to keep out the birds; and spirits, winged by the common faith, soared above all earthly-made distinctions and met in the higher regions of Christian communion. When the tide rises it fills and unifies the scattered pools on the beach. So the uniting power of Christian faith was

manifest in these early days, when it bound such discordant elements together, and made 'the church that was in Babylon' forget that they were to a large extent Romans by birth, and stretch out their hands, with their hearts in them, to the churches to whom this letter was sent.

Now, brethren, our temptation is not so much to let barriers of race and language and distance weaken our sense of Christian community, as it is to let even smaller things than these do the same tragical office for us. And we, as Christian people, are bound to try and look over the fences of our 'denominations' and churches, and recognise the wider fellowship and larger company in which all these are merged. God be thanked! there are manifest tokens all round us to-day that the age of separation and division is about coming to an end. Yearnings for unity, which must not be forced into acts too soon, but which will fulfil themselves in ways not yet clear to any of us, are beginning to rise in Christian hearts. Let us see to it, dear friends, that we do our parts to cherish and to increase these, and to yield ourselves to the uniting power of the common faith.

II. We note, further, the clear recognition here of what is the strong bond uniting all Christians.

Peter would probably have been very much astonished if he had been told of the theological controversies that were to be waged round that word 'elect.' The emphasis here lies, not on 'elect,' but on 'together.' It is not the thing so much as the common possession of the thing which bulks largely before the Apostle. In effect he says, 'The reason why these Roman Christians that have never looked you Bithynians in the face do yet feel their hearts going out to you, and send you their loving messages, is because they, in common with you, have been recipients of precisely the same Divine act of grace.' We do not now need to discuss the respective parts of man and God in it, nor any of the interminable controversies that have sprung up

around the word. God had, as the fact of their possession of salvation showed, chosen Romans and Asiatics together to be heirs of eternal life. By the side of these transcendent blessings which they possessed in common, how pitifully small and insignificant all the causes which kept them apart looked and were!

And so here we have a partial parallel to the present state of Christendom, in which are seen at work, on one hand, superficial separation; on the other, underlying unity. The splintered peaks may stand, or seem to stand, apart from their sister summits, or may frown at each other across impassable gorges, but they all belong to one geological formation, and in their depths their bases blend indistinguishably into a continuous whole. Their tops are miles apart, but beneath the surface they are one. And so the things that bind Christian men together are the great things and the deepest things; and the things that part them are the small and superficial ones. Therefore it is our wisdom—not only for the sake of the fact of our unity and for the sake of our consciousness of unity, but because the truths which unite are the most important ones—that they shall bulk largest in our hearts and minds. And if they do, we shall know our brother in every man that is like-minded with us towards them, whatever shibboleth may separate us. I spoke a moment ago about the separate pools on the beach, and the tide rising. When the tide goes down, and the spiritual life ebbs, the pools are parted again. And so ages of feeble spiritual vitality have been ages of theological controversy about secondary matters; and ages of profound realisation by the Church of the great fundamentals of gospel truth have been those when its members were drawn together, they knew not how. Hence they can say of and to each other, 'Elect together with you.'

Brethren, for the sake of the strength of our own religious life, do not let us fix our attention on the peculiarities of our sects, but upon the catholic truths believed everywhere, always, by all. Then we

shall 'walk in a large place,' and feel how many there are that are possessors of 'like precious faith' with ourselves.

III. Then, lastly, we may find here a hint as to the pressing need for such a realisation of unity.

'The church that is in Babylon' was in a very uncongenial place. Thank God, no Babylon is so Babylonish but that a Church of God may be found planted in it. No circumstances are so unfavourable to the creation and development of the religious life but that the religious life may grow there. An orchid will find footing upon a bit of stick, because it draws nourishment from the atmosphere; and they who are fed by influx of the Divine Spirit may be planted anywhere, and yet flourish in the courts of our God. So 'the church that is in Babylon' gives encouragement as to the possibility of Christian faith being triumphant over adverse conditions.

But it also gives a hint as to the obligation springing from the circumstances in which Christian people are set, to cultivate the sense of belonging to a great brotherhood. Howsoever solitary and surrounded by uncongenial associations any Christian man may be, he may feel that he is not alone, not only because his Master is with him, but because there are many others whose hearts throb with the same love, whose lives are surrounded by the same difficulties. It is by no means a mere piece of selfish consolation which this same Apostle gives in another part of his letter, when he bids the troubled so be of good cheer, as remembering that the 'same afflictions were accomplished in the brotherhood which is in the world.' He did not mean to say, 'Take comfort, for other people are as badly off as you are,' but he meant to call to the remembrance of the solitary sufferer the thousands of his brethren who were 'dreeing the same weird' in the same uncongenial world.

If thus you and I, Christian men, are pressed upon on all sides by such worldly associations, the more need that we should let our hearts go out to the innumerable multitude of our fellows,

companions in the tribulation, and patience, and kingdom of Jesus Christ. Precisely because the Roman believers were in Babylon, they were glad to think of their brethren in Asia. Isolated amidst Rome's splendours and sins, it was like a breath of cool air stealing into some banqueting house heavy with the fumes of wine, or some slaughter-house reeking with the smell of blood, to remember these far-off partakers of a purer life.

But if I might for a moment diverge, I would venture to say that in the conditions of thought, and the tendencies of things in our own and other lands, it is more than ever needful that Christian people should close their ranks, and stand shoulder to shoulder. For men who believe in a supernatural revelation, in the Divine Christ, in an atoning Sacrifice, in an indwelling Spirit, are guilty of suicidal folly if they let the comparative trivialities that part them, separate God's army into isolated groups, in the face of the ordered battalions that are assaulting these great truths.

Because persecution was beginning to threaten and rumble on the horizon, like a rising thundercloud, it was the more needful, in Peter's time, that Christians parted by seas, by race, language, and customs, should draw together. And for us, fidelity to our testimony and loyalty to our Master, to say nothing of common sense and the instinct of self-preservation, command Christian men in this day to think more, and to speak more, and to make more, of the great verities which they all possess in common.

Thus, brethren, living in Babylon, we should open our windows to Jerusalem; and though we dwell here as aliens, we may say, 'We are come unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; to an innumerable company of angels; to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to the Church of the first-born whose names are written in Heaven.'

1 Peter v. 13— MARCUS, MY SON

'... So doth Marcus, my son.'—1 Peter v. 13.

The outlines of Mark's life, so far as recorded in Scripture, are familiar. He was the son of Mary, a woman of some wealth and position, as is implied by the fact that her house was large enough to accommodate the 'many' who were gathered together to pray for Peter's release. He was a relative, probably a cousin (Col. iv. 10, Revised Version), of Barnabas, and possibly, like him, a native of Cyprus. The designation of him by Peter as 'my son' naturally implies that the Apostle had been the instrument of his conversion. An old tradition tells us that he was the 'young man' mentioned in his Gospel who saw Christ arrested, and fled, leaving his only covering in the captor's hands. However that may be, he and his relatives were early and prominent disciples, and closely connected with Peter, as is evident from the fact that it was to Mary's house that he went after his deliverance. Mark's relationship to Barnabas made it natural that he should be chosen to accompany him and Paul on their first missionary journey, and his connection with Cyprus helps to account for his willingness to go thither, and his unwillingness to go further into less known ground. We know how he left the Apostles, when they crossed from Cyprus to the mainland, and retreated to his mother's house at Jerusalem. We have no details of the inglorious inactivity in which he spent the time until the proposal of a second journey by Paul and Barnabas. In the preparations for it, the foolish indulgence of his cousin, far less kind than Paul's wholesome severity, led to a rupture between the Apostles, and to Barnabas setting off on an evangelistic tour on his own account, which received no sympathy from the church at Antioch, and has been deemed unworthy of record in the Acts.

Then followed some twelve years or more, during which Mark seems to have remained quiescent; or, at all events, he does not appear to have had any work in connection with the great Apostle.

Then we find him reappearing amongst Paul's company when he was in prison for the first time in Rome; and in the letters to Colossæ he is mentioned as being a comfort to the Apostle then. He sends salutations to the Colossians, and is named also in the nearly contemporaneous letter to Philemon. According to the reference in Colossians, he was contemplating a journey amongst the Asiatic churches, for that in Colossæ is bidden to welcome him. Then comes this mention of him in the text. The fact that Mark was beside Peter when he wrote seems to confirm the view that Babylon here is a mystical name for Rome; and that this letter falls somewhere about the same date as the letters to Colossæ and Philemon. Here again he is sending salutations to Asiatic churches. We know nothing more about him, except that some considerable time after, in Paul's last letter, he asks Timothy, who was then at Ephesus, the headquarters of the Asiatic churches, to 'take Mark,' who, therefore, was apparently also in Asia, 'and bring him' with him to Rome; 'for,' says the Apostle, beautifully referring to the man's former failure, 'he is profitable to me for'—the very office that he had formerly flung up—'the ministry.'

So, possibly, he was with Paul in his last days. And then, after that, tradition tells us that he attached himself more closely to the Apostle Peter; and, finally, at his direction and dictation, became the evangelist who wrote the 'Gospel according to Mark.'

Now that is his story; and from the figure of this 'Marcus, my son,' and from his appearance here in this letter, I wish to gather two or three very plain and familiar lessons.

I. The first of them is the working of Christian sympathy.

Mark was a full-blooded Jew when he began his career. 'John, whose surname was Mark,' like a great many other Jews at that time, bore a double name—one Jewish, 'John,' and one Gentile, 'Marcus.' But as time goes on we do not hear anything more about 'John,' nor even about 'John Mark,' which are the two forms of his name when

he is first introduced to us in the Acts of the Apostles, but he finally appears to have cast aside his Hebrew and to have been only known by his Roman name. And that change of appellation coincides with the fact that so many of the allusions which we have to him represent him as sending messages of Christian greeting across the sea to his Gentile brethren. And it further coincides with the fact that his gospel is obviously intended for the use of Gentile Christians, and, according to an old and reliable tradition, was written in Rome for Roman Christians. All of which facts just indicate two things, that the more a man has real operative love to Jesus Christ in his heart, the more he will rise above all limitations of his interests, his sympathy, and his efforts, and the more surely will he let himself out, as far as he can, in affection towards and toils for all men.

This change of name, though it is a mere trifle, and may have been adopted as a matter of convenience, may also be taken as reminding us of a very important truth, and that is, that if we wish to help people, the first condition is that we go down and stand on their level, and make ourselves one with them, as far as we can. And so Mark may have said, 'I have put away the name that parts me from these Gentiles, for whom I desire to work, and whom I love; and I take the name that binds me to them.' Why, it is the very same principle, in a small instance—just as a raindrop that hangs on the thorn of a rose-bush is moulded by the same laws that shape the great sphere of the central sun—it is a small instance of the great principle which brought Jesus Christ down into the world to die for us. You must become like the people that you want to help. 'Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same, that He might deliver them.' And so, not only the duty of widening our sympathies, but one of the supreme conditions of being of use to anybody, are set forth in the comparatively trifling incident, which we pass by without noticing it, that this man, a Jew to his finger-tips, finally found himself—or, rather, finally was carried, for it was no case of unconscious drifting—into the position of a messenger of the Cross

to the Gentiles; and for the sake of efficiency in his work, and of getting close by the side of people whom he wanted to influence, flung away deliberately that which parted him from them. It is a small matter, but a little window may show a very wide prospect.

II. The history of Mark suggests the possibility of overcoming early faults.

We do not know why he refused to bear the burden of the work that he had so cheerily begun. Probably the reason that I have suggested may have had something to do with it. When he started he did not bargain for going into unknown lands, in which there were many toils to be encountered. He was willing to go where he knew the ground, and where there were people that would make things easy for him; but when Paul went further afield, Mark's courage ebbed out at his finger ends, and he slunk back to the comfort of his mother's house in Jerusalem. At all events, whatever his reason, his return was a fault; or Paul would not have been so hard upon him as he was. The writer of the Acts puts Paul's view of the case strongly by the arrangement of clauses in the sentence in which he tells us that the Apostle 'thought not good to take him with them who withdrew from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.' If he thus threw down his tools whenever he came to a little difficulty, and said, 'As long as it is easy work, and close to the base of operations, I am your man, but if there is any sacrifice wanted you must look out for somebody else,' he was not precisely a worker after Paul's own heart. And the best way to treat him was as the Apostle did; and to say to Barnabas' indulgent proposal, 'No! he would not do the work before, and now he shall not do it.' That is often God's way with us. It brings us to our senses, as it brought Mark to his.

We do not know how long it took to cure Mark of his early fault, but he was thoroughly cured. The man that was afraid of dangers and difficulties and hypothetical risks in Asia Minor became brave

enough to stand by the Apostle when he was a prisoner, and was not ashamed of his chain. And afterwards, so much had he won his way into the Apostle's confidence, and made himself needful for him by his services and his sweetness, that the lonely prisoner, with the gibbet or headsman's sword in prospect, feels that he would like to have Mark with him once more, and bids Timothy bring him with himself, for 'he is profitable to me for the ministry.' 'He can do a thousand things that a man like me cannot do for himself, and he does them all for love and nothing for reward.' So he wants Mark once more. And thus not only Paul's generosity, but Mark's own patient effort had pasted a clean sheet over the one that was inscribed with the black story of his desertion, and he became 'profitable for' the task that he had once in so petulant and cowardly a way, flung up.

Well, translate that from the particular into the general and it comes to this. Let no man set limits to the possibilities of his own restoration, and of his curing faults which are most deeply rooted within himself. Hope and effort should be boundless. There is nothing that a Christian man may not reach, in the way of victory over his worse self, and ejection of his most deeply-rooted faults, if only he will be true to Jesus, and use the gifts that are given to him. There are many of us whose daily life is pitched in a minor key; whose whole landscape is grey and monotonous and sunless; who feel as if yesterday must set the tune for to-day, and as if, because we have been beaten and baffled so often, it is useless to try again. But remember that the field on which the Stone of Help was erected, to commemorate the great and decisive victory that Israel won, was the very field on which the same foes had before contended, and *then* Israel had been defeated.

So, brethren, we may win victories on the very soil where formerly we were shamefully put to the rout; and our Christ with us will make anything possible for us, in the way of restoration, of cure of old faults, of ceasing to repeat former sins. I suppose that when a spar is

snapped on board a vessel, and lashed together with spun yarn and lanyards, as a sailor knows how to do, it is stronger at the point of fracture than it was before. I suppose that it is possible for a man to be most impregnable at the point where he is naturally weakest, if he chooses to use the defences that Jesus Christ has given.

III. Take another lesson—the greatness of little service.

We do not hear that this John Mark ever tried to do any work in the way of preaching the gospel. His business was a very much humbler one. He had to attend to Paul's comfort. He had to be his factotum, man of all work; looking after material things, the commissariat, the thousand and one trifles that some one had to see to if the Apostle's great work was to get done. And he did it all his life long. It was enough for him to do thoroughly the entirely 'secular' work, as some people would think it, which it was in his power to do. That needed some self-suppression. It would have been so natural for Mark to have said, 'Paul sends Timothy to be bishop in Crete; and Titus to look after other churches; Epaphroditus is an official here; and Apollos is a great preacher there. And here am I, grinding away at the secularities yet. I think I'll "strike," and try and get more conspicuous work.' Or he might perhaps deceive himself, and say, 'more directly religious work,' like a great many of us that often mask a very carnal desire for prominence under a very saintly guise of desire to do spiritual service. Let us take care of that. This 'minister,' who was not a minister at all, in our sense of the word, but only in the sense of being a servant, a private attendant and valet of the Apostle, was glad to do that work all his days.

That was self-suppression. But it was something more. It was a plain recognition of what we all ought to have very clearly before us, and that is, that all sorts of work which contribute to one end are one sort of work; and that at bottom the man who carried Paul's books and parchments, and saw that he was not left without clothes, though he

was so negligent of cloaks and other necessities, was just as much helping on the cause of Christ as the Apostle when he preached.

I wonder if any of you remember the old story about an organist and his blower. The blower was asked who it was that played that great sonata of Beethoven's, or somebody's. And he answered, 'I do not know who played, but I blew it.' There is a great truth there. If it had not been for the unknown man at the bellows, the artist at the keys would not have done much. So Mark helped Paul. And as Jesus Christ said, 'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward.'

IV. Take as the last lesson the enlarged sphere that follows faithfulness in small matters.

What a singular change! The man who began with being a servant of Paul and of Barnabas ends by being the evangelist, and it is to him, under Peter's direction, that we owe what is possibly the oldest, and, at all events, in some aspects, an entirely unique, narrative of our Lord's life. Do you think that Peter would ever have said to him: 'Mark! come here and sit down and write what I tell you,' if there had not been beforehand these long years of faithful service? So is it always, dear friends, 'He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.' That is not only a declaration that faithfulness is one in kind, whatever be the diameter of the circle in which it is exercised, but it may also be taken as a promise, though that was not the original intention of the saying.

For quite certainly, in God's providence, the tools do come to the hand that can wield them, and the best reward that we can get for doing well our little work is to have larger work to do. The little tapers are tempted, if I may use so incongruous a figure, to wish themselves set up on loftier stands. Shine your brightest in your corner, and you will be 'exalted' in due time. It is so, as a rule, in this world; sometimes too much so, for, as they say is the case at the English bar, so it is sometimes in God's Church, 'There is no

medium between having nothing to do and being killed with work.' Still the reward for work is more work. And the law will be exemplified most blessedly when Christ shall say, 'Well done! good and faithful servant. Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.'

So this far-away figure of the minister-evangelist salutes us too, and bids us be of good cheer, notwithstanding all faults and failures, because it is possible for us, as he has proved, to recover ourselves after them all. God will not be less generous in forgiveness than Paul was; and even you and I may hear from Christ's lips, 'Thou art profitable to Me for the ministry.'