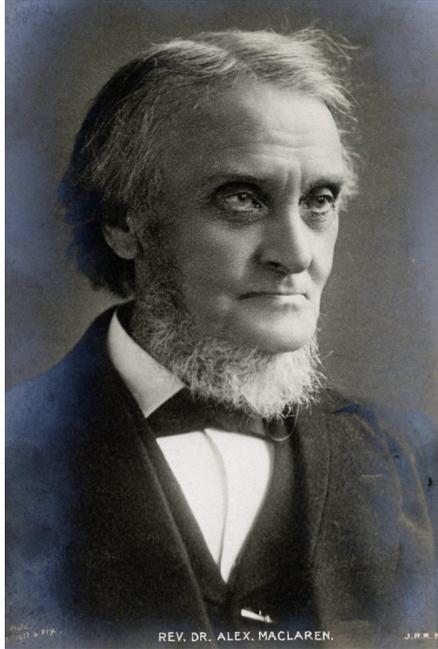


EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Volume 17



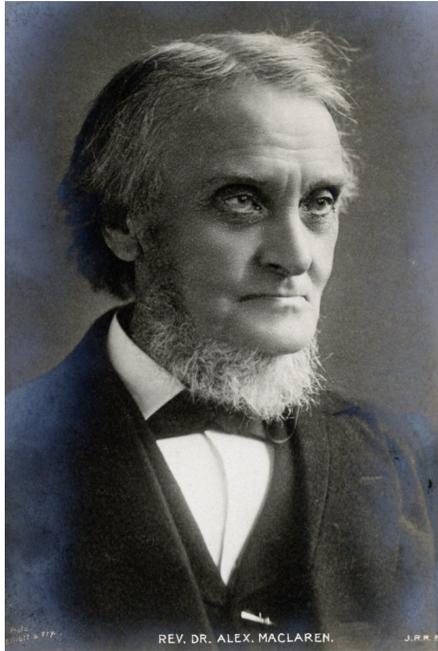
by

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

2 PETER, 1, 2, 3 JOHN, JUDE, REVELATION

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II. PETER

2 Peter i. 1— LIKE PRECIOUS FAITH

'... Them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.'—2 Peter i. 1.

Peter seems to have had a liking for that word 'precious.' It is not a very descriptive one; it does not give much light as to the quality of the things to which it is applied; but it is a suggestion of one-idea value. It is interesting to notice the objects to which, in his two letters—for I take this to be his letter—he applies it. He speaks of the trial of faith as being 'precious.' He speaks (with a slight modification of the word employed) of Jesus Christ as being 'to them that believe, precious.' He speaks of the 'precious' blood of Christ. These instances are in the first epistle. In this second epistle we have the words of my text, and a moment after, 'exceeding great and precious promises.' Now look at Peter's list of valuables; 'Christ, Christ's blood, God's promises, our Faith, and the discipline to which that faith is subjected.' These are things that the old man had found out to be of worth.

But then there is another word in my text that must be noted, 'like precious.' It brings into view two classes, to one of which Peter himself belongs—'us' and 'they.' Who are these two classes? It may be that he is thinking of the immense difference between the intelligent and developed faith of himself and the other Apostles, and the rudimentary and infantile faith of the recent believers to whom he may be speaking. And, if so, that would be beautiful, but I rather take it that he is tacitly contrasting in his own mind the difference between the Gentile converts as a whole, and the members of the Jewish community who had become believers in

Jesus Christ, and that he is repeating the lesson that he had learned on the housetop at Joppa, and had had further confirmed to him by the experience of Cæsarea, and that he is really saying exactly what he said when he defended himself before the Council in Jerusalem: 'Seeing that God had given unto them the like gift that he did unto us, who was I, that I should withstand God?' And so he looks out over all the Christian community, and ignores 'the middle wall of partition,' and says, 'Them that have obtained like precious faith with us.' I wish very simply to try to draw out the thoughts that lie in these words, and cluster round that well-worn and threadbare theological expression and Christian verity of 'faith' or 'trust.'

I. And the first thing that I would desire to point you to is, what we learn here as to the object of faith.

Now those of you who are using the Revised Version will notice that there is a very slight, but important, alteration there, from the rendering in the old translation. We read in the latter: 'Like precious faith with us *through* the righteousness, ...' and that is a meaning that might be defended. But the Revised Version says, and says more accurately as far as the words go, and more truly as far as Christian thought goes, 'them that have obtained like precious faith with us *in* the righteousness.' Now, I daresay, it will occur to us all that that is a departure from the usual form in which faith is presented to us in the New Testament, because there, thank God! we are clearly taught that the one thing which faith grapples is not a thing but a Person. Christian faith is only human trust turned in a definite direction. Just as our trust lays hold on one another, so the object of faith is, in the deepest analysis, no doctrine, no proposition, not even a Divine fact, not even a Divine promise, but the Doer of the fact, and the Promiser of the promise, and the Person, Jesus Christ. When you say, 'I trust so-and-so's word!' what you mean is, 'I trust *him*, and so I put credence in his word.' And Christianity would have been delivered from mountains of misconception, and many a poor soul would have felt that a blaze of light had come in upon it, if this had

been clearly proclaimed, and firmly apprehended by preachers and by hearers, that the object of trust is the living Person, Jesus Christ, and that the trust which grapples us to Him is essentially a personal relation entered into by our wills and hearts far more than by our heads.

All that is being apprehended by the Christian Church to-day a great deal more clearly than it used to be when some of us were young. But we have the defects of our qualities. And this generation is accustomed far too lightly and superficially to say 'Oh! I do not care about doctrines. I cleave to the living Christ!' Amen! say I. But there is another question—What Christ is it that you are cleaving to? For our only way of knowing a person with whom we have no external acquaintance is by what we are told about him, and believe about him. And so, while we cannot assert too strongly that faith or trust in the living Christ, and not in a dogma, is the basis of real Christian life, we have need to be very definite and sure as to what Christ—which Christ—it is that we are trusting to? And there my text comes in, and tells us that faith is to grasp Christ as our righteousness; and another saying of the Apostle Paul's comes in, who for once speaks of faith as being faith not only in the Christ, but in 'His blood':—

'Jesus! Thy blood and righteousness,

My beauty are, my glorious dress.'

Brethren! you will not get beyond that. The Christ, trusting in whom we have life and salvation, is the Christ whose blood cleanses, whose righteousness clothes us poor, sinful men. So, while proclaiming with all emphasis, and rejoicing to press it upon all my brethren, that salvation comes by personal trust in the Person, I supplement and fill out, not contradict, that proclamation, when I further say that the Person by trusting in whom we are saved, is the Jesus whose blood cleanses and whose righteousness becomes ours. That righteousness is, in our text, contemplated as God's, as being embodied in Christ's, that from Him it may be imparted to us, if we

will fulfil the condition on which alone it can be ours, viz., faith. It becomes ours, by no mere imputation which has not a reality at the back of it, but because faith brings us into such a vital union with Jesus Christ as that His righteousness, or at least a spark from the central flame, becomes ours, not only in reference to our exemption from the burden of our guilt, but in reference to our becoming conformed to the image of His dear Son, and created anew in righteousness and holiness. The object of faith is Christ, the Christ whose blood and righteousness cleanses and clothes sinful souls.

II. Let me ask you to look, in the next place, to what this text suggests to us about the worth of Christian faith.

Peter calls it precious. Consider its worth as a channel. There is a very remarkable expression used in the Acts of the Apostles, 'The door of faith.' A door is of little value in itself, worth a few shillings at the most, but if it opens the way into a palace then it is worth something. And all the preciousness that there is in faith comes, not from its intrinsic value, but from the really precious things which it gives into our hands. Just as the dyer's hand may be tinged with royal purple, if he has been working in it, or a woman's hand may be scented and made fragrant if she has been handling perfumes, so the hand of faith takes tint and fragrance from that with which it is conversant. It is precious because it is the channel by which all precious things flow into our hearts and lives. If Ladysmith is, as I suppose it is, dependent for its water supply on one lead pipe, the preciousness of that pipe is not measured by what it would fetch if it were put up to auction for its lead, but by that which flows through it, and without which Death would come. And my faith is the pipe by which all the water of life comes sparkling and rejoicing into my thirsty soul. It is the opening of the door 'that the King of Glory may come in'; it is the taking down of the shutters that the sunshine may blaze into the darkened chamber; it is the grasping of the electric wire that the circuit may be completed. God puts out His hand, and we lay hold of it. It is not the outstretched hand from earth, but the

down-stretched hand from heaven that makes the tottering man stand. So, dear friends, let us understand that salvation does not come as the reward of faith, but that the salvation is *in* the faith, because faith is the channel by which all God's salvation pours into us. So there is nothing arbitrary in the way of salvation, as some shallow thinkers seem to propose, and there is no reason in the question, 'Why does God make salvation depend upon faith?' God could not but make salvation depend upon faith, because there is no other possible way by which the blessings which are gathered together into that one great pregnant word 'salvation' could find their way into a man's heart but through the channel of his trust. Have you opened that channel? If you have not, you need not wonder it cannot be otherwise—that salvation does not come unto you.

Consider its worth as a defence. The Apostle in one place speaks about 'the shield of faith.' But there is nothing in the belief that I am safe to make me safe. It is very often a fatal blunder. All depends upon that or Him, to which or whom I am trusting for my safety. Put yourself beneath the true Shield—'The Lord God is a sun and shield'—and then you will be safe. Your way of running into the strong tower which alone, with its massive walls, protects us from all danger and from all sin, is by trusting Him.

Just as light things on a ship's deck have to be lashed in order to be secured and lie still, you and I have to lash ourselves to Jesus Christ; then, not by reason of the lashings, but by reason of Him, we are fastened and secured.

Consider the worth of faith as a means of purifying. This very Apostle, in his great speech in Jerusalem, when vindicating the reception of the Gentiles into the Church, spoke of God as having 'purified their hearts by faith.' And here again, I say, there is no cleansing power in the act of trust. Cleansing power is in that which, by the act of trust, comes into my heart. Faith is not simple receptivity, not mere passive absorbing of what is given, but it is the

active taking by desire as well as by confidence. And when we trust in Jesus Christ, His blood and righteousness, there flows into our hearts that Divine life which, like a river turned into a dung-heap, will sweep all the filth before it. You have to get the purifying power by faith. Ay! and you have to utilise the purifying power by effort and by work. 'What God hath joined together, let not men put asunder.'

III. Now, lastly, note the identity of faith.

'*Like precious*,' says Peter, and, as I said, there may be defended a double application of the word, and two sets of pairs of classes may be supposed to have been in his mind. I do not discuss which of these may be the case, only I would suggest to you that from this beautiful gathering together of all the diversities of the Christian character, conception, and development into one great whole, we are taught that the one thing that makes a Christian is this trust. That is the universal characteristic; that is uniform, whatever may differ. Ah! how much and how little it takes to make a Christian. 'Only faith?' you say. Yes, thank God! not this, or that, not rites, not anything that a priest can do to you. Not orthodoxy; not morality; these will come, but trust in Christ and His blood and righteousness. England is a Christian country; is it? This is a Christian congregation; is it? You are a Christian; are you? Are you trusting in that Christ? If you are not; no! though you be orthodox up to the eyebrows, and though seven or seven hundred sacraments may have been given to you, and though you be a clean living man—all that does not make a Christian, but *this* does—'*Like precious faith with us in the righteousness of God and our Saviour.*'

Again, this great thought of the identity or uniformity of the one characteristic may suggest to us how Christian faith is one, under all varieties of form. There never has been in the Christian Church again, notwithstanding all our deplorable divisions and schisms, such a tremendous cleft as there was in the primitive Church

between the Jewish and Gentile components thereof. But Peter flings this flying bridge across that abyss, and knits the two sides together, because he knows that away out yonder, amongst the Gentiles, and here in the little circle of the Jewish believers, there was the one faith that unifies all.

So, dear friends, there should be the widest charity, but no vagueness; for the Christian faith in Him which unifies and bridges over all differences, mental and theological, is the Christ by whose blood we are cleansed, with whose righteousness we are made righteous.

Again, from the same thought flows the other, of the identity of the uniform characteristic, at all stages of development or maturity. The mustard-seed and the tree, 'which is greater than all herbs,' have the same life in them. And the feeblest, tremulous little spark in some heart, just kindled, and scarcely capable of sustaining itself, is one with the flame leaping heaven-high, which lights up and cleanses the whole soul. So for those in advance, humility, and for those in the rear, hope. And something more than hope, for if you have the feeblest beginning of tremulous trust, you have that which only needs to be fostered to make you like Jesus Christ. Look at what follows our text: 'Add to your faith, virtue, and to virtue, knowledge,' and so on, through the whole linked series of Christian graces. They all come out of that trust which knits us to Him who is the source of them all. So you and I are responsible for bringing our faith to the highest development of which it is capable.

Alas! alas! are we not all like this very Apostle, who, in an ecstasy of trust and longing, ventured himself on the wave, and as soon as he felt the cold water creeping above his knees lost his trust, and so lost his buoyancy, and was ready to go down like a stone? He had so little faith, that he was beginning to sink; he had so much that he put out his hand—a desperate hand it was—and cried, 'Lord, save me!' And the hand came, and that steadied him, and bore him up till the

water was beneath the soles of his feet again. 'Lord! I believe; help Thou my unbelief!'

2 Peter i. 3— MAN SUMMONED BY GOD'S GLORY AND ENERGY

'... His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue.'—2 Peter i. 3.

'I knew thee,' said the idle servant in our Lord's parable, 'that thou wert an austere man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou hadst not strewed. I was afraid, and went and hid my talent in the earth.' Our Lord would teach us all with that pregnant word the great truth that if once a man gets it into his head that God's principal relation to him is to demand, and to command, you will get no work out of that man; that such a notion will paralyse all activity and cut the nerve of all service. And the converse is as true, namely, that the one thought about God, which is fruitful of all blessing, joy, spontaneous, glad activity, is the thought of Him as giving, and not of demanding, of bestowing, and not of commanding. Teach a man that he is, as the book of James has it, 'the giving God,' and let that thought soak into the man's heart and mind, and you will get any work out of him. And only when that thought is deep in the spirit will there be true service.

Now that is the connection in which the words of my text come; for they are laid as the broad foundation of the great commandment that follows: 'Beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to your virtue knowledge,' and so on, all the round of the ladder by which the Apostle represents us as climbing up to God. The foundation of this injunction is—God has given you everything. You have got it to begin with, and so do you set yourselves to work, and see that you make the thing that is yours your own, and

incorporate into your being and into the very substance of your soul, and work out in all the blessed activities of a Christian life, the gifts that His royal and kingly hand has bestowed upon you. Take for granted that God loves you and gives you His whole self, and work on in the fulness of His possessed gift.

That is the connection of the words before us. I take them just as they lie in our passage, dealing first of all with this question—God's call to you and me; how it is done. Now I do not know if I can venture to indulge any remarks about Biblical criticism, but you will perhaps bear with me just for a moment whilst I say that the people who know a great deal more about such subjects than either you or I, agree with one consent that the proper way of reading this verse of my text is not as our Bible has it; 'Him that has called us *to* glory and virtue,' but 'Him that hath called us *by*—by his own glory and virtue.' Do you see the difference? In one case the language expresses the things in imitation of the Divine nature to which God summons you and me when He calls us. That is how our Bible has taken it; but the deeper thought still is the things in that Divine nature and activity itself which constitute His great summons and invitation of men to His side; and these are the two, whatever they might be, which the Apostle here describes in that rather peculiar and unusual language for Scripture, 'Who has called us by His own glory and His own virtue.' I venture to dwell on these two points for a moment or two.

Now, first of all, God's glory. Threadbare and consequently vague as the expression is in the minds of a great many people who have heard it with their ears ever since they were little children, God's glory has a very distinct and definite meaning in Scripture, and all starts, as I think, from the Old Testament use of the expression, which was the distinct specific name for the supernatural light that lay between the cherubim, and brooded over the ark on the mercy-seat. The word signifies specifically and originally the glory of God, and irradiation of a material, though supernatural, symbol of His

Divine and spiritual presence. Very well, lay hold of that material picture, for God teaches us as we do our children, with pictures. Take the symbol and lift it up into the spiritual region, and it is just this: the glory of God in its deepest meaning is the irradiation and the perpetual pouring out and out and out from Himself, as the rays of the sun stream out from its great orb, pouring out from Himself the light and the perfectness and the beauty of His own self revelation. And I think we may fairly translate and paraphrase the first words of my text into this: God's great way of summoning men to Himself is by laying out His love upon them and letting the fulness of that ineffable and uncreated light, in which is no darkness at all, stream into the else blinded and hopeless lives and hearts of men. Then the other side of the Apostle's thought seems to me—if we will only strip it of the threadbare technicalities associated with it—as great and wonderful, God's glory and God's virtue. A heathenish kind of smack lingers about that word, both as applied to men and as applied to God, and so seldom found in the New Testament; but meaning here, as I venture to say, without stopping to show it—meaning here substantially the same thing that we mean by that word energy or power. You know old women in country places talk about the virtues of plants. They do not mean by this the goodness of plants, but they mean the occult powers which they suppose them able to put forth. We read in one of the gospels that our Lord Himself said at one singular period of His life that virtue had gone out of Him, meaning thereby not goodness but energy. So I think we get a sufficient equivalent to the Apostle's meaning if for the second two words of my text we read, 'He hath called us by the glory, the raying out of his love, and He hath called us by the activity and the energy, the power in action of His great and illustrious Spirit.' So you see these two things, the light that streams out of an energy which is born of the streaming light. These two things are really at bottom but one, various aspects of one idea. Modern physicists tell us that all the activity in the system comes from the sun, and in the higher region all the activity comes from the

sun, and there is no mightier force in the physical universe than the sunlight. Lightnings are vulgar, noisy, and limited in contrast. The all-conquering force is the light that streams out, and so says Peter in his vivid picturesque way—not meaning the mere talk of philosophy or theology—the manifestation of the glory of God is the mightiest force in the whole universe. It is not like the play of the moonbeam upon an iceberg, ineffectual, cold, merely touching the death without melting or warming it, but it rays out like the sun in the heavens, and the work done by the light is mightier than all our work. By His glory, and by the transcendent energies which reside in that illustrious manifestation of the uncreated light, God summons men to Himself. Well, if that is anything like fair exposition of the words before us, let me just ask you before I go further to stop on them for one moment. If I may venture to say so, put off your theological spectacles for a minute, and do not let us harden this thought down with any mere dogma that can be selected in the language of the creeds. Let us try and put it into words a little less hackneyed. Suppose, instead of talking about calling, you were to talk about inviting, summoning, beckoning; or I might use tenderer words still—beseeching, wooing, entreating; for all that lies in the thought. God summoning and calling, in that sense, men to Himself, by the raying out of His own perfect beauty, and the might with which the beams go forth into the darkness. Ah! is not that beautiful, dear brethren; that there is nothing more, indeed, for God to do to draw us to Himself than to let us see what He is? So perfectly fair, so sweet, so tender, so strong, so absolutely corresponding to all the necessities of our beings and the hunger of our hearts, that when we see Him we cannot choose but love Him, and that He can do nothing more to call wandering hearts back to the light and sweetness of His own heart than to show them Himself. And so from all corners of His universe, and in every activity of His hand and heart and spirit, we can hear a voice saying, 'Son, give me thine heart.' 'Oh! taste and see that God is good.' 'Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee.'

But great and wonderful as such a thought seems to be when we look at it in the freshness which belongs to it, do you suppose that that was all that Peter was thinking about? Do you think that a wide, general, and if you leave it by itself, vague utterance like that which I have been indulging in, would give all the specific precision and fulness of the meaning of the word before us? I think not. I fancy that when this Apostle wrote these words he remembered a time long, long ago, when somebody stood by the little fishing-cobble there, and as the men were up to their knees in slush and dirt, washing their nets, said to them, 'Follow Me.' I think that was in Peter's estimate God's call to him by God's glory and by God's virtue. And so I pause there for a moment to say that all the lustrous pouring out of light, all that transcendent energy of active love, is not diffused nebulous through a universe; it is not even spread in that sense over all the deeds of His hand; but whilst it is everywhere, it has a focus and a centre and a fire. The fire is gathered into the Son, Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ in His manhood and in His Deity; Jesus Christ in His life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and kingly reign. The whole creation, as this New Testament proclaims Him to us, is God's glory and God's virtue, whereby He draws men to Himself. I cannot stay to dwell on that thought as I should be glad to do. Let me just remind you of the two parts into which it splits itself up; and I commend it, dogmatically as I have to state it in such an audience as this—I commend it to the multitudes of young men here present. The highest form of the Divine glory is Jesus Christ, not the attributes with which men clothe the Divinity, not those abstractions which you find in books of theology. All that is but the fringe of the glory. And I tell you, dear friends, the living white light at the centre and heart of all the radiance of the flame is the light of life which is conveyed into the gentle Christ. As the Apostle John has it, 'We beheld His glory.' Yes, and taking and binding together the two words which people have so often treated against each other, 'We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,' the highest light in Him that says, 'I am the

light of the world'—very light of very light. As a much maligned document has it, 'very light of very light,' the brightness of His glory, the irradiation of His splendour, and the express image of His person. And as the light so the power. Christ the power; power in its highest, noblest form, the power of patient gentleness and Divine suffering; power in its widest sweep, 'unto every one that believeth'; power in its most wondrous operation, 'the power of God unto salvation.' So I come to you, I hope, with one message on my lips and in my heart. If you want light, look to Christ. If you want to behold that unveiled face, the glory of the Lord, turn to Him, and let His sunshine smite you on the face as the light smote Stephen, and then you can say, 'He that hath seen Him hath seen the Father.' My brother, the highest, noblest, perfect, and, as I believe, final form in which all God's glory, all God's energy, are gathered together, and make their appeal to you and me, was when a Galilean peasant stood up in a little knot of forgotten Jews and said to them, and through them to you and me, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' He calls by His glory and by His virtue.

Now still further. Confining myself as before to the words as they lie here in this text, let me ask you to think, and that for a moment or two only, on the great and wondrous purpose which this Divine energy and light had in view in summoning us to itself. His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and all things that pertain to godliness. Look at that! One of the old Psalms says: 'Gather my saints together unto me, those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice; assemble them all before my throne, and I will judge my people.' Is that the last and final revelation of God's purpose of drawing men to Him? Is that why He sends out His heralds and summons through the whole intelligent creation? Nay, something better. Not to judge, not to scourge, not to chastise, not to avenge. To give. This is the meaning of that summons that comes out through the whole earth, 'Come up hither,' that when we get there we may be flooded with the richness of His mercy, and that He

may pour His whole soul out over us in the greatness of His gifts. This is God, and the perpetual activity summoning men to Himself that there He may bless them. He makes our hearts empty that He may fill them. He shapes us as we are that we may need Him and may recreate ourselves in Him. He says, 'Bring all your vessels and I will fill them full.' Now look in this part of my subject at what I may venture to call the magnificent confidence that this Peter has in the—what shall I say?—the encyclopædical—if I may use a long word—and universal character of God. All things that pertain to life, all things that pertain to godliness. And somebody says, 'Yes, that is tautology, that is saying the same thing twice over in different language.' Never mind, says Peter, so much the better, it will help to express the exuberant abundance and fulness. He takes a leaf out of his brother Paul's book. He is often guilty when he speaks of God's gifts of that same sin of tautology, as for instance, 'Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding, abundantly, above all'—there are four of them—'all that we can ask or think.' Yes, in all forms language is but faint and feeble, weak and poor in the presence of that great miracle of a love that passeth knowledge and that we may know the heights and depths. And so says our Apostle, 'All things that pertain to life, all things that pertain to godliness.' The whole circle all round, all the 360 degrees of it, God's love will come down and lie on the top of it as it were, superimposed, so that there should not be a single gift where there is a flaw or a defect. Everything you want of life, everything you want for godliness. Yes, of course, the gift must bear some kind of proportion to the giver. You do not expect a millionaire to put down half a crown to a subscription list if he gives anything at all. And God says to you and me, 'Come and look at My storehouses, count if you can those golden vases filled with treasure, look at those massive ingots of bullion, gaze into the vanishing distances of the infiniteness of My nature and of My possessions, and then listen to Me. I give thee Myself—Myself, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God. All things that pertain to life, all things that pertain to godliness. But I cannot pass on from this part

of my subject without venturing one more remark. It is this: I do not suppose it is too minute, verbal criticism. This great encyclopædial gift is represented in my text, not as a thing that you are going to get, Christian men and women, but as a thing that you have gotten. And any of you that are able to test the correctness of my assertion will see I have thought the form of language used in the original is such as to point still more specifically than in our translation, to some one definite act in the past in which all that fulness of glory and virtue of life and godliness was given to us men. Is there any doubt as to what that is? We talk sometimes as if we had to ask God to give us more. God cannot give you any more than He gave you nineteen hundred years ago. It was all in Christ. Get a very vulgar illustration which is altogether inadequate for a great many purposes, but may serve for one. Suppose some man told you that there was a thousand pounds paid to your credit at a London bank, and that you were to get the use of it as you drew cheques against it. Well, the money is there, is it not? The gift is given, and yet for all that you may be dying, and half-dead, a pauper. I was reading a book only the other day which contained a story that comes in here. An Arctic expedition, some years ago, found an ammunition chest that Commander Parry had left fifty years ago, safe under a pile of stones. The wood of the chest had not rotted yet; the provisions inside of it were perfectly sweet, and good, and eatable. There it had lain all those years. Men had died of starvation within arm's length of it. It was there all the same. And so, if I might venture to vulgarise the great theme that I try to speak about, God has given us His Son, and in Him, all that pertains to life and all that pertains to godliness. My brother, take the things that are freely given to you of God.

And so that leads me to one last word, and it shall only be a word, in regard to what our text tells us of the way by which on our side we can yield to this Divine call, and receive this Divine fulness of gifts, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory. Through the knowledge! Yes, well there are two kinds of knowledge, are

there not? There is the knowledge by which you know a book, for instance, on the subject of study, and there is the knowledge by which you know one another; and the kind of thing I mean when I say, 'I know mathematics,' is entirely different to what I mean when I say, 'I know John, Thomas,' or whoever he may be. And I venture to say that the knowledge, which is the condition of receiving the whole fulness of the glory and the whole fulness of the light, is a great deal more like the thing we mean when we talk of knowing one another than when we talk of knowing a book. That is to say, a man may have all the creeds and confessions of faith clear in his head, and yet none of the life, none of the light, none of the power, and none of the godliness. But if we know Him as our brother, know Him as our friend, our sacrifice, our Redeemer, Lord, all in all; know Him as our heaven, our righteousness, and our strength; if we know Him with the knowledge which is possession; if we know Him with the knowledge which, as the profoundest of the Apostles says, 'hath the truth in life'; if we know Him, see then, 'This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.'

Now, friends, my words are done. God is calling you. No, let us put it a little more definitely than that—God is calling *thee*. There is no speech nor language where His voice is not heard. His words are gone out to the end of the world, and have reached even thyself. He calls thee, oh! brother, sister, friend, that you and I may turn round to Him and say, 'When Thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' Amen.

2 Peter i. 4—PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

'He hath given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.'—2 Peter i. 4.

'Partakers of the Divine nature.' These are bold words, and may be so understood as to excite the wildest and most presumptuous dreams. But bold as they are, and startling as they may sound to some of us, they are only putting into other language the teaching of which the whole New Testament is full, that men may, and do, by their faith, receive into their spirits a real communication of the life of God. What else does the language about being 'the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty' mean? What else does the teaching of regeneration mean? What else mean Christ's frequent declarations that He dwells in us and we in Him, as the branch in the vine, as the members in the body? What else does 'he that is joined to the Lord in one spirit' mean? Do not all teach that in some most real sense the very purpose of Christianity, for which God has sent His Son, and His Son has come, is that we, poor, sinful, weak, limited, ignorant creatures as we are, may be lifted up into that solemn and awful elevation, and receive in our trembling and yet strengthened souls a spark of God? 'That ye may be partakers of the Divine nature' means more than 'that you may share in the blessings which that nature bestows.' It means that into us may come the very God Himself.

I. So I want you to look with me, first, at this lofty purpose which is here presented as being the very aim and end of God's gift in the gospel.

The human nature and the Divine are both kindred and contrary. And the whole Bible is remarkable for the emphasis with which it insists upon both these elements of the comparison, declaring, on the one hand, as no other religion has ever declared, the supreme sovereign, unapproachable elevation of the infinite Being above all creatures, and on the other hand, holding forth the hope, as no other religion has ever ventured to do, of the possible union of the loftiest and the lowest, and the lifting of the creature into union with God Himself. There are no gods of the heathen so far away from their worshippers, and there are none so near them, as our God. There is no god that men have bowed before, so unlike the devotee; and there

is no system which recognises that, as is the Maker so are the made, in such thorough-going fashion as the Bible does. The arched heaven, though high above us, it is not inaccessible in its serene and cloudless beauty, but it touches earth all round the horizon, and man is made in the image of God.

True, that divine nature of which the ideal man is the possessor has faded away from humanity. But still the human is kindred with the divine. The drop of water is of one nature with the boundless ocean that rolls shoreless beyond the horizon, and stretches plumbless into the abysses. The tiniest spark of flame is of the same nature as those leaping, hydrogen spears of illuminated gas that spring hundreds of thousands of miles high in a second or two in the great central sun.

And though on the one hand there be finiteness and on the other infinitude: though we have to talk, in big words, of which we have very little grasp, about 'Omniscience,' and 'Omnipresence,' and 'Eternity,' and such like, these things may be deducted and yet the Divine nature may be retained; and the poor, ignorant, finite, dying creature, that perishes before the moth, may say, 'I am kindred with Him whose years know no end; whose wisdom knows no uncertainty nor growth; whose power is Omnipotence; and whose presence is everywhere.' He that can say, 'I am,' is of the same nature as His whose mighty proclamation of Himself is 'I AM THAT I AM.' He who can say 'I will' is of the same nature as He who willeth and it is done.

But that kindred, belonging to every soul of man, abject as well as loftiest, is not the 'partaking' of which my text speaks; though it is the basis and possibility of it; for my text speaks of men as '*becoming* partakers,' and of that participation as the result, not of humanity, but of God's gift of 'exceeding great and precious promises.' That creation in the image and likeness of God, which is represented as crowned by the very breath of God breathed into man's nostrils implies not only kindred with God in personality and

self-conscious will, but also in purity and holiness. The moral kindred has darkened into unlikeness, but the other remains. It is not the gift here spoken of, but it supplies the basis which makes that gift possible. A dog could not become possessor of the Divine nature, in the sense in which my text speaks of it. Any man, however bad, however foolish, however degraded, abject and savage, can become a partaker of it, and yet no man has it without something else than the fact of his humanity.

What, then, is it? No mere absorption, as extravagant mystics have dreamed, into that Divine nature, as a drop goes back into the ocean and is lost. There will always be 'I' and 'thou,' or else there were no blessedness, nor worship, nor joy. We must so partake of the Divine nature as that the bounds between the bestowing God and the partaking man shall never be broken down. But that being presupposed, union as close as is possible, the individuality of the giver and the receiver being untampered with is the great hope that all Christian men and women ought consciously to cherish.

Only mark, the beginning of the whole is the communication of a Divine life which is manifested mainly in what we call moral likeness. Or to put it into plain words, the teaching of my text is no dreamy teaching, such as an eastern mystic might proclaim, of absorption into an impersonal Divine. There is no notion here of any partaking of these great though secondary attributes of the Divine mind which to many men are the most Godlike parts of His nature. But what my text mainly means is, you may, if you like, become 'holy as God is holy.' You may become loving as God is loving, and with a breath of His own life breathed into your hearts. The central Divinity in the Divine, if I may so say, is the amalgam of holiness and love. That is God; the rest is what belongs to God. God *has* power; God *is* love.

That is the regnant attribute, the spring that sets everything agoing. And so, when my text talks about making us all, if we will, partakers

of a Divine nature, what it means, mainly, is this—that into every human spirit there may pass a seed of Divine life which will unfold itself there in all purity of holiness, in all tenderness and gentleness of love. 'God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.' Partakers we shall be in the measure in which by our faith we have drawn from Him the pure and the hearty love of whatever things are fair and noble; the measure in which we love righteousness and hate iniquity.

And then remember also that this lofty purpose which is here set forth is a purpose growingly realised in man. The Apostle puts great stress upon that word in my text, which, unfortunately, is not rendered adequately in our Bible, 'that by these ye might *become* partakers of the Divine nature.' He is not talking about a *being*, but about a *becoming*. That is to say, God must ever be passing, moment by moment, into our hearts if there is to be anything godly there. No more certainly must this building, if we are to see, be continually filled with light-beams that are urged from the central sun by its impelling force than the spirit must be receiving, by momentary communication, the gift of life from God if it is to live. Cut off the sunbeam from the sun and it dies, and the house is dark; cut off the life from the root and it withers, and the creature shrivels. The Christian man lives only by continual derivation of life from God; and for ever and ever the secret of his being and of his blessedness is not that he has become a possessor, but that he has become a partaker, of the Divine nature.

And that participation ought to, and will, be a growing thing. By daily increase we shall be made capable of daily increase. Life is growth; the Divine life in Him is not growth, but in us it does grow, and our infancy will be turned into youth; and our youth into maturity; and, blessed be His name, the maturity will be a growing one, to which grey hairs and feebleness will never come, nor a term ever be set. More and more of God we may receive every day we live, and through the endless ages of eternity; and if we have Him in

our hearts, we shall live as long as there is anything more to pass from God to us. Until the fountain has poured its whole fulness into the cistern, the cistern will never be broken. He who becomes partaker of the Divine nature can never die. So as Christ taught us the great argument for immortality is the present relation between God and us, and the fact that He is the God of Abraham points to the resurrection life.

II. Look, in the second place, at the costly and sufficient means employed for the realisation of this great purpose. 'He hath given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might become partakers,' etc.

Of course the mere words of a promise will not communicate this Divine life to men's souls. 'Promises' here must necessarily, I think, be employed in the sense of fulfilment of the promises. And so we might think of all the great and wondrous words which God has spoken in the past, promises of deliverance, of forgiveness, and the like; but I am rather disposed to believe that the extreme emphasis of the epithets which the Apostle selects to describe these promised things now fulfilled suggests another interpretation.

I believe that by these 'exceeding great and precious promises' is meant the unspeakable gift of God's own Son, and the gift therein and thereafter of God's life-giving Spirit. For is not this the meaning of the central fact of Christianity, the incarnation—that the Divine becomes partaker of the human in order that the human may partake of the Divine? Is not Christ's coming the great proof that however high the heavens may stretch above the flat, sad earth, still the Divine nature and the human are so kindred that God can enter into humanity and be manifest in the flesh? Contrariety vanishes; the difference between the creature and the Creator disappears. These mere distinctions of power and weakness, of infinitude and finiteness, of wisdom and of ignorance, of undying being and decaying life, vanish, as of secondary consequence, when we can

say, 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.' There can be no insuperable obstacle to man's being lifted up into a union with the Divine, since the Divine found no insuperable obstacle in descending to enter into union with the human.

So then, because God has given us His Son it is clear that we may become partakers of the Divine nature; inasmuch as He, the Divine, has become partaker of the children's flesh and blood, and in that coming of the Divine into the human there was brought the seed and the germ of a life which can be granted to us all. Brethren! there is one way, and one way only, by which any of us can partake of this great and wondrous gift of a share in God, and it is through Jesus Christ. 'No man hath ascended up into Heaven,' nor ever will either climb or fly there, 'save He that came down from Heaven; even the Son of man which is in Heaven.' And in Him we may ascend, and in Him we may receive God.

Christ is the true Prometheus, if I may so speak, who brings to earth in the fragile reed of his humanity the sacred and immortal fire which may be kindled in every heart. Open your hearts to Him by faith and He will come in, and with Him the rejoicing life which will triumph over the death of self and sin, and give to you a share in the nature of God.

III. Let me say, lastly, that this great text adds a human accompaniment of that Divine gift: 'Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.'

The only condition of receiving this Divine nature is the opening of the heart by faith to Him, the Divine human Christ, who is the bond between men and God, and gives it to us. But that condition being presupposed, this important clause supplies the conduct which attends and attests the possession of the Divine nature.

Notice, here is human nature without God, described as 'the corruption that is in the world in lust.' It is like a fungus, foul-

smelling, slimy, poisonous; whose growth looks rather the working of decay than of vitality. And, says my text, that is the kind of thing that human nature is if God is *not* in it. There is an 'either' and 'or' here. On the one hand we must have a share in the Divine nature, or, on the other, we have a share in the putrescence 'that is in the world through lust.'

Corruption is initial destruction, though of course other forms of life may come from it; destruction is complete corruption. The word means both. A man either escapes from lust and evil, or he is destroyed by it.

And the root of this rotting fungus is 'in lust,' which word, of course, is used in a much wider meaning than the fleshly sense in which we employ it in modern times. It means 'desire' of all sorts. The root of the world's corruption is my own and my brothers' unbridled and godless desires.

So there are two states—a life plunged in putridity, or a heart touched with the Divine nature. Which is it to be? It cannot be both. It must be one or the other. Which?

A man that has got the life of God, in however feeble measure, in him, will flee away from this corruption like Lot out of Sodom. And how will he flee out of it? By subduing his own desires; not by changing position, not by shirking duty, not by withdrawing himself into unwholesome isolation from men and men's ways. The corruption is not only 'in the world,' so that you could get rid of it by getting out of the world, but it is 'in the world in lust,' so that you carry the fountain of it within yourself. The only way to escape is by no outward flight, but by casting out the unclean thing from our own souls.

Depend upon it, the measure in which a man has the love of God in him can be very fairly estimated by the extent to which he is doing this. There is a test for you Christian people. There have been plenty

of men and women in all ages of the Church, and they abound in this generation, who will make no scruple of declaring that they possess a portion of this Divine Spirit and a spark of God in their souls. Well then, I say, here is the test, bring it all to this—does that life within you cast out your own evil desires? If it does, well; if it does not, the less you say about Christ in your hearts the less likely you will be to become either a hypocrite, or a self-deceiver.

And so, brethren, remember, one last word, viz., that whilst on the one hand whoever has the life of God in his heart will be fleeing from this corruption, on the other hand you can weaken—ay! and you can kill the Divine life by not so fleeing. You have got it, if you have it, to nourish, to cherish, and to do that most of all by obeying it. If you do not obey, and if habitually you keep the plant with all its buds picked off one after another as they begin to form, you will kill it sooner or later. You Christian men and women take warning. God has given you Jesus Christ. It was worth while for Christ to live; it was worth while for Christ to die, in order that into the souls of all sinful, God-forgetting, devil-following men there might pass this Promethean spark of the true fire.

You get it, if you will, by simple faith. You will not keep it unless you obey it. Mind you do not quench the Holy Spirit, and extinguish the very life of God in your souls.

2 Peter i. 5— THE POWER OF DILIGENCE

'Giving all diligence, add to your faith ...'—2 Peter i. 5.

It seems to me very like Peter that there should be so much in this letter about the very commonplace and familiar excellence of diligence. He over and over again exhorts to it as the one means to the attainment of all Christian graces, and of all the blessedness of the Christian life. We do not expect fine-spun counsels from a

teacher whose natural bent is, like his, but plain, sturdy, common sense, directed to the highest matter, and set aglow by fervent love to his Lord. The Apostle paints himself, and his own way of Christian living, when he thus frequently exhorts his brethren to 'give all diligence.' He says in this same chapter that he himself will 'give diligence [*endeavour*, in Authorised Version] that they may be able after his decease to have these things always in remembrance.' We seem to see Peter, not much accustomed to wield a pen, sitting down to what he felt a somewhat difficult task, and pointing the readers to his own example as an instance of the temper which they must cherish if they are to make anything of their Christian life. 'Just as I labour for your sakes at this unfamiliar work of writing, so do you toil at perfecting your Christian graces.'

Now it strikes me that we may gain some instruction if we throw together the various objects to which in Scripture, and especially in this letter, we are exhorted to direct this virtue of diligence, and mark how comprehensive its range, and how, for all beauty of character and progress in the Divine life, it is regarded as an indispensable condition. Let us then look, first, at the homely excellence that is the master-key to all Christian maturity and grace, and then at the various fields in which we are to apply it.

I. Now as to the homely virtue itself, 'giving all diligence.'

We all know what 'diligence' means, but it is worth while to point out that the original meaning of the word is not so much *diligence* as *haste*. It is employed, for instance, to describe the eager swiftness with which the Virgin went to Elizabeth after the angel's salutation and annunciation. It is the word employed to describe the murderous hurry with which Herodias came rushing in to the king to demand John the Baptist's head. It is the word with which the Apostle, left solitary in his prison, besought his sole trusty companion Timothy to 'make haste so as to come to him before winter.' Thus, the first notion in the word is haste, which crowds every moment with

continuous effort, and lets no hindrances entangle the feet of the runner. Wise haste has sometimes to be content to go slowly. 'Raw haste' is 'half sister to delay.' When haste degenerates into hurry, and becomes agitation, it is weakness, not strength; it turns out superficial work, which has usually to be pulled to pieces and done over again, and it is sure to be followed by reaction of languid idleness. But the less we hurry the more should we hasten in running the race set before us.

But with this caution against spurious haste, we cannot too seriously lay to heart the solemn motives to wise and well-directed haste. The moments granted to any of us are too few and precious to let slip unused. The field to be cultivated is too wide and the possible harvest for the toiler too abundant, and the certain crop of weeds in the sluggard's garden too poisonous, to allow dawdling to be considered a venial fault. Little progress will be made if we do not work as feeling that 'the night is far spent, the day is at hand,' or as feeling the apparently opposite but really identical conviction, 'I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day. The night cometh when no man can work.' The day of full salvation, repose, and blessedness is near dawning. The night of weeping, the night of toil, is nearly past. By both aspects of this brief life we should be spurred to haste.

The first element, then, in Christian diligence is economy of time as of most precious treasure, and the avoidance, as of a pestilence, of all procrastination. 'To-morrow and to-morrow' is the opiate with which sluggards and cowards set conscience asleep, and as each to-morrow becomes to-day it proves as empty of effort as its predecessors, and, when it has become yesterday, it adds one more to the solemn company of wasted opportunities which wait for a man at the bar of God. 'All their yesterdays have lighted' such idlers 'to dusty death,' because in each they were saying, 'to-morrow we will begin the better course,' instead of beginning it to-day. 'Now is the accepted time.' 'Wherefore, giving all haste, add to your faith.'

Another of the phases of the virtue, which Peter here regards as sovereign, is represented in our translation of the word by 'earnestness,' which is the parent of diligence. Earnestness is the sentiment, of which diligence is the expression. So the word is frequently translated. Hence we gather that no Christian growth is possible unless a man gives his mind to it. Dawdlers will do nothing. There must be fervour if there is to be growth. The heated bar of iron will go through the obstacle which the cold one will never penetrate. We must gather ourselves together under the impulse of an all-pervading and noble earnestness, too deep to be demonstrative, and which does not waste itself in noise, but settles down steadily to work. The engine that is giving off its steam in white puffs is not working at its full power. When we are most intent we are most silent. Earnestness is dumb, and therefore it is terrible.

Again we come to the more familiar translation of the word as in the text. 'Diligence' is the panacea for all diseases of the Christian life. It is the homely virtue that leads to all success. It is a great thing to be convinced of this, that there are no mysteries about the conditions of healthy Christian living, but that precisely the same qualities which lead to victory in any career to which a man sets himself do so in this; that, on the one hand, we shall never fail if in earnest and saving the crumbs of moments, we give ourselves to the work of Christian growth; and that on the other hand, no fine emotions, no select moments of rapture and communion will ever avail to take the place of the dogged perseverance and prosaic hard work which wins in all other fields; and wins, and is the only thing that does win, in this one too. If you want to be a strong Christian—that is to say, a happy man—you must bend your back to the work and 'give all diligence.' Nobody goes to heaven in his sleep. No man becomes a vigorous Christian by any other course than 'giving all diligence.' It is a very lowly virtue. It is like some of the old wives' recipes for curing diseases with some familiar herb that grows at every cottage door. People will not have that, but if you bring them some medicine

from far away, very rare and costly, and suggest to them some course out of the beaten rut of ordinary, honest living, they will jump at that. Quackery always deals in mysteries and rare things. The great physician cures diseases with simples that grow everywhere. A pennyworth of some familiar root will cure an illness that nothing else will touch. It is a homely virtue, but if in its homeliness we practised it, this Church and our own souls would wear a different face from what it and they do to-day.

II. Note the wide field of action for this homely grace.

I can do nothing more—nor is it necessary that I should—than put before your mind, in a sentence or two, the various applications of it which our letter gives.

First, note that in our text, 'giving all diligence, add to your faith.' That is to say, unless you work with haste, with earnestness, and therefore with much putting forth of strength, your faith will not evolve the graces of character which is in it to bring forth. If, on the other hand, we set ourselves to our tasks, then out of faith will come, as the blossoms mysteriously and miraculously do out of an apparently dead stump, virtue, manliness, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godliness, and brotherly mindedness, and charity. All that galaxy of light and beauty will shine forth on the one condition of diligence, and it will not appear without that. Without it, the faith, though it may be genuine, which lies in a man who is idle in cultivating Christian character, will bear but few and shrivelled fruits. The Apostle uses a very remarkable expression here, which is rendered in our Bible imperfectly 'giving all diligence.' He has just been saying that God has 'given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, and exceeding great and precious promises.' The Divine gift, then, is everything that will help a man to live a high and godly life. And, says Peter, on this very account, because you have all these requisites for such a life already given you, see that you 'bring besides into' the heap of gifts, as it

were, that which you and only you can bring, namely, 'all diligence.' The phrase implies that diligence is our contribution. And the very reason for exercising it is the completeness of God's gift. 'On this very account'—because He has given so much—we are to lay 'all diligence' by the side of His gifts, which are useless to the sluggard.

On the one hand there are all great gifts and boundless possibilities as to life and godliness, and on the other diligence as the condition on which all these shall actually become ours, and, passing into our lives, will there produce all these graces which the Apostle goes on to enumerate. The condition is nothing recondite, nothing hard either to understand or to practise, but it is simply that commonplace, humdrum virtue of diligence. If we will put it forth, then the gifts that God has given, and which are not really ours unless we put it forth, will pass into the very substance of our being, and unfold themselves according to the life that is in them; even the life that is in Jesus Christ Himself, in all forms of beauty and sweetness and power and blessedness. 'Diligence' makes faith fruitful. Diligence makes God's gifts ours.

Then, again, the Apostle gives an even more remarkable view of the possible field for this all-powerful diligence when he bids his readers exercise it in order to 'make their calling and election sure.' Peter's first letter shows that he believed that Christians were 'chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.' But for all that he is not a bit afraid of putting the other side of the truth, and saying to us in effect. 'We cannot read the eternal decrees of God nor know the names written in the Book of Life. These are mysteries above us. But if you want to be sure that you are one of the called and chosen, work and you will get the assurance.' The confirmation of the 'call,' of the 'election,' both in fact and in my consciousness depends upon my action. The 'diligence,' of which the Apostle thinks such great things, reaches, as it were, a hand up into heaven and binds a man to that great unrevealed, electing purpose of God. If we desire that upon our Christian lives there shall shine the perpetual sunshine of

an unclouded confidence that we have the love and the favour of God, and that for us there is no condemnation, but only 'acceptance in the beloved,' the short road to it is the well-known and trite path of toil in the Christian life.

Still further, one of the other writers of the New Testament gives us another field in which this virtue may expatiate, when the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts to diligence, in order to attain 'the full assurance of hope.' If we desire that our path should be brightened by the clear vision of our blessed future beyond the grave, and above the stars, and within the bosom of God, the road to that happy assurance and sunny, cloudless confidence in a future of rest and fellowship with God lies simply here—work! as Christian men should, whilst it is called to-day.

The last of the fields in which this virtue finds exercise is expressed by our letter, when Peter says, 'Seeing that we look for such things, let us *be diligent*, that we may be found of Him in peace without spot, and blameless.' If we are to be 'found in peace,' we must be 'found spotless,' and if we are to be 'found spotless' we must be 'diligent.' 'If that servant begin to say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and to be slothful, and to eat and drink with the drunken, the lord of that servant will come in an hour when he is not aware.' On the other hand, 'who is that faithful servant whom his lord hath set ruler over his household? Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing?' Doing so, and diligently doing it, 'he shall be found in peace.'

What a beautiful ideal of Christian life results from putting together all these items. A fruitful faith, a sure calling, a cloudless hope, a peaceful welcome at last! The Old Testament says, 'The hand of the diligent maketh rich'; the New Testament promises unchangeable riches to the same hand. The Old Testament says, 'Seest thou a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings.' The New Testament assures us that the noblest form of that promise shall be

fulfilled in the Christian man's communion with his Lord here, and perfected when the diligent disciple shall 'be found of Him in peace,' and stand before the King in that day, accepted and himself a king.

2 Peter i. 11, 15— GOING OUT AND GOING IN

'An entrance ... my decease.'—2 Peter i. 11, 15.

I do not like, and do not often indulge in, the practice of taking fragments of Scripture for a text, but I venture to isolate these two words, because they correspond to one another, and when thus isolated and connected, bring out very prominently two aspects of one thing. In the original the correspondence is even closer, for the words, literally rendered, are 'a going in' and 'a going out.' The same event is looked at from two sides. On the one it is a departure; on the other it is an arrival. That event, I need not say, is Death.

I note, further, that the expression rendered, 'my decease,' employs the word which is always used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to express the departure of the Children of Israel from bondage, and which gives its name, in our language, to the Second Book of the Pentateuch. 'My exodus'—associations suggested by the word can scarcely fail to have been in the writer's mind.

Further, I note that this expression for Death is only employed once again in the New Testament—viz., in St. Luke's account of the Transfiguration, where Moses and Elias spake with Jesus 'concerning His decease—the exodus—which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.' If you look on to the verses which follow the second of my texts, you will see that the Apostle immediately passes on to speak about that Transfiguration, and about the voice which He heard then in the holy mount. So that I think we must suppose that in the words of our second text he was already beginning to think

about the Transfiguration, and was feeling that, somehow or other, his 'exodus' was to be conformed to his Master's.

Now bearing all these points in mind, let us just turn to these words and try to gather the lessons which they suggest.

I. The first of them is this, the double Christian aspect of death.

It is well worth noting that the New Testament very seldom condescends to use that name for the mere physical fact of dissolution. It reserves it for the most part for something a great deal more dreadful than the separation of body and soul, and uses all manner of periphrases, or what rhetoricians call euphemising, that is, gentle expressions which put the best face upon a thing instead of the ugly word itself. It speaks, for instance, as you may remember, in the context here about the 'putting off' of a tent or 'a tabernacle,' blending the notions of stripping off a garment and pulling down a transitory abode. It speaks about death as a sleep, and in that and other ways sets it forth in gracious and gentle aspects, and veils the deformity, and loves and hopes away the dreadfulness of it.

Now other languages and other religions besides Christianity have done the same things, and Roman and Greek poets and monuments have in like manner avoided the grim, plain word—death, but they have done it for exactly the opposite reason from that for which the Christian does it. They did it because the thing was so dark and dismal, and because they knew so little and feared so much about it. And Christianity does it for exactly the opposite reason, because it fears it not at all, and knows it quite enough. So it toys with leviathan, and 'lays its hand on the cockatrice den,' and my text is an instance of this.

'My decease ... an entrance.' So the terribleness and mystery dwindled down into this—a change of position; or if locality is scarcely the right class of ideas to apply to spirits detached from the body—a change of condition. That is all.

We do not need to insist upon the notion of change of place. For, as I say, we get into a fog when we try to associate place with pure spiritual existence. But the root of the conviction which is expressed in both these phrases, and most vividly by their juxtaposition, is this, that what happens at death is not the extinction, but the withdrawal, of a person, and that the man *is*, as fully, as truly as he was, though all the relations in which he stands may be altered.

Now no materialistic teaching has any right to come in and bar that clear faith and firm conclusion. For by its very saying that it knows nothing about life except in connection with organisation, it acknowledges that there is a difference between them. And until science can tell me how it is that the throb of a brain or the quiver of a nerve, becomes transformed into morality, into emotion, I maintain that it knows far too little of personality and of life to be a valid authority when it asserts that the destruction of the organisation is the end of the man. I feel myself perfectly free—in the darkness in which, after all investigation, that mysterious transformation of the physical into the moral and the spiritual lies—I feel perfectly free to listen to another voice, the voice which tells me that life can subsist, and that personal being can be as full—ay, fuller—apart altogether from the material frame which here, and by our present experience, is its necessary instrument. And though accepting all that physical investigation can teach us, we can still maintain that its light does not illumine the central obscurity; and that, after all, it still remains true that round about the being of each man, as round about the being of God, clouds and darkness roll,

'Life and thought have gone away,

Side by side,

Leaving door and window wide.'

That, and nothing more, is death—'My decease ... an entrance.'

Then, again, the combination of these two words suggests to us that the one act, in the same moment, is both departure and arrival. There is not a pin-point of space, not the millionth part of a second of time, intervening between the two. There is no long journey to be taken. A man in straits, and all but desperation, is recorded in the old Book to have said: 'There is but a step between me and death.' Ah, there is but a step between death and the Kingdom; and he that passes out at the same moment passes in.

I need not say a word about theories which seem to me to have no basis at all in our only source of information, which is Revelation; theories which would interpose a long period of unconsciousness—though to the man unconscious it be no period at all—between the act of departure and that of entrance. Not so do I read the teaching of Scripture: 'This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.' We pass out, and as those in the vestibule of a presence-chamber have but to lift the curtain and find themselves face to face with the king, so we, at one and the same moment, depart and arrive.

Friends stand round the bed, and before they can tell by the undimmed mirror that the last breath has been drawn, the saint is 'with Christ, which is far better.' To depart *is* to be with Him. There is a moment in the life of every believing soul in which there strangely mingle the lights of earth and the lights of heaven. As you see in dissolving views, the one fades and the other consolidates. Like the mighty angel in the Apocalypse, the dying man stands for a moment with one foot on the earth and the other already laved and cleansed by the waters of that 'sea of glass mingled with fire which is before the Throne,' 'Absent from the body; present with the Lord.'

Further, these two words suggest that the same act is emancipation from bondage and entrance into royalty.

'My exodus.' Israel came out of Egyptian servitude and dropped chains from wrists and left taskmasters cracking their useless whips behind them, and the brick kilns and the weary work were all done

when they went forth. Ah, brethren, whatever beauty and good and power and blessedness there may be in this mortal life, there are deep and sad senses in which, for all of us, it is a prison-house and a state of captivity. There is a bondage of flesh; there is a dominion of the animal nature; there are limitations, like high walls, cribbing, cabining, confining us—the limitations of circumstance. There is the slavery of dependence upon this poor, external, and material world. There are the tyranny of sin and the subjugation of the nobler nature to base and low and transient needs. All these fetters, and the scars of them, drop away. Joseph comes out of prison to a throne. The kingdom is not merely one in which the redeemed man is a subject, but one in which he himself is a prince. 'Have thou authority over ten cities.' These are the Christian aspects of death.

II. Now note, secondly, the great fact on which this view of death builds itself.

I have already remarked that in one of my texts the Apostle seems to be thinking about Jesus Christ and His decease. The context also refers to another incident in his own life, when our Lord foretold to him that the putting off his tabernacle was to be 'sudden,' and added: 'Follow thou Me.'

Taking these allusions into account, they suggest that it is the death of Jesus Christ—and that which is inseparable from it, His Resurrection—that changes for a soul believing on Him the whole aspect of that last experience that awaits us all. It is His exodus that makes 'my exodus' a deliverance from captivity and an entrance upon royalty.

I need not remind you, how, after all is said and done, we are sure of life eternal, because Jesus Christ died and rose again. I do not need to depreciate other imperfect arguments which seem to point in that direction, such as the instincts of men's natures, the craving for some retribution beyond, the impossibility of believing that life is extinguished by the fact of physical death. But whilst I admit that a

good deal may be said, and strong probabilities may be alleged, it seems to me that however much you may argue, no words, no considerations, moral or intellectual, can suffice to establish more than that it would be a very good thing if there were a future life and that it is probable that there is. But Jesus Christ comes to us and says, 'Touch Me, handle Me; a spirit hath not flesh and bones as I have. Here I am. I *was* dead; I *am* alive for evermore.' So then *one* life, that we know about, *has* persisted undiminished, apart from the physical frame, and that one Man has gone down into the dark abyss, and has come up the same as when He descended. So it is His exodus—and, as I believe, His death and Resurrection alone—on which the faith in immortality impregnably rests.

But that is not the main point which the text suggests. Let me remind you how utterly the whole aspect of any difficulty, trial, or sorrow, and especially of that culmination of all men's fears—death itself—is altered when we think that in the darkest bend of the dark road we may trace footsteps, not without marks of blood in them, of Him that has trodden it all before us. 'Follow thou Me,' He said to Peter; and it should be no hard thing for us, if we love Him, to tread where He trod. It should be no lonely road for us to walk, however the closest clinging hands may be untwined from our grasp, and the most utter solitude of which a human soul is capable may be realised, when we remember that Jesus Christ has walked it before us.

The entrance, too, is made possible because He has preceded us. 'I go to prepare a place for you.' So we may be sure that when we go through those dark gates and across the wild, the other side of which no man knows, it is not to step out of 'the warm precincts of the cheerful day' into some dim, cold, sad land, but it is to enter into His presence.

Israel's exodus was headed by a mummy case, in which the dead bones of their whilom leader were contained. Our exodus is headed by the Prince of Life, who was dead and is alive for evermore.

So, brethren, I beseech you, treasure these thoughts more than you do. Turn to Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead more than you do. I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that the Christianity of this day is largely losing the habitual contemplation of immortality which gave so much of its strength to the religion of past generations. We are all so busy in setting forth and enforcing the blessings of Christianity in its effects in the present life that, I fear me, we are largely forgetting what it does for us at the end, and beyond the end. And I would that we all thought more of our exodus and of our entrance in the light of Christ's death and resurrection. Such contemplation will not unfit us for any duty or any enjoyment. It will lift us above the absorbed occupation with present trivialities, which is the bane of all that is good and noble. It will teach us 'a solemn scorn of ills.' It will set on the furthest horizon a great light instead of a doleful darkness, and it will deliver us from the dread of that 'shadow feared of man,' but not by those who, listening to Jesus Christ, have been taught that to depart is to be with Him.

III. Now I meant to have said a word, in the close of my sermon, about a third point—viz., the way of securing that this aspect of death shall be our experience, but your time will not allow of my dwelling upon that as I should have wished. I would only point out that, as I have already suggested, this context teaches us that it is His death that must make our deaths what they may become; and would ask you to notice, further, that the context carries us back to the preceding verses. 'An entrance shall be *ministered* unto you *abundantly*.' We have just before read, 'If these things be in you and *abound*, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ'; and just before is the exhortation, 'giving all diligence, minister to your faith virtue.'

So the Apostle, by reiterating the two words which he had previously been using, teaches us that if death is to be to us that departure from bondage and entrance into the Kingdom, we must here and now bring forth the fruits of faith. There is no entrance hereafter, unless there has been a habitual entering into the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus Christ even whilst we are on earth. There is no entrance by reason of the fact of death, unless all through life there has been an entrance into rest by reason of the fact of faith.

And so, dear brethren, I beseech you to remember that it depends on yourself whether departing shall be arrival, and exodus shall be entrance. One thing or other that last moment must be to us all—either a dragging us reluctant away from what we would fain cleave to, or a glad departure from a foreign land and entrance to our home. It may be as when Peter was let out of prison, the angel touched him, and the chains fell from his hands, and the iron gate opened of its own accord, and he found himself in the city. It is for you to settle which of the two it shall be. And if you will take Him for your King, Companion, Saviour, Enlightener, Life here, 'the Lord shall bless your going out and coming in from this time forth and even for evermore.'

2 Peter ii. 1— THE OWNER AND HIS SLAVES

'Denying the Lord that bought them.'—2 Peter ii. 1.

The institution of slavery was one of the greatest blots on ancient civilisation. It was twice cursed, cursing both parties, degrading each, turning the slave into a chattel, and the master, in many cases, into a brute. Christianity, as represented in the New Testament, never says a word to condemn it, but Christianity has killed it. 'Make the tree good and its fruit good.' Do not aim at institutions, change the people that live under them and you change *them*. Girdle the tree

and it will die, and save you the trouble of felling it. But not only does Christianity never condemn slavery, though it was in dead antagonism to all its principles, and could not possibly survive where its principles were accepted, but it also takes this essentially immoral relation and finds a soul of goodness in the evil thing, which serves to illustrate the relation between God and man, between Christ and us. It does with slavery as it does with war, uses what is good in it as illustrating higher truths, and trusts to the operation, the slow operation of its deepest principles for its destruction.

So, then, we have one Apostle, in his letters, binding on his forehead as a crown the designation, 'Paul,' a *slave* of 'Jesus Christ,' and we have in my text an expanded allusion to slavery. The word that is here rendered rightly enough, 'Lord,' is the word which has been transferred into English as 'despot,' and it carries with it some suggestion of the roughness and absoluteness of authority which that word suggests to us. It does not mean merely 'master,' it means 'owner,' and it suggests an unconditional authority, to which the only thing in us that corresponds is abject and unconditional submission. That is what Christ is to you and me; the Lord, the Despot, the Owner.

But we have not only owner and slave here; we have one of the ugliest features of the institution referred to. You have the slave-market, 'the Lord that *bought* them,' and because He purchased them, owns them. Think of the hell of miseries that are connected with that practice of buying and selling human flesh, and then estimate the magnificent boldness of the metaphor which Peter does not scruple to take from it here, speaking of the owner who acquired them by a price. And not only that, but slaves will run away, and when they are stopped, and asked who they belong to, will say they know nothing about him. And so here is the runaway's denial, 'denying the Lord that bought them.' Now I ask you to think of these three points.

I. Here we have the Owner of us all.

I do not need, I suppose, to spend a moment in showing you that this relationship, which is laid down in our text, subsists between Jesus Christ and men, and it subsists between Jesus Christ and all men. For the people about whom the Apostle is saying that they have 'denied the Lord that bought them' can, by no construction, be supposed to be true Christians, but were enemies that had crept into the Church without any real allegiance to Jesus Christ, and were trying to wreck it, and to destroy His work. So there is no reference here to a little elected group out of the midst of humanity, who especially belonged to Jesus Christ, and for whom the price has been paid; but the outlook of my text in its latter portion is as wide as humanity. The Lord—that is, Jesus Christ—owns all men.

Let me expand that thought in one or two illustrations which may help to make it perhaps more vivid. The slave's owner has absolute authority over him. You remember the occasion when a Roman officer, by reflecting upon the military discipline of the legion, and the mystical power that the commander's word had to set all his men in obedient activity, had come to the conclusion that, somehow or other, this Jesus whom he desired to heal his servant had a similar power in the material universe, and that just as he, subordinate officer though he was, had yet—by reason of the fact that he was 'under authority,' and an organ of a higher authority—the power to say to his servant, 'Go,' and he would go; and to another one, 'Come,' and he would come; so this Christ had power to say to disease, 'Depart,' and it would depart; and to health, 'Come,' and it would come; and to all the material forces of the universe, 'Do this,' and obediently they would do it. That is the picture, in another region, of the relation which Jesus Christ bears to men, though, alas, it is not the picture of the relation which men bear to Christ. But to all of us He has the right to say, wherever we are, 'Come,' the right to say, 'Go,' the right to say, 'Do,' the right to say, 'Be this, that, and the other thing.'

Absolute authority is His; what should be yours? Unconditional submission. My friend, it is no use your calling yourself a Christian unless that is your attitude. My sermon to-night has something else to do than simply to present truths to you. It has to press truths on you, and to appeal not only to your feelings, not only to your understandings, but to your wills. And so I come with this question: Do you, dear friend, day by day, yield to the absolute Master the absolute submission? And is that rebellious will—which is in you, as it is in us all—tamed and submitted so as that you can say, 'Speak, Lord! Thy servant heareth'? Is it?

Further, the owner has the right, as part of that absolute authority of which I have been speaking, to settle without appeal each man's work. In those Eastern monarchies where the king was surrounded, not by constitutional ministers, but by his personal slaves, he made one man a shoemaker or a pipe-bearer, and the man standing next to him his prime minister. And neither the one nor the other had the right to say a word. Jesus Christ has the right to regulate your life in all its details, to set you your tasks. Some of us will get what the world vulgarly calls 'more important duties'; some will get what the world ignorantly calls more 'insignificant' ones. What does that matter? It was our Owner that set us to our work, and if He tells us to black shoes, let us black them with all the pith of our elbows, and with the best blacking and brushes we can find; and if He sets us to work, which people think is more important and more conspicuous, let us do that too, in the same spirit, and for the same end.

Again, the owner has the absolute right of possession of all the slave's possessions. He gets a little bit of land in the corner of his master's plantation, and grows his vegetables, yams, pumpkins, a leaf of tobacco or two, or what not, there. And if his master comes along and says, 'These are mine,' the slave has no recourse, and is obliged to accept the conditions and to give them up. So Jesus Christ claims ours as well as us—ours because He claims us—and whilst, on the other hand, the surrender of external good is incomplete

without the surrender of the inward will, on the other hand the abandonment and surrender of the inward life is incomplete, if it be not hypocritical, without the surrender of external possessions. All the slave's goods belonged to the owner.

And the owner has another right. He can say, 'Take that man's child and sell him in the market!' and he can break up the family ties and separate husband and wife, and parent and child, and not a word can be said. Our Master comes, not with rough authority, but with loving, though absolute authority, and He sometimes untwines the hands that are most closely clasped, and says to the one of the two that have grown together in love and blessedness, 'Come!' and he cometh, and to the other 'Go!' and she goeth. Blessed they who can say, 'It is the Lord! Let Him do what seemeth Him good.'

Now, dear friends, this absolute authority cannot be exercised by any man upon another man, and this unconditional submission, which Jesus Christ asks from us all, ought not to be rendered by any man to a man. It is a degradation when a human creature is put even in the external relation of slavery and servitude to another human creature, but it is an honour when Jesus Christ says to me, 'Thou art Mine,' and I say to Him, 'I am Thine, O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; Thou hast loosed my bonds.' In the old Saxon monarchies, some antiquarians tell us, the foundation of our modern nobility or aristocracy is found in that the king's servants became nobles. Jesus Christ's slave is everybody else's master. And it is the highest honour that a man can have to bow himself before that Lord, and to take His yoke upon him and learn of Him. So much, then, for my first point; now a word with regard to the second.

II. The sale, and the price.

'The Lord that bought them.' You perhaps remember other words which say, 'Ye are bought with a price; be not the servants of men'; also other words of this Apostle himself, in which he speaks, in his other letter, of being 'bought with the precious blood of Christ, as of

a Lamb without blemish and without spot.' Now notice, Christ's ownership of us does not depend on Christ's Divinity, which I suppose most of us believe, but on Christ's sacrifice for us. It is perfectly true that creation gives rights to the Creator. It is perfectly true that if we believe, as I think the New Testament teaches, that He, who before His name was Jesus was the Eternal Word of God, was the Agent of all Creation, and therefore has rights. But Christ's heart does not care for rights of that sort. It wants something far deeper, far tenderer, far closer than any such. And He comes to us with the language that is the language of love over all the universe, as between man and woman, as between man and man, as between man and God, as between God and man, upon His lips, and says, 'Thou must love Me, for I have died for thee.' Yes, brother; the only ground upon which absolute possession of a man can be rested is the ground of prior absolute surrender to Him. Christ must give Himself to me before He can ask me to give myself to Him. So all that was apparently harsh in the relationship, as I have been trying to set it forth to you, melts away and disappears. No owner ever owned a slave as truly as a loving woman owns her husband, or a loving husband his wife, because the ownership is the expression of perfect love on both sides. And that is the golden bond that binds men's souls to Christ in a submission which, the more abject it is, the more elevating it is, just because 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.'

I do not dwell upon any cold theological doctrine of an Atonement, but I wish you to feel that deep in this great metaphor of our text there lie the two things; first, the price that was paid, and, second, the bondage from which the slave was delivered. He belonged to another master before Christ bought him for Himself. 'He that committeth sin is the slave of sin.' Some of you are your own despots, your own tyrants. The worse half of you has got the upper hand. The mutineers that ought to have been down under hatches, and shackled, have taken possession of the deck and clapped the captain and the officers, and all the sextants and log-books, away into a corner, and they are driving the ship—that is, you—on to the

rocks, as hard as they can. A man that is not Christ's slave has a far worse slavery in submitting to these tyrant sins that have tempted him with the notion of how fine it is to break through these old-womanly restraints and conventional fads of a narrow morality, and to have his fling, and do as he likes and follow nature. Ay, some of you have been doing that, and could write a far better commentary than any preacher ever wrote, out of your own experience, on the great words, 'Whilst they promised them liberty, they themselves are the slaves of corruption!' Young men, is that true about any of you—that you came here into Manchester to a situation, and lonely lodgings, comparatively innocent, and that some body said, 'Oh, do not be a milksop! come along and see life,' and you thought it was fine to shake off the shackles that your poor old mother used to try to put upon your limbs? And what have you made of it? I will tell you what a great many young men have made of it—I have seen scores of them in the forty years that I have been preaching here: 'His bones are full of the iniquity of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust.'

There is a slavery which is blessedness, and there is a slavery which at first is delightsome to the worst part of us, and afterwards becomes bitter and deadly. And it is the bondage of sin, the bondage to my worst self, the bondage to my indulged passions, the bondage to other men, the bondage to the material world. Jesus Christ speaks to each of us in His great sacrifice, by which He says to us, 'The Son will make you free, and you shall be free indeed.' The Lord has bought us. Have you let Him emancipate you from all your bondage? Dear friends, bear with me if I press again upon you, I pray God that it may ring in your ears till you can answer that question, Jesus Christ having bought me, do I belong to Him?

III. And now, lastly, notice the runaways.

Did it ever occur to you what a pathetic force there is in Peter's picking out that word 'denying' as the shorthand expression for all

sorts of sins? Who was it that thrice denied that he knew Him? That experience went very deep into the Apostle; and here, as I take it, is a most significant illustration of his penitent remembrance of his past life, all the more significant because of its reticence. The allusion is one that nobody could catch that did not know his past, but which to those who did know it was full of meaning and of pathos:—'Denying the Lord, as *I* did on that dismal morning, in the High Priest's palace. I am speaking about it, for I know what it comes to, and the tears that will follow after.'

But what I desire to press upon you, dear friends, is just this: That in that view of the lives of people who are not Christians there is suggested to us the essential sinfulness, the black ingratitude, and the absolute folly of refusing to acknowledge the claims of Him to whom we belong, and who has bought us at such a price. You can do it by word, and perhaps some of us are not guiltless in that respect. You can do it by paring down the character and office of Jesus Christ, and minimising the importance of His sacrifice from the world's sins, and thinking of Him, not as the Owner that bought us, but as the Master that teaches us. You can do it by cowardly hiding of your colours and being too shamefaced, too sensitive to the curled lip of the man that works at the next bench, or sits at the next desk, or the student that is beside you, or somebody else whose opinion you esteem, which prevents you from saying like a man, 'I belong to Jesus Christ, and whomsoever other people serve, as for me, I am going to serve Him.' And you can do it, and many of you are doing it, by simply ignoring His claims, refusing to turn to Him, not yielding up your will to Him, not turning your heart to Him, not setting your dependence upon Him. Is it not a shame that men, whose hearts will glow with thankfulness when another man, especially if he is a superior, comes to them with some gift, valuable, but nothing as compared with the transcendent gift that Christ brings, will yet let Him die for them and not care anything about Him? I can understand the vehement antagonism that some people have to Christ and Christianity, but what I cannot understand

is the attitude of the immense mass of people that come to services like this, who profess to believe that Jesus Christ's love for them brought Him to the cross, and yet will not even pay the poor tribute of a little interest and a momentary inclination of heart towards Him. 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by,' that Jesus Christ died for you? He bought you for His own. Let me beseech you to 'yield yourselves' servants, slaves of Christ, and then you will be free, and you will hear Him say in the very depth of your hearts, 'Henceforth I call you not slaves, but friends.'

2 Peter iii. 14— BE DILIGENT

'Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.'—2 Peter iii. 14.

As we pass the conventional boundary of another year, most of us, I suppose, cast glances into the darkness ahead. To those of us who have the greater part of our lives probably before us, the onward look will disclose glad possibilities. To some of us, who have life mostly behind us, the prospect will take 'a sober colouring from an eye that hath kept watch over man's mortality,' and there will be little on the lower levels to attract. My text falls in with the mood which the season fosters. It directs our onward look to a blessed certainty instead of a peradventure, and it deduces important practical consequences from the hope. These three things are in the words of our text: a clear vision that should fill the future; a definite aim for life, drawn from the vision; and an earnest diligence in the pursuit of that aim, animated by that hope.

Now these three—a bright hope, a sovereign purpose, and a diligent earnestness—are the three conditions of all noble life. They themselves are strength, and they will bring us buoyancy and

freshness which will prolong youth into old age, and forbid anything to appear uninteresting or small.

So I ask you to look at these three points, as suggested by my text.

I. First, then, the clear hope which should fill our future.

'Seeing that ye look for such things.' What things? Peter has been drawing a very vivid and solemn picture of the end, in two parts, one destructive, the other constructive. Anticipating the predictions of modern science, which confirm his prophecy, he speaks of the dissolution of all things by fervent heat, and draws therefrom the lesson: 'What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?'

But that dissolution by fire is not, as people often call it, the 'final conflagration.' Rather is it a regenerating baptism of fire, from which 'the heavens and the earth that now are'—like the old man in the fable, made young in the flame—shall emerge renewed and purified. The lesson from that prospect is the words of our text.

Now I am not going to dwell upon that thought of a new heaven and a new earth renewed by means of the fiery change that shall pass upon them, but simply to remark that there is a great deal in the teaching of both Old and New Testaments which seems to look in that direction. It is, at least, a perfectly tenable belief, and in my humble judgment is something more, that this earth, the scene of man's tragedy and crime, the theatre of the display of the miracle of redeeming love, emancipated from the bondage of corruption, shall be renewed and become the seat of the blessed. They who dwell in it, and it on which they dwell pass through analogous changes, and as for the individuals, the 'new creation' is the old self purified by the fire of the Divine Spirit into incorruption and righteousness, so the world in which they live shall, in like manner, be 'that new world which is the old,' only having suffered the fiery transformation and been glorified thereby.

But passing from that thought, which, however interesting it may be as a matter of speculation, is of very small practical importance, notice, still further, the essential part of the hope which the Apostle here sets forth—viz., that that order of things towards which we may look is one permeable only for feet that have been washed and made clean. 'Therein dwelleth righteousness.' *Righteousness* there, of course, is the abstract for the concrete; the quality is put for the persons that exhibit it. And just as the condition of being at home in this present material world is the possession of flesh and blood, which puts creatures into relationships therewith, and just as it is impossible for a finite, bodiless spirit to move amongst, and influence, and be influenced by, the gross materialities of the heavens and the earth that now are, so is it impossible for anything but purity to be at rest in, or even to enter into that future world. 'The gates' of the New Jerusalem 'shall not be closed day nor night'; but through the ever-open gates none can pass except they who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. There stand at the gates of that Paradise unseen, the repulsions of the angel with the flaming sword, and none can enter except the righteous. Light kills the creatures of the darkness.

'How pure that soul must be

Which, placed within Thy piercing sight,

Shall shrink not, but with calm delight

Can live, and look on Thee!'

Thus, then, brethren, an order of things free from all corruption, and into which none can pass but the pure, should be the vision that ever flames before us. Peter takes it for granted that the anticipation of that future is an inseparable part of the Christian character. The word which he employs, by its very form, expresses that that expectance is habitual and continuous. I am afraid that a great many so-called Christians very seldom send their thoughts, and still less

frequently their desires, onwards to that end. In all your dreams of the future, how much space has been filled by this future which is no dream? Have you, in these past days, and do you, as a matter of habitual and familiar occupation of your mind, let your eyes travel on beyond and above the low levels of earth and peradventures, to fix them on that certainty?

Opticians make glasses with three ranges, and write upon a little bar which shifts their eyepieces, 'Theatre,' 'Field,' 'Marine.' Which of the three is your glass set to? The turn of a button determines its range. You can either look at the things close at hand, or, if you set the eyepiece right and use the strongest, you can see the stars. Which is it to be? The shorter range shows you possibilities; the longer will show you certainties. The shorter range shows you trifles; the longer, all that you can desire. The shorter range shows you hopes that are destined to be outgrown and left behind; the longer, the far-off glories, a pillar of light which will move before you for ever. Oh, how many of the hopes that guided our course, and made our objective points in the past, are away down below the backward horizon! How many hopes we have outgrown, whether they were fulfilled or disappointed. But we may have one which will ever move before us, and ever draw our desires. The greater vision, if we were only wise enough to bring our lives habitually under its influence, would at once dim and ennoble all the near future.

Let us then, dear friends, not desecrate that wondrous faculty of looking before as well as after which God has given to us, by wasting it upon the nothings of this world, but heave it higher, and anchor it more firmly in the very Throne of God Himself. And for us let one solemn, blessed thought more and more fill with its substance and its light the else dim and questionable and insufficient future, and walk evermore as seeing Him who is invisible, and as hastening unto the coming of the day of the Lord.

II. Then, secondly, note the definite aim which this clear hope should impress upon life.

If you knew that you were going to emigrate soon, and spend all your life on the other side of the world, in circumstances the outlines of which you knew, you would be a fool if you did not set yourself to get ready for them. The more clearly we see and the more deeply we feel that future hope, which is disclosed for us in the words of my text, the more it will prescribe a dominant purpose which will give unity, strength, buoyancy, and blessedness to any life. 'Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent.' For what? 'That ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.'

Now mark the details of the aim which this great hope impresses upon life, as they are stated in the words of my text. Every word is weighty here. 'That ye may be *found*.' That implies, if not search, at least investigation. It suggests the idea of the discovery of the true condition, character, or standing of a man which may have been hidden or partially obscured before—and now, at last, is brought out clearly. With the same suggestion of investigation and discovery, the same phrase is employed in other places; as, for instance, when the Apostle Paul speaks about being 'found naked,' or as when he speaks about being 'found in Him, not having mine own righteousness.' So, then, there is some process of examination or investigation, resulting in the discovery, possibly for the first time, of what a man really is.

Then note, 'Found *in Him*,' or as the Revised Version reads it, 'in His sight.' Then Christ is the Investigator, and it is before 'those pure eyes and perfect judgment' that they have to pass, who shall be admitted into the new heavens and the new earth, 'wherein dwelleth righteousness.'

Then mark what is the character which, discovered on investigation by Jesus Christ, admits there: 'without spot and blameless.' There must be the entire absence of every blemish, stain, or speck of impurity. The purer the white the more conspicuous the black. Soot

is never so foul as when it lies on driven snow. They who enter there must have nothing in them akin to evil. 'Blameless' is the consequence of 'spotless.' That which in itself is pure attracts no censure, whether from the Judge or from the assessors and onlookers in His court.

But, further, these two words, in almost the same identical form—one of them absolutely the same, and the other almost so—are found in Peter's other letter as a description of Jesus Christ Himself. He was a Lamb 'without blemish and without spot.' And thus the character that qualifies for the new heavens is the copy of us in Jesus Christ.

Still further, only those who thus have attained to the condition of absolute, speckless purity and conformity to Jesus Christ will meet His searching eye in calm tranquillity and be 'found of Him *in peace.*'

The steward brings his books to his master. If he knows that there has been trickery with the figures and embezzlement, how the wretch shakes in his shoes, though he may stand apparently calm, as the master's keen eye goes down the columns! If he knows that it is all right, how calmly he waits the master's signature at the end, to pass the account! The soldiers come back with victory on their helmets, and are glad to look their captain in the face. But if they come back beaten, they shrink aside and hide their shame. If we are to meet Jesus Christ with quiet hearts, and we certainly shall meet Him, we must meet Him 'without spot and blameless.' The discovery, then, of what men truly are will be like the draining of the bed of a lake. Ah, what ugly, slimy things there are down in the bottom! What squalor and filth flung in from the houses, and covered over many a day by the waters! All that surface work will be drained off from the hearts of men. Shall we show slime and filth, or shall we show lovely corals and silver sands without a taint or a speck?

These are the details of the life's aim of a Christian man. And they may all be gathered up into one. The end which we should seek as sovereign and high above all others is the conformity of our character to Jesus Christ our Lord. Never mind about anything else; let us leave all in God's hands. He will do better for us than we can do for ourselves. Let us trust Him for the contingent future; and let us set ourselves to secure this, that, whether joy or sorrow, whether wealth or poverty, whether success or failure, whether sweet companionship or solitary tears be our lot for the rest of our lives, we may grow in grace, and in the knowledge and likeness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Make that your aim, and freshness, buoyancy, enthusiasm, the ennobling of everything in this world, and the bending of all to be contributory of it, will gladden your days. Make anything else your aim, and you fail of your highest purpose, and your life, however successful, will be dreary and disappointed, and its end will be shame.

III. Lastly, notice the earnest diligence with which that aim should be pursued, in the light of that hope.

Peter is fond of using the word which is here translated 'be diligent.' Hard work, honest effort, continuous and persevering, is His simple recipe for all nobleness. You will find He employs it, for instance, at least three times in this letter, in such connections as, 'Besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue,' and so on through the whole glorious series; and again, 'Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.' So, then, there is no mystery about the way of securing the aim; work towards it, and you will get it.

Now, of course, there are a great many other considerations to be brought in in reference to the Christian man's means of becoming Christlike. We should have to speak of the gifts of a Divine Spirit, of the dependence upon God for it, and the like; but for the present purpose we may confine ourselves to Peter's own prescription, 'be

diligent,' and that will secure it. But then the word itself opens out into further meanings than that. It not only implies diligence: there may be diligence of a very mechanical and ineffective sort. The word also includes in its meaning earnestness, and it very frequently includes that which is the ordinary consequence of earnestness—viz., haste and economy of time.

So I venture, in closing, just to throw my remarks into three simple exhortations. Be in earnest in cultivating a Christlike character. Half-and-half Christians, like a great many of us, are of no use either to God or to men or to themselves. Dawdling and languid, braced up and informed by no earnestness of purpose, and never having had enthusiasm enough to set themselves fairly alight, they do no good and they come to nothing. 'I would thou wert cold or hot.' One thing sorely wanted in the average Christianity of this day is that professing Christians should give the motives which their faith supplies for earnest consecration due weight and power. Nothing else will succeed. You will never grow like Christ unless you are in earnest about it any more than you could pierce a tunnel through the Alps with a straw. It needs an iron bar tipped with diamond to do it. Unless your whole being is engaged in the task, and you gather your whole self together into a point, and drive the point with all your force, you will never get through the rock barrier that rises between you and the fair lands beyond. Be in earnest, or give it up altogether.

Then another thing I would venture to say is, Make it your *business* to cultivate a character like that of Jesus Christ. If you would go to the work of growing a Christ-like spirit one-hundredth part as systematically as you will go to your business to-morrow, and stick at it, there would be a very different condition of things in most of our hearts. No man becomes noble and good and like the dear Lord 'by a jump,' without making a systematic and conscious effort towards it.

I would say, lastly, Make haste about cultivating a Christlike character. The harvest is great, the toil is heavy, the sun is drawing to the west, the evening shadows are very long with some of us, the reckoning is at hand, and the Master waits to count your sheaves. There is no time to lose, brother; set about it as you have never done before, and say, 'This one thing I do.'

And so let us not fill our minds with vain hopes which, whether they be fulfilled or not, will not satisfy us, but lift our eyes to and stay our anticipations on those glories beyond, as real as God is real, and as certain as His word is true. Let these hopes concentrate and define for us the aims of our life; and let the aims, clearly accepted and recognised, be pursued with earnestness, with 'diligence,' with haste, with the enthusiasm of which they, and they only, are worthy. Let us listen to our Master, 'I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh.' And let us listen to the words of the servant, which reverse the metaphor, and teach the same lesson in a trumpet call which anticipates the dawn and rouses the sleeping soldiers: 'The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.'

2 Peter iii. 18— GROWTH

'But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ....'—2 Peter iii. 18.

These are the last words of an old man, written down as his legacy to us. He was himself a striking example of his own precept. It would be an interesting study to examine these two letters of the Apostle Peter, in order to construct from them a picture of what he became, and to contrast it with his own earlier self when full of self-confidence, rashness, and instability. It took a lifetime for Simon, the son of Jonas, to grow into Peter; but it was done. And the very faults of the character became strength. What he had proved possible in his own case he commands and commends to us, and from the height to which he has reached, he looks upwards to the infinite

ascent which he knows he will attain when he puts off this tabernacle; and then downwards to his brethren, bidding them, too, climb and aspire. His last word is like that of the great Roman Catholic apostle to the East Indies: 'Forward!' He is like some trumpeter on the battlefield who spends his last breath in sounding an advance. Immortal hope animates his dying injunction: 'Grow! grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.'

So I think we may take these words, dear friends, as the starting-point for some very plain remarks about what I am afraid is a neglected duty, the duty of growth in Christian character.

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

Now those of you who use the Revised Version will see in it a very slight, but very valuable alteration. It reads there: 'Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.' The effect of that alteration being to bring out more clearly that whilst the direction of the growth is twofold, the process is one. And to bring out more clearly, also, that both the grace and the knowledge have connection with Jesus Christ.

He is the Giver and the Author of the grace. He is the Object of the knowledge. The one is more moral and spiritual; the other, if we may so say, more intellectual; but both are realised by one act of progress, and both inhere in, and refer to, and are occupied with, and are derived from, Jesus Christ Himself.

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

First, we have growth in the 'grace' of Christ. Grace, of course, means, first, the undeserved love and favour which God in Jesus

Christ bears to us sinful and inferior creatures; and then it means the consequence of that love and favour in the manifold spiritual endowments which in us become 'graces,' beauties, and excellences of Christian character. So then, if you are a Christian, you ought to be continually realising a deeper and more blessed consciousness of Christ's love and favour as yours. You ought to be, if I may so say, nestling every day nearer and nearer to His heart, and getting more and more sure, and more and more happily sure, of more and more of His mercy and love to you.

And if you are a Christian you ought not only thus to be realising daily, with increasing certitude and power, the fact of His love, but you ought to be drinking in and deriving more and more every day of the consequences of that love, of the spiritual gifts of which His hands are full. There is open for each of us in Him an inexhaustible store of abundance. And if our Christian life is real and vigorous there ought to be in us a daily increasing capacity, and therefore a daily increasing possession of the gifts of His grace. There ought to be, in other words, also a daily progressive transformation into His likeness. It is 'the grace of our Lord Jesus,' not only in the sense that He is the Author and the Bestower of it to each of us, but also in the sense that He Himself possesses and exemplifies it. So that there is nothing mystical and remote from the experience of daily life in this exhortation: 'Grow in grace'; and it is not growth in some occult theological virtue, or transcendent experience, but a very plain, practical thing, a daily transformation, with growing completeness and precision of resemblance, into the likeness of Jesus Christ; the grace that was in Him being transferred to me, and my character being growingly irradiated and refined, softened and ennobled by the reflection of the lustre of His.

This it is to 'grow into the grace of our Lord and Saviour'; a deeper consciousness of His love creeping round the roots of my heart every day, and fuller possession of His gifts placed in my opening

hand every day; and a continual approximation to the beauty of His likeness, which never halts nor ceases.

'Grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.' The knowledge of a person is not the same as the knowledge of a creed or of a thought or of a book. We are to grow in the knowledge of Christ, which includes but is more than the intellectual apprehension of the truths concerning Him. He might turn the injunction into—'Increase your acquaintance with your Saviour.' Many Christians never get to be any more intimate with Him than they were when they were first introduced to Him. They are on a kind of bowing acquaintance with their Master, and have little more than that. We sometimes begin an acquaintance which we think promises to ripen into a friendship, but are disappointed. Circumstances or some want of congeniality which is discovered prevent its growth. So with not a few professing Christians. They have got no nearer Jesus Christ than when they first knew Him. Their friendship has not grown. It has never reached the stage where all restraints are laid aside and there is perfect confidence. 'Grow in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' Get more and more intimate with Him, nearer to Him, and franker and more cordial with Him day by day.

But there is another side to the injunction besides that. We are to grow in the grasp, the intellectual grasp and realisation of the truths which lie wrapped up and enfolded in Him. The first truths that a man learns when he becomes a Christian are the most important. The lesson that the little child learns contains the Omega as well as the Alpha of all truth. There is no word in all the gospel that is an advance on that initial word, the faith of which saves the most ignorant who trusts to it. We begin with the end, if I may say so, and the highest truth is the first truth that we learn. But the aspect which that truth bears to the man when, first of all, it dawns upon him, and he sees in it the end of his fears, the cleansing of his heart, the pardoning of his sins, his acceptance with God, is a very different thing from the aspect that it ought to wear to him, after, say forty

years of pondering, of growing up to it, after years of experience have taught him. Life is the best commentary upon the truths of the gospel, and the experience teaches their depths and their power, their far-reaching applications and harmonies. So our growth in the knowledge of Jesus Christ is not a growing away from the earliest lessons, or a leaving them behind, but a growing up to and into them. So as to learn more fully and clearly all their infinite contents of grace and truth. The treasure put into our hands at first is discovered in its true preciousness as life and trial test its metal and its inexhaustibleness. The child's lesson is the man's lesson. All our Christian progress in knowledge consists in bringing to light the deep meaning, the far-reaching consequences of the fact of Christ's incarnation, death, and glory. 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' The same truth which shone at first a star in a far-off sky, through a sinful man's night of fear and agony, grows in brilliance as we draw nearer to it, until at last it blazes, the central Sun of the Universe, the hearth for all vital warmth, the fountain of all guiding light, the centre of all energy. Christ in His manhood, in His divinity, Christ in His cross, resurrection, and glory, is the object of all knowledge, and we grow in the knowledge of Him by penetrating more deeply into the truths which we have long ago learned, as well as by following them as they lead us into new fields, and disclose unsuspected issues in creed and practice.

That growth will not be one-sided; for grace and knowledge will advance side by side—the moral and spiritual keeping step with the intellectual, the practical with the theoretical. And that growth will have no term. It is growth towards an infinite object of our aspiration, imitation, and affection. So we shall ever approach and never surpass Jesus Christ. Such endless progress is the very salt of life. It keeps us young when physical strength decays. It flames, an immortal hope, to light the darkness of the grave when all other hopes are quenched in night.

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

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

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

... and there

'Lo! in the middle of the wood,

The folded leaf is wooed from out the bud,

Grows green and broad, and takes no care.'

But that is not how we grow. 'In the sweat of thy brow,' with pain and peril, with effort and toil, and not otherwise, do men grow in everything but stature. And especially is it so in the Christian character. There are other metaphors that need to be taken into consideration as well as this of growth, with all its sweet suggestions of continuous, effortless, spontaneous advance.

The Christian progress is not only growth, it is warfare. The Christian progress is not only growth, it is a race. The Christian progress is not only growth, it is mortifying the old man. The Christian progress is not only growth, it is putting off the old man with his deeds and putting on the new! 'First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear,' was never meant for a complete account of how the Christian life is perfected.

We are bidden to grow, and that command points to hindrances and resistance, to the need for effort and the governing action of our own wills.

The command is one sorely needed in the present state of our average Christianity. Our churches are full of monsters, specimens of arrested growth, dwarfs, who have scarcely grown since they were babes, infants all their lives. I come to you with a very plain question: Have you any more of Christ's beauty in your characters, any more of His grace in your hearts, any more of His truth in your minds than you had a year ago, ten years ago, or at that far-off period when some of you greyheaded men first professed to be Christians? Have you experienced so many things in vain? Have the years taught you nothing? Ah, brethren! for how many of us is it true: 'When for the time ye ought to be teachers ye have need that one teach you which be the first principles of the oracles of God'? 'Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.'

And we need the command because all about us there are hindrances. There is the hindrance of an abuse of the evangelical doctrine of conversion, and the idea that springs up in many hearts that if once a man has 'passed from death unto life,' and has managed to get inside the door of the banqueting-hall, that is enough. And there are numbers of people in our Nonconformist communities especially, where that doctrine of conversion is most distinctly preached, whose growth is stopped by the abuse that they make of it in fancying if they have once exercised faith in Jesus Christ they may safely and sinlessly stand still. 'Conversion' is turning round. What do we turn round for? Surely, in order that we may travel on in the new direction, not that we may stay where we are. There is also the hindrance of mere indolence, and there is the hindrance arising from absorption in the world and its concerns.

If all your strength is going thither, there is none left to grow with. Many professing Christians take such deep draughts of the

intoxicating cup of this world's pleasures that it stunts their growth. People sometimes give children gin in order to keep them from growing. Some of you do that for your Christian character by the deep draughts that you take of the Circean cup of this world's pleasures and cares.

And not unfrequently, some one favourite evil, some lust or passion, or weakness, or desire, which you have not the strength to cast out, will kill all aspirations and destroy all possibilities of growth; and will be like an iron band round a little sapling, which will confine it and utterly prevent all expansion. Is that the case with any of us? We all need—and I pray you suffer—the word of exhortation.

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

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

Now as to the first. The true means by which we shall grow in Christian grace is by holding continual intercourse and communion with Jesus Christ. It is from Him that all come. He is the Fountain of Life; He gives the life, He nourishes the life, He increases the life. And whilst I have been saying, in an earlier part of this discourse, that we are not to expect an effortless growth, I must here say that we shall very much mistake what Christian progress requires if we suppose that the effort is most profitably directed to the cultivation of specific and single acts of goodness and purity. Our efforts are best when directed to keeping ourselves in union with our Lord. The heart united to Him will certainly be advancing in all things fair and lovely and of good report. Keep yourselves in touch with Christ; and Christ will make you grow. That is to say, occupy heart and mind with Him, let your thoughts go to Him. Do you ever, from morning to night, on a week-day, think about your Master, about His truth, about the principles of His Gospel, about His great love to you? Keep your heart in union with Him, in the midst of the rush and

hurry of your daily life. Are your desires turning to Him? Do they go out towards Him and feel after Him? It will take an effort to keep up the union with Him, but without the effort there will be no contact, and without the contact there will be no growth. As soon may you expect a plant, wrenched from the soil and shut out from the sunshine to grow, as expect any Christian progress in the hearts which are disjoined from Jesus Christ. But rooted in that soil, smiled upon by that sun, watered by the perpetual dew from His Heaven, we shall 'grow like the lily, and cast forth our roots like Lebanon. The secret of real Christian progress and the direction in which the effort of Christian progress can most profitably and effectually be made, is simply in keeping close to our Lord and Master. He is the food of the Spirit. 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.'

Communion with Christ includes prayer. Desire to grow will help our growth. We tend to become what we long to be. Desire which impels to effort will not be in vain if it likewise impels to prayer. We may have the answer to our petition for growth in set ways; we may be but partially conscious of the answer, nor know that our faces shine when we go among men. But certainly if we pray for what is in such accordance with His will as 'growth in grace' is, we shall have the petition that we desire. That longing to know Him better and to possess more of His grace, like the tendrils of some climbing plant, will always find the support round which it may twine, and by which it may ascend.

The other condition of growth is exercise. Use the grace which you have, and it increases. Practice the truth which you know, and many things will become clearer. The blacksmith's muscles are strengthened by wielding the forge-hammer, but unused they waste. The child grows by exercise. To him that hath—truly possesses with that possession which only use secures—shall be given.

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

IV. Lastly, observe the solemn alternative to growth.

It is not a question of either growing or not growing, and there an end; but if you will look at the context you will see that the exhortation of my text comes in in a very significant connection. 'Behold! beware, lest being led away ... ye fall from your own steadfastness.' 'But grow in grace.' That is to say, the only preventive of falling away from steadfastness is continual progress. The alternative of advance is retrogression. There is no standing still upon the inclined plane. If you are not going up, gravity begins to act, and down you go. There must either be continual advance or there will be certain decay and corruption. As soon as growth ceases in this physiology *disintegration* commences. Just as the graces exercised are strengthened, so the graces unexercised decay. The slothful servant wraps his talent in a napkin, and buries it in the ground. He may try to persuade his Master and himself with 'There Thou hast that is Thine'; but He will not take up what you buried. Rust and verdigris will have done their work upon the coin; the inscription will be obliterated and the image will be marred. You cannot bury your Christian grace in indolence without diminishing it. It will be like a bit of ice wrapped in a cloth and left in the sun, it will all have gone into water when you come to take it out. And the truth that you do *not* live by, whose relations and large harmonies and controlling power are not being increasingly realised in your lives; that truth is becoming less and less real, more and more shadowy, and ghostlike to you. Truth which is not growing is becoming fossilised. 'The things most surely believed' are often the things which have least power. Unquestioned truth too often lies 'bedridden in the dormitory of the soul side by side with exploded error.' The sure way to reduce your knowledge of Jesus Christ to that inert condition is to neglect increasing it and applying it to your daily life. There are men, in all churches, and there are some whole

communions whose creeds are the most orthodox, and also utterly useless, and as near as possible nonentities, simply because the creed is accepted and shelved. If your belief is to be of any use to you, or to be held by you in the face of temptations to abandon it, you must keep it fresh, and oxygenated, so to say, by continual fresh apprehension of it and closer application of it to conduct. As soon as the stream stands, it stagnates; and the very manna from God will breed worms and stink. And Christian truth unpractised by those who hold it, corrupts itself and corrupts them.

So Peter tells us that the alternative is growth or apostasy. This decay may be most real and unsuspected. There are many, many professing Christians all ignorant that, like the Jewish giant of old, their strength is gone from them, and the Spirit of God departed. My brother, I beseech you, rouse yourself from your contented slothfulness. Do not be satisfied with merely having come within the Temple. Count nothing as won whilst anything remains to be won. There is a whole ocean of boundless grace and truth rolling shoreless there before you. Do not content yourselves with picking up a few shells on the beach, but launch out into the deep, and learn to know more and more of the grace and truth and beauty of your Saviour and your God.

But remember dead things do not grow. You cannot grow unless you are alive, and you are not alive unless you have Jesus Christ.

Have you given yourselves to Him? have you taken Him as yours? given yourselves to Him as His servants, subjects, soldiers? taken Him for yours as your Saviour, Sacrifice, Pattern, Inspirer, Friend? If you have, then you have life which will grow if you keep it in union with Him. Joined to Him, men are like a 'tree that is planted by the rivers of water,' which spreads its foliage and bears its fruit, and year after year flings a wider shadow upon the grass, and lifts a sturdier bole to the heavens. Separated from Him they are like the chaff, which has neither root nor life, and which cannot grow.

Which, my friend, are you?

I. JOHN

1 John i. 5-ii. 6— THE MESSAGE AND ITS PRACTICAL RESULTS

'This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. 6. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 7. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. 8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.'

'My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 2. And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. 3. And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him. 6. He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.'—1 John i. 5-ii. 6.

John is the mystic among the New Testament writers. He dwells much on the immediate union of the soul with God, and he has little to say about institutions and rites. His method is not to argue, but to utter deep, simple propositions which convince by their own light. But he is also intensely eager for plain, practical morality, and in that respect sets the example which, unfortunately, too many of the

more mystical types of Christian teaching have failed to follow. To him the outcome and test of all deep hidden union with God is righteousness in life.

The blending of these two elements, which is the very keynote of this letter, is wonderfully set forth in this passage. They would require much more space than we command for their treatment, for every clause is weighty as gold. We can but skim the surface, and try to bring out the salient points.

I. We have, first, a wonderful gathering up of the whole gospel message into one utterance as to the essential nature of God. Light is in all languages the symbol of knowledge, of joy, of purity. It is the source of life. Its very nature is to ray itself out into and conquer darkness. Its splendor dazzles every eye; all things rejoice in its beams. Darkness is the type of ignorance, of sorrow, of sin. But, whilst the symbol is thus rich in manifold revelations, probably purity and self-communication are the predominating ideas here.

John has been honoured to give the world the three great revelations that God is spirit, is light, is love. And this profound saying in some sense includes both the others, inasmuch as light, which to the popular mind is most widely apart from matter, may well stand for the emblem of spirit, and, since to radiate is its inseparable quality, does represent in symbol the delight in imparting Himself, which is the very heart of the declaration that God is love. If, then, we grasp these two thoughts of absolute purity and of self-impartation as the very nature and property of God, John tells us that we grasp the kernel of the Gospel.

And he thinks that men never will grasp them certainly unless a 'message' from God, a definite revelation in historical fact, certifies them. We may hope or doubt, or desire, but we cannot be sure that God is light unless he tells us so by unmistakable act. John knew what act that was—the sending of His only-begotten Son. To the positive statement John, in his usual manner, appends an emphatic

negative one: 'Darkness is not in him, no, not in any way.' He is light, all light, only light.

II. With characteristic moral earnestness, John passes at once to the practical effects which the message is meant to have. We are not told what God is simply that we may know, but that, knowing, we may do and be. If He is light, two things will follow in those who are in union with Him—they will walk in light, and they will in His light see their own evil. John deals with these two consequences in verses 6-10—the former in verses 6 and 7; the latter in verses 8-10. The parallelism in the construction of these two sets of verses is striking:

Verses 6, 7.	Verses 8, 9.
If we say	If we say
that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness,	that we have no sin
we lie, and do not the truth.	we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light,	If we confess our sins,
we have fellowship one with another.	He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins,
and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin.	and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

As to the former of these two paragraphs, the underlying thought is that fellowship with God necessarily involves moral likeness to Him. Worship is always aspiration after, and conformity to, the character of the god worshipped, and there can be no true

communion with a God who is light unless the worshipper walks in light. In plain language, all high-flying pretensions to communion with God must verify themselves by practical righteousness. That cuts deep into an emotional religion, which has much to say about raptures and the like, but produces little purifying effect on the humble details of daily life.

There are always professing Christians who talk of their blessed experiences, and woefully fail in prosaic virtues. It is a pity that a man should hold his head so high that he does not look to keep his feet out of the mud. Such a profession is for the most part tainted with more or less conscious falsehood, and is always a proof that the truth—the sum of God's revelation—is not operative in the man; that he is not turning his belief into act, as all belief should be. On the other hand, the true relation resulting from the message is that we should walk in the light, as He is in it.

Verse 10 seems to be simply a reiteration of the preceding idea, with some intensifying, and that chiefly in the description of the true character of the denial of sin. To make God a liar is worse than to lie or to deceive ourselves; and all ignoring of sin does that, because not only has God declared its universality by the words of revelation, but all His dealings with men are based upon the fact that they are all sinners, and we fly in the face of all His words and works if we deny that which we ourselves are. Therefore the Apostle further varies his expression, and says 'His word' instead of 'the truth,' thus bringing into prominence the thought that 'the truth' is made accessible to us because God has spoken.

III. Chapter ii. 1-6 is in structure analogous to the preceding section. As there, so here, the 'message' is summed up in one great fact,—Christ's work as advocate for believers and as propitiation for the world. As there, so here, two practical consequences follow, which are drawn out on corresponding lines. Observe the repetition in

verses 3 and 5 *b*, of 'hereby know we,' and in verses 4 and 6 of 'He that saith.'

Note, too, the reappearance of 'is a liar' and of 'the truth is not in him' in verse 4. The drift of the section may be briefly put as follows. John's heart melts as he thinks of the possibilities of holiness open to believers, and of the sad actualities of their imperfect lives, and he addresses them by the tender name, 'my little children.' The impelling and guiding motive of his letter is that they may not sin. Practical righteousness is the end of revelation, and its complete attainment should be the aim of every believer.

But the sad experience of 'saints' is that they are not yet wholly delivered from its power. Therefore 'the message' is not only 'God is light without blending of darkness,' but, 'we Christians have an Advocate with the Father.' Jesus is to-day carrying on His mighty work of prevalent intercession for all His servants, and that intercession secures forgiveness for their inconsistencies and lapses, because it rests upon Christ's finished work of 'propitiation,' which is for the whole world, even though it actually avails only for believers.

Such being the power of Christ's work in its twofold aspect of propitiation and of intercession, the same practical issues as in the preceding section were shown to flow from the revealed nature of God are here, in somewhat different form, linked with that work. First, keeping his commandments (which is equivalent to 'walking in the light') is the test to ourselves, as well as to others, of our really knowing Him with a knowledge which is not mere head work, but the acquaintance of sympathy and friendship, or, in the words of the previous paragraph, having fellowship with Him.

Clearly, the scope of this section requires that 'His commandments' should here mean Christ's, not the Father's. All professions of knowing Jesus which are not verified by obedience to Him are false. If we do keep His word—not merely the individual

'commandments,' but the word as one great whole—our love to God reaches its perfection, for it is no mere emotion of the heart, but the force which is to mould and actuate all our acts.

Verse 5 *b* should be separated from the preceding words, for it is really the beginning of the second issue from the work of Christ, and is parallel with 'hereby know we,' etc., in verse 3. Observe the progress in thought from the assurance that we *know* (ver. 3) to the assurance that we *are in* Him. The Christian's relation to Jesus is not only that of acquaintance, however intimate, loving, and transforming, but that of actual dwelling in Him. That great truth shines on every page of the New Testament, and is not to be weakened down into metaphor or rhetoric. It is the very heart of the Christian life, and the test that we have attained to it, and that not merely as an occasional, but as a permanent, condition (note that '*are in* Him' is strengthened to '*abideth in* Him') is that our outward life, in its manifold activities, shall be conformed to the pattern of all holiness in the life of Jesus. To walk as He walked is to walk in the light. Profession is nothing, conduct is everything, and we shall only be clear of sin in the measure in which we have Him who is the light of men for the very life of our lives.

1 John i. 7— WALKING IN THE LIGHT

'If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.'—1 John i. 7.

John was the Apostle of love, but he was also a 'son of thunder.' His intense moral earnestness and his very love made him hate evil, and sternly condemn it; and his words flash and roll as no other words in Scripture, except the words of the Lord of love. In the immediate context he has been laying down what is to him the very heart of his message, that 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' There are spots in the sun, great tracts of blackness on its radiant disc; but in God is unmingled, perfect purity. That being so, it is clear that no

man can be in sympathy or hold communion with Him, unless he, too, in his measure, is light.

So, with fiery indignation, John turns to the people, of whom there were some, even in the primitive Church, who made claims to a lofty spirituality and communion with God, and all the while were manifestly living in the darkness of sin. He will not mince matters with them. He roundly says that they are lying, and the worst sort of lie—an acted lie: 'They do not the truth.' Then, with a quick turn, he opposes to these pretenders the men who really are in fellowship with God, and in my text lays down the principle that walking in the light is essential to fellowship with God. Only, in his usual fashion, he turns the antithesis into a somewhat different form, so as to suggest another aspect of the truth, and instead of saying, as we might expect for the verbal accuracy of the contrast, 'If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with God,' he says, 'we have fellowship one with another.' Then he adds a still further result of that walk, 'the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin.'

Now there are three things: walking in the light, which is the only Christian walk; the companions of those who walk in the light; and the progressive cleansing which is given.

I. Note this 'Walking in the light,' which is the only Christian walk.

In all languages, light is the natural symbol for three things: knowledge, joy, purity. The one ray is broken into its three constituent parts. But just as there are some surfaces which are sensitive to the violet rays, say, of the spectrum, and not to the others, so John's intense moral earnestness makes him mainly sensitive to the symbolism which makes light the expression, not so much of knowledge or of joy, as of moral purity. And although that is not exclusively his use of the emblem, it is predominately so, and it is so here. To 'walk in the light' then, is, speaking generally, to have purity, righteousness, goodness, as the very element and

atmosphere in which our progressive and changeful life is carried on.

Note, too, before I go further, that very significant antithesis: we 'walk'; He *is*—God *is* in the light essentially, changelessly, undisturbedly, eternally; and the light in which He is, His 'own calm home, His habitation from eternity,' is light which has flowed out from Himself as a halo round the midnight moon. It is all one in substance to say God is in light, or, as the Psalmist has it, 'He covered Himself with light as with a garment,' and to say, 'God is light.'

But, side by side with that changeless abiding in the perfect purity, which is inaccessible, the Apostle ventures to put, not in contrast only, but in parallel (*as* He is), our changing, effortful, active, progressive life in the light (God is); we walk.

So, then, the essential of a Christian character is that the light of purity and moral goodness shall be as the very orb, in the midst of which it stands and advances. That implies effort, and it implies activity, and it implies progress. And we are only Christians in the measure in which the conscious activities of our daily lives, and the deepest energies of our inward being, are bathed and saturated with this love of, and effort after, righteousness. It is vain, says John, to talk about fellowship with God, unless the fellowship is rooted in sympathy with Him in that which is the very heart of his Being, the perfect light of perfect holiness. Test your Christianity by that.

Then, still further, there is implied in this great requirement of walking in the light, not only activity and effort, and progress and purity, but also that the whole of the life shall be brought into relation with, and shall be moulded after, the pattern of the God in whom we profess to believe. Religion, in its deepest meaning, is the aspiration after likeness to the god. You see it in heathenism. Men make their gods after their own image, and then the god makes the worshippers after his image. Mars is the god of the soldier, and

Venus goddess of the profligate, and Apollo god of the musical and the wise, etc., and in Christianity the deepest thing in it is aspiration and effort after likeness to God. Love is imitation; admiration, especially when it is raised to the highest degree and becomes adoration, is imitation. And the man that lies before God, like a mirror in the sunshine, receives on the still surface of his soul—but not, like the mirror, on the surface only, but down into its deepest depths—the reflected image of Him on Whom he gazes. 'We all with unveiled face, mirroring glory, are changed into the same image.' So to walk in the light is only possible when we are drawn into it, and our feeble feet made fit to tread upon the radiant glory, by the thought that He is in the light. To imitate Him is to be righteous. So do not let us forget that a correct creed, and devout emotions, ay! and a morality which has no connection with Him, are all imperfect, and that the end of all our religion, our orthodox creed and our sweet emotions and inward feelings of acceptance and favour and fellowship, are meant to converge on, and to produce this—a life and a character which lives and moves and has its being in a great orb of light and purity.

But another thing is included in this grand metaphor of my text. Not only does it enjoin upon us effort and activity and progress in the light and the linking of all our purity with God, but also, it bids us shroud no part of our conduct or our character either from ourselves or from Him. Bring it all out into the light. And although with a penitent heart, and a face suffused with blushes, we have sometimes to say, 'See, Father, what I have done!' it is far better that the revealing light should shine down upon us, and like the sunshine on wet linen, melt away the foulness which it touches, than that we should huddle the ugly thing up in a corner, to be one day revealed and transfixed by the flash of the light turned into lightning. 'He that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest.'

II. So much, then, for my first point; the second is: The companions of the men that walk in the light.

I have already pointed out that the accurate, perhaps pedantically accurate, form of the antithesis would have been: 'If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with God.' But John says, first, 'we have fellowship one with another.' Underlying that, as I shall have to say in a moment, there is the other thought: 'We have fellowship with God.' But he deals with the other side of the truth first. That just comes to this, that the only cement that perfectly knits men to each other is their common possession of that light, and the consequent fellowship with God. There are plenty of other bonds that draw us to one another; but these, if they are not strengthened by this deepest of all bonds, the affinity of souls, that are moving together in the realm of light and purity, are precarious, and apt to snap. Sin separates men quite as much as it separates each man from God. It is the wedge driven into the tree that rends it apart. Human society with its various bonds is like the iron hoop that may be put around the barrel staves, giving them a quasi-unity. The one thing that builds men together into a whole is that each shall be, as it were, embedded in the rock which is the foundation, and the building will rise into a holy temple in the Lord. Sin separates; as the prophet confessed, 'All we like sheep have gone astray, every one to *his own way*,' and the flock is broken up into a multitude of scattered sheep. Social enthusiasts may learn the lesson that the only way by which brotherhood among men can become anything else than a name, and probably end, as it did in the great French Revolution, in 'brothers' making hecatombs of their brethren under the guillotine, is that it shall be the corollary from the Fatherhood of God. If we walk in the light, not otherwise, we have 'fellowship one with another.'

Then, still further, in this fellowship one with another, John presupposes the fellowship with God for each, which makes the possibility and the certainty of all being drawn into one family. He does not think it necessary to state, what is so plain and obvious,

viz., that unless we are in sympathy with God, in our aspiration and effort after the light which is His home and ours, we have no real communion with Him. I said that sin separated man from man, and disrupted all the sweet bonds of amity, so that if men come into contact, being themselves in the darkness, they come into collision rather than into communion. A company of travellers in the night are isolated individuals. When the sun rises on their paths they are a company again. And in like manner, sin separates us from God, and if our hearts are turned towards, and denizens of, the darkness of impurity, then we have no communion with Him. He cannot come to us if we love the darkness. He

'Can but listen at the gate,

And hear the household jar within.'

The tide of the Atlantic feels along the base of iron-bound cliffs on our western shores, and there is not a crevice into which it can come. So God moves about us, but is without us, so long as we walk in darkness. So let us remember that no union with Him is possible, except there be this common dwelling in the light. Two grains of quicksilver laid upon a polished surface will never unite if their surfaces be dusted over with minute impurities, or if the surface of one of them be. Clean away the motes, and they will coalesce and be one. A film of sin separates men from God. And if the film be removed the man dwells in God, and God in him.

III. That brings me to my last point: The progressive cleansing of those who dwell in the light.

'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.' Now if you will notice the whole context, and eminently the words a couple of verses after my text, you will see that the cleansing here meant is not the cleansing of forgiveness, but the cleansing of purifying. For the two things are articulately distinguished in the ninth verse: 'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all

unrighteousness.' So, to use theological terms, it is not justification, but sanctification that is meant here.

Then there is another thing to be noticed, and that is that when the Apostle speaks here about the blood of Christ, he is not thinking of that blood as shed on the Cross, the atoning sacrifice, but of that blood as transfused into the veins, the source there of our new life. The Old Testament says that 'the blood is the life.' Never mind about the statement being scientifically correct; it conveys the idea of the time, which underlies a great deal of Old and New Testament teaching. And when John says the blood of Jesus cleanses from 'all sin,' he says just the same thing as his brother Paul said, 'the law of the spirit of life in Jesus Christ makes me free from the law of sin and death.' That is to say, a growing cleansing from the dominion and the power of sin is granted to us, if we have the life of Jesus Christ breathed into our lives. The metaphor is a very strong one. They tell us—I know nothing about the truth of it—that sometimes it has been possible to revive a moribund man by transfusing into his veins blood from another. That is a picture of the only way by which you and I can become free from the tyranny that dominates us. We must have the life of Christ as the animating principle of our lives, the spirit of Jesus emancipating us from the power of sin and death.

So you see, there are two aspects of Christ's great work set before us under that one metaphor of the blood in its two-fold form, first, as shed for us sinners on the Cross; second, as poured into our veins day by day. That works progressive cleansing. It covers the whole ground of all possible iniquity. Pardon is much, purifying is more. The sacrifice on the Cross is the basis of everything, but that sacrifice does not exhaust what Christ does for us. He died for our sins, and lives for our sanctifying. He died for us, He lives in us. Because He died, we are forgiven; because He lives, we are made pure. Only remember John's 'if.' The 'blood of Jesus will progressively cleanse us until it has cleansed us from *all* sin,' on condition that we 'walk in the light,' not otherwise. If the main

direction of our lives is towards the light; if we seek, by aspiration and by effort, and by deliberate choice, to live in holiness, then, and not else, will the power of the life of Jesus Christ deliver us from the power of sin and death.

Now, my text presupposes that the people to whom it is addressed, and whom it concerns, have already passed from darkness into light, if not wholly, yet in germ. But for those who have not so passed, there is something to be said before my text. And John says it immediately; here it is, 'If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but for the whole world.' So we have to begin with the blood shed for us, the means of our pardon, and then we have the advance of the blood sprinkled on us, the means of our cleansing. If by humble faith we take the dying Lord for our Saviour, and the channel of our forgiveness, we shall have the pardon of our sins. If we listen to the voice that says, 'Ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light,' we shall have fellowship with the living Lord, and daily know more and more of the power of His cleansing blood, making us 'meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.'

1 John ii. 7, 8— THE COMMANDMENT, OLD YET NEW

'I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning.... Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you.'—1 John ii. 7, 8.

The simplest words may carry the deepest thoughts. Perhaps angels and little children speak very much alike. This letter, like all of John's writing, is pellucid in speech, profound in thought, clear and deep, like the abysses of mid-ocean. His terms are such as a child

can understand; his sentences short and inartificial: he does not reason, he declares; he has neither argument nor rhetoric, but he teaches us the deepest truths, and shows us that we get nearer the centre by insight than by logic.

Now the words that I have taken for my text are very characteristic of this Apostle's manner. He has a great, wide-reaching truth to proclaim, and he puts it in the simplest, most inartificial manner, laying side by side two artless sentences, and stimulates us by the juxtaposition, leading us to feel after, and so to make our own, the large lessons that are in them. Let me, then, try to bring these out.

I. And the first one that strikes me is—'the word' is 'a commandment.'

Now, by 'the word' here the Apostle obviously means, since he speaks about it as that which these Asiatic Christians 'heard from the beginning,' the initial truth which was presented for their acceptance in the story of the life and death of Jesus Christ. That was 'the word' and, says he, just because it was a history it is a commandment; just because it was the Revelation of God it is a law. God never tells us anything merely that we may be wise. The purpose of all divine speech, whether in His great works in nature, or in the voices of our own consciences, or in the syllables that we have to piece together from out of the complicated noises of the world's history, or in this book, or in the Incarnate Word, where all the wandering syllables are gathered together into one word—the purpose of all that God says to men is primarily that they may know, but in order that, knowing, they may do; and still more that they may be. And so, inasmuch as every piece of religious knowledge has in it the capacity of directing conduct, all God's word is a commandment.

And, if that is true in regard to other revelations and manifestations that he has made of Himself, it is especially true in regard to the summing-up of all in the Incarnate Word, and in His words, and in the words that tell us of His life and of His death. So whatever truths

there may be, and there are many, which, of course, have only the remotest, if any, bearing upon life and conduct, every bit of Christian truth has a direct grip upon a man's life, and brings with it a stringent obligation.

Now, the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ, 'the Word which ye heard from the beginning,' which, I suppose, would roughly correspond with what is told us in our four Gospels; the word which these Asiatic Christians heard at first, the good news that was brought to them in the midst of their gropings and peradventures, commanded, in the first place, absolute trust, the submission of the will as well as the assent of the understanding. But also it commanded imitation, for Jesus Christ was revealed to them, as He is revealed to us, as being the Incarnate realisation of the ideal of humanity; and what He is, the knowledge that He is that, binds us to try to be in our turn.

And more than that, brethren, the Cross of Christ is a commandment. For we miserably mutilate it, and sinfully as well as foolishly limit its application and its power, if we recognise it only—I was going to say mainly—as being the ground of our hope and of what we call our salvation, and do not recognise it as being the obligatory example of our lives, which we are bound to translate into our daily practice. Jesus Christ Himself has told us that in many a fashion, never more touchingly and wondrously than when in response to the request of a handful of Greeks to see Him, He answered with the word which not only declared what was obligatory upon Him, but what was obligatory upon us all, and for the want of which all the great endowments of the Greek mind at last rotted down into sensuousness, when He said, 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit' and then went on to say, 'he that loveth his life shall lose it,'

So, then, brethren, 'the word which ye heard at the beginning,' the story of Christ, His life and His death, is a stringent commandment. Now, this is one of the blessings of Christianity, that all which was hard and hopeless, ministering to despair sometimes, as well as stirring to fierce effort at others, in the conception of law or duty as it stands outside us, is changed into the tender word, 'if ye love Me, keep My commandments.' If any man serve Me, let him ... 'follow Me.' It is a law; it is 'the law of liberty.' So you have not done all that is needful when you have accepted the teaching of Christ in the Scriptures and the teaching of the Scriptures concerning Christ. Nor have you done all that is needful when clasping Him, and clinging simply to His Cross, you recognise in it the means and the pledge of your acceptance with God, and the ground and anchor of all your hope. There is something more to be done. The Gospel is a commandment, and commandments require not only assent, not only trust, but practical obedience. The 'old commandment' is the 'word which ye heard from the beginning.'

II. The old Christ is perpetually new.

The Apostle goes on, in the last words of my text, to say, 'Which thing' (viz., this combination of the old and the new) 'is true in Him and in you.' 'True in Him'—that is to say, Christ, the old Christ that was declared to these Asiatic Christians as they were groping amidst the illusions of their heathenism, is perpetually becoming new as new circumstances emerge, and new duties are called for, and new days come with new burdens, hopes, possibilities, or dangers. The perpetual newness of the old Christ is what is taught here.

Suppose one of these men in Ephesus heard for the first time the story that away in Judea there had lived the manifestation of God in the flesh, and that He, in His wonderful love, had died for men, that they might be saved from the grip of their sins. And suppose that man barely able to see, had yet seen that much, and clutched at it. He was a Christian, but the Christ that he discerned when he first

discerned Him through the mists, and the Christ that he had in his life and in his heart, after, say, twenty years of Christian living, are very different. The old Christ remained, but the old Christ was becoming new day by day, according to the new necessities and positions. And that is what will be our experience if we have any real Christianity in us. The old Christ that we trusted at first was able to do for us all that we asked Him to do, but we did not ask Him at first for half enough, and we did not learn at first a tithe of what was in Him. Suppose, for instance, some great ship comes alongside a raft with ship-wrecked sailors upon it, and in the darkness of the night transfers them to the security of its deck. They know how safe they are, they know what has saved them, but what do they know compared with what they will know before the voyage ends of all the reservoirs of power and stores of supplies that are in her? Christ comes to us in the darkness, and delivers us. We know Him for our Deliverer from the first moment, if we truly have grasped Him. But it will take summering and wintering with Him, through many a long day and year, before we can ever have a partially adequate apprehension of all that lies in Him.

And what will teach us the depths of Christ, and how does He become new to us? Well, by trusting Him, by following Him, and by the ministry of life. Some of us, I have no doubt, can look back upon past days when sorrow fell upon us, blighting and all but crushing; and then things that we had read a thousand times in the Bible, and thought we had believed, blazed up into a new meaning, and we felt as if we had never understood anything about them before. The Christ that is with us in the darkness, and whom we find able to turn even it, if not into light, at least into a solemn twilight not unvisited by hopes, that Christ is more to us than the Christ that we first of all learnt so little to know. And life's new circumstances, its emerging duties, are like the strokes of the spade which clears away the soil, and discloses the treasure in all its extent which we purchased when we bought that field. We buy the treasure at once, but it takes a long time to count it. The old Christ is perpetually the new Christ.

So, brethren, Christian progress consists not in getting away from the original facts, the elements of the Gospel, but it consists in penetrating more deeply into these, and feeling more of their power and their grasp. All Euclid is in the definitions and axioms and postulates at the beginning. All our books are the letters of the alphabet. And progress consists, not in advancing beyond, but in sinking into, that initial truth, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.'

I might say a word here as to another phase of this perpetual newness of the old Christ—viz., in His adaptation to deal with all the complications and perplexities and problems of each successive age. It has taken the Church a long, long time to find out and to formulate, rightly or wrongly, what it has discovered in Jesus. The conclusions to be drawn from the simple Gospel truth, the presuppositions on which it rests, require all the efforts of all the Church through all the ages, and transcend them all. And I venture to say, though it may sound like unsupported dogma, that for this generation's questionings, social, moral, and political, the answer is to be found in Him. He, and He only, will interpret each generation to itself, and will meet its clamant needs. There is none other for the world to-day but the old Christ with the new aspect which the new conditions require.

Did it ever strike you how remarkable it is, and, as it seems to me, of how great worth as an argument for the truth of Christianity it is, that Jesus Christ comes to this, as to every generation, with the air of belonging to it? Think of the difference between the aspect which a Plato or a Socrates presents to the world to-day, and the aspect which that Lord presents. You do not need to strip anything off Him. He committed Himself to no statements which the progress of thought or knowledge has exploded. He stands before the world to-day fitting its needs as closely as He did those of the men of His own generation. The old Christ is the new Christ.

III. Lastly, in the Christian life the old commandment is perpetually new.

'Which thing is true ... in you.' That is to say, 'the commandment which ye received at the beginning,' when ye received Christ as Saviour, has in itself a power of adapting itself to all new conditions as they may emerge, and will be felt increasingly to grow stringent, and increasingly to demand more entire conformity, and increasingly to sweep its circle round the whole of human life. For this is the result of all obedience, that the conception of duty becomes more clear and more stringent. 'If any man will do His will' the reward shall be that he will see more and more the altitude of that will, the length and breadth and depth and height of the possible conformity of the human spirit to the will of God. And so as we advance in obedience we shall see unreached advances before us, and each new step of progress will declare more fully how much still remains to be accomplished. In us the 'old commandment' will become ever new.

And not only so, but perpetually with the increasing sweep and stringency of the obligation will be felt an increasing sense of our failure to fulfil it. Character is built up, for good or for evil, by slow degrees. Conscience is quickened by being listened to, and stifled by being neglected. A little speck of mud on a vestal virgin's robe, or on a swan's plumage, will be conspicuous, while a splash twenty times the size will pass unnoticed on the rags of some travel-stained wayfarer. The purer we become, the more we shall know ourselves to be impure.

Thus, my brother, there opens out before us an endless course in which all the blessedness that belongs to the entertaining and preservation of ancient convictions, lifelong friends, and familiar truths, and all the antithetical blessedness that belongs to the joy of seeing, rising upon our horizon as some new planet with lustrous light, will be united in our experience. We shall at once be

conservative and progressive; holding by the old Christ and the old commandment, and finding that both have in them endless novelty. The trunk is old; every summer brings fresh leaves. And at last we may hope to come to the new Jerusalem, and drink the new wine of the Kingdom, and yet find that the old love remains, and that the new Christ, whose presence makes the new heavens and the new earth, is 'the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,' the old Christ whom, amid the shadows of earth, we tried to love and copy.

1 John ii. 14— YOUTHFUL STRENGTH

'I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.'—1 John ii. 14.

'What am I going to be?' is the question that presses upon young people stepping out of the irresponsibilities of childhood into youth. But, unfortunately, the question is generally supposed to be answered when they have fixed upon a trade or profession. It means, rightly taken, a great deal more than that. 'What am I going to make of myself?' 'What ideal have I before me, towards which I constantly press?' is a question that I would fain lay upon the hearts of all that now hear me. For the misery and the reason of the failure of so many lives is simply that people have never fairly looked that question in the face and tried to answer it, but drift and drift, and let circumstances determine them. And, of course, in a world like this, such people are sure to turn out what such an immense number of people do turn out, failures as far as all God's purposes with humanity are concerned. The absence of a clear ideal is the misery and the loss of all young people who do not possess it.

So here in my text is an old man's notion of what young men ought to be and may be. 'Ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.'

So said the aged John to some amongst his hearers in these corrupt Asiatic cities. It was not merely a fair ideal painted upon vacancy, but it was a portrait of actual young Christians in these little Asiatic churches. And I would fain have some of you take this realised ideal for yours and see to it that your lives be conformed to it.

There are three points here. The Apostle, first of all, lays his finger upon the strength, which is something more than mere physical strength, proper to youth. Then he lets us see the secret source of that strength: 'Ye have the word of God abiding in you.' And then he shows the field on which it should be exercised, and the victory which it secures: 'And ye have overcome the wicked one.' Now let me touch upon these three points briefly in succession.

I. First, then, note here the strength which you young people ought to covet and to aim at.

It is not merely the physical strength proper to their age, nor the mere unworn buoyancy and vigour which sorrows and care and responsibilities have not thinned and weakened. These are great and precious gifts. We never know how precious they are until they have slipped away from us. These are great and precious gifts, to be preserved as long as may be, by purity and by moderation, and to be used for high and great purposes. But the strength that is in thews and muscles is not the strength that the Apostle is speaking about here, nor anything that belongs simply to the natural stage of your development, whether it be purely physical or purely mental. Samson was a far weaker man than the poor little Jew 'whose bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible,' and who all his days carried about with him that 'thorn in the flesh.' It is not your body that is to be strong, but yourselves.

Now the foundation of all true strength lies here, in a good, strong will. In this world, unless a man has learned to say 'No!' and to say it very decidedly, and to stick to it, he will never come to any good. Two words contain the secret of noble life: '*Resist!*' and '*Persist!*'

And the true strength of manhood lies in this mainly, that, in spite of all antagonisms, hindrances, voices, and things that array themselves against you, having greatly resolved, you do greatly do what you have resolved, and having said 'I will!' let neither men nor devils lead you to say, 'I will not.' Depend upon it, that to be weak in this direction is to be weak all through. Strong passions make weak men. And a strong will is the foundation, in this wicked and antagonistic world in which we live, of all real strength.

But then the strength that I would have you seek, and strive to cultivate, must be a strength of will founded upon strong reason. Determination unenlightened is obstinacy, and obstinacy is weakness. A mule can beat you at that: 'Be ye not as the mule, which have no understanding.' A determination which does not take into its view all the facts of the case, nor is influenced by these, has no right to call itself strength. It is only, to quote a modern saying—I know not whether true of the person to whom it was originally applied or no—is 'only a lath painted to look like iron.' Unintelligent obstinacy is folly, like the conduct of some man who sticks to his pick and his task in a quarry after the bugle has warned him of an impending explosion, which will blow him to atoms.

But that is not all. A strong will, illuminated by a strong beam of light from the understanding, must be guided and governed by a strong hand put forth by Conscience. 'I should like' is the weakling's motto. 'I will' may be an obstinate fool's motto. 'I ought, therefore, God helping me, and though the devil hinders me, I will,' is a man's. Conscience is king. To obey it is to be free; to neglect it is to be a slave.

Is not this a better ideal for life than gathering any outward possessions, however you may succeed therein? A thousand things will have to be taken into account, and may help or may hinder outward prosperity and success. But nobody can hinder you working at your character and succeeding in making it what it ought to be;

and to form character is the end of life. 'To be weak is miserable, doing or suffering.' Ay! that is true, though Milton put it into the devil's mouth. And there is only one strength that will last, 'for even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail.' But the strength of a fixed and illuminated and conscience-guided will, which governs the man and is governed by God, shall never faint or grow weak. This is the strength which we should seek, and which I ask you to make the conscious aim of your lives.

II. Now note, secondly, how to get it.

'Ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you.' Those young Asiatic Christians, that John had in his eye, had learned the secret and the conditions of this strength; and not only in limb and sinew, or in springy and elastic buoyancy of youthful, mental, and spiritual vigour were they strong, but they were so because 'the Word of God abode in them.' Now, there are two significations of that great expression, both of them frequent in John's Gospel, and both of them, I think, transferred to this Epistle, each of which may yield us a word of counsel. By 'the Word of God,' as I take it, is meant—perhaps I ought to say *both*, but, at all events, *either*—the revelation of God's truth in Holy Scripture, or the personal revelation of the will and nature of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Whichever of these two meanings—and at bottom they come to be one—we attach to this expression, we draw from them an exhortation. Let me put this very briefly.

Let me say to you, then, if you want to be strong, let Scripture truth occupy and fill and be always present to your mind. There are powers to rule and to direct all conduct, motive powers of the strongest character in these great truths of God's revelation. They are meant to influence a man in all his doings, and it is for us to bring the greatest and solemnest of them to bear on the smallest things of our daily life. Suppose, now, that you go to your work, and some little difficulty starts up in your path, or some trivial annoyance

ruffles your temper, or some lurking temptation is suddenly sprung upon you. Suppose your mind and heart were saturated with God's truth, with the great thoughts of His being, of His love, of His righteousness, of Christ's death for you, of Christ's presence with you, of Christ's guardianship over you, of Christ's present will that you should walk in His ways, of the bright hopes of the future, and the solemn vision of that great White Throne and the retribution that streams thence, do you think it would be possible for you to fall into sin, to yield to temptation, to be annoyed by any irritation or bother, or overweighted by any duty? No! Whosoever lives with the thoughts that God has given us in His Word familiar to His mind and within easy reach of His hand, has therein an armlet against all possible temptation, a test that will unveil the hidden corruption in the sweetest seductions, and a calming power that will keep his heart still and collected in the midst of agitations. If the Word of God in that lower sense of the principles involved in the gospel of Jesus Christ, dwell in your hearts, the fangs are taken out of the serpent. If you drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt you, and you will 'be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.'

Bring the greatest truths you can find to bear on the smallest duties, and the small duties will grow great to match the principles by which they are done. Bring the laws of Jesus Christ down to the little things, for, in the name of common sense, if our religion is not meant to regulate trifles, what is it meant to regulate? Life is made up of trifles. There are half a dozen crises in the course of your life, but there are a thousand trivial things in the course of every day. It would be a poor kind of regulating principle that controlled the crises, and left us alone to manage with the trifles the best way we could.

But in order that there shall be this continual operation of the motives and principles involved in the gospel upon our daily lives, we must have them very near our hand, ready to be laid hold of. The soldier that would march through an enemy's country, having left his

gun in the hands of some camp follower, would be very likely to be shot before he got his gun. I remember going through the Red Sea; at the mouth of it where the entrance is narrow, and the currents run strong, when the ship approaches the dangerous place, the men take their stations at appointed places, and the ponderous anchors are loosened and ready to be dropped in an instant if the swirl of the current sweeps the ship into dangerous proximity to the reef. It is no time to cut the lashings of the anchors when the keel is grating on the coral rocks. And it is no time to have to look about for our weapons when the sudden temptation leaps upon us like a strong man armed. You must have them familiar to you by devout meditation, by frequent reflection, prayer, study of God's Word, if they are to be of any use to you at all. And I am afraid that about the last book in the world that loads of young men and women think of sitting down to read, systematically and connectedly, is the Bible. You will read sermons and other religious books; you will read newspapers, pamphlets, novels; but the Scripture, in its entirety, is a strange book to myriads of men who call themselves Christians. And so they are weak. If you want to be strong, 'let the Word of God abide in your hearts.'

And then if we take the other view, which at bottom is not another, of the meaning of this phrase, and apply it rather to the personal word, Jesus Christ Himself, that will yield us another exhortation, and that is, let Jesus Christ into your hearts and keep Him there, and He will make you strong. I believe that it is no piece of metaphor or an exaggerated way of putting the continuance of the influence of Christ's example and Christ's teaching upon men's hearts and minds, when He tells us that 'if any man open the door He will come in and sup with him.' I want to urge the one thought on you that it is possible, in simple literal fact, for that Divine Saviour, who was 'in Heaven' whilst He walked on earth, and walks on earth to-day when He has returned to His native Heaven, to enter into my spirit and yours, and really to abide within us, the life of our lives, 'the strength of our hearts, and our portion for ever.' The rest of us can render

help to one another by strength ministered from without; Jesus Christ will come into your hearts, if you let Him, in His very sweetness and omnipotence of power, and will breathe His own grace into your weakness, strengthening you as from within. Others can help you from without, as you put an iron band round some over-weighted, crumbling brick pillar in order to prevent it from collapsing, but He will pass into us as you may drive an iron rod up through the centre of the column, and make it strong inside, and we shall be strong if Jesus Christ dwells within us. Open the door, dear young friends; let Christ come into your hearts, which He will do if you do not hinder Him, and if you ask Him. Trust Him with simple reliance upon Him for everything. Faith is 'the door'; the door is nothing of itself, but when it is opened it admits the guest. So do you let that Master come and abide, and you will hear Him say to you, as He said of old, 'Child! My grace is sufficient.' How modest He is. Sufficient!—an ocean *enough* to fill a thimble! 'My grace is sufficient for thee; and My strength is made perfect in weakness.'

III. Now, lastly, notice the field on which the strength is to be exercised, and the victory which it secures. 'Ye have overcome the wicked one.'

There is a battle for us all, on which I need not dwell, the conflict with evil around and with evil within, and with the prince of the embattled legions of the darkness, whom the New Testament has more clearly revealed to us. You young people have many advantages in the conflict; you have some special disadvantages as well. You have strong passions, you have not much experience, you do not know how bitter the dregs are of the cup whose foaming bubbles look so attractive, and whose upper inch tastes so sweet. But on the other hand you have not yet contracted habits that it is misery to indulge in, and, as it would seem, impossible to break, and the world is yet before you.

You cannot begin too soon to choose your side. And here is the side on which alone victory is possible for a man—the side of Jesus Christ, who will teach your hands to war and your fingers to fight.

Notice that remarkable phrase, 'Ye have overcome the wicked one.' He is talking to young Christians before whom the battle may seem to lie, and yet He speaks of their conquest as an accomplished fact, and as a thing behind them. What does that mean? It means this, that if you will take service in Christ's army, and by His grace resolve to be His faithful soldier till your life's end, that act of faith, which enrols you as His, is itself the victory which guarantees, if it be continued, the whole conquest in time.

There used to be an old superstition that—

'Who sheds the foremost foeman's life

His party conquers in the strife';

and whosoever has exercised, however imperfectly and feebly, the faith in Jesus Christ the Lord has therein conquered the devil and all his works, and Satan is henceforth a beaten Satan, and the battle, in essence, is completed even in the act of its being begun.

'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith'; not only because our confidence in Jesus Christ is the blowing of the bugle that summons to warfare and shakes off the tyrant's yoke, but it is also the means by which we join ourselves to Him who has overcome, and make His victory ours. He has fought our antagonist in the wilderness once, in Gethsemane twice, on the Cross thrice; and the perfect conquest in which Jesus bound the strong man and spoiled his goods may become, and will become, your conquest, if you wed yourselves to that dear Lord by simple faith in Him.

What a priceless thing it is that you may begin your independent manhood with a conquest that will draw after it ultimate and supreme victory. You will still have to fight, but you will have only

to fight detachments. If you trust yourselves to Jesus Christ you have conquered the main body of the army, and it is only the stragglers that you will have to contend with hereafter. He that loves Jesus, and has given himself to Him, has pinned the dragon to the ground by its head, and though it may 'swinge the scaly horror of its folded tail,' and twine its loathly coils around him, yet he has conquered, and he is conquering, and he will conquer. Only let him hold fast by the hand which brings strength into him by its touch.

Will you, dear young friends, take service in this army? Do you want to be weak or strong? Do you want your lives to be victorious whatever may happen to them in the way of outward prosperity or failure? Then give yourselves to this Lord. His voice calls you to be His soldiers. He will cover your heads in the day of battle. He will strengthen you 'with might by His Spirit in the inner man.' He will hide His Word in your heart that you offend not against Him. He will dwell Himself within you to make you strong in your extremest weakness and victorious over your mightiest foe; and in that sign you will conquer and 'be more than conquerors through Him that loved you.'

Oh, I pray that you may ask yourselves the question, 'What am I going to be?' and may answer it, 'I am going to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might'; and to overcome, as He also hath overcome, the world and the flesh and the devil.

1 John ii. 17— RIVER AND ROCK

'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'—1 John ii. 17.

John has been solemnly giving a charge not to love the world, nor the things that are in it. That charge was addressed to 'children,' 'young men,' 'fathers.' Whether these designations be taken as

referring to growth and maturity of Christian experience, or of natural age, they equally carry the lesson that no age and no stage is beyond the danger of being drawn away by the world's love, or beyond the need of the solemn dehortation therefrom.

My text is the second of the reasons which the Apostle gives for his earnest charge. We all, therefore, need it, and we always need it; though on the last Sunday of another year, it may be more than usually appropriate to turn our thoughts in its direction. 'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof.' Let us lay the handful of snow on our fevered foreheads and cool our desires.

Now there are but two things set forth in this text, which is a great and wonderful antithesis between something which is in perpetual flux and passage and some thing which is permanent. If I might venture to cast the two thoughts into metaphorical form, I should say that here are a river and a rock. The one, the sad truth of sense, universally believed and as universally forgotten; the other, the glad truth of faith, so little regarded or operative in men's lives.

I ask you, then, to look with me for a few moments at each of these thoughts.

I. First, then, the river, or the sad truth of sense.

Now you observe that there are two things in my text of which this transiency is predicated, the one 'the world,' the other 'the lust thereof'; the one outside us, the other within us. As to the former, I need only, I suppose, remind you in a sentence that what John means by 'the world' is not the material globe on which we dwell, but the whole aggregate of things visible and material, together with the lives of the men whose lives are directed to, and bounded by, that visible and material, and all considered as wrenched apart from God. That, and not the mere external physical creation, is what he means by 'the world,' and therefore the passing away of which he speaks is not only (although, of course, it includes) the decay and

dissolution of material things, but the transiency of things which are or have to do with the visible, and are separated by us from God. Over all these, he says, there is written the sentence, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.' There is a continual flowing on of the stream. As the original implies even more strongly than in our translation, 'the world' is in the act of 'passing away.' Like the slow travelling of the scenes of some moveable panorama which glide along, even as the eye looks upon them, and are concealed behind the side flats before the gazer has taken in the whole picture, so equably, constantly, silently, and therefore unnoticed by us, all is in a state of continual motion. There is no *present* time. Even whilst we name the moment it dies. The drop hangs for an instant on the verge, gleaming in the sunlight, and then falls into the gloomy abyss that silently sucks up years and centuries. There is no present, but all is movement.

Brethren, that has been the commonplace of moralists and poets and preachers from the beginning of time; and it would be folly for me to suppose that I can add anything to the impressiveness of the thought. All that I want to do is to wake you up to preach it to yourselves, for that is the only thing that is of any use.

'So passeth, in the passing of an hour

Of mortal life, the leaf, the bud, the flower.'

But besides this transiency external to us, John finds a corresponding transiency within us. 'The world passeth, and the lust thereof.' Of course the word 'lust' is employed by him in a much wider sense than in our use of it. With us it means one specific and very ugly form of earthly desire. With him it includes the whole genus—all desires of every sort, more or less noble or ignoble, which have this for their characteristic, that they are directed to, stimulated by, and fed or starved on, the fleeting things of this outward life. If thus a man has anchored himself to that which has no perpetual stay, so long as the cable holds he follows the fate of

the thing to which he has pinned himself. And if it perish he perishes, in a very profound sense, with it. If you trust yourselves in the leaky vessel, when the water rises in *it* it will drown *you*, and you will go to the bottom with the craft to which you have trusted yourselves. If you embark in the little ship that carries Christ and His fortunes, you will come with Him to the haven.

But these fleeting desires, of which my text speaks, point to that sad feature of human experience, that we all outgrow and leave behind us, and think of very little value, the things that once to us were all but heaven. There was a time when toys and sweetmeats were our treasures, and since that day how many burnt-out hopes we all have had! How little we should know ourselves if we could go back to the fears and wishes and desires that used to agitate us ten, twenty, thirty years ago! They lie behind us, no longer part of ourselves; they have slipped away from us, and

'We all are changed, by still degrees,

All but the basis of the soul.'

The self-conscious same man abides, and yet how different the same man is! Our lives, then will zig-zag instead of keeping a straight course, if we let desires that are limited by anything that we can see guide and regulate us.

But, brethren, though it be a digression from my text, I cannot help touching for a moment upon a yet sadder thought than that. There are desires that *remain*, when the gratification of them has become impossible. Sometimes the lust outlasts the world, sometimes the world outlasts the lust; and one knows not whether is the sadder. There is a hell upon earth for many of us who, having set our affections upon some creatural object, and having had that withdrawn from us, are ready to say, 'They have taken away my gods! And what shall I do?' And there is a hell of the same sort waiting beyond those dark gates through which we have all to pass,

where men who never desired anything, except what the world that has slipped out of their reluctant fingers could give them, are shut up with impossible longings after a for-ever-vanished good. 'Father Abraham! a drop of water; for I am tormented in this flame.' That is what men come to, if the fire of their lust burn after its objects are withdrawn.

But let me remind you that this transiency of which I have been speaking receives very strange treatment from most of us. I do not know that it is altogether to be regretted that it so seldom comes to men's consciousness. Perhaps it is right that it should not be uppermost in our thoughts always; but yet there is no vindication for the entire oblivion to which we condemn it. The march of these fleeting things is like that of cavalry with their horses' feet wrapped in straw, in the night, across the snow, silent and unnoticed. We cannot realise the revolution of the earth, because everything partakes in it. We talk about standing still, and we are whirling through space with inconceivable rapidity. By a like illusion we deceive ourselves with the notion of stability, when everything about us is hastening away. Some of you do not like to be reminded of it, and think it a killjoy. You try to get rid of the thought, and hide your head in the sand, and fancy that the rest of your body presents no mark to the archer's arrow. Now surely common sense says to all, that if there be some fact certain and plain and applying to you, which, if accepted, would profoundly modify your life, you ought to take it into account. And what I want you to do, dear friends, now, is to look in the face this fact, which you all acknowledge so utterly that some of you are ready to say, 'What was the use of coming to a chapel to hear that threadbare old thing dinned into my ears again?' and to take it into account in shaping your lives. Have you done so? Have you? Suppose a man that lived in a land habitually shaken by earthquakes were to say, 'I mean to ignore the fact; and I am going to build a house just as if there was not such a thing as an earthquake expected'; he would have it toppling about his ears very soon. Suppose a man upon the ice-slopes of the Alps was to say, 'I am

going to ignore slipperiness and gravitation,' he would before long find himself, if there was any consciousness left in him, at the bottom of a precipice, bruised and bleeding. And suppose a man says, 'I am not going to take the fleetingness of the things of earth into account at all, but intend to live as if all things were to remain as they are'; what would become of him do you think? Is he a wise man or a fool? And is he *you*? He *is* some of you! 'So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.'

Then let me say to you, see that you take noble lessons out of these undeniable and all-important facts. There is one kind of lesson that I do not want you to take out of it. 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,' or, to put it into a more vulgar formula, 'A short life and a merry one.' The mere contemplation of the transiency of earthly things may, and often does, lend itself to very ignoble conclusions, and men draw from it the thought that, as life is short, they had better crowd into it as much of sensual enjoyment as they can.

'Gather ye roses while ye may' is a very common keynote, struck by poets of the baser sort. And it is a thought that influences some of us, I have little doubt. Or there may be another consideration. 'Make hay whilst the sun shines.' 'Hurry on your getting rich, because you have not very long to do it in'; or the like.

Now all that is supremely unworthy. The true lesson to be drawn is the plain, old one which it is never superfluous to shout into men's ears, until they have obeyed it—viz., 'Set not thine heart on that which is not; and which flieth away as an eagle towards heaven.' Do you, dear brother, see to it, that your roots go down through the gravel on the surface. Do you see to it that you dig deeper than that; and thrusting your hand, as it were, through the thin, silk-paper screen that stands between you and the Eternal, grasp the hand that you will find on the other side, waiting and ready to clasp you, and to hold you up.

When they build a new house in Rome they have to dig down through sometimes sixty or a hundred feet of rubbish that runs like water, the ruins of old temples and palaces, once occupied by men in the same flush of life in which we are now. We too have to dig down through ruins, until we get to the Rock and build there, and build secure. Withdraw your affections and your thoughts and your desires from the fleeting, and fix them on the permanent. If a captain takes anything but the pole-star for his fixed point he will lose his reckoning, and his ship will be on the reefs. If we take anything but God for our supreme delight and desire we shall perish.

Then let me say, too, let this thought stimulate us to crowd every moment, as full as it can be packed, with noble work and heavenly thoughts. These fleeting things are elastic, and you may put all but infinite treasure into them. Think of what the possibilities, for each of us, of this dying year were on the 1st of January; and of what the realisation has been by the 28th of December. So much that we could have done! so little that we have done! So many ripples of the river have passed, bearing no golden sand to pile upon the shore! 'We have been' is a sad word; but oh, the one sad word is, 'We might have been!' And, so, do you see to it that you fill time with that which is kindred to eternity, and make 'one day as a thousand years' in the elastic possibilities and realities of consecration and of service.

Further, let the thought help us to the conviction of the relative insignificance of all that can change. That will not spoil nor shade any real joy; rather it will add to it poignancy that prevents it from cloying or from becoming the enemy of our souls. But the thought will wondrously lighten the burden that we have to carry, and the tasks which we have to perform. 'But for a moment,' makes all light. There was an old rabbi, long ago, whose real name was all but lost, because everybody nick-named him 'Rabbi Thisalso.' The reason was because he had perpetually on his lips the saying about

everything as it came, 'This also will pass.' He was a wise man. Let us go to his school and learn his wisdom.

II. Now let me say a word, and it can only be a word, about the second of the thoughts here, which I designated as the Rock, or the glad truth of Faith.

We might have expected that John's antithesis to the world that passeth would have been the God that abides. But he does not so word his sentence, although the thought of the divine permanence underlies it. Rather over against the fleeting world he puts the abiding man who does the will of God.

Of course there is a very solemn sense in which all men, even they who have most exclusively lived for what they call the present, do last for ever, and in which their deeds do so too. After death is the judgment, and the issues of eternity depend upon the actions of time; and every fleeting thought comes back to the hand that projected it, like the Australian savage's boomerang that, flung out, returns and falls at the feet of the thrower. But that is not what John means by 'abiding for ever.' He means something very much more blessed and lofty than that; and the following is the course of his thought. There is only one permanent Reality in the universe, and that is God. All else is shadow and He is the substance. All else was, is, and is not. He is the One who was, is, and is to come, the timeless and only permanent Being. The will of God is the permanent element in all changeful material things. And consequently he who does the will of God links himself with the Divine Eternity, and becomes partaker of that solemn and blessed Being which lives above mutation.

Obedience to God's will is the permanent element in human life. Whosoever humbly and trustfully seeks to mould his will after the divine will, and to bring God's will into practice in his doings, that man has pierced through the shadows and grasped the substance, and partakes of the Immortality which he adores and serves. Himself shall live for ever in the true life which is blessedness. His deeds

shall live for ever when all that lifted itself in opposition to the Divine will shall be crushed and annihilated. They shall live in His own peaceful consciousness; they shall live in the blessed rewards which they shall bring to the doers. His habits will need no change.

What will you do when you are dead? You have to go into a world where there are no gossip and no housekeeping; no mills and no offices; no shops, no books; no colleges and no sciences to learn. What will you do there? 'He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' If you have done your housekeeping, and your weaving and spinning, and your book-keeping, and your buying and selling, and your studying, and your experimenting with a conscious reference to God, it is all right. That has made the act capable of eternity, and there will be no need for such a man to change. The material on which he works will change, but the inner substance of his life will be unaffected by the trivial change from earth to heaven. Whilst the endless ages roll he will be doing just what he was doing down here; only here he was playing with counters, and yonder he will be trusted with gold, and dominion over ten cities. To all other men the change that comes when earth passes from them, or they from it, is as when a trench is dug across a railway, into which the express goes with a smash, and there is an end. To the man who, in the trifles of time, has been obeying the will of God, and therefore subserving eternity and his interests there, the trench is bridged, and he will go on after he crosses it just as he did before, with the same purpose, the same desires, the same submission, and the same drinking into himself of the fulness of immortal life.

Brother, John tells us that obedience to the will of God brings permanence into our fleeting years. But how are we to obey the will of God? John tells us that the only way is by love. But how are we to love God? John tells us that the only way to love—which love is the only way to obedience—is by knowing and believing the love that God hath to us. But how are we to know that God hath love to us? John tells us that the only way to know the love of God, which is the

only way of our loving Him, which in its turn is the only way to obedience, which again is the only way to permanence of life, is to believe in Jesus Christ and His propitiation for our sins. The river flows on for ever, but it sweeps round the base of the Rock of Ages. And in Him, by faith in His blood, we may find our sure refuge and eternal home.

1 John iii. 1— THE LOVE THAT CALLS US SONS

'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God....'—1 John iii. 1.

One or two points of an expository character will serve to introduce what else I have to say on these words.

The text is, I suppose, generally understood as if it pointed to the fact that we are called the sons of God as the great exemplification of the wonderfulness of His love. That is a perfectly possible view of the connection and meaning of the text. But if we are to translate with perfect accuracy we must render, not 'that we should be called,' but '*in order that* we should be called the sons of God.' The meaning then is that the love bestowed is the means by which the design that we should be called His sons is accomplished. What John calls us to contemplate with wonder and gratitude is not only the fact of this marvellous love, but also the glorious end to which it has been given to us and works. There seems no reason for slurring over this meaning in favour of the more vague 'that' of our version. God gives His great and wonderful love in Jesus Christ, and all the gifts and powers which live in Him like fragrance in the rose. All this lavish bestowal of love, unspeakable as it is, may be regarded as having one great end, which God deems worthy of even such expenditure, namely, that men should become, in the deepest sense, His children. It is not so much to the contemplation of our blessedness in being sons, as to the devout gaze on the love which, by its wonderful

process, has made it possible for us to be sons, that we are summoned here.

Again, you will find a remarkable addition to our text in the Revised Version—namely, 'and such we are.' Now these words come with a very great weight of manuscript authority, and of internal evidence. They are parenthetical, a kind of rapid 'aside' of the writer's, expressing his joyful confidence that he and his brethren are sons of God, not only in name, but in reality. They are the voice of personal assurance, the voice of the spirit 'by which we cry Abba, Father,' breaking in for a moment on the flow of the sentence, like an irrepressible, glad answer to the Father's call. With these explanations let us look at the words.

I. The love that is given.

We are called upon to come with our little vessels to measure the contents of the great ocean, to plumb with our short lines the infinite abyss, and not only to estimate the quantity but the quality of that love, which, in both respects, surpasses all our means of comparison and conception.

Properly speaking, we can do neither the one nor the other, for we have no line long enough to sound its depths, and no experience which will give us a standard with which to compare its quality. But all that we can do, John would have us do—that is, look and ever look at the working of that love till we form some not wholly inadequate idea of it.

We can no more 'behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us' than we can look with undimmed eyes right into the middle of the sun. But we can in some measure imagine the tremendous and beneficent forces that ride forth horsed on his beams to distances which the imagination faints in trying to grasp, and reach their journey's end unwearied and ready for their task as when it began. Here are we, ninety odd millions of miles from the

centre of the system, yet warmed by its heat, lighted by its beams, and touched for good by its power in a thousand ways. All that has been going on for no one knows how many æons. How mighty the Power which produces these effects! In like manner, who can gaze into the fiery depths of that infinite Godhead, into the ardours of that immeasurable, incomparable, inconceivable love? But we can look at and measure its activities. We can see what it does, and so can, in some degree, understand it, and feel that after all we have a measure for the Immeasurable, a comparison for the Incomparable, and can *thus* 'behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us.'

So we have to turn to the work of Christ, and especially to His death, if we would estimate the love of God. According to John's constant teaching, that is the great proof that God loves us. The most wonderful revelation to every heart of man of the depths of that Divine heart lies in the gift of Jesus Christ. The Apostle bids me 'behold what manner of love.' I turn to the Cross, and I see there a love which shrinks from no sacrifice, but gives 'Him up to death for us all.' I turn to the Cross, and I see there a love which is evoked by no loveliness on my part, but comes from the depth of His own Infinite Being, who loves because He must, and who must because He is God. I turn to the Cross, and I see there manifested a love which sighs for recognition, which desires nothing of me but the repayment of my poor affection, and longs to see its own likeness in me. And I see there a love that will not be put away by sinfulness, and shortcomings, and evil, but pours its treasures on the unworthy, like sunshine on a dunghill. So, streaming through the darkness of eclipse, and speaking to me even in the awful silence in which the Son of Man died there for sin, I 'behold,' and I hear, the 'manner of love that the Father hath bestowed upon us,' stronger than death and sin, armed with all power, gentler than the fall of the dew, boundless and endless, in its measure measureless, in its quality transcendent—the love of God to me in Jesus Christ my Saviour.

In like manner we have to think, if we would estimate the 'manner of this love,' that through and in the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ there comes to us the gift of a divine life like His own. Perhaps it may be too great a refinement of interpretation; but it certainly does seem to me that that expression 'to bestow His love upon' us, is not altogether the same as 'to love us,' but that there is a greater depth in it. There may be some idea of that love itself being as it were infused into us, and not merely of its consequences or tokens being given to us; as Paul speaks of 'the love of God shed abroad in our hearts' by the spirit which is given to us. At all events this communication of divine life, which is at bottom divine love—for God's life is God's love—is His great gift to men.

Be that as it may, these two are the great tokens, consequences, and measures of God's love to us—the gift of Christ, and that which is the sequel and outcome thereof, the gift of the Spirit which is breathed into Christian spirits. These two gifts, which are one gift, embrace all that the world needs. Christ for us and Christ in us must both be taken into account if you would estimate the manner of the love that God has bestowed upon us.

We may gain another measure of the greatness of this love if we put an emphasis—which I dare say the writer did not intend—on one word of this text, and think of the love given to '*us*,' such creatures as we are. Out of the depths we cry to Him. Not only by the voice of our supplications, but even when we raise no call of entreaty, our misery pleads with His merciful heart, and from the heights there comes upon our wretchedness and sin the rush of this great love, like a cataract, which sweeps away all our sins, and floods us with its own blessedness and joy. The more we know ourselves, the more wonderingly and thankfully shall we bow down our hearts before Him, as we measure His mercy by our unworthiness.

From all His works the same summons echoes. They all call us to see mirrored in them His loving care. But the Cross of Christ and the

gift of a Divine Spirit cry aloud to every ear in tones of more beseeching entreaty and of more imperative command to 'behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.'

II. Look next at the sonship which is the purpose of His given Love.

It has often been noticed that the Apostle John uses for that expression 'the sons of God,' another word from that which his brother Paul uses. John's phrase would perhaps be a little more accurately translated 'children of God,' whilst Paul, on the other hand, very seldom says 'children,' but almost always says 'sons.' Of course the children are sons and the sons are children, but still, the slight distinction of phrase is characteristic of the men, and of the different points of view from which they speak about the same thing. John's word lays stress on the children's kindred nature with their father and on their immature condition.

But without dwelling on that, let us consider this great gift and dignity of being children of God, which is the object that God has in view in all the lavish bestowment of His goodness upon us.

That end is not reached by God's making us men. Over and above that He has to send this great gift of His love, in order that the men whom He has made may become His sons. If you take the context here you will see very clearly that the writer draws a broad distinction between 'the sons of God' and 'the world' of men who do not comprehend them, and so far from being themselves sons, do not even know God's sons when they see them. And there is a deeper and solemn word still in the context. John thinks that men (within the range of light and revelation, at all events) are divided into two families—'the children of God and the children of the devil.' There *are* two families amongst men.

Thank God, the prodigal son in his rags amongst the swine, and lying by the swine-troughs in his filth and his husks, and his fever, *is* a son! No doubt about that! He has these three elements and

marks of sonship that no man ever gets rid of: he is of a divine origin, he has a divine likeness in that he has got mind and will and spirit, and he is the object of a divine love.

The doctrine of the New Testament about the Fatherhood of God and the sonship of man does not in the slightest degree interfere with these three great truths, that all men, though the features of the common humanity may be almost battered out of recognition in them, are all children of God because He made them; that they are children of God because still there lives in them something of the likeness of the creative Father; and, blessed be His name! that they are all children of God because He loves and provides and cares for every one of them.

All that is blessedly and eternally true; but it is also true that there is a higher relation than that to which the name 'children of God' is more accurately given, and to which in the New Testament that name is confined. If you ask what that relation is, let me quote to you three passages in this Epistle which will answer the question. 'Whoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God,' that is the first; 'Every one that doeth righteousness is born of God,' that is the second; 'Every one that loveth is born of God,' that is the third. Or to put them all into one expression which holds them all, in the great words of his prologue in the first chapter of John's Gospel you find this: 'To as many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God.' Believing in Christ with loving trust produces, and doing righteousness and loving the brethren, as the result of that belief, prove the fact of sonship in its highest and its truest sense.

What is implied in that great word by which the Almighty gives us a name and a place as of sons and daughters? Clearly, first, a communicated life, therefore, second, a kindred nature which shall be 'pure as He is pure,' and, third, growth to full maturity.

This sonship, which is no mere empty name, is the aim and purpose of God's dealings, of all the revelation of His love, and most

especially of the great gift of His love in Christ. Has that purpose been accomplished in you? Have you ever looked at that great gift of love that God has given you on purpose to make you His child? If you have, has it made you one? Are you trusting to Jesus Christ, whom God has sent forth that we might receive the standing of sons in Him? Are you a child of God because a brother of that Saviour? Have you received the gift of a divine life through Him? My friend, remember the grim alternative! A child of God or a child of the devil! Bitter words, narrow words, uncharitable words—as people call them! And I believe, and therefore I am bound to say it, *true* words, which it concerns *you* to lay to heart.

III. Now, still further, let me ask you to look at the glad recognition of this sonship by the child's heart.

I have already referred to the clause added in the Revised Version, 'and such we are.' As I said, it is a kind of 'aside,' in which John adds the Amen for himself and for his poor brothers and sisters toiling and moiling obscure among the crowds of Ephesus, to the great truth. He asserts his and their glad consciousness of the reality of the fact of their sonship, which they know to be no empty title. He asserts, too, the present possession of that sonship, realising it as a fact, amid all the commonplace vulgarities and carking cares and petty aims of life's little day. 'Such we are' is the 'Here am I, Father,' of the child answering the Father's call, 'My Son.'

He turns doctrine into experience. He is not content with merely having the thought in his creed, but his heart clasps it, and his whole nature responds to the great truth. I ask you, do you do that? Do not be content with hearing the truth, or even with assenting to it, and believing it in your understandings. The truth is nothing to you, unless you have made it your very own by faith. Do not be satisfied with the orthodox confession. Unless it has touched your heart and made your whole soul thrill with thankful gladness and quiet triumph, it is nothing to you. The mere belief of thirty-nine or thirty-

nine thousand Articles is nothing; but when a man has a true heart-faith in Him, whom all articles are meant to make us know and love, then dogma becomes life, and the doctrine feeds the soul. Does it do so with you, my brother? Can *you* say, 'And such we are?'

Take another lesson. The Apostle was not afraid to say 'I know that I am a child of God.' There are many very good people, whose tremulous, timorous lips have never ventured to say 'I know.' They will say, 'Well, I hope,' or sometimes, as if that was not uncertain enough, they will put in an adverb or two, and say, 'I humbly hope that I am.' It is a far robuster kind of Christianity, a far truer one, ay, and a humbler one too, that throws all considerations of my own character and merits, and all the rest of that rubbish, clean behind me, and when God says, 'My son!' says 'My Father;' and when God calls us His children, leaps up and gladly answers, 'And we are!' Do not be afraid of being too confident, if your confidence is built on God, and not on yourselves; but be afraid of being too diffident, and be afraid of having a great deal of self-righteousness masquerading under the guise of such a profound consciousness of your own unworthiness that you dare not call yourself a child of God. It is not a question of worthiness or unworthiness. It is a question, in the first place, and mainly, of the truth of Christ's promise and the sufficiency of Christ's Cross; and in a very subordinate degree of anything belonging to you.

IV. We have here, finally, the loving and devout gaze upon this wonderful love. 'Behold,' at the beginning of my text, is not the mere exclamation which you often find both in the Old and in the New Testaments, which is simply intended to emphasise the importance of what follows, but it is a distinct command to do the thing, to look, and ever to look, and to look again, and live in the habitual and devout contemplation of that infinite and wondrous love of God.

I have but two remarks to make about that, and the one is this, that such a habit of devout and thankful meditation upon the love of

God, as manifested in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the consequent gift of the Divine Spirit, joined with the humble, thankful conviction that I am a child of God thereby, lies at the foundation of all vigorous and happy Christian life. How can a thing which you do not touch with your hands and see with your eyes produce any effect upon you, unless you think about it? How can a religion which can only influence through thought and emotion do anything in you, or for you, unless you occupy your thoughts and your feelings with it? It is sheer nonsense to suppose it possible. Things which do not appeal to sense are real to us, and indeed we may say, *are* at all for us, only as we think about them. If you had a dear friend in Australia, and never thought about him, he would even cease to be dear, and it would be all one to you as if he were dead. If he were really dear to you, you *would* think about him. We may say (though, of course, there are other ways of looking at the matter) that, in a very intelligible sense, the degree in which we think about Christ, and in Him behold the love of God, is a fairly accurate measure of our Christianity.

Now will you apply that sharp test to yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that, and decide how much of your life was pagan, and how much of it was Christian? You will never make anything of your professed Christianity, you will never get a drop of happiness or any kind of good out of it; it will neither be a strength nor a joy nor a defence to you unless you make it your habitual occupation to 'behold the manner of love'; and look and look and look until it warms and fills your heart.

The second remark is that we cannot keep that great sight before the eye of our minds without effort. You will have very resolutely to look away from something else if, amid all the dazzling gauds of earth, you are to see the far-off lustre of that heavenly love. Just as timorous people in a thunder-storm will light a candle that they may not see the lightning, so many Christians have their hearts filled with the twinkling light of some miserable tapers of earthly care and

pursuits, which, though they be dim and smoky, are bright enough to make it hard to see the silent depths of Heaven, though it blaze with a myriad stars. If you hold a sixpence close enough up to the pupil of your eye, it will keep you from seeing the sun. And if you hold the world close to mind and heart, as many of you do, you will only see, round the rim of it, the least tiny ring of the overlapping love of God. What the world lets you see you will see, and the world will take care that it will let you see very little—not enough to do you any good, not enough to deliver you from its chains. Wrench yourselves away, my brethren, from the absorbing contemplation of Birmingham jewellery and paste, and look at the true riches. If you have ever had some glimpses of that wondrous love, and have ever been drawn by it to cry, 'Abba, Father,' do not let the trifles which belong not to your true inheritance fill your thoughts, but renew the vision, and by determined turning away of your eyes from beholding vanity, look off from the things that are seen, that you may gaze upon the things that are not seen, and chiefest among them, upon the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you have never looked on that love, I beseech you now to turn aside and see this great sight. Do not let that brightness burn unnoticed while your eyes are fixed on the ground, like the gaze of men absorbed in gold digging, while a glorious sunshine is flushing the eastern sky. Look to the unspeakable, incomparable, immeasurable love of God, in giving up His Son to death for us all. Look and be saved. Look and live. 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on you,' and, beholding, you will become the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty.

1 John iii. 2— THE UNREVEALED FUTURE OF THE SONS OF GOD

'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.'—1 John iii. 2.

I have hesitated, as you may well believe, whether I should take these words for a text. They seem so far to surpass anything that can be said concerning them, and they cover such immense fields of dim thought, that one may well be afraid lest one should spoil them by even attempting to dilate on them. And yet they are so closely connected with the words of the previous verse, which formed the subject of my last sermon, that I felt as if my work were only half done unless I followed that sermon with this.

The present is the prophet of the future, says my text: 'Now we are the sons of God, *and*' (not 'but') 'it doth not yet appear what we shall be.' Some men say, 'Ah! *now are* we, but we shall be—nothing!' John does not think so. John thinks that if a man is a son of God he will always be so. There are three things in this verse, how, if we are God's children, our sonship makes us quite sure of the future; how our sonship leaves us largely in ignorance of the future, but how our sonship flings one bright, all-penetrating beam of light on the only important thing about the future, the clear vision of and the perfect likeness to Him who is our life. 'Now are we the sons of God,' therefore we shall be. We are the sons; we do not know what we shall be. We are the sons, and therefore, though there be a great circumference of blank ignorance as to our future, yet, blessed be His name, there is a great light burning in the middle of it! 'We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

I. The fact of sonship makes us quite sure of the future.

I am not concerned to appraise the relative value of the various arguments and proofs, or, it may be, presumptions, which may recommend the doctrine of a future life to men, but it seems to me that the strongest reasons for believing in another world are these two:—first, that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and has gone up there; and, second, that a man here can pray, and trust, and love God, and feel that he is His child. As was noticed in the preceding

sermon, the word rendered 'sons' might more accurately be translated 'children.' If so, we may fairly say, 'We are the *children* of God now—and if we are children now, we shall be grown up some time.' Childhood leads to maturity. The infant becomes a man.

That is to say, he that here, in an infantile way, is stammering with his poor, unskilled lips the name 'Abba! Father!' will one day come to speak it fully. He that dimly trusts, he that partially loves, he that can lift up his heart in some more or less unworthy prayer and aspiration after God, in all these emotions and exercises, has the great proof in himself that such emotions, such relationship, can never be put an end to. The roots have gone down through the temporal, and have laid hold of the Eternal. Anything seems to me to be more credible than that a man who can look up and say, 'My Father,' shall be crushed by what befalls the mere outside of him; anything seems to me to be more believable than to suppose that the nature which is capable of these elevating emotions and aspirations of confidence and hope, which can know God and yearn after Him, and can love Him, is to be wiped out like a gnat by the finger of Death. The material has nothing to do with these feelings, and if I know myself, in however feeble and imperfect a degree, to be the son of God, I carry in the conviction the very pledge and seal of eternal life. That is a thought 'whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that it was born for immortality.' 'We are the sons of God,' therefore we shall always be so, in all worlds, and whatsoever may become of this poor wrappage in which the soul is shrouded.

We may notice, also, that not only the fact of our sonship avails to assure us of immortal life, but that also the very form which our religious experience takes points in the same direction.

As I said, infancy is the prophecy of maturity. 'The child is father of the man'; the bud foretells the flower. In the same way, the very imperfections of the Christian life, as it is seen here, argue the existence of another state, where all that is here in the germ shall be

fully matured, and all that is here incomplete shall attain the perfection which alone will correspond to the power that works in us. Think of the ordinary Christian character. The beginning is there, and evidently no more than the beginning. As one looks at the crudity, the inconsistencies, the failings, the feebleness of the Christian life of others, or of oneself, and then thinks that such a poor, imperfect exhibition is all that so divine a principle has been able to achieve in this world, one feels that there must be a region and a time where we shall be all which the transforming power of God's spirit can make us. The very inconsistencies of Christians are as strong reasons for believing in the perfect life of Heaven as their purities and virtues are. We have a right to say mighty principles are at work upon Christian souls—the power of the Cross, the power of love issuing in obedience, the power of an indwelling Spirit; and is this all that these great forces are going to effect on human character? Surely a seed so precious and divine is somewhere, and at some time, to bring forth something better than these few poor, half-developed flowers, something with more lustrous petals and richer fragrance. The plant is clearly an exotic; does not its obviously struggling growth here tell of warmer suns and richer soil, where it will be at home?

There is a great deal in every man, and most of all in Christian men and women, which does not fit this present. All other creatures correspond in their capacities to the place where they are set down; and the world in which the plant or the animal lives, the world of their surroundings, stimulates to activity all their powers. But that is not so with a man. 'Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests.' They fit exactly, and correspond to their 'environment.' But a man!—there is an enormous amount of waste faculty about him if he is only to live in this world. There are large capacities in every nature, and most of all in a Christian nature, which are like the packages that emigrants take with them, marked 'Not wanted on the voyage.' These go down into the hold, and they are only of use after landing in the new world. If I am a son of God I have much in me that is 'not

wanted on the voyage,' and the more I grow into His likeness, the more I am thrown out of harmony with the things round about me, in proportion as I am brought into harmony with the things beyond.

That consciousness of belonging to another order of things, because I am God's child, will make me sure that when I have done with earth, the tie that binds me to my Father will not be broken, but that I shall go home, where I shall be fully and for ever all that I so imperfectly began to be here, where all gaps in my character shall be filled up, and the half-completed circle of my heavenly perfectness shall grow like the crescent moon, into full-orbed beauty. 'Neither life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature' shall be able to break that tie, and banish the child from the conscious grasp of a Father's hand. Dear brother and sister, can you say, 'Now am I a child of God!' Then you may patiently and peacefully front that dim future.

II. Now I come to the second point, namely, that we remain ignorant of much in that future.

That happy assurance of the love of God resting upon me, and making me His child through Jesus Christ, does not dissipate all the darkness which lies on that beyond. 'We are the sons of God, *and*,' just because we are, 'it does not yet appear what we shall be.' Or, as the words are rendered in the Revised Version, 'it is not yet made manifest what we shall be.'

The meaning of that expression, 'It doth not yet appear,' or, 'It is not made manifest,' may be put into very plain words. John would simply say to us, 'There has never been set forth before men's eyes in this earthly life of ours an example, or an instance, of what the sons of God are to be in another state of being.' And so, because men have never had the instance before them, they do not know much about that state.

In some sense there has been a manifestation through the life of Jesus Christ. Christ has died; Christ is risen again. Christ has gone about amongst men upon earth after Resurrection. Christ has been raised to the right hand of God, and sits there in the glory of the Father. So far it has been manifested what we shall be. But the risen Christ is not the glorified Christ, and although He has set forth before man's senses irrefragably the fact of another life, and to some extent given glimpses and gleams of knowledge with regard to certain portions of it, I suppose that the 'glorious body' of Jesus Christ was not assumed by Him till the cloud 'received Him out of their sight,' nor, indeed, could it be assumed while He moved among the material realities of this world, and did eat and drink before them. So that, while we thankfully recognise that Christ's Resurrection and Ascension have 'brought life and immortality to light,' we must remember that it is the fact, and not the manner of the fact, which they make plain; and that, even after His example, it has not been manifested what is the body of glory which He now wears, and therefore it has not yet been manifested what we shall be when we are fashioned after its likeness.

There has been no manifestation, then, to sense, or to human experience, of that future, and, therefore, there is next to no knowledge about it. You can only know facts when the facts are communicated. You may speculate and argue and guess as much as you like, but that does not thin the darkness one bit. The unborn child has no more faculty or opportunity for knowing what the life upon earth is like than man here, in the world, has for knowing that life beyond. The chrysalis' dreams about what it would be when it was a butterfly would be as reliable as a man's imagination of what a future life will be.

So let us feel two things:—Let us be thankful that we do not know, for the ignorance is the sign of the greatness; and then, let us be sure that just the very mixture of knowledge and ignorance which we have about another world is precisely the food which is most fitted

to nourish imagination and hope. If we had more knowledge, supposing it could be given, of the conditions of that future life, it would lose some of its power to attract. Ignorance does not always prevent the occupation of the mind with a subject. Blank ignorance does; but ignorance, shot with knowledge like a tissue which, when you hold it one way seems all black, and when you tilt it another, seems golden, stimulates desire, hope, and imagination. So let us thankfully acquiesce in the limited knowledge.

Fools can ask questions which wise men cannot answer, and will not ask. There are questions which, sometimes, when we are thinking about our own future, and sometimes when we see dear ones go away into the mist, become to us almost torture. It is easy to put them; it is not so easy to say: 'Thank God, we cannot answer them yet!' If we could it would only be because the experience of earth was adequate to measure the experience of Heaven; and that would be to bring the future down to the low levels of this present. Let us be thankful then that so long as we can only speak in language derived from the experiences of earth, we have yet to learn the vocabulary of Heaven. Let us be thankful that our best help to know what we shall be is to reverse much of what we are, and that the loftiest and most positive declarations concerning the future lie in negatives like these:—'I saw no temple therein.' 'There shall be no night there.' 'There shall be no curse there.' 'There shall be no more sighing nor weeping, for the former things are passed away.'

The white mountains keep their secret well; not until we have passed through the black rocks that make the throat of the pass on the summit, shall we see the broad and shining plains beyond the hills. Let us be thankful for, and own the attractions of, the knowledge that is wrapt in ignorance, and thankfully say, 'Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not appear what we shall be!'

III. Now I must be very brief with the last thought that is here, and I am the less unwilling to be so because we cannot travel one inch

beyond the revelations of the Book in reference to the matter. The thought is this, that our sonship flings one all-penetrating beam of light on that future, in the knowledge of our perfect vision and perfect likeness. 'We know that when He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

'When He shall be manifested'—to what period does that refer? It seems most natural to take the manifestation here as being the same as that spoken of only a verse or two before. 'And now, little children, abide in Him, and when He shall *be manifested*, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming' (ii. 28). That 'coming' then, is the 'manifestation' of Christ; and it is at the period of His coming in His glory that His servants 'shall be like Him, and see Him as He is.' Clearly then it is Christ whom we shall see and become like, and not the Father invisible.

To behold Christ will be the condition and the means of growing like Him. That way of transformation by beholding, or of assimilation by the power of loving contemplation, is the blessed way of ennobling character, which even here, and in human relationships, has often made it easy to put off old vices and to clothe the soul with unwonted grace. Men have learned to love and gaze upon some fair character, till some image of its beauty has passed into their ruder natures. To love such and to look on them has been an education. The same process is exemplified in more sacred regions, when men here learn to love and look upon Christ by faith, and so become like Him, as the sun stamps a tiny copy of its blazing sphere on the eye that looks at it. But all these are but poor, far-off hints and low preludes of the energy with which that blessed vision of the glorified Christ shall work on the happy hearts that behold Him, and of the completeness of the likeness to Him which will be printed in light upon their faces.

It matters not, though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, if to all the questionings of our own hearts we have this for our all-

sufficient answer, 'We shall be like Him.' As good old Richard Baxter has it:—

*'My knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim;
But, 'tis enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be like Him!'*

'It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord.'

There is no need to go into the dark and difficult questions about the manner of that vision. He Himself prayed, in that great intercessory prayer, 'Father, I will that these whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory.' That vision of the glorified manhood of Jesus Christ—certain, direct, clear, and worthy, whether it comes through sense or through thought—to behold that vision is all the sight of God that men in Heaven ever will have. And through the millenniums of a growing glory, Christ as He is will be the manifested Deity. Likeness will clear sight, and clearer sight will increase likeness. So in blessed interchange these two will be cause and effect, and secure the endless progress of the redeemed spirit towards the vision of Christ which never can behold all His Infinite Fulness, and the likeness to Christ which can never reproduce all his Infinite Beauty.

As a bit of glass when the light strikes it flashes into sunny glory, or as every poor little muddy pool on the pavement, when the sunbeams fall upon it, has the sun mirrored even in its shallow mud, so into your poor heart and mine the vision of Christ's glory will come, moulding and transforming us to its own beauty. With unveiled face reflecting as a mirror does, the glory of the Lord, we 'shall be changed into the same image.' 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

Dear brethren, all begins with this, love Christ and trust Him and you are a child of God! 'And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.'

1 John iii. 3— THE PURIFYING INFLUENCE OF HOPE

'And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.' 1 John iii. 3.

That is a very remarkable 'and' with which this verse begins. The Apostle has just been touching the very heights of devout contemplation, soaring away up into dim regions where it is very hard to follow,—'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

And now, without a pause, and linking his thoughts together by a simple 'and,' he passes from the unimaginable splendours of the Beatific Vision to the plainest practical talk. Mysticism has often soared so high above the earth that it has forgotten to preach righteousness, and therein has been its weak point. But here is the most mystical teacher of the New Testament insisting on plain morality as vehemently as his friend James could have done.

The combination is very remarkable. Like the eagle he rises, and like the eagle, with the impetus gained from his height, he drops right down on the earth beneath!

And that is not only a characteristic of St. John's teaching, but it is a characteristic of all the New Testament morality—its highest revelations are intensely practical. Its light is at once set to work, like the sunshine that comes ninety millions of miles in order to make the little daisies open their crimson-tipped petals; so the profoundest things that the Bible has to say are said to you and me, not that we may know only, but that knowing we may *do*, and *do* because we *are*.

So John, here: 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' 'And'—a simple coupling-iron for two such thoughts—'every man that hath this hope in Him'—that is, in Christ, not in himself, as we sometimes read it—'every man that hath this hope,' founded on Christ, 'purifies himself even as He is pure.'

The thought is a very simple one, though sometimes it is somewhat mistakenly apprehended. Put into its general form it is just this:—If you expect, and expecting, hope to be like Jesus Christ yonder, you will be trying your best to be like Him here. It is not the mere purifying influence of hope that is talked about, but it is the specific influence of this one hope, the hope of ultimate assimilation to Christ leading to strenuous efforts, each a partial resemblance of Him, here and now. And that is the subject I want to say a word or two about now.

I. First, then, notice the principle that is here, which is the main thing to be insisted upon, namely, If we are to be pure, we must purify *ourselves*.

There are two ways of getting like Christ, spoken about in the context. One is the blessed way, that is more appropriate for the higher Heaven, the way of assimilation and transformation by beholding—'If we see Him' we shall be 'like Him.' That is the blessed method of the Heavens. Yes, but even here on earth it may to some extent be realised! Love always breeds likeness. And there is such a thing, here on earth and now, as gazing upon Christ with an intensity of affection, and simplicity of trust, and rapture of aspiration, and ardour of desire which shall transform us in some measure into His own likeness. John is an example of that for us. It was a true instinct that made the old painters always represent him as like the Master that he sat beside, even in face. Where did John get his style from? He got it by much meditating upon Christ's words. The disciple caught the method of the Master's speech, and to some extent the manner of the Master's vision.

And so he himself stands before us as an instance of the possibility, even on earth, of this calm, almost passive process, and most blessed and holiest method of getting like the Master, by simple gazing, which is the gaze of love and longing.

But, dear brethren, the law of our lives forbids that that should be the only way in which we grow like Christ. 'First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear,' was never meant to be the exhaustive, all-comprehensive statement of the method of Christian progress. You and I are not vegetables; and the Parable of the Seed is only one side of the truth about the method of Christian growth. The very word 'purify' speaks to us of another condition; it implies impurity, it implies a process which is more than contemplation, it implies the reversal of existing conditions, and not merely the growth upwards to unattained conditions.

And so growth is not all that Christian men need; they need excision, they need casting out of what is in them; they need change as well as growth. 'Purifying' they need because they are impure, and growth is only half the secret of Christian progress.

Then there is the other consideration, viz., if there is to be this purifying it must be done by myself. 'Ah!' you say, 'done by yourself? That is not evangelical teaching.' Well, let us see. Take two or three verses out of this Epistle which at first sight seem to be contradictory of this. Take the very first that bears on the subject: —'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin' (i. 7). 'If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (i. 9). 'He that abideth in Him sinneth not' (iii. 6). 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith' (v. 4).

Now if you put all these passages together, and think about the general effect of them, it comes to this: that our best way of cleansing ourselves is by keeping firm hold of Jesus Christ and of the cleansing powers that lie in Him. To take a very homely

illustration—soap and water wash your hands clean, and what you have to do is simply to rub the soap and water on to the hand, and bring them into contact with the foulness. You cleanse yourselves. Yes! because without the friction there would not be the cleansing. But is it you, or is it the soap, that does the work? Is it you or the water that makes your hands clean? And so when God comes and says, 'Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings, your hands are full of blood,' He says in effect, 'Take the cleansing that I give you and rub it in, and apply it: and your flesh will become as the flesh of a little child, and you shall be clean.'

That is to say, the very deepest word about Christian effort of self-purifying is this—keep close to Jesus Christ. You cannot sin as long as you hold His hand. To have Him with you;—I mean by that to have the thoughts directed to Him, the love turning to Him, the will submitted to Him, Him consciously with us in the day's work. To have communion with Jesus Christ is like bringing an atmosphere round about us in which all evil will die. If you take a fish out of water and bring it up into the upper air, it writhes and gasps, and is dead presently; and our evil tendencies and sins, drawn up out of the muddy depths in which they live, and brought up into that pure atmosphere of communion with Jesus Christ, are sure to shrivel and to die, and to disappear. We kill all evil by fellowship with the Master. His presence in our lives, by our communion with Him, is like the watchfire that the traveller lights at night—it keeps all the wild beasts of prey away from the fold.

Christ's fellowship is our cleansing, and the first and main thing that we have to do in order to make ourselves pure is to keep ourselves in union with Him, in whom inhere and abide all the energies that cleanse men's souls. Take the unbleached calico and spread it out on the green grass, and let the blessed sunshine come down upon it, and sprinkle it with fair water; and the grass and the moisture and the sunshine will do all the cleansing, and it will glitter in the light, 'so as no fuller on earth can white it.'

So cleansing is keeping near Jesus Christ. But it is no use getting the mill-race from the stream into your works unless you put wheels in its way to drive. And our holding ourselves in fellowship with the Master in that fashion is not all that we have to do. There have to be distinct and specific efforts, constantly repeated, to subdue and suppress individual acts of transgression. We have to fight against evil, sin by sin. We have not the thing to do all at once; we have to do it in detail. It is a war of outposts, like the last agonies of that Franco-Prussian war, when the Emperor had abdicated, and the country was really conquered, and Paris had yielded, but yet all over the face of the land combats had to be carried on.

So it is with us. Holiness is not feeling; it is character. You do not get rid of your sins by the act of divine amnesty only. You are not perfect because you say you are, and feel as if you were, and think you are. God does not make any man pure in his sleep. His cleansing does not dispense with fighting, but makes victory possible.

Then, dear brethren, lay to heart this, as the upshot of the whole matter: First of all, let us turn to Him from whom all the cleansing comes; and then, moment by moment, remember that it is our work to purify ourselves by the strength and the power that is given to us by the Master.

II. The second thought here is this: This purifying of ourselves is the link or bridge between the present and the future.—'Now are we the sons of God,' says John in the context. That is the pier upon the one side of the gulf. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but when He is made manifest we shall be like Him.' That is the pier on the other. How are the two to be connected? There is only one way by which the present sonship will blossom and fruit into the future perfect likeness, and that is,—if we throw across the gulf, by God's help day by day here, that bridge of our effort after growing likeness to Himself, and purity therefrom.

That is plain enough, I suppose. To speak in somewhat technical terms, the 'law of continuity' that we hear so much about, runs on between earth and Heaven; which, being translated into plain English, is but this—that the act of passing from the limitations and conditions of this transitory life into the solemnities and grandeurs of that future does not alter a man's character, though it may intensify it. It does not make him different from what he was, though it may make him more of what he was, whether its direction be good or bad.

You take a stick and thrust it into water; and because the rays of light pass from one medium to another of a different density, they are refracted and the stick seems bent; but take the human life out of the thick, coarse medium of earth and lift it up into the pure rarefied air of Heaven, and there is no refraction; it runs straight on. Straight on! The given direction continues; and in whatever direction my face is turned when I die, thither my face will be turned when I live again.

Do not you fancy that there is any magic in coffins and graves and shrouds to make men different from their former selves. The continuity runs clean on, the rail goes without a break, though it goes through the Mont Cenis tunnel; and on the one side is the cold of the North, and on the other the sunny South. The man is the same man through death and beyond.

So the one link between sonship here and likeness to Christ hereafter is this link of present, strenuous effort to become like Him day by day in personal purity. For there is another reason, on which I need not dwell, viz., unless there be this daily effort on our part to become like Jesus Christ by personal purity, we shall not be able to 'see Him as He is.' Death will take a great many veils off men's hearts. It will reveal to them a great deal that they do not know, but it will not give the faculty of beholding the glorified Christ in such fashion as that the beholding will mean transformation. 'Every eye

shall see Him,' but it is conceivable that a spirit shall be so immersed in self-love and in godlessness that the vision of Christ shall be repellent and not attractive; shall have no transforming and no gladdening power. And I beseech you to remember that about that vision, as about the vision of God Himself, the principle stands true; it is 'the pure in heart that shall see God' in Christ. And the change from life to the life beyond will not necessarily transform into the image of His dear Son. You make a link between the present and the future by cleansing your hands and your hearts, through faith in the cleansing power of Christ, and direct effort at holiness.

III. Now I must briefly add finally: that this self-cleansing of which I have been speaking is the offspring and outcome of that 'hope' in my text. It is the child of hope. Hope is by no means an active faculty generally. As the poets have it, she may 'smile and wave her golden hair'; but she is not in the way of doing much work in the world. And it is not the mere fact of hope that generates this effort; it is, as I have been trying to show you, a certain kind of hope—the hope of being like Jesus Christ when 'we see Him as He is.'

I have only two things to say about this matter, and one of them is this: of course, such strenuous effort of purity will only be the result of such a hope as that, because such a hope will fight against one of the greatest of all the enemies of our efforts after purity. There is nothing that makes a man so down-hearted in his work of self-improvement as the constant and bitter experience that it seems to be all of no use; that he is making so little progress; that with immense pains, like a snail creeping up a wall, he gets up, perhaps, an inch or two, and then all at once he drops down, and further down than he was before he started.

Slowly we manage some little, patient self-improvement; gradually, inch by inch and bit by bit, we may be growing better, and then there comes some gust and outburst of temptation; and the whole painfully reclaimed soil gets covered up by an avalanche of mud and

stones, that we have to remove slowly, barrow-load by barrow-load. And then we feel that it is all of no use to strive, and we let circumstances shape us, and give up all thoughts of reformation.

To such moods then there comes, like an angel from Heaven, that holy, blessed message, 'Cheer up, man! "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."' Every inch that you make now will tell then, and it is not all of no use. Set your heart to the work, it is a work that will be blessed and will prosper.

Again, here is a test for all you Christian people, who say that you look to Heaven with hope as to your home and rest.

A great deal of the religious contemplation of a future state is pure sentimentality, and like all pure sentimentality is either immoral or non-moral. But here the two things are brought into clear juxtaposition, the bright hope of Heaven and the hard work done here below. Now is that what the gleam and expectation of a future life does for you?

This is the only time in John's Epistle that he speaks about hope. The good man, living so near Christ, finds that the present, with its 'abiding in Him' is enough for his heart. And though he was the Seer of the Apocalypse, he has scarcely a word to say about the future in this letter of his, and when he does it is for a simple and intensely practical purpose, in order that he may enforce on us the teaching of labouring earnestly in purifying ourselves.

My brother, is that your type of Christianity? Is that the kind of inspiration that comes to you from the hope that steals in upon you in your weary hours, when sorrows, and cares, and changes, and loss, and disappointments, and hard work weigh you down, and you say, 'It would be blessed to pass hence'? Does it set you harder at work than anything else can do? Is it all utilised? Or if I might use such an illustration, is it like the electricity of the Aurora Borealis, that paints your winter sky with vanishing, useless splendours of

crimson and blue? or have you got it harnessed to your tramcars, lighting your houses, driving sewing-machines, doing practical work in your daily life? Is the hope of Heaven, and of being like Christ, a thing that stimulates and stirs us every moment to heroisms of self-surrender and to strenuous martyrdom of self-cleansing?

All is gathered up into the one lesson. First, let us go to that dear Lord whose blood cleanseth from all sin, and let us say to Him, 'Purge me and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' And then, receiving into our hearts the powers that purify, in His love and His sacrifice and His life, 'having these promises' and these possessions, 'Dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.'

1 John iii. 7— PRACTICAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

'Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous.'—1 John iii. 7.

The popular idea of the Apostle John is strangely unlike the real man. He is supposed to be the gentle Apostle of Love, the mystic amongst the Twelve. He *is* that, but he was the 'son of thunder' before he was the Apostle of Love, and he did not drop the first character when he attained the second. No doubt his central thought was, 'God is Love'; no doubt that thought had refined and assimilated his character, but the love which he believed and the love which he exercised were neither of them facile feebleness, but strong and radiant with an awful purity. None of the New Testament writers proclaims a more austere morality than does John. And just because he loved the Love and the Light, he hated and loathed the darkness. He can thunder and lighten when needful, and he shows us that the true divine love in a man recoils from its opposite as passionately as it cleaves to God and good.

Again, John is, *par excellence*, the mystic of the New Testament, always insisting on the direct communion which every soul may have with God, which is the essence of wholesome mysticism. Now that type of thinking has often in its raptures forgotten plain, pedestrian morality; but John never commits that error. He never soars so high as to lose sight of the flat earth below; and whilst he is always inviting us and enjoining us to dwell in God and abide in Christ, with equal persistence and force he is preaching to us the plainest duties of elementary morality.

He illustrates this moral earnestness in my text. The 'little children' for whom he was so affectionately solicitous were in danger, either from teachers or from the tendencies native in us all, to substitute something else for plain, righteous conduct; and the Apostle lovingly appeals to them with his urgent declaration, that the only thing which shows a man to be righteous—that is to say, a disciple of Christ—is his daily life, in conformity with Christ's commands. The errors of these ancient Asiatics live to-day in new forms, but still substantially the same. And they are as hard to kill amongst English Nonconformists like us as they were amongst Asiatic Christians nineteen centuries ago.

I. So let me try just to insist, first of all, on that thought that doing righteousness is the one test of being a Christian.

Now that word 'righteousness' is a theological word, and by much usage the lettering has got to be all but obliterated upon it; and it is worn smooth like sixpences that go from pocket to pocket. Therefore I want, before I go further, to make this one distinct point, that the New Testament righteousness is no theological, cloistered, peculiar kind of excellence, but embraces within its scope, 'whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are fair, whatsoever things are of good report'; all that the world calls virtue, all which the world has combined to praise. There are countries on the earth which are known by different names to their inhabitants and to

foreigners. The 'righteousness' of the New Testament, though it embraces a great deal more, includes within its map all the territories which belong to morality or to virtue. The three words cover the same ground, though one of them covers more than the other two. The New Testament 'righteousness' differs from the moralist's morality, or the world's virtue, in its scope, inasmuch as it includes our relations to God as well as to men; it differs in its perspective, inasmuch as it exalts some types of excellence that the world pooh-poohs, and pulls down some that the world hallelujahs and adulates; it strips the fine feathers of approving words off some vices which masquerade as virtues. It casts round the notion of duty, of morality, of virtue, a halo, and it touches it with emotion. Christianity does with the dictates of the natural conscience what we might figure as being the leading out of some captive virgin in white, from the darkness into the sunshine, and the turning of her face up to heaven, which illuminates it with a new splendour, and invests her with a new attractiveness. But all that any man rightly includes in his notion of the things that are 'of good report' is included in this theological word, righteousness, which to some of you seems so wrapped in mists, and so far away from daily life.

I freely confess that in very many instances the morality of the moralist has outshone the righteousness of the Christian. Yes! and I have seen canoe-paddles carved by South Sea Islanders with no better tools than an oyster-shell and a sharp fish-bone, which in the minuteness and delicacy of their work, as well as in the truth and taste of their pattern, might put to shame the work of carvers with better tools. But that is not the fault of the tools; it is the fault of the carvers. And so, whilst we acknowledge that Christian people have but poorly represented to the world what Christ and Christ's apostles meant by righteousness, I reiterate that the righteousness of the gospel is the morality of the world *plus* a great deal more.

That being understood, let me remind you of two or three ways in which this great truth of the text is obscured to us, and in some

respects contradicted, in the practice of many professing Christians. First, let me say my text insists upon this, that the conduct, not the creed, makes the Christian. There is a continual tendency on our part, as there was with these believers in Asia Minor long ago, to substitute the mere acceptance, especially the orthodox acceptance, of certain great fundamental Christian truths for Christianity. A man may believe thirty-nine or thirty-nine thousand Articles without the smallest intellectual drawback, and not be one whit nearer being a Christian than if he did not believe one of them. For faith, which is the thing that makes a man a Christian to begin with, is not assent, but trust. And there is a whole gulf, wide enough to drown a world in, between the two attitudes of mind. On the one side of the gulf is salvation, on the other side of the gulf there may be loss. Of course, I know that it is hard, though I do not believe it is impossible, to erect the structure of a saving faith on a very, very imperfect intellectual apprehension of Scripture truth. That has nothing to do with my present point. What I am saying is that, unless you erect that structure of a faith which is an act of your will and of your whole nature, and not the mere assent of your understanding, upon your belief, your belief is impotent, and is of no use at all, and you might as well not have it.

What is the office of our creed in regard to our conduct? To give us principles, to give us motives, to give us guidance, to give us weapons. If it does these things then it does its work. If it lies in our heads a mere acceptance of certain propositions, it is just as useless and as dead as the withered seeds that rattle inside a dried poppy-head in the autumn winds. You are meant to begin with accepting truth, and then you are meant to take that truth as being a power in your lives that shall shape your conduct. To know, and there an end, is enough in matters of mere science, but in matters of religion and in matters of morality or righteousness knowing is only the first step in the process, and we are made to know in order that, knowing, we may do.

But some professing Christians seem to have their natures built, like ocean-going steamers, with water-tight compartments, on the one side of which they keep their creed, and there is no kind of communication between that and the other side where their conduct is originated. 'Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous.'

Again, my text suggests conduct and not emotion.

Now there is a type of Christian life which is more attractive in appearance than that of the hard, fossilised, orthodox believer—viz., the warmly emotional and fervent Christian. But that type, all experience shows, has a pit dug close beside it into which it is apt to fall. For there is a strange connection between emotional Christianity and a want of straightforwardness in daily business life, and of self-control and government of the appetites and the senses. That has been sadly shown, over and again, and if we had time one could easily point to the reasons in human nature, and its strange contexture, why it should be so. Now I am not disparaging emotion—God forbid—for I believe that to a very large extent the peculiarity of Christian teaching is just this, that it does bring emotion to bear upon the hard grind of daily duty. But for all that, I am bound to say that this is a danger which, in this day, by reason of certain tendencies in our popular Christianity, is a very real one, and that you will find people gushing in religious enthusiasm, and then going away to live very questionable, and sometimes very mean, and sometimes even very gross and sensual lives. The emotion is meant to spring from the creed, and it is meant to be the middle term between the creed and the conduct. Why, we have learnt to harness electricity to our tramcars, and to make it run our messages, and light our homes, and that is like what we have to do with the emotion without which a man's Christianity will be a poor, scraggy thing. It is a good servant; it is a bad master. You do not show yourselves to be Christians because you gush. You do not show yourselves to be Christians because you can talk fervidly and feel

deeply. Raptures are all very well, but what we want is the grind of daily righteousness, and doing little things because of the fear and the love of the Lord.

May I say again, my text suggests conduct, and not verbal worship. You and I, in our adherence to a simpler, less ornate and æsthetic form of devotion than prevails in the great Episcopal churches, are by no means free from the danger which, in a more acute form, besets them, of substituting participation in external acts of worship for daily righteousness of life *Laborare est orare*—to work is to pray. That is true with explanations, commentaries, and limitations. But I wonder how many people there are who sing hymns which breathe aspirations and wishes that their whole daily life contradicts. And I wonder how many of us there are who seem to be joining in prayers that we never expect to have answered, and would be very much astonished if the answers came, and should not know what to do with if they did come. We live in one line, and worship in exactly the opposite. Brethren, creed is necessary; emotion is necessary; worship is necessary! But that on which these three all converge, and for which they are, is daily life, plain, practical righteousness.

II. Now let me say, secondly, that being righteous is the way to do righteousness.

One of the great characteristics of New Testament teaching of morality, or rather let me say of Christ's teaching of morality, is that it shifts, if I may so put it, the centre of gravity from acts to being, that instead of repeating the parrot-cry, 'Do, do, do' or 'Do not, do not, do not,' it says, 'Be, and the doing will take care of itself. Be; do not trouble so much about outward acts, look after the inward nature.' Character makes conduct, though, of course, conduct reacts upon character. 'As a man thinketh in his heart so is he,' and the way to set actions right is to set the heart right.

Some of us are trying to purify the stream by putting in disinfectants half-way down, instead of going up to the source and dealing with

the fountain. And the weakness of all the ordinary, commonplace morality of the world is that it puts its stress upon the deeds, and leaves comparatively uncared for the condition of the person, the inward self, from whom the deeds come. And so it is all superficial, and of small account.

If that be so, then we are met by this experience: that when we honestly try to make the tree good that its fruit may be good we come full front up to this, that there is a streak in us, a stain, a twist—call it anything you like—like a black vein through a piece of Parian marble, or a scratch upon a mirror, which streak or twist baffles our effort to make ourselves righteous. I am not going, if I can help it, to exaggerate the facts of the case. The Christian teaching of what is unfortunately called total depravity is not that there is no good in anybody, but that there is a diffused evil in everybody which affects in different degrees and in different ways all a man's nature. And that is no mere doctrine of the New Testament, but it is a transcript from the experience of every one of us.

What then? If I must be righteous in order that I may do righteousness, and if, as I have found out by experience (for the only way to know myself is to reflect upon what I have done)—if I have found out that I am not righteous, what then? You may say to me, 'Have you led me into a blind alley, out of which I cannot get? Here you are, insisting on an imperative necessity, and in the same breath saying that it is impossible. What is left for me?' I go on to tell you what is left.

III. Union with Jesus Christ by faith makes us 'righteous even as He is righteous.'

There is the pledge, there is the prophecy, there is the pattern; and there is the power to redeem the pledge, to fulfil the prophecy, to make the pattern copyable and copied by every one of us. Brethren, this is the very heart of John's teaching, that if we will, not by the

mere assent of our intellect, but by the casting of ourselves on Jesus Christ, trust in Him, there comes about a union between us and Him so real, so deep, so vital, so energetic, that by the touch of His life we live, and by His righteousness breathed into us, we, too, may become righteous. The great vessel and the tiny pot by its side may have a connecting pipe, and from the great one there shall flow over into the little one as much as will fill it brim full. In Him we too may be righteous.

My friend, there are men and women who are ready to set to their seals that that is true, and who can say, 'I have found it so. By union with Jesus Christ in faith, I have received new tastes, new inclinations, a new set to my whole life, and I have been able to overcome unrighteousnesses which were too many and too mighty for myself.' It is so; and some of us to our own consciences and consciousness are witnesses to it, however imperfectly. God forgive us! We may have manifested the renewing power of union with Christ in our daily lives.

'Even as He is righteous'—the water in the great vessel and the little one are the same, but the vase is not the cistern. The beam comes from the sun, but the beam is not the sun. 'Even as' does not mean equality, but it does mean similarity. Christ is righteous, eternally, essentially, completely; we may be 'even as He is' derivatively, partially, and if we put our trust in Him we shall be so, and that growingly through our daily lives. And then, after earth is done with, 'we know that, when He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

May we each, dear brethren, 'be found in Him, not having our own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.'

1 John iv. 10— CHRIST'S MISSION THE REVELATION OF GOD'S LOVE

'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'—1 John iv. 10.

This is the second of a pair of twin verses which deal with substantially the same subject under two slightly different aspects. The thought common to both is that Christ's mission is the great revelation of God's love. But in the preceding verse the point on which stress is laid is the manifestation of that love, and in our text the point mainly brought out is its essential nature. In the former we read, 'In this was *manifested* the love of God,' and in the present verse we read, 'Herein *is* love.' In the former verse John fixes on three things as setting forth the greatness of that manifestation—viz., that the Christ is the only begotten Son, that the manifestation is for the world, and that its end is the bestowment of everlasting love. In my text the points which are fixed on are that that Love in its nature is self-kindled—'not that we loved God, but that He loved us'—and that it lays hold of, and casts out of the way that which, unremoved, would be a barrier between God and us—viz., our sin: 'He hath sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'

Now it is interesting to notice that these twin verses, like a double star which reflects the light of a central sun, draw their brightness from the great word of the Master, 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Do you not hear the echo of His voice in the three expressions in the verse before the text—'only begotten' 'world' 'live'? Here is one more of the innumerable links which bind together in indissoluble union the Gospel and the Epistle. So, then, the great thought suggested by the words before us is just this, that in the Incarnation and Sacrifice of Jesus Christ we have the great revelation of the love of God.

I. Now there are three questions that suggest themselves to me, and the first is this, What, then, does Christ's mission say about God's love?

I do not need to dwell on the previous question whether, apart from that mission, there is any solid revelation of the fact that there is love in Heaven, or whether we are left, apart from it, to gropings and probabilities. I need not refer you to the ambiguous oracles of nature or to the equally ambiguous oracles of life. I need not, I suppose, do more than just remind you that even the men whose faith grasps the thought of the love of God most intensely, know what it is to be brought to a stand before some of the dreadful problems which the facts of humanity and the facts of nature press upon us, nor need I remind you how, as we see around us to-day, in the drift of our English literature and that of other nations, when men turn their backs upon the Cross, they look upon a landscape all swathed in mists, and on which darkness is steadily settling. The reason why the men of this generation, some of them very superficially, and for the sake of being 'in the swim' and some of them despairingly and with bleeding hearts, are turning themselves to a reasoned pessimism, is because they will not see what shines out from the Cross, that God is love.

Nor need I do more than remind you, in a word, of the fact that, go where we will through this world, and consult all the conceptions that men have made to themselves of gods many and lords many, whilst we find the deification of power, and of vice, and of fragmentary goodnesses, of hopes and fears, of longings, of regrets, we find nowhere a god of whom the characteristic is love. And amidst that Pantheon of deities, some of them savage, some of them lustful, some of them embodiments of all vices, some of them indifferent and neutral, some of them radiant and fair, none reveals this secret, that the centre of the universe is a heart. So we have to turn away from hopes, from probability dashed with many a doubt, and find something that has more solid substance in it, if it is to be

enough to bear up the man that grasps it and to yield before no tempests. For all that Bishop Butler says, probabilities are *not* the guide of life, in its deepest and noblest aspects. They may be the guide of practice, but for the anchorage of the soul we want no shifting sand-bank, but that to which we may make fast and be sure that, whatever shifts, it remains immovable. You can no more clothe the soul in 'perhappes' than a man can make garments out of a spider's web. Religion consists of the things of which we are sure, and not of the things which are probable. 'Peradventure' is not the word on which a man can rest the weight of a crushed, or an agonising, or a sinking soul; he must have 'Verily! verily!' and then he is at rest.

How do we know what a man is? By seeing what a man does. How do we know what God is? By knowing what God does. So John does not argue with logic, either frosty or fiery, but he simply opens his mouth, and in calm, pellucid utterances sets forth the truths and leaves them to work. He says to us, 'I do not relegate you to your intuitions; I do not argue with you; I simply say, Look at Him; look, and see that God is love.'

What, then, does the mission of Christ say to us about the love of God? It says, first, that it is a love independent of, and earlier than, ours. We love, as a rule, because we recognise in the object to which our heart goes out something that draws it, something that is loveable. But He whose name is 'I am that I am' has all the reasons of His actions within Himself, and just as He

'Sits on no precarious throne,

Nor borrows leave to be,'

nor is dependent on any creature for existence, so He is His own motive, He is His own reason. Within that sacred circle of the Infinite Nature lie all the energies which bring that Infinite Nature into action; and like some clear fountain, more sparkling than

crystal, there wells up for ever, from the depths of the Divine Nature, the love which is Himself. He loves, not because we love Him, but because He is God. The very sun itself, as some astronomers believe, owes its radiant brightness and ever-communicated warmth to the impact on, and reception into, it of myriads of meteors and of matter drawn from the surrounding system. So when the fuel fails, that fire will go out, and the sun will shrivel into a black ball. But this central Sun of the universe has all His light within Himself, and the rays that pour out from Him owe their being and their motion to nothing but the force of that central fire, from which they rush with healing on their wings.

If, then, God's love is not evoked by anything in His creatures, then it is universal, and we do not need anxiously to question ourselves whether we deserve that it shall fall upon us, and no conscious unworthiness need ever make us falter in the least in the firmness with which we grasp that great central thought. The sun, inferior emblem as it is of that Light of all that is, pours down its beams indiscriminately on dunghill and on jewel, though it be true that in the one its rays breed corruption and in the other draw out beauty. That great love wraps us all, is older than our sins, and is not deflected by them. So that is the first thing that Christ's mission tells us about God's love.

The second is—it speaks to us of a love which gives its best. John says, 'God *sent* His Son,' and that word reposes, like the rest of the passage, on many words of Christ's—such as, for instance, when He speaks of Himself as 'sanctified and sent into the world,' and many another saying. But remember how, in the foundation passage to which I have already referred, and of which we have some reflection in the words before us, there is a tenderer expression—not merely 'sent,' but 'gave.' Paul strengthens the word when he says, 'gave *up* for us all.' It is not for us to speculate about these deep things, but I would remind you of what I dare say I have had occasion often to point out, that Paul seems to intend to suggest to us a mysterious

parallel, when he further says, 'He that *spared* not His own Son, but freely gave Him up to death for us all.' For that emphatic word 'spared' is a distinct allusion to, and quotation of, the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac: 'Seeing thou hast not *withheld* from Me thine only son.' And so, mysterious as it is, we may venture to say that He not only sent, but He gave, and not only gave, but gave up. His love, like ours, delights to lavish its most precious gifts on its objects.

Now there arises from this consideration a thought which I only mention, and it is this. Christian teaching about Christ's work has often, both by its friends and its foes, been so presented as to lead to the conception that it was the work of Christ which made God love men. The enemies of evangelical truth are never tired of talking in that sense; and some of its unwise friends have given reason for the caricature. But the true Christian teaching is, 'God so loved ... that He gave.' The love is the cause of the mission, and not the mission that which evokes the love. So let us be sure that, not because Christ died does God love us sinful creatures, but that, because God loves us, Christ died for us.

The third thing which the mission of Christ teaches us about the love of God is that it is a love which takes note of and overcomes man's sin. I have said, as plainly as I can, that I reject the travesty of Christianity which implies that it was Christ's mission which originated God's love to men. But a love that does not in the slightest degree care whether its object is good or bad—what sort of a love do you call that? What do you name it when a father shows it to his children? Moral indifference; culpable and weak and fatal. And is it anything nobler, if you transfer it to God, and say that it is all the same to Him whether a man is living the life of a hog, and forgetting all that is high and noble, or whether he is pressing with all his strength towards light and truth and goodness? Surely, surely they who, in the name of their reverence for the supreme love of God, cover over the fact of His righteousness, are mutilating and

killing the very attribute that they are trying to exalt. A love that cares nothing for the moral character of its object is not love, but hate; it is not kindness, but cruelty. Take away the background because it is so black, and you lower the brilliancy of whiteness of that which stands in front of it. There is such a property in God as is fittingly described by that tremendous word 'wrath.' God cannot, being what He is, treat sin as if it were no sin; and therefore we read, 'He sent His son to be the *propitiation* for our sins.' The black dam, which we build up between ourselves and the river of the water of life, is to be swept away; and it is the death of Jesus Christ which makes it possible for the highest gift of God's love to pour over the ruined and partially removed barrier and to flood a man's soul. Brethren, no God that is worthy the name can give Himself to a sinful soul. No sinful soul that has not the habit, the guilt, the penalty of its sins swept away, is capable of receiving the life, which is the highest gift of the love. So our twin texts divide what I may call the process of redemption between them; and whilst the one says, 'He sent His Son that we should have life through Him,' the other tells us of how the sins which bar the entrance of that life into our hearts, as our own consciences tell us they do, can be removed. There must first be the propitiation for our sins, and then that mighty love reaches its purpose and attains its end, and can give us the life of God to be the life of our souls. So much for my first and principle question.

II. Now I have to ask, secondly, how comes it that Christ's mission says anything about God's love?

That question is a very plain one, and I should like to press the answer to it very emphatically. Take any other of the great names of the world's history of poet, thinker, philosopher, moralist, practical benefactor; is it possible to apply such a thought as this to them—except with a hundred explanations and limitations—that they, however radiant, however wise, however beneficent, however fruitful their influence, make men sure that God loves them? The

thing is ridiculous, unless you are using language in a very fantastic and artificial fashion.

Christ's mission reveals God's love, because Christ is the Son of God. If it is true, as Jesus said, that 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,' then I can say, 'In Thy tenderness, in Thy patience, in Thy attracting of the publican and the harlot, in Thy sympathy with all the erring and the sorrowful, and, most of all, in Thy agony and passion, in Thy cross and death, I see the glory of God which is the love of God.' Brother, if you break that link, which binds the man Christ Jesus with the ever-living and the ever-loving God, I know not how you can draw from the record of His life and death a confidence, which nothing can shake, in the love of the Father.

Then there is another point. Christ's mission speaks to us about God's love, if—and I was going to say *only* if—we regard it as His mission to be the propitiation for our sins. Strike out the death as the sacrifice for the world's sin, and what you have left is a maimed something, which may be, and I thankfully recognise often is, very strengthening, very helpful, very calming, very ennobling, even to men who do not sympathise with the view of that work which I am now setting forth, but which is all that to them, very largely, because of the unconscious influence of the truths which they have cast away. It seems to me that those who, in the name of the highest paternal love of God, reject the thought of Christ's sacrificial death, are kicking away the ladder by which they have climbed, and are better than their creeds, and happily illogical. It is the Cross that reveals the love, and it is the Cross as the means of propitiation that pours the light of that blessed conviction into men's hearts.

III. My last question is this: what does Christ's mission say about God's love to me?

We know what it ought to say. It ought to carry, as on the crest of a great wave, the conviction of that divine love into our hearts, to be fruitful there. It ought to sweep out, as on the crest of a great wave,

our sins and evils. It ought to do this; does it? On some of us I fear it produces no effect at all. Some of you, dear friends, look at that light with lack-lustre eyes, or, rather, with blind eyes, that are dark as midnight in the blaze of noonday. The voice comes from the Cross, sweet as that of harpers harping with their harps, and mighty as the voice of many waters, and you hear nothing. Some of us it slightly moves now and then, and there an end.

Brethren, you have to turn the world-wide generality into a personal possession. You have to say, 'He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*.' It is of no use to believe in a universal Saviour; do you trust in your particular Saviour? It is of no use to have the most orthodox and clear conceptions of the relation between the Cross of Christ and the revelation to men of the love of God; have you made that revelation the means of bringing into your own personal life the conviction that Jesus Christ is *your* Saviour, the propitiation for *your* sins, the Giver to *you* of life eternal? It is faith that does that. Note that, in the great foundation passage to which I have made frequent reference, there are two conditions put in between the beginning and the end. Some of us are disposed to say, 'God so loved the world that every man might have eternal life.' That is not what Christ said, 'God so loved the world that'—and here follows the first condition—'He *gave His Son* that'—and here follows the second—'he that *believeth on Him* should not perish, but have everlasting life.' God has done what it is needful for Him to do. His part of the conditions has been fulfilled. Fulfil yours—'He that believeth on Him.' And if you can say, not He is the propitiation for our sin, but for *my* sin, then you will live and move and have your being in a heaven of love, and will love Him back again with an echo and reflection of His own, and nothing shall be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 John iv. 17— THE SERVANT AS HIS LORD

'... As He is, so are we in this world.'—1 John iv. 17.

Large truths may be spoken in little words. Profundity is often supposed to be obscurity, but the deepest depth is clear. John, in his gospel and epistles, deals with the deepest realities, and with all things in their eternal aspects, but his vocabulary is the simplest in the New Testament. God and the world, life and death, love and hate, light and darkness, these are the favourite words round which his thoughts gather. Here are nine little monosyllables. What can be simpler than, 'As He is, so are we in this world?' And what can go beyond the thought that lies in it, that a Christian is a living likeness of Christ?

But the connection of my text is quite as striking as its substance. John has been dwelling upon his favourite thought that to abide in love is to abide in God, and God in us. And then he goes on to say that 'Herein'—that is, in such mutual abiding in love—'is love made perfect with us'; and the perfection of that love, which is thus communion, is in order that, at the great solemn day of future trial, men may lift up their faces and meet His glance—which is *not* strange to them, nor met for the first time—with open-hearted and open-countenanced 'boldness.' But 'love' and 'abiding' are the source of confidence in the Day of Judgment, because love and abiding are the source of assimilation to Christ's life. We have boldness, 'because as He is, so are we in this world'; and we are as He is, because we love and abide in Him. So here are three thoughts, the assimilation of the Christian man to Christ; the frank confidence which it begets; and the process by which it is secured.

I. A Christian is Christ's living likeness.

That is a startling thing to say, and all the more startling if you notice that John does not say 'As He *was*,' in this earthly life of humiliation and filial obedience, but 'as He *is*,' in His heavenly life

and reign and glory. That might well repel us from all thought of possible resemblance, but the light, however brilliant it may be, is not blinding, and it is the Christ as He *is*, and not only—true as that is—the Christ as He *was*, who is the original of which Christian men are copies.

Now *there* is the difference between the teaching of such classes of religionists as represent Christ's humanity as all in all, and preach to us that He, in His earthly life is the pattern to whom we are to seek to conform our lives, and the true evangelical teaching. That dead Man is living, and His present life has in it elements which we can grasp, and to which every Christian life is to be conformed.

Is there anything, then, within the glory to which I, in my poor, struggling, hampered, imperfect life here on earth, can feel that my character is being shaped? Yes, surely there is. I have no doubt that, in the words of my text, the Apostle is remembering the solemn ones of our Lord's high-priestly prayer as recorded in the seventeenth chapter of his gospel, where the same antithesis of our being in the world, and His not being there, recurs; and where the analogy and resemblance are distinctly stated—'I in Thee, and Thou in Me, that they also may be in us.'

So, then, when we stand with our letter-writer in his Patmos island, and see the countenance 'as the sun shining in his strength, and the eyes as a flame of fire,' and the many crowns upon the head, and the many stars in the hand, though we may feel as if all resemblance was at an end, and aspiration after likeness could only fall at His feet and cover its face, yet there is within the glory something which may be repeated and reproduced in our lives, and that is, the indissoluble union of a Son with a Father, in all loving obedience, in all perfect harmony, in all mutual affection and outgoing of heart and thoughts. This is the centre of the life, alike of the Christ when He is glorified, and of the Christ when He was upon earth. So the very secret heart of the mysterious being of the Son is to be, and

necessarily is, repeated in all those who in Him have received the adoption of sons.

Or to put the whole thing into plainer words, it is the religious and the moral aspects of Christ's being, and not any one particular detail thereof; and these, as they live and reign on the Throne, just as truly as these, as they suffered and wept upon earth—it is these to which it is our destiny to be conformed. We are like Him, if we are His, in this,—that we are joined to God, that we hold fellowship with Him, that our lives are all permeated with the divine, that we are saturated with the presence of God, that we have submitted ourselves to Him and to His will, that 'not my will, but Thine, be done' is the very inmost meaning of our hearts and our lives. And thus 'we,' even here, 'bear the image of the heavenly, as we have borne the images of the earthly.' Now I am not going to dwell upon details; all these can be filled in by each of us for himself. The centre-point which I insist upon is this—the filial union with God, the filial submission to Him, and the consequent purity as Christ is pure, righteousness as Christ is righteous, and walking even as Christ walked, for ever in the light.

But then there is another point that I desire to refer to. I have put an emphasis upon the 'is' instead of the 'was,' as it applies to Jesus Christ. I would further put an emphasis upon the 'are,' as it applies to us—'So *are* we.'

John is not exhorting, he is affirming. He is not saying what Christian men ought to strive to be, but he is saying what all Christian men, by virtue of their Christian character, *are*. Or, to put it into other words, likeness to the Master is certain. It is inevitably involved in the relation which a Christian man bears to the Lord. There may be degrees in the likeness, there may be differences of skill and earnestness in the artist. We have to labour like a portrait painter, slowly and tentatively approaching to the complete resemblance. It is 'a life-long task ere the lump be leavened.' This

likeness does not reach its completeness by a leap. It is not struck, as the image of a king is, upon the blank metal disc, by one stroke, but it is wrought out by long, laborious, and, as I said, approximating and tentative touches. My text suggests that to us by its addition, 'So are we, *in this world*.' The 'world'—or, to use modern phraseology, 'the environment'—conditions the resemblance. As far as it is possible for a thing encompassed with dust and ashes to resemble the radiant sun in the heavens, so far is the resemblance carried here. Some measure of it, and a growing measure, is inseparable from the reality of a Christian life.

Now, you Christian people, does that plain statement touch you anywhere? 'So *are* we.' Well! you would be quite easy if John had said: 'So *may* we be; so *should* we be; so *shall* we be.' But what about the 'so *are* we'? What a ghastly contradiction the lives of multitudes of professing Christians are to that plain statement! 'Like Jesus Christ'—would anybody say that about anything in me? 'So are we'—no words of mine, dear brethren, can make the statement more searching, more impressive; but, I pray you, lay this to heart: 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.' You may take sacraments and profess Christianity, or, as we Nonconformists have it, 'join churches,' and do all manner of outward work for ever and a day; but if you have not the likeness of Christ, at least in germ, and growing to something more than a germ, in your characters, you had better revise your position, and ask whether, after all, you have not been walking in a vain show, and fancied yourselves the servants of Christ, while you bear the image of Christ's enemy.

A very tiny gully on a hillside, made by showers of rain, may fall into the same slopes, and has been created by the very same forces, working according to the same laws, as have scooped out valleys miles broad, bordered by mountains thousands of feet high. And in my little life, poor as it is, limited as it is, environed as it is by the world, and therefore often hampered and stained, as well as helped and brightened, by its environment, there may be, and there will be,

in some degree, if I am a Christian man, the very same power at work by which Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father shines as the sun on the throne of the universe.

But then, notice further, how that limitation to which I have referred in this world carries with it another message. *There* is Christ in the heavens, veiled and unseen. Here are you on earth, his representative. There is a rage at present for putting pictures into all books, and folk will scarcely read unless they get illustrated literature. The world has for its illustrations of the gospel the lives of us Christian people. In the book there are principles and facts, and readers should be able to turn the page and see all pictured in us.

That is what you are set to do in this world. 'As the Father sent Me, even so send I you.' 'As He is, so are we in this world.' It may be our antagonist, but it is our sphere, and its presence is necessary to evoke our characters. Christ has entrusted His reputation, His honour, to us, and many a man that never cares to look at *Him* as He is revealed in Scripture, would be wooed and won to look at Him and love Him, if we Christian people were more true to our vocation, and bore more conspicuously on our faces and in our characters the image of the heavenly.

II. Look for a moment at the second thought that is here: such a likeness to Jesus Christ is the only thing that will enable a man to lift up his head in the Day of Judgment.

'We have boldness,' says John, *because* 'as He is, so are we.' Now that is a very strong statement of a truth that popular, evangelical theology has far too much obscured. People talk about being, at the last, 'accepted in the beloved.' God be thanked, it is true. A sweet old hymn that a great many of us learned when we were children, though it is not so well known in these days, says:—

'Bold shall I stand in that great day,

*For who aught to my charge shall lay,
While through Thy blood absolved I am
From sin's tremendous curse and shame?'*

I believe that, and I try to preach it. But do not let us forget the other side. My text is in full accordance with the principles of our Lord's own teaching; and who knows the principles of His own words so well as the judge, who tells us, in His pictures of that great day, that the question put to every man will be, not what you *believe*, but what did you *do*, and what *are* you?

But this truth of my text has been not only wounded in the house of the friends of Christianity, but it has been overlooked by one of the very frequent objections that we hear made to evangelical teaching, that, according to it, a man is judged according to his belief and not according to his deeds. A man is judged according to his—not *belief*—but according to his *faith*. But he is judged according also to—not his *work*—but according to his *character*.

And I wish, dear friends, to lay this upon your hearts, because many of us are too apt to forget it, that whilst unquestionably the beginning of salvation, and the condition of forgiveness here, and of acceptance hereafter, are laid in trust in Jesus Christ, that trust is sure to work out a character which is in conformity with His requirements and moulded after the likeness of Himself. 'The judgment of God is according to truth,' and what a man is determines where a man shall be, and what he shall receive through all eternity. Remember Christ's own teaching. Remember the teaching of that other apostle than John, according to which the 'wood, hay, stubble,' built by a man upon the foundation shall be burned up, and the builder himself be saved, yet so as by fire. And lay this to heart, that it is only when faith works in us, through love and communion, characters like Jesus Christ's, that we shall be able to stand—though even then we shall have to trust to divine and

infinite mercy, and to the sprinkling of His blood—before the Throne of God. Lay up in store for yourselves a good foundation unto eternal life. And take this as the preaching of my text; character, and character alone, will stand the judgment of that great day.

There is no real antagonism between such truths and the widest preaching of salvation by faith. It is the same man who, in his gospel, says, as from the lips of the Lord Himself, 'He that believeth is not judged,' and in his letter says, 'We may have boldness in that day, because, as He is, so are we in this world.'

III. One word about the last point; the process by which this likeness is secured.

That is contained, as I tried to show in my introductory remarks, in the earlier part of the verse. Our love is made perfect by dwelling in God, and God in us; in order that we may be thus conformed to Christ's likeness, and so have boldness in that great day. To be like Jesus Christ, what is needed is that we love Him, and that we keep in touch with Him. What is it to 'abide' in Him?—to direct the continual flow of mind and love and will and practical obedience to Him, to bear Him ever in the secret place of my heart whilst my hands are occupied with daily business, and my feet are running the sometimes rough race that is set before me. Think of Him ever, love Him ever. Let His name be like a perfume breathed through the whole atmosphere of your lives. Keep your wills in the attitude of submission, of acceptance, of indecision when necessary, and of absolute dependence upon Him. Let your outward acts be such as shall not bring a film of separation between Him and you. When thus our whole being is steeped and drenched with Christ, then it cannot but be that we shall be like Him. Even 'clouds themselves as suns appear, when the sun pierces them with light.' 'Abide in Me, and I in you.' You cannot make yourselves like Christ, but you can

fasten yourselves to Christ, and He will give you power which shall make you like Him.

But, remember, such abiding is no idle waiting, no passive confidence. It is full of energy, full of suppression, when necessary, of what is contrary to your truest self, and full of strenuous cultivation of that which is in accord with the will of the Father, and with the likeness of the 'first-born among many brethren.'

Dear friends, lie in the light and you will become light. Abide in Christ, and you will get like Christ; and, being like Him, you will be able to lift up your heads, and rejoice when you front Him on the Throne, and you are at the bar. Then, when you are no more in the world, the likeness will be perfected, because the communion is complete. 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

1 John iv. 18— LOVE AND FEAR

'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.'—1 John iv. 18.

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

stages and lower degrees, is often perturbed and dashed by apprehension and dread.

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

I. The empire of fear.

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

I believe, for my part, that such a dumb, dim consciousness of discord attaches to all men, though it is often smothered, often ignored, and often denied. But there it is; the snake hibernates, but it

is coiled in the heart all the same; and warmth will awake it. Then it lifts its crested head, and shoots out its forked tongue, and venom passes into the veins. A dread of God is the ghastliest thing in the world, the most unnatural, but universal, unless expelled by perfect love.

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

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

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

But now there is something else that casts out fear than perfect love, and that is—perfect levity. For it is the explanation of the fact that so many of us know nothing of this fear of which I speak, and fancy that I am exaggerating, or putting forward false views. There is a type of man, and I have no doubt there are some of its representatives among my hearers, who are below both fear and love

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

II. That brings me to the second point—viz., the mission of fear.

John uses a rare word in my text when he says 'fear hath torment.' 'Torment' does not convey the whole idea of the word. It means suffering, but suffering for a purpose; suffering which is correction; suffering which is disciplinary; suffering which is intended to lead to something beyond itself. Fear, the apprehension of personal evil, has the same function in the moral world as pain has in the physical. It is a symptom of disease, and is intended to bid us look for the remedy and the Physician. What is an alarm bell for but to rouse the

sleepers, and to hurry them to the refuge? And so this wholesome, manly dread of the certain issue of discord with God is meant to do for us what the angels did for Lot—to lay a mercifully violent hand on the shoulder of the sleeper, and shake him into aroused wakefulness, and hasten him out of Sodom, before the fire bursts through the ground, and is met by the fire from above. The intention of fear is to lead to that which shall annihilate it by taking away its cause.

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

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

Brethren, I said I was not preaching the religion of Fear. But I think we shall scarcely understand the religion of Love unless we

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

III. Lastly, the expulsion of fear.

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

As I said, you cannot love and fear the same person, unless the love is of a very rudimentary and imperfect character. But just as when you pour pure water into a bladder, the poisonous gases that it may have contained will be driven out before it, so when love comes in, dread goes out. The river, turned into the foul Augean stables of the heart, will sweep out all the filth and leave everything clean. The black, greasy smoke-wreath, touched by the fire of Christ's love, will flash out into ruddy flames, like that which has kindled them; and Christ's love will kindle in your hearts, if you accept it and apprehend it aright, a love which shall burn up and turn into fuel for itself the now useless dread.

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

Inconsistent as the two emotions are in themselves, in practice, they may be united, by reason of the imperfection of the nobler. And in the Christian life they are united with terrible frequency. There are many professing Christian people who live all their days with a burden of shivering dread upon their shoulders, and an icy cold fear in their hearts, just because they have not got close enough to Jesus Christ, nor kept their hearts with sufficient steadfastness under the quickening influences of His love, to have shaken off their dread as a sick man's distempered fancies. A little love has not mass enough in it to drive out thick, clustering fears. There are hundreds of professing Christians who know very little indeed of that joyous love of God which swallows up and makes impossible all dread, who, because they have not a loving present consciousness of a loving Father's loving will, tremble when they front in imagination, and still more when they meet in reality, the evils that must come, and who cannot face the thought of death with anything but shrinking apprehension. There is far too much of the old leaven of selfish dread left in the experiences of many Christians. 'I feared thee, because thou wert an austere man, and so, because I was afraid, I went and hid my talent, and did nothing for thee' is a transcript of the experience of far too many of us. The one way to get deliverance is to go to Jesus Christ and keep close by Him.

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

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

1 John iv. 19— THE RAY AND THE REFLECTION

'We love Him, because He first loved us.'—1 John iv. 19.

Very simple words! but they go down into the depths of God, lifting burdens off the heart of humanity, turning duty into delight, and changing the aspect of all things. He who knows that God loves him needs little more for blessedness; he who loves God back again offers more than all burnt offering and sacrifices. But it is to be observed that the correct reading of my text, as you will find in the Revised Version, omits 'Him' in the first clause, and simply says 'we love,' without specifying the object. That is to say, for the moment John's thought is fixed rather on the inward transformation effected, from self-regard to love—than on considering the object on which the love is expended. When the heart is melted, the streams flow wherever there is a channel. The river, as he goes on to show us, parts into two heads, and love to God and love to man are, in their essence and root-principle, one thing.

So my text is the summary of all revelation about God, the ultimate word about all our relations to Him, and the all-inclusive directory as to our conduct to one another. To know that God loves, and to love again—there is a little pocket encyclopædia in two volumes, which contains the smelted-down essence of all theology and of all morality. Let us look at these three points.

I. The ultimate word about God.

'He first loved us.' Properly and strictly speaking, that 'first' only declares the priority of the divine love towards us over ours towards Him. But we may fairly give it a wider meaning, and say—first of all, ere Creation and Time, away back in the abysmal depths of an everlasting and changeless heart, changeless in the sense that its love was eternal, but not changeless in the sense that love could have no place within it—first of all things was God's love; last to be discovered because most ancient of all. The foundation is disclosed last when you come to dig, and the essence is grasped last in the process of analysis.

So one of the old psalms, with wondrous depth of truth, traces up everything to this, 'For His mercy endureth for ever.' Therefore, there was time; therefore, there were creatures—'He made great lights, for His mercy endureth for ever.' Therefore, there were judgments—'He slew famous kings ... for His mercy endureth for ever.' And so we may pass through all the works of the divine energy, and say, 'He first loved us.'

It is no accident that there are but foregleams of this great thought brightening the words and the thoughts of psalmist and prophet, saint and sage, from the beginning onwards, while the articulate utterance of the simple sentence was first heard from the lips of Him who declared the Father, and stands in that part of the Book which, both in its position there, and in its date of composition is the last of the Apostolic utterances. 'God is love';—that is in one aspect the foundation of His being, and in another aspect the shining ruby set on the very sky-piercing summit of the completed process of the revelation of that Being to man. 'He first loved us'; and thence, from that centre and germinal point, streams out the whole train of consequences in the divine activity, and in the divine self-revelation.

I need not ask you to contrast with this infinitely simple and infinitely deep utterance all other thoughts of a divine Being—the cold abstractions of Theism, the dim dreads of popular

apprehension, the vague utterances of any mythology, the clouds that men's thoughts have covered over the face of this great truth—and then, to set by the side of all these groping, these peradventures, these fears, these narrow, unworthy ideas, the clear simplicity, the infinite depth of 'He first loved us.'

But I may ask you to consider, but for a moment, the relation which all the other perfection of the divine nature have to this central and foundation one. There are all those pompous names, 'Omnipresence' and 'Omniscience' and the like, which are but the negations of the limitations of humanity or of finite creatures. There are the more spiritual and moral thoughts of Wisdom and Righteousness and the like. These are but the fringes of the glory: I was going to venture to say that the divinest thing in God is love. There is the central blaze; the rest is but the brilliant periphery that encloses it. And that infinite love stands to all these other attributes in the relation of being their master and motive spring. They are Love's instrument, and in the divine nature Love is Lord of all. They give it majesty; it gives them tenderness. We may reverently say, in regard to the divine nature, what the Apostle says about our humanity, that love is the 'bond of perfectness'—the girdle which, braced round all the garments, keeps them in their place.

For round these infinite, innumerable, unnameable, and named divine perfections, is that which brings them all into symmetry and keeps them all in harmonious action—Love. He has wisdom, and power, and eternal being, but He is Love.

But do not let us forget that whilst thus my text proclaims the ultimate truth, these other attributes, as they are called, are all smelted down, as it were, into, and present in, the love which is their crown. The same Apostle, who has thus the honour of ringing out to the world the good news that God is Love, declares that 'this is the message' which he has to tell, that 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' So the light of righteousness, as well as the lambent

flame of love, burn together on that central fire of the universe. We must not so conceive of the love of God, as to darken the radiance of His righteousness, or to obscure the brilliancy of that pure light which tolerates no admixture of darkness.

May I venture a step further, and ask whether we are not warranted in believing that in that which we call the love of God there do abide the same elements as characterise the thing that bears the same name in our human experience? The spectrum has told us that the constituents of the mighty sun in the heavens are the same as the constituents of this little darkened earth. And there are the same lines in the divine spectrum that there are in ours. So if we can venture to say of Him, He is Love, do not let us shrink from saying that then, like us, He delights in the companionship of His beloved; that, like us, He rejoices in giving Himself to His beloved; that, like us, but infinitely, He desires the good of His beloved; and that, like us, He seeks only for the requital of an answering love. All these things, the joy of the Lord in man, the yielding of the Lord to man, the beneficent desire of the Lord for the good of man, and the hunger of the Lord for the response of love from man—all these things are affirmed when we affirm that God is Love.

Our Apostle would concur heartily in the great text which was the theme of a recent sermon. Paul said, 'God establishes His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' John says, 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'

So the Cross of Christ is the one demonstration that God loved us. Looking to it we can say, with a great modern teacher:—

*'So the All-great were the All-loving too,
So through the thunder comes a human voice,
Saying "Oh! heart I made; a heart beats here,*

*Face, My hands fashioned, see it in Myself;
Thou hast no power, nor mayest conceive of Mine;
But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,
And thou must love Me, who have died for thee."*

II. Here we have the ultimate word as to our religion.

'We love Him, because He first loved us.' There is a bridge wanted between these two, and the bridge is supplied abundantly in this letter, in entire harmony with the teaching of the rest of the New Testament. Much has been said, and profitably said, with reference to the modification of the general type of Christian teaching in the writings respectively of Paul, Peter, James, and John. I thankfully recognise the diversities. They are not divergencies; they are perfectly complementary, and may all be made to harmonise. This Apostle of love has also declared to us how it comes that the love which burns at the centre of things, where there is a heart, kindles a responding love away out on the circumference of things, where there are men with hearts; and the bridge is—'We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.' So says John. And Paul, the Apostle of faith, who sometimes seems as if his only conception of the link of union between God and man was, on the part of man, faith, responds when he speaks of a faith which worketh, comes to energetic operation, through the love which it has kindled.

So we come to this, that a simple trust in the love of God, as manifested in Jesus Christ, our Lord, is the only thing which will so deal with man's natural self-regard and desire to make himself his own object and centre, as to substitute for that the victorious love to God. You cannot love God, unless you believe that He loves you. You will never be absolutely sure of that, unless you have learned it from the Cross of Christ. You will not respond with the love that He desires, but there will be a film between your ice and the fire that

could melt it, until that is swept away by the simple act of confidence in God manifested to you in Jesus Christ. This is Christianity; this, nothing less, is religion—to love God, because I believe that in Jesus Christ God has loved me.

And that is the only thing that He desires or accepts. The Religion of Fear; what is it? 'Thou wert an austere man ... and I was afraid.' Yes! and what did you do when you were afraid? 'I hid my talent in the ground,' and was utterly idle. Here rise, on either side of the valley, two mountains—Ebal and Gerazim. From the one were thundered the curses, from the other broke the benediction of the blessings; the one is barren, the other is verdant—'which thing is an allegory.' The Religion of Fear does nothing, the Religion of Love does all. The Religion of Self-interest is narrow, poor, mostly inoperative of any lofty enthusiasm or high nobleness of character. The Religion of Duty; 'I ought to worship, I am bidden to do this, that, or the other thing, which I do not a bit like to do. I am forbidden to do this, that, and the other thing which I should very much like to do, if I durst'—that religion is the religion of a slave; and there are hosts of us that know nothing better. And so our Christianity is a feeble and an uncomfortable thing; and there are little joy, and little subjugation of the will, and little leaping up of the heart in glad obedience in it. I was talking to a good, aged man, not long ago, whose religion was of a very gloomy type. He said to me, 'As to love, I know next to nothing about it.' Ah! brethren, I am afraid that is true about a good many of us who call ourselves Christians.

Then let me say, too, that if we love Him, it will be the motive power and spring of all manner of obediences and glad services. Love is the mother-tincture, so to speak, which you can colour, and to which you can add in various ways, and produce variously tinted and tasted and perfumed commixtures. Love lies at the foundation of all Christian goodness. It will lead to the subjugation of the will; and that is the thing that is most of all needed to make a man righteous and pure. So St. Augustine's paradox, rightly understood, is a

magnificent truth, 'Love! and do what you will.' For then you will be sure to will what God wills, and you ought.

If this be the summing-up of all religion, a practical conclusion follows. When we feel ourselves defective in the glow and operative driving power of love to God, what is the right thing to do? When a man is cold, he will not warm himself by putting a clinical thermometer into his mouth, and taking his temperature, will he? Let him go into the sunshine and he will be warmed up. You can pound ice in a mortar, and except for the little heat generated by the impact of the pestle, it will keep ice still. But float the iceberg south into the tropics, and what has become of it? It has all run down into sweet, warm water, and mingled with the warm ocean that has dissolved it. So do not think about yourselves and your own loveless hearts so much, but think about God, and the infinite welling up of love in His heart to you, a great deal more. 'We love Him, because He first loved us'; therefore, to love Him more, we must feel more that He does love us.

III. Lastly, here is the ultimate word about our conduct to men.

I said that John, by leaving out any specification of the object of love, as well as by the verses that immediately follow, shows that he regards the emotion as one, though its direction is two-fold. That just comes to the plain truth, that the only victorious antagonist to the self-regarding temperament of average men, and the only power which will change philanthropy from a sentiment into a self-denying and active principle of conduct, is to be found in the belief of the love of God in Jesus Christ, and in answering love to Him.

That is a lesson for many sorts of people to-day. What they call altruism is no discovery of Christianity, but its practice is. I freely admit that there is much honest and self-sacrificing beneficence and benevolence which are not connected, in the men who practice them, with faith in Jesus Christ. But I question very much whether these would have existed if the story of the Cross had been unknown. And

sure I am that the history of non-Christian attempts to promote the brotherhood of man, and to diffuse a wide and operative love of mankind, teaches us, on the one side, that the emotion is not strong enough to last, and to work, unless it is based on God's love in Jesus Christ. And the history of Christianity, on the other side, though with many defects and things to be ashamed of, teaches us, conversely, that wherever there is a genuine love of God, its exterior form, so to say, the outside of it which is presented to the world, will be true love to man.

Christian people, lay this to heart; you are to be mirrors of the love to which you turn for all blessedness and peace. It is of no use to say, 'My religion is the love of God' unless the love of God is manifested in the love of man. If you love God, you will love those that God loves, those for whom Christ died, those who are just like what *you* were when you learned that God loved you. The service of God is the service of man.

One last word, 'We love Him, because He first loved us.' Do you? Or is it rather true of you: 'I do not love God, though He has loved me'? I saw not long since, up on the flank of a mountain, an obstinate patch of snow, that had fronted, in unmelted cold, months of the summer sun. There are some of us who lift a broad shield of thick-ribbed ice between ourselves and the radiance of the warm heart of God. Oh! brother; do not shut that love out of your heart; for if you do, you shut out peace and goodness, and shut in all manner of poisonous creatures and doleful shapes, whose companionship will be misery and death.

2 JOHN

2 John 1:3--GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE

‘Grace be with you. mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.’ —2 John 1:3.

WE have here a very unusual form of the Apostolic salutation. ‘Grace, mercy, and peace’ are put together in this fashion only in Paul’s two Epistles to Timothy, and in this the present instance; and all reference to the Holy Spirit as an agent in the benediction is, as there, omitted.

The three main words, ‘Grace, mercy, and peace,’ stand related to each other in a very interesting manner. If you will think for a moment you will see, I presume, that the Apostle starts, as it were, from the fountain-head, and slowly traces the course of the blessing down to its lodgment in the heart of man. There is the fountain, and the stream, and, if I may so say; the great still lake in the soul, into which its waters flow, and which the flowing waters make. There is the sun, and the beam, and the brightness grows deep in the heart of man. Grace, referring solely to the Divine attitude and thought: mercy, the manifestation of grace in act, referring to the workings of that great Godhead in its relation to humanity: and peace, which is the issue in the soul of the fluttering down upon it of the mercy which is the activity of the grace. So these three come down, as it were, a great, solemn, marble staircase from the heights of the Divine mind, one step at a time, down to the level of earth; and the blessings which are shed along the earth. Such is the order. All begins with grace; and the end and purpose of grace, when it flashes into deed, and becomes mercy, is to fill my soul with quiet repose, and shed across all the turbulent sea of human love a great calm, a beam of sunshine that gilds, and miraculously stills while it gilds, the waves.

If that be, then, the account of the relation of these three to one another, let me just dwell for a moment upon their respective characteristics, that we may get more fully the large significance and wide scope of this blessing.

Let us begin at what may be regarded either as the highest point from which all the stream descends, or as the foundation upon which all the structure rests ‘Grace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father.’ These *two*, blended and yet separate, to either of whom a Christian man has a distinct relation, these two are the sources, equally, of the whole of the grace.

The Scriptural idea of grace is love that stoops, and that pardons, and that communicates. I say nothing about that last characteristic, but I would like to dwell for a moment or two upon the other phases of this great word, a key-word to the understanding of so much of Scripture.

The first thing then that strikes me in it is how it exults in that great thought that there is no reason whatsoever for God’s love except God’s will. The very foundation and notion of the word ‘grace’ is a free, undeserved, unsolicited, self-prompted, and altogether gratuitous bestowment, a love that is its own reason, as indeed the whole of the Divine acts are, just as we say of Him that He draws His being from Himself, so the whole motive for His action and the whole reason for His heart of tenderness to us lies in Himself. We have no power. We love one another because we apprehend something deserving of love, or fancy that we do. We love one another because there is something in the object on which our love falls; which, either by kindred or by character, or by visible form, draws it out. We are influenced *so*, and love a thing because the thing or the person is perceived by us as being worthy, for some reason or other, of the love. God loves because He cannot help it; God loves because He is God. Our love is drawn out — I was going to say pumped out — by an application of external causes.

God's love is like an artesian well, whensoever you strike, up comes, self-impelled, gushing into light because there is such a central store of it beneath everything, the bright and flashing waters. Grace is love that is not drawn out, but that bursts out, self-originated, undeserved. 'Not for your sakes, be it known unto you, O house of Israel, but for Mine own name's sake, do I this.' The grace of God is above that, comes spontaneously, driven by its own fulness, and welling up unasked, unprompted, undeserved, and therefore never to be turned away by our evil, never to be wearied by our indifference, never to be brushed aside by our negligence, never to be provoked by our transgression, the fixed, eternal, unalterable centre of the Divine nature. His love is grace.

And then, in like manner, let me remind you that there lies in this great word, which in itself is a gospel, the preaching that God's love, though it be not turned away by, is made tender by our sin. Grace is love extended to a person that might reasonably expect, because he deserves, something very different; and when there is laid, as the foundation of everything, the grace of our Father and of the Son of the Father; it is but packing into one word that great truth which we all of us, saints and sinners, need — a sign that God's love is love that deals with our transgressions and shortcomings, flows forth perfectly conscious of them, and manifests itself in taking them away, both in their guilt, punishment, and peril. 'The grace of our Father' is a love to which sin-convinced consciences may certainly appeal; a love to which all sin-tyrannised souls may turn for emancipation and deliverance. Then, if we turn for a moment from that deep fountain, 'Love's ever-springing well,' as one of our old hymns has it, to the stream, we get other blessed thoughts. The love, the grace, breaks into mercy. The fountain gathers itself into a river, the infinite, Divine love concentrates itself in act, and that act is described by this one word, mercy. As grace is love which forgives, so mercy is love which pities and helps. Mercy regards men, its object, as full of sorrows and miseries, and so robes itself in garb of compassion, and takes wine and oil into its hands to pour into the

wound, and lays often a healing hand, very carefully and very gently, upon the creature, lest, like a clumsy surgeon, it should pain instead of heal, and hurt where it desires to console. God's grace softens itself into mercy, and all His dealings with us men must be on the footing that we are not only sinful, but that we are weak and wretched, and so fit subjects for a compassion which is the strangest paradox of a perfect and divine heart.

The mercy of God is the outcome of His grace.

And as is the fountain and the stream, so is the great lake into which it spreads itself when it is received into a human heart. Peace comes, the all-sufficient sum-mint up of everything that God can give, and that men can need, from HIS loving-kindness, and from their needs. The world is too wide to be narrowed to any single aspect of the various discords and disharmonies which trouble men. Peace with God, peace in this anarchic kingdom within me, where conscience and will, hopes and fears, duty and passion, sorrows and joys, cares and confidence, are ever fighting one another; where we are torn asunder by conflicting aims and rival claims, and wherever any part of our nature asserting itself against another leads to intestine warfare, and troubles the poor soul. All that is harmonised and quieted down, and made concordant and co-operative to one great end, when the grace and the mercy have flowed silently into our spirits and harmonised aims and desires.

There is peace that comes from submission; tranquillity of spirit, which is the crown and reward of obedience; repose, which is the very smile upon the face of faith, and all these things are given unto us along with the grace and mercy of our God. And as the man that possesses this is at peace with God, and at peace with himself, so he may bear in his heart that singular blessing of a perfect tranquillity and quiet amidst the distractions of duty, of sorrows, of losses, and of cares. 'In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known unto God; and the peace of

God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.’ And he who is thus at friendship with God, and in harmony with himself, and at rest from sorrows and cares, will surely find no enemies amongst men with whom he must needs be at war, but will be a son of peace, and walk the world, meeting in them all a friend and a brother. So all discords maybe quieted; even though still we have to fight the good fight of faith, we may do, like Gideon of old, build an altar to ‘Jehovah-shalom,’ the God of peace.

And now one word, as to what this great text tells us are the conditions for a Christian man, of preserving, vivid and full, these great gifts, ‘Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you,’ or, as the Revised Version more accurately reads, ‘shall be with us in truth and love.’ Truth and love are, as it were, the space within which the river flows, if I may so say, the banks of the stream. Or, to get away from the metaphor, these are set forth as being the conditions abiding in which, for our parts, we shall receive this benediction

— ‘In truth and in love.’

I have no time to enlarge upon the great thoughts that these two words, thus looked at, suggest; let me put it into a sentence. To ‘abide in the truth’ is to keep ourselves conscientiously and habitually under the influence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and of the Christ who is Himself the Truth.

They who, keeping in Him, realising His presence, believing His word, founding their thinking about the unseen, about their relations to God, about sin and forgiveness, about righteousness and duty, and about a thousand other things, upon Christ and the revelation that He makes, these are those who shall receive ‘Grace, mercy, and peace.’ Keep yourselves in Christ, and Christ coming to you, brings in His hands, and is, the grace and the mercy and the peace of which my text speaks. And in love, if we want these blessings, we must keep ourselves consciously in the possession of, and in the grateful

response of our hearts to, the great love, the incarnate Love, which is given in Jesus Christ.

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

3 JOHN

3 John 1:2--A PROSPEROUS SOUL

‘Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth.’ —3 John 1:2.

This little letter contains no important doctrinal teaching nor special revelation of any kind. It is the outpouring of the Christian love of the old Apostle to a brother about whom we know nothing else except that John, the beloved, loved him in the truth. And this prayer — for it is a prayer rather than a mere wish, since a good man like John turned all his wishes into prayers — this prayer in the original is even more emphatic and beautiful than in our version. ‘Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth,’ says the Revised Version, and that slight change in the position of one clause is at once felt to be an improvement. We can scarcely suppose an Apostle praying for anybody ‘above all things’ that he might get on in the world. But the wish that Gains may prosper outwardly in all things, as his soul

prosper, is eminently worthy of John. He sets these two types of prosperity over against one another, and says, 'My wish for you is that you may be as prosperous and robust in spiritual matters as you are in bodily and material things.'

I. Now note in the first place, What makes a prosperous soul? That question might be answered in a great variety of ways, but I purpose for the present to answer it by confining myself to this letter, and seeing what we can find out about the man to whom it was addressed. 'I rejoiced greatly when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee.' There is the starting-point of true health of soul. That soul and only that soul, is prosperous, in which what the Apostle calls here 'the truth' is lodged and rooted; and by 'the truth' he means, of course, the whole great revelation of God in Jesus Christ; and eminently Jesus Christ Himself who is the embodied Truth. Whether we take the phrase as meaning the abiding of Jesus Christ in the heart, or whether we take it as meaning more simply the incorporation into the very substance of the being, of the motives and principles that lie in the Gospel, comes to pretty much the same thing. The one thing which makes a man's soul healthy is to get Jesus Christ into it. That acts like an amulet that banishes all diseases and corruptions. That is like the preserving salt which, rubbed into a perishable substance, arrests corruption and makes food sweet and savoury. It is the engrafted word that is able to save the soul, and howsoever many other things may contribute to the inner well-being and prosperity of a man, such as intellectual acquirements, refined tastes, the gratification of pure affections, the fulfilment of innocent and legitimate hopes, and the like, the one thing that makes the soul prosperous is to have Christ in His word deeply planted and inseparably enshrined in its personality and being.

And how is that enshrining to be brought about? Alas, we all know the way a great deal better than we, practise it. The prosperous soul is the soul that has opened itself in docile obedience for the entrance

of the quickening and cleansing word. And just as a flower will open its calyx in the sunshine, and being opened by the sunshine playing upon its elastic filaments, will, because it is opened, receive into itself the sun that opened it and so grow; in like manner, that heart that disparts itself at the touch of Christ's hand, and welcomes Him into the inner chambers and shrine of its being, will find that where He comes He brings warmth and fragrance and growth and all blessing. The prosperous soul is the Christ-inhabited soul By willing reception, by patient waiting, by the study of God's word, by the endeavour to bring ourselves more and more under the influence of the truth as it is in Jesus, does that truth that makes prosperity take up its abode within us.

But the letter gives another of the characteristics of the truly prosperous and healthy soul. 'Thy brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.' The Apostle is not afraid of a confusion of metaphors which shocks sticklers for rhetorical propriety. The truth is, first of all, regarded as being in the man; and then it is regarded as being a road on which, and within the limits of which he walks, or an atmosphere in which he moves. The incongruity is no real incongruity, but it strikingly brings out the great and blessed fact of the Gospel that the man who has the grace of *God*, the truth as it is in Jesus, within him, thereby finds that there is prepared for him a path within the limits of that truth in which he can safely walk. There will be progress if there be prosperity. The prosperous spirit is the active and advancing spirit, not content merely with sitting and saying, 'I have the truth in my soul Thy word have I hid in my heart that I sin not against Thee'; but recognising that that truth is the law of his life, and prescribes for him a course of conduct. The prosperous soul is the soul that confines its activity within the fence which 'the truth as it is in Jesus,' who is the pattern, and the motive, and the law, and the power, has laid down for us; and within those limits makes daily and hourly advance to a more entire conformity with the example of the Lord. The prosperous soul is the soul that *walks* — not that sits idle

— for action is the end of thought, and the purpose of the truth is to make men good, and not merely wise — a soul that acts and advances, yet never passing out of the atmosphere of the Gospel, nor going beyond the principles and motives that are laid down there.

There is a third characteristic in this letter, which we may also take for an illustration of the Apostle's idea. For he says: 'Thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest.'

Now 'faithfully' is not here used in the sense of righteously discharging all obligations and fulfilling one's stewardship, but it means something deeper than that. The root idea is 'whatever thou doest thou doest as a work of Christian faith'; or, to put it into other words, the prosperous soul is the soul all whose activity is based upon that one great truth made its own by faith, that Jesus Christ loves it, and so is all the result of trust in Him. Faith in Christ is the mother-tincture, out of which every virtue can be compounded, according to the liquid to which you add it. The basis of all, the 'stock' from which all the rest is really made, is the act of faith in Jesus Christ. And so the prosperous soul is the soul that has the truth in it, and walks in the truth which it has, and does everything because it trusts in the living God and in Jesus Christ His Son.

Is that your notion of the ideal of human nature, of the true and noble prosperity of an immortal spirit? Unless it be you have yet to learn the loftiest elevation and the fairest beauty that are possible for men. The prosperous soul filled with Christ within; and walking with Christ by its side, and drawing laws and motives, pattern and power from Him, is the soul that truly has fulfilled its ideal, and is journeying on the right road, For that is the literal meaning of the word that is rendered here 'prosper'; journeying on the right road to the true goal of human nature.

II. Look at the wished-for correspondence between this soul-prosperity and outward prosperity. 'Beloved,' says John, 'I wish

above all things,' or rather,' I wish that in regard to all things, thou mayest prosper and be in health as thy soul prospereth.'

How would you like that standard applied to your worldly prosperity? Would you like not to get on any better in business than you do in religion? Would you be content that your limbs should be no more healthy than your soul, or that you should be making no more advances in worldly happiness and material prosperity than you are in the Divine life? Would you be content to have your worldly prosperity doled out to you out of the same spoon, of the same dimensions, with which you are content to receive your spiritual prosperity 'As thy soul prospereth' — that would mean a very Lenten diet for a good many of us, and a very near approach to insolvency for some commercial men, Brethren, there is a sharp test in these words. I suppose this good Gaius to whom the letter was written was very likely in humble circumstances, and not improbably in enfeebled health. And John was probably wishing for him more than he had, when he wished him to get on as well in the world as he did in his spiritual life, and desired that his soul might prosper as much as his body. It would be a bad thing for some of us if the same standard of proportion were applied to us. Another consideration is suggested by this correspondence, and that is that it is always a disastrous thing for Christian people when outward prosperity gets ahead of inward. It is the ruin of a good many so-called Christian people. When a man gets on in the world he begins, too *often*, to decline in the truth. It is difficult for us to carry a full cup without spilling it. And the worst thing that could happen to many Christian people would be what they fret, and fume, and work themselves into a fever, and live careful days and sleepless nights in order to secure — and that is, outward prosperity. The best thing is that the soul should be more prosperous than the body, and the worst adversity is the outward prosperity that ruins or harms the inward life.

III. So, lastly, note the superiority of the inward prosperity. There is no overstrained spiritualism here, John has set us an example that we need not be afraid to follow. If he that leaned upon Christ's bosom, and had drunk in more of the spirit of his Master than any of the Twelve, was not afraid to pray for this good brother that he might have worldly good and health, we need not doubt that for ourselves, and for those that are dear to us, it is perfectly legitimate and right that we should desire and pray for both things. There is no unnatural, artificial, hypocritical pretence of despising the present and the outward in the words here. Although the Apostle does put the two things side by side, he does not fall into the error of casting contempt upon either. He is a true disciple of the Master who said, 'Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.' And if your Father knows that you have need, then you may be quite sure that you will get them, and it is a He to pretend that you do not want them when you do.

But then, that being admitted, look how the higher towers above the legitimate lower. It will always be the case that if a man seeks first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, there will be — in his simple devotion to the truth, and walking within the limits that it prescribes, and making all his life an act of faith — a direct tendency in a great many directions to secure the best possible use, and the largest possible enjoyment, from the things that are seen and *temporal*. 'Godliness hath promise of the life which now is'; and the first Psalm, which perhaps may have been in the Apostle's mind here, contains a truth that was not exhausted in the Old Testament days, because the man whose heart is set on the law of God, and who meditates upon that law day and night, all that he doeth shall prosper. There is in godliness a distinct and constant tendency to make the best of both worlds; but the best is not made of the present world unless we subordinate it and feel distinctly its insignificance in comparison with the future, which is also the present, unseen world.

And even when, as is often the case, the devout and inwardly prosperous soul is compassed about with sorrows that never can be stanch'd, with griefs through which anything but an immortal life would bleed itself away; or with poverty and want and anxiety arising from causes which no personal devotion can ever touch or affect—even then if the soul prospers it has the power, the magic power, of converting poison into food, and sorrow into a means of growth; and they whose spirits are joined to Jesus Christ, and whose souls ever move in harmony with Him — and therefore are prosperous souls — will find that there is nothing in this world that is really adverse to them. For ‘all things work together for good to them that love God,’ since he who loves God thinks nothing bad that helps him to love Him better; and since he who loves God finds occasion for loving and trusting Him more in every variety and vicissitude of earthly fortune.

Therefore, brethren, if we will follow the directions that this Apostle gives us as to how to secure the prosperity of our *souls*, God is faithful and He will measure to us prosperity in regard of outward things by the proportion which our faith in Him bears to His faithfulness. The more we love Him, the more certainly will all things be our servants. If we can say ‘We are Christ’s,’ then all things are ours.

3 John 1:7.--FOR THE SAKE OF THE NAME

‘For His name’s sake.’ —3 John 1:7.

THE Revised Version gives the true force of these words by omitting the ‘His,’ and reading merely ‘for the sake of the Name.’ There is no need to say whose name. There is only One which could evoke the heroism and self-sacrifice of which the Apostle is speaking. The expression, however, is a remarkable one. The name seems almost, as it were, to be personified.

There are one or two other instances in the New Testament where the same usage is found, according to the true reading, though it is obscured in our Authorised Version, because it struck some early transcribers as being strange, and so they tried to mend and thereby spoiled it.

We read, for instance, in the true reading, in the Acts of the Apostles, as to the disciples, on the first burst of persecution, that ‘they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name.’ And again, in Philipians, that in recompense and reward for ‘His obedience unto death’

— the Father hath given unto the Son — ‘the Name which is above every name.’ Once more, though less obviously, we find James speaking about ‘the worthy name by which we are called.’

Then the other part of this phrase is quite as significant as this principal one. The word rendered ‘for the sake of,’ does not merely mean — though it does mean that — ‘on account of,’ or ‘by reason of,’ but ‘on behalf of,’ as if, in some wonderful sense, that mighty and exalted Name was furthered, advantaged, or benefited by even men’s poor services. So, you see, a minute study of the mere words of the Scripture, though it may seem like grammatical trifling and pedantry, yields large results. Men do sometimes ‘gather grapes of thorns’; and the hard, dry work of trying to get at the precise shade of meaning in Scriptural words always repays us with large lessons and impulses. So let us consider the thoughts which naturally arise from the accurate observation of the very language here.

I. And, first, let us consider the pre-eminence implied in ‘the Name.’

Now I need not do more than remind you in a sentence that eminently in the Old Testament, and also in the New, a name is a great deal more than the syllables which designate a person or a thing. It describes, not only who a man is, but what he is; and

implies qualities, characteristics, either bodily or spiritual, which were either discerned in or desired for a person. So when the creatures are brought to Adam that he might give them names, that expresses the thought of the primitive man's insight into their nature and characteristics. So we find our Lord changing the names of His disciples, in some cases in order to express either the deep qualities which His eye discerned lying beneath the more superficial ones, and to be evolved in due time, or declaring some great purpose which He had for them, official or otherwise.

So here the name substantially means the same thing as the Person Jesus. It is not the syllables by which He is called, but the whole character and nature of Him who is called by these syllables, that is meant by 'the Name.' The distinction between it, as so used, and Person, is simply that the former puts more stress on the qualities and characteristics as known to us.

Thus 'the Name' means the whole Christ as we know Him, or as we may know Him, from the Book, in the dignity of His Messiahship, in the mystery of His Divinity, in the sweetness of His life, in the depth of His words, in the gentleness of His heart, in the patience and propitiation of His sacrifice, in the might of His resurrection, in the glory of His ascension, in the energy of His present life and reigning work for us at the right hand of God. All these, the central facts of the Gospel, are gathered together into that expression *the Name*, which is the summing up in one mighty word, so to speak, which it is not possible for a man to utter except in fragments, of all that Jesus Christ is in Himself, and of all that He is and does for us.

It is but a picturesque and condensed way of saying that Jesus Christ, in the depth of His nature and the width of His work, stands alone, and is the single, because the all-sufficient, Object of love and trust and obedience.

There is no need for a forest of little pillars; as in some great chapter-house one central shaft, graceful as strong, bears the groined

roof, and makes all other supports unnecessary and impertinent. There is one Name, and one alone, because in the depths of that wondrous nature, in the circumference of that mighty work, there is all that a human heart, or that all human hearts, can need for peace, for nobleness, for holiness, for the satisfaction of all desires, for the direction of efforts, for the stability of their being. The name stands alone, and it will be the only Name that, at last, shall blaze upon the page of the world's history when the ages are ended; and the chronicles of earth, with the brief 'immortality' which they gave to other names of illustrious men, are moulded into dust. 'The Name is above every name,' and will outlast them all, for it is the all-sufficient and encyclopaedical embodiment of everything that a single heart, or the whole race, can require, desire, conceive, or attain.

So then, brethren, the uniqueness and solitariness of the name demands an equal and corresponding exclusiveness of devotion and trust in us. 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord thy God is one Lord. Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God with *all* thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.' And in like manner we may argue — There is one Christ, and there is none other but He. Therefore all the current of my being is to set to Him. and on Him alone am I to repose my undivided weight, casting all my cares and putting all my trust only on Him. Lean on none other. You cannot lean too heavily on that strong arm. *Love* none other except in Him; for His heart is wide enough and deep enough for all mankind. Obey none other, for only His voice has the right to command. And lifting up our eyes, let us see 'no man any more save Jesus only.' That Name stands alone.

Involved in this, but worthy of briefly putting separately, is this other thought, that the pre-eminent and exclusive mention of the Name carries with it, in fair inference, the declaration of His Divine nature. It seems to me that we have here a clear case in which the Old Testament usage is transferred to Jesus Christ, only, instead of

the Name being Jehovah, it is Jesus. It seems to me impossible that a man saturated as this Apostle was with Old Testament teaching, and familiar as he was with the usage which runs through it as to the sanctity of 'the Name of the Lord,' should have used such language as this of my text unless he had felt, as he has told us himself, that 'the Word was God.' And the very incidental character of the allusion gives it the more force as a witness to the commonplaceness which the thought of the divinity of Jesus Christ had assumed to the consciousness of the Christian Church.

II. But passing from that, let me ask you to look, secondly, at the power of the Name to sway the life.

I have explained the full meaning of the preposition in my text in my introductory remarks. It seems to me to cover both the ground of 'on account of,' or 'by reason of,' and 'on behalf of.'

Taking the word in the former of these two senses, note how this phrase, 'for the sake of the Name,' carries with it this principle, that in that Name, explained as I have done, there lie all the forces that are needed for the guidance and the impulses of life. In Him, in the whole fulness of His being, in the wonders of the story of His character and historical manifestation, there lies all guidance for men. He is the Pattern of our conduct. He is the Companion for us in our sorrow. He is the Quickener for us in all our tasks. And to set Him before us as our Pattern, and to walk in the paths that He dictates, is to attain to perfection. Whosoever makes 'for the sake of the Name' the motto of his life will not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

And not only is there guidance, But there is impulse, and that is better than guidance. For what men most of all want is a power that shall help or make them to do the things that they see plainly enough to be right.

And oh, brother, where is there such a force to quicken, to ennoble, to lead men to higher selves than their dead past selves, as lies in the grand sweep of that historical manifestation which we understand by the Name of Jesus? There is nothing else that will go so deep down into the heart and unseal the fountains of power and obedience as that Name. There is nothing else that will so strike the shackles off the prisoned will, and ban back to their caves the wild beasts that tyrannise within, and put the chain round their necks, as the Name of Jesus Christ. That is the Talisman that ennobles everything, that evokes undreamed-of powers, that ‘out of these stones,’ the hard and unsusceptible and obstinate wills of godless men, will ‘raise up children unto Abraham.’ This is the secret that turns the heavy lead of *our* corrupt natures into pure gold.

And where does the impulsive power lie? Where, in that great continent, the whole life and work of Jesus Christ, is the dominant summit from which the streams run down? The Cross! The Cross! The Love that died for us, individually and singly, as well as collectively, is the thing that draws out answering love. And answering love is the untiring and omnipotent power that transmutes my whole nature into the humble aspiration to be like Him who has given Himself for me, and to render back myself unto Him for His gift. Brother, if you have not known the Name of Christ as the Name of the Divine Saviour who died on the Cross for you, you do not yet understand the power to transform, to ennoble, to energise, to impel to all self-sacrifice that lies in that Name. In the fact of His death, and in the consequent fact of the communication of life from Him to each of us if we will, lie the great impulses which will blessedly and strongly carry us along the course which He marks out for us. And they who can say ‘For the sake of the Name’ will live lives calm, harmonious, noble, and in some humble measure conformed to the serene and transcendent beauty to which they bow and on which they rest. The impulse for a life — the only one that will last, and the only one that will lift — lies in the recognition of the Name. And so, let me remind you how our consequent simple duty is honestly,

earnestly, prayerfully, always, to try to keep ourselves under the influence of that sweet compulsion and mighty encouragement which lie in the Name of Jesus Christ. How fragmentary, how interrupted, how imperfect at the best are our yieldings to the power and the sweetness of the motives and pattern given to us in Christ's Name! How much of our lives would be all the same if Jesus Christ never had come, or if we never had believed in Him! Look back over your days, Christian men, and see how little of them has borne that stamp, and how slightly it has been impressed upon them.

Our whole life ought to be filled with His Name. You can write it anywhere. It does not need a gold plate to carve His Name upon. It does not need to be set in jewels and diamonds. The poorest scrap of brown paper, and the bluntest little bit of pencil, and the shakiest hand, will do to write the Name of Christ; and all life, the trivialities as well as the crises, may be flashing and bright with the sacred syllables. Mohammedans decorate their palaces and mosques with no pictures, but with the name of Allah, in gilded arabesques. Everywhere, on walls and roof, and windows and cornices, and pillars and furniture, the name is written. There is no such decoration for a life as that Christ's Name should be inscribed thereon.

III. Lastly, notice the service that even we can do to the Name.

That, as I said, is the direct idea of the Apostle here. He is speaking about a very small matter. There were some anonymous Christian people who had gone out on a little missionary tour, and in the course of it, penniless and homeless, they had come to a city the name of which we do not know, and had been taken in and kindly entertained by a Christian brother, whose name has been preserved to us in this one letter. And, says John, these humble men went out 'on behalf of the Name' — to do something to further it, to advantage it! Jesus Christ, the bearer of the Name, was in some

sense helped and benefited, if I may use the word, by the work of these lowly and unknown brethren.

Now there are one or two other instances in the New Testament where this same idea of the benefit accruing to the name of Jesus from His servants on earth is stated, and I just point to them in a sentence.

In order that you may have all the evidence before you. There is the passage to which I have already referred, recording the disciples' joy that they were 'accounted worthy to suffer shame on behalf of the Name.' There are the words of Christ Himself in reference to Paul at his conversion, 'I will shew him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake.' There is the church's eulogium on Barnabas and Paul. as 'men that have hazarded their lives for the Name of our Lord Jesus.' There is Paul's declaration that he is 'ready, not only to be bound, but to die, on behalf of the Name of the Lord Jesus.' And in the introduction of the Epistle to the Romans he connects his apostleship with the benefit that thereby accrued to the Name of Christ. If we put all these together they just come to this, that, wonderful as it is, and unworthy as we are to take that great Name into our lips, yet, in God's infinite mercy and Christ's fraternal and imperial love, He has appointed that His Name should be furthered by the sufferings, the service, the life, and the death of His followers.

'He was extolled with my tongue,' says the Psalmist, in a rapture of wonder that any words of his could exalt God's Name. So to you Christians is committed the charge of magnifying the name of Jesus Christ. You can do it by your lives, and you can do it by your words, and you are sent to do both. We can 'adorn the doctrine'; paint the lily and gild the refined gold, and make men think more highly of our Lord by our example of faithfulness and obedience. We can do it by our definite proclamation of His Name, which is laid upon us all to do, and for which facilities of varying degrees are granted. The

inconsistencies of the professing followers of Christ are the strongest barriers to the world's belief in the glory of His Name. The Church as it is forms the hindrance rather than the help to the world's becoming a church. If from us sounded out the Name, and over all that we did it was written, blazing, conspicuous, the world would look and listen, and men would believe that there was something in the Gospel.

If you are a Christian professor, either Christ is glorified or put to shame in you, His saint; and either it is true of you that you do all things in the Name of the Lord Jesus and so glorify His Name, or that through you the Name of Christ is 'blasphemed among the nations.' Choose which of the two it shall be!

3 John 1:8.--FELLOW-WORKERS WITH THE TRUTH

'That we might be fellow-helpers to the truth.' —3 John 1:8.

'FELLOW-HELPERS to the Truth.' A word or two may be permitted as to the immediate occasion of the expression. There seems to have been, as we learn not only from occasional references in the New Testament, but from early Christian literature, and very frequent practice in the primitive churches, of certain members having, like our friends the Quakers, 'a concern' for some special ministry, and being loosed from their ordinary avocations, and sent out with the sanction of the Church. These travelling evangelists went from place to place, and sought the hospitality and help of the Christian communities to which they came. My text is an exhortation from the aged Apostle to treat such brethren as they deserved, seeing that they have 'come forth for the sake of the Name'; and should be welcomed and helped as brethren.

Now there are ambiguities about the words, on which I need not dwell So far as the grammatical construction of the originals are concerned, they may either mean what our Authorised Version takes them to mean, 'fellow-helpers' — or rather 'fellow-workers' — for

the Truth; the co- operation being regarded as confined to the two sets of men, the evangelists and their hospitable receivers — or they may mean, as the Revised Version takes them, ‘fellow-workers *with* the Truth’ — ‘the Truth’ and the two Sets of human agents being all supposed as co- operating in one common end. The latter is, I presume, the real meaning of the Evangelist. ‘The Truth’ is supposed to be an active force in the world, which both the men who directly preach it, and the men who sustain and cheer those who do, are co-operating with. Then there is another question as to whether, by ‘the Truth’ here, we are to understand the whole body Of Christian revelation, or whether We are to see shining through the words the august figure of Him who is personally, as He Himself claimed, ‘the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.’ I believe that the latter explanation is the truer one, and more in accordance with the intense saturation in all John’s writings with the words of the Master. I can scarcely think that when he spoke thus about ‘the Truth,’ or when he spoke in another of his letters about the ‘Truth which dwelleth in us, and shall be in us for ever,’ he meant only a body of principles. I think he meant Jesus Christ Himself.

And so with that sacred and auguster meaning attaching to his *words*, I wish to look at them with you.

I. The possessors of the Truth are to be workers with the Truth.

I do not say a word about the claim which is made ha this expression, that Christian people possess the absolute truth in regard to all matters’ upon which the revelation made to them in Jesus Christ touches. That is a bold assumption, but I do not need to say a word about it here. I take it for granted that you professing Christians concur in the belief that what you have received about God and Christ and God’s will concerning men, and the way of salvation, and the prospects for the future life, stands alone and complete, as ‘the Truth,’ to which all other conceptions of God and man and duty and destiny are related, but as fragmentary at the

highest, and as often perversions, corruptions, and contradictions. Do not let any modern width of thought, or any impressions gathered from the new science of comparative religion, blur the distinctness and the joyousness of your confidence that in Christ we have not a peradventure of men, but the 'Verily! verily!' of heaven: the Truth.

And then remember that, according to the representation of my text, this Truth, wherever it enters into a man's heart, lays hold upon him, and makes him its apostle. All moral and spiritual truth has that power. There are plenty of dry statements in various regions of science and thought the reception of which brings with it no compulsion whatever to say a word about them. No man is ever smitten with the conviction that it is his duty to go out into the world and proclaim that 'two and two make four,' or truths of that sort. But once lodge in a man's heart thoughts of a moral, religious, spiritual character, and as soon as he believes them he wakes up to feel.

Then I must — I must proclaim them, and get somebody else to share my convictions; It is the test of real, deep, vital possession of 'the Truth' that it shall be as a fire shut up in our bones, burning its way necessarily out into the light; and that no man who has it dare wrap it in a napkin and bury it in the ground.

God forbid that I should say that a silent Christian is not a genuine Christian. I know too well how far beneath the ideal we all come, but sure I am that if men have never found that when 'the Truth as it is in Jesus' drew back her veil, and let the lambent beauty of her face blaze in upon their hearts, it made them her slaves and knight-errants for evermore, they have seen very very little of that supreme loveliness. Brethren! the truth that we believe is our mistress. and of the Christian truth that we profess to bold, we are sworn by the very fact to be the apostles and the missionaries.

Nor let us forget the solemn and elevating thought which goes along with the imagery of my text; that the Truth, for all its majesty and

dignity and divinity, needs men for its helpers. The only way by which it can spread is through us and our fellows. There is no magic by which it can divide and impart itself, apart from the agency of the men who already possess it. The torch has been brought from heaven, and the light with which it blazes is celestial, but in order to enlighten the darkness of the earth it must be passed from hand to hand by a linked chain of men. The lake lies full of possible fertility and promise to flush with green verdure the barren burning desert sands; but it will lie there, its possible good unrealised for ever, unless men with their spades and excavators dig the channels and lead the heaven-sent blessing that came from the clouds into all the barren places.

The Truth needs us, but when the work is done that the workers with the Truth do, it is the Truth and not the workers that have clone the work.

So, Christian men and women, I come to you with this message — recognise your dignity, the honor that is laid upon you in being allowed to be co-operators with the gospel of the glory of the Messed God. Recognise the obligation, solemn and heavy, which is laid upon you by the-very nature of the truth which we believe, by the common bonds of fellowship between man and man, to impart the message that has brought life to us; and recognise it as at ones our highest honour and our widest duty to be ‘fellow-workers with the Truth.’

II. The companions of Christ are to be workers with Christ.

He, as I have pointed out, is the Incarnate Truth. And here we come upon the especial peculiarity of Christianity as a system, considered in its relation to Jesus Christ, its Founder and its Giver. You can take Plato’s philosophy and do what you like with it, and treat Plato as a negligible quantity. You can do the same with all other great teachers, even those of them who have most impressed their own individuality upon their thinkings, and theorisings, and teachings,

but you cannot do that with Christianity; you cannot say, 'Never mind who it was that said it. Attend to what was said.' For Jesus Christ' and His message, are so interwoven and interlaced in such a fashion as that you cannot get rid of Him, and keep it. He Himself is the Truth. Christ is Christianity; mad any man that has ever tried to deal with the teachings of the New Testament as a body of principles, ignoring the lips from which they came, is left with what they call a *caput mortuum*, a dead mass of impotent generalities. Get Christ into them, and they are all palpitating, and living, and flaming, and have power.

So, then, when I call my brethren, and feel myself bound to the task of being 'workers with the Truth,' is no mere devotion to the propaganda of a creed that I want to urge, but it is devotion to proclaiming the beloved hand of the person out of whom the creed is carved, and in whom all the truth is shrined and sphered. Every man that is Christ's companion is thereby bound to be a worker with the incarnate Truth. He needs our help. True, he finds all the capital, but we are His partners, HIS representatives and agents here on earth, as He has taught us in more than one parable.

The pound or the talent is His; it is given to me, but it is left with me to determine whether it shall increase and fructify or not. On the Cross He said, 'It is finished,' but all through the ages He is working, and all through the ages His mightiest means of working is through the men by whom He works. The Lord works with them, and they work with the Lord. They are His tools; He makes them, but He cannot do His work without them. And notwithstanding the Cross, notwithstanding the adequate powers for the regeneration of humanity, and the salvation of individuals, which lie in that message of the Gospel, the co-operation of the Church is needed if the world is to be saved. Surely it is constituted in order to fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ, and to carry on the unfinished development of the finished work which, done once for all on the Cross, is not done until it has been applied to the world by Christ

working through His people, and by His people working with Christ. If there is a flaw in the covering that enwraps the wire, there will be no message at the other end. If you and I are non-conductors, no matter how much power may be flashed into us, that which is beyond us will want the power. The medium between Christ and the world that He died and lives to save, the medium is we Christian people.

‘Workers with the Truth.’ That is parallel with what Paul says, in the great word which he ventures upon when, having just declared that neither he nor Apollos are anything, he rises to the thought which balances that of their nothingness: ‘We are labourers together with God.’

Is not that a dignity? And what shall we say of men who have so little consciousness of union with Jesus Christ as that they have next to no sympathy with the things that fill His heart? I plead for no narrow interpretation of the duties of the ‘fellow-workers with the Truth.’ He came to redress all human misery, sin, and evil. He came not only to speak the words that save the soul with the everlasting salvation of sin forgiven, and friendship restored between God and man, but to carry light and healing and peace and hope into every region where the darkness broods, to break every chain and let the oppressed go free. Social improvements, and all the wider outlooks which Christian benevolence takes in these late years, all come into the general category of being the carrying out of Christ’s sympathies and purpose, and being part of the work of those who are ‘fellow-workers’ with Him in His toil, and who shall one day hear, ‘It is finished! The kingdoms of this world are the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.’

III. Further, the workers with Christ are to be workers with one another.

These travelling evangelists had one function. The people in the unknown church in Asia Minor, staying at home and following their

secular callings, had another; and that was, to help and to further these peripatetic brethren. Co-operation means diversity of function and identity of aims and ends.

For us there remains the duty still, as incumbent as it was in those early days, of recognising our own special task, of cleaving to that, and yet of furthering and helping all our brethren who, in their diverse ways, are engaged in the same great end. The men that take care of the base of operations of that army that is pressing down upon the foe are as truly fighting the enemy as the men that are in the front. It was the old law in Israel, based upon a clear understanding that all who co-operated towards one end, in whatsoever divers ways, are united together; that 'as his part is that goes down into the battle, so shall his part be that abides by the stuff; they shall part alike.'

Brethren, learn your special work. Remember that you have each something to do that nobody can do as well as you. Learn your special work, and beware of narrowing your sympathies to your special work. Let them go out to embrace all, however far apart upon the wall and however different may be their tasks, they are still co-operant to one end. 'He that planteth and he that watereth are one.' Identity of purpose, and wide diversity of method, with as wide charity, and as wide sympathy, ought to mark all Christian workers.

All the thoughts that I have been trying to urge have a very direct bearing upon church as well as upon individual life. Although there is no intention, on our Apostle's part, of laying down anything like the constitution of a Christian church, in the incidental words of my text, yet the principles involved in these words do lie very deep down in the conception of what a Christian church ought to be. They make very short work of all sacerdotal assumptions. A priest doing a miracle there at the altar, and the people simple recipients of, and spectators — that, in many quarters, is the modern notion of the

relation between pastor and people. John gives the truer one when he says — ‘fellow-helpers to the Truth’

The words bear on a mistake that is more common in the audience, I suppose, than sacramentarian notion — namely, that a church is a place where people come to hear sermons and pay their pew-rents, and there an end. There is a dead-weight of idle people clogging the work of every Christian congregation in England. Christian professors! what do you do for the Truth, for your Lord, for your brethren? I, for my part, have to say with the Apostle, ‘not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy; for by faith ye stand.’ I decline all responsibility for doing more than my own share of the evangelistic work of this church. The Chinese put up mud-forts in which there is one real cannon that can be fired, and make a noise, and all the rest are dummies; painted, wooden.

That is a great deal too like what a great many Christian churches are — one piece to fire, and the others for show.

‘Fellow-helpers.’ That defines our mutual relation. But do not be too sure that your work is only the indirect work of sustaining ‘them that are such.’ There is some direct work for *you* to do. And you are shutting your souls out from a great blessing by not doing it.

Sure I am that whoever is in union with Jesus will have his lips touched to proclaim His Name somehow. And sure I am that whoever, smitten by love and loyalty to his Master, by the ardour of affection born of the grasp of the Truth, and by real love for his fellow-men that need it, opens his lips to make Christ known, will find that there is no surer way of increasing his own grasp of the Truth, and deepening his own union with Christ. than to seek to make others share in the blessings which are his life. ‘Fellow-helpers to the Truth’ — and *with* the Truth — I pray that we may be so more and more for the days or years that may yet remain to us.

3 John 1:12.--THE CHRISTIAN'S WITNESSES TO CHARACTER

‘Demetrius hath a good report of all men, and of the truth itself.’ —3 John 1:12.

WHAT a strange fate this Demetrius has had! He has narrowly escaped oblivion, yet he is remembered for ever and his name is known over all the world. But beyond the name nothing is certain. Who he was, where and when he lived, what he had done to earn the old Apostle’s commendation are unknown. All his surroundings are swallowed up in darkness, and there shines out only that one little point of light that he ‘hath a good report’ — or, as the Revised Version better renders it, ‘he hath the witness of all men, and of the truth itself.’ A great many brilliant reputations might be glad to exchange a fame that has filled the world for a little epitaph like that.

I said we did not know anything about him. What if he should be the Demetrius whose astute appeal to profit and religion roused the shrine-makers at Ephesus and imperilled Paul’s life? Of course, that is mere conjecture, and the identity of name is not a strong foundation to build on, for it was a very common one. If this disciple, thus praised by John, is our old acquaintance in Acts, what a change had come over him! Truly, to him, ‘old things had passed away, all things were become new.’ If we remember John’s long connection with Ephesus, the conjecture will perhaps seem reasonable. At all events, we do no harm if, perhaps led by sentiment, we give as much weight as we can to the supposition that here we have, reappearing within the Church, the old antagonist, and that ‘this Paul’ had ‘persuaded’ him, too, that ‘they be no gods which are made with hands,’ and so had turned him to Jesus Christ. I wonder what became of his craft, and his silver shrines, if this is the same man as he who mustered the Ephesian silversmiths.

But be that as it may, I desire — keeping in mind the alteration of rendering that I have suggested — ‘hath *witness* of all men,’ and of the truth itself — to look at the sort of witnesses to character that a Christian man should be able to call.

I. The first witness is Common Opinion.

There is something wrong unless a Christian can put popular opinion into the witness-box in his favour. Of course there is a sense in which there is nothing more contemptible than seeking for that, and in which no heavier woe can come upon us, and no worse thing can be said about us, than that all men speak well of us. But, on the other hand, whether men speak well of us or not, there should be a distinctive characteristic plainly visible in us Christians which shall make all sorts of observers say to themselves, ‘Well! that is a good man anyhow. I may not like him; I may not want to resemble him; but I cannot help seeing what sort of a man he is, and that there is no mistake about his genuine goodness.’ That is a testimony which Christians ought to be more ambitious of possessing than many of them are, and to lay themselves out more consciously to get, than most of them do. For bad men generally know a good one when they see him, and a great many of them

‘Compound for sins they are inclined to By praising virtues they’ve no mind to,’ and substitute admiration of uncongenial goodness for imitation of it. It is nothing uncommon to find the drunkard praising the temperate man, and evil-livers of all sorts recognising the beauty of their own opposites. The worst man in the world has an ideal of goodness in his conscience and mind, far purer and loftier than the best man has realised.

And, again, it is a very righteous and good thing that people who are not Christians should have such extremely lofty and strict standards for the conduct of people that are. We sometimes smile when we see in the newspapers, for instance, sensational paragraphs about the crime of some minister, or clergyman, or some representative

religious man. No doubt a dash of malice is present in these; but they are an unconscious testimony to the high ideal of character which attaches to the profession of Christianity. No similar paragraphs appear about the immoralities or crimes of non-religious men. They are not expected to be saints. But we are, and it is right that we should be thus expected. The world does not demand of us more than it is entitled to do, or that our Lord has demanded. There is nothing more wholesome than that Christian people should feel that there are 'lynx eyes watching them, and hundreds who will have a malicious joy if they defile their garments, and bring discredit on their profession.

I have not the smallest objection to that; and I only wish that some of us who talk a great deal about the depth of our spiritual life could hear what is thought of us by our next-door neighbours, and our servants, and the

tradesmen that we deal with, and all those other folk that have no sympathy with our religion, and are, therefore, rigid judges of our conduct.

Then there is another consideration which I suggest — that a great many good people think that it is their Christianity that makes folk speak ill of them, when it is their inconsistencies and not their Christianity that provoke the sarcasm. If you wrap up the treasure of your Christianity in a rough envelope of angularity, self-righteousness, sourness, censure, and criticism, you need not wonder that people do not think much of your Christianity. It is not because Christian professors are good, but because they are not better, that ninety-nine out of a hundred of the uncharitable things that are said about them are said, and truly said.

So, dear friends, let us — not in any cowardly spirit of trying to disarm censure, nor because we have an itch to be caressed, like a parrot to have its head scratched, nor because we are pleased that men shall think well of us, but because the judgment of the world is,

in some degree, a more wholesome tribunal than the judgment of our own consciences, and is, in some sense, an anticipation, though with many mistakes, of the judgment of God — let us try to have a good report of ‘them that are without,’ and to be ‘living epistles, known and read of all men,’ who will recognise the handwriting, and say, ‘That is Christ’s.’

Remember Daniel in that court where luxury and vice and sensuality, and base intrigues of all sort, rioted, and how they said of him, ‘We shall find no occasion against him except it be concerning the law of his God.’ And let us try to earn the same kind of reputation; and be sure of this that, unless the world endorses our profession of Christianity, which it may do by *disliking* us—that is as it may be — there is grave reason to doubt whether the profession is a reality or not.

II. Then there is another witness here mentioned — ‘the truth itself.’

The Gospel of Jesus Christ witnesses for the man who witnesses for, and lives by it. A law broken testifies against the breaker; a law kept testifies for him. And so, if there be an approximation in the drift of our lives to the great ideal set forth in the law of God, that law will bear witness for us.

But there must be in us the things that Christianity plainly requires before ‘the truth’ can be put into the witness-box for us. There must be manifest self-surrender.

Let us go back to our supposition, which, of course, I freely admit is the only conjecture. If this is the Demetrius of the Acts, and he became a Christian, the first thing that ‘the truth’ required of him would be to shut up shop, to give up the lucrative occupation by which he had his wealth, and to cast in his lot with the men that were warring against idols. We, in our degree, will have, in some form or other, the same self-surrender to exercise.

I have a letter which tells me the story of a man who for years has been trying to serve God, in the employ of some establishment where they sell wines and spirits, but now his conscience has smitten him, and he has had to give it up, and writes to ask me if I can find him a situation. Well! he is borne witness to by the truth itself, which he has loyally obeyed. We all, as Christians, have to do the like, and not only in the great acts of our lives to rid ourselves of everything that is contrary to the principles and commandments of the Word, but in the small things to be ever seeking to come nearer and nearer to the ideal which He requires.

When looking into the perfect law of liberty we see in its precepts our own characters reflected, if I may so say; because we keep these we may be sure that we are right. If we do not, we may be sure that we are wrong. The truth will bear witness against lives that are ordered in defiance of it, and for those which are conformed to it. It is possible that even the lofty and perfect examples of conduct and character which are in the history of the Master, and the principles that are drawn from Him, may testify of us; and if so, what quiet blessedness will be ours!

III. But there is a last thought here. Christ Himself will be a witness.

I do not know that in these profound and mystical letters of the Apostle John, that great designation ‘the truth’ is ever employed to mean only the body of teaching contained in what we call the Gospel. I think that there is always trembling in the expression, and sometimes predominating in it, in these letters, the personal application of which our Lord, as reported by the same Apostle when he was playing the part of Evangelist, gives us the warrant, when He says, ‘I am the Truth.’ And if that personal meaning is, as I think it is, shimmering through these words, then we may venture to deal with it separately in conclusion, and to say that the third witness is Jesus Christ Himself.

‘With me,’ said Paul, ‘it is a very small matter to be judged of you, or of man’s judgment’; and that wholesome disregard of opinion is part of the attitude which we should bear towards popular or any human estimate — but ‘he that judgeth me is the Lord.’

Now, notice Paul’s tenses. He does not say, ‘He that is going to judge me,’ away out yonder in the indefinite future, at some great Day of Judgment after death, but he says, ‘He that judgeth me’; and he means us to feel that, step by step, all through our lives, and in reference to each individual action at the time of its commission, there is an act of Christ’s judgment, in infallible determination by Him of the moral good or evil of our deed. So, moment by moment, we are at that tribunal, and act by act, we please or we displease Him; and of each feeling and thought, word, and deed. He says, ‘Well,’ or ‘Ill, is it done.’

We may have Him for our Witness as well as for our Judge. How does He witness? To-day, and all through our earthly days, He will witness by His voice in the inner man, enlightened and made sensitive to evil by His own gracious presence. I believe that conscience is always the irradiation of the ‘Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world’; but I believe that the conscience of the man who is born again by faith in Jesus Christ is in a more special manner the voice of Christ Himself speaking within him. And when there rises in the heart that quiet glow which follows His approval, there is a Witness that no voices around, censuring or praising, have the smallest power to affect. Never mind what the world says if the voice within, which is the voice of Jesus Christ, testifies to integrity and to the desire to serve Him.

And covet this, dear friends, as by far the best and the happiest thing that we can possess in this world, when we hear Him, in the recesses of our hearts, saying to us, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant,’ then our thoughts are carried forward still further; and we may venture, with all our imperfections, to look onward to the day when

again the Judge will be the Witness for us, even to the surprise of those whose acts He then attests. He Himself has taught us so, when He pictures the wondering servant saying. ‘Lord, when did I do all these things, which Thou hast discovered in me?’ And He has assured us that ‘never will He forget any of our works,’ and that at the last solemn hour, when we must be manifested before the Judgment-seat of Christ, He Himself will confess our deeds before the

Father and before His holy angels. It is well to have the witness of man; it is heaven to have the witness of the Truth Himself.

JUDE

Jude 1:3, Titus 1:4--COMMON SALVATION

‘The common salvation.’ — Jude 1:3.

‘The common faith.’ — Titus 1:4.

JUDE was probably one of Christ’s brothers, and a man of position and influence in the Church. He is writing to the whole early Christian community, numbering men widely separated from each other by nationality, race, culture, and general outlook on life; and he beautifully and humbly unites himself with them all as recipients of a ‘common salvation.’ Paul is writing to Titus, the veteran leader to a raw recruit. Wide differences of mental power, of maturity of religious experience, separated the two; and yet Paul beautifully and humbly associates himself with his pupil, manifesting a ‘common faith.’

Probably neither of the writers meant more than to bring himself nearer to the persons whom they were respectively addressing; but their language goes a great deal further than the immediate application of it. The ‘salvation’ was ‘common’ to Jude and his

readers, as ‘the faith’ was to Paul and Titus, because the salvation and the faith are one, all the world over.

It is for the sake of insisting upon this community, which is universal, that I have ventured to isolate these two fragments from their proper connection, and to bring them together. But you will notice that they take up the same thought at two different stages, as it were. The one declares that there is but one remedy and healing for all the world’s woes; the other declares that there is but one way by which that remedy can be applied. All who possess ‘the common Salvation’ are so blessed because they exercise ‘the common faith.’

I. Note the underlying conception of a universal deepest need.

That Christian word ‘salvation’ has come to be threadbare and commonplace, and slips over people’s minds without leaving any dint. We all think we understand it. Some of us have only the faintest and vaguest conception of what it means, and have never realised the solemn view of human nature and its necessities which lies beneath it. And I want to press that upon you now. The word ‘to save’ means either of two things — to heal from a sickness, or to deliver from a danger. These two ideas of sickness to be healed and of dangers to be secured from enter into the Christian use of the word. Underlying it is the implication that the condition of humanity is universally that of needing healing of a sore sickness, and of needing deliverance from an overhanging and tremendous danger. ‘*Sin* is the sickness, and the issues of sin are the danger. And sin is making myself my centre and my law, and so distorting and flinging out of gear, as it were, my relations to God.

Surely it does not want many words to show that that must be the most important thing about a man. Deep down below all superficialities there lies this fundamental fact, that he has gone wrong with regard to God; and no amount of sophistication about heredity and environment and the like can ever wipe out the blackness of the fact that men willingly do break through the law,

which commands us all to yield ourselves to God, and not to set ourselves up as our own masters, and our own aims and ends, independently of Him. I say that is the deepest wound of humanity.

In these days of social unrest there are plenty of voices round us that proclaim other needs as being clamant, but, oh, they are all shallow and on the surface as compared with the deepest need of all: and the men that come round the sick-bed of humanity and say, 'Ah, the patient is suffering from a lack of education,' or 'the patient is suffering from unfavourable environment,' have diagnosed the disease superficially. There is something deeper the matter than that, and unless the physician has probed further into the wound than these surface appearances, I am afraid his remedy will go as short a way down as his conception of the evil goes.

Oh, brethren, there is something else the matter with us than ignorance or unfavourable conditions. 'The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.' The tap-root of all human miseries lies in the solemn fact of human transgression. That is a universal fact. Wide differences part us, but there is one thing that we have all in common: a conscience and a will that lifts itself against disliked good. Beneath all surface differences of garb there lies the same fact, the common sickness of sin. The king's robe, the pauper's uniform, the student's gown, the mill-hand's fustian, the naked savage's brown skin, each cover a heart that is evil, and because it is evil, needs salvation from sickness and deliverance from danger.

For do not forget that if it is true that men have driven their rebellious chariots through God's law, they cannot do that without bringing down God's hand upon them, and they ought not to be able to do it; and He would not be a loving God if it were not so. There are dangers; dangers from the necessary inevitable consequences, here and yonder, of rebellion against Him.

Now, do not let us lose ourselves in generalities. That is the way in which many of us have all our lives long blunted the point of the

message of the Gospel to our hearts. That is what we do with all sorts of important moral truths. For instance, I suppose there never was a time in your lives when you did not believe that all men must die. But I suppose most of us can remember some time when there came upon us, with a shock which made some of us cower before it as an unwelcome thing, the thought, ‘And *I* must.’

The *common* sickness? Yes! ‘Thou art the man.’ Oh, brother, whatever you may have or whatever you may want, be sure of this: that your deepest needs will not be met, your sorest sickness will not be healed, your most tremendous peril not secured against, until the fact of your individual sinfulness and the consequences of that fact are somehow or other dealt with, stanching, and swept away. So much, then, for the first point.

II. Now a word as to the common remedy. One of our texts gives us that. — ‘the common salvation.’

You all know what I am going to say, and so, perhaps, you suppose that it is not worth while for me to say it. I dare say some of you think that it was not worth while coming here to hear the whole, threadbare, commonplace story. Well! is it worth while for me to speak once more to men that have so often heard and so often neglected? Let me try. Oh, that I could get you one by one, and drive home to each single soul that is listening to me, or perhaps, that is *not* listening, the message that I have to bring!

‘The common salvation.’ There is One remedy for the sickness. There is one safety against the danger. There is only one, because it is the remedy for all men, and it is the remedy for all men because it is the remedy *for* each. Jesus Christ deals, as no one else has ever pretended to deal, with this outstanding rut of my transgression and yours.

He, by His death, as I believe, has saved the world from the danger, because He has set right the world’s relations to God. I am not

going, at this stage of my sermon, to enter upon anything in the nature of discussion. My purpose is an entirely different one. I want to press upon *you*, dear brethren, this plain fact, that since there is a God, and since you and I have sinned, and since things are as they are, and the consequences will be as they will be, both in this world and in the next, we all stand in danger of death-death eternal, which comes from, and, in one sense, consists of, a separation in heart and mind from God.

You believe in a judgment day, do you not? Whether you do or not, you have only to open your eyes, you have only to turn them inwards, to see that even here and now, every sin and transgression and disobedience does receive its just recompense of reward. You cannot do a wrong thing without hurting yourself, without desolating some part of your nature, without enfeebling your power of resistance to evil and aspiration after good, without lowering yourself in the scale of being, and making yourself ashamed to stand before the Bar of your own conscience. You cannot do some wrong things, that some of you are fond of doing, without dragging after them consequences, in this world, of anything but an agreeable kind. Sins of the flesh avenge themselves in kind, as some of you young men know, and will know better in the days that are before you. Transgressions which are plain and clear in the eyes of even the world's judgment draw after them damaged reputations, on-feeble health, closed doors of opportunity, and a whole host of such things. And all these are but a kind of premonitions and overshadowings of that solemn judgment that lies beyond. For all men will have to eat the fruit of their doings and drink that which they have prepared. But on the Cross, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, bore the weight of the world's sin, yours and mine and every man's. There is one security against the danger; and it is that He, fronting the incidence of the Divine law, says, as He said to His would-be captors in the garden, 'If ye seek Me, let *these* go their way.' And they go their way by the power of His atoning death.

Further, Jesus Christ imparts a life that cures the sickness of sin.

What is the meaning of this Whitsuntide that all the Christian world is professing to keep to-day? Is it to commemorate a thing that happened nineteen centuries ago, when a handful of Jews for a few minutes had the power of talking in other languages, and a miraculous light flamed over their heads and then disappeared? Was that all? Have you and I any share in it? Yes. For if Pentecost means anything it means this, that, all down through the ages, Jesus Christ is imparting to men that cleave to Him the real gift of a new life, free from all the sickness of the old, and healthy with the wholesomeness of His own perfect sinlessness, so that, however inveterate and engrained a man's habits of wrong-doing may have been, if he will turn to that Saviour, and let Him work upon him, he will be delivered from his evil. The leprosy of his flesh, though the lumps of diseased matter may be dropping from the bones, and the stench of corruption may drive away human love and sympathy, can be cleansed, and his flesh become like the flesh of a little child, if only he will trust in Jesus Christ. The sickness can be cured. Christ deals with men in the depth of their being. He will give you, if you will, a new life and new tastes, directions, inclinations, impulses, perceptions, hopes, and capacities, and the evil will pass away, and you will be whole.

Ah, brethren, that is the only cure. I was talking a minute or two ago about imperfect diagnoses; and there are superficial remedies too. Men round us are trying, in various ways, to stanch the world's wounds, to heal the world's sicknesses. God forbid that I should say a word to discourage any such! I would rather wish them ten times more numerous than they are; but at the same time I believe that, unless you deal with the fountain at its head, you will never cleanse the stream, and that you must have the radical change, which comes by the gift of a new life in Christ, before men can be delivered from the sickness of their sins. And so all these panaceas, whilst they may do certain surface good, are, if I may quote a well-known phrase,

like ‘pills against an earthquake,’ or like giving a lotion to cure pimples, when the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. You will never cure the ills of humanity until you have delivered men from the dominion of their sin.

Jesus Christ heals society by healing the individual.

There is no other way of doing it. If the units are corrupt the community cannot be pure. And the only way to make the units pure is that they shall have Christ on the Cross for their redemption, and Christ in the heart for their cleansing. And then all the things that men try to produce in the shape of social good and the like, apart from Him, will come as a consequence of the new state of things that arises when the individuals are renewed. Apart from Him all human attempts to deal with social evils are inadequate.

There is a terrible disillusionising and disappointment awaiting many eager enthusiasts to-day, who think that by certain external arrangements, or by certain educational and cultivated processes, they can mend the world’s miseries. You educate a nation. Well and good, and one result of it is that your bookshops get choked with trash, and that vice has a new avenue of approach to men’s hearts. You improve the economic condition of the people. Well and good, and one result of it is that a bigger percentage than ever of their funds finds its way into the drink-shop. You give a nation political power. Well and good, and one result of it is that the least worthy and the least wise have to be flattered and coaxed, because they are the rulers. Every good thing, divorced from Christ, becomes an ally of evil, and the only way by which the dreams and desires of men can be fulfilled is by the salvation which is in Him entering the individual hearts and thus moulding society.

III. Now, lastly, the common means of possessing the common healing.

My second text tells us what that is — ‘the common faith.’ That is another of the words which is so familiar that it is unintelligible, which has been dinned into your ears ever since you were little children, and in the case of many of you excites no definite idea, and is supposed to be an obscure kind of thing that belongs to theologians and preachers, but has little to do with your daily lives. There is only one way by which this healing and safety that I have been speaking about can possibly find its way into a man’s heart.

You have all been trained from childhood to believe that men are saved by faith, and a great many of *you*, I dare say, think that men might have been saved by some other way, if God had chosen to appoint it so. But that is a clear mistake. If it is true that salvation is a gift from God, then it is quite plain that the only thing that we require is an outstretched hand. If it is true that Jesus Christ’s death on the Cross has brought salvation to all the world, then it is quite plain that, His work being finished, we have no need to come in pottering with any works of ours, and that the only thing we have to do is to accept it. If it is true that Jesus Christ will enter men’s hearts, and there give a new spirit and a new life, which will save them from their sins and make them free from the law of sin and death, then it is plain that the one thing that we have to do is to open our hearts and say ‘Come in, Thou King of Glory, come in!’ Because salvation is a gift; because it is the result of a finished work; because it is imparted to men by the impartation of Christ’s own life to them: for all these reasons it is plain that the only way by which God can save a man is by that man’s putting his trust in Jesus Christ. It is no arbitrary appointment. The only possible way of possessing ‘the common salvation’ is by the exercise of ‘the common faith’

So we are all put upon one level, no matter how different we may be in attainments, in mental capacity — geniuses and blockheads, scholars and ignoramuses, millionaires and paupers, students and savages, we are all on the one level. There is no carriage road into

heaven. We have all to go in at the strait gate, and there is no special entry for people that come with their own horses; and so some people do not like to have to descend to that level, and to go with the ruck and the undistinguished crowd, and to be saved just in the same fashion as Tom, Dick, and Harry, and they turn away.

Plenty of people believe in a ‘common salvation,’ meaning thereby a vague, indiscriminate gift that is flung broadcast over the mass. Plenty of people believe in a ‘common faith.’ We hear, for instance, about a ‘national Christianity,’ and a ‘national recognition of religion,’ and ‘Christian nations,’ and the like. There are no Christian nations except nation, of which the individuals are Christians, and there is no ‘common faith’ except the faith exercised in common by all the units that make up a community.

So do not suppose that anything short of your own personal act brings you into possession of ‘the common salvation.’ The table is spread, but you must take the bread into your own hands, and you must masticate it with your own teeth, and you must assimilate it in your own body, or it is no bread for you. The salvation is a ‘common,’ like one of the great prairies, but each separate settler has to peg off his own claim, and fence it in, and take possession of it, or he has no share in the broad land. So remember that ‘the common salvation’ must be made the individual salvation by the individual exercise of ‘the common faith.’ Cry, ‘Lord! I believe!’ and then you will have the right to say, ‘The Lord is *my* strength; He also is become my salvation.’

Jude 1:20, 21--KEEPING OURSELVES IN THE LOVE OF GOD

‘But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, 21. Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.’ — Jude 1:20, 21.

JUDE has been, in all the former part of the letter. pouring out a fiery torrent of vehement indignation and denunciation against ‘certain men’ who had ‘crept’ into the Church, and were spreading gross immorality there. He does not speak of them so much as heretics in belief, but rather as evil-doers in practice; and after the thunderings and lightning, he turns from them with a kind of sigh of relief in this emphatic, ‘*But*, ye! beloved.’ The storm ends in gentle rain; and he tells the brethren who are yet faithful how they are to comport themselves in the presence of prevalent corruption, and where is their security and their peace.

You will observe that in my text there is embedded, in the middle of it, a direct precept: ‘Keep yourselves in the love of God’; and that that is encircled by three clauses, like each other in structure, and unlike it — ‘building,’ ‘praying,’ ‘looking.’ The great diamond is surrounded by a ring of lesser jewels. Why did Jude put two of these similar clauses in front of his direct precept, and one of them behind it? I think because the two that precede indicate the ways by which the precept can be kept, and the one that follows indicates the accompaniment or issue of obedience to the precept. If that be the reason for the structure of my next, it suggests also to us the course which we had best to pursue in the exposition of it.

I. So we have, to begin with, the great direct precept for the Christian life.

‘Keep yourselves in the love of God.’ Now I need not spend a moment in showing that ‘the love of God’ here means, not ours to Him, but His to us. It is that in which, as in some charmed circle, we are to keep ourselves.

Now that injunction at once raises the question of the possibility of Christian men being out of the love of *God*, straying away from their home, and getting out into the open. Of course there is a sense in which His ‘tender mercies are over all His works.’ Just as the sky embraces all the stars and the earth within its blue round, so that

love of God encompasses every creature; and no man can stray so far away as that, in one profound sense, he gets beyond its pale. For no man can ever make God cease to love him. But whilst that is quite true, on the other side it is equally true that contrariety of will and continuance in evil deeds do so alter a man's relation to the love of God as that he is absolutely incapable of receiving its sweetest and most select manifestations, and can only be hurt by the incidence of its beams. The sun gives life to many creatures, but it slays some. There are crawling things that live beneath a stone, and when you turn it up and let the arrows of the sunbeams smite down upon them, they squirm and die. It is possible for a man so to set himself in antagonism to that great Light as that the Light shall hurt and not bless and soothe.

It is also possible for a *Christian* man to step out of the charmed circle, in the sense that he becomes all unconscious of that Light. Then to him it comes to the same thing that the love shall be non-existent, as that it shall be unperceived. If I choose to make abode on the northern side of the mountain, my thermometer may be standing at 'freezing,' and I may be shivering in all my limbs on Midsummer Day at noontide. And so it is possible for us Christian people to stray away out from that gracious abode, to pass from the illuminated disc into the black shadow; and though nothing is 'hid from the heat thereof,' yet we may derive no warmth and no enlightening from the all-pervading beams. We have to 'keep ourselves in the love of God.'

Then that suggests the other more blessed possibility, that amidst all the distractions of daily duties, and the solicitations of carking cares, and the oppression of heavy sorrows, it is possible for us to keep ourselves perpetually in the conscious enjoyment of the love of God. I need not say how this ideal of the Christian life may be indefinitely approximated to in our daily experiences; nor need I dwell upon the sad contrast between this ideal unbrokenness of conscious sunning ourselves in the love of God, and the reality of the lives that most of

us live. But, brethren, if we more fully believed that we can keep up, amidst all the dust and struggle of the arena, the calm sweet sense of God's love, our lives would be different.

Nightingales will sing in a dusty copse by the roadside, however loud the noise of traffic may be upon the highway. And we may have, all through our lives, that song, unbroken and melodious. That sub-consciousness underlying our daily work, 'like some sweet beguiling melody, so sweet, we know not we are listening to it,' may be ever present with each of us in our daily work, like some 'hidden brook in the leafy month of June,' that murmurs beneath the foliage, and yet is audible through all the wood.

And what a peaceful, restful life ours would be, if we could thus be like John, leaning on the Master's bosom. We might have a secret fortress into the central chamber of which we could go, whither no sound of the war in the plains could ever penetrate. We might, like some dwellers in a mountainous island, take refuge in a central glen, buried deep amongst the hills, where there would be no sound of tempest, though the winds were fighting on the surface of the sea, and the spindrift was flying before them. It is possible to 'keep ourselves in the love of God.' And if we keep in that fortress we are safe. If we go beyond its walls we are sure to be picked off by the well-aimed shots of the enemy. So, then, that is the central commandment for the Christian life.

II. Now let me turn to consider the methods by which we can thus keep ourselves in the love of God.

These are two: one mainly bearing on the outward, the other on the inward, life. By 'building up yourselves on your most holy faith': that is the one. By 'praying in the Holy Ghost': that is the other. Let us look at these two.

'Building up yourselves on your most holy faith.' I suppose that 'faith' here is used in its ordinary sense, Some would rather prefer to

take it in the latter, ecclesiastical sense, by which it means, not the act of belief, but the aggregate of the things believed. — ‘Our most holy faith,’ as it is called by quotation — I think mis-quotation — of this passage. But I do not see that there is any necessity for that meaning. The words are perfectly intelligible in their ordinary meaning. What Jude says is just this: ‘Your trust in Jesus Christ has in it a tendency to produce holiness, and that is the foundation on which you are to build a great character. Build up yourselves on your most holy faith.’ For although it is not what the world’s ethics recognise, the Christian theory of morality is this, that it all rests upon trust in God manifested to us in Jesus Christ. Faith is the foundation of all supreme excellence and nobility and beauty of character; because, for one thing, it dethrones self, and enthrones God in our hearts; making Him our aim and our law and our supreme good; and because, for another thing, our trust brings us into direct union with Him, so that we receive from Him the power thus to build up a character.

Faith is the foundation. Ay! but faith is only the foundation. It is ‘the potentiality of wealth,’ but it is not the reality. ‘All things are *possible to him that believeth*’; but all things are not actual except on conditions. A man may have faith, as a great many professing Christians have it, only as a ‘fire-escape,’ a means of getting away from hell, or have it only as a hand that is stretched out to grasp certain initial blessings of the spiritual life.

But that is not its full glory nor its real aspect. It is meant to be the beginning in us of ‘all things that are lovely and of good report.’ What would you think of a man that carefully put in the foundations for a house, and had all his building materials on the ground, and let them lie there ?

And that is what a great many of you Christian people do, who ‘have fled for refuge,’ as you say, ‘to the hope set before you in the Gospel’; and who have never wrought out your faith into noble

deeds. Remember what the Apostle says, 'Faith which worketh'; and worketh 'by love,' It is the foundation, but only the foundation.

The work of building a noble character on that firm foundation is never- ending. 'Tis a life-long task 'till the lump be leavened.' The metaphor of growth by building suggests effort, and it suggests continuity; and it suggests slow, gradual rearing up, course upon course, stone by stone. Some of us have done nothing at it for a great many years. You will pass, sometimes, in our suburbs, a row of houses begun by Some builder that has become bankrupt; and there are mouldering bricks and gaping empty places for the Windows, and the rafters decaying, and stagnant water down in the holes that were meant for the cellars. That is like the kind of thing that hosts of people who call themselves Christians have built. 'But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith,... Keep yourselves in the love.'

Then the other way of building is suggested in thin next clause, 'praying in the Holy Ghost' — that is to say, prayer which is not mere utterance of my own petulant desires which a great deal of our 'prayer' is, but which is breathed into us by that Divine Spirit that will brood over our chaos, and bring order out of confusion, and light and beauty out of darkness, and weltering sea: —

*'The prayers I make will then be sweet indeed, If Thou the Spirit
give by which I pray.'*

As Michael Angelo says, such prayer inspired and warmed by the influences of that Divine Spirit playing upon the dull flame of our desires, like air injected into a grate where the fire is half out, such prayers are our best help in building. For who is there that has honestly tried to build himself up 'for a habitation of God' but has felt that it must be 'through a

Spirit' mightier than himself, who will overcome his weaknesses and arm him against temptation? No man who honestly endeavours

to reform his character but is brought very soon to feel that he needs a higher help than his own. And perhaps some of us know how, when sore pressed By temptation, one petition for help brings a sudden gush of strength into us, and we feel that the enemy's assault is weakened.

Brethren, the best attitude for building is on our knees; and if, like Cromwell's men in the fight, we go into the battle singing,

'Let God arise, and scattered Let all His enemies be,' we shall come out victorious, 'Ye, beloved, building and praying, keep yourselves.'

III. Now, lastly, we have here in the final clause the fair prospect visible from our home, in the love of God.

'Looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.'

After all building and praying, we need 'the mercy.' Jude has been speaking in his letter about the destruction of evil-doers, when Christ the Judge shall come. And I suppose that that thought of final judgment is still in his mind, colouring the language of my text, and that it explains why he speaks here of 'the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ' instead of, as is usual in Scripture, 'the mercy of God.' He is thinking of that last Day of Judgment and retribution, wherein Jesus Christ is to be the Judge of all men, saints as well as sinners, and therefore he speaks of mercy as bestowed by Him then on those who have 'kept themselves in the love of God.' Ah! we shall need it. The better we are the more we know how much wood, hay, stubble, we have built into our buildings; and the more we are conscious of that love of God as round us, the more we shall feel the unworthiness and imperfection of our response to it. The best of us, when we lie down to die, and the wisest of us, as we struggle on in life, realise most how all our good is stained and imperfect, and that after all efforts we have to cry 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'

Not only so, but our outlook and confident expectation of that mercy day by day, and in its perfect form at least, depends upon our

keeping ourselves 'in the love of God.' We have to go high up the hill before we can see far over the plain. Our home in that love commands a fair prospect. When we stray from it, we lose sight of the blue distance. Our hope of 'the mercy of God unto eternal life' varies with our preset consciousness and experience of His love.

That mercy leads on to eternal life. We get many of its manifestations and gifts here, but these are but the pale blossoms of a plant not in its native habitat, nor sunned by the sunshine which can draw forth all its fragrance and colour.

We have to look forward for the adequate expression of the mercy of God to all that fulness of perfect blessedness for all our faculties, which is summed up in the one great word — 'life everlasting.'

So our hope ought to be as continuous as the manifestation of the mercy, and, like it, should last until the eternal life has come. All our gifts here are fragmentary and imperfect. Here we drink of brooks by the way. There we shall slake our thirst at the fountainhead. Here we are given ready money for the day's expenses. There we shall be free of the treasure-house, where He the uncoined and uncounted masses of bullion, which God has laid up in store for them that fear Him. So, brethren, let us hope perfectly for the perfect manifestation of the mercy. Let us sot ourselves to build up, however slowly, the fair fabric of a life and character which shall stand when the tempest levels all houses built upon the sand. Let us open our spirits to the entrance of that Spirit who helps the infirmities of our desires as well as of our efforts. Thus let us keep ourselves in the charmed circle of the love of God, that we may be safe as a garrison in its fortress, blessed as a babe on its mother's breast.

Jude's words are but the echo of the tenderer words of his Master and ours, when He said, 'As My Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide ye in My love. If ye keep My commandments ye shall abide in My love.'

Jude 1:24, 25--WITHOUT STUMBLING

‘Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding Joy, 25. To the only wise God our Saviour. be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and over. Amen.’ — Jude 1:24, 25.

I POINTED OUT in a recent sermon on a former verse of this Epistle that the earlier part of it is occupied with vehement denunciations of the moral corruptions that had crept into the Church, and that the writer turns away from that spectacle earnestly to exhort the Christian community to ‘keep themselves in the love of God,’ by ‘building themselves upon their most holy faith, and praying in the Holy Ghost.’ But that is not all that Jude has to say. It is wise to look round on the dangers and evils that tempt; it is wise to look inward to the weaknesses that may yield to the temptations. But every look on surrounding dangers, and every look at personal weakness, ought to end in a look upwards ‘to Him that is able to keep’ the weakest ‘from falling’ before the assaults of the strongest foes.

The previous exhortation, which I have discussed, might seem to lay almost too much stress on our own strivings — ‘Keep *yourselves* in the love of God.’ Here is the complement to it: ‘Unto Him that is able to keep you from falling.’ So denunciations, exhortations, warnings, all end in the peaceful gaze upon God, and the triumphant recognition of what He is able to do for us. We have to work, but we have to remember that ‘it is He that worketh in us both to will and to do of His own good pleasure.’

I. So I think that, looking at these great words, the first thing to be noted is the solitary, all-sufficient stay for our weakness.

‘To the only wise God our Saviour.’ Now it is to be noticed, as those of you who use the Revised Version will observe, that the word ‘wise’ seems to have crept in here by the reminiscence of another

similar doxology in the Epistle to the Romans, and was probably inserted by some scribe who had not grasped the great thought of which the text is the expression- It ought to read, 'to the only God, our Saviour.' The writer's idea seems to be just this — he has been massing in a dark crowd the whole multitudinous mob of corruptions and evils that were threatening the faith and righteousness of professing Christians. And he turns away from all that rabble, multitudinous as they are, to look to the One who is all-sufficient, solitary, and enough. 'The only God' is the refuge from the crowds of evils that dog our steps, and from the temptations and studious foes that assail us at every point.

This is the blessed peculiarity of the Christian faith, that it simplifies our outlook for good, that it brings everything to the one point of possessing the one *Person*, beyond whom there is never any need that the heart should wander seeking after love, that the mind should depart in its search for truth, or that the will should stray in its quest after authoritative commands. There is no need to seek a multitude of goodly pearls; the gift of Christianity to men's torn and distracted hearts and lives is that all which makes them rich, and all which makes them blessed, is sphered and included in the one transcendent pearl of *price*, the '*only* God.'

I have been in Turkish mosques, the roofs of which are held up by a bewildering forest of slender pillars. I have been in cathedral chapter-houses, where one strong stone shaft in the centre carries all the beauty of the branching roof; and I know which is the highest work and the fairest. Why should we seek in the manifold for what we can never find, when we can find it all in the ONE ? The mind seeks for unity in truth; the heart seeks for oneness in love; no man is at rest until he has all his heart's treasures in one person; and no man who foolishly puts all his treasures in one creature-person but is bringing down upon his own head sorrow.

Do you remember that pathetic inscription in one of our country churches, over a little child, whose fair image is left us by the pencil of Reynolds: 'Her parents put all their wealth in one vessel, and the shipwreck was total'? It is madness to trust to but one refuge, unless that refuge is the only God. If we, like the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, are wise, we shall lift up our eyes and 'see no man any more, save Jesus only.' He can be our solitary Stay, Refuge, Wealth, and Companion, because He is sufficient, and He abides for ever.

But there is another peculiarity that I would point out in these words, and that is the unusual attribution to God, the Father, of the name 'Saviour' — 'the only God our Saviour.' The same various reading which strikes out 'wise' inserts here, as you will see in the Revised Version, 'through Jesus Christ our Lord.' But although the phraseology is almost unique, the meaning is in full harmony with the scope of New Testament teaching. It is a fault of evangelical and orthodox people that they have too often spoken and thought as if Jesus Christ's work modified and changed the Father's will, and as if God loved men because Christ died for them. The fact is precisely the converse. Christ died because God loved men; and the fountal source of the salvation, of which the work of Jesus Christ is the channel, bringing it to men, is the eternal, unmotivated, infinite love of God the Father. Christ is 'the well-beloved Son,' because He is the executor of the Divine purpose, and all which He has done is done in obedience to the Father's will. If I might use a metaphor, the love of God is, as it were, a deep secluded lake amongst the mountains, and the work of Christ is the stream that comes from it, and brings its waters to be life to the world. Let us never forget that, however we love to turn our gratitude and our praise to Christ the Saviour, my text goes yet deeper into the councils of Eternity when it ascribes the praise 'to the only God our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

II. And now notice the possibility of firm standing in the slippery present. 'To Him that is able to keep us from falling.' Now the word that is rendered 'from falling' is even more emphatic, and carries a larger promise. For it literally means 'without stumbling,' and stumbling is that which precedes falling. We are not only kept from falling, we are kept even from stumbling over the stumbling-stones that are in the way. The metaphor, perhaps, was suggested by the words of Isaiah, who, in one of his lovely images, describes God as 'leading Israel through the depths as a horse in the desert, that they stumble not.' Do you not see the picture? The nervous, susceptible animal, slipping and sliding over the smooth rock, in a sweat of terror, and the owner laying a kindly hand and a firm one on the bridle-rein, and speaking soothing words of encouragement, and leading it safely, that it stumble not. So God is able to lay hold of us when we are in perilous places, and when we cry, 'My foot slippeth,' His mercy will hold us up.

Is that rhetoric? Is that merely pulpit talk? Brethren, unless we lay firm hold of this faith, that God can and does touch and influence hearts that wait upon Him, so as by His Spirit and by His Word, which is the sword of the Spirit, to strengthen their feeble good, and to weaken their strong evil, to raise what is low, to illumine what is dark, and to support what is weak, we have not come to understand the whole wealth of possible good and blessedness which lies in the Gospel. This generation has forgotten far too much the place which the work of God's Holy Spirit on men's spirit fills in the whole proportioned scheme of New Testament revelation. It is because we believe that so little, in comparison with the clearness and strength of our faith in the work of Jesus Christ, the atoning sacrifice, that so many of us find it so foreign to our experience that any effluences from God come into our hearts, and that our spirits are conscious of being quickened and lifted by His Spirit! Ah! we might feel, far more than any of us do, His hand on the bridle-rein. We might feel, far more than any of us do, His strong upholding, keeping our feet from *slipping as well as 'falling.'* And if we believed and expected a

Divine Spirit to enter into our spirits and to touch our hearts, the expectation would not be in vain.

I beseech you, believe that a solid experience and meaning lies in that word ‘able to keep us from stumbling.’ If we have that Divine Spirit moving in our spirits, moulding our desires, lifting our thoughts, confirming our wills, then the things that were stumbling-stones — that is to say, that appealed to our worst selves, and tempted us to evil — will cease to be so. The higher desires will kill the lower ones, as the sunshine is popularly supposed to put out household fires. If we have God’s upholding help, the stumbling-stone will no more be a stumbling-stone, but a stepping-stone to something higher and better; or like one of those erections that we see outside old-fashioned houses of entertainment, where three or four steps are piled together, in order to enable a man the more easily to mount his horse and go on his way. For every temptation overcome brings strength to the overcomer.

Only let us remember ‘Him that is able to keep.’ Able! What is wanted that the ability may be brought into exercise; that the possibility of which I have spoken, of firm standing amongst those slippery places, shall become a reality? What is wanted? It is of no use to have a stay unless you lean on it. You may have an engine of ever so many horse-power in the engine-house, but unless the power is transmitted by shafts and belting, and brought to the machinery, not spindle will revolve. He is *able to* keep us from stumbling, and if you trust Him, the ability will become actuality, and you will be kept from falling. If you do not trust Him, all the ability will lie in the engine-house, and the looms and the spindles will stand idle. So the reason why — and the only reason why — with such an abundant, and over-abundant, provision for never falling, Christian men do stumble and fall, is their own lack of faith.

Now remember that this text of mine follows on the heels of that former text which bade us ‘build ourselves,’ and ‘keep ourselves in

the love of God.’ So you get the peculiarity of Christian ethics, and the blessedness of Christian effort, that it is not effort only, but effort rising from, and accompanied with, confidence in God’s keeping hand. There is all the difference between toiling without trust and toiling because we do trust. And whilst, on the one hand, we have to exhort to earnest faith in the upholding hand of God, we have to say on the other, ‘Let that faith lead you to obey the apostolic command, "Stand fast in the evil day... taking unto you the whole armour of God."'’

III. Further, we have here the possible final perfecting in the future.

‘To Him that is able... to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.’ Now that word rendered ‘faultless’ has a very beautiful meaning. It is originally applied to the requirement that the sacrificial offerings shall be without blemish. It is then applied more than once to our Lord Himself, as expressive of His perfect, immaculate sinlessness. And it is here applied to the future condition of those who have been kept without stumbling; suggesting at once that they are, as it were, presented before God at last, stainless as the sacrificial lamb; and that they are conformed to the image of the Lamb of God ‘without blemish and without spot.’ Moral perfectness, absolute and complete; a standing ‘before the presence of His glory,’ the realisation and the vision of that illustrious light, too dazzling for eyes veiled by flesh to look upon, but of which hereafter the purified souls will be capable, in accordance with that great promise, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’; ‘with exceeding joy,’ which refers not to the joy of Him that presents, though that is great, but to the joy of them who are presented. So these three things are the possibilities held out before such poor creatures as we. And miraculous as it is, that all stains should melt away from our characters — though I suppose not the remembrance of them from our consciousness — and be shaken off as completely as the foul water of some stagnant pond drops

from the white swan-plumage, and leaves no stain; that perfecting is the natural issue of the present being kept from stumbling.

You have seen sometimes in a picture-dealer's shop window a canvas on which a face is painted, one half of which has been cleaned, and the other half is still covered with some varnish or filth. That is like the Christian character here. But the restoration and the cleansing are going to be finished up yonder; and the great Artist's ideal will be realised, and each redeemed soul will be perfected in holiness.

But as I said about the former point, so I say about this, He is able to do it. What is wanted to make the ability an actuality? Brethren, if we are to stand perfect, at last, and be without fault before the Throne of God, we must begin by letting Him keep us from stumbling here. Then, and only then, may we expect that issue.

Now I was going to have said a word, in the last place, about the Divine praise which comes from all these dealings, but your time will not allow me to dwell upon it. Only let me remind you that all these things, which in my text are ascribed to God, 'glory and majesty, dominion and power,' are ascribed to Him because He is our Saviour, and able to keep us from stumbling, and to 'present us faultless before His glory.' That is to say, the Divine manifestation of Himself in the work of redemption is the highest of His self-revealing works. Men are not presumptuous when they feel that they are greater than sun and stars; and that there is more in the narrow room of a human heart than in all the immeasurable spaces of the universe, if these are empty of beings who can love and inquire and adore. And we are not wrong when we say that the only evil in the universe is sin.

Therefore, we are right when we say that high above all other works of which we have experience is that miracle of love and Divine power which can not only keep such feeble creatures as we are from

stumbling, but can present us stainless and faultless before the Throne of God.

So our highest praise, and our deepest thankfulness, ought to arise, and will arise — if the possibility has become, in any measure, an actuality, in ourselves — to Him, because our experience will be that of the Psalmist who sang, ‘When I said, my foot slippeth, Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.’ Let us take the comfort of believing, ‘He shall not fall, for the Lord is able to make him stand’; and let us remember the expansion which another Apostle gives us when, with precision, he discriminates and says, ‘Kept *by* the power of God *through* faith, *unto* salvation.’

REVELATION

Revelation 1:4, 5--THE GIFTS OF CHRIST AS WITNESS, RISEN AND CROWNED

‘Grace be unto you, and peace, from... 5. Jesus Christ, who is the faithful Witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the Prince at the kings of the earth.’ — Revelation 1:4, 5.

So loftily did John in his old age come to think of his Lord. The former days of blessed nearness had not faded from his memory; rather he understood their meaning better than when he was in the midst of their sweetness. Years and experience, and the teaching of God’s Spirit, had taught Him to understand what the Master meant when He said: — ‘It is expedient for you that I go away’; for when He had departed John saw Him a great deal more clearly than ever he had done when he beheld Him with his eyes. He sees Him now invested with these lofty attributes, and, so to speak, involved in the brightness of the Throne of God. For the words of my text are not only remarkable in themselves, and in the order in which they give these three aspects of *our* Lord’s character, but remarkable also in that they occur in an invocation in which the Apostle is calling down

blessings from Heaven on the heads of his brethren. The fact that they do so occur points a question: Is it possible to conceive that the writer of these words thought of Jesus Christ as less than divine? Could he have asked for 'grace and peace' to come down on the Asiatic Christians from the divine Father, and an Abstraction, and a Man? A strange Trinity that would be, most certainly. Rightly or wrongly, the man that said, 'Grace and peace be unto you, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come, and from the seven Spirits which are before His Throne, and from Jesus Christ,' believed that the name of the One God was Father, *Son*, and Holy Spirit.

But it is not so much to this as to the connection of these three clauses with one another, and to the bearing of all three on our Lord's power of giving grace and peace to men's hearts, that I want to turn your attention now. I take the words simply as they lie here; asking you to consider, first, how grace and peace come to us 'from the faithful Witness'; how, secondly, they come 'from the first begotten from the dead'; and how, lastly, they come 'from the Prince of the kings of the earth.'

I. Now as to the first of these, 'the faithful Witness.' All of you who have any familiarity with the language of Scripture will know that a characteristic of all the writings which are ascribed to the Apostle John, viz., his Gospel, his Epistles, and the book of the Revelation, is their free and remarkable use of that expression, 'Witness.' It runs through all of them, and is one of the many threads of connection which tie them all together, and which constitute a very strong argument for the common authorship of the three sets of writings, vehemently as that has of late been denied.

But where did John get this word? According to his own teaching he got it from the lips of the Master, who began His career with these words, 'We speak that we do know, and bear witness to that we have seen,' and who all but ended it with these royal word, 'Thou sayest

that I am a King! For this, cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the Truth.' Christ Himself, then, claimed to be in an eminent and special sense the witness to the world.

The witness of what? What was the substance of His testimony? It was a testimony mainly about God. The words of my text substantially cover the same ground as His own words, 'I have declared Thy name unto My brethren,' and as those of the Apostle: 'The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.' And they involve the same ideas as lie in the great name by which He is called in John's Gospel, 'the Word of God.'

That is to say, all our highest and purest and best knowledge of God comes from the life and conduct and character of Jesus Christ. His revelation is no men revelation by words. Plenty of men have talked about God, and said noble and true and blessed things about Him. Scattered through the darkness of heathenism, and embedded in the sinfulness of every man's heart, there are great and lofty and pure thoughts about Him, which to cleave to and follow out would bring strength and purity. It is one thing to speak about God in words, maxims, precepts; it is another thing to show us God in act and life. The one is theology, the other is gospel. The one is the work of man, the other is the exclusive prerogative of God manifested in the flesh.

It is not Christ's words only that make Him the 'Amen,' the 'faithful and true Witness,' but in addition to these, He witnesses by all His deeds of grace, and truth, and gentleness, and pity; by all His yearnings over wickedness, and sorrow, and sinfulness; by all His drawings of the profligate and the outcast and the guilty to Himself, His life of loneliness, His death of shame. In all these, He is showing us not only the sweetness of a perfect human character, but in the sweetness of a perfect human character, the sweeter sweetness of our Father, God. The substance of His testimony is the Name, the revelation of the character of His Father and our Father.

This name of 'witness' bears likewise strongly upon the characteristic and remarkable *manner* of our *Lord's* testimony. The task of a witness is to affirm; his business is to tell his story — not to argue about it, simply to state it. And there is nothing more characteristic of our Lord's words than the way in which, without attempt at proof or argumentation, He makes them stand on their own evidence; *or*, rather, depend upon His veracity. All His teaching is characterised by what would be insane presumption in any of us, and would at once rule us out of court as unfit to be listened to on any grave subject, most of all on religious truth. For His method is this: 'Verily, verily, I say to you! Take it on My word. You ask Me for proof of My saying: I am the proof of it; I assert it. That is enough for you!' Not so do men speak. So does the faithful Witness speak; and instead of the conscience and common-sense of the world rising up and saying, 'This is the presumption of a religious madman and dictator,' they have bowed before Him and said, 'Thou art fairer than the children of men! Grace is poured into Thy lips.' He is the 'faithful Witness, who lays His own character and veracity as the basis of what He has to say, and has no mightier word by which to back His testimony than His own sovereign 'Verily! verily!'

The name bears, too, on the *ground* of His testimony.

A faithful witness is an eye-witness. And that what Christ claims when He witnesses about God. 'We speak that we do know, we testify that we have seen.' 'I speak that which I have seen with My Father!' There is nothing more remarkable about the oral portion of our Lord's witness than the absence of any appearance, such as marks all the wisest words of great men, of having come to them as the result of patient thought. We never see Him in the act of arriving at a truth, nor detect any traces of the process of forming opinions in Him. He speaks as if He had seen, and His tone is that of one who is not thinking out truth or grasping at it, but simply narrating that which lies plain and clear ever before His eyes. I do not ask you

what that involves, but I quote His own statement of what it involves: ‘No man hath ascended up into Heaven save He that came down from Heaven, even the Son of Man which is in Heaven’

There have been plenty of great and gracious words about God, and there have been plenty of black and blasphemous thoughts of Him. They rise in our own hearts, and they come from our brothers’ tongues. Men have worshipped gods gracious, gods loving, gods angry, gods petulant, gods capricious; but God after the fashion of the God whom Jesus Christ avouches to us, we have nowhere else, a God of absolute love, who ‘so loved the world’ — that is, you and me ‘that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish.’

And now I ask, is there not grace and peace brought to us all from that faithful Witness, and from His credible testimony? Surely the one thing that the world wants is to have the question answered whether there really is a God in Heaven that cares anything about me, and to whom I can trust myself wholly; believing that He will lift me out of all my meannesses and sins, and make me clean and pure and blessed like Himself. Surely that is the deepest of all human needs, howsoever little men may know it. And sure I am that none of us can find the certitude of such a Father unless we give credence to the message of Jesus Christ our Lord.

This day needs that witness as much as any other; sometimes in our unbelieving moments, we think more than any other. There is a wave — I believe it is only a wave — passing over the cultivated thought of Europe at present which will make short work of all belief in a God that does not grip fast to Jesus Christ. As far as I can read the signs of the times, and the tendency of modern thinking, it is this: — either an absolute Silence, a Heaven stretching above us, blue and clear, and cold, and far away, and *dumb*; or else a Christ that speaks — He or none! The Theism that has shaken itself loose from Him will be crushed, I am sure, in the encounter with the

agnosticism and the materialism of this day. And the one refuge is to lay fast hold of the old truth: — ‘The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.’

Oh I you orphan children that have forgotten your Father, and have turned prodigals and rebels; you that have begun to doubt if there is any one above this, low earth that cares for you; you that have got bewildered and befogged amidst the manifold denials and controversies of this day; come back to the one voice that speaks to us in tones of confident certainty as from personal knowledge of a Father. ‘He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,’ says Jesus to us all: ‘hearken unto Me, and know God, whom to know in Me is eternal life.’ Listen to Him. Without His testimony you will be the sport of fears, and doubts, and errors. With it in your hearts you will be at rest. Grace and peace come from the faithful Witness

II. We have grace and peace from the Conqueror of Death.

The ‘first *begotten* from the dead’ does not precisely convey the idea of the original, which would be more accurately represented by ‘the first born from the dead’ — the resurrection being looked upon as a kind of birth into a higher order of life. It is, perhaps, scarcely necessary to observe that the accuracy of this designation, ‘the first born from the dead,’ as applied to our Lord, is not made questionable because of the mere fact that there were others who rose from the dead before His resurrection, for all of these died again. What a strange feeling that must have been for Lazarus and the others, to go twice through the gates of death; twice to know the pain and the pang of separation! But these all have been gathered to the dust, and lie now waiting ‘the adoption, that is the resurrection of the body.’ But this Man, being raised, dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over Him. And how is it that grace and peace come to us from the risen Witness? Two or three words may be said about that.

Think how, first of all, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the confirmation of His testimony. In it the Father, to whom He hath borne witness in His life and death, bears witness to Christ, that His claims were true and His work well-pleasing. He is 'declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead.' If our Lord did not rise from the dead, as all Christendom to-day has been declaring its faith that He did then, as it seems to me, there is an end to His claims to be Son of God, and Son of Man, or anything other than a man like the rest of us. If He be no more and naught else than a man, altogether like the rest of us, then there is an end to any special revelation of the Divine nature, heart, purposes, and will, in His works and character. They may still be beautiful, they may still reveal God in the same sense in which the doings of any good man suggest a fontal source of goodness from which they flow, but beyond that they are nothing. So all the truth, and all the peace, all the grace and hope which flow to us from the witness of Jesus Christ to the Father, are neutralised and destroyed unless we believe in the resurrection from the dead. His words may still remain gracious, and true in a measure, only all dashed with the terrible mistake that He asserted that He would rise again, and rose not. But as for His life, it ceases to be in any real sense, because it ceases to be in any unique sense, the revelation to the world of the character of God.

And therefore, as I take it, it is no exaggeration to say that the whole fabric of Christianity, and all Christ's worth as a witness to God, stand or fall with the fact of His resurrection. If you pull out that keystone, down comes the arch. There may still be fair carving on some of the fallen fragments, but it is no longer an arch that spans the great gulf, and has a firm pier on the other side. Strike away the resurrection and you fatally damage the witness of Jesus. You cannot strike the supernatural out of Christianity, and keep the natural. The two are so inextricably woven together that to wrench away the one lacerates the other, and makes it bleed, even to death. If Christ be not risen we have nothing to preach, and you have nothing to believe. Our preaching and your faith are alike vain: ye

are yet in your sins. Grace and peace come from faith in the 'first begotten from the dead.'

And that is true in another way too. Faith in the resurrection gives us a living Lord to confide in — not a dead Lord, whose work we may look back upon with thankfulness; but a living one, who works now upon us, and by whose true companionship and real affection strength and help are granted to us every day. The cold frost of death has not congealed that stream of love that poured from His heart while He lived on earth; it flows yet for each of us, for all of us, for the whole world.

My brother, we cannot do without a living Christ to stand beside us, to sympathise, to help, to love. We cannot do without a living Christ with whom we may speak, who will speak to us. And that communion which is blessedness, that communication of power and righteousness which is life, are only possible, if it be true that His death was not the end of His relationship to us, or of His work in the world, but was only a transition from one stage of that work to another. We have to look to Christ, the 'faithful Witness,' the Witness who witnessed when He died; but we have to look to Him that is risen again and takes His place at the right hand of God. And the grace and peace flow to us not only from the contemplation of the past witness of the Lord, but are showered upon us from the open hands of the risen and living Christ.

In still another way do grace and peace reach us, from the 'first begotten from the dead,' inasmuch as in Him and in His resurrection-life we are armed for victory over that foe whom He has conquered. If He be the first born, He will have 'many brethren'. The 'first' implies a second. He has been raised from the dead, therefore death is not the destruction of conscious life. He has been raised from the dead, therefore any other man may be. Like another Samson, He has come forth from the prison-house, with the bars and gates upon His mighty shoulders, and has carried them away up

there to the hill-top where He is. And the prison-house door stands gaping wide, and none so weak but he can pass out through the ever open portals. Christ has risen, and therefore if we will trust Him we have conquered that last and grimmest foe. And so for ourselves, when we are trembling, as we all do with the natural shrinking of flesh from the thought of that certain death; for ourselves, in our hours of lonely sorrow, when the tears come or the heart is numbed with pain; for ourselves when we lay ourselves down in our beds to die, grace and peace, like the dove that fell on His sacred head as it rose from the water of the baptism — will come down from His hands who is not only ‘the faithful Witness,’ but the ‘first begotten from the dead.’

III. Lastly, we have grace and peace from the King of kings.

The series of aspects of Christ’s work here is ranged in order of time, in so far as the second follows the first, and the third follows from both, though we are not to suppose that our Lord has ceased to be the faithful Witness when He has ascended HIS Sovereign Throne. His own saying, ‘I have declared Thy name, and will declare it,’ shows us that His witness is perpetual, and carried on from His seat at the right hand of God.

He is the ‘Prince of the kings of the earth,’ just because He is ‘the faithful Witness.’ That is to say, — His dominion is the dominion of the truth; dominion is a kingdom over men’s wills and spirits. Does He rule by force? No! Does He rule by outward means? No! By terror? No! but because, as He said to the astonished Pilate, He came ‘to bear witness to the truth’; therefore is He the King not of the Jews only but of the whole world. A kingdom over heart and conscience, will and spirit, is the kingdom which Christ has founded, and His rule rests upon HIS witness.

And not only *so*, He is ‘the Prince of the kings of the earth’ because in that witness He dies, and so becomes a ‘martyr’ to the truth — the word in the original conveying both ideas. That is to say, His

dominion rests not only upon truth. That would be a dominion grand as compared with the kingdom of this world, but still cold. His dominion rests upon love and sacrifice. And so His Kingdom is a kingdom of blessing and of gentleness; and He is crowned with the crowns of the universe, because He was first crowned with the crown of thorns. His first regal title was written upon His Cross, and from the Cross His Royalty ever flows. He is the King because He is the sacrifice.

And He is the Prince of the kings of the earth because, witnessing and slain, He has risen again; His resurrection has been the step midway, as it were, between the humiliation of earth and death, and the loftiness of the Throne. By it He has climbed to His place at the right hand of God. He is King and Prince, then, by right of truth, love, sacrifice, death, resurrection.

And King to what end? That He may send grace and peace. Is there no peace for a man's heart in feeling that the Brother that loves him and died for him rules over all the perplexities of life, the confusions of Provident, the sorrows of a world, and the corruptions of his own nature? Is it not enough to drive away fears, to anodyne cares, to disentangle perplexities, to quiet disturbances, to make the coward brave, and the feeble strong, and the foolish wise, and the querulous patient, to think that my Christ is king; and that the hands which were nailed to the Cross wield the sceptre, and that He who died for me rules the universe and rules me?

Oh, brethren! there is no tranquillity for a man anywhere else but in the humble, hearty recognition of that Lord as his Lord. Crown Him with your reverence, with your loyal obedience, with your constant desires; crown Him with your love, the most precious of all the crowns that He wears, and you will find that grace and peace come to you from Him.

Such, then, is the vision that this seer in Patmos had of his Lord. It was to him a momentary opening of the heavens, which showed him

his throned Lord; but the fact which was made visible to his inward eye for a moment is an eternal fact. To-day as then, to-morrow as to-day, for Asiatic Greeks and for modern English-men, for past centuries, for the present, and for all the future, for the whole world for ever, Jesus Christ is the only witness whose voice breaks the awful silence and tells us of a Father; the only Conqueror of Death who makes the life beyond a firm, certain fact; the King whose dominion it is life to obey. We all need Him. Your hearts have wants which only His grace can supply, your lives have troubles which only

His peace can still. Sin and sorrow, change and trial, separation and death, are facts in every man's experience. They are ranked against us in serried battalions. You can conquer them all if you will seek shelter and strength from Him who has died for you, and lives to succour and to save. Trust Him! Let your faith grasp the past fact of the Cross whose virtue never grows old, and the present fact of the Throne from which He bends down with hands full of grace; and on His lips the tender old words: 'Peace I leave with you, My peace give I unto you!'

Revelation 1:5--CHRIST'S PRESENT LOVE AND PAST LOOSING FROM SINS

Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sine in His own blood.' — Revelation 1:5.

THE Revised Version rightly makes two slight but important changes in this verse, both of which are sustained by preponderating authority. For 'loved' it reads 'loveth,' and for 'washed' it reads 'loosed'; the whole standing 'Unto Him that loveth us, loosed us from our sins by His blood.' Now the first of these changes obviously adds much to the force and richness of the representation, for it substitutes for a past a present and timeless love. The second of them, though it seems greater, is really smaller, for it makes no change in the meaning, but only in the figure under which the

meaning is represented. If we read 'washed,' the metaphor would be of sin as a stain; if we read 'loosed,' the metaphor is of sin as a 'chain.' Possibly the context may somewhat favour the alteration, inasmuch as there would then be the striking contrast between the condition of captives or bondsmen, and the dignity of 'kings and priests unto God,' into which Jesus brings those whom He has freed from the bondage. Taking, then, these changes, and noting the fact that our text is the beginning of a doxology, we have here three points, the present love of Christ, the great past act which is its outcome and proof, and the praise which should answer that great love.

I. We have here that great thought of the present love of Christ.

The words seem to me to become especially beautiful, if we remember that they come from the lips of him whose distinction it was that he was 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' It is as if he had said, 'I share my privilege with you all. I was no nearer Him than you may be. Every head may rest on the breast where mine rested. Having the sweet remembrance of that early love, these things write I unto you that ye also may have fellowship with me in that which was my great distinction. I, the disciple whom Jesus loved, speak to you as the disciples whom Jesus loves.'

Mark that he is speaking of One who had been dead for half a century, and that he is speaking to people, none of whom had probably ever seen Jesus in His lifetime, and most of whom had not been born when He died. Yet to them all he turns with that profound and mighty present tense, and says, 'He loveth us.' He was speaking to all generations, and telling all the tribes of men of a love which is in active operation towards each of them, not only at the moment when John spoke to Asiatic Greeks, but at the moment when we Englishmen read his words, 'Christ that loveth us.'

Now that great thought suggests two things, one as to the permanence, and one as to the sweep of Christ's love. With regard

to the permanence, we have here the revelation of One whose relation to life and death is altogether unique. For though we must believe that the dead do still cherish the love that lighted earth for them, we cannot suppose that their love embraces those whom on earth they did not know, or that for those who are still held in its grasp it can be a potency in active operation to bless them and to do them good. But here is a Man, to the exercise of whose love, to the clearness of whose apprehension and knowledge, to the outgoing of whose warm affection, the active energy of that affection life or death make no difference. The cold which stays the flow of all other human love, like frost laid upon the running streams which it binds in fetters, has no power over the flow of Christ's love, which rolls on, unfrozen and unaffected by it. But not only does Christ's present love require that He should be lifted above death as it affects the rest of us, but it also demands for its explanation that we shall see in Him true Divinity.

For this 'loveth' is the timeless present of that Divine nature, of which we cannot properly say either that it was or that it will be, but only that it for ever is, and the outgoings of His love are like the outgoings of that Divine energy of which we cannot properly say that it did or that it will do, but only that it ever does. His love, if I might use such a phrase, is lifted above all tenses, and transcends even the bounds of grammar. He did love. He does love. He will love. All three forms of speech must be combined in setting forth the ever present, because timeless and eternal, love of the Incarnate Word.

Then let me remind you too that this present love of Christ is undiminished by the glory to which He is exalted. We find clear and great differences between the picture of Jesus Christ in the four gospels and the picture of Him drawn in that magnificent vision of this chapter. But the differences are surface, and the identity is deep-lying. The differences affect position much rather than nature, and as we look upon that revelation which was given to the seer in his

rocky Patmos, and with him 'in the Spirit' behold 'the things that are,' we carry into all the glory the thought 'He loveth us'; and the breast girded with the golden girdle is as loving as that upon which John's happy head lay, and the hand that holds the seven stars is as tender as when it was laid on little children in blessing or on lepers in cleansing; or as when it held up the sinking Apostle, or lifted the sick from their couches, or as when it was stretched on the Cross and pierced with the nails; and the face, 'which is as the sun shineth in his strength,' is as gracious as when it beamed in pity upon wanderers and sorrowful ones, and drew by its beauty and its sweetness the harlots and publicans to His pity. The exalted Christ loves as did the lowly Christ on earth.

How different this prosaic, worried present would be if we could carry with us, as we may if we will, into all its trivialities, into all its monotony, into all its commonplace routine, into all its little annoyances and great sorrows, that one lambent thought as a source of light and strength and blessing, 'He loveth us.' Ah! brethren, we lose tremendously of what we might all possess, because we think so of 'He loved,' and travel back to the Cross for its proof, and think so comparatively seldom 'He loveth,' and feel the touch of His hand on our hearts for its token.

But here we have not only the present and permanent love, but we have the sweep and extent of it. 'He loveth us.' And though John was speaking primarily about a little handful of people scattered through some of the seaboard towns of Asia Minor, the principle upon which he could make the assertion in regard to them warrants us in extending the assertion not only to men that respond to the love, and believe in it, but right away over all the generations and all the successive files of the great army of humanity, down to the very ends of time, 'He loveth us.'

That universality, wonderful as it is, and requiring for its basis the same belief in Christ's Divine nature which the present energy of

His love requires, has to be translated by each of us into an individualising love which is poured upon each single soul, as if it were the sole-recipient of the fulness of the heart of Christ. When we extend our thoughts or our sympathies to a crowd, we lose the individual. We generalise, as logicians say, by neglecting the particular instances. That is to say, when we look at the forest we do not see the trees. But Jesus Christ sees each tree, each stem, each branch, each leaf, just as when the crowd thronged Him and pressed Him, He knew when the tremulous finger, wasted and shrunken to skin and bone, was timidly laid on the hem of His garment; as there was room for all the five thousand on the grass, and no man's plenty was secured at the expense of another man's penury, so each of us has a place in that heart; and my abundance will not starve you, nor your feeding full diminish the supplies for me. Christ loves all, not with the vague general philanthropy with which men love the mass, but with the individualising knowledge and special direction of affection towards the individual which demands for its fulness a Divine nature to exercise it. And so each of us may have our own rainbow, to each of us the sunbeam may come straight from the sun and strike upon our eye in a direct line, to each of us the whole warmth of the orb may be conveyed, and each of us may say, 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.' Is that your conception of your relation to Jesus Christ, and of Christ's to you?

II. Notice the great proof and outcome of this present love. Because it is timeless love, and has nothing to do with the distinction of past, present, and future, John lays hold of a past act as the manifestation of a present love. If we would understand what that love is which is offered to each of us in the present, we must understand what is meant and what is involved in that past act to which John points: 'He loosed us from our sins by His own Mood.' Christ is the Emancipator, and the instrument by which He makes us free is 'His own blood.'

Now there underlies that thought the sad metaphor that sin is captivity. There may be some kind of allusion in the Apostle's mind to the deliverance from Egyptian bondage; and that is made the more probable if we observe that the next clause, 'hath made us kings and priests unto God,' points back to the great charter of Israel's national existence which was given immediately after the Exodus. But, be that as it may, the notion of bondage underlies this metaphor of loosing a fetter. If we would be honest with ourselves, in our account of our own inward experiences, that bondage we all know. There is the bondage of sin as guilt, the sense of responsibility, the feeling that we have to answer for what we have done, and to answer — as I believe and as I think men's consciences for the most part force them to believe — not only here but hereafter, when we appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. Guilt is a chain. And there is the bondage of habit, which ties and holds us with the cords of our sins, so as that, slight as the fetter may seem at first, it has an awful power of thickening and becoming heavier and more pressing, till at last it holds a man in a grip that he cannot get away from. I know of nothing in human life more mystically awful than the possible influence of habit. And you cannot break these fetters yourselves, brethren, any more than a man in a dungeon, shackled to the wall, can file through his handcuffs and anklets with a pin or a broken penknife. You can do a great deal, but you cannot deal with the past fact of guilt, and you can only very partially deal with the present fact of tyranny which the evil habit exercises on you.

'He loosed us from our sins by His own blood.' This is not the place to enter upon theological speculations, but I, for my part, believe that, although I may not get to the bottom of the bottomless, *nor* speak about the Divine nature with full knowledge of all that it is, Scripture is pledged to the fact that the death of Jesus Christ is the Sacrifice for the world's sin. I admit that a full theory is not within reach, but I do not admit that therefore we are to falter in declaring that Christ's death is indispensable in order that a man's sin may be

forgiven, and the fetters broken, in so far as guilt and condemnation and Divine disapprobation are concerned.

But that is only one side of the truth. The other, and in some aspects a far more important one, is that that same blood which shed delivers them that trust in Jesus Christ from the guilt of their sin, imparted to men, delivers them from the power of their sin. 'The blood is the life,' according to the simple physiology of the Old and of the New Testament. When we read in Scripture that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin, as I believe we are intended to understand that word, the impartation of Christ's life to us purifies our nature, and makes us, too, in our degree, and on condition of our own activity, and gradually and successively free from all evil. So as regards both aspects of the thralldom of sin, as guilt and as habit: 'He has loosed us from our sins in His own blood.'

That is the great token and manifestation of His love. If we do not believe that, how else can we have any real conviction and proof of anything worth calling love as being in the heart of Jesus Christ to any of us? To me it seems that unless a man accepts that great thought, 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me,' and is daily working in my nature to make it and me more like Himself, he has no real proof that Jesus Christ cares a jot for him, or knows anything about him. But I, for my part, venture to say that looking on Christ and His past as this text does, we can look up to Christ in the present as the seer did, and, behold, enthroned by the side of the glory, the Man, the Incarnate Word, who loves with timeless love every single soul of man.

III. So, lastly, let me point you to the praise which should answer this present love and emancipation.

'Unto Him,' says John, 'he' — or is — 'glory and dominion for ever and ever.' That present love, and that great past act which is its vindication and manifestation, are the true glory of God. For His glory lies, not in attributes, as we call them, that distinguish Him

from the limitations of humanity, such as Omniscience and Omnipresence and Eternal Being and the like; all these are great, but they are not the greatest. The divinest thing in God is His love, and the true glory is the glory that rays out from Him whom we behold 'full of grace and truth,' full of love, and dying on the Cross. When we look at that weak man there yielding to the last infirmity of humanity, and yet in yielding to it manifesting His dominion over it, there we see God as we do not see Him anywhere besides To Him is the glory for His love, and His 'loosing' manifest the glory, and from His love and His loosing accrue to Him glory beyond all other revenue of praise which comes to Him from creative and sustaining acts.

'Unto Him be dominion,' for His rule rests on His sacrifice and on His love. The crown of thorns prepared for the 'many crowns' of heaven, the sceptre of reed was the prophecy of the sceptre of the universe. The Cross was the footstool of His Throne. He is King of men because He has loved us perfectly, and given everything for us.

And so, brethren, the question of questions for each of us is, Is Jesus Christ my Emancipator? Do I see in Him He that looses me from my sins, and makes me free indeed, because the Son has made me free and a son? Do I render to Him the love which such a love requires? Do I find in Him my ever-present Lover and Friend, and is His love to me as a stimulus for all service, an amulet against every temptation, a breakwater in all storms, a light in every darkness, the pledge of a future heaven, and the beginning of a heaven even upon earth? I beseech you, recognise your fetters, and do not say 'we were never in bondage to any man.' Recognise your Liberator, put your trust in Him; and then you will be able to join, even here on earth, and more perfectly hereafter, in that great storm and chorus of praise which is in heaven and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, saying, 'Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth on the Throne and to the Lamb for ever and ever.'

Revelation 1:6--KINGS AND PRIESTS

‘He hath made us kings and priests unto God.’ — Revelation 1:6.

THERE is an evident reference in these words to the original charter of the Jewish nation, which ran, ‘If ye will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then shall ye be to Me a kingdom of priests.’ That reference is still more obvious if we follow the reading of our text in the Revised Version, which runs, ‘He made us to be a kingdom, to be priests.’ Now it is unquestionable that, in the original passage, Israel is represented as being God’s kingdom, the nation over which He reigned as King. But in John’s use of the expression there seems to be a slight modification of meaning, as is obvious in the parallel passage to this, which occurs in a subsequent chapter, where we read in addition, ‘They shall reign with Him for ever.’ That is to say, in our text we should rather translate the word ‘kingship’ than ‘kingdom,’ for it means rather the Royal dominion of the Christian community than its subjection to the reign of God.

So the two dignities, the chief in the ancient world, which as a rule were sedulously kept apart, lest their union should produce a grinding despotism from which there was no appeal, are united in the person of the humblest Christian, and that not merely at some distant future period beyond the grave, but here and now; for my text says, not ‘will make,’ but ‘hath made.’ The coronation and the consecration are both past acts, they are the sequel, certain to follow upon the previous act: ‘He hath loosed us from our sins in His own blood.’ The timeless love of Christ, of which that ‘loosing’ was the manifestation and the outcome, is not content with emancipating the slaves; it enthrones and hallows them. ‘He lifts the beggar from the dunghill to set him among princes.’ ‘He hath loosed us from our sins,’ He hath therein made us ‘kings and priests to God.’

I. So, then, we have to consider, first, the Royalty of the Christian life.

Now as I have already observed, that royalty has two aspects, a present and a future, and therein the representation coincides with the whole strain of the New Testament, which never separates the present from the future condition of Christian people, as if they were altogether unlike, but lays far more emphasis upon the point in which they coincide than on the points in which they differ, and represents that future as being but the completion and the heightening to a more lustrous splendour, of that which characterises Christian life in the present. So there is a present dominion, notwithstanding all the sorrows and limitations and burdens of life; and there is a future one, which is but the expansion and the superlative degree of that which is enjoined in the present. What, then, is the present royalty of the men that have been loosed from their sins?

Well, I think that the true kingship, which comes as the consequence of Christ's emancipation of us from the guilt and power of sin, is dominion over ourselves. That is the real royalty, to which every man, whatever his position, may aspire, and may exercise. Our very nature shows that we are not, if I might so say, a republic or a democracy, but a monarchy, for there are parts of every one of us that are manifestly intended to be subjected and to obey, and there are parts that are as manifestly intended to be authoritative and to command. On the one side are the passions and the desires that inhere in our fleshly natures, and others, more refined and sublimated forms of the same, and on the other, there is will, reason, conscience. And these, being themselves the authoritative and commanding parts of our nature, observe a subordination also. For the will which impels all the rest is but a blind giant unless it be illumined by reason. And will and reason alike have to bow to the dictates of that conscience which is the vicegerent of God in every man.

But there is rebellion in the monarchy, as we all know, a revolt that spreads widely. And there is no power that will enable my will to

dominate my baser part, and no power that will enthrone my reason above my will, and no power that will give to the empty voice of conscience force to enforce its decrees, except the power of Him that 'has loosed us from our sins in His own blood.' When we bow to Him, then, and, as I believe in its perfect measure, only then, shall we realise the dominion over the anarchic, rebellious self, which God means every man to exercise. Christ, and Christ alone, makes us fit to control all our nature. And He does it by pouring into us His own Spirit, which will subdue, by strengthening all the motives which should lead men to obedience, by setting before them the perfect pattern in Himself, and by the communication of His own life, which is symbolised by His blood cleansing us from the tyranny under which we have been held. We were slaves, He makes us free, and making us free He enthrones us. He that is king over himself is the true king.

Again, the present royalty of the Christian man is found in his sovereignty over the world. He commands the world who despises it. He is lord of material things who bends them to the highest use, the development of his own nature, and the formation in him of a God-pleasing and Christlike character. He is king of the material who uses it as men use the leaping-bars and other apparatus in a gymnasium, for the strengthening of the frame, and the bringing out of the muscles. He is the king of the world to whom it is all a mirror that shows God, a ladder by which we can climb to Him. And this domination over things visible and material is possible to us in its superlative degree only in the measure in which we are united by faith and obedience to Him who declared, with almost His dying breath, 'I have overcome the world,' and bade us therefore 'be of good cheer.' 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,' and He is the master of all who has submitted himself to the monarchy of Jesus Christ. And so the royalty which begins with ruling my own nature goes on to be master of all things around me, according to that great saying, the depth of which can be realised only by experience, 'All things are yours, and ye are Christ's.'

There is another department in which the same kingship is at present capable of being exercised by us all, and that is that we may become, by faith in Jesus Christ, independent of men, and lords over them, in the sense that we shall take no orders from them, nor hang upon their approbation or disapprobation, nor depend upon their love for our *joy*, nor be frightened or bewildered by their hate, but shall be able to say, 'We are the servants of Christ, therefore we are free from men.' The King's servant is everybody else's master. In the measure in which we hold ourselves in close union with that Saviour we are set free from all selfish dependence on, and regard to, the judgments of perishable and fallible creatures like ourselves.

But the passage to which I have already referred as determining the precise meaning of the ambiguous expression in my text goes a little further. It not only speaks of being kings and priests here and now, but it adds they *shall* 'reign with Him,' and so points us onward to a dim future, in which all that is tendency here, and an imperfect kingship, shall be perfectly realised hereafter. I do not dwell upon that, for we see that future but 'through a glass darkly'; only I remind you of such sayings as 'have thou authority over ten cities,' and the other phrase in one of the letters to the seven churches, in which 'authority over the nations' and 'ruling them with a rod of iron' is promised to Christ's servants. These are promises as dim as they are certain, but they, at least, teach us that they who here, in lowly dependence on the King of kings, have bowed themselves to Him, and, emancipated by Him, have been made to share in some measure in His royalty here, shall hereafter, according to the depth of His own wonderful promise, 'sit with Him on His Throne, as He also hath sat down with the Father on His Throne.'

For indeed this kingship of all Christ's children, like the priesthood with which it is associated in my text, is but one case of the general principle that, by faith in Jesus Christ, we are so united with Him as that where He is, and what He is, there and that 'we shall be also.' He has become like us that we might become like Him. He has taken

part of the flesh and blood of which the children are partakers, that they might take part of the Spirit of which He is the Lord. He, the Son, has become the Son of Man that sons of men might in Him become the sons of God. The branches partake of the 'fatness' of the vine; and the King who is Priest makes all to trust Him, not only sons but kings through Himself.

II. We have here the priesthood of the Christian life. Now that idea is but a symbolical way of putting some very great and wondrous thoughts, for what are the elements that go to make up the idea of a priest, First, direct access to God, and that is the prerogative of every Christian. All of us, each of us, may pass into the secret place of the Most High, and stand there with happy hearts, unabashed and unafraid, beneath the very blaze of the light of the Shekinah. And we can do that, because Jesus Christ has come to us with these words upon His lips, 'I am the Way; no man cometh to the Father but by Me.' The path into that Divine Presence is for every sinful soul blocked by an immense black rock, its own transgressions; but He has blasted away the rock, and the path is patent for all our feet. By His death we have the way made open into the holiest of all. And so we can come, come with lowly hearts, come with childlike confidence, come with the whole burden of our weaknesses and wants and woes, and can spread them all before Him, and nestle to the great heart of God the Father Himself. We are priests to God, and our prerogative is to pass within the veil by the new and living Way which Christ is for us.

Again, another idea in the conception of the priest is that he must have somewhat to offer; and we Christian people are in that sense priests. Christ has offered the 'one Sacrifice for sins for ever,' and there is no, addition to that possible or requisite. But after the offering of the expiatory sacrifice, the ancient Ritual taught us a deep truth when it appointed that following it there should be the sacrifice of thanksgiving. And these are what we are to bring. You remember the words, 'I Beseech you, Brethren, by the mercies

of God, that ye present' — and that word is the technical one for the offering of sacrifice — 'your bodies a living sacrifice, acceptable unto God.' You remember Peter's use of this same expression, 'Ye are a royal priesthood,' and his description of their function to offer up spiritual 'sacrifices.' You remember the other words of the great sacerdotal book of the New Testament, the Epistle to the Hebrews, which claims for Christians all that seemed to be disappearing with the dying Jewish economy, and says, 'By Him, therefore. let us offer the sacrifice of praise unto God... that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His Name, and to do good, and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well-pleased.' So the sacrifice of myself, moved by the mercies of God as a great thank-offering, and in detail the sacrifice of praise, of good gifts and good deeds, and a life devoted to Him, these are the sacrifices which we have to bring.

I need not remind you of yet another aspect in which the sacrificial idea inheres in the very notion of the Christian life, and that is not only access to God, and the offering of sacrifice, but mediation with man. For the function is laid upon all Christian people by Jesus Christ Himself, that they should represent God and Him in the world, and beseech men, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God. And so the priesthood and the kingship both belong to the ideal of the Christian life.

III. In the last place, just a word or two as to the practical conclusions from this idea. The first of them is one on which I touch very lightly, but which I cannot well omit, and that is the bearing of this thought on the relations of the members of the Christian community to one another. The New Testament knows of two kinds of priesthood, and no third. It knows of Christ as the High Priest *who*, by His great sacrifice for the sins of the world, has made all other expiation antiquated and impertinent, and has swept away the whole fabric of ceremonial and sacrificial worship; and it knows of the derived priesthood which belongs to every member of Christ's Church. But it stops there; and there is not a word in the New

Testament which warrants any single member of that universal priesthood monopolising the title to himself, and so separating himself from the community of his brethren. I do not wish to elaborate that point, or to bring any mere controversial elements into my sermon, but I am bound to say that if that name of priest be given to a class, you elevate the class and you degrade the mass of believers. You take away from the community what you concentrate on the individual. And historically it has always been

the case that wherever the name of priest has been allotted to the officials, the ministers of the Church, there the priesthood of the community has tended to be forgotten.

I do not dwell upon the other great error which goes along with that name as applied to an officer in any Christian community. But a priest must have a *sacrifice*, and you cannot sustain the sacerdotal idea except by the help of the sacramentarian idea which, I venture to say, travesties the simple memorial rite of the Lord's Supper into what it is called in Roman Catholic phraseology, 'the tremendous sacrifice.'

Brethren, the hand of the priest paralyses the life of the Church; and politically, intellectually, socially, and above all religiously, it blights whatsoever it touches. You free Churchmen have laid upon you this day the imperative duty of witnessing for the two things, the sole priesthood of Jesus Christ, and the universal priesthood of all His people.

Let me say again, these thoughts bear upon our individual duty. It is idle, as some of us are too apt to do, to use them as a weapon to fight ecclesiastical assumptions with, unless they regulate our own lives. Be what you are is what I would say to all Christian men. You are a king; see that you rule yourself and the world. You are a priest; see that the path into the Temple is worn by your continual feet. See that you offer yourselves sacrifices to God in the daily work and

self-surrender of life. See that you mediate between God and man, in such brotherly mediation as is possible to us.

Above all, dear friends, let us all begin where Christ begins, where my text begins, and go to Him to have ourselves 'loosed from our sins in His own blood.' Then the king's diadem and the priest's mitre will meet on our happy heads. In plain English, if we want to govern ourselves and the world, we must let Christ govern us, and then all things will be our servants. If we would draw near to God — and to be distant from Him is misery; and if we would offer to Him the sacrifices — to refrain from offering which is sin and sorrow — we must begin with going to Jesus Christ, and trusting in Him as our Redeemer from sin. And then, so trusting, He will give us here and now, amid the sorrows and imperfections of life, and more perfectly amid the glories and unknown advances in power and beauty in the heavens, a share in His Royalty and His unchangeable Priesthood.

Revelation 1:9-20--THE KING OF GLORY AND LORD OF THE CHURCHES

'I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. 10. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, 11. Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Alia; unto Ephesus, and Into Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. 12. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; 13. And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with · garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. 14. His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes wore as a flame of fire; 15. And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they

burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. 16. And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. 17. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. And He laid HIS right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: 18. I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. 19. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; 20. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in My right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. — Revelation 1:9-20.

In this passage we have the seer and his commission (vs. 9-11); the vision of the glorified Christ (vs. 12-16); His words of comfort, self-revelation, and command (vs. 17-20).

I. The writer does not call himself an apostle, but a brother and sharer in the common good of Christiania He does not speak as an apostle, whose function was to witness to the past earthly history of the Lord, but as a prophet, whose message was as to the future.

The true rendering of verse 9 (R.V.) brings all three words, 'tribulation,' 'kingdom,' and 'patience' into the same relation to 'in Jesus.' Sharing in afflictions which flow from union to Him is the condition of partaking in His kingdom; and tribulation leads to the throne, when it is borne with the brave patience which not only endures, but, in spite of sorrows, goes right onwards, and which is ours if we are in Christ.

Commentators tell us that John was banished to Patmos, an insignificant rock off the Asiatic coast, under Domitian, and returned to Ephesus in the reign of Nerva (A.D. 96). No wonder that all through the book we hear the sound of the seal It was common for the Romans to dispose of criminals in that fashion, and, clearly,

John was shut up in Patmos as a criminal. *'For the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus,'* cannot fairly bear any other meaning than that he was sent there as punishment for bearing witness to Jesus. Observe the use of 'witness' or testimony, as connecting the Apocalypse with the Gospel and Epistles of John.

In his rocky solitude the Apostle was 'in the Spirit,' — by which is, of course, not meant the condition in which every Christian should ever be, but such a state of elevated consciousness and communion as Paul was in when he was caught up to the heavens. No doubt John had been meditating on the unforgotten events of that long-past day of resurrection, which he was observing in his islet by solitary worship, as he had often observed it with his brethren in Ephesus; and his devout thoughts made him the more capable of supernatural communications. Whether the name of the first day of the week as 'the Lord's Day' originated with this passage, or had already become common, is uncertain. But, at all events, it was plainly regarded as the day for Christian worship. Solitary souls, far away from the gatherings of Christ's people, may still draw near to Him; and if they turn thought and love towards Him, they will be lifted above this gross earth, and hear that great voice speaking to them, which rose above the dash of waves, and thrilled the inward ear of the lonely exile. That voice, penetrating and clear like a trumpet, gave him his charge, and woke his expectation of visions to follow.

We cannot enter on any consideration of the churches enumerated, or the reasons for their selection. Suffice it to note that their number suggests their representative character, and that what is said to them is meant for all churches in all ages.

II. The fuller consideration of the emblem of the candlesticks will come presently, but we have reverently to gaze upon the glorious figure which flashed on John's sight as he turned to see who spoke to him there in his loneliness. His first glimpse told him that it was 'one like to the Son of man'; for it can scarcely be supposed that the

absence of the definite article in the Greek obliges us to think that all that John meant to say was that the form was manlike. Surely it was a more blessed resemblance than that vague one which struck on his heart. It was He Himself 'with His human air,' 'standing there in the blaze of celestial light. What a rush of memories, what a rapture of awe and surprise would flood his soul, as that truth broke on him! The differences between the form seen and that remembered were startling, indeed, but likeness persisted through them all. Nor is it inexplicable that, when he had taken in all the features of the vision, he should have fallen as one dead; for the truest love would feel awe at the reappearance of the dearest invested with heavenly radiance.

The elements of the description are symbolical, and, in most instances, drawn from the Old Testament. The long robe, girdled high up with a golden girdle, seems to express at once kingly and priestly dignity.

Girded loins meant work. This girdled breast meant royal repose and priestly calm. The whiteness of the hair (comp. Daniel 7:9) may indicate, as in Daniel, length of days; but more probably it expresses 'the transfiguration in light of the glorified person of the Redeemer' (Trench). The flaming eyes are the symbol of His all-seeing wrath against evil, and the feet of burning brass symbolise the exalted Christ's power to tread clown His enemies and consume them. His voice was as the sound of many waters, like the billows that broke on Patmos, whereby is symbolized the majesty of His utterance of power, whether for rebuke or encouragement, but mainly for the former.

Flashing in His hand were seven stars. The seer does not stop to tell us how they were disposed there, nor how one hand could grasp them all; but that right hand can and does. What this point of the vision means we shall see presently.

The terrible power of the exalted Christ's word to destroy His foes is expressed by that symbol of the two-edged sword from His mouth,

which, like so many prophetic symbols, is grotesque if pictured, but sublime when spoken. The face Blazed with dazzling brightness unbearable as the splendours of that southern sun which poured its rays on the flashing waters round John's rocky prison.

Is this tremendous figure like the Christ on whose bosom John had leaned? Yes; for one chief purpose of this book is to make us feel that the exalted Jesus is the same in all essentials as the lowly Jesus. The heart that Beats beneath the golden girdle is the same that melted with pity and overflowed with love here. The hands that bear the seven stars are those that were pierced with nails. The eyes that flash fire are those that dropped tears at a grave and over Jerusalem. The lips from which issues the sharp sword are the same which said, 'I will give you rest.' He has carried all His love, His gentleness, His sympathy, into the blaze of Deity, and in His glory is still our brother.

III. His gracious words to John tell us this and more. Soothingly He laid the hand with the stars in it on the terrified Apostle, and gentle words, which he had heard Him say many a time on earth, came soothingly from the mouth from which the sword proceeded. How the calming graciousness rises into majesty! 'I am the first and the last.' That is a Divine prerogative (Isaiah 44:6). The glorified Christ claims to have been before all creatures, and to be the end to which all tend.

Verse 18 should be more closely connected with the preceding than in Authorised Version. The sentence runs on unbroken, 'and the Living one,' which is equivalent to the claim to possess life in Himself (John 5:26), on which follows in majestic continuity, 'and I became dead' — pointing to the mystery of the Lord of life entering into the conditions of humanity, and stooping to taste of death — 'and, behold, I am alive for evermore' — the transient eclipse of the grave is followed by glorious life for ever — 'and I have the keys of

death and of Hades' — having authority over that dark prison-house, and opening and shutting its gates as I will.

Mark how, in these solemn words, the threefold state of the eternal Word is set forth, in His pre-incarnate fulness of Divine life, in His submission to death, in His resurrection, and in His ascended *glory*, as Lord of life and death, and of all worlds. Does our faith grasp all these? We shall never understand His life and death on earth, unless we see before them the eternal dwelling of the Word with God, and after them the exaltation of His manhood to the throne of the universe.

The charge to the Apostle, which follows on this transcendent revelation, has two parts — the command to write his visions, and the explanation of the symbols of the stars and the candlesticks. As to the former, we need only note that it extends to the whole book, and that the three divisions of 'what thou seest,' 'the things which are,' and 'the things which shall be hereafter,' may refer, respectively, to the vision in this chapter, the letters to the seven churches, and the subsequent prophetic part of the book.

As to the explanation of the symbols, stars are always, in Scripture, emblems of authority, and here they are dearly so. But there is great difference of opinion as to the meaning of the 'angels,' which are variously taken as being guardian angels of each church, or the presiding officers of these, or ideal figures representing each church in its collective aspect. It is impossible to enter on the discussion of these views here, and we can only say that, in our judgment, the opinion that the angels are the bishops of the churches is the most probable. If so, the fact that they are addressed as representing the churches, responsible for and sharing in their spiritual condition, suggests very solemn thoughts as to the weight laid on every one who sustains an analogous position, and the inseparable connection between the spiritual condition of pastor and people.

The seven candlesticks are the seven churches. The formal unity of the ancient church, represented by the one candlestick with its seven branches, is exchanged for the real unity which arises from the presence of Christ in the midst. The old candlestick is at the bottom of the Mediterranean. The unity of the Church does not depend on compression into one organisation, but on all its parts being clustered around Jesus.

The emblem of the candlestick, or lamp-holder, may suggest lessons as to the Church's function. Each church should be light. That light must be derived. There is only one unkindled and unfed light — that of Jesus Christ. Of the rest of us it has to be said, 'He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.' Each church should be, as it were, a clustered light, like those rings of iron, pierced with many little holes, from each of which a tiny jet of gas comes, which, running all together, make one steady lustre. So we should each be content to blend our little twinkle in the common light.

Revelation 1:9 --THE THREEFOLD COMMON HERITAGE

'I John, your brother, and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus.' — Revelation 1:9 (R.V.).

So does the Apostle introduce himself to his readers; with no word of pre-eminence or of apostolic authority, but with the simple claim to share with them in their Christian heritage. And this is the same man who, at an earlier stage of his Christian life, desired that he and his brother might 'sit on Thy right hand and on Thy left in Thy Kingdom.' What a change had passed over him ! What was it that out of such timber made such a polished shaft? I think there is only one answer — the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gift of God's good Spirit that came after it.

It almost looks as if John was thinking about his old ambitious wish, and our Lord's answer to it, when he wrote these words; for the very

gist of our Lord's teaching to him on that memorable occasion is reproduced in compressed form in my text. He had been taught that fellowship in Christ's sufferings must go before participation in His throne; and so here he puts tribulation before the kingdom. He had been taught, in answer to his foolish request, that pre-eminence was not the first thing to think of, but service; and that the only principle according to which rank was determined in that kingdom was service. So here he says nothing about dignity, but calls himself simply a brother and companion. He humbly suppresses his apostolic authority, and takes his place, not by the side of the throne, apart from others, but down among them.

Now the Revised Version is distinctly an improved version in its rendering of these words. It reads 'partaker with you,' instead of '*companion,*' and so emphasises the notion of participation. It reads, 'in the tribulation and kingdom and patience,' instead of 'in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience'; and so, as it were, brackets all the three nouns together under one preposition and one definite article, and thus shows more closely their connection. And instead of 'in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ,' it reads, 'which are in Jesus Christ,' and so shows that the predicate, 'in Jesus Christ,' extends to all the three — the 'tribulation,' the 'kingdom,' and the 'patience,' and not only to the last of the three, as would be suggested to an ordinary reader of our English version. So that we have here a participation by all Christian men in three things, all of which are, in some sense, 'in Christ Jesus.' Note that participation in 'the kingdom' stands in the centre, buttressed, as it were, on the one side by participation 'in the tribulation,' and on the other side by participation 'in the patience.' We may, then, best bring out the connection and force of these thoughts by looking at the common royalty, the common road leading to it, and the common temper in which the road is trodden — all which things do inhere in Christ, and may be ours on condition of our union with Him.

I. So then, first, note the common royalty. ‘I John am a partaker with you in the kingdom.’

Now John does not say, ‘I am *going to* be a partaker,’ but says, ‘Here and now, in this little rocky island of Patmos, an exile and all but a martyr, I yet, like all the rest of you, who have the same *weird* to dree, and the same bitter cup to drink, even now *am* a partaker of the kingdom that is in Christ.’

What is that kingdom? It is the sphere or society, the state or realm, in which His will is obeyed; and, as we may say, His writs run. His kingdom, in the deepest sense of the word, is only there, where loving hearts yield, and where His will is obeyed consciously, because the conscious obedience is rooted in love.

But then, besides that, there is a wider sense of the expression in which Christ’s kingdom stretches all through the universe, and wherever the authority of God is there is the kingdom of the exalted Christ, who is the right hand and active power of God.

So then the ‘kingdom that is in Christ’ is yours if you are ‘in Christ.’ Or, to put it into other words, whoever is ruled *by* Christ has a share in rule *with* Christ. Hence the words in the context here, to which a double meaning may be attached, ‘He hath made us to be a kingdom.’ We are His kingdom in so far as our wills joyfully and lovingly submit to His authority; and then, in so far as we are His kingdom, we are kings. So far as our wills bow to and own His sway, they are invested with power to govern ourselves and others. His subjects are the world’s masters. Even *now*, in the midst of confusions and rebellions, and apparent contradictions, the true rule in the world belongs to the men and women who bow to the authority of Jesus Christ. Whoever worships Him, saying, ‘Thou art the King of *Glory*, O Christ,’ receives from Him the blessed assurance, ‘and I appoint unto you a kingdom.’ His vassals are altogether princes. He is ‘King of kings,’ not only in the sense that He is higher than the kings of the earth, but also in the sense, though

it be no part of the true meaning of the expression, that those whom He rules are, by the very submission to His rule, elevated to royal dignity.

We rule over ourselves, which is the best kingdom to govern, on condition of saying: — ‘Lord! I cannot rule myself, do Thou rule me.’ When we put the reins into His hands, when we put our consciences into His keeping, when we take our law from His gentle and yet sovereign lips, when we let Him direct our thinking; when His word is absolute truth that ends all controversy, and when His will is the supreme authority that puts an end to every hesitation and reluctance, then we are masters of ourselves. The man that has rule over his own spirit is the true king. He that thus is Christ’s man is his own master. Being lords of ourselves, and having our foot upon our passions, and conscience and will flexible in His hand and yielding to His lightest touch, as a fine-mouthed horse does to the least pressure of the bit, then we are masters of circumstances and the world; and all things are on our side if we are on Christ’s side.

So we do not need to wait for Heaven to be heirs, that is possessors, of the kingdom that God hath pro-pared for them that love Him. Christ’s dominion is shared even now and here by all who serve Him. It is often hard for us to believe this about ourselves or others, especially when toil weighs upon us, and adverse circumstances, against which we have vainly striven, tyrannise over our lives. We feel more like powerless victims than lords of the world. Our lives seem concerned with such petty trivialities, and so absolutely lorded over by externals, that to talk of a present dominion over a present world seems irony, flatly contradicted by facts.

We are tempted to throw forward the realisation of our regality to the future. We are heirs, indeed, of a great kingdom, but for the present are set to keep a small huckster’s shop in a back street. So we faithlessly say to ourselves; and we need to open our eyes, as John would have his brethren do, to the fact of the present

participation of every Christian in the present kingdom of the enthroned Christ. There can be no more startling anomalies in our lots than were in his, as he sat there in Patmos, a solitary exile, weighed upon with many cares, ringed about with perils not a few. But in them all he knew his share in the kingdom to be real and inalienable, and yielding much for present fruition, however much more remained over for hope and future possession. The kingdom is not only 'of' but 'in' Jesus Christ. He is, as it were, the sphere in which it is realised. If we are 'in

Him' by that faith which engrafts us into Him, we shall ourselves both be and possess that kingdom, and *possess* it, because we *are* it.

But while the kingdom is present, its perfect form is future. The crown of righteousness is laid up for God's people, even though they are already a kingdom, and already (according to the true reading of Revelation 5:10) 'reign upon the earth.' Great hopes, the greater for their dimness, gather round that future when the faithfulness of the steward shall be exchanged for the authority of the ruler, and the toil of the servant for the joy of the Lord. The presumptuous ambition of John in his early request did not sin by setting his hopes too high; for, much as he asked when he sought a place at the right hand of his Master's throne, his wildest dreams fell far below the reality, reserved for all who overcome, of a share in that very throne itself. There is room there, not for one or two of the aristocracy of heaven, but for all the true servants of Christ.

They used to say that in the days of the first Napoleon every French soldier carried a field-marshal's baron in his knapsack. That is to say, every one of them had the chance of winning it, and many of them did win it. But every Christian soldier carries a crown in his, and that not because he perhaps may, but because he certainly will, wear it, when the war is over, if he stands by his flag, and because he has it already in actual possession, though for the present the helmet becomes his brow rather than the diadem. On such themes

we can say little, only let us remember that the present and the future life of the Christian are distinguished, not by the one possessing the royalty which the other wants, but as the partial and perfect forms of the same kingdom, which, in both forms alike, depends on our true abiding in Him. That kingdom is in Him, and is the common heritage of all who are in Him, and who, on earth and in heaven, possess it in degrees varying accurately with the measure in which they are in Christ, and He in them.

II. Note, secondly, the common road to that common royalty.

As I have remarked, the kingdom is the central thought here, and the other two stand on either side as subsidiary: on the one hand, a common 'tribulation'; on the other, a common 'patience.' The former is the path by which all have to travel who attain the royalty; the latter is the common temper in which all the travellers must face the steepnesses and roughnesses of the road.

'Tribulation' has, no doubt, primarily reference to actual persecution, such as had sent John to his exile in Patmos, and hung like a threatening thunder-cloud over the Asiatic churches. But the significance of the word is not exhausted thereby. It is always true that 'through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom.' All who are bound to the same place, and who start from the same place, must go by the same road. There are no short-cuts nor by-paths for the Christian pilgrim. The only way to the kingdom that is in Christ is the road which He Himself trod. There is 'tribulation in Christ,' as surely as in Him there are peace and victory, and if we are in Christ we shall be sure to get our share of it. The Christian course brings new difficulties and trials of its own, and throws those who truly out-and-out adopt it into relations with the world which will surely lead to oppositions and pains. If we are in the world as Christ was, we shall have to make up our minds to share 'the reproach of Christ' until Egypt owns Him, and not Pharaoh, for its King. If there be no such experience, it is much more probable that the reason for

exemption is the Christian's worldliness than the world's growing Christlikeness.

No doubt the grosser forms of persecution are at an end, and no doubt multitudes of nominal Christians live on most Amicable terms with the world, and know next to nothing of the tribulation that is in Christ. But that is not because there is any real alteration in the consequences of union with Jesus, but because their union is so very slight and superficial. The world 'loves its own,' and what can it find to hate in the shoals of people, whose religion is confined to their tongues mostly, and has next to nothing to do with their lives? It has not ceased to be a hard thing to be a real and thorough Christian. A great deal in the world is against us when we try to be so, and a great deal in ourselves is against us. There will be 'tribulation' by reason of self-denial, and the mortification and rigid suppression or regulation of habits, tastes, and passions, which some people may be able to indulge, but which we must cast out, though dear and sensitive as a right eye, if they interfere with our entrance into life. The law is unrepealed — 'If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him.'

But this participation in the tribulation that is in Christ has another and gentler aspect. The expression points to the blessed softening of our hardest trials when they are borne in union with the Man of Sorrows. The sunniest lives have their dark times. Sooner or later we all have to lay our account with hours when the heart bleeds and hope dies, and we shall not find strength to bear such times aright unless we bear them in union with

Jesus Christ, by which our darkest sorrows are turned into the tribulation that is in Him, and all the bitterness, or, at least, the poison of the bitterness, taken out of them, and they almost changed into a solemn joy. Egypt would be as barren as the desert which bounds it, were it not for the rising of the Nile; so when the cold waters of sorrow rise up and spread over our hearts, if we are

Christians, they will leave a precious deposit when they retire, on which will grow rich harvests. Some edible plants are not fit for use till they have had a touch of frost. Christian character wants the same treatment. It is needful for us that the road to the kingdom should often run through the valley of weeping. Our being in the kingdom depends upon the bending of our wills in submission to the King; then surely nothing should be more welcome to us, as nothing can be more needful, than anything which bends them, even if the fire which makes their obstinacy pliable, and softens the iron so that it runs in the appointed mould, should have to be very hot. The soil of the vineyards on the slopes of Vesuvius is disintegrated lava. The richest grapes, from which a precious wine is made, grow on the product of eruptions which tore the mountain-side and darkened all the sky. So our costliest graces of character are grown, in a heart enriched by losses and made fertile by convulsions which rent it and covered smiling verdure with what seemed at first a fiery flood of ruin. The kingdom is reached by the road of tribulation. Blessed are they for whom the universal sorrows which flesh is heir to become helps heavenwards because they are borne in union with Jesus, and so hallowed into 'tribulation that is in Him.'

III. We note the common temper in which the common road to the common royalty is to be trodden.

'Tribulation' refers to circumstances — 'patience' to disposition. We shall certainly meet with tribulation if we are Christians, and if we are, we shall front tribulation with patience. Both are equally, though in different ways, characteristics of all the true travellers to the kingdom. Patience is the link, so to speak, between the kingdom and the tribulation. Sorrow does not of itself lead to the possession of the kingdom. All depends on the disposition which the sorrow evokes, and the way in which it is borne. We may take our sorrows in such a fashion as to be driven by them out of our submission to Christ, and so they may lead us away from and not towards the kingdom. The worst affliction is an affliction wasted, and every

affliction is wasted, unless it is met with patience, and that in Christ Jesus. Many a man is soured, or paralysed, or driven from his faith, or drowned in self-absorbed and self-compassionating regret, or otherwise harmed by his sorrows, and the only way to get the real good of them is to keep closely united to our Lord, that in Him we may have patience as well as peace.

Most of us know that the word here translated 'patience' means a great deal more than the passive endurance which we usually mean by that word, and distinctly includes the notion of active perseverance. That active element is necessarily implied, for instance, in the exhortation, 'Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.' Here uncomplaining passive endurance is not the temper which leads to running any race. It simply bears and does nothing, but the persistent effort of the runner with tense muscles calls for more than patience. A vivid metaphor underlies the word

— that of the fixed attitude of one bearing up a heavy weight or pressure without yielding or being rushed. Such immovable constancy is more than passive. There must be much active exercise of power to prevent collapse. But all the strength is not to be exhausted in the effort to bear without flinching. There should be enough remaining for work that remains over and above the sorrow. The true Christian patience implies continuance in well-doing, besides meek acceptance of tribulation. The first element in it is, no doubt, uncomplaining acquiescence in whatsoever affliction from God or man beats against us on our path. But the second is, continual effort after Christian progress, notwithstanding the tribulation. The storm must not blow us out of our course. We must still 'bear up and steer right onward,' in spite of all its force on our faces, or, as 'birds of tempest-loving kind' do, so spread our pinions as to be helped by it towards our goal.

Do I address any one who has to stagger along the Christian course under some heavy and, perhaps, hopeless load of sorrow? There is a

plain lesson for all of us in such circumstances. It is not less my duty to seek to grow in grace and Christlikeness because I am sad. That is my first business at all times and under all changes of fortune and mood. My sorrows are meant to help me to that, and if they so absorb me that I am indifferent to the obligation of Christian progress, then my patience, however stoical and uncomplaining it may be, is not the ‘perseverance that is in Christ Jesus.’ Nor does tribulation absolve from plain duties. Poor Mary of Bethany sat still in the house, with her hands lying idly in her lap, and her regrets busy with the most unprofitable of all occupations — fancying how different all would have been if one thing had been different. Sorrow is excessive and misdirected and selfish, and therefore hurtful, when for the sake of indulgence in it we fling up plain tasks. The glory of the kingdom shining athwart the gloom of the tribulation should help us to be patient, and the patience, laying hold of the tribulation by the right handle, should convert it into a blessing and an instrument for helping us to a fuller possession of the kingdom.

This temper of brave and active persistence in the teeth of difficulties will only be found where these other two are found — in Christ. The stem from which the three-leaved plant grows must be rooted in Him. He is the King, and in Him abiding we have our share of the common royalty. He is the forerunner and pathfinder, and, abiding in Him, we tread the common path to the common kingdom, which is hallowed at every rough place by the print of His bleeding feet. He is the leader and perfecter of faith, and, abiding in Him, we receive some breath of the spirit which was in Him, who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame. Abiding in Him, we shall possess in our measure all which is in Him, and find ourselves partakers with an innumerable company ‘in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Christ Jesus,’ and may hope to hear at last, ‘Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations, and I appoint unto you a Kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me.’

Revelation 1:13--LIVING ONE WHO BECAME DEAD

‘I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death,’ — Revelation 1:13.

IF we had been in ‘the isle which is called Patmos’ when John saw the glorified Lord, and heard these majestic words from His mouth, we should probably have seen nothing but the sunlight glinting on the water, and heard only the wave breaking on the shore. The Apostle tells us that he ‘was in the Spirit’; that is, in a state in which sense is lulled to sleep, and the inner man made aware of supersensual realities. The communication was none the less real because it was not perceived by the outward eye or ear. It was not born in, though it was perceived by, the Apostle’s spirit. We must hold fast by the objective reality of the communication, which is not in the slightest degree affected by the assumption that sense had no part in it.

Further what John once saw always is; the vision was a transient revelation of a permanent reality. The snowy summits are there, Behind the cloud- wrack that hides them, as truly as they were when the sunshine gleamed on their peaks. The veil has fallen again, But all behind it is as it was. So this revelation, Both in regard of the magnificent symbolic image imprinted on the Apostle’s consciousness, and in regard of the words which he reports to us as impressed upon him by Christ Himself, is meant for us just as it was for him, or for those to whom it was originally transmitted. ‘He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.’ And as we meditate upon this proclamation by the kingly Christ Himself of His own style and titles, I we shall best gain its full sublimity and force if we simply take the words, clause by clause, as they stand in the text.

I. First, then, the royal Christ proclaims His absolute life.

Observe that, as the Revised Version will show those who use it, there is a much closer connection between the words of our text and those of the preceding verse than our Authorised Version gives. We must strike out that intrusive and wholly needless supplement, 'I am,' and read the sentence unbrokenly: 'I am the first, and the last and the living One.'

Now that close connection of clauses in itself suggests that this expression, 'the Living One,' means something more than the mere declaration that He was alive. That follows appropriately, as we shall see, in the last clause of the verse, which cannot be cleared from the charge of tautology, unless we attach a far deeper meaning than the mere declaration of life to this first solemn clause. What can stand worthily by the side of these majestic words, 'I am the first and the last'? These claim a Divine attribute and are a direct quotation from ancient prophecy, where they are spoken as by the great Jehovah of the old covenant, and appear in a connection which makes any tampering with them the more impossible. For there follow upon them the great words, 'and beside Me there is no God.' But this royal Christ from the heavens puts out an unpresumptuous hand, and draws to Himself, as properly belonging to Him, the very style and signature of the Divine nature, 'I am the first' — before all creatural being, 'and the last,' as He to whom it all tends — its goal and aim. And therefore I say that this connection of clauses, apart altogether from other consideration, absolutely forbids our taking this great word, 'the Living One,' as meaning less than the similar lofty and profound signification. It means, as I believe, exactly what Jesus Christ meant when, in the hearing of this same Apostle, He said upon earth, 'Am the Father hath life in Himself so hath He given' — strange paradox — 'so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself.' A life which, considered in contrast with all the life of creatures, is underived, independent, self-feeding, and, considered in contrast with the life of the Father with whom that Son stands in ineffable and unbroken *union*, is bestowed. It is a paradox, I *know*, but until we assume that we have sounded all the depths and

climbed all the height., and gone round the boundless boundaries of the circumference of that Divine nature, we have no business to say that it is impossible. And this, as I take it, is what the great words that echoed from Heaven in the Apostle's hearing upon Patmos meant — the claim by the glorified Christ to possess absolute fontal life, and to be the Source of all creation, 'in whom was life.' He was not only 'the Living One,' but, as Himself has said, He was 'the Life.' And so He was the agent of all creation, as Scripture teaches us.

Now I am not going to dwell upon this great thought, but I .imply wish, in one sentence, to leave with you my own earnest conviction that it is the teaching of all Scripture, that it is distinctly the teaching of Christ Himself when on earth; that it is repeated in a real revelation from Himself to the recipient seer in this vision before us, that it is fundamental to all true understanding of Christ's person and work, since none of His acts on earth shine in their full lustre of beauty unless the thought of His pre-incarnate and essential life is held fast to heighten all the marvels of His condescension, and to invest with power all the sweetness of His pity. 'I am the first, and the last, and the Living One.'

II. Secondly, the royal Christ proclaims His submission to death.

The language of the original is, perhaps, scarcely capable of smooth transference into English, but it is to be held fast notwithstanding, for what is said is not 'I *was* dead,' as describing a past condition, but 'I *became* dead,' as describing a past act. There is all the difference between these two, and avoidance of awkwardness is dearly purchased by obliteration of the solemn teaching of that profound word 'became.'

I need not dwell upon this at any length, but I suggest to you one or two plain considerations. Such a statement implies our Lord's assumption of flesh. The only possibility of death, for 'the Living One,' lies in His enwrapping Himself with that which can die. As

you might put a piece of asbestos into a twist of cotton wool, over which the flame could have power, or as a sun might plunge into thick envelopes of darkness, so this eternal, absolute Life gathered to itself by voluntary accretion the surrounding which was capable of mortality. It is very significant that the same word which the seer in Patmos employs to describe the Lord's submission to death is the word which, in his character of evangelist, he employs to describe the same Lord's incarnation: 'The Word became flesh,' and so the Life 'became dead.' And this expression implies, too, another thing, on which I need not dwell, because I was touching on it in a previous sermon, and that is the entirely voluntary character of our Lord's submission to the great law of mortality. He 'became' dead, and it was His act that He became so.

Thus we are brought into the presence of the most stupendous fact in the world's history. Brethren, as I said that the firm grasp of the other truth of Christ's absolute life was fundamental to all understanding of His earthly career, so I say that this fundamental truth of His voluntarily becoming dead is fundamental to all understanding of His Cross. Without that thought His death becomes mere surplusage, in so far as His power over men is concerned. With it, what adoration can be too lowly, what gratitude can be disproportionate? He arrays Himself in that which can die, as if the sun plunged into the shadow of eclipse. Let us bow before that mystery of Divine love, the death of the Lord of Life. The motive which impelled Him, the consequences which followed, are not in view here. These are full of blessedness and of wonder, but we are now to concentrate our thoughts on the bare fact, and to find in it food for endless adoration and for perpetual praise.

But there is another consideration that I may suggest. The eternal Life became dead. Then the awful solitude — awful when we think of it for ourselves, awful when we stand by the bed, and feel so near, and yet so infinitely remote from the dear one that may be lying there — the awful solitude is solitary no longer. 'All alone, so

Heaven has willed, we die'; but as travellers are cheered on a solitary road when they see the footprints that they know belonged to loved and trusted ones who have trodden it before, that desolate loneliness is less lonely when we think that He became dead. He will come to the shrinking, single soul as He joined Himself to the sad travellers on the road to Emmaus, and 'our hearts' may burn within us, even in that last hour of their beating, if we can remember who has become dead and trodden the road before us.

III. The royal Christ proclaims His eternal life in glory. 'Behold!' — as if calling attention to a wonder — 'I am alive for evermore.' Again, I say, we have here a distinctly Divine prerogative claimed by the exalted Christ, as properly belonging to Himself. For that eternal life of which He speaks is by no means the communicated immortality which He imparts to them that in His love go down to death, but it is the inherent eternal life of the Divine nature.

But, mark, who is the 'I' that speaks? The seer has told us: 'One like unto the Son of Man' — which title, whether it repeats the name which our Lord habitually used, or whether, as some persons suppose, it should be read 'a Son of Man,' and merely declares that the vision of the glorified One was manlike, is equally relevant for my present purpose. For that is to ask you to mark that the 'I' of my text is the Divine-human Jesus. The manhood is so intertwined with the Deity that the absolute life of the latter has, as it were, flowed over and glorified the former; and it is a Man who lays His hand upon the Divine prerogative, and says, 'I live for evermore.'

Now why do I dwell upon thoughts like this? Not for the purpose merely of putting accurately what I believe to be the truth, but for the sake of opening out to you and to myself the infinite treasures of consolation and strength which lie in that thought that He who 'is alive for evermore' is not merely Divine in HIS absolute life, but, as Son of Man, lives for ever. And so, 'because I live, ye shall live also.' We cannot die as long as Christ is alive. And if we knit our

hearts to Him, the Divine glory which flows over His Manhood will trickle down to ours, and we, too, though by derivation, shall possess as immortal — and, in its measure, as glorious — a life as that of the Brother who reigns in Heaven, the Man Christ Jesus.

His resurrection is not only the demonstration of what manhood is capable of, and so, as I believe, the one irrefragable and all-satisfying proof of immortality, but it is also the actual source of that immortal life to all of us, if we will trust ourselves to Him For it is only because ‘He both died and rose and revived’ that He, in the truest and properest sense, becomes the gift of life to us men. The alabaster box was broken, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Christ’s death is the world’s life.

Christ’s resurrection is the pledge and the source of eternal life for us.

IV. And so, lastly, the royal Christ proclaims His authority over the dim regions of the dead.

Much to be regretted are two things in our Authorised Version’s rendering of the final words of our text. One is the order in which, following an inferior reading, it has placed the two things specified. And the other is that deplorable mistranslation, as it has come to be, of the word *hades* by the word ‘hell.’ The true original does not read ‘hell and death,’ but ‘death and *hades*,’ the dim unseen regions in which *all* the dead, whatsoever their condition may be, are gathered. The *hades* of the New Testament includes the paradise into which the penitent thief was promised entrance, as well as the *gehenna* which threatened to open for the impenitent.

Here it is figured as being a great gloomy fortress, with barb and gates and locks, of which that ‘shadow feared of man’ is the warder, and keeps the portals. But he does not keep the keys. The kingly Christ has these in His own hand. So, brethren, He has authority to open and to shut; and death is not merely a terror nor is it altogether

accounted for, when we say either that it is the fruit of sin, or that it is the result of physical laws. For behind the laws is the will — the will of the loving Christ. It is His hand that opens the dark door, and they who listen aright may hear Him say, when He does it, ‘Come! My people; enter thou into thy chamber until these calamities be overpast.’ ‘He openeth, and no man shutteth; He shutteth, and no man openeth.’ So is not the terror gone; and ‘the raven plumes of that darkness smoothed until it smiles’?

If we believe that He has the keys, how shall we dread when ourselves or our dear ones have to enter into the portal? There are two gates to the prison-house, and when the one that looks earthwards opens, the other, that gives on the heavens, opens too, and the prison becomes a thoroughfare, and the light shines through the short tunnel even to the hither side.

Because He has the keys, He will not leave His holy ones in the fetters. And for ourselves, and for our dearest, we have the right to think that the darkness is so short as to be but like an imperceptible wink of the eye; and ere we know that we have passed into it, we shall have passed out.

‘This is the gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter.’ And it may be with us as it was with the Apostle who was awakened out of his sleep by the angel — only we shall be awakened out of ours by the angel’s Master — and who did not come to himself, and know that he had been delivered, until he had passed through the iron gate ‘that opened to him of its own accord’; and then, bewildered, he recovered himself when he found that, with the morning breaking over his head, he stood, delivered, in the city.

Revelation 2:1--THE SEVEN STARS AND THE SEVEN CANDLESTICKS

‘... He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.’ — Revelation 2:1.

IT is one of the obligations which we owe to hostile criticism that we have been forced to recognise with great dearness the wide difference between the representation of Christ in John's Gospel and that in the Apocalypse. That there is such a contrast is unquestionable. The Prince of all the kings of the earth, going forth conquering and to conquer, strikes one at once as being unlike the Christ whom the Evangelist painted weeping at the grave of Lazarus. We can afford to recognise the fact, though we demur to the inference that both representations cannot have proceeded from one pen. Surely that is not a necessary conclusion unless the two pictures are contradictory. Does the variety amount to discordance? Unless, it do, the variety casts no shadow of suspicion on the common authorship. I, for my part, see no inconsistency in them, and thankfully accept both as completing each other.

This grand vision, which forms the introduction to the whole Book of the Apocalypse, gives us indeed the Lord Jesus clothed with majesty and wielding supreme power, but it also shows us the old love and tenderness. It was the old voice which fell on John's ear, in words heard from Him before, 'Fear not.' It was the same hand as he had often clasped that was lovingly laid upon him to strengthen him. The assurance which He gives His Apostle declares at once the change in the circumstances of His Being, and in the functions which He discharges, and the substantial identity of His Being through all the changes: 'I am the first, and the last... I am the Living One, who was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore.' This vision and the whole book calls to us, 'Behold the Lion of the Tribe of Judah'; and when we look, 'Lo, in the midst of the throne, stands a Lamb as it had been slain' — the well-known meek and patient Jesus, the suffering Redeemer — 'the Lamb Of God which taketh away the sins of the world.'

Still further, this vision is the natural introduction to all that follows, and indeed defines the main purpose of the whole book, inasmuch as it shows us Christ sustaining, directing, dwelling, in His Churches.

We are thus led to expect that the remainder of the prophecy shall have the Church of Christ for its chief subject, and that the politics of the world, and the mutations of nations, shall come into view mainly in their bearing upon that.

The words of our text, then, which resumes the principal emblem of the preceding vision, are meant to set forth permanent truths in regard to Christ's Churches, His relation to them, and theirs to the world, which I desire to bring to your thoughts now. They speak to us of the Churches and their servants, of the Churches and their work, of the Churches and their Lord.

I. We have in the symbol important truths concerning the Churches and their servants.

The seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches. Now I need not spend time in enumerating all the strange and mystical interpretations which have been given to these angels of the Churches. I see no need for taking them to have been anything but men; the recognised heads and representatives of the respective communities. The word 'angel' means messenger. Those superhuman beings who are usually designated by it are so called, not to describe their nature, but their function. They are 'God's messengers,' and their name means only that. Then the word is certainly used, both in its Hebrew and Greek forms, in reference to men. It is applied to priests, and even in one passage, as it would appear, to an officer of the synagogue. If here we find that each Church had its angel, who had a letter addressed to him, who is spoken to in words of rebuke and exhortation, who could sin and repent, who could be persecuted and die, who could fall into heresies and be perfected by suffering, it seems to me a violent and unnecessary hypothesis that a superhuman being is in question. And the name by which he is called need not imply more than his function, — that of being the messenger and representative of the Church.

Believing this as the more probable meaning of the phrase, I see in the relations between these men and the little communities to which they belonged an example of what should be found existing between all congregations of faithful men and the officers whom they have chosen, be the form of their polity what it may. There are certain broad principles which must underlie all Christian organisations, and are incomparably more important than the details of Church government.

Note then, first, that the messengers are rulers. They are described in a double manner — by a name which expresses subordination, and by a figure which expresses authority. I need not do more than remind you that throughout Scripture, from the time when Balaam beheld from afar the star that should come out of Jacob and the sceptre that should rise out of Israel, that has been the symbol for rulers. It is so notably in this Book of Revelation. Whatever other ideas, then, are connected with its use here, this leading one of authority must not be lost sight of.

But this double representation of these persons as being in one aspect servants and in another rulers, perfectly embodies the very essential characteristic of all office and power in Christ's Church. It is a repetition in pictorial form of the great principle, so sadly forgotten, which He gave when He said, 'He that is greatest among you, let him be your servant.' The higher are exalted that they may serve the lower. Dignity and authority mean liberty for more and more self-forgetting work. Power binds its possessor to toil. Wisdom is stored in one, that from him it may flow to the foolish; strength is given that by its holder feeble hands may be stayed.

Noblesse oblige. The King Himself has obeyed the law. 'Jesus, knowing the Father had given all things into His hands, took a towel, and girded Himself.' We are redeemed because He came to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many. He is among us 'as He that serveth.' God Himself has obeyed the law. He is above all

that He may bless all. He, the highest, stoops the most deeply. His dominion is built on love, and stands in giving. And that law which makes the throne of God the refuge of all the weak, and the treasury of all the poor, is given for our guidance in our humble measure. Wheresoever Christian men think more of themselves and of their dignity than of their brethren and their work; wheresoever gifts are hoarded selfishly or selfishly squandered; wheresoever the accidents of authority, its baubles and signature, its worldly consequences, and its pride of place, bulk larger in its possessors' eyes than its solemn obligations; — there the law is broken, and the heathen devilish notion of rule lays waste the Church of God.

The true idea is not certain to be held, nor its tempting counterfeit to be avoided, by any specific form of organisation. Wherever there are offices, there will be danger of officialism. Where there are none, that will not drive out selfishness. Quakerism and Episcopacy, with every form of Church government that lies between, are in danger from the same source — our forgetfulness that in Christ's kingdom to rule is to serve. All Churches have shown that their messengers could become 'lords over God's heritage.' The true spirit of Christ's servants is not secured by any theory about the appointment or the duties of the servants, but only by fellowship and sympathy with the Master who helps us all, and cares nothing for any glory which He cannot share with His disciples.

But to be servant of all does not mean to do the bidding of all. The service which imitates Christ is helpfulness, not subjection. Neither the Church is to lord it over the messenger, nor the messenger over the Church. The true bond is broken by official claims of dominion; it is broken just as much by popular claims to control. All alike are to stand free from all men — in independence of will, thought, and action; shaping their lives and moulding their beliefs, according to Christ's will and Christ's word; and repelling all coercion, from whatsoever quarter it comes. All alike are by love to Serve one another; counting every possession, material, intellectual, and

spiritual as given for the general good. The one guiding principle is, 'He that is chiefest among you, let him be your servant,' and the other, which guards this from misconstruction and abuse from either side, 'One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.'

Another point to be observed in this symbol is, that the messengers and the churches have at bottom the same work to do.

Stars shine, so do lamps. Light comes from both, in different fashion indeed, and of a different quality, but still both are lights. These are in the Saviour's hands, those are by His side; but each is meant to stream out rays of brightness over a dark night, so, essentially, all Christian men have the same work to do. The ways of doing it differ, but the thing done is one.

Whatever be the difference between those who hold offices in God's Church and the bulk of their brethren, there is no difference here. The loftiest gifts, the most conspicuous position, the closest approach to the central sun, have no other purpose than that which the lowliest powers, in the obscurest corner, are meant to subserve. The one distributing Spirit divides to each man severally as He will; and whether He endows him with starlike gifts, which soar above and blaze over half the world with lustre that lives through the centuries, or whether He sets him in some cottage window to Send out a tiny cone of light, that pierces a little way into the night for an hour or two, and then is quenched' — it is all one. The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man for the same purpose — to do good with. And we have all one office and function to be discharged by each in his own fashion — namely, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.

Again, observe, the Churches and their messengers are alike in their religious condition and character. The successive letters treat his strength or weakness, his fervour or coldness, his sin or victory over evil, as being theirs. He represents them completely. And that representative character seems to me to be the only reason worth

considering for supposing that these angels are superhuman Beings, inasmuch as it seems that the identification is almost too entire to be applicable to the relation of any man to the community. But, perhaps, if we think of the facts which every day's experience shows us, we may see even in this solemn paralleling of the spiritual state of the Churches and of their servants, a strong reason for holding to our interpretation, as well as a very serious piece of warning and exhortation for us all.

For is it not true that the religious condition of a Church, and that of its leaders, teachers, pastors, ever tend to the same, as that of the level of water in two connected vessels? There is such a constant interaction and reciprocal influence that uniformity results. Either a living teacher will, by God's grace, quicken a languid Church, or a languid Church will, with the devil's help, stifle the life of the teacher. Take two balls of iron, one red hot, and one cold, and put them down beside each other. How many degrees of difference between them, after half an hour, will your thermometer show? Thank God for the many instances in which one glowing soul, all aflame with love of God, has sufficed to kindle a whole heap of dead matter, and mend it leaping skyward in ruddy brightness!

Alas! for the many instances in which the wet, green wood has been too strong for the little spark, and has not only obstinately resisted, but has ignominiously quenched its ineffectual fire! Thank God, that when His Church lives on a high level of devotion, it has never wanted for single souls who have towered even above that height, and have been elevated by it, as the snowy Alps spring not from the flats of Holland, but from the high central plateau of Europe. Alas! for the leaders who have rayed out formalism, and have chilled down the Church to their own coldness, and stiffened to their own deadness!

Let us, then, not bandy reproaches from pulpit to pew, and from pew to pulpit; but remembering that the spiritual character of each helps

to determine the condition of the whole, and the general condition of the body determines the vigour of each part, let us go together to God with acknowledgments of common faithlessness, and of our individual share in it, and let us ask Him to quicken His Church, that it may yield messengers who in their turn shall be the helpers of His people and the glory of God.

II. The text brings before us the Churches and their work.

Of course, you understand that what the Apostle saw was not seven candlesticks, which are a modern piece of furniture, but seven lamps. There is a distinct reference in this, as in all the symbols of the Apocalypse, to the Old Testament. We know that in the Jewish Temple there stood, as an emblem of Israel's work in the world, the great seven-branched candlestick, burning for ever before the veil and beyond the altar. The difference between the two symbols is as obvious as their resemblance. The ancient lamp had all the seven bowls springing from a single stem.

It a formal unity. The New Testament seer saw not one lamp with seven arms rising from one pillar, but seven distinct lamps — the emblems of a unity which was not formal, but reel They were one in their perfect manifoldness, because of Him who walked in the midst. In which difference lies a representation of one great element in the superiority of the Church over Israel, that for the hard material oneness of the separated nation there has come the true spiritual oneness of the Churches of the saints; one not because of any external connection, but by reason that Christ is in them.

The seven-branched lamp lies at the bottom of the Tiber. There let it lie. We have a better thing,, in these manifold lights, which stand before the Throne of the New Temple, and blend into one, because lighted from one Source, fed by one Spirit, tended and watched by one Lord.

But looking a little more closely at this symbol, it suggests to us some needful thoughts as to the position and work of the Church, which is set forth as being light, derived light, clustered light.

The Church is to be light. That familiar image, which applies, as we have seen, to stars and lamps alike; lends itself naturally to point many an important lesson as to what we have to do, and how we ought to do it. Think, for instance, how spontaneously light streams forth. 'Light is light, which circulates.' The substance which is lit cannot but shine; and if we have any real possession of the truth, we cannot but impart it; and if we have any real illumination from the Lord, who is the light, we cannot but give it forth. There is much good done in the world by direct, conscious effort. There is perhaps more done by spontaneous, unconscious shining, by the involuntary influence of character, than by the lip or the pen. We need not balance the one form of usefulness against the other. We need both. But, Christian men and women, do you ten, ember that from you a holy impression revealing Jesus ought to flow as constantly? as spontaneously, as light from the sun! Our lives should be like the costly box of fragrant ointment which that penitent, loving woman lavished on her Lord, the sweet, penetrating, subtle odour of which stole through all the air till the house was filled. So His name, the revelation of His love, the resemblance to His character, should breathe forth from our whole being; and whether we think of it or no, we should be unto God a sweet savour of Christ.

Then think again how *silent* and gentle, though so mighty, is the action of the light. Morning by morning God's great mercy of sunrise steals upon a darkened world in still, slow, self-impartation; and the light which has a force that has carried it across gulfs of space that the imagination staggers in trying to conceive, yet falls so gently that it does not move the petals of the sleeping flowers, nor hurt the lids of an infant's eyes, nor displace a grain of dust. Its work is mighty, and clone without 'speech or language.' Its force is gigantic, but, like its Author, its gentleness makes its dependents

great. So should we live and work, clothing all our power in tenderness, doing our work in quietness, disturbing nothing but the darkness, and with silent increase of beneficent power filling and flooding the dark earth with healing beams.

Then think again that heaven's light is itself *invisible*, and, revealing all things, reveals not itself. The source you can see, but not the beams. So we are to shine, not showing ourselves but our Master — not coveting fame or conspicuousness—glad if, like one to whom He bore testimony that he was a light, it be said of us to all that ask who we are, 'He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light,' and rejoicing without stint or reservation that for us, as for John the Baptist, the necessity is, that we must decrease and Christ must increase.

We may gather from this emblem in the text the further lesson that the Church's light is derived light. Two things are needed for the burning of a lamp: that it should be lit, and that it should be fed. In both respects the light with which we shine is derived. We are not suns, we are moons; reflected, not self-originated, is all our radiance. That is true in all senses of the figure: it is truest in the highest. It is true about all in every man which is of the nature of light. Christ is the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Whatsoever beam of wisdom, whatsoever ray of purity, whatsoever sunshine of gladness has ever been in any human spirit, from Him it came, who is the Light and Life of men: from Him it came, who brings to us in form fitted for our eyes, that otherwise inaccessible light of God in which alone we see light. And as for the more special work of the Church (which chiefly concerns us now), the testimony of Christ to John, which I have just quoted in another connection, gives us the principle which is true about all 'He was not that light,' the Evangelist said of John, denying that in him was original and native radiance. 'He was a lamp burning' — where the idea is possibly rather 'lighted' or made to burn — and therefore shining, and in whose light men could rejoice for a little while. A

derived and transient light is all that any man can be. In ourselves we are darkness, and only as we hold fellowship with Him do we become capable of giving forth any rays of light. The condition of all our brightness is that Christ shall give us light. He is the source, we are but reservoirs. He the fountain, we only cisterns. He must walk amidst the candlesticks, or they will never shine. He must hold the stars in His hand, or they will drop from their places and dwindle into darkness. Therefore our power for service lies in reception; and if we are to live for Christ, we must live in Christ.

But there is still another requisite for the shining of the light. The prophet Zechariah once saw in vision the great Temple lamp, and by its side two olive trees from which golden oil flowed through golden pipes to the central light. And when he expressed his ignorance of the meaning of the vision, this was the interpretation by the angel who talked with him: 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts' The lamp that burns must be kept fed with oil Throughout the Old Testament the soft, gracious influences of God's Spirit are symbolised by oil, with which therefore prophets, priests, and kings were designated to their office. Hence the Messiah in prophecy says, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me.' Thus the lamp too must be fed, the soul which is to give forth the light of Christ must first of all have been kindled by Him, and then must constantly be supplied with the grace and gift of His Divine Spirit. Solemn lessons, my friends, gather round that thought. What became of those who had lamps without oil? Their lamps had gone out, and their end was darkness. Oh! let us beware lest by any sloth and sin we choke the golden pipes, through which there steals into our tiny lamps the soft flow of that Divine ell which alone can keep up the flame. The wick, untrimmed and unfed, may burn for a little while, but it soon chars, and smokes, and goes out at last in foul savour offensive to God axial man.

Take care lest you resist the Holy Spirit of God. Let your loins be girt and your lamps burning; and that they may be, give heed that the light caught from Jesus be fed by the pure oil which alone can save it from extinction.

Again, the text sets before us the Church's light as blended or clustered light.

Each of these little communities is represented by one lamp. And that One light is composed of the united brightness of all the individuals who constitute the community. They are to have a character, an influence, a work as a society, not merely as individuals. There is to be Co-operation in service, there is to be mingling of powers, there is to be subordination of individuals to the whole, and each separate man and his work is to be gladly merged in the radiance that issues from the community. A Church is not to be merely a multitude of separate points of brilliancy, but the separate points are to coalesce into one great orb'd brightness. You know these lights which we have seen in public places, where you have a ring pierced with a hundred tiny holes, from each of which bursts a separate flame; but when all are lit, they run into one brilliant circle, and lose their separateness in the rounded completeness of the blended blaze. That is like what Christ's Church ought to be. We each by our own personal contact with Him, by our individual communion with our Saviour, become light in the Lord, and yet we joyfully blend with our brethren, and, fused into one, give forth our mingled light. We unite our voices to theirs, knowing that all are needed to send out the Church's choral witness and to hymn the Church's full-toned praise. The lips of the multitude thunder out harmony, before which the melody Of the richest and sweetest single voice is thin and poor.

Union of heart, union of effort is commended to us by this symbol of our text. The great law is, work together if you would work with strength. To separate ourselves from our brethren is to lose power.

Why, half-dead brands heaped close will kindle one another, and flame will sparkle beneath the film of white ashes on their edges. Fling them apart and they go out- Rake them together and they glow. Let us try not be little feeble tapers, stuck in separate sockets, and each twinkling struggling rays over some inch or so of space; but draw near to our brethren, and be workers together with them, that there may rise a glorious flame from our summed and collective brightness which shall be a guide and hospitable call to many wandering and weary spirit.

III. Finally, the text shows us the Churches and their Lord.

He it is who holds the stars in His right hand, and walks among the candlesticks. That strong grasp of that mighty hand — for the word in the original conveys more than ‘holds,’ it implies a tight and powerful grip, — sustains and guards His servants, whose tasks need special grace, and whose position exposes them to special dangers. They may be of good cheer, for none shall pluck them out of His hand. That strengthening and watchful presence moves among His Churches, and is active on their behalf. The symbols are but the pictorial equivalent of His own parting promise, ‘Lo, I am with you always!’

That presence is a plain liberal fact, however feebly we lay hold of it. It is not to be watered down into a strong expression for the abiding influence of Christ’s teaching or example, nor even to mean the constant Benefits which flow to us from His work, nor the presence of His loving thoughts with us. All these things are true and blessed, but none of them, nor all of them taken together, reach to the height of this great promise. He is absent in body, He is present in person. Talk of a ‘real presence’! This is the real presence: ‘I will not leave you orphans, I will come unto you.’ Through all the ages, in every land wheresoever two or three are gathered in His name, there is He in the midst of them. The presence of Christ with His Church is analogous to the Divine presence in the

material universe. As in it, the presence of God is the condition of all life; and if He were not here, there were no beings and no 'here': so in the Church, Christ's presence constitutes and sustains it, and without Him it would cease. So St.

Augustine says, 'Where Christ, there the Church.'

I know what wild absurdities these statements appear to many men who have no faith in the true Divinity of our Lord. Of course the belief of His perpetual presence with His people implies the belief that He possesses Divine attributes. This mysterious Person, who lived among men the exemplar of all humility, departing, leaves a promise which is either the very act of insane arrogance, or comes from the consciousness of indwelling Divinity. He declares that, from generation to generation, He will in very deed be with all who in every place call upon His name. Who does He thereby claim to be?

For what purpose is He there with HIS Churches?

The text assures us that it is to hold up and to bless. His unwearied hand sustains, His unceasing activity moves among them. But beyond these purposes, or rather included in them, the vision of which the text is the interpretation brings into great prominence the thought that He is with us to observe, to judge, and, if need be, to punish. Mark how almost all the attributes of that majestic figure suggest such thoughts. The eyes like a flame of fire, the feet glowing as if in a furnace, hot to burn, heavy to tread down all evil where He walks, from the lips a two-edged sword to smite, and, thank God, to heal, the countenance as the sun shineth in his strength — this is the Lord of the Churches. Yes, and this is the same loving and forbearing Lord whom the Apostle had learned to trust on earth, and found again revealed from heaven.

Brethren! He dwells with us; He guards and protects His churches to the end, else they perish. He rules all the commotions of earth, all

the errors of His people, all the delusions of lies, and overrules them all for the strengthening and purifying of His Church. But He dwells with us likewise as the watchful observer, out of these eyes of flame, of all our faults; as the merciful destroyer, with the sword of His mouth, of every error and every sin. Thank God for the chastising presence of Christ. He loves us too well not to smite us when we need it. He will not be so cruelly kind, so foolishly fond, as in anywise to suffer sin upon us. Better the eye of fire than the averted face. Better the sharp sword than His holding His peace as He did with Caiaphas and Herod. Better the Judge in our midst, though we should have to fall at His feet as dead, than that He should *say*, 'I will go and return to My place.' Pray Him not to depart, and submit to the merciful rebukes and effectual chastisement which prove that, for all our unworthiness, He loves us still, and has not cast us away from His presence.

Nor let us forget how much of hope and encouragement lies in the examples, which these seven Churches afford, of His long-suffering patience. That presence was granted to them all, the best and the worst — the decaying love of Ephesus, the licentious heresies of Pergamos and Thyatira, the all but total deadness of Sardis, and the self-satisfied indifference of Laodicea, concerning which even He could say nothing that was good. All had Him with them as really as the faithful Smyrna and the steadfast Philadelphia. We have no right to say with how much of theoretical error and practical sin the lingering presence of that patient pitying Lord may consist. For others our duty is the widest charity — for ourselves the most careful watchfulness.

For these seven Churches teach us another lesson — the possibility of quenched lamps and ruined shrines. Ephesus and her sister communities, planted by Paul, taught by John, loved and upheld by the Lord, warned and scourged by Him — where are they now? Broken columns and roofless walls remain; and where Christ's name was praised, now the minaret rises by the side of the mosque, and

daily echoes the Christless proclamation, ‘There is no God but God, and Mahomet is His prophet.’ ‘The grace of God,’ says Luther somewhere, ‘is like a flying summer shower.’ It has fallen upon more than one land, and passed on. Judaea had it, and lies barren and dry. These Asiatic coasts had it and flung it away. Let us receive it, and hold it fast, lest our greater light should bring greater condemnation, and here, too, the candlestick should be removed out of its place.

Remember that solemn, strange legend which tells us that, on the night before Jerusalem fell, the guard of the Temple heard through the darkness a voice mighty and sad, saying, ‘Let us depart,’ and were aware as of the sound of many wings passing from out of the Holy Place; and on the morrow the iron heels of the Roman legionaries trod the marble pavement of the innermost shrine, and heathen eyes gazed upon the empty place where the glory of the God of Israel should have dwelt, and a torch, flung by an unknown hand, burned with fire the holy and beautiful house where He had promised to put His name for ever. And let us learn the lesson, and hold fast by that Lord whose blood has purchased, and whose presence preserves through all the unworthiness and the lapses of men, that Church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail

Revelation 2:7-- I. THE VICTOR’S LIFE-FOOD

‘...To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. — Revelation 2:7.

THE sevenfold promises which conclude the seven letters to the Asiatic Churches, of which this is the first, are in substance one. We may, indeed, say that the inmost meaning of them all is the gift of Christ Himself. But the diamond flashes variously coloured lights according to the angle at which it is held, and breaks into red and green and white. The one great thought may be looked at from different points of view, and sparkle into diversely splendid rays. The reality is single and simple, But so great that our best way of

approximating to the apprehension of that. which we shall never comprehend till we possess it is to blend various conceptions and metaphors drawn from different sources,

I have a strong conviction that the Christianity of this day suffers, intellectually and practically, from its comparative neglect of the teaching of the New Testament as to the future life. We hear and think a great deal less about it than was once the case, and we are thereby deprived of a strong motive for action, and a sure comfort in sorrow. Some of us may, perhaps, be disposed to look with a little sense of lofty pity at the simple people who let the hope of heaven spur, or restrain, or console. But- if there is a future life at all, and if the characteristic of it which most concerns us is that it is the reaping, in consequences, of the acts of the present, surely it cannot be such superior wisdom, as it sometimes pretends to be, to ignore it altogether; and perhaps the simplicity of the said people is more in accordance with the highest reason than is our attitude.

Be that as it may, believing, as I do, that the hope of immortality is meant to fill a very large place in the Christian life, and fearing, as I do, that it actually does fill but a very small one with many of us, I have thought that it might do us all good to turn to this wealth of linked, promises and to consider them in succession, so as to bring our hearts for a little while into contact with the motive for brave fighting which does occupy large a space in the New Testament, however it may fail to do so in our lives.

I. I ask you to look first at the Gift.

Now, of *course*, I need scarcely remind you that this fires promise, in the last book of- Scripture, goes back to the Beginning, to the old story in Genesis about Paradise and the Tree of Life. We may distinguish between the substance of the promise and the highly metaphorical form into which it is here cast. The substance Of the promise is the communication of life; the form is a poetic and

imaginative and pregnant allusion to the story on the earliest pages of Revelation.

Let me deal first with the substance. Now it seems to me that if we are to pare down this word 'life' to its merely physical sense of continuous existence, this is not a promise that a man's heart leaps up at the hearing of. To anybody that will honestly think, and try to realise, in the imperfect fashion in which alone it is possible for us to realise it, that notion of an absolutely interminable continuance of being, its awfulness is far more than its blessedness, and it overwhelms a man. It seems to me that the 'crown of life,' if life only means conscious existence, would be a crown of thorns indeed.

No, brethren, what our hearts crave, and what Christ's heart *gives*, is not the mere, bare, bald, continuance of conscious being. It is something far deeper than that. That is the substratum, of course; but it is only the substratum, and not until we let in upon this word, which is one of the key- words of Scripture, the full flood of light that comes to it from John's Gospel, and its use on the Master's lips there, do we begin to understand the meaning of this great promise. Just as we say of men who are sunk in gross animalism, or whose lives are devoted to trivial and transient aims, that theirs is not worth calling life, so we say that the only thing that deserves, and that in Scripture gets, the august name of '*life*,' is a condition of existence in conscious union with, and possession of, God, who is manifested and communicated to mortals through Jesus Christ His Son. 'In Him was life, and the life was manifested.' Was that bare existence? And the life was not only manifested but communicated, and the essence of it is fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. The possession of 'the Spirit of Hie which was in Christ,' and which in heaven will be perfectly communicated, will make men 'free,' as they never can be upon earth whilst implicated in the bodily life of this material world, 'from the law of sin and death.' The gift that Christ bestows on him that 'overcometh' is not only conscious existence, but existence

derived from, and, so to speak, embraided with the life of God Himself, and therefore blessed.

For such a life, in union with God in Christ, is the only condition in which all a man's capacities find their fitting objects, and all his activity finds its appropriate sphere, and in which, therefore, to live is to be blessed, because the heart is united with the source and fountain of all blessedness. Here is the deepest depth of that promise of future blessedness. It is not mainly because of any changes, glorious as these must necessarily be, which follow upon the dropping away of flesh, and the transportation into the light that is above, that heaven is a place of blessedness, but it is because the saints that are there are joined to God, and into their recipient hearts there pours for ever the fulness of the Divine life. That makes the glory and the blessedness.

But let us remember that all which can come hereafter of that full and perfect life is but the continuance, the development, the increase, of that which already is possessed. Here it fulls in drops; there in floods. Here it is filtered; there poured. Here, the plant, taken from its native climate and soil, puts forth some pale blossoms, and grows but to a stunted height; there, set in their deep native soil, and shone upon by a more fervent sun, and watered by more abundant warm rains and dews, 'they that' on earth 'were planted in the house of the Lord shall,' transplanted, 'flourish in the courts of our God.' The life of the Christian soul on earth and of the Christian soul in heaven is continuous, and though there is a break to our consciousness looking from this side — the break of death the reality is that without interruption, and without a turn, the road runs on in the same direction. We begin to live the life of heaven here, and they who can say, 'I was dead in trespasses and sins, but the life which I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God,' have already the germs of the furthest development in the heavens in their hearts.

Notice, for a moment, the form that this great promise assumes here. That is a very pregnant and significant reference to the Tree of Life in the paradise of God. The old story tells how the cherub with the flaming sword was set to guard the way to it, And that paradise upon earth faded and disappeared. But it reappears. 'Then comes a statelier Eden back to man,' for Jesus Christ is the restorer of all lost blessings; and the Divine purpose and ideal has not faded away amidst the clouds of the stormy day of earth's history, like the flush of morning from off the plains. Christ brings back the Eden, and quenches the flame of the fiery sword; and instead of the repellent cherub, there stands Himself with the merciful invitation upon His lips: 'Come! Eat; and live for ever.'

'There never, was .one lost good; what was shall live as before. On the earth the broken arcs; in heaven the perfect round.' Eden shall come back; and the parade into which the victors go is richer and fuller, by all their conflict and their wounds, than ever could have been the simpler, paradise of which souls innocent, because untried, could have been capable. So much for the gift of life.

II. Notice, secondly, the Giver.

This is a majestic utterance; worthy of coming from the majestic Figure portrayed in the first chapter of this book. In it Jesus Christ claims to be the Arbiter of men's deserts and Giver of their rewards. That involves His judicial function, and therefore His Divine as well as human nature. I accept these words as truly His words. Of course, if you do not, my present remarks have no force for you; but if you do not, you ought to be very sure of your reasons for not doing so; and if you do, then I see not how any man who believes that Jesus Christ has said that He will give to all the multitude of faithful fighters, who have brought their shields out of the battle, and their swords undinted, the gift of life eternal, can be vindicated from the charge of taking too much upon him, except on the belief of His Divine nature.

But I observe, still further, that this great utterance of the Lord's, paralleled in all the other six promises, in all of which He is represented as the bestower of the reward, whatever it may be, involves another thing, viz., the eternal continuance of Christ's relation to men as the Revealer and Mediator of God. 'I will give' — and that not only when the victor crosses the threshold and enters the Capitol of the heavens, but all through its ceaseless ages Christ is the Medium by which the Divine life passes into men. True, there is a sense in which He shall deliver up the kingdom to His Father, when the partial end of the present dispensation has come. But He is the Priest of mankind for ever; and for ever is His kingdom enduring.

And through all the endless ages, which we have a right to hope we shall see, there will never come a point in which it will not remain as true as it is at this moment: 'No man hath seen God at any time, nor can see Him; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.' Christ is for ever the Giver of life in the heavens as on earth.

Another thing is involved which I think also is often lost sight of. The Bible does not know anything about what people call 'natural immortality.' Life here is not given to the infant once for all, and then expended through the years, but it is continually being bestowed. My belief is that no worm that creeps, nor angel that soars, nor any of the beings between, is alive for one instant except for the continual communication from the fountain of life, of the life that they live. And still more certainly is it true about the future, that there all the blessedness and the existence, which is the substratum and condition of the blessedness, are only ours because, wavelet by wavelet, throbbing out as from a central fountain, there flows into the Redeemed a life communicated by Christ Himself. If I might so say — were that continual bestowment to cease, then heaven, like the vision of a fairy tale, would fade away; and there would be

nothing left where the glory had shone. 'I will give' through eternity.

III. Lastly, note the Recipients.

'To him that overcometh.' Now I need not say, in more than a sentence, that it seems to me that the fair interpretation of this promise, as of all the other references in Scripture to the future life, is that the reward is immediately consequent upon the cessation of the struggle. 'To depart' is 'to be with Christ,' and to be with Christ, in regard of a spirit which has passed from the bodily environment, is to be conscious of His presence, and lapt in His robe, feeling the warmth and the pressure of His heart. So I believe that Scripture teaches us that at one moment there may be the clash of battle, and the whiz of the arrows round one's head, and next moment there may be the laurel-crowned quiet of the victor.

But that does not enter so much into our consideration now. We have, rather, here to think of just this one thing, that the gift is given to the victor because only the victor is capable of receiving it; that future life, interpreted as I have ventured to interpret it in this sermon, is no arbitrary bestowment that could be dealt all round miscellaneously to everybody, if the Giver chose so to give. Here on earth many gifts are bestowed upon men, and are neglected by them, and wasted like water spilled upon the ground; but this elixir of life is not poured out so. It is only poured into vessels that can take it in and hold it.

Our present struggle is meant to make us capable of the heavenly life. And that is — I was going to say the only, but at all events — incomparably the chiefest, of the thoughts which make life not only worth living, but great and solemn. Go into a mill, and in a quiet room, often detached from the main building, you will find the engine working, and seeming to do nothing but go up and down. But there is a shaft which goes through the wall and takes the power to the looms.

We are working here, and we are making the cloth that we shall have to own and say, 'Yes, it is my manufacture!' when we get yonder. According to our life to-day will be our destiny in the great tomorrow. Life is given to the victor, because the victor only is capable of possessing it.

But the victor can only conquer in one way. 'This,' said John, when he was not an apocalyptic seer, but a Christian teacher to the Churches of Asia, 'this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.' If we trust in Christ we shall get His power into our hearts, and if we get His power into our hearts, then we shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved us.' Christ gives life eternal, gives it here in germ and yonder in fulness. In its fulness only those who overcome are capable of receiving it. Those only who fight the good fight by His help overcome. Those only who trust in Him fight the good fight by His help. He gives to eat of the Tree of Life; He gives it to faith, but faith must be militant. He gives it to the conqueror, but the conqueror must win by faith in Him who overcame the world for us, who will help us to overcome the world by Him.

Help us, O our God, we beseech Thee; 'teach our hands to war, and our fingers to fight.' Give us grace to hold fast by the life which is in Jesus Christ; and living by Him the lives which we live in the flesh, may we be capable, by the discipline of earth's sorrows, of that rest and fuller 'life which remaineth for the people of God.'

Revelation 2:11-- II. THE VICTOR'S LIFE-CROWN

'... He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.' — Revelation 2:11.

Two of the seven Churches, viz., Smyrna, to which our text is addressed, and Philadelphia — offered nothing, to the pure eyes of Christ, that needed rebuke. The same two, and these only, were warned to expect persecution. The higher the tone of Christian life

in the Church, the more likely it is to attract dislike and, if circumstances permit, hostility. Hence the whole gist of this letter is to encourage to steadfastness, even if the penalty is death.

That purpose determined at once the aspect of Christ which is presented in the beginning, and the aspect of future blessedness which is held forth at the close. The aspect of Christ is — ‘these things saith the First and the Last, which was dead and is alive’; a fitting thought to encourage the men who were to be called upon to die for Him. And, in like manner, the words of our text naturally knit themselves with the previous mention of death as the penalty of the Smyrneans’ faithfulness.

Now this promise is sharply distinguished from those to the other Churches by two peculiarities: one, that it is merely negative, whilst all the rest are radiantly positive; the other, that there is no mention of our Lord in it, whilst in all the others He stands forth with His emphatic and majestic ‘I will give’; ‘I will write upon him My new Name’; ‘I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God.’ The first peculiarity may partially account for the second, because the Giver is naturally more prominent in a promise of positive gifts, than in one of a merely negative exemption. But another reason is to be found for the omission of the mention of our Lord in this promise. If you will refer to the verse immediately preceding my text, you will find the missing positive promise with the missing reference to Jesus Christ: ‘I will give thee a crown of life.’ So that we are naturally led to link together both these statements when taking account of the hopes that were held forth to animate the Christians of Smyrna in the prospect of persecution even to the death; and we have to consider them both in conjunction now. I think I shall best do so by simply asking you to look at these two things: the Christian motive contained in the victor’s immunity from a great evil, and the Christian motive contained in the victor’s possession of a great good. ‘He shall not be hurt of the second death.’ ‘I will give thee a crown of life.’

I. The Christian motive contained in the victor's immunity from a great evil.

Now that solemn and thrilling expression 'the second death' is peculiar to this booker the Apocalypse. The name is peculiar; the *thing* is common to all the New Testament writers. Here it comes with especial appropriateness, in contrast with the physical death which was about to be inflicted upon some members of the Smyranean Church. But beyond that there lies in the phrase a very solemn and universally applicable meaning. I do not feel dear brethren, that such a thing ought to be made matter of pulpit rhetoric. The bare vagueness of it seems to me to shake the heart a great deal more than any weakening expansion of it that we can give.

But yet, let me say one word. Then, behind that grim figure, the shadow feared of man that waits for all at some turn of their road, cloaked and shrouded, there rises a still grimmer and more awful form,' if form it can be called which form hath none.' There is something, at the back of physical death, which can lay its grip upon the soul that is already separated from the body; something running on the same lines somehow, and worthy to bear that name of terror and disintegration — 'the second death.' What can it be? Not the cessation of conscious existence; that is never the meaning of death. But let us apply the key which opens so many of the locks of the New Testament sayings about the future that the true and deepest meaning of *death* is separation from Him who is the fountain of life, and in a very deep sense is the only life of the universe. Separation from God; *that* is death. What touches the surface of mere bodily life is but a faint shadow and parable, and the second death, like a second tier of mountains, rises behind and above it, sterner and colder than the lower hills of the foreground. What desolation, what unrest, what blank misgivings, what peeling off of capacities, faculties, opportunities, delights, may be involved in that solemn conception, we never can tell here—God grant that we may never

know! Like some sea-creature, cast high and dry on the beach, and gasping out its pained being, the men that are separated from God die whilst they live, and live a living death. The second is the comparative degree, of which the first is the positive.

Now note again that immunity from this solemn fate is no small part of the victor's blessedness. At first sight we feel as if the mere negative promise of my text stands on a lower level than what I have called the radiantly positive ones in the other letters; but it is worthy to stand beside these. Gather them together, and think of how manifold and glorious the dim suggestions which they make of felicity and progress are, and then set by the side of them this one of our text as worthy to stand there. To eat of the Tree of Life; to have power over the nations; to rule them with a rod of iron; to blaze with the brightness o! the morning star; to eat of the hidden manna; to bear the new name known only to those who receive it; to have that name confessed before the Father and His angels; to be a pillar in the Temple of the Lord; to go no more out; and to sit with Christ on His throne: — these are the positive promises, along with which this barely negative one is linked, and is worthy to be linked: 'He shall not be hurt of the second death.'

If this immunity from that fate is fit to stand in line with these glimpses of an inconceivable glory, how solemn must be the fate, and how real the danger of our falling into it! Brethren, in this day it has become unfashionable to speak of that future, especially of its sterner aspects. The dimness of the brightest revelations in the New Testament, the unwillingness to accept it as the source of certitude with regard to the future, the recoil from the stern severity of Divine retribution, the exaggerated and hideous guise in which that great truth was often presented in the past, the abounding worldliness of this day, many of its best tendencies and many of its worst ones concur in making some of us look with very little interest, and scarcely credence, at the solemn words of which the New Testament is full. But I, for my part, accept them; and I dare not but, in such

proportion to the rest of revelation as seems to me to be right, bring them before you. I beseech you, recognise the solemn teaching that lies in this thought, that this negative promise of immunity from the second death stands parallel with all these prorates of felicity and blessedness.

Further, note that such immunity is regarded here as the direct outcome of the victor's conduct and character. I have already pointed out the peculiarities marking our text. The omission of any reference to our Lord in it is accounted for, as suggested, by that reference occurring in the immediately preceding context, but it may also be regarded as suggesting—when considered in contrast with the other promises, where He stands forward as the giver of heavenly Blessedness — that that future condition is to be regarded not only as retribution, which implies the notion of a judge, and a punitive or rewarding energy on his part, But also as being the necessary result of the earthly life that is lived; a harvest of Which we sow the seeds here.

Transient deeds consolidate into permanent character. Beds of sandstone rock, thousands of feet thick, are the sediment dropped from vanished seas, or borne down by long dried-up rivers. The actions which we often so unthinkingly perform, whatever may be the width and the permanency of their effects external to us, react upon ourselves, and tend to make our permanent bent or twist or character. The chalk cliffs at Dover are the 'skeletons of millions upon millions of tiny organisms, and our little lives are built up by the recurrence of transient deeds, which leave their permanent marks upon us. They make character, and character determines position yonder. As said the Apostle, with tender sparingness, and yet with profound truth, 'he went to *his own place*,' wherever that was. The surroundings that he was fitted for came about him, and the company that he was fit for associated themselves with him. So in another part of this book where the same solemn expression, 'the second death,' is employed, we read, These shall have their part in

‘the second death’: the lot that belongs to them. Character and conduct determine position. However small the lives here, they settle the far greater ones hereafter, just as a tiny wheel in a machine may, by cogs and other mechanical devices, transmit its motion to another wheel at a distance, many times its diameter. You move this end of a lever through an arc of an inch, and the other end will move through an arc of yards. The little life here determines the sweep of the great one that is lived yonder. The victor wears his past conduct and character, if I may so say, as a fireproof garment, and if he entered the very furnace, heated seven times hotter than before, there would be no smell of fire upon him. ‘He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.’

II. Now note, secondly, the Christian motive contained in the victor’s reception of a great good.

‘I will give him a crown of life.’ I need not remind you, I suppose, that this metaphor of ‘the crown’ is found in other instructively various places in the New Testament. Paul, for instance, speaks of his own personal hope of ‘the crown of righteousness.’ James speaks, as does the letter to the Smyrnan Church, of ‘the crown of life.’ Peter speaks ‘of the crown of glory.’ Paul, in another place, speaks of ‘the crown incorruptible.’ And all these express substantially the one idea, There may be a question as to whether the word employed here for the crown is to be taken in its strictly literal acceptance as meaning, not a kingly coronal, but a garland. But seeing that, although that is the strict meaning of the word, it is employed in a subsequent part of the letter to designate what must evidently be kingly crowns — viz., in the fourth chapter — there seems to be greater probability in the supposition that we are warranted in including under the symbolism here both the aspects of the crown, as royal, and also as laid upon the brows of the victors in the games or the conflict. I venture to take it in that meaning.

Substantially the promise is the same as that which we were considering in the previous letter, 'I will give him to eat of the Tree of Life'; the promise of life in all the depth and fulness and sweep of that great encyclopaedical word. But it is life considered from a special point of view that is set forth here.

It is a *kingly* life. Of course that notion of regality and dominion, as the prerogative of the redeemed and glorified servants of Jesus Christ, is for ever cropping up in this book of the Revelation. And you remember how our Lord has set the example of its use when He said, 'Have thou authority over ten cities.' What may He in that great symbol it is not for us to say.

The rule over ourselves, over circumstances, the deliverance from the tyranny of the external, the deliverance from the slavery of the body and its lusts and passions, these are all included. The man that can will rightly, and can do completely as he rightly wills, that man is a king. But there is more than that. There is the participation in wondrous, and for us inconceivable, ways, in the majesty and regality of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Therefore did the crowned elders before the throne sing a new song to the Lamb, who made redeemed men out of every tribe and tongue, to be to God a kingdom, and priests who should reign upon the earth.

But, brethren, remember that this conception of a kingly life is to be interpreted according to Christ's own teaching of that wherein royalty in His kingdom consists. For heaven, as for earth, the purpose of dominion is service, and the use of power is beneficence. 'He that is chiefest of all, let him be servant of all,' is the law for the regalities of heaven as well as for the lowliness of earth.

That life is a *triumphant* life. The crown, was laid on the head of the victor in the games. Think of the victor as he went back, flushed and modest, to his village away up on the slopes of some of the

mountain-chains of Greece. With what a tumult of acclaim he would be hailed! If we do *our* work and fight our fight down here as we ought, we shall enter into the great city not unnoticed, not unwelcomed, but with the praise of the King and the paeans of His attendants. 'I will confess his name before My Father and the holy angels.'

That life is a festal life. The garlands are twined on the heated brows of revellers, and the fumes of the wine and the closeness of the chamber soon make them wilt and droop. This amaranthine crown fadeth never. And the feast expresses for us the felicities, the abiding satisfactions without satiety, the blessed companionship, the repose which belong to the crowned.

Royalty, triumph, festal goodness, all fused together, are incomplete, but they are not useless symbols. May we experience their fulfilment!

Brethren, the crown is promised not merely to the man that says, 'I have faith in Jesus Christ,' but to him who has worked out his faith into faithfulness, and by conduct and character has made himself capable of the felicities of the heavens. If that immortal crown were laid upon the head of another, it would be a crown of thorns; for the joys of that future require the fitness which comes from the apprenticeship to faith and faithfulness here on earth. We evangelical preachers are often taunted with preaching that future blessedness comes as the result of the simple act of Belief. Yes; but only if, and when, the simple act of faith, which is more than belief, is wrought out in the loveliness of faithfulness. 'We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end.'

Now, dear friends, I dare say that some of you may be disposed to brush aside these fears and hopes as very low motives, unworthy to be appealed to; but I cannot so regard them. I know that the appeal to fear is directed to the lower order of sentiments, but it is a

legitimate motive. It is meant to stir us up to gird ourselves against the dangers which we wisely dread. And I, for my part, believe that we preachers are going aside from our Pattern, and are flinging away a very powerful weapon, in the initial stages of religious experience, if we are afraid to Bring before men's hearts and answering consciences the solemn facts of the future which Jesus Christ Himself has revealed to us. We are no more to be blamed for it than the signalman for waving his red flag. And I fancy that there are some of my present hearers who would be nearer the love of God if they took more to heart the fear of the Lord and of His judgment.

Hope is surely a perfectly legitimate motive to appeal to. We are not to be good because we thereby escape hell and secure heaven. We are to be

good, because Jesus Christ wills us to be, and has won us to love Him, or has sought to win us to love Him, by His great sacrifice for us. But that being the basis, men can be brought to build upon it by the compulsion of fear and by the attraction of hope. And that being the deepest motive, there is a perfectly legitimate and noble sphere for the operation of these two other lower motives, the consideration of the personal evils that attend the opposite course, and of the personal good that follows from cleaving to Him. Am I to be told that Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who went to his martyrdom, and was 'faithful unto death,' with the words on his lips: 'Eighty-and-six years have I served Him, and He has done me nothing but good; how shall I deny my King and my Saviour!' was yielding to a low motive when to him the crown that the Master promised to the Church of which he was afterwards bishop floated above the head that was soon to be shorn off, and on whose blood-stained brows it was then to fall? Would that we had more of such low motives! Would that we had more of such high lives as fear nothing because they 'have respect to the recompense of the reward,' and are ready for service or martyrdom, because they hear and believe the

crowned Christ saying to them: 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'

Revelation 2:17-- III. THE VICTOR'S LIFE-SECRET

... To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.' — Revelation 2:17.

THE Church at Pergamos, to which this promise is addressed, had a sharper struggle than fell to the lot of the two Churches whose epistles precede this. It was set 'where Satan's seat is.' Pergamos was a special centre of heathen worship, and already the blood of a faithful martyr had been shed in it. The severer the struggle, the nobler the reward.

Consequently the promise given to this militant Church surpasses, in some respects, those held out to the former two. They were substantially promised that life eternal, which indeed includes everything; but here some of the blessed contents of that life are expanded and emphasised.

There is a threefold promise given: 'the hidden manna,' 'the white stone,' a 'new name' written. The first and the last of these are evidently the most important. They need little explanation; of the central one 'the white stone,' a bewildering variety of interpretations — none of them, as it seems to me, satisfactory have been suggested. Possibly there may be an allusion to the ancient custom of dropping the votes of the judges into an urn — a white pebble meaning innocence and acquittal; black meaning guilty — just as we, under somewhat similar circumstances, talk about 'blackballing.' But the objection to that interpretation lies in the fact that the 'white stone' of our text is given to the person concerned, and not deposited elsewhere. There may be an allusion to a practice, which antiquarians have hunted out, of conferring upon the victors

in the games a little tile with a name inscribed upon it, which gave admission to the public festivals. But all the explanations are so doubtful that one hesitates to accept any of them.

There remains one other alternative, which seems to me to be suggested by the very language of the text, viz., that the 'white stone' is here named — with possibly some subsidiary thought of innocence and purity — merely as the vehicle for the name. And so I dismiss it from further consideration, and concentrate our thoughts on the remaining two promises.

I. We have the victor's food, the manna.

That seems, at first sight, a somewhat infelicitous symbol, because manna was wilderness food. But that characteristic is not to be taken into account.

Manna, though it fell in the wilderness, came from heaven, and it is the heavenly food that is suggested by the symbol. When the warrior passes from the fight into the city, the food which came down from heaven will be given to him in fulness. It is a beautiful thought that as soon as the man, 'spent with changing blows,' and weary with conflict, enters the land of peace, there is a table spread for him; not, as before, in 'the presence of his enemies,' but in the presence of the companions of his repose. One moment hears the din of the battlefield, the next moment feels the refreshment of the heavenly manna.

But now there can be little need for dealing, by way of exposition, with this symbol. Let us rather try to lay it upon our hearts.

Now the first thing that it plainly suggests to us is the absolute satisfaction of all the hunger of the heart. It is possible, and for those that overcome it will one day be actual experience, that a man shall have everything that he wishes the moment that he wishes it. Here we have to suppress desires, sometimes because they are illegitimate

and wrong, sometimes because circumstances sternly forbid their indulgence. There, to desire will be to have, and partly by the rectifying of the appetite, partly by the fulness of the supply, there will be no painful sense of vacuity, and no clamouring of the unsubdued heart for good that is beyond its reach. They — and you and I may be amongst them, and so we may say ‘*we*’ — ‘shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more.’ Oh, brethren! to us who are driven into activity by desires, half of which go to water and are never fulfilled — to us who know what it is to try to tame down the hungering, yelping wishes and longings of our souls — to us who have so often spent our ‘money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not,’ it ought to be a Gospel: ‘I will give him to eat of the hidden manna.’ Is it such to you? Do you believe it possible, and are you addressing yourselves to make the fulfilment of it actual in your case?

Then there is the other plain thing suggested here, that that satisfaction does not dull the edge of appetite or desire. Bodily hunger is fed, is replete, wants nothing more until the lapse of time and digestion have intervened.

But it is not so with the loftiest satisfactions. There are some select, noble, blessed desires even here, concerning which we know that the more we have, the more we hunger with a hunger which has no pain in it, but is only the greatened capacity for greater enjoyment. You that know what happy love is know what that means — a satisfaction which never approaches satiety, a hunger which has in it no gnawing. And in the loftiest and most perfect of all realms, that co-existence of perfect fruition and perfect desire will be still more wondrously and blessedly manifest. At each moment the *more* we have, the wider will our hearts be expanded by possession, and the wider they are expanded the more will they be capable of receiving, and the more they are capable of receiving the more deep and full and blessed and all-covering will be the inrush of the river of the water of life.

Satisfaction without satiety, food which leaves him blessedly appetised for larger bestowments, belong to the victor.

Another thing to be noticed here is what we have already had occasion to point out in the previous promises: 'I will give him.' Do you remember our Lord's own wonderful words: 'Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and shall come forth and serve them'? The victor is seated at the board, and the Prince, as in some earthly banquet to a victorious army, Himself moves up and down amongst the tables, and supplies the wants of the guests. There was an old Jewish tradition, which perhaps may have influenced the form of this promise, to the effect that the Messiah, when He came, would bring again to the people the gift of the manna, and men should once more eat angels' food. Whether there is any allusion to that poetic fancy or no in the words of my text, the reality infinitely transcends it. Christ Himself bestows upon His servants the sustenance of their spirits in the realm above. But there is more than that. Christ is not only the Giver, but He is Himself the Food. I believe that the deepest meaning of this sevenfold cluster of jewels, the promises to these seven Churches, is in each case Christ. He is the Tree of Life; He is the Crown of Life, He *is* — as well as *gives* — 'the hidden manna.' You will remember how He Himself gives us this interpretation when, in answer to the Jewish taunt, 'Our fathers did eat manna in the wilderness. What dost Thou work?' He said, 'I am that Bread of God that came down from heaven.'

So, then, once more, we come back to the all-important teaching that, whatever be the glories of the perfected flower and fruit in heaven, the germ and root of it is already here. The man who lives upon the Christ by faith, love, obedience, imitation, communion, aspiration, here on earth, has already the earnest of that feast. No doubt there will be aspects and sweetnesses and savours and sustenance in the heavenly form of our possession of, and living on,

Him, which we here on earth know nothing about. But no doubt also the beginning and positive degree of all these sweetnesses and savours and sustenances yet to be revealed is found in the experience of the man who has listened to the cry of that loving voice, 'Eat, and your souls shall live'; and has taken Jesus Christ Himself, the living Person, to be not only the source but the nourishment of his spiritual life.

So, brethren, it is of no use to pretend to ourselves that we should like as they put it in bald, popular language — to 'go to heaven,' unless we are using and relishing that of heaven which is here today. If you do not like the earthly form of feeding upon Jesus Christ, which is trusting Him, giving your heart to Him, obeying Him, thinking about Him, treading in His footsteps, you would not like, you would like less, the heavenly form of that feeding upon Him. If you would rather have the strong-smelling garlic and the savoury leeks — to say nothing about the swine's trough and the husks — than 'this light bread,' the 'angels' food,' which your palates cannot stand and your stomachs cannot digest, you could not swallow it if it were put into your lips when you get beyond the grave; and you would not like it if you could. Christ forces this manna into no man's mouth; but Christ gives it to all who desire it and are fit for it, As is the man's appetite, so is the man's food; and so is the life that results therefrom.

II. Note the victor's new name.

I have often had occasion to point out to you that Scripture attaches, in accordance with Eastern habit, large importance to names, which are intended to be significant of character, or circumstances, or parental hopes or desires. So that, both in reference to God and man, names come to be the condensed expression of the character and the personality. When we read, 'I will give him a stone, on which there is a new name written,' we infer that the main suggestion made in that promise is of a change in the self, something new in the

personality and the character. I need not dwell upon this, for we have no material by which to expand into detail the greatness of the promise. I would only remind you of how we are taught to believe that the dropping away of the corporeal and removal from this present scene carries with it, in the case of those who have here on earth Begun to walk with Christ, and to become citizens of the spiritual realm, changes great, ineffable, and all tending in the one direction of making the servants more fully like their Lord. What new capacities may be evolved by the mere fact of losing the limitations of the bodily frame; what new points of contact with a new universe; what new analogues of what we here call our senses and means of perception of the external world may be the accompaniments of the disembarassment from 'the earthly house of this tabernacle,' we dare not dream. We could not, if we were told, rightly understand. But, surely, if the tenant is taken from a clay hut and set in a royal house, eternal, not made with hands, its windows must be wider and more transparent, and there must be an inrush of wondrously more brilliant light into the chambers.

But whatsoever Be these changes, they are changes that repose upon that which has been in the past. And so the second thought that is suggested by this new name is that these changes are the direct results of the victor's course. Both in old times and in the peerage of England you will find names of conquerors, by land or by water, who carry in their designations and transmit to their descendants the memorial of their victories in their very titles. In like manner as a Scipio was called Africanus, as a Jervis became Lord St. Vincent, so the victor's 'new name' is the concentration and memorial of the victor's conquest. And what we have wrought and fought here on earth we carry with us, as the basis of the changes from glory to glory which shall come in the heavens. 'They rest from their labours; their works do follow them,' and, gathering behind the laurelled victor, attend him as he ascends the hill of the *Lord*.

But once more we come to the thought that whatever there may be of change in the future, the main direction of the character remains, and the consolidated issues of the transient deeds of earth remain, and the victor's name is the summing up of the victor's life.

But, further, Christ gives the name. He changed the names of His disciples. Simon He called Cephas, James and John He called 'Sons of Thunder.' The act claimed authority, and designated a new relation to Him. Both these ideas are conveyed in the promise: 'I will give him... a new name written.' Only, brethren, remember that the transformation keeps true to the line of direction begun here, and the process of change has to be commenced on earth. They who win the new name of heaven are they of whom it would be truly said, while they bore the old name of earth, 'If any man be in Christ he is a new creature.'

'Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.'

III. Lastly, note the mystery of both the food and the name.

'I will give him the hidden manna... a new name... which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.' Now we all know that the manna was laid up in the Ark, beneath the Shekinah, within the curtain of the holiest place.

And, besides that, there was a Jewish tradition that the Ark and its contents, which disappeared after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the first Temple, had been buried by the prophet Jeremiah, and lay hidden away somewhere on the sacred soil, until the Messiah should return. There may be an allusion to that here, but it is not necessary to suppose it. The pot of manna lay in the Ark of the Covenant, of which we hear in another part of the symbolism in this book, within the veil in the holiest of all. And Christ gives the victor to partake of that sacred and secret food. The name which is given 'no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.' Both symbols

point to the one thought, the impossibility of knowing until we possess and experience.

That impossibility besets all the noblest, highest, purest, divinest emotions and possessions of earth. Poets have sung of love and sorrow from the beginning of time; but men must love to know what love means. Every woman has heard about the sweetness of maternity, but not till the happy mother holds her infant to her breast does she understand it. And so we may talk till Doomsday, and yet it would remain true that we must eat the manna, and look upon the white stone for ourselves, before we can adequately comprehend.

Since, then, experience alone admits to the knowledge, how vulgar, how futile, how absolutely destructive of the very purpose which they are intended to subserve are all the attempts of men to forecast that ineffable glory. It is too great to be understood. The mountains that ring us round keep the secret well of the fair lands beyond. There are questions that bleeding hearts sometimes ask, questions which prurient curiosity more often ask, and which foolish people today are taking illegitimate means of solving, about that future life, which are all left — though some of them might conceivably have been answered — in silence. Enough for us to listen to the voice that says, ‘In My Father’s house are many mansions’ — room for you and me — ‘if it were not so I would have told you.’ For the silence is eloquent. The curtain is the picture. The impossibility of telling is the token of the greatness of the thing to be told. Hope needs but little yarn to weave her web with. I believe that the dimness is part of the power of that heavenly prospect. Let us be reticent before it. Let us remember that, though our knowledge is small and our eyes dim, Christ knows all, and we shall be with Him; and so say, with no sense of pained ignorance or unsatisfied curiosity, ‘It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.’ Cannot our hearts add, ‘It is enough for the servant that he be as his master’?

An old commentator on this verse says, ‘Wouldst thou know what manner of new name thou shalt hear? Overcome. It is vain for thee to ask beforehand. Hereafter thou shalt soon see it written on the white stone; Help us, O Lord, to fight the good fight of faith, in the sure confidence that Thou wilt receive us, and refresh us, and renew us.

Revelation 2:12--THE FIRST AND LAST WORKS

‘I know thy last works..., to be more than the first.’ — Revelation 2:12.

IT is beautiful to notice that Jesus Christ, in this letter, says all He can of praise before He utters a word of blame. He is glad when His eye, which is as a flame of fire, sees in His children that which He can commend. Praise from Him is praise indeed; and it does not need that the act should be perfect in order to get His commendation. The main thing is, which way does it look? Direction, and not attainment, is what He commends. And if the deed of the present moment be better than the deed of the last, though there be still a great gap between it and absolute completeness, the commendation of my text applies, and is never grudgingly rendered. ‘I know thy last done works to be more than the first.’

There is blame in plenty, grave, and about grave matters, following in this letter, but that is not permitted in the slightest degree to diminish the warmth and heartiness of the commendation.

I. So these words tell us, first, what every Christian life is meant to be.

A life of continual progress, in which each ‘to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant,’ in reference to all that is good and noble and true is the ideal after which every Christian man, by his profession, is bound to aim, because in the gospel that we say

we believe there lie positively infinite powers to make us perfectly pure and noble and complete all round. And in it there lie, if we lay them upon our hearts, and let them work, positively omnipotent motives, to impel us with unwearied and ever-growing earnestness towards likeness to the Master whom we say we love and serve. A continuous progress towards and in all good of every sort is the very law of the Christian life.

The same law holds good in regard to all regions of life. Everybody knows, and a hundred commonplace proverbs tell us, that practice makes perfect, that the man who carries a little weight to-day will be able to carry a bigger one to-morrow; that powers exercised are rewarded by greater strength; that he that begins by a short march, though he is wearied after he has walked a mile or two, will be able to walk a great deal farther the next day. In all departments of effort it is true that the longer we continue in a course, the easier ought it be to do the things, and the larger ought to be the results. The fruit tree does not begin to bear for a year or two, and when it does come the crop is neither in size nor in abundance anything to compare with that which is borne afterwards.

In the same way, for the Christian course, continual progress and an ever-widening area of the life conquered for and filled with Christ, manifestly ought to be the law. 'Forgetting the things that are behind, reaching forth toward the things that are before, we press toward the mark.' Every metaphor about the life of the Christian soul carries the same lesson. Is it a building? Then course by course it rises. Is it a tree? Then year by year it spreads a broader shadow, and its leafy crown reaches nearer heaven. Is it a body? Then from childhood to youth, and youth to manhood, it grows. Christianity is growth, continual, all-embracing, and unending.

II. The next remark that I make is this, the commendation of Christ describes what a sadly large proportion of professedly Christian lives are not.

Do you think, brethren, that if He were to come amongst us now with these attributes which the context gives us, with His 'eyes like unto a flame of fire' to behold, and His 'feet like unto fine brass' to tread down all opposition and evil, He would find amongst us what would warrant His pure lips in saying this about us, either as a community or as individuals — 'I know that thy last works are more than thy first'?

What is the ordinary history of the multitudes of professing Christians? Something which they call — rightly or wrongly is not the question for the moment — 'conversion,' then a year or *two*, or perhaps a month *or two*, or perhaps a week or two, or perhaps a day or two, of profound earnestness, of joyful consecration, of willing obedience — and then back swarm the old ties, and habits, and associations. Many professing Christians are cases of arrested development, like some of those monstrosities that you see about our pavements — a full-grown man in the upper part with no under limbs at all to speak of, aged half a century, and only half the height of a ten-year-old child. Are there not multitudes of so-called Christian people, in all our churches and communities, like that? I wonder if there are any of them here to-night, that have not grown a bit for years, whose deeds yesterday were just the same as their deeds to-day, and so on through a long, dreary, past perspective of unprogressive life, the old sins cropping up with the old power and venom, the old weak bits in the dyke bursting out again every winter, and at each flood, after all tinkering and mending, the old faults as rampant as ever, the new life as feeble, fluttering, spasmodic, uncertain. They grow, if at all, by fits and starts, after the fashion, say, of a tree that every winter goes to sleep, and only makes wood for a little while in the summer time. Or they do not grow even as regularly as that, but there will come sometimes an hour or two of growth, and then long dreary tracts in which there is no progress at all, either in understanding of Christian doctrine or in the application of Christian precept; no increase of conformity to Jesus Christ, no increase of realising hold of His love, no clearer or

more fixed and penetrating contemplation of the unseen realities, than there used to be long, long ago. How many of us are babes in Christ when we have grey hairs upon our heads, and when for the time we ought to be teachers have need that one should teach us again which be the first principles of the oracles of God?

Oh ! dear friends, it seems to me sometimes that that notion of the continuous growth in Christian understanding and feeling and character, as attaching to the very essence of the Christian life, is clean gone out of the consciousness of half the professing Christians of this day. How far our notions about Church fellowship, and reception of people into the Church, and the like, have to do with it, is not for me to discuss here. Only this I cannot help feeling, that if Jesus Christ came into most of our congregations nowadays He would not, and could not, say what He said to these poor people at Thyatira, 'I know thy last works are more than thy first.'

Well, then, let us remember that if He cannot say that, He has to say the opposite. I take it that the words of my text are a distinct allusion to other words of His, when He spoke the converse, about the 'last state of that man as worse than the first,' The allusion is obvious, I think, and it is also made in the Second Epistle of Peter, where we find a similar description of the man who has fallen away from Jesus Christ. Let us learn the lesson that either to-day is better than yesterday or it is worse. If a man on a bicycle stands still, he tumbles. The condition of keeping upright is to go onwards. If a climber on an Alpine ice-slope does not put all his power into the effort to ascend, he cannot stick at the place, at an angle of forty-five degrees upon ice, but down he is bound to go. Unless, by effort, he overcomes gravitation, he will be at the bottom very soon. And so, if Christian people are not daily getting better, they are daily getting worse. And this will be the end of it, the demon that was east out will go back to his house, which he finds 'swept and garnished' indeed, but 'empty,' because there is no all-filling principle of love to Jesus Christ living in it. He finds it empty. Nature abhors a

vacuum; and in he goes with his seven friends; and ‘the last of that man is worse than the first.’

There are two alternatives before us. I would that I could feel for myself always, and that you felt for yourselves, that one or other of them must describe us as professing Christians. Either we are getting more Christlike or we are daily getting less so.

III. Lastly, my text, in its relation to this whole letter, suggests how this commendation may become ours.

Notice the context. Christ says, according to the improved reading which will be found in the Revised Version: ‘I know thy works, and love, and faith, and service’ (or ministry), ‘and patience, and that thy last works are more than the first.’ That is to say, the great way by which we can secure this continual growth in the manifestations of Christian life is by making it a habit to cultivate what produces it, viz., these two things, charity (or love) and faith.

These are the roots; they need cultivating. A Christian man’s love to Jesus Christ will not grow of itself any more than his faith will. Unless we make a conscience by prayer, by reading of the Scriptures, by subjecting ourselves to the influences provided for the purpose in His word, of strengthening our faith and warming our love, both will dwindle and become fruitless, bearing ‘nothing but leaves’ of barren though glittering profession. You need to cultivate faith and love just as much as to cultivate any other faculty or any other habit. Neglected, they are sure to die. If they are not cultivated, then their results of ‘service’ (or ‘ministry’) and ‘patience’ are sure to become less and less.

These two, faith and love, are the roots; their vitality determines the strength and abundance of the fruit that is borne. And unless you dig about them and take care of them, they are sure to die in the unkindly soil of our poor rocky hearts, and blown upon by the nipping winds that howl round the world. If we want our works to

increase in number and to rise in quality, let us see to it that we make an honest habit of cultivating that which is their producing cause—love to Jesus Christ and faith in Him.

And then the text still further suggests another thought. At the end of the letter I read: ‘He that overcometh and keepeth My works to the end, to him will I give,’ etc.

Now mark what were called ‘thy works’ in the beginning of the letter are called ‘My works’ in its close. And it is laid down here that the condition of victory, and the prerequisite to a throne and dominion, is the persevering and pertinacious keeping unto the end of these which are now called ‘Christ’s works’ — that is to say, if we want that the Master shall see in us a continuous growth towards Himself, then, in addition to cultivating the habit of faith and love, we must cultivate the other habit of looking to Him as the source of all the work that we do for Him. And when we have passed from the contemplation of our deeds as ours, and come to look upon all that we do of right and truth and beauty as Christ working in us, then there is a certainty of our work increasing in nobility and in extent.

The more we lose ourselves and feel ourselves to be but instruments in Christ’s hands, the more shall we seek to fill our lives with all noble service; the more shall we be able to adorn them with all beauty of growing likeness to Him who is their source.

There is still another thing to be remembered, and that is, that if we are to have this progressive godliness we must put forth continuous effort right away to the very close.

We come to no point in our lives when we can slack off in the earnestness of our endeavour to make more and more of Christ’s fulness our own. But to the very last moment of life there is a possibility of still larger victories, and the corresponding possibility of defeat. And, therefore, till the very last, ‘effort, built upon faith and made joyous by love and strong by the grasp of His hand, must

be the law for us. It is the man that 'keeps His works' and persistently strives to do them to the 'very end' that 'overcomes.' And if he slacks one moment before the end he loses the blessing that he otherwise would have attained.

'Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth Unto the things that are before,' must be our motto till the last. We must ever have shining far before us the unattained heights which it may yet be possible for our feet to tread. We must never let habit stiffen us in any one attitude of obedience, nor past failures set a bound to our anticipations of what it is possible for us to become in the future. We must never compare ourselves with ourselves, or with one another. We must never allow low thoughts, and the poor average of Christian life, in our brethren, to come between us and that lofty vision of perfect likeness to Jesus Christ, which should burn before us all as no vain dream, but as the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us.

And if, smitten by its beauty, and drawn by its power, and daily honestly submitting ourselves to the accumulating influences of Christ's long experienced love, and enlisting habit upon the side of godliness, and weakening opposition and antagonism by long discipline and careful priming, 'we press toward the mark for the prize of the higher calling of God in Jesus Christ,' we shall be like the wise householder that keeps the best wine until the last,

'And in old age, when others fade, We fruit still forth shall bring.'

And then death itself will but continue the process that has blessed and ennobled life, and will lead us up into another state, whereof the latest works shall be more than the first.'

Revelation 2:26-28-- IV. THE VICTOR'S LIFE-POWER

'He that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: 27. And he shall rule them with a

rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of My Father. 28. And I will give him the morning star.’ — Revelation 2:26-28.

This promise to the victors in Thyatira differs from the preceding ones in several remarkable respects. If you will observe, the summons to give ear to ‘ what the Spirit saith to the churches’ *precedes* the promises in the previous letters; here it follows that promise, and that order is observed in the three subsequent epistles. Now the structure of all these letters is too careful and artistic to allow of the supposition that the change is arbitrary or accidental. There must be some significance in it, but I do not profess to be ready with the explanation, and I prefer acknowledging perplexity to pretending enlightenment.

Then there is another remarkable peculiarity of this letter, viz., the expansion which is given to the designation of the victor as ‘He that overcometh and keepeth My works unto the end.’ Probably not unconnected with that expansion is the other peculiarity of the promise here, as compared with its precursors, viz., that they all regard simply the individual victor and promise to him ‘partaking of the tree of life’; a ‘crown of life’; immunity from ‘the second death’; ‘the hidden manna’; the ‘white stone’; and the ‘new name written’; which, like all the rest of the promises there, belonged to Himself alone; but here the field is widened, and we have others brought in on whom the victor is to exercise an influence. So, then, we enter upon a new phase of conceptions of that future life in these words, which not only dwell upon the sustenance, the repose, the glory that belong to the man himself, but look upon him as still an instrument in Christ’s hands, and an organ for carrying out, by His activities, Christ’s purposes in the world. So, then, I want you to look with me very simply at the ideas suggested by these words.

I. We have the victor’s authority.

Now the promise in my text is moulded by a remembrance of the great words of the second psalm. That psalm stands at the beginning of the Psalter as a kind of prelude; and in conjunction with its companion psalm, the first, is a summing up of the two great factors in the religious life of the

Hebrews, viz., the blessedness in the keeping of the law, and the brightness of the hope of the Messiah. The psalm in question deals with that Messianic hope under the symbols of an earthly conquering monarch, and sets forth His dominion as established throughout the whole earth. And our letter brings this marvellous thought, that the spirits of just men made perfect are, somehow or other, associated with Him in that campaign of conquest.

Now, there is much in these words which, of course, it is idle for us to attempt to expand or expound. We can only wait, as we gaze upon the dim brightness, for experience to unlock the mystery. But there is also much which, if we will reverently ponder it, may stimulate us to brave conflict and persistent diligence in keeping Christ's commandments. I, for my part, believe that Scripture is the only source of such knowledge as we have of the future life; and I believe, too, that the knowledge, such as it is, which we derive from Scripture is knowledge, and can be absolutely trusted. *And so*, though I abjure all attempts at rhetorical setting forth of the details of this mysterious symbol, I would lay it upon our hearts. It is not the less powerful because it is largely inconceivable; and the mystery, the darkness, the dimness, may be, and are part of the revelation and of the light. 'There was the hiding of His power.'

And so, notice that whatever may be the specific contents of such a promise as this, the general form of it is in full harmony with the words of our Lord whilst He was on earth. Twice over, according to the gospel narratives — once in connection with Peter's foolish question, 'What shall *we* have therefore?' and once in a still more sacred connection, at the table on the eve of Calvary — our Lord

gave His trembling disciples this great promise: 'In the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' Make all allowance that you like for the vesture of symbolism, the reality that lies beneath is that Jesus Christ, the truth, has pledged Himself to this, that His servants shall be associated with Him in the activity of His royalty. And the same great thought, which we only spoil when we try to tear apart the petals which remain closed until the sun shall open them, underlies the twin parables of the pounds and the talents, in regard to each of which we have, 'Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things'; and, linked along with the promise of authority, the assurance of union with the Master, 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' So this book of the Revelation is only following in the footsteps and expanding the hints of Christ's own teaching when it triumphs in the thought that we are made kings and priests to God; when it points onwards to a future wherein — we know not how, but we know, if we believe Him when He speaks, that it shall Be so — they shall reign with Him for ever and ever.

My text adds further the image of a conquering campaign, of a sceptre of iron crushing down antagonism, of banded opposition broken into shivers, 'as a potter's vessel' dashed upon a pavement of marble. And it says that in that final conflict and final conquest they that have passed into the rest of God, and have dwelt with Christ, shall be with Him, the armies of heaven following Him, clad in white raiment pure and glistening, and with Him subduing, ay! and converting into loyal love the antagonisms of earth. I abjure all attempts at millenarian prophecy, but I point to this, that all the New Testament teaching converges upon this one point, that the Christ who came to die shall come again to reign, and that He shall reign, and His servants with Him. That is enough; and that is all. For all the rest is conjecture and fancy and sometimes folly; and details minimise, and do not magnify, the great, undetailed, magnificent fact.

But all the other promises deal not with something in the remoter future, but with something that begins to take effect the moment the dust, and confusion, and garments rolled in blood, of the battlefield are swept away. At one instant the victors are fighting, at the next they are partaking of the Tree of Life, and on their locks lies the crown, and their happy lips are feeding upon 'the hidden manna.' And so, I think, that though, no doubt, the main stress of the promise of authority here points onwards, as our Lord Himself has taught us, to the time of 'the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of His glory; the incidence of the promise is not to be exclusively confined thereto. There must be something in the present for the blessed dead, as well as for them in the future. And this is, that they are united with Jesus Christ in His present activities; and through Him, and in Him, and with Him, are even now serving Him. The servant, when he dies, and has been fitted for it, enters at once on his government of the ten cities.

Thus this promise of my text. in its deepest meaning, corresponds with the deepest needs of a man's nature. For we can never be at rest unless we are at work; and a heaven of doing nothing is a heaven of *ennui* and weariness. Whatever sneers may have been cast at the Christian conception of the future, which find vindication, one is sorry to say, in many popular representations and sickly bits of hymns, the New Testament notion of what that future life is to be is noble with all energy, and fruitful with all activity, and strenuous with all service. This promise of my text comes in to supplement the three preceding. They were addressed to the legitimate, wearied longings for rest and fulness of satisfaction for oneself. This is addressed to the deeper and nobler longing for larger service. And the words of my text, whatever dim glory they may partially reveal, as accruing to the victor in the future, do declare that, when he passes beyond the grave, there will be waiting for him nobler work to do than any that he ever has done here.

But let us not forget that all this access of power and enlargement of opportunity are a consequence of Christ's royalty and Christ's conquering rule. That is to say, whatever we have in the future we have because we are knit to Him, and all our service there, as all our blessedness here, flows from our union with that Lord. So when He says, as in the words that I have already quoted, that His servants shall sit on thrones, He presents Himself as on the central throne. The authority of the steward over the ten cities is but a consequence of the servant's entrance into the joy of the Lord. Whatever there lies in the heavens, the germ of it all is this, that we are as Christ, so closely identified with Him that we are like Him, and share in all His possessions. He says to each of us, 'All Mine is thine.' He has taken part of our flesh and blood that we may share in His Spirit. The bride is endowed with the wealth of the bridegroom, and the crowns that are placed on the heads of the redeemed are the crown which Christ Himself has received as the reward of His Cross — 'even as I have received of My Father.'

II. Note the victor's starry splendour.

The second symbol of my text is difficult of interpretation, like the first: 'I will give him the morning star.' Now, no doubt, throughout Scripture a star is a symbol of royal dominion; and many would propose so to interpret it in the present case. But it seems to me that whilst that explanation — which makes the second part of our promise simply identical with the former, though under a different garb — does justice to one part of the symbol, it entirely omits the other. For the emphasis is here laid on 'morning' rather than on 'star.' It is 'the morning star,' not any star that blazes in the heavens, that is set forth here as a symbolical representation of the victor's condition. Then another false scent, as it were, on which interpretations have gone, seems to me to be that, taking into account the fact that in the last chapter of the Revelation our Lord is Himself described as 'the bright and morning star,' they bring this promise down simply to mean, 'I will give him Myself.' Now

though it is quite true that, in the deepest of all views, Jesus Christ Himself is the gift as well as the giver of all these sevenfold promises, yet the propriety of representation seems to me to forbid that He should here say, 'I will give them Myself!'

So I think we must fall back upon what any touch of poetic imagination would at once suggest to be the meaning of the promise, that it is the dawning splendour of that planet of hope and morning, the harbinger of day, which we are to lay hold of. Hebrew prophets, long before, had spoken of Lucifer, 'light-bringer,' 'the son of the morning.' Many a poet sang of it before Milton with his

'Hesperus, that led the starry host, Rode brightest.'

So that I think we are just to lay hold of the thought that the starry splendour, the beauty and the lustre that will be poured upon the victor is that which is expressed by this symbol here. What that lustre will consist in it becomes us not to say. That future keeps its secret well, but that it shall be the perfecting of human nature up to the most exquisite and consummate height of which it is capable, and the enlargement of it beyond all that human experience here can conceive, we may peaceably anticipate and quietly trust.

Only, note the advance here on the previous promises is as conspicuous as in the former part of this great promise. There the Christian man's influence and authority were set forth under the emblem of regal dominion. Here they are set forth under the emblem of lustrous splendour. It is the spectators that see the glory of the beam that comes from the star. And this promise, like the former, implies that in that future there will be a sphere in which perfected spirits may ray out their light, and where they may gladden and draw some eyes by their beams. I have no word to say as to the sky in which the rays of that star may shine, but I do feel that the very essence of this great representation is that Christian souls in the future, as in the present, will stand forth as the visible embodiments of the glory and lustre of the unseen God.

Further, remember that this image, like the former, traces up the lustre, as that traced the royalty, to communion with Christ, and to impartation from Him. 'I will *give* him the morning star.' We shall shine as the 'brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever,' as Daniel said — not By inherent but by reflected light. We are not suns, but planets, that move round the Sun of Righteousness, and flash with His beauty.

III. Lastly, mark the condition of the authority and of the lustre.

Here I would say a word about the remarkable expansion of the designation of the victor, to which I have already referred: 'He that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end.' We do not know why that expansion was put in, in reference to Thyatira only, but if you will glance over the letter you will see that there is more than usual about works — works to be repented of, or works which make the material of a final retribution and judgment.

Whatever may be the explanation of the expanded designation here, the lesson that it reads to us is a very significant and a very important one. Bring the metaphor of a victor down to the plain, hard, prose fact of doing Christ's work right away to the end of life. Strip off the rhetoric of the fight, and it comes down to this — dogged, persistent obedience to Christ's commandments. 'He that keepeth My works' does not appeal to the imagination as 'He that overcometh' does. But it is the explanation of the victory, and one that we all need to lay to heart.

'My works': that means the works that He enjoins. No doubt; but look at a verse before my text: 'I will give unto every one of you according to your works.' That is, the works that you do, and Christ's works are not only those which He enjoins, but those of which He Himself set the pattern. He will 'give according to works'; He will give authority; give the morning star. That is to say, the life which has been moulded according to Christ's pattern, and shaped in obedience to Christ's commandments is the life which is capable of

Being granted participation in His dominion, and invested with reflected lustre. If here we do His work we shall be able to do it more fully yonder. ‘The works that I do shall he do also.’ That is the law for life — ay, and it is the promise for heaven. ‘And greater works than these shall he do, because I go to My Father.’ When we have come to partial conformity with Him here we may hope — and only then have we the right to hope — for entire assimilation to Him hereafter. If here, from this dim spot which men call earth, and amid the confusion and dust and distances of this present life, we look to Him, and with unveiled faces behold Him, and here, in degree and part, are being changed from glory to glory, there He will turn His face upon us, and, beholding it, in righteousness, ‘we shall be satisfied when we awake with His likeness.’

Brethren, it is for us to choose whether we shall share in Christ’s dominion or be crushed by His iron sceptre. It is for us to choose whether, moulding our lives after His will and pattern, we shall hereafter be made like Him in completeness. It is for us to choose whether, seeing Him here, we shall, when the brightness of His coming draws near, be flooded with gladness, or whether we shall call upon the rocks and the hills to cover us from the face of Him that sitteth on the Throne. Time is the mother of Eternity. To-day moulds to-morrow, and when all the to-days and to-morrows have become yesterdays, they will have determined our destiny, because they will have settled our characters. Let us keep Christ’s commandments, and we shall be invested with dignity and illuminated with glory, and entrusted to work, far beyond anything that we can conceive here, though, in their farthest reach and most dazzling brightness, these are but the continuation and the perfecting and the feeble beginnings of earthly conflict and service.

Revelation 3:1--LORD OF THE SPIRITS AND THE STARS

‘... These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven star.’ — Revelation 3:1.

The titles by which our Lord speaks of Himself in the letters to the seven churches are chosen to correspond with the spiritual condition of the community addressed. The correspondence can usually be observed without difficulty, and in this case is very obvious. The church in Sardis, to which Christ is presented under this aspect as the possessor of ‘the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars,’ had no heresies needing correction. It had not life enough to produce even such morbid secretions. Neither weeds nor flowers grow in winter. There may be a lower depth than the condition of things when people are all thinking, and some of them thinking wrongly, about Christian truth. Better the heresies of Ephesus and Thyatira than the acquiescent deadness of Sardis.

It had no immoralities. The gross corruptions of some in Pergamum had no parallel there. Philadelphia had none, for it kept close to its Lord, and Sardis is rebuked for none, because its evil was deeper and sadder. It was not flagrantly corrupt, it was only — dead.

Of course it had no persecutions. Faithful Smyrna had tribulation unto death, hanging like a thundercloud overhead, and Philadelphia, beloved of the Lord, was drawing near its hour of trial. But Sardis had not life enough to be obnoxious. Why should the world trouble itself about a dead church? It exactly answers the world’s purpose, and is really only a bit of the world under another name.

To such a church comes flaming in upon its stolid indifference this solemn and yet glad vision of the Lord of the ‘seven Spirits of God,’ and of ‘the seven stars.’

I. Let us think of the condition of the church which especially needs this vision.

It is all summed up in that judgment, pronounced by Him who ‘knows its works’: ‘Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.’ No works either good or bad are enumerated, though there were

some, which He gathers together in one condemnation, as ‘not perfect before God.’

We are not to take that word ‘dead’ in the fullest sense of which it is capable, as we shall see presently. But let us remember how, when on earth, the Lord, whose deep words on that matter we owe mainly to John, taught that all men were either living, because they had been made alive by Him, or dead — how He said, ‘Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man, ye have no life in you,’ and how one of the main ideas of John’s whole teaching is, ‘He that hath the Son hath life.’ This remembrance will help us to give the words their true meaning. Death is the condition of those who are separated from Him, and not receiving from Him the better life into their spirits by communion and faith.

Into this condition the church in Sardis had fallen. People and bishop had lost their hold on Him. Their hearts beat with no vigorous love to Him, but only feebly throbbed with a pulsation which even His hand laid on their bosoms could scarcely detect. Their thoughts had no clear apprehension of Him or of His love. Their communion with Him had ceased. Their lives had no radiant beauty of self-sacrifice for Christ’s sake. Their Christianity was dying out.

But this death was not entire, as is seen from the fact that in the next verse ‘ready to die’ is the expression applied to some among them, or perhaps to some lingering works which still survived. They were at the point of death, moribund, with much of their spiritual life extinct, but here and there a spark among the ashes, which His eye saw, and His breath could fan into a flame. Some works still survived, though not ‘perfect,’ shrunken and sickly like the blanched shoots of a plant feebly growing in a dark cellar.

In some animals of low organisation you may see muscular movements after life is extinct. So churches and individual Christians may keep on performing Christian work for a time after

the true impulse that should produce it has ceases. A train will run for some distance — after the steam has been shut off. Institutions last after the life is out of them, for use and wont keeps up a routine of action, though the true motive is dead, and men may go on for long, nominal adherents of a cause to which they are bound by no living conviction. How much of your Christian activity is the manifestation of life, and how much of it is the ghastly twitchings of a corpse under galvanism?

This death was unseen but by the flame-eyed Christ. These people in Sardis had ‘a name to live.’ They had a high reputation among the Asiatic churches for vigorous Christian character. And they themselves, no doubt, would be very much astonished at the sledgehammer blow of this judgment of their state. One can fancy them saying — ‘We dead! Do not we stand high among our brethren, have we not this and the other Christian work among us? Have we not prophesied in Thy name?’ Yes, and the surest sign of spiritual death is unconsciousness. Paralysis is not felt. Mortification is painless. Frost-bitten limbs are insensitive. They *only* tingle when life is coming back to them. When a man says I am asleep, he is more than half awake.

One characteristic of their death is that they have forgotten what they were in better and happier times, and therefore need the exhortation, ‘Remember how thou hast received and didst hear.’ They have fallen so far that the height on which they once stood is out of their sight, and they are content to lie on the muddy fiat at its base. No stings from conscious decline disturb them. They are too far gone for that. The same round of formal Christian service which marked their decline from their brethren hid it from themselves. That is a solemn fact worth making very clear to ourselves, that the profoundest spiritual decline may be going on in us, and we be all unconscious of it. ‘Samson wist not that his strength was departed from him,’ and in utter ignorance he tried to perform his old feats, only to find his weakness. So the life of our spirits may have ebbed

away, and we know not how much blood we have lost until we try to raise ourselves and sink back fainting. Like some rare essence in a partially closed vessel, put away in some drawer, we go to take it out and find nothing but a faint odour, a rotten cork, and an empty phial. The sure way to lose the precious elixir of a Christian life is to shut it up in our hearts. No life is maintained without food, air, and exercise. We must live on the bread of God which came down from heaven, and breathe the breath of His life-giving Spirit, and use all our power for Him, or else, for all our name to live, and our shrunken, feeble imitations of the motions of life, the eyes which are as a flame of fire will see the sad reality, and the lips into which grace is poured will have to speak over us the one grim word — *dead*.

II. Notice now the thought of Christ presented to much a church. ‘He that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.’

The greater part of the attributes with which our Lord speaks of Himself in the beginnings of the seven letters to the churches are drawn from the features of the majestic vision of the Christ in the first chapter of this book. But nothing there corresponds to the first clause of this description, and so far this designation is singular. There are, however, three other places in the Apocalypse which throw much light on it, and to these we may turn for a moment. In the apostolic salutation at the beginning of the book (1:4) John intakes mercy and grace on the Asiatic churches from the Eternal Father, and from the seven Spirits which are before the throne, and from Christ, the faithful witness. In the grand vision of heavenly realities (ch. 4.) the seer beholds burning before the throne seven lamps of fire, ‘which are the seven Spirits of *God*,’ and when, in the later portion of the same, he beholds the conquering Lamb, who looses the seals of the book of the world’s history, he sees Him having ‘seven eyes which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth,’ an echo of old words of the same prophet who had been John’s precursor in the symbolic use of the ‘candlestick,’

as representing the Church, and who speaks of ‘the seven eyes of the Lord which run to and fro throughout the whole earth’ (Zechariah 4:10).

Clearly in all these passages we have the same idea presented of the Holy Spirit of God in the completeness and manifoldness of its sevenfold energies, conceived of as possessed and bestowed by the Lamb of God, the Lord of all the churches. The use of the plural and the number seven is remarkable, but quite explicable, on the ground of the sacred number expressing perfection, and not inconsistent with personal unity, underlying the variety of manifestations. The personality of the Spirit is sufficiently set forth by that refrain in each epistle, ‘Let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.’ The divinity of the Spirit is plainly involved in the triple benediction at the beginning of the letter, and by the sacred place in which there the Spirit is invoked, midmost between the Father and the Son. The seven lamps before the throne speak of the flaming perfection of that Spirit of burning conceived of as ‘immanent’ in the Divine nature. The seven eyes sent forth into all the earth speak of the perfectness of the energies of that same Spirit, conceived of as flashing and gleaming through all the world.

And the great words of our text agree with that vision of these seven as being the eyes of the Lamb slain, in telling us that that fiery Spirit is poured out on men by the Lord, who had to die before He could cast fire on earth.

This is the thought which a dead or decaying church needs most. There is a Spirit which gives life, and Christ is the Lord of that Spirit. The whole fulness of the Divine energies is gathered in the Holy Spirit, and this is His chiefest work — to breathe into our deadness the breath of life. Many other blessed offices are His, and many other names belong to Him. He is ‘the Spirit of adoption,’ He is ‘the Spirit of Supplication,’ He is ‘the Spirit of Holiness,’ He is ‘the Spirit of Wisdom,’ He is ‘the Spirit of Power and of Love and

of a sound mind,' He is 'the Spirit of Counsel and Might'; but highest of all is the name which expresses His mightiest work, 'the Spirit of Life.' The flaming lamps tell of His flashing brightness; the seven eyes of His watchful Omniscience, and other symbols witness the various sides of His gracious activity on men's hearts. The anointing oil was consecrated from gold to express His work of causing men's whole powers to move sweetly and without friction in the service of God, and of feeding the flame of devotion in the heart. The 'water' spoke of cleansing efficacy, as 'fire' of melting, transforming, purifying power. But the 'rushing mighty wind,' blowing where it listeth, unsustained, and free, visible only in its effects, and yet heard by every ear that is not deaf, sometimes soft and low, as the respiration of a sleeping child, sometimes loud and strong as the storm, is His best emblem. The very name 'the Spirit' emphasises that aspect of His work in which He is conceived of as the source of life. This is the thought of His working which comes with most glad yet solemn meaning to Christian people who feel how low their life has sunk. This is the true antidote to the deadness, so real and common among all communions now, however it is skimmed over and hidden by a kind of film of activity.

Christ has this sevenfold Spirit. That means first that the same peaceful dove which floated down from the open heavens on His meek head, just raised from the baptismal stream, fills now and for ever His whole humanity with its perfect energies. 'God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.' How marvellous that there is a manhood to which the whole fulness of the Spirit of God can be imparted, an 'earthen vessel,' capacious enough to hold this 'treasure'! How marvellous that there is a Son of man, who is likewise Son of God, and has the Spirit, not only for His own human perfecting, but to shed it forth on all who love Him! It is the slain Lamb, who has the seven Spirits of God. That is to say, it was impossible that the fulness of spiritual influence could be poured out quickening on men until Christ had died, and by His death He has become the dispenser to the world of the principle of life. In His

hands is the gift. He is the Lord of the Spirit, ascended up to give to men, according to the measure of their capacity, of that Spirit which He has received, until we all come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. How unlike the relation of other teachers to their disciples! Their spirit is the very thing they cannot give. They can impart teaching, they can give a method and principles, and a certain direction to the mind. They can train imitators. But they are like Elijah, knowing not if their spirit will rest on their successors, and sure that, if it do, it has not been their gift. The departing prophet had to say to the petitioner for an elder son's legacy of his spirit, 'Thou hast asked a hard thing,' but Christ ascending let that gift fall from His uplifted hands of blessing, and the dove that abode on Him fluttered downwards from the hiding cloud, to rest on the Apostles' heads, as they steadfastly gazed up into heaven. Therefore they went back to Jerusalem with joy, even before the fuller gift of Pentecost.

Pentecost was but a transitory sign of a perpetual gift. The rushing wind died into calm, and the flickering tongues of fire had faded before the spectators reached the place. Nor did the miracle of utterance last either. But whilst all that is past, the substance remains. The fire of Pentecost has not died down into chilly embers, nor have the 'rivers of living water, promised by the lips of incarnate truth, been swallowed up in the sands or failed at their source. He is perpetually bestowing the Spirit of God upon His Church. We are only too apt to forget the present activity of our ascended Lord. We think of His mighty work as 'finished' on the *Cross*, and do not conceive clearly and strongly enough His continuous work which is being done, now and ever, on the throne. That work is not only His priestly intercession and representation of us in heaven, but is also His working on earth in the bestowal on all His followers of that Divine Spirit to be the life of their lives and the fountain of all their holiness, wisdom, strength, and joy. For ever is He near us, ready to quicken and to bless. He will breathe in silent ways grace and power into us, and when life is low, He will pour a fuller tide into our

veins. He knows all our deadness and He can cure it all He is Himself the life, and He is the Lord and giver of life, because the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth are the seven eyes of the slain Lamb.

One great channel through which spiritual life is imparted to a dying church is suggested by the other part of the description of our *Lord* here as having ‘the seven stars.’ The ‘stars’ are the ‘angels of the churches,’ by whom we are probably to understand their bishops and pastors. If so, then we have a striking thought, symbolised by the juxtaposition. Christ, as it were, holds in the one hand the empty vessels, and in the other the brimming cup, from which He will pour out the supply for their emptiness.

The lesson taught us is, that in a dead church the teachers mostly partake of the deadness, and are responsible for it. But, further, we learn that Christ’s way of reviving a decaying and all but effete church is oftenest by filling single men full of His Spirit, and then sending them out to kindle a soul under the ribs of death. So Luther brought back life to the churches in his day. So the Wesleys brought about the great evangelical revival of last century. So let us pray that it may be again in our day when another century is drawing near its end, and the love of many has grown cold.

If we regard the ‘angels’ as being but ideal representatives of the churches themselves, then we may gather from the juxtaposition of the two clauses a lesson which is ever true. In Christ’s one hand is the perfect supply for all our need, wisdom *for* our blindness, might to clothe our weakness, righteousness for our sin, life to flood our drooping souls. In Christ’s other hand He holds us all, and surely He will not leave us empty while we are within His arm’s length of such fulness. Let us look to Him alone for all we need, and rejoice to know that we, held in His grasp, are near His heart, the home of infinite love, and near His hand, the source of infinite supply of strength and grace.

III. Consider, now, the practical uses of these thoughts.

That vision should shame us into penitent consciousness of our own deadness. When we contrast the little life we possess with the abundance waiting to be given, like the poor scanty supply in some choked millstream compared with the full-flashing store in the brimming river, we may well be stricken with shame. So much offered and so little possessed; such fiery energy of love possible, and poor tepid feeling, actual Such a mighty breath of God blowing all about us, and we lying as if enchanted and becalmed, with scarce wind enough to keep our idle sails from flapping. There in Jesus Christ is the measure of what we might possess, and the pattern of what we should possess — -does it not bow us in penitence, because of what we do possess?

But while ashamed and penitent, we should be kept by that vision from despondent thoughts, as if the future could never be different from the past. It is not good to think too much of our failure and emptiness, lest penitence darken into despair, and shame cut the sinews of our souls and unfit them for all brave endeavour. Let us think of Christ's fulness and hope, as well as repent.

Let it stir us too to seek for the reason why we have not more of Christ's life. What is the film which prevents the light from reaching our eyes? I remember once seeing by a roadside a stone trough for cattle to drink from empty, because the pipe from which it was fed was stopped by a great plug of ice. That is the reason why many of our hearts are so empty of Christ's Spirit. We have plugged the channel with a mass of ice. Close communion with Jesus Christ is the only means of possessing His Spirit. With penitence let us go back to Him, and let us hold fast by His hand. If we listen to Him, trust Him, keep our minds and hearts attent on Him, He will breathe on us as of old, and as we hear Him say, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost,' a diviner life will pass into our veins, and the law of the

Spirit of life in Christ will make us free from the law of sin and death.

Revelation 3:4--WALKING IN WHITE

‘Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy.’ — Revelation 3:4.

THE fond fancy that the primitive Church was a Better Church than to-day's is utterly Blown to pieces by the facts that are obvious in Scripture. Here, in the Apostolic time, under the very eye of the fervent Apostle of Love, and so recently after the establishment of Christianity on the seaboard of Asia, was a church, a young church, with all the faults of a decrepit old one, and in which Jesus Christ Himself could find nothing to commend, and about which He could only say that it had a name to live and was dead. The church at Sardis suffered no persecution. It was much too like the world to be worth the trouble of persecuting. It had no heresy; it did not care enough shout religion to breed heresies. It was simply utterly apathetic and dead. And yet there was a salt in it, or it would have been rotten as well as dead. There were ‘a few names, even in Sardis,’ which, in the midst of all the filth, had kept their skirts white. They had ‘not defiled their garments,’ and so with beautiful congruity the promise is given to them — ‘they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.’ The promise, I said. It would have Been wiser to have said the *promises*, for there are a great many wrapped up in germ in these quiet, simple words. Nearly all that we know, and all that we need to know, about that mysterious future is contained in them. So my put-pose now is, with perfectly inartificial simplicity, just to take these words and weigh them as a jeweller might weigh in his scales stones which are very small but very precious.

I. We have here, then, the promise of continuous and progressive activity—‘they shall walk.’

In Scripture we continually find that metaphor of the 'walk' as equivalent to an outward life of action. To make that idea prominent in our conceptions of the future is a great gain, for it teaches us at once how imperfect and one-sided are the thoughts about it which come with such fascination to most of us wearied men. It is a wonderful, unconscious confession of the troubled, toilsome, restless lives which most of us live, that the sweetest and most frequently recurring thought about the great future is, 'There remaineth a rest for the people of God'; where the wearied muscles may be relaxed, and the tortured hearts may be quiet. But whilst we must not say one word to break or even to diminish the depth and sweetness of that aspect of the Christian hope, neither must we forget that it is only one phase of the complete whole, and that this promise of the text has to be taken with it. 'They shall walk,' in all the energies of a constant activity, far more intense than it was at its highest here, and yet never, by one hair's breadth, trenching upon the serenity and indisturbance of that perpetual repose. We have to put together the two ideas, which to all our experience are antagonistic, but which yet are not really so, but only complementary, as the two halves of a sphere may be, in order to get the complete round. We have to say, with this very book of the Apocalypse, which goes so deep into the secrets of heaven, 'His servants serve Him and see His face' — uniting together in one harmonious whole the apparent and, as far as earth's experience goes, the real opposites of continual contemplation and continual activity of service. It is so hard for us in this life to find out practically for ourselves how much to give to each of these, that it is blessed to know that there comes a time for all of us, if we will, when that difficulty will solve itself, and Mary and Martha shall be one person, continually serving and yet continually sitting, no more troubled about many things, in the quiet of the Master's presence. 'They shall walk,' harmonising work and rest, contemplation and service.

And then there is the other thought, too, involved in that pregnant word, of continuous advancement, growing every moment, through the dateless cycles, nearer and nearer to the true centre of our souls, and up into the loftiness of perfection. We do not know what ministries of love and service may wait for Christ's servants yonder, but of this we can be quite sure, that all the faculties for service which we see crippled and limited by the hindrances of earth will find in the future a worthier sphere. Do you think it likely that God should so waste His wealth as to take men and redeem them and sanctify them, and prepare them by careful discipline and strengthen their powers by work, and then, just when they are out of their apprenticeship and ready for larger service, should condemn them to idleness? Is that like Him? Must it not rather be that there is a wider field for the faculties that were trained here; and that, whatsoever there may be in eternity, there will be no idleness there?

II. Still further, here is the further promise of companionship with Christ. 'They shall walk *with Me.*'

'How can two walk together except they be agreed?' If there be this promised union, it can only be because of the completeness of sympathy and the likeness of character between Christ and His companions. The unity between Christ and His followers in the heavens is but the carrying into perfectness of the imperfect union that makes all the real blessedness of life here upon earth.

'*With Me.*' Why I that union with Christ is all we know about heaven. All the rest is imagery, that is reality. All the rest is material symbol, that is what it all means.

In the sweet, calm words of Richard Baxter's simple, but deep song

'My knowledge of that life is small, The eye of faith is dim;

But 'tis enough that Christ knows all, And I shall be with Him.'

We ask ourselves and one another, and God's Word, a great many questions about that unseen life; and sometimes it seems to us as if it would have been so much easier for us to bear the burdens that are laid upon us if some of these questions could have been answered. But we do not really need to know more than that we shall be 'ever with the Lord.' Two, who are ever with Him, cannot be far from one another. So we may thankfully feel that the union of all is guaranteed by the union of each with Him. And for the rest we can wait.

Only remember that to walk with Him implies that those who were but little children here have grown up to maturity. We try to tread in His footsteps here, but at the best we follow Him with tottering feet and short steps, as children trying to keep up with an elder brother. But there we shall keep step and walk in His company, side by side. For earth the law is, 'leaving us an example that we should follow His steps.' For heaven the law is 'they shall walk with Me'; or, as the other promise of this book has it, 'they shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.' No heights are so high to which He rises but He will make our feet like hind's feet to tread upon the high places; no glories so great but we shall share them. Nothing in His divine nature shall part Him from us, but we shall be ever with Him. Let us comfort one another with these words.

III. Further, my text speaks a promise of the perfection of purity. 'They shall walk with Me *in white*.'

The white garment, of course, is a plain metaphor-for unsullied purity of moral character. And it is worth notice that the word employed by the Apocalyptic seer here for white, as indeed is the case throughout the manifold references to that heavenly colour which abound in this book, implies no dead ghastly white, but a flashing glistening whiteness, as of sunshine upon snow, which, I suppose, is the whitest thing that human eyes can look upon

undazzled. So of the same radiant tint as the great White Throne on which He sits shall be the vestures of those that follow Him.

The white robe is the conqueror's robe, the white robe is the priest's robe, the white robe is the copy of His who stood in that solitary spot on Mount Hermon, just below its snowy summit, with garments 'so as no fuller on earth could white them'; white as the driven and sunlit snow that sparkled above. Perhaps we are to think of a glorified body as being the white garment. Perhaps it may be rather that the image expresses simply the conception of entire moral purity, But in either case it means the loftiest manifestation of the most perfect Christlike beauty as granted to all His followers.

IV. And so, lastly, note the condition of all these promises.

'Thou hast a few names, even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy.' The only thing that makes it possible for any man to have that future life of active communion with Jesus Christ, in perfect beauty of inward character and of outward form, is that here he shall by faith keep himself 'unspotted from the world.' There is a congruity and proportion between the earthly life and the future life. Heaven is but the life of earth prolonged and perfected by the dropping away of all the evil, the strengthening and lifting to completeness of all the good. And the only thing that fits a man for the white robe of glory is purity of character down here on earth.

There is nothing said here directly about the means by which that purity can be attained or maintained. That is sufficiently taught us in other places, but what in this saying Christ insists upon is that, however it is got, it must be got, and that there is no life of Blessedness, of holiness and glory, beyond the grave, except for those for whom there is the life of aspiration after, and in some real measure possession of, moral purity and righteousness and goodness here upon earth.

Do not be surprised at that word — ‘They are *worthy*.’ It is an evangelical word. It declares the perfect congruity between the life on earth and the issue and reward of the life in heaven. And it holds up to us the great principle that purity here is crowned with glory hereafter. If the white garments could be put upon a black soul they would be like the poisoned shirt on the demigod in the Greek legend, they would bite into the flesh, and burn and madden. But it is impossible, and for ever and ever it remains true that only those who have kept their garments undefiled here shall ‘walk in white.’ It does not need absolute cleanness from all spot, God be thanked! But it does need, first, that we shall have ‘washed our robes and made them white’ in the ‘blood of the Lamb.’ And then that we shall keep them white, by continual recourse to the blood that cleanses from all sin, and by continual effort after purity like His own and received from Him.

They who come back as prodigals in rags, and have their filthy tatters exchanged for the clean garment of Christ’s righteousness, with which by faith they are invested, and who then take heed to follow Him, with loins girt and robes kept undefiled, and ever washed anew in His cleansing blood, shall be of the heavenly companions of the glorified Christ, joined to Him in all His dominion, and clothed in flashing white new like the body of His glory.

Revelation 3:5-- V. THE VICTOR’S LIFE-ROBE

‘He that overcometh the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.’ — Revelation 3:5.

THE brightest examples of earnest Christianity are generally found amidst widespread indifference. If a man does not yield to the prevailing tone, it is likely to quicken him into strong opposition. So it was in this Church of Sardis. It was dead. That was the summing

up of its condition. It had a name to live, and the name only made the real deadness more complete.

But there were exceptions: souls ablaze with Divine love, who in the midst of corruption had kept their robes clean, and whom Christ's own voice declared to be worthy to walk with Him in white.

That great eulogium, which immediately precedes our text, is referred to in the first of its triple promises; as is even more distinctly seen if we read our text as the Revised Version-does: 'He that overcometh, the same shall thus be clothed in white raiment'; the 'thus' pointing back to the preceding words, and widening the promise to the faithful few in Sardis so as to extend to all victors in all Churches throughout all time.

Now the remaining two clauses of our text also seem to be coloured by the preceding parts of this letter. We read in it, 'Thou hast a name that thou livest'; and again, 'Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; Our text catches up the word, and moulds its promises accordingly. One is more negative, the other more positive; both link on to a whole series of Scriptural representations.

Now all these declarations of the blessedness of the victors are, of course, intensely symbolical, and we can but partially translate them. I simply seek now to take them as they stand, and to try to grasp at least some part of the dim but certain hopes which they partly reveal and partly hide. There are, then, three things here.

I. The victor's robes.

'He that overcometh, the same shall (thus) be clothed in white raiment.' White, of course, is the festal colour. But it is more than that: it is the heavenly colour. In this book we read of white thrones, white horses, hairs 'white as snow,' white stones. But we are to notice that the word here employed 'does not merely mean a dead

whiteness, which is the absence of colour, but a lustrous and glistening white, like that of snow smitten by sunshine, or like that which dazzled the eyes of the three on the Mount of Transfiguration, when they saw the robes of the glorified Christ ‘whitened as no fuller on earth could white them.’ So that we are to associate with this metaphor, not only the thoughts of purity, festal joy, victory, but likewise the thought of lustrous glory.

Then the question arises, can we translate that metaphor of the robe into anything that will come closer to the fact? Now I may remind you that this figure runs through the whole of Scripture. We find, for instance, in one of the old prophets, a vision in which the taking away of Israel’s sin is represented by the high priest, the embodiment of the nation, standing in filthy garments, which were stripped off him and fair ones put on him. We find our Lord giving forth a parable of a man who came to the feast not having on a wedding garment. We find the Apostle Paul speaking frequently, in a similar metaphor, of putting off an ancient nature and putting on a new one. We find in this book, not only the references in my text and the context, but the great saying concerning those that have ‘washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,’ and the final benediction pronounced upon those who washed their robes, that they may ‘have a right to enter through the gate into the city.’

Putting all these things together — and the catalogue might be extended — we have to observe that the signification of this symbol is not that of something wholly external to or apart from the man, but that it is rather that part of his nature, so to speak, which is visible to beholders, and we may translate it very simply — the robe is character. So the promise of my text, brought down so far as we can bring it to its primary element, is of a purity and lustrous glory of personal character, which shall be visible to any eye that may look upon the wearer. What more there may be found in it when we are ‘clothed upon with our house which is from heaven,’

if so be that ‘being clothed we shall not be found naked,’ I do not presume to say. I do not speculate, I simply translate the plain words of Scripture into the truth which they represent.

But now I would have you notice that this, like all the promises of the New Testament in regard to a future life, lays main stress on what a man is. Not where we are, not what we have, not what we do or know, make heaven, but *what we are*. The promises are clothed for us, as they must needs be, in sensuous images, which sensuous men have interpreted in far too low a sense; or sometimes have not been even at the trouble of interpreting. But in reality there are but two facts that we *know* about that future, and they are smelted together, as cause and effect, in the great saying of the most spiritual of the Apostles: ‘We shall be like Him’ — that is what we shall be

— ‘for we shall see Him as He is.’ So, then, purity of character, when all the stains on the garments, spotted by the flesh, shall have melted away; purity of character, when temptations shall have no more food in us and so conflict shall not be needful; purity like Christ’s own, and derived from the vision of Him, according to the great law that beholding is transformation, and the light we see is the light which we reflect — this is the heart of this great promise.

But notice that the main thing about it is that this lustrous purity of a perfected character is declared to be the direct outcome of the character, that was made by effort and struggle carried on in faith here upon earth. In this clause the familiar ‘I will give’ does not appear; and the thought of the condition upon earth working itself out into the glory of lustrous purity in the heavens is made even more emphatic by the adoption of the reading to which I have referred: ‘Shall thus be clothed,’ which points us backwards to what preceded, where our Lord’s own voice declares that the men who have not defiled their garments upon earth are they who ‘shall walk with Him in white.’ The great law of continuity and of increase, so that the dispositions cultivated here rise to sovereign power

hereafter, and that what was tendency, and struggle, and imperfect realisation upon earth becomes fact and complete possession in the heavens, is declared in the words before us.

What solemn importance that thought gives to the smallest of our victories or defeats here on earth! They, are threads in the web out of which our garment is to be cut. After all, yonder as here, we are dressed in homespun, and we make our clothing and shape it for our wear. That truth is perfectly consistent with the other truth on which it reposes — that the Christian man owes to Christ the reception of the new garment of purity and holiness. The evangelical doctrine, ‘not by works of righteousness which we have done,’ and its complement in the words of my text, are perfectly harmonious. We cannot weave the web except Christ gives us yarn, nor can we *work* out our own salvation except Christ bestows upon us the salvation which we work out. The two things go together. Let us remember that, whilst in one aspect the souls that were all clad in filthy garments are arrayed as a bridegroom decketh his bride with a fair vesture, in another aspect we ourselves, by our own efforts, by our own struggles, By our own victories, have to weave and fashion and cut and sew the dress which we shall wear for ever.

II. Notice here the victor’s place in the Book of Life.

‘I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life.’ I have pointed out that in the former clause the characteristic ‘I will give’ is omitted, in order that emphatic expression might be secured for the thought that in one aspect the reward of the future is automatic or self-working. But that thought is by no means a complete statement of the truth with regard to this matter; and so, in both of the subsequent clauses, we have our Lord representing Himself (for it is never to be forgotten that these promises are Christ’s own words from heaven) as clothed with His judicial functions, and as determining the fates of men. ‘I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life.’ That is a solemn and tremendous claim, that Christ’s

finger can write, and Christ's finger can erase, the name from that register.

Now I have said that all these clauses link themselves on to a whole series of Scriptural representatives. I showed that briefly in regard to the former; I would do so in regard to the present one.

You will remember, perhaps, in the early history of Israel, that Moses, with lofty self-devotion, prayed God to blot his name out of His book, if only by that sacrifice Israel's sin might be forgiven. You may recall too, possibly, how one of the prophets speaks of 'those that are written amongst the living in Jerusalem,' and how Daniel, in his eschatological vision, refers to those whose names were or were not written in the book. I need not remind you of how our Lord commanded HIS disciples to rejoice not in that the spirits were subject to them, but rather to rejoice because their names were written in heaven. Nor need I do more than simply refer to the Apostle's tender and pathetic excuse for not remembering the names of some of his fellow-workers, that it mattered very little, because their names were written in the Book of Life. Throughout this Apocalypse, too, we find subsequent allusions of the same nature, just as in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read of the 'Church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven.' Now all these, thus put together, suggest two ideas: one which I do not deal with here — viz., that of a burgess-roll — and the other that of a register of those who truly live. And that is the thought that is suggested here. The promise of my text links on to the picture in the letter of the condition of the Church at Sardis, which was dead, and says that the victor will truly and securely and for ever possess life, with all the clustered Blessedness which, like a nebula unresolved, gather themselves, dim yet radiant, round that great word.

But what I especially note here is, not so much this reiteration of the fundamental and all-embracing promise which has met us in preceding letters, the promise of a secure, eternal life, as that plain

and solemn implication that a name may be struck out of that book. Theological exigencies compelled our fathers to deny that, but surely the words of our text are too plain to be neglected or misunderstood. It is possible that a name, like the name of a dishonest attorney, shall Be struck off the rolls. Do not let any desire for theological symmetry blind you, Brother, to that fact.

Take it into account in your daily lives. It is possible for a man to ‘cast away his confidence.’ It is possible for him to make shipwreck of the faith. Some of you will remember that pathetic story of Cromwell’s deathbed, when he asked one of his ghostly counsellors whether it was true that ‘once in the covenant, always in the covenant?’ He got the answer, ‘Yes’; and then he said, ‘I know I once was,’ and so died. Brethren, it is the victors whose names are kept upon the roll. These people at Sardis had a name to live, and they thought that their names were in the Book of Life. And when it was opened, lo! a blot. Some of us have seen upon the granite of Egyptian temples the cartouches of a defeated dynasty chiselled out by their successors. The granite on which this list is written is not so hard but that a man, by his own sin, falling away from the Master, may chisel out his name. A student goes up for his examination. He thinks he has succeeded. The pass-lists come out, and his name is not there. Take care that you are not building upon past faith, but remember that it is the *victor’s* name that is not blotted out of the Book of Life.

III. Lastly, the victor’s recognition by the Commanding Officer.

‘I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.’ There, too, we have a kind of mosaic, made up of previous Scripture declarations. Our Lord, twice in the Gospels — and on neither occasion in the Gospel according to St. John — has similar sayings; hence about confessing the name of him who confesses His name ‘before the Father’; once about confessing it ‘before the holy

angels.’ Here these are smelted together into the one great recognition by Jesus Christ of the victor as being His.

Now I need not remind you of how emphatically, to this clause also, the remark which I have made with regard to the former one applies, and how tremendous and inexplicable, except on one hypothesis, is this same assumption by Christ of judicial functions which determine the fate and the standing of men.

But I would rather point to the thought that this promise carries with it, not only Christ’s judicial recognition of the victor, but also the thought of loving relationship, of close friendship, of continual regard. He ‘confesses the name’ — that means that He takes to His heart, and loves and cares for the person.

Is it not the highest honour that can be given to any soldier, to have honourable mention in the general’s despatches? It matters very little what becomes of our names upon earth, though there they be dark, and swift oblivion devours them almost as soon as we are dead, except in so far as they may live for a little while in the memory of two or three that loved us. That is the fate of most of us. And surely ‘the hollow wraith of dying fame’ may ‘fade wholly,’ and we ‘exult,’ if Jesus Christ confess our name. It matters little who forgets us if He remembers us. It matters even less what the judgments pronounced in our obituaries may be, if He says, ‘That man is Mine, and I own him.’ Ah! brethren, what a reversal of the world’s judgments there will be one day; and how names that have been blown through a thousand trumpets, and had hosannas sung to them, and been welcomed with a tumult of acclaim through generations, will sink into oblivion and never be heard of any *more*, and the unseen and obscure men who lived by, and for, and with Jesus Christ, will come to the front! Praise from Him is praise indeed.

Now, brethren, the upshot of it all is that life here derives its meaning and its consecration from life hereafter. The question for us

is, do we habitually realise that we are weaving the garment we must wear, be it a poisoned robe that shall eat into our flesh like fire, or be it a vesture clean and white? Do we brace ourselves for the obscure struggles of our little lives, feeling that they are not small because they carry eternal consequences? Are we content to be unknown because well known by Him, and to live so that He shall acknowledge us in the day when to be acknowledged by Him means glory and blessedness beyond all hopes and all symbols; and to be disowned by Him means ruin and despair? You know the conditions of victory. Lay them to heart, and its issues, and the tragical results of death; and then cleave, with mind and heart and will, to Him who can make you more than conquerors, who will change your frayed and dented armour for the fine linen, clean and white, and will point to you, before His Father and the universe, and say, ‘This man was one of Thy faithful soldiers.’ That will be honour indeed. Do you see to it that you make it yours.

Revelation 3:10--KEEPING AND KEPT

‘Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the war of temptation.’ — Revelation 3:10.

THERE are only two of the seven churches which receive no censure or rebuke from Jesus Christ; and of these two — viz., the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia — the former receives but little praise though much sympathy. This church at Philadelphia stands alone in the abundance and unalloyed character of the eulogium which Christ passes upon it. He doles out His praise with a liberal hand, and nothing delights Him more than when He can commend even our imperfect work. He does not wait for our performances to reach the point of absolute sinlessness before He approves them. Do you think that a father or a mother, when its child was trying to please him or her, would be at all likely to say, ‘Your gift is worth very little. I could buy a far better one in a

shop'? And do you think that Jesus Christ's love and delight in the service of His children are less generous than ours? Surely not.

So here we are not to suppose that these good souls in Philadelphia lived angelic lives of unbroken holiness because Jesus Christ has nothing but praise for them. Rather we are to learn the great thought that, in all our poor, stained service, He recognises the central motive and main drift, and, accepting these, is glad when He can commend. 'Thou hast kept the word of My patience,' and, with a beautiful reciprocity, 'I will keep those that keep My word from' and 'in the hour of temptation.'

I. Now notice, in the first place, the thing kept. That is a remarkable phrase 'the word of My patience.' A verse or two before, our Lord had said to the same church, evidently speaking about the same thing in them, 'Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word.' This expression, 'the word of My patience,' seems to be best understood in the same general way as that other which precedes it, and upon which it is a commentary and an explanation. It refers, not to individual commandments to patience, but to the entire gospel message, the general whole of 'the Word of Jesus Christ' communicated therein to men. That is a profound and beautiful way of characterising the sum of the revelation of God in Christ as 'the word of His patience,' and is one which yields, ample reward to meditative thought.

The whole gospel, then, is so named, inasmuch as it all records the patience which Christ exercised.

What does the New Testament mean by 'patience'? Not merely endurance, although, of course, that is included, but endurance of such a sort as will secure persistence in work, in spite of all the opposition and sufferings which may come in the way. The world's patience simply means, 'Pour on, I will endure.' The New Testament patience has in it the idea of perseverance as well as of endurance, and means, not only that we bow to the pain or the

sorrow, but that nothing in sorrow, nothing in trial, nothing in temptation, nothing in antagonism, has the smallest power to divert us from doing what we know to be right. The man who will reach his hand through the smoke of hell to lay hold of plain duty is the patient man of the New Testament. 'Though there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the housetops, I will go in.' That speech of Luther's, though uttered with a little too much energy, expressed the true idea of Christian patience. High above the stormy and somewhat rough determination of the servant towers, calm and gentle, and therefore stronger, the 'patience' of the Lord, and the whole story of His life on earth may well be regarded, from this point of view, as the record of His unfaltering and meek continuance in obedience to the Father's will, in the face of opposition and suffering. His life, to use a secular word, was the most 'heroic' ever lives. Before Him was the thing to be done, and between Him and it were massed such battalions of antagonism and evil as never were mustered in opposition to any other saintly soul upon earth. And through all He went persistently, with 'His face like a flint,' of set purpose to do the work for which He came into the world.

But there was no fierce antagonism about Jesus Christ's patience. His persistence, in spite of all obstacles and opposition, was the persistence of meekness, the heroism of gentleness. Patience in the lower sense of quiet endurance, as well as in the higher, of heroic scorn of all that opposition could do to hinder the realisation of the Father's will, is deeply stamped upon His life. We think of His gentleness, of His meekness, of His humility, of all the softer, and, as men insolently call them, the more feminine virtues in Christ's character. But I do not know that we often enough think of what men, with equal insolence and shortsightedness, call the masculine virtues of which, too, He is the great Exemplar, that magnificent, unparalleled, and perfectly quiet and unostentatious invincibility of will and heroism of settled resolve with which He pressed towards the mark, though the mark was a cross.

This is the theme of the gospel story, and this Apocalypse of a gentle Christ, whose gentleness was the gentleness of inflexible strength, this story, or word ‘of My patience,’ is that which we are to lay upon our hearts. For that name is fitly applied to the gospel, inasmuch as it enjoins upon every one of us in our degree, and in regard of the far easier tasks and slighter antagonisms with which we have to do and which we have to meet, to make Christ’s persistence the model for our lives. So the whole morality of Christianity may almost Be gathered up into this one expression, which sets forth at once the law and the supreme motive for fulfilling it. Unwelcome and hard tasks are made easy and delightful when we hear Jesus say, ‘The record of My patience is thy pattern and thy power. Be like Me, and thou shalt be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.’

II. Notice, next, the keepers of this word.

The metaphor represents to us the action of one who, possessing some valuable thing, puts it into some safe place, takes great care of it, carries it very near to the heart, perhaps within the robe, and watches tenderly and jealously over it. So’ thou hast kept the word of My patience.’

There are two ways by which Christians are to do that; the one is by inwardly cherishing the word, and the other by outwardly obeying it. There should be both the inward counting it dear and precious, and treasuring it in mind and heart, as the Psalmist says, ‘Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I should not offend against Thee,’ and also the regulation of conduct which we more usually regard as keeping the commandment.

Let me say a word, and it shall only be a *word*, about each of these two things. I am afraid that the plain practical duty of reading their Bibles is getting to be a much neglected duty amongst professing Christian people. I do not know how you are to keep the words of Christ’s patience in your heart, and minds if you do not read them. I

am afraid that most Christian congregations nowadays do their systematic and prayerful study of the New Testament by proxy, and expect their ministers to read the Bible for them and to tell them what is there. A mother will sometimes take a morsel of her child's food into her mouth, and half masticate it first before she passes it to the little gums. I am afraid that newspapers, and circulating libraries, and magazines, and little religious books — very good in their way, but secondary and subordinate — have taken the place that our fathers used to have filled by honest reading of God's Word. And that is one of the reckons, and I believe it is a very large part of the reason, why so many professing Christians do not come up to this standard; and instead of 'running with patience the race that is set before them,' *walk* in an extraordinarily leisurely fashion, by fits and starts, and sometimes with long intervals, in which they sit still on the road, and are not a mile farther at a year's end than they were when it began. There never was, and there never will be, vigorous Christian life unless there be an honest and habitual study of God's Word. There is no short-cut by which Christians can reach the end of the race. Foremost among the methods by which their eyes are enlightened and their hearts rejoiced are application to the eyes of their understanding of that eye-salve, and the hiding in their hearts of that sweet solace and fountain of gladness, the Word of Christ's patience, the revelation of God's will. The trees whose roots are laved and branches freshened by that river have leaves that never wither, and all their blossoms set.

But the word is kept by continual obedience in - action as well as by inward treasuring. Obviously the inward must precede the outward. Unless we can say with the Psalmist, 'Thy word have I hid in my heart,' we shall not be able to say with him, 'I have not hid Thy righteousness within my heart.' If the Word of the Lord is to sound like a rousing trumpet-blast from our lives, it must first be heard in secret by us, and its music linger in our listening hearts.

We need this brave persistence in daily life if we are not to fail wholly. Very instructive in this aspect are many of the Scripture allusions to 'patience' a, essential to the various virtues and blessednesses of Christian life.

For example, 'In your patience ye shall win your souls.' Only he who presses right on, in spite of all that externals can do to hinder him from realising his conviction of duty, is the lord of his own spirit. All others are slaves to something or some one. By persistence in the paths of Christian service, no matter what around or within us may rise up to hinder us, and by such persistence only, do we become masters of ourselves. Many a man has to walk, as in the old days of ordeal by fire, over a road strewn with hot ploughshares, to get to the place where God will have him to be. And if he does not flinch, though he may reach the goal with scorched feet, he will reach it with a quiet heart, and possess himself, whatever he may lose.

Again, the Lord Himself says to us, 'These are those which bring forth fruit with patience.' There is no growth of Christian character, no flowering of Christian conduct, no setting of incipient virtues into the mature fruit of settled habit, without this persistent adherence in the face of all antagonism, to the dictates of conscience and the commandment of Christ. It is the condition of bringing forth fruit, some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundredfold.

Again the Scripture says, demanding this same persistence, gentle abstinence, and sanctified stiffneckedness, 'Run with perseverance the race that is set before you.' There is no progress in the Christian course, no accomplishing the *stadia* through which we have to pass, except there be this dogged keeping at what we know to be duty, in spite of all the reluctance of trembling limbs, and the cowardice of our poor hearts.

III. We have here Christ keeping the keepers of His word.

‘Because thou hast kept the word of My patience I will keep thee from,’ and *in*, ‘the hour of temptation.’ There is a beautiful reciprocity, as I said. Christ will do for us as we have done with His word. Christ still does in heaven what He did upon earth. In the great high priest’s prayer recorded by the evangelist who was also the amanuensis of these letters from heaven, Jesus said, ‘I kept them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me, and I guarded them, and not one of them perished.’ And now, speaking from heaven, He continues His earthly guardianship, and bids us trust that, just as when with His followers here, He sheltered them as a parent bird does its young, fluttering round them, bearing them up on its wings, and drew them within the sacred circle of His sweet, warm, strong, impregnable protection, so, if we keep the word of His patience, cherishing the story of His life in our hearts, and humbly seeking to mould our lives after its sweet and strong beauty, He will keep us in the midst of, and also from, the hour of temptation. The Christ in heaven is as near each trembling heart and feeble foot, to defend and to uphold, as was the Christ upon earth.

He does not promise to keep us at a distance from temptation, so as that we shall not have to face it, but from means, as any that can look at the original will see, that He will save us *out of it*, we having previously been in it, so as that ‘the hour of temptation’ shall not be the hour of falling. Yes! the man whose heart is filled with the story of Christ’s patience, and who is seeking to keep that word, will walk in the midst of the fire-damp of this mine that we live in, as with a safety lamp in his hand, and there will be no explosion. If we keep our hearts in the love of God, and in that great word of Christ’s patience, the gunpowder in our nature will be wetted, and when a spark falls upon it there will be no flash. Outward circumstances will not be emptied of their power to tempt, but our susceptibility will be deadened in proportion as we keep the word of the patience of the patient Christ.

The lustre of earthly brightnesses will have no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth, and when set by the side of heavenly gifts will show black against their radiance, as would electric light between the eye and the sun.

It is great to wrestle with temptation and fling it, but it is greater to be so strong that it never grasps us.

It is great to be victor over passions and lusts, and to put our heel upon them and suppress them, but it is better to be so near the Master that they have crouched before Him, and ‘the lion eats straw like the ox.’

To such blessed state we attain if, and only if, we draw near to Him and in daily communion with Him secure that the secret of His patient continuance in well-doing is repeated in us. So we shall be lifted above temptation. That great word of His patience, and the spirit which goes with the word, will be for us like the cotton wool that chemists put into the flask which they wish to seal hermetically from the approach of microscopic gems of corruption. It will let all the air through, but it will keep all the infinitesimal animated points of poison out. It will filter the most polluted atmosphere, and bring it to our lungs clean and clear. ‘If thou keep the word of My patience I will keep thee from the hour of temptation.’

Revelation 3:11 --‘THY CROWN’

‘...Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.’ — Revelation 3:11.

THE Philadelphian Church, to which these stirring words are addressed, is the only church of the seven in which there was nothing that Christ rebuked. It had no faults, or at least no recorded faults, either of morals or of doctrine. It had had no great storm of persecution beating upon it, although one was threatened. But yet, although thus free from blame and occasion for censure, it was not

beyond the need of stimulating exhortation, not beyond the need of wholesome warning, not beyond the reach of danger and possible loss. 'That no man take thy crown' — as long as Christian men are here, so long have they to watch against the tendency of received truth to escape their hold because of its very familiarity; of things that are taken for granted to become impotent and to slip, and so for the crown to fall from the head, which is all unconscious of its discrowned shame.

We have here, then, three things: 'thy crown'; the possibility of losing it; the way to secure it.

I. Now, as to the first. It contributes to the understanding of the meaning of the metaphor to remember that the crown spoken of here is not the symbol of royalty, not the golden or other circlet which kings and emperors wore, but the floral wreath or garland which in ancient social life played many parts: was laid on the temples of the victors in the games, was wreathed around the locks of the conquering general, was placed upon the anointed heads of brides and of feasters, was the emblem of victory, of festivity, of joy. And it is this crown, not the symbol of dominion, but the symbol of a race accomplished and a conquest won, an outward and visible sign of a festal day, with all its abundance and ease and abandonment to delight, which the apocalyptic vision holds out before the Christian man.

The crown is a common figure all through the New Testament, and it may help us to grasp the fulness of the meaning of the metaphor if we just recall in a sentence or two the various instances of its occurrence. It is spoken about under three designations, as a crown of 'life,' of 'righteousness,' of 'glory'; the first and last designating it in reference to that of which it may be supposed to consist, namely, life and glory; the centre one designating it rather in reference to that of which it is the reward. The righteousness of earth is crowned by the more abundant life and the more radiant glory of

the future. The roses that were wreathed round the flushed temples of the revellers withered and faded, and their petals drooped in the hot atmosphere of the banqueting hall, laden with fumes of wine. The parsley wreath, that was twined round the locks of the young athlete who had been victorious in the games, was withered tomorrow and cast into the dust heap. 'But,' says one of the New Testament writers, 'the crown of glory fadeth not away.' And the other wreaths, intrinsically worthless, were only symbols of victory and honour, but this itself is full of preciousness and of substance and of power.

So the crown is the reward of righteousness, and consists of life so full that our present experience contrasted with it may almost be called an experience of death; of glory so flashing and wonderful that, if our natures were not strengthened, it would be an 'exceeding weight of glory' that would crush them down, and upon all the life and all the glory is stamped the solemn signature of eternity, and they are for ever. Now, says my text to each Christian, all this, the consequence and reward of sore toil, faithfully done, and of effort that strains every muscle in the race — the festal participation in life and glory for evermore — is 'thy crown'; not because thou hast it now, but because, as sure as God is God and righteousness is righteousness, nothing can prevent the man who, holding by Jesus Christ, has become possessor of the righteousness, which is of God by faith, from receiving that great reward. It is his already in the Divine destination; his by the immutable laws of proprietorship in God's kingdom; his upon the simple condition of his continuing to be what he is. Like Peter's saying about the inheritance 'reserved in heaven for you,' this representation treats the perfect future blessedness of us who are toiling and struggling here as already in existence and waiting for us, beyond the dust of the wrestling-ground, and the fury of the battlefield. Of course that is not meant to be taken in prosaic literality. The 'place' may indeed be 'prepared' in which that blessedness is to be realised, but the blessedness itself can have no existence apart from those who possess it. The purpose

of the representations is to put in the strongest possible way the absolute certainty of the heads that now are pressed by the helmet being then encircled with the crown, and of the strangers scattered abroad reaching and resting for ever in the promised land to which they journey. The reward is as sure as if each man's crown, with his name engraved upon it, lay safely guarded in the treasure-house of God.

The light of that great certainty should ever draw our weary eyes, weary of false glitter and vulgar gauds. The assurance of that joy unspeakable makes the best joy here. Future blessedness, apprehended by the long arm of faith, brings present blessedness. The gladness and the power of the Christian life largely depend on the habitual beholding, with yearning and hope, of 'the King in His beauty and of the land that is very far off,' and yet so near, and of our own proper 'portion of the inheritance of the saints in light.' Christian men, it much concerns the vigour of your Christianity that you should take time and pains to cultivate the habit of looking forward through all the mists and darkness of this petty and unsubstantial present, and of thinking of that future as a certainty more certain than the contingencies of earth and as a present possession, more real by far than any of the fleeting shadows which we proudly and falsely call our own.

They pass from hand to hand. They are mine to-day, another's tomorrow. I have no real possession of them while they were called mine. We truly possess but two possessions — God and ourselves. We possess both by the same way of giving ourselves to God in love and obedience; and of such surrender and possession the crown is the perfecting and the reward. 'Thy crown' will fit no temples but thine. It is part of thy perfected self, and certain to be thine, if thou hold fast the beginning of thy confidence firm unto the end.

II. Note next the grim possibility of losing the crown. 'That no man take' it. Of course we are not to misunderstand the contingency

shadowed here, as if it meant that some other person could filch away and put on his own head the crown which once was destined for us, which is a sheer impossibility and absurdity. No man would think to win heaven by stealing another's right of entrance there. No man could, if he were to try. The results of character cannot be transferred. Nor are we to suppose reference to the machinations of tempters, either human or diabolic, who deliberately and consciously try to rob Christians of their religion here, and thereby of their reward hereafter. But it is only too possible that men and things round about us may upset this certainty that we have been considering, and that though the crown be 'thine,' it may never come to be thy actual possession in the future, nor ever be worn upon thine own happy head in the festival of the skies.

That is the solemn side of the Christian life, that it is to be conceived of as lived amidst a multitude of men and things that are always trying to make us unfit to receive that crown of righteousness. They cannot work directly upon it. It has no existence except as the efflorescence of our own character crowned by God's approbation. It is an ideal thing; but they can work upon us, and if they stain our heads with foul dust, then they make them unfit for our crown. So here are we, Christian men and women! in a world all full of things that tend and may be regarded as desiring to rob us of our crowns. This is not the way in which we usually think of the temptations that assail us. For instance, there comes some sly and whispering one to us and suggests pleasant hours, bought at a very small sacrifice of principle; delights for sense or for ambition, or for one or other of the passions of our nature, and all looks very innocent, and the harm seems to be comparatively small Ah! let us look a little bit deeper. That temptation that seems to threaten so little and to promise so much is really trying to rob us of the crown. If we would walk through life with this thought in our minds, how it would strip off the masks of all these temptations that buzz about us! If once we saw their purpose and understood the true aim of the flattering lies

which they tell us, should we not see over the lies, and would not they lose their power to deceive us?

Be sure — and oh! let us hold fast by the illuminating conviction when the temptations come — be sure that, with all their glozing words and false harlot kisses, their meaning is this, to rob us of the bright and precious thing that is most truly ours; and so let us put away the temptations, and say to them, ‘Ah! you come as a friend, but I know your meaning; and forewarned is forearmed.’

III. Lastly, note the way to secure the crown which is ours.

‘Hold fast that thou hast.’ For if you do not hold it fast, it will slip. The metaphor is a plain one — if a man has got something very precious, he grips it with a very tight hand. The slack hand will very soon be an empty hand. Anybody walking through the midst of a crowd of thieves with a bag of gold in charge would not hold it dangling from a finger-tip, but he would put all five round it, and wrap the strings about his wrist.

The first shape which we may give to this exhortation is — hold fast by what God has given in His gospel; hold fast His Son, His truth, His grace. Use honestly and diligently your intellect to fathom and to keep firm hold of the great truths and principles of the gospel. Use your best efforts to

keep your wandering hearts and mobile wills fixed and true to the revealed love of the great Lover of souls, which has been given to you in Christ, and to obey Him. You have got a Christ that is worth keeping, see to it that you keep Him, and do not let Him slip away out of your fingers. When the storms come a wise captain lashes all the light articles, and then they are safe. You and I have to struggle through many a storm, and all the loose stuff on deck will be washed off or blown away long before we get into calm water. Lash it by meditation, by faithful obedience, and by constant communion, and

hold fast the Christian gospel, and, in the Christ whom the gospel reveals, the spiritual life that you possess.

But there is another aspect of the same commandment which applies not so much to that which is given us in the objective revelation and manifestation of God in Christ, as to our own subjective degrees of progress in the appropriation of Christ, and in likeness to Him. And possibly that is what my text more especially means, for just a little before, the Lord has said to that Church, ‘Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name.’ ‘Thou hast a little strength.., hold fast that which thou hast.’ See to it that thy present attainment in the Christian life, though it may be but rudimentary and incomplete, is at least kept. Cast not away your confidence, hold fast the beginning of your confidence firm, with a tightened hand, unto the end. For if we keep what we have, it will grow.

Progress is certain, if there be persistence. If we do not let it go, it will increase and multiply in our possession. In all branches of study and intellectual pursuit, and in all branches of daily life, to hold fast what we have, and truly to possess what we possess, is the certain means to make our wealth greater. And so it is in the Christian life. Be true to the present knowledge, and use it, as it is meant to be used, and it will daily increase. ‘Hold fast that thou hast.’ Thou *hast* the ‘strength’; thou hast not yet the crown. Keep what God has committed to you, and God will keep what He has reserved for you.

And so the sure way to get the crown is to keep the faith; and then the life and the *glory*, which are but the outcome and the fruit of the faithful, persistent life here, are as sure as the cycles of the heavens, or as the throne and the will of God. Men and things and devils may try to take your crown from you, but nobody can deprive you of it but yourself. Hold fast the present possession, and make it really your own, and the future crown which God has promised to all who love and thereby possess Him will, in due time, be twined around

your head. He who has and holds fast Christ here cannot fail of the crown yonder.

Revelation 3:12-- VI. THE VICTOR'S LIFE-NAMES

‘Him that overcometh will I make as pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more, out: and I will write upon him the name of My God. and the name of the city of My God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God: and I will write upon him My new name.’ — Revelation 3:12.

THE eyes which were as a flame of fire saw nothing to blame in the Philadelphian Church, and the lips out of which came the two-edged sword that cuts through all hypocrisy to the discerning of the thoughts and intents of the heart, spoke only eulogium — ‘Thou hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name.’ But however mature and advanced may be Christian experience, it is never lifted above the possibility of temptation; so, with praise, there came warning of an approaching hour which would try the mettle of this unblamed Church. Christ’s reward for faithfulness is not immunity from, but strength in, trial and conflict. As long as we are in the world there will be forces warring against us; and we shall have to fight our worst selves and the tendencies which tempt us to prefer the visible to the unseen, and the present to the future. So the Church which had no rebuke received the solemn injunction: ‘ Hold fast that thou hast; let no man take thy crown.’ There is always need of struggle, even for the most mature, if we would keep what we have. The treasure will be filched from slack hands; the crown, will be stricken from a slumbering head. So it is not inappropriate that the promise to this Church should be couched in the usual terms, ‘ to him that *overcometh*,’ and the conclusion to be drawn is the solemn and simple one that the Christian life is always a conflict, even to the end.

The promise contained in my text presents practically but a twofold aspect of that future blessedness; the one expressed in the clause, ‘I

will make him a pillar'; the other expressed in the clauses referring to the writing upon him of certain names. I need not do more than again call attention to the fact that here, as always, Jesus Christ represents Himself as not only allocating the position and determining the condition, but as shaping, and moulding, and enriching the characters of the redeemed, and ask you to ponder the question, What in Him does that assumption involve?

Passing on, then, to the consideration of these two promises more closely, let us deal with them singly. There is, first, the steadfast pillar; there is, second, the threefold inscription.

I. The steadfast pillar.

Now I take it that the two clauses which refer to this matter are closely connected. 'I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out.' In the second clause the figure is dropped, and the point of the metaphor is brought out more clearly. The stately column in the temples, with which these Philadelphian Christians, dwelling in the midst of the glories of Greek architecture, were familiar, might be, and often has been, employed as a symbol of many things. Here it cannot mean the office of sustaining a building, or pre-eminence above others, as it naturally lends itself sometimes to mean. For instance, the Apostle Paul speaks of the three chief apostles in Jerusalem, and says that they 'seemed to be pillars'; by which pre-eminence and the office of maintaining the Church are implied. But that obviously cannot be the special application of the figure here, inasmuch as we cannot conceive of even redeemed men sustaining that temple in the heavens, and also inasmuch as the promise here is perfectly universal, and is given to all that overcome—that is to say, to all the redeemed. We must, therefore, look in some other direction. Now, the second of the two clauses which are thus linked together seems to me to point in the direction in which we are to look. 'He shall go no more out.' A pillar is a natural emblem of stability and permanence, as poets in

many tongues and in many lands have felt it to be. I remember one of our own quaint English writers who speaks of men who 'are bottomed on the basis of a firm faith, mounting up with the clear shaft of a shining life, and having their persevering tops garlanded about, according to God's promise, "I will give thee a crown of life."' That idea of stability, of permanence, of fixedness, is the one that is prominent in the metaphor here.

But whilst the general notion is that of stability and permanence, do not let us forget that it is permanence and stability in a certain direction, for the pillar is 'in the temple of My God.' Now! would recall to you the fact that in other parts of Scripture we find the present relation of Christian men to God set forth under a similar metaphor: 'Ye are the temple of the living God'; or again, 'In whom ye are builded for a habitation of God through the Spirit'; or again, in that great word which is the foundation of all such symbols, 'We will come and make our abode with Him.' So that the individual believer and the community of all such are, even here and now, the dwelling-place of God. And whilst there are ideas of dignity and grace attaching to the metaphor of the pillar, the underlying meaning of it is substantially that the individual souls of redeemed men shall be themselves parts of, and collectively shall constitute, the temple of God in the heavens. This book of the Apocalypse has several points of view in regard to that great symbol It speaks, for instance, of there being 'no temple therein,' by which is meant the cessation of all material and external worships such as belong to earth. It speaks also of God and the Lamb as themselves being 'the Temple thereof.' And here we have the converse idea that not only may we think of the redeemed community as dwelling in God and Christ, but of God and Christ as dwelling in the redeemed community. The promise, then, is of a thrilling consciousness that God is in us, a deeper realisation of His presence, a fuller communication of His grace, a closer touch of Him, far beyond anything that we can conceive of on earth, and yet being the continuation and the completion of the earthly experiences of those in whom God dwells

by their faith, their love, and their obedience. We have nothing to say about the new capacities for consciousness of God which may come to redeemed souls when the veils of flesh and sense, and the absorption in the present drop away. We have nothing to say, because we know nothing about the new manifestations and more intimate touches which may correspond to these new capacities. There are vibrations of sounds too rapid or too slow for our ears as at present organised to catch. But whether these be too shrill or too deep to be heard, if the ear were more sensitive there would be sound where there is silence, and music in the waste places. So with new organs, with new capacities, there will be a new and a deeper sense of the presence of God; and utterances of His lips too profound to be caught by us now, or too clear and high to be apprehended by our limited sense, will then thunder into melody and with clear notes sound His praises. There are rays of light in the spectrum, at both ends of it, as yet not perceptible to human eyes; but then 'we shall, in Thy light, see light' flaming higher and deeper than we can do now. We dwell in God here if we dwell in Christ, and we dwell in Christ if He dwell in us, by faith and love, But in the heavens the indwelling shall be more perfect, and transcend all that we know now.

The special point in regard to which that perfection is expressed here is to be kept prominent. 'He shall go no more out.' Permanence, and stability, and uninterruptedness in the communion and consciousness of an indwelling God, is a main element in the glory and blessedness of that future life. Stability in any fashion comes as a blessed hope to us, who know the curse of constant change, and are tossing on the unquiet waters of life. It is blessed to think of a region where the seal of permanence will be set on all delights, and our blessedness will be like the bush in the desert, burning and yet not consumed. But the highest form of that blessedness is the thought of stable, uninterrupted, permanent communion with God and consciousness of His dwelling in us. The contrast forces itself upon us between that equable and unvarying communion and the

ups and downs of the most uniform Christian life here — to-day thrilling in every nerve with the sense of God, to-morrow dead and careless.

Sometimes the bay is filled with flashing waters that leap in the sunshine; sometimes, when the tide is out, there is only a long stretch of grey and oozy mud. It shall not be always so. Like lands on the equator, where the difference between midsummer and midwinter is scarcely perceptible, either in length of day or in degree of temperature, that future will be a calm continuance, a uniformity which is not monotony, and a stability which does not exclude progress.

I cannot but bring into contrast with that great promise 'he shall go no more out' an incident in the gospels. Christ and the Twelve were in the upper room, and He poured out His heart to them, and their hearts burned within them. But 'they went out to the Mount of Olives' — He to Gethsemane and to Calvary; Judas to betray and Peter to deny; all to toil and suffer, and sometimes to waver in their faith. 'He shall go no more out.' Eternal glory and unbroken communion is the blessed promise to the victor who is made by Christ 'a pillar in the temple of My God.'

II. Now, secondly, notice the threefold inscription. We have done with the metaphor of the pillar altogether. We are not to think of anything so incongruous as a pillar stamped with writing, a monstrosity in Grecian architecture. But it is the man himself on whom Christ is to write the threefold name. The writing of a name implies ownership and visibility.

So the first of the triple inscriptions declares that the victor shall be conspicuously God's. 'I will write upon him the name of My God.' There may possibly be an allusion to the golden plate which flamed in the front of the high priest's mitre, and on which was written the unspoken name of Jehovah. But whether that be so or no, the underlying ideas are these two which I have already referred to —

complete ownership, and that manifested in the very front of the character.

How do we possess one another? How do we belong to God? How does God belong to us? There is but one way by which a spirit can possess a spirit — by love, which leads to self-surrender and to practical obedience. And if — as a man writes his name in his books, as a farmer brands on his sheep and oxen the marks that express his ownership on the redeemed there is written the name of God, that means, whatever else it may mean, perfect love, perfect self-surrender, obedience, that the whole nature shall be owned, and know itself owned, and be glad to be owned, by God. That is the perfecting of the Christian relationship which is begun here on earth. And if we here yield ourselves to God and depart from that foolish and always frustrated attempt to be our own masters and owners, so escaping the misery and burden of self-hood, and entering into the liberty of the children of God, we shall reach that blessed state in which there will be no murmuring and incipient rebellions, no disturbance of our inward submission, no breach in our active obedience, no holding back of anything that we have or are; but we shall be wholly God's — that is, wholly possessors of ourselves, and blessed thereby. 'He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life, the same shall find it.' And that Name will be stamped on us, that every eye that looks, whoever they may be, shall know 'whose we are and whom we serve.'

The second inscription declares that the victor conspicuously belongs to the City. Our time will not allow of my entering at all upon the many questions that gather round that representation of 'the New Jerusalem which cometh down out of heaven.' I must content myself with simply pointing to the possible allusion here to the promise in the preceding letter to Sardis There we were told that the victor's name should not 'be blotted out of the Book of Life'; and that Book of Life suggested the idea of the burgess-roll of the city, as well as the register of those that truly live. Here the same

thought is suggested by a converse metaphor. The name of the victor is written on the rolls of the city, and the name of the city is stamped on the forehead of the victor. That is to say, the affinity which, even here and now, has knit man who believe in Jesus Christ to an invisible order, where is their true mother-city and metropolis, will then be uncontradicted by any inconsistencies, unobscured by the necessary absorption in daily duties and transient aims and interests, which often veils to others, and readers less conscious to ourselves, our true belonging to the city beyond the sea. The name of the city shall be stamped upon the victor. That, again, is the perfecting and the continuation of the central heart of the Christian life here, the consciousness that we are come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and belong to another order of things than the visible and material around us.

The last of the triple inscriptions declares that the victor shall be conspicuously Christ's. 'I will write upon him My new name.' All the three inscriptions link themselves, not with earlier, but with later parts of this most artistically constructed book of the Revelation; and in a subsequent portion of it we read of a new name of Christ's, which no man knoweth save Himself. What is that new name? It is an expression for the sum of the new revelations of what He is, which will flood the souls of the redeemed when they come from earth. That new name will not obliterate the old one — God forbid! It will not do away with the ancient, earth-begun relation of dependence and faith and obedience. 'Jesus Christ is the same..., for ever': and His name in the heavens, as upon earth is Jesus the Saviour. But there are abysses in Him which no man moving amidst the incipencies and imperfections of this infantile life of earth can understand. Not until we possess can we know the depths of wisdom and knowledge, and of all other blessed treasures which are stored in Him. Here we touch but the fringe of His great glory: yonder we shall penetrate to its central flame.

That new name no man fully knows even when he has entered on its possession and carries it on his forehead; for the infinite Christ, who is the manifestation of the infinite God, can never be comprehended, much less exhausted, even by the united perceptions of a redeemed universe; but for ever and ever, more and more will well out from Him. His name shall last as long as the sun, and blaze when the sun himself is dead.

‘I will write upon him My new name’ was said to a church, and while the eulogium was, ‘Thou hast not denied My name.’ If we are to pierce the heart and the glory there, we must begin on its edges here. If the name is to be on our foreheads then, we must bear in our body the marks of the Lord Jesus — the brand of ownership impressed on the slave’s palm. In the strength of the name we can overcome; and if we overcome, His name will hereafter blaze on our fore-heads — the token that we are completely His for ever, and the pledge that we shall be growingly made like unto him.

Revelation 3:15, 19--LAODICEA

‘I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot..., be zealous therefore, and repent.’ — Revelation 3:15, 19,

WE learn from Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians that there was a very close connection between that Church and this at Laodicea. It is a probable conjecture that a certain Archippus, who is spoken of in the former Epistle, was the bishop or pastor of the Laodicean strance and appeal to you professing Christians, to draw some lessons from these solemn words.

I. I pray you to look at that loving rebuke of the faithful Witness: ‘Thou art neither cold nor hot.’

We are manifestly there in the region of emotion. The metaphor applies to feeling. We talk, for instance, about warmth of feeling, ardour of affection, fervour of love, and the like. And the opposite,

cold, expresses obviously the absence of any glow of a true living emotion.

So, then, the persons thus described are Christian people (for their Christianity is presupposed), with very little, though a little, warmth of affection and glow of Christian love and consecration.

Further, this defectiveness of Christian feeling is accompanied with a large amount of self-complacency: — ‘Thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.’ Of course it is so. A numbed limb feels no pain. As cold increases the sensation of cold, and of everything else, goes away. And a sure mark of defective religious emotion is absolute unconsciousness on the man’s part that there is anything the matter with him. All of you that have no sense that the indictment applies to you, by the very fact show that it applies most especially and most tragically to you. Self-complacency diagnoses spiritual cold, and is an inevitable and a constantly accompanying symptom of a deficiency of religious emotion.

Then again, this deficiency of warmth is worse than absolute zero. ‘I would thou wert cold or hot.’ That is no spurt of impatience on the part of the ‘true Witness.’ It is for their sake that He would they were cold or hot.

And why? Because there is no man more hopeless than a man on whom the power of Christianity has been brought to bear, and has failed in warming and quickening him. If you were acid, at absolute zero, there would be at least a possibility that when you were brought in contact with the warmth you might kindle. But you have been brought in contact with the warmth, and this is the effect. Then what is to be done with you? There is nothing more that can be brought to bear on your consciousness to make you anything higher or better than you are, than what you have already had in operation in your spiritual life. And if it has failed, all God’s armoury is

empty, and He has shot His last bolt, and there is nothing more left. 'I would thou wert cold or hot.'

Now, dear friends, is that our condition? I am obliged sadly to say that I believe it is to a fearful extent the condition of professing Christendom to-day. 'Neither cold nor hot!' Look at the standard of Christian life round about us. Let us look into our own hearts. Let us mark how wavering the line is between the Church and the world; how little upon our side of the line there is of conspicuous consecration and unworldliness; how entirely in regard of an enormous mass of professing Christians, the maxims that are common in the world are their maxims; and the sort of life that the world lives is the sort of life that they live. 'Oh! thou that art named the House of Israel,' as one of the old prophets wailed out, 'is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings?' And so I would say, look at your churches and mark their feebleness, the slow progress of the gospel among them, the low lives that the bulk of us professing Christians are living, and answer the question: Is that the operation of a Divine Spirit that comes to transform and to quicken everything into His own vivid and flaming life? or is it the operation of our own selfishness and worldliness, crushing clown and hemming in the power that ought to sway us? Brethren! it is not for me to cast condemnation, but it is for each of us to ask ourselves the question: Do we not hear the voice of the 'faithful and true Witness' saying to us, 'I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot'?

II. And now will you let me say a word next as to some of the plain causal-of this lukewarmness of spiritual life?

Of course the tendency to it is in us all. Take a bar of iron out of the furnace on a winter day, and lay it down in the air, and there is nothing more wanted. Leave it there, and very soon the white heat will change into livid dulness, and then there will come a scale over it, and in a short time it will be as cold as the frosty atmosphere around it. And so there is always a refrigerating process acting upon

us, which needs to be counteracted by continual contact with the fiery furnace of spiritual warmth, or else we are cooled down to the degree of cold around us. But besides this universally operating cause there are many others which affect us.

Laodicea was a great commercial city, an emporium of trade, which gives especial point and appropriateness to the loving counsel of the context. 'I advise thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire.' And Manchester life, with its anxieties, with its perplexities for many of you, with its diminished profits, and apparently diminishing trade, is a fearful foe to the warmth and reality of your Christian life. The cares of this world, and the riches of this world are both amongst the thorns which choke the Word and make it unfruitful I find fault with no man for the earnestness which he flings into his business, but I ask you to contrast this entire absorption of spirit, and the willing devotion of hours and strength to *it*, with the grudging, and the partial, and the transient devotion of ourselves to the religious life; and say whether the relative importance of the things seen and unseen is fairly represented by the relative amount of earnestness with which you and I pursue these respectively.

Then, again, the existence among us, or around us, of a certain widely diffused doubt as to the truths of Christianity is, illogically enough, a cause for diminished fervour on the part of the men that do not doubt them. That is foolish, and it is strange, but it is true. It is very hard for us, when so many people round about us are denying, or at least are questioning, the verities which we have been taught to believe, to keep the freshness and the fervour of our devotion to these; just as it is very difficult for a man to keep up the warmth of his body in the midst of some creeping mist that enwraps everything. So with us, the presence, in the atmosphere of doubt, depresses the vitality and the vigour of the Christian Church where it does not intensify its faith, and make it cleave more desperately to the things that are questioned. Beware, then, of unreasonably yielding so far to the influence of prevailing unbelief as to make you

grasp with a slacker hand the thing which still you do not say that you doubt.

And there is another case, which I name with some hesitation, but which yet seems to me to be worthy of notice; and that is, the increasing degree to which Christian men are occupied with what we call, for want of a better name, *secular* things. The leaders in the political world, on both sides, in our great commercial cities, are usually professing Christians. I am the last man to find fault with any Christian man for casting himself, so far as his opportunities allow, into the current of political life, if he will take his Christianity with him, and if he will take care that he does not become a great deal more interested in elections, and in pulling the strings of a party, and in working for ‘the cause,’ than he is in working for his Master. I grudge the political world nothing that it gets of your strength, but I do grudge, for your sakes as well as for the Church’s sake, that so often the two forms of activity are supposed by professing Christians to be incompatible, and that therefore the more important is neglected, and the less important done. Suffer the word of exhortation.

And, in like manner, literature and art, and the ordinary objects of interest on the part of men who have no religion, are coming to absorb a great deal of our earnestness and our energy. I would not wish to draw one iota of the culture that now prevails largely in the Christian Church. All that I plead for, dear brethren, is this, ‘Ye are the salt of the earth.’ Go where you like, and fling yourselves into all manner of interests and occupations, only carry your Master with you. And remember that if you are not salting the world, the world is putrefying you

There I think you have some, though it be imperfect, account of the causes which operate to lower the temperature of the Christian Church in general, and of this Christian Church, and of you as individual members of it.

III. Now, further, note the loving call here to deepened earnestness. 'Be zealous, therefore.' The word translated, and rightly translated, *zealous* means literally *boiling with* heat. It is an exhortation to fervour. Now there is no worse thing in all this world than for a man to try to work up emotion, nothing which is so sure, sooner or later, to come to mischief, sure to breed hypocrisy and all manner of evil. If there be anything that is worse than trying to work up emotion, it is attempting to pretend it. So when our Master here says to us, 'Be zealous, therefore,' we must remember that zeal in a man ought to be a consequence of knowledge; and that, seeing that we are reasonable creatures, intended to be guided by our understandings, it is an upsetting of the whole constitution of a man's nature if his heart works independently of his head. And the only way in which we can safely and wholesomely increase our zeal is by increasing our grasp of the truths which feed it.

Thus the exhortation, 'Be zealous,' if we come to analyse it, and to look into its basis, is this day hold upon, and meditate upon, the great truths that will make your heart glow. Notice that this exhortation is a consequence, 'Be zealous, therefore,' and repent. *Therefore*, and what precedes? A whole series of considerations such as these: 'I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire... and white raiment... and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve.' That is to say, lay hold of the truth that Christ possesses a full store of all that you can want. Meditate on that great truth and it will kindle a flame of desire and of fruition in your hearts. 'Be zealous, *therefor*' And again, 'As many as I love I rebuke and chaste —' 'Be zealous, therefore.' That is to say, grasp the great thought of the loving Christ, all whose dealings, even when His voice assumes severity, and His hand comes armed with a rod, are the outcome and manifestation of His love; and sink into that love, and that will make your hearts glow. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.' 'Be zealous, therefore.' Think of the earnest, patient, long-suffering appeal which the Master makes, hearing with all our weaknesses and our shortcomings, and not suffering His gentle hand to be turned

away, though the door has been so long barred and bolted in His face. And let these sweet thoughts of a Christ that gives everything, of a Christ all whose dealings are love, of a Christ who pleads with us through the barred door, and tries to get at us through the obstacles which ourselves have fastened against Him, let them draw us to Him, and kindle and keep alight a brighter flame of consecration and of devotion in our hearts to Him. *'Be zealous.'* Feed upon the great truths of the Gospel which kindles zeal.

Brethren, the utmost warmth is reasonable in religion. If Christianity be true, there is no measure of ardour or of consecration which is beyond the reasonable requirements of the case. We are told that's sober standard of feeling in matters of religion is the great thing to aim at. So I say. But I would differ, perhaps, with the people that are fond of saying so, in my definition of sobriety. A sober standard is a standard of feeling in which the feeling does not outrun the facts on which it is built. Enthusiasm is disproportionate or ignorant feeling; warmth without light. A sober, reasonable feeling is the emotion which is correspondent to the truths that evoke it. And will any man tell me that any amount of earnestness, of flaming consecration, of fiery zeal, is in advance of the great truths that Christ loves me, and has given Himself for me?

IV. And now, lastly, observe the merciful call to a new beginning: *'Repent.'*

There must be a lowly consciousness of sin, a clear vision of my past shortcomings, an abhorrence of these, and, joined with that, a resolute act of mind and heart beginning a new course, a change of purpose and of the current of my being.

Repentance is sorrow for the past, blended with a resolve to paste down the old leaf and begin a new writing on a new page. Christian men have need of these fresh beginnings, and of new repentance, even as the patriarch when he came up from Egypt went to the place where *'he builded the altar at the first,'* and there offered sacrifice.

Do not you be ashamed, Christian men and women, if you have been living low and inconsistent Christian lives in the past, to make a new beginning and to break with that past. There was never any great outburst of life in a Christian Church which was not preceded by a lowly penitence. And there is never any penitence worth naming which is not preceded by a recognition, glad, rapturous, confident as self-consciousness, of Christ's great and infinite love to me.

Oh! if there is one thing that we want more than smother to-day, it is that the fiery Spirit shall come and baptise all the churches, and us an individual members of them. What was it that finished the infidelity of the last century? Was it Paley and Butler, with their demonstrations and their books? No! it was John Wesley and Whitefield. Here is a solution, full of microscopic germs that will putrefy. Expose it to heat, raise the temperature, and you will kill all the germs, so that you may keep it for a hundred years, and there will be no putrefaction in it. Get the temperature of the Church up, and all the evils that are eating out its life will shrivel and drop to the bottom dead. They cannot live in the heat; cold is their region.

So, dear brethren, let us get near to Christ's love until the light of it shines in our own faces. Let us get near to Christ's love until, like coal laid upon the fire, its fervours penetrate into our substance and change even our blackness into ruddy flame. Let us get nearer to the love, and then, though the world may laugh and say, 'He hath a devil and is mad,' they that see more clearly will say of us: 'The zeal of Thine house hath eaten him up,' and the Father will say even concerning us: 'This is My beloved *son*, in whom I am well pleased.'

Revelation 3:18--CHRIST'S COUNSEL TO A LUKEWARM CHURCH

'I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the

shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.’ — Revelation 3:18.

AFTER the scathing exposure of the religious condition of this Laodicean Church its members might have expected something sterner than ‘counsel.’ There is a world of love and pity, with a dash of irony, in the use of that softened expression. He does not willingly threaten, and He never scolds; but He rather speaks to men’s hearts and their reason, and comes to them as a friend, than addresses Himself to their fears.

Whether there be any truth or not in the old idea that these letters to the seven churches are so arranged as, when taken in sequence, to present a fore-glimpse of the successive conditions of the Church till the second coming of our Lord, it is at least a noteworthy fact that the last of them in order is the lowest in spiritual state. That Church was ‘lukewarm’; ‘neither cold’ — untouched by the warmth of the Spirit of Christ at all — ‘nor hot’ — adequately inflamed thereby.

That is the worst sort of people to get at, and it is no want of charity to say that Laodicea is repeated in a thousand congregations, and that Laodiceans are prevalent in every congregation. All our Christian communities are hampered by a mass of loose adherents with no warmth of consecration, no glow of affection, no fervour of enthusiasm; and they bring down the temperature, as snow-covered mountains over which the wind blows make the thermometer drop on the plains. It is not for me to diagnose individual conditions, but it is for me to take note of widespread characteristics and strongly running currents; and it is for you to settle whether the characteristics are yours or not.

So I deal with Christ’s advice to a lukewarm church, and I hope to do it in the spirit of the Master who counselled, and neither scolded nor threatened.

I. Now I observe that the first need of the lukewarm church is to open its eyes to see facts.

I take it that the order in which the points of this counsel are given is not intended to be the order in which they are obeyed. I dare say there is no thought of sequence in the succession of the clauses. But if there is, I think that a little consideration will show us that that which comes last in mention is to -be first in fulfilment.

Observe that the text falls into two distinct parts, and that the counsel to buy does not extend — though it is ordinarily read as if it did — to the last item in our Lord's advice. These Laodiceans are bid to 'buy of' Him 'gold' and 'raiment,' but they are bid to use the 'eyesalve' that they may see. No doubt, whatever is meant by that 'eyesalve' comes from Him, as does everything else. But my point is that these people are supposed already to possess it, and that they are bid to employ it. And, taking that point of view, I think We can come to the understanding of what is meant.

No doubt the exhortation, 'anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see,' may be so extended as to refer to the general condition of spiritual blindness which attaches to humanity, apart from the illuminating and sight-giving work of Jesus Christ. That true Light, which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world, has a threefold office as the result of all the parts of which there comes to our darkened eyes the vision of the things that are. He reveals the objects to see; He gives the light by which we see them; and He gives us eyes to see with. He shows us God, immortality, duty, men's condition, men's hopes, and He takes from us the cataract which obscures, the shortsightedness which prevents us from beholding things that are far off, and the obliquity of vision which forbids us to look steadily and straight at the things which it is worth our while to behold. 'For judgment am I come into the world,' said He, 'that they which see not might see.' And it is possible that the general illuminating influence of Christ's mission and work. and

especially the illuminating power of His Spirit dwelling in men's spirits, may be included in the thoughts of the eyesalve with which we are to anoint our eyes.

But the context seems to me rather to narrow the range of the meaning of this part of our Lord's counsel For these Laodiceans had the conceit of their own sufficing wealth, of their own prosperous religious condition, and were blind as bats to the real facts that they were 'miserable and poor and naked.' Therefore, our Lord says: 'Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see — recognise your true state; do not live in this dream that you are satisfactorily united to Myself, when all the while the thread of connection is so slender that it is all but snapped. Behold Me as I am, and the things that I reveal to you as they are; and then you will see yourselves as you are.'

So, then, there comes out of this exhortation this thought, that a symptom constantly accompanying the lukewarm condition is absolute unconsciousness of it. In all regions the worse a man is the less he knows it It is the good people that know themselves to be bad; the bad ones, when they think about themselves, conceit themselves to be good. It is the men in the van of the march that feel the prick of the impulse to press farther: the laggards are quite content to stop in the rear. The higher a man climbs, in any science, or in the practice of any virtue, the more clearly he sees the unsealed peaks above him. The frost-bitten limb is quite comfortable. It is when life begins to come back into it that it tingles and aches. And so these Laodiceans were like the Jewish hero of old, who prostituted his strength, and let them shear away his leeks while his lazy head lay in the harlot's lap: he went out 'to shake himself' as of old times, and knew not that the Spirit of God had departed from him. So, brethren, the man in this audience who most needs to be roused and startled into a sense of his tepid religionism is the man that least suspects the need, and would be most surprised if a more infallible and penetrating voice than mine were to come

and say to him, 'Thou — thou art the man.' 'Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see'; and let the light which Christ pours upon unseen things, pour itself revealing into your hearts, that you may no longer dream of yourselves as 'rich, and increased with goods, and having need of nothing'; but may know that you are poor and blind and naked.

Another thought suggested by this part of the counsel is that the blind man must himself rub in the eyesalve. *Nobody* else can do it for him. True! it comes, like every other good thing, from the Christ in the heavens; and, as I have already said, if we will attach specific meanings to every part of a metaphor, that 'eyesalve' may be the influence of the Divine Spirit who convicts men of sin. But whatever it is, you have to apply it to your own eyes. Translate that into plain English, and it is just this, by the light of the knowledge of God and duty and human nature, which comes rushing in a flood of illumination from the central sun of Christ's mission and character, test yourselves. Our forefathers made too much of self-examination as a Christian duty, and pursued it often for mistaken purposes. But this generation makes far *too light* of it. Whilst I would not say to anybody, 'Poke into the dark places of your own hearts in order to find out whether you are Christian people or not,' for that will only come to diffidence and despair, I would say, 'Do not be a stranger to yourselves, but judge yourselves rigidly, by the standard of God's Word, of Christ's example, and in all your search, ask Him to give you that 'candle of the Lord. which will shine into the dustiest corners and the darkest of our hearts, and reveal to us, if we truly wish it, all the cobwebs and unconsidered litter and rubbish, if not a venomous creatures, that are gathered there. Apply the eyesalve; it will be keen, it will bite; welcome the smart, and be sure that anything is good for you which takes away the veil that self-complacency casts over your true condition, and lets the light of God into the cellars and dark places of your souls.

II. The second need of the lukewarm church is the true wealth which Christ gives.

‘I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire.’ Now there may be many different ways of putting the thought that is conveyed here, but I think the deepest truth of human nature is that the only wealth for a man is the possession of God. And so instead of, as many commentators do, suggesting interpretations which seem to me to be inadequate, I think we go to the root of the matter when we find the meaning of the wealth which Christ counsels us to buy of Him in the possession of God Himself, who is our true treasure and durable riches.

That wealth alone makes us paupers truly rich. For there is nothing else that satisfies a man’s craving and supplies a man’s needs. ‘He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance, with increase’; but if we have the gold of God, we are rich to all intents of bliss; and if we have Him not, if we are ‘for ever roaming with a hungry heart,’ and though we may have a large balance at our bankers, and much wealth in our coffers, and ‘houses full of silver and gold,’ we are poor indeed.

That wealth has immunity from all accidents. No possession is truly mine of which any outward emergency or circumstance can deprive me. But this wealth, the wealth of a heart enriched with the possession of God, whom it knows, loves, trusts, and obeys, this wealth is incorporated with a man’s very being. and enters into the substance of his nature; and so nothing can deprive him of it. That which moth or rust can corrupt; that which thieves can break through and steal; that which is at the mercy of the accidents of a commercial community or of the fluctuations of trade; that is no wealth for a man. Only something which passes into me, and becomes so interwoven with my being as is the dye with the wool, is truly wealth for me. And such wealth is God.

The only possession which we can take with us when our nerveless hands drop all other goods, and our hearts are untwined from all other loves, is this durable riches. ‘Shrouds have no pockets,’ as the grim proverb has it. But the man that has God for his portion carries all his riches with him into the darkness, whilst of the man that made creatures his treasure it is written: ‘His glory shall not descend after him.’ Therefore dear brethren, let us all listen to that counsel, and buy of Jesus gold that is tried in the fire.

III. The third need of a lukewarm church is the raiment that Christ gives.

The wealth which He bids us buy of Him belongs mostly to our inward life; the raiment which He proffers us to wear, as is natural to the figure, applies mainly to our outward lives, and signifies the dress of our spirits as these are presented to the world.

I need not remind you of how frequently this metaphor is employed throughout the Scriptures, both in the Old and the New Testament — from the vision granted to one of the prophets, in which he saw the high priest standing before God, clothed in filthy garments, which were taken off him by angel hands, and he draped in pure and shining vestures — down to our Lord’s parable of the man that had not on the wedding garment; and Paul’s references to putting off and putting on the old and the new man with his deeds. Nor need I dwell upon the great frequency with which, in this book of the Revelation, the same figure occurs. But the sum and substance of the whole thing is just this, that we can get from Jesus Christ characters that are pure and radiant with the loveliness and the candour of His own perfect righteousness. Mark that here we are not bidden to put on the garment, but to take it from His hands. True, having taken it, we are to put it on, and that implies daily effort. So my text puts this counsel in its place in the whole perspective of a combined Christian truth, and suggests the combination of faith which receives, and of effort which puts on, the garment that Christ gives. No thread of it is

woven in our own looms, *nor* have we the making of the vesture, but we have the wearing of it.

There is nothing in the world vainer than effort after righteousness which is not based on faith. There is nothing more abnormal and divergent from the true spirit of the New Testament than faith, so-called, which is not accompanied with daily effort. On the one hand we must be contented to receive; on the other hand we must be earnest to appropriate. ‘Buy of Me gold,’ and then we are rich. ‘Buy of Me raiment,’ and then — listen to the voice that says, ‘Put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man of God created in righteousness and holiness of truth.’

IV. Lastly, all supply of these needs is to be bought.

‘Buy of Me.’ There is nothing in that counsel contradictory to the great truth that ‘the gift of God is eternal life.’ That buying is explained by the great gospel invitation, long centuries before the gospel — ‘Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, ... buy, and eat without money and without price.’ It is explained by our Lord’s twin parables of the treasure hid in a field, which, when a man had found, he went and sold all that he had and bought the field; and of the pearl of great price which, when the merchantman searching had discovered, he went and sold all that he had that he might possess the one.

For what is ‘all that we have’? Self! and we have to give away self that we may buy the riches and the robes. The only thing that is needed is to get rid, once and for all, of that conceit that we have anything that we can offer as the equivalent for what we desire. He that has opened his eyes, and sees himself as he is, poor and naked, and so comes to sue *in forma pauperis*, and abandons all trust in self, he is the man who buys of Christ the gold and the vesture. If we will thus rightly estimate ourselves, and estimating ourselves, have not only the negative side of faith, which is self-distrust, but the positive, which is absolute reliance on Him, we shall not ask in

vain. He counsels us to buy, and if we take His advice and come, saying, ‘Nothing in my hand I bring,’ He will not stultify Himself by refusing to give us what He has bid us ask. ‘What things were given to me; those I counted loss for Christ. Yea! doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.’ If we, with opened eyes, go to Him thus, we shall come away from Him enriched and clothed, and say, ‘My soul shall be joyful in my God, for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.’

Revelation 3:23--CHRIST AT THE DOOR

‘Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.’ — Revelation 3:23

MANY of us are familiar, I dare say, with the devoutly imaginative rendering of the first part of these wonderful words, which we owe to the genius of a living painter. In it we see the fast shut door, with rusted hinges, all overgrown with rank, poisonous weeds, which tell how long it has been closed. There stands, amid the night dews and the darkness, the patient Son of man, one hand laid on the door, the other bearing a light, which may perchance flash through some of its chinks. In His face are love repelled, and pity all but wasted; in the touch of His hand are gentleness and authority.

But the picture pauses, of course, at the beginning of my text, and its sequel is quite as wonderful as its first part. ‘I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me.’ What can surpass such words as these? I venture to take this great text, and ask you to look with me at the three things that lie in it; the suppliant for admission; the door opened; the entrance, and the feast.

I. Think, then, first of all, of that suppliant for admission.

I suppose that the briefest explanation of my text is sufficient. Who knocks? The exalted Christ. What is the door? This closed heart of man. What does He desire? Entrance. What are His knockings and His voice? All providences; all monitions of His Spirit in man's spirit and conscience; the direct invitations of His written or spoken word; in brief, whatsoever sways our hearts to yield to Him and enthrone Him. This is the meaning, in the fewest possible words, of the great utterance of my text.

Here is a revelation of a universal truth, applying to every man and woman on the face of the earth; but more especially and manifestly to those of us who live within the sound of Christ's gospel and of the written revelations of His grace. True, my text was originally spoken in reference to the unworthy members of a little church of early believers in Asia Minor, but it passes far beyond the limits of the lukewarm Laodiceans to whom it was addressed. And the 'any man' which follows is wide enough to warrant us in stretching out the representation as far as the bounds of humanity extend, and in believing that wherever there is a closed heart there is a knocking Christ, and that all men are lightened by that Light which came into the world.

Upon that I do not need to dwell, but I desire to enforce the individual bearing of the general truth upon our own consciences, and to come to each with this message: The saying is true about thee, and at the door of thy heart Jesus Christ stands, and there His gentle, mighty hand is laid, and on it the flashes of His light shine, and through the chinks of the unopened door of thy heart comes the beseeching voice, 'Open! Open unto Me.' A strange reversal of the attitudes of the great and of the lowly, of the giver and of the receiver, of the Divine and of the human! Christ once said, 'Knock and it shall be opened unto yes' But He has taken the suppliant's place, and, standing by the side of each of us, He beseeches us that we let Him bless us, and enter in for our rest.

So, then, there is here a revelation, not only of a universal truth, but a most tender and pathetic disclosure of Christ's yearning love to each of us. What do you call that emotion which more than anything else desires that a heart should open and let it enter? We call it love when we find it in one another. Surely it bears the same name when it is sublimed into all but infinitude, and yet it is as individualising and specific as it is great and universal, as it is found in Jesus Christ. If it be true that He wants me, if it be true that in that great heart of His there are a thought and a wish about His relation to me, and mine to Him, then, then, each of us is grasped by a love that is like our human love, only perfected and purified from all its weaknesses.

Now we sometimes feel, I am afraid, as if all that talk about the love which Jesus Christ has to each of us was scarcely a prose fact. There is a woeful lack of belief among us in the things that we profess to believe most. You are all ready to admit, when I preach it, that it is true that Jesus Christ loves us. Have you ever tried to realise it, and lay it upon your hearts, that the sweetness and astoundingness of it may soak into you, and change your whole being? Oh! listen, not to my poor, rough notes, but to His infinitely sweet and tender melody of voice, when He says to you, as if your eyes needed to be opened to perceive it, 'Behold! I stand at the door and knock.'

There is a revelation in the words, dear friends, of an infinite long-suffering and patience. The door has long been fastened; you and I have, like some lazy servant, thought that if we did not answer the knock, the Knocker would go away when He was weary. But we have miscalculated the elasticity and the unfailingness of that patient Christ's love. Rejected, He abides; spurned, He returns. There are men and women who all their lives long have known that Jesus Christ coveted their love, and yearned for a place in their hearts, and have steeled themselves against the knowledge, or frittered it away by worldliness, or darkened it by sensuality and sin. And they are once more brought into the presence of that rejected, patient, wooing Lord, who courts them for their souls, as if they were, which indeed

they are, too precious to be lost, as long as there is a ghost of a chance that they may still listen to His voice. The patient Christ's wonderfulness of long-suffering may well bow us all in thankfulness and in penitence. How often has He tapped or thundered at the door of your heart, dear friends, and how often have you neglected to open? Is it not of the Lord's mercies that the rejected or neglected love is offered you once more? and the voice, so long deadened and deafened to your ears by the rush of passion, and the hurry of business, and the whispers of self, yet again appeals to you, as it does even through my poor translation of it.

And then, still further, in that thought of the suppliant waiting for admission there is the explanation for us all of a great many misunderstood facts in our experience. That sorrow that darkened your days and made your heart bleed, what was it but Christ's hand on the door? Those blessings which pour into your life day by day' beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye yield yourselves living sacrifices. That unrest which dogs the steps of every man who has not found rest in Christ, what is it but the application of His hand to the obstinately closed door? The stings of conscience, the movements of the Spirit, the definite proclamation of His Word, even By such lips as mine, what are they an except His appeals to us? And this is the deepest meaning of joys and sorrows, of gifts and losses, of fulfilled and disappointed hopes. This is the meaning of the yearning of Christless hearts, of the stings of conscience which come to us all 'Behold! I stand at the door and knock.' If we understood Better that all life was guided by Christ, and that Christ's guidance of life was guided by His desire that He should find a place in our hearts, we should less frequently wonder at sorrows, and should better understand our blessings.

The boy Samuel, lying sleeping Before the light in the inner sanctuary, heard the voice of God, and thought it was only the grey-bearded priest that spoke. We often make the same mistake, and confound the utterances of Christ Himself with the speech of men.

Recognise who it is that pleads with you; and do not fancy that when Christ speaks it is Eli that is calling; but say, ‘Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth.’ ‘Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in.’

II. And that leads me, secondly, to ask you to look at the door opened.

I need not enlarge upon what I have already suggested, the universality of the wide promise here — ‘If any man open the door’; but what I want rather to notice is that, according to this representation, ‘the door’ has no handle outside, and is so hinged that it opens from within, outwards.

Which, Being taken out of metaphor and put into fact, means this, you are the only being that can open the door for Christ to come in. The whole responsibility, brother, of accepting or rejecting God’s gracious Word, which comes to you all in good faith, lies with yourself.

I am not going to plunge into theological puzzles, but I appeal to consciousness. You know as well as I do — better a great deal, for it is *yourself* that is in question — that at each time when your heart and conscience have been brought in contact with the offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, if you had liked you could have opened the *door*, and welcomed His entrance. And you know that nobody and nothing kept it fast except only yourselves. ‘Ye *will* not come to Me,’ said Christ, ‘that ye might have life.’ Men, indeed, do pile up such mountains of rubbish against the door that it cannot be opened, but it was they that put them there; and they are responsible if the hinges are so rusty that they will not move, or the doorway is so clogged that there is no room for it to open Jesus Christ knocks, but Jesus Christ cannot break the *door* open. It lies in your hands to decide whether you will take or whether you will reject that which He brings.

The door is closed, and unless there be a definite act on your parts it will not be opened, and He will not enter. So we come to this, that to do nothing is to keep your Saviour outside; and that is the way in which most men that miss Him do miss Him.

I suppose there are very few of us who have ever been conscious of a definite act by which, if I might adhere to the metaphor, we have laid hold of the door on the inside, and held it tight lest it should be opened. But, I fear me, there are many who have sat in the inner chamber, and heard the gracious hand on the outer panel, and have kept their hands folded and their feet still, and done nothing. Ah! brethren, to do nothing is to do the most dreadful of things, for it is to keep the shut door shut in the face of Christ. No passionate antagonism is needed, no vehement rejection, no intellectual denial of His truth and His promises. If you want to ruin yourselves, you have simply .to do nothing! All the dismal consequences necessarily follow.

‘Well,’ you say, ‘but you are talking metaphors; let us come to plain facts. What do you want me to do?’ I want you to listen to the message of an infinitely loving Christ who died on the Cross to bear the sins of the whole world, including you and me; and who now lives, pleading with each of us from heaven that we will take by simple faith, and keep by holy obedience, the gift of eternal life which He offers, and He alert. can give. The condition of His entrance is simple trust in Him, as the Saviour of my soul. That is opening the door, and if you will do that, then, just as when you open the shutters, in comes the sunshine; just as when you lift the sluice in flows the crystal stream into the slimy, empty lock, so — I was going to say by gravitation, rather by the diffusive impulse that belongs to light, which is Christ — He will enter in, wherever He is not shut out by unbelief and aversion of will.

III. And so that brings me to my last *point*, *viz.*, the entrance and the feast.

My text is a metaphor, but the declaration that ‘if any man open the door’ Jesus Christ ‘will come *in to him*,’ is not a metaphor, but is the very heart and centre of the Gospel, ‘I will come in to him,’ dwell in him, be really incorporated in his being, or inspirited, if I may so say, in his spirit. Now you may think that that is far too recondite and lofty a thought to be easily grasped by ordinary people, but its very loftiness should recommend it to us. I, for my part, believe that there is no more prose fact in the whole world than the actual dwelling of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who is in heaven, in the spirits of the people that love Him and trust Him. And this is one great part of the Gospel that I have to preach to you, that into our emptiness He will come with His fulness; that into our sinfulness He will come with His righteousness; that into our death He will come with His triumphant and immortal life; and He being in us and we in Him, we shall be full and pure and live for ever, and be blessed with the blessedness of Jesus. So remember that embedded in the midst of the wonderful metaphor of my text lies the fact, which is the very centre of the Gospel hope, the dwelling of Jesus Christ in the hearts even of poor sinful creatures like you and me.

But it comes into view here only as the basis of the subsequent promises, and on these I can only touch very briefly, ‘I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with Me.’ Well, that speaks to us in lovely, sympathetic language of a close, familiar, happy communication between Christ and my poor self, which shall make all life as a feast in company with Him. We remember who is the mouthpiece of Jesus Christ here. It is the disciple who knew most of what quietness of blessedness and serenity of adoring communion there were in leaning on Christ’s breast at supper, casting back his head on that loving bosom; looking into those deep sad eyes, and asking questions which were sure of answer. And John, as he wrote down the words ‘I will sup with him, and he with Me,’ perhaps remembered that upper room where, amidst all the bitter herbs, there was such strange joy and tranquillity. But whether he did or no, my

we not take the picture as suggesting to us the possibilities of loving fellowship, of quiet repose, of absolute satisfaction of all desires and needs, which will be ours if we open the door of our hearts by faith and let Jesus Christ come in?

But, note, when He does come He comes as guest. 'I will sup with him.' 'He shall have the honour of providing that of which I partake.' Just as upon earth He said to the Samaritan woman, 'Give Me to drink,' or sat at the table, at the modest village feast in Bethany, in honour of the miracle of a man raised from the dead, and smiled approval of Martha serving, as of Lazarus sitting at table, and of Mary anointing Him, so the humble viands, the poor man's fare that our resources enable us to lay upon His table, are never too small or poor for Him to delight in. This King feasts in the neatherd's cottage, and He will even condescend to turn the cakes. 'I will sup with Him.' We cannot bring anything so coarse, so poor, so unworthy, if a drop or two of love has been sprinkled over it, but that it will be well-pleasing in His sight, and He Himself will partake thereof. 'He has gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner.'

But more than that, where He is welcomed as guest, He assumes the place of host. 'I will sup with him, and *he with Me.*' You remember how, after the Resurrection, when the two disciples, moved to hospitality, implored the unknown Stranger to come in and partake of their humble fare, He yielded to their importunity, and when they were in the guest-chamber, took His place at the head of the table, and blessed the bread and gave it to them. You remember how, in the beginning of His miracles, He manifested forth His glory in this, that, invited as a common guest to the rustic wedding, He provided the failing wine. And *so*, wherever a poor man opens his heart and says, 'Come in,' and I will give Thee my 'best,' Jesus Christ comes in, and gives the man His best, that the man may render it back to Him. He owes nothing to any man, He accepts the poorest from

each, and He gives the richest to each. He is Guest and Host, and what He accepts from us is what He has first given to us.

The promise of my text is fulfilled immediately when the door of the heart is opened, but it shadows and prophesies a nobler fulfilment in the heavens. Here and now Christ and we may sit together, but the feast will be like the Passover, eaten with loins girt and staves in hand, and the Red Sea and wilderness waiting to be trodden. But there comes a more perfect form of the communion, which finds its parallel in that wonderful scene when the weary fishers, all of whose success had depended on their obedience to the Master's direction, discerned at last, through the grey of the morning, who it was that stood upon the shore, and, struggling to His side, saw there a fire of coals, and fish laid thereon, and bread, to which they were bidden to add their modest contribution in the fish that they had caught; and the meal being thus prepared partly by His hand and partly by theirs, ennobled and filled by Him, His voice says, 'Come and dine.' So, brethren, Christ at the last will bring His servants to His table in His kingdom, and there their works shall follow them; and He and they shall sit together for ever, and for ever 'rejoice in the fatness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple'

I beseech you, listen not to my poor voice, but to His that speaks through it, and when He knocks do you open, and Christ Himself shall come in. 'If any man love Me he will keep My commandments, and My Father will love him, and We will come and make Our abode with him.'

Revelation 3:21-- VII. THE VICTOR'S SOVEREIGNTY

'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.' — Revelation 3:21.

THE Church at Laodicea touched the lowest point of Christian character. It had no heresies, but that was not because it clung to the

truth, but because it had not life enough to breed even them. It had no conspicuous vices, like some of the other communities. But it had what was more fatal than many vices — a low temperature of religious life and feeling, and a high notion of itself. Put these two things together — they generally go together — and you get the most fatal condition for a Church. It is the condition of a large part of the so-called ‘Christian world’ to-day, as that very name unconsciously confesses; for ‘world’ is the substantive, and ‘Christian’ only the adjective, and there is a great deal more ‘world’ than ‘Christian’ in many so-called ‘Churches.’

Such a Church needed, and received, the sharpest rebuke. A severe disease requires drastic treatment. But the same necessity which drew forth the sharp rebuke drew forth also the loftiest of the promises. If the condition of Laodicea was so bad, the struggle to overcome became proportionately greater, and, consequently, the reward the larger. The least worthy may rise to the highest position. It was not to the victors over persecution at Smyrna, or over heresies at Thyatira, nor even to the blameless Church of Philadelphia, but it was to the faithful in Laodicea, who had kept the fire of their own devotion well alight amidst the tepid Christianity round them, that this climax of all the seven promises is given.

In all the others Jesus Christ stands as the bestower of the gift. Here He stands, not only as the bestower, but as Himself participating in that which He bestows. The words beggar all exposition, and I have shrunk from taking them as my text. We seem to see in them, as if looking into some sun with dazzled eyes, radiant forms moving amidst the brightness, and in the midst of them one like unto the Son of man. But if my words only dilute and weaken this great promise, they may still help to keep it before your own minds for a few moments. So I ask you to look with me at the two great things that are bracketed together in our text; only I venture to reverse the order of consideration, and think of —

I. The Commander-in-Chiefs conquest and royal repose.

‘I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.’ It seems to me that, wonderful as are all the words of my text, perhaps the most wonderful of them all are those by which the two halves of the promise are held together — ‘Even as I also.’ The Captain of the host takes His place in the ranks, and, if I may go say, shoulders His musket like the poorest private. Christ sets Himself before us as pattern of the struggle, and as pledge of the victory, and reward. Now let me say a word about each of the two halves of this great thought of our Lord’s identification of Himself with us in our fight, and identification of us with Him in His victory.

As to the former, I would desire to emphasise, with all the strength that I can, the point of view from which Jesus Christ Himself, in these final words from the heavens, directed to all the Churches, looks back upon His earthly career, and bids us think of it as a true conflict. You remember how, in the sanctities of the upper room, and ere yet the supreme moment of the crucifixion had come, our Lord said, when within a day of the Cross and an hour of Gethsemane, ‘I have overcome the world.’ This is an echo of that never-to-be-forgotten utterance that the aged Apostle had heard when leaning on his Master’s Bosom in the seclusion and silence of that sacred upper chamber. Only here our Lord, looking back upon the victory, gathers it all up into one as a past thing, and says, ‘I overcame,’ in those old days long ago.

Brethren, the orthodox Christian is tempted to think of Jesus Christ in such a fashion as to reduce His conflict on earth to a mere sham fight. Let no supposed theological necessities induce you to weaken down in your thoughts of Him what He Himself has told us — that He, too, struggled, and that He, too, overcame. That temptation in the wilderness, where the necessities of the flesh and the desires of the spirit were utilised By the Tempter as weapons with which His unmoved obedience and submission were assailed, was repeated

over and over again all through HIS earthly life. We believe — at least I believe — that Jesus Christ was in nature sinless, and that temptation found nothing in Him on which it could lay hold, no fuel or combustible material to which it could set light. But, notwithstanding, inasmuch as He became partaker of flesh and blood, and entered into the limitations of humanity, His sinlessness did not involve His incapacity for being tempted, nor did it involve that His righteousness was not assailed, nor His submission often tried. We be-Here — or at least I believe — that He ‘did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.’ But I also reverently listen to Him unveiling, so far as may need to be unveiled, the depths of His own nature and experience, and I rejoice to think that He fought the good fight, and Himself was a soldier in the army of which He is the General He is the Captain, the Leader, of the long procession of heroes of the faith; and He is the ‘perfecter’ of it, inasmuch as His own faith was complete and unbroken.

But I may remind you, too, that from this great word of condescending self-revelation and identification, we may well learn what a victorious life really is. ‘I overcame’; but from the world’s point of view He was utterly beaten. He did not gather in many who would listen to Him or care for His words. He was misunderstood, rejected; lived a life of poverty.; died when a young man, a violent death; was hunted by all the Church dignitaries of His generation as a blasphemer, spit upon by soldiers, and execrated after His death. And that is victory, is it? Well, then, we shall have to revise our estimates of what is a conquering career. If He, the pauper-martyr, if He, the misunderstood enthusiast, if He conquered, then some of our notions of a victorious life are very far astray.

Nor need I say a word, I suppose, about the completeness, as well as the reality, of that victory of His. From heaven He claims in this great word just what He claimed on earth, over and over again, when He fronted His enemies with, ‘Which of you convinceth Me of sin?’ and when He declared in the sanctities Of His confidence with

His friends, 'I do always the things that please Him.' The rest of us partially overcome, and partially are defeated. He alone bears His shield out of the conflict undinted and unstained. To do the will of God, to dwell in continual communion with the Father, never to be hindered by anything that the world can present or my sins can suggest, whether of delightful or dreadful, from doing the will of the Father in heaven from the heart — that is victory, and all else is defeat. And that is what the Captain of our salvation, and only He, did.

Turn for a moment now to the other side of our Lord's gracious identification of Himself with us. 'Even as I also am set down with My Father in His throne.' That points back, as the Greek original shows even more distinctly, to the historical fact of the Ascension. It recalls the great words by which, with full consciousness of what He was doing, Jesus Christ sealed His own death-warrant in the presence of the Sanhedrim when He said: 'Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power.' It carries us still further back to the psalm which our Lord Himself quoted, and thereby stopped the mouths of Scribes and Pharisees: 'The Lord said unto My Lord, sit Thou at My right hand till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.' He hid His hand upon that great promise, and claimed that it was to be fulfilled in His ease. And here, stooping from amidst the blaze of the central royalty of the Universe, He confirms all that He had said before, and declares that He shares the Throne of God.

Now, of course, the words are intensely figurative, and have to be translated as best we can, even though it may seem to weaken and dilute them, into less concrete and sensible forms than the figurative representation. But I think we shall not be mistaken if we assert that, whatever lies in this great statement far beyond our conception in the present, there lie in it three things — repose, royalty, communion of the most intimate kind with the Father.

There is repose. You remember how the first martyr saw the opened heavens and the ascended Christ, in that very hall, probably, in which Christ had said, 'Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power.' But Stephen, as he declared, with rapt face smitten by the light into the likeness of an angel's, saw Him standing at the right hand.

We have to combine these two images, incongruous as they are in prose, literally, before we reach the conception of the essential characteristic of that royal rest of Christ's. For it is a repose that is full of activity. 'My Father worketh hitherto,' said He on earth, 'and I work.' And that is true with regard to His unseen and heavenly life. The verses which are appended to the close of Mark's gospel draw a picture for us — 'They went everywhere preaching the Word': He sat at 'the right hand of God.' The two halves do not fuse together. The Commander is in repose; the soldiers are bearing the brunt of the fight. Yes! but then there comes the word which links the two halves together. 'They went everywhere preaching, the Lord also working with them.'

Christ's repose indicates, not merely the cessation from, but much rather the completion *of*, His work on earth, which culminated on the Cross; which work on earth is the basis of the still mightier work which He is doing in the heavens. So the Apostle Paul sets up a great ladder, so to speak, which our faith climbs by successive stages, when he says, 'He that died — yea, rather that is risen again — who is even at the right hand of

God — who also maketh intercession for us.' His repose is full of beneficent activity for all that love Him.

Again, there is set forth royalty, participation in Divine dominion. The highly metaphorical language of our text, and of parallel verses elsewhere, presents this truth in two forms. Sometimes we read of 'sitting at the right hand of God'; sometimes, as here, we read of 'sitting on the throne.' The 'right hand of God' is everywhere. It is

not a local designation. 'The right hand of the Lord' is the instrument of His omnipotence, and to speak of Christ as sitting on the right hand of God is simply to cast into symbolical words the great thought that He wields the forces of Divinity. When we read of Him as enthroned on the Throne of God, we have, in like manner, to translate the figure into this overwhelming and yet most certain truth, that the Man Christ Jesus is exalted to supreme, universal dominion, and that all the forces of omnipotent Divinity rest in the hands that still bear, for faith, the prints of the nails.

But again that session of Christ with the Father suggests the thought, about which it becomes us not to speak, of a communion with the Father — deep, intimate, unbroken, beyond all that we can conceive or speak. We listen to Him when He says, 'Glorify Thou Me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.' We bow before the thought that what He asked in that prayer was the lifting of one of ourselves, the humanity of Jesus, into this inseparable unity with the very glory of God. And then we catch the wondrous words: 'Even as I also.'

II. That brings me to the second of the thoughts here, which may be more briefly disposed of after the preceding exposition, and that is, the private soldier's share in the Captain's victory and rest. 'I will grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also.'

Now with regard to the former of these, our share in Christ's triumph and conquest, I only wish to say one thing, and it is this — I thankfully recognise that to many who do not share with me in what I believe to be the teaching of Scripture, viz., the belief that Christ was more than example, their partial belief, as I think it, in Him as the realised ideal, the living pattern of how men ought to live, has given strength for far nobler and purer life than could otherwise have been reached. But, brethren, it seems to me that we want a great deal more than a pattern, a great deal closer and more intimate union with the Conqueror than the mere setting forth of the

possibility of a perfect life as realised in Him, ere we can share in His victory. What does it matter to me, after all, except for stimulus and for rebuke, that Jesus Christ should have lived the life? Nothing. But when we can link the words in the upper room, 'I have overcome,' and the words from heaven, 'Even as I also overcame,' with the same Apostle's words in his epistle, 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,' then we share in the Captain's victory in an altogether different manner from that which *they* do who can see in Him only a pattern that stimulates and inspires. For if we put our trust in that Saviour, then the very life which was in Christ Jesus, and which conquered the world in Him, will pass into us; and the law of the spirit of life in Christ will make us more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

And then the victory being secured, because Christ lives in us and makes us victorious, our participation in His throne is secure likewise.

There shall be repose, the cessation of effort, the end of toil. There shall be no more aching heads, strained muscles, exhausted brains, weary hearts, dragging feet, There will be no more need for resistance. The helmet will be antiquated, the laurel crown will take its place. The heavy armour, that rusted the garment ever which it was braced, will be laid aside, and the trailing robes, that will contract no stain from the golden pavements, will be the attire of the redeemed. We have all had work enough, and weariness enough, and battles enough, and beatings enough, to make us thankful for the thought that we shall *sit* on the throne.

But if it is a rest like His, and if it is to be the rest of royalty, there will be plenty of work in it; work of the kind that fits us and is blessed. I know not what new elevation, or what sort of dominion will be granted to those who, instead of the faithfulness of the steward, are called upon to exercise the activity of the Lord over

ten cities. I know not, and I care not; it is enough to know that we shall sit on His throne,

But do not let us forget the last of the thoughts: ‘They shall sit *with Me.*’ Ah! there you touch the centre — ‘To depart and to be with Christ, which is far better’; ‘Absent from the body; present with the Lord.’ We know not how. The lips are locked that might, perhaps, have spoken; only this we know, that, not as a drop of water is absorbed into the ocean and lose, it, individuality, shall we be united to Christ. There will always be the two, or there would be no blessedness in the two being one; but as close as is compatible with the sense of being myself, and of His being Himself, will be our fellowship with Him. ‘He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.’

Brethren, this generation would be a great deal the better for thinking more often of the promises and threatenings of Scripture with regard to the future. I believe that no small portion of the lukewarmness of the modern Laodicea is owing to the comparative neglect into which, in these days, the Christian teachings on that subject have fallen. I have tried in these sermons on these seven promises to bring them at least before your thoughts and hearts. And I beseech you that you would, more than you have done, ‘have respect unto the recompense of reward,’ and let that future blessedness enter as a subsidiary motive into your Christian life.

We may gather all these promises together, and even then we have to say, ‘the half hath not been told us.’ ‘It doth not yet appear what we shall be.’ Symbols and negations, and these alone, teach us the little that we know about that future; and when we try to expand and concatenate these, I suppose that our conceptions correspond to the reality about as closely as would the dreams of a chrysalis as to what it would be when it was a butterfly. But certainty and clearness are not necessarily united. ‘It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him.’ Take ‘even as I also’ for the key that unlocks all the mysteries of that

glorious future. 'It is enough for the servant that he be as his Master.'

Revelation 5:6--SEVEN EYES OF THE SLAIN LAMB

'...A Lamb as it had been slain, having...seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth,' — Revelation 5:6.

JOHN received a double commission, to write the things which are and the things which shall be. The things which are signify, I suppose, the unseen realities which flashed upon the inward eye of the solitary seer for a moment in symbol when the door was opened in Heaven. All that is here is seeming and illusion; the only substantial existences lie within the veil. And of all those 'things which are,' in timeless, eternal being, this vision of the throned Lamb, as it had been slain,' is the centre.

Between the Great White Throne and the outer ring of worshippers, representing in the 'living creatures' the crown and glory of creatural life, and in the elders, the crown and glory of redeemed humanity, stands the Lamb slain, which is the symbolical way of declaring that for ever and ever, through Christ and for the sake of His sacrifice, there pass to the universe all Divine gifts, and there rise from the universe all thankfulness and praise. His manhood is perpetual, the influence of His sacrifice in the Divine administration and government never ceases.

The attributes with which this verse clothes that slain Lamb are incongruous; but, perhaps, by reason of their very incongruity all the more striking and significant. The 'seven horns' are the familiar emblem of perfect power; the 'seven eyes' are interpreted by the seer himself to express the fulness of the Divine Spirit.

The eye seems a singular symbol for the Spirit, but it may be used as suggesting the swiftest and subtlest way in which the influences of a human spirit pass out into the external universe. At all events,

whatever may have been the reason for the selection of the emblem, the interpretation of it lies here, in the words of our text itself. The teaching of this emblem, then, is: 'He, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received the promise of the Father, sheds forth this.' The whole fulness of spiritual Divine power is in the hand of Christ to impart to the world.

I. The ' slain Lamb ' is the Lord and Giver of the Spirit. He ' hath the seven Spirits of God ' in the simplest sense of all, that the manhood of our Brother who died on the Cross for us, lifted up to the right hand of God, is there invested and glorified with every fulness of the Divine Spirit, and with all the mysteries of the life of God. Whatsoever there is, in Deity, of spirit and power; whatsoever of swift flashing energy; whatsoever of gentleness and grace; whatsoever of holiness and splendour; all inheres in the Man Christ Jesus; unto whom even in His earthly lowliness and humiliation the Spirit was not given by measure, but unto whom in the loftiness of His heavenly life that Spirit is given in yet more wondrous fashion than in His humiliation. For I suppose that the exaltation with which Christ is exalted is not only a change of position, but in some sense His manhood is progressive; and now in the Heavens is yet fuller of the indwelling Spirit than it was here upon earth.

But it is not as the recipient, but as the bestower of the Spirit, that He comes before us in the great words of my text. All that He has of God, He has that He may give. Whatsoever is His is ours; we share in His fulness and we possess His grace. He gives His own life, and that is the very central idea of Christianity.

There are very many imperfect views of Christ's work afloat in the world. The lowest of them, the most imperfect, so imperfect and fragmentary as scarcely to be worth calling Christianity at all, is the view which recognises Him as being merely Example, Guide, Teacher. High above that there comes the view which is common amongst orthodox people of the more superficial type — the view

which is, I am afraid, still too common amongst us — which regards the whole work of Jesus Christ as terminated upon the Cross. It thinks of Him as being something infinitely more than Teacher and Guide and Example, but it stops at the thought of His great reconciling death as being the completion of His work, and hears Him say from the Cross, ‘It is finished,’ with a faith which, however genuine, cannot but be considered as imperfect unless it is completed with the remembrance that it was but one volume of His work that was finished when He died upon the Cross. His death was really a transition to a form of work which if not loftier was at all events other than the work which was completed upon Calvary. His earthly life finished His perfect obedience as Pattern and as Son; His death on the Cross finished His mighty work of self-surrender and sacrifice, which is propitiation and atonement for the sins of the whole world. His life on earth and His death on the Cross taken together finished His great work of revealing the Father in so far as that revelation depended upon outward, objective facts. But His life on earth and His death on the Cross did not even begin the work, but only laid the foundation for it, of communicating to men the life which was in Himself. He lived that He might complete obedience and manifest the Father. He died that He might ‘put away sin’ and reveal the Father still more fully. And now, exalted at the right hand of God, He works on through the ages in that which is the fruit of His Cross and the crown of His sacrifice, the communication to men, moment by moment, of His own perfect life, that they too may live for ever and be like Him.

He died that we might not die; He lives that the life which we live in the flesh may be His life and not ours. We may not draw comparisons between the greatness of the various departments of our Master’s work, but we can say that His earthly life and His death of shame are the foundation of the work which He does to-day. And so, dear brethren, whilst nineteen centuries ago His triumphant words, ‘It is finished,’ rang out the knell of sin’s dominion, and the first hope for the world’s emancipation, another voice, far ahead still

in the centuries, waits to be spoken; and not until the world has been filled with the glory of His Cross and the power of His life shall it be proclaimed: 'It is done!'

The interspace between these two is filled with the activity of that slain Lamb who, by His death, has become the Lord of the Spirit; and through His blood is able to communicate to all men the life of His own soul. The Lord of the Spirit is the Lamb that was slain.

II. Then let me ask you to look, secondly, at the representation here given of the infinite variety of gifts which Christ bestows.

Throughout this Book of the Revelation we find this remarkable expression, in which the Spirit of God is not spoken of as in His personal unity, but as in sevenfold variety. So at the beginning of the letter we find the salutation, 'Grace and peace from Him which is, and was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before His Throne. And again we read, in one of the letters to the churches: 'These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars'; the 'correspondence being marked between the number of each. And again we read in the earlier part of this same vision, in the preceding chapter, that before the throne there were seven torches flaming, 'which are the seven Spirits of God.' And so, again, in my text, we read, 'seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.'

Now it is obvious that there is not any question here of the personality and unity of the Divine Spirit, which is sufficiently recognised in other parts of the Apocalypse, such as 'the Spirit and the Bride say: "Come!"' and the like; but that the thing before the Evangelist's mind is the variety of the operations and activities of that one Spirit.

And the number seven, of course, at once suggests the idea of perfection and completeness. So that the thought emerges of the

endless, boundless, manifoldness, and wonderful diversity of the operations of this great life- spirit that streams from Jesus Christ.

Think of the number of designations by which that Spirit is described in the New Testament. In regard to all that belongs to intellectual life, He is 'the Spirit of wisdom' and of 'illumination in the knowledge of Christ,' He is 'the Spirit of Truth.' In regard to all that belongs to the spiritual life, He is 'the Spirit of holiness,' the 'Spirit of liberty'; the Spirit of self-control, or as rendered in our Bible, 'of a sound mind'; the 'Spirit of love.' In regard to all that belongs to the practical life, He is ' the Spirit of counsel and of might,' the 'Spirit of power.' In regard to all that belongs to the religious life, He is 'the Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, Abba! Father!'; the 'Spirit of grace and of supplication,' the 'Spirit of life.' So over the whole round of man's capacity and nature, all his intellectual, moral, practical, and religious being, there are gifts which fit each side and each part of it.

Think of the variety of the symbols under which He is presented: 'the oil,' with its soft, gentle flow; 'the fire,' with its swift transmuting, purifying energy; the water, refreshing, fertilising, cleansing; the breath, quickening, vitalising, purifying the blood; the wind, gentle as the sigh of an infant, loud and mighty as a hurricane, sometimes scarcely lifting the leaves upon the tender spring herbage, sometimes laying the city low in a low place. It is various in manifestation, graduating through all degrees, applying to every side of human nature, capable of all functions that our weakness requires, helping our infirmities, making intercession for us and in us, with unutterable groanings, sealing and confirming our possession of His grace; searching the deep things of God and revealing them to us; guiding into all truth, freeing us from the law of sin and death. There are diversities of operation, but the same Spirit. It is protean, and takes every shape that our necessities require.

Think of all men's diverse weaknesses, miseries, sins, cravings — every one of them an open door through which God's grace may come; every one of them a form provided into which the rich molten ore of this golden Spirit may flow. Whatsoever a man needs, that he will find in the infinite variety of the spiritual help and strength which the Lamb slain is ready to give. It is like the old fable of the manna, which the Rabbis tell us tasted upon each lip precisely what each man chose. So this nourishment from above becomes to every man what each man requires. Water will take the shape of any vessel into which you choose to pour it; the Spirit of God assumes the form that is imposed upon it by our weaknesses and needs.

And if you want to know the exhaustless variety of the seven Spirits which the Lamb gives, find out the multiplicity and measure, the manifoldness and the depth, of man's necessities, of weakness, of sorrow, and sin, and ye will know how much the Spirit of God is able to bestow and still remain full and unexhausted.

III. Still further, my text suggests the unbroken continuity of the gifts which the slain Lamb has to give.

The language of the original, for any of you that can consult it, will show you that the word 'sent' might be rendered 'being sent,' expressive of a continual impartation.

Ah! God's Spirit is not given once in a way and then stops. It is given, not by fits and starts. People talk about 'revivals,' as if there were times when the Spirit of God came down more abundantly than at other times upon the world, or upon churches, or upon individuals. It is not so. There are variations in our receptiveness; there are no variations in its steady efflux. Does the sun shine at different rates, are its beams cut off sometimes, or poured out with less energy, or is it on]y the position of the earth that makes the difference between the summer and the winter, the days and the nights, whilst the great central orb is raying out at the same rate all through the murky darkness, all through the frosty days? And so the

gifts of Jesus Christ pour out from Him at a uniform continuous rate, with no breaks in the golden beams, with no pauses in the continual flow. Pentecost is far back, but the fire that was kindled then has not died down into grey ashes. It is long since that stream began to flow, but it is not yet shrunken in its banks. For ever and for ever, with unbroken continuity, whether men receive or whether they forbear, He shines on, communicating Himself and pouring out the Spirit of grace, ay! even into a non-receiving world! How much sunshine seems to be lost, how much of that Spirit's influence seems lost, and yet it pours on for ever.

Men talk about Christianity as being effete. People to-day look back upon the earlier ages, and say: 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?' The earlier ages had nothing that you and I have not, and Christianity will not die out, and God's Church will not die out, until the sun that endureth for ever is shorn of its beams and forgets to shine. The seven Spirits are streaming out as they were at the beginning, and as — blessed be God! — they shall do to the end.

IV. And, lastly, my text suggests a universal diffusion of these gifts. 'Seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.' The words are a quotation from a remarkable prophecy in the book of Zechariah, which speaks about the 'seven eyes of God,' running —

'To and fro over all the earth.'

There are no limitations of these gifts to any one race or nation as there were in the old times, nor any limitations either to a democracy. 'On My servants and on My handmaidens will I pour out of My Spirit,' In olden days the mountain-tops were touched with the rays, and all the lowly valleys lay deep in the shadow and the darkness. Now the risen sunshine pours down into the deepest clefts, and no heart so poor, so illiterate, so ignorant but that it may receive the full sunshine of that Spirit.

Of course, in the very widest of all senses the words are true of the universal diffusion of spiritual gifts from Christ; for all the light with which men see is His light; and all the eyes with which they have ever looked at truth, or beauty, or goodness, come from Him who is 'the Master-light of all our seeing.' And poet, and painter, and thinker, and teacher, and philanthropist, and every man that has helped his fellows or has had any glimpse of any angle or bit of the Divine perfection, has seen because the eye of the class or order. Christianity as the true Lord has been in some measure granted to him, and 'the inspiration, of the Almighty has given him understanding.'

But the universal diffusion of spiritual gifts of this sort is not what is meant in my text. It means the gifts of a higher religious character. And I need not remind you of how over broad lands that were heathen when John in his rocky Patmos got this vision, there has now dawned the glory of Christ and the knowledge of His name. Think of all the treasures of the literature of the Christian Church in Latin and African Teutonic lands that have come since the day when this chapter was written. Think of what Britain was then and of what it is to-day. Remember the heroisms, holinesses, illuminations that have shone over these then barbarous lands since that time; and understand how it has all come because from the Lamb by the Throne there has been sent out over all the earth the Spirit that is wisdom and holiness and life.

And think how steadily down through layers of society that were regarded as outcast and contemptible in the time of the founding of the Church, there has trickled and filtered the knowledge of Himself and of His grace; and how amongst the poor and the humble and the outcast, amongst the profligate and the sinful, there have sprung up flowers of holiness and beauty all undreamed of before; and we shall understand how all classes in all lands may receive a portion of the sevenfold Spirit.

Every Christian man and woman is inspired, not to be a teacher of infallible truth, but inspired in the true and deep sense that in them dwells the Spirit of Jesus Christ. 'If any man have not the Spirit he is none of His.' All of us, weak, sinful as we are, ignorant and bewildered often, may possess that Divine life to live in our hearts.

Only, dear brethren, remember it is the *slain* Lamb that gives the Spirit. And unless we are looking to that Lamb slain as our hope and confidence, we shall not receive it. A maimed Christianity that has a Christ, But no slain Lamb, has little of His Spirit; but if you trust to His Sacrifice, and rest your whole hopes on His Cross, then there will come into your hearts His own mighty grace, and 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus will make you free from the law of sin and death.'

Revelation 7:9--THE PALM-BEARING MULTITUDE

'... Lo, a great multitude..., stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.' — Revelation 7:9.

THE Seer is about to disclose the floods of misery which are to fall upon the earth at the sound of the seven trumpets, like avalanches set loose by a noise. But before the crash of their descent comes there is a lull.

He sees angels holding back the winds, like dogs in a leash, lest they should blow, and all destructive agencies are suspended. In the pause before the storm he sees two visions: one, that of the sealing of the servants of God, the pledge that, amidst the world-wide calamities, they shall be secure; and *one*, this vision of my text, the assurance that beyond the storms there waits a calm region of life and glory. The vision is meant to brace all generations for their trials, great or small, to draw faith and love upwards and forwards, to calm sorrow, to diminish the magnitude of death and the pain of

parting, and to breed in us humble desires that, when our time comes, we too may go to join that great multitude.

It can never be inappropriate to look with the eyes of the Seer on that jubilant crowd. So I turn to these words and deal with them in the plainest possible *fashion*, just taking each clause as it lies, though, for reasons which will appear, modifying the order in which we look at them, I think that, taken together, they tell us all that we can or need know about that future.

I. Note the palm-bearing multitude.

Now the palm, among the Greeks and Romans, was a token of victory. That is usually taken to be the meaning of the emblem here, as it was taken in the well-known hymn —

'More than conquerors at last.'

But it has been well pointed out that there is no trace of such a use of the palm in Jewish practice, and that all the emblems of this Book of the Revelation move within the circle of Jewish ideas. Therefore, appropriate as the idea of victory may be, it is not, as I take it, the one that is primarily suggested here. Where, then, shall we look for the meaning of the symbol?

Now there was in Jewish practice a very significant use of the palm-branches, for it was the prescription, of the ritual law that they should be employed in the Feast of Tabernacles, when the people were hidden to take palm-branches and 'rejoice before the Lord seven days.' It is that distinctly Jewish use of the palm-branch that is brought before our minds here, and not the heathen one of mere conquest.

So then, if we desire to get the whole significance and force of this emblem of the multitude with the palms in their hands, we have to ask what was the significance of that Jewish festival. Like all other Jewish feasts, it was originally a Nature-festival applying to a season

of the year, and it afterwards came to have associated with it the remembrance of something in the history of the nation which it commemorated. That double aspect, the natural and the historical, are both to be kept in view. Let us take the eldest one first. The palm-bearing multitude before the Throne suggests to us the thought of rejoicing reapers at the close of the harvest. The year's work is done, the sowing days are over, the reaping days have come. 'They that gather it shall eat it in the courts of the Lord.' And so the metaphor of my text opens out into that great thought that the present and the future are closely continuous, and that the latter is the time for realising, in one's own experience, the results of the life that we have lived here. To-day is the time of sowing; the multitude with the palms in their hands are the reapers. Brother! what are you sowing? Will it be for you a glad day of festival when you have to reap what you have sown? Are you scattering poisoned seed? Are you sowing weeds, or are you sowing good fruit that shall be found after many days unto praise and honour and glory? Look at your life here as being but setting in motion a whole series of causes of which you are going to have the effects punctually dealt out to you yonder in the time to come. That great multitude reaped what they had sown, and rejoiced in the reaping. Shall I? We are like operators in a telegraph office, touching keys here which make impressions upon ribbons in a land beyond the sea, and when we get there we shall have to read what we have written here. How will you like it, when the ribbon is taken out of the machine and spread before you, and you have to go over it syllable by syllable and translate all the dots and dashes into what they mean? It will be a feast or a day of sadness. But, festival or no, there stands plain and irrefragable the fact that 'whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,' and he will not only have to reap it, but he will have to eat it, and be filled with the fruit of his own doings. That is the first thought,

Turn to the other one. That palm-bearing multitude keeping their Feast of Tabernacles reminds us of the other aspect of the festival in its original intention, which was the commemoration of all that God

had done for the people as they passed through the wilderness, and the rejoicing, in their settled abode, over 'the way by which the Lord their God had led them,' and over the rest to which He had led them. So the other idea comes out that they who have passed into that great Presence look back on the darkness and the dreariness, on the struggles and the change, on the drought and the desert, on the foes and the fears, and out of them all find occasions for rejoicing and reasons for thankfulness. There can be no personal identity without memory, and the memory of sorrows changes into joy when we come to see the whole meaning and trend of the sorrow. The desert was dreary, solitary, *dry*, and parched as they passed through it. But like some grim mountain-range seen in the transfiguring light of sunrise, and from the far distance, all grimness is changed into beauty, and the long dreary stretch looks, when beheld from afar, one unbroken manifestation of the Divine love and presence. What was grim rock and cold ice when we were near it is clothed with the violets and the purples that remoteness brings, and there shines down upon it the illuminating and interpreting light of the accomplished purpose of God. So the festival is the feast of inheriting consequences, and the feast of remembering the past.

There is one other aspect of this metaphor which I may just mention in a sentence. Later days in Judaism added other features to the original appointments of the Feast of Tabernacles, and amongst them there was one which our Lord Himself used as the occasion of setting forth one aspect of His work. 'On the last day, that great day of the feast,' the priests went down from the Temple, and filled their golden vases at the fountain, brought back the water, and poured it forth in the courts of the Temple, chanting the ancient song from the prophet, 'With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.' And our Lord in His earthly life used this last day of the feast and its ceremonial as the point of attachment for His revelation of Himself, as He who gave to men the true living water. In like manner, the expansion of my text, which occurs in the subsequent verses, refers, as it would seem, to the festival, and to our Lord's own use of it,

when we read that the ‘Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne shall be their Shepherd, and shall lead them to the fountains of living waters.’

So the emblem of the feast brings to our mind, not only the thought of retribution and of repose, but also the thought of the abundant communication of all supplies for all the desires and thirsts of the dependent and seeking soul. Whatsoever human nature can need there, it receives in its fulness from Jesus Christ. The Rabbis used to say that he who had not seen the joy of the Feast of Tabernacles did not know what joy meant; and I would say that until we, too, stand there, with the palms in our hands, we shall not know of how deep, fervent, calm, perpetual a gladness the human heart is capable.

II. Note their place and attitude.

They stand before the Throne, and before the Lamb. Now it would take me too far away from my present purpose to do more than point, in a sentence, to that remarkable and tremendous juxtaposition of the ‘Throne’ and the ‘Lamb,’ which Lamb is the crucified Christ. What did the man that ventured upon that form of speech, bracketing together the ‘Throne’ of the Divine Majesty and the slain’ Lamb’ who is Christ, think about Christ that he should sever Him from all the multitude of men, and unite Him with the solitary God? I only ask. I leave you to answer.

But I turn to the two points — ‘before the Throne and the Lamb,’ and ‘standing’; and these two suggest, it seems to me, the two thoughts which, though we cannot do much to fill them out, are yet all-sufficient for illumination, for courage, and for hope. These two are the thought of nearness and the thought of service. ‘Before the Throne and the Lamb’ is but a picturesque way of saying ‘to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.’ I do not enter upon any attempt to expound the manner of such nearness. All that I say is that it is a poor affair if we are to let flesh and sense interpret for us what is meant by ‘near’ and ‘far.’ For even here, and whilst we are

entangled with this corporeal existence and our dependence upon the conditions of time and space, we know that there is nearness mediated by sympathy and love which is independent *of*, which survives and disregards, external separation in space. Every loving heart knows that where the treasure is, there the heart is, and where the heart is, there the man is. And the very same thing that knits us together, though oceans wide between us roll, in its highest form will knit the souls that love Jesus Christ to Him, wherever in space they and He may be. Here we have five senses, five windows, five gates. If our ears were different we should hear sounds, shrill and deep, which now are silence to us. If our eyes were different we should see rays at both ends of the spectrum which now are invisible. The body hides as much as it reveals, and we may humbly believe that when the perfect spirit is clothed with its perfect organ, the spiritual body — that is to say, the body that answers to all the needs of the spirit, and is its fit instrument, then many of those melodies which now pass by us unheard will fill *our* senses with sweetness, and many of these flashing lustres which now we cannot gather into visual impressions will then blaze before us in the perfect light. We shall be near Him, and to be with Christ, however it is mediated (and we cannot tell how), is all that you need, for peace, for nobleness, for blessedness, for immortality. Brethren! to have Christ with me here is my strength; to be with Christ yonder is my blessedness. They are ‘before the Throne of God and the Lamb.’ I do not believe that we know much beyond that, and I am sure that we need nothing beyond it, if we rightly understand all that it means.

But I said there was another idea here, and that is implied by the words, they ‘stood before the Throne,’ and is further drawn out in the expansion of my text which follows it as interpretation: ‘Therefore are they before the Throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His Temple.’ What the nature of the service may be it boots not to inquire, only let us remember that the caricature of the Christian heaven which has often been flung at Christian people as a taunt, viz., that it is an eternity of idleness and psalm- singing, has

no foundation in Scripture, because the New Testament conception unites the two thoughts of being with Christ and of service for Christ. Remember, for instance, the parable of the pounds and the talents, in which the great law is laid down. 'Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things,' and mark how here 'these... that came out of great tribulation' are not only in His presence, but active in His service. We have the same blending still more definitely set forth in the last chapter of this book, where we read of 'those who serve Him, and see His face'; where the two ideas of the life of contemplation and rapt vision, and of the life of active service and joyful employment are welded together as being not only not incompatible, but absolutely necessary for each other's completeness.

But remember that if there is to be service yonder, here is the exercising ground, where we are to cultivate the capacities and acquire the habitudes which there will find ampler scope and larger field. I do not know what we are here in this world for at all, unless it is to apprentice us for heaven. I do not know that there is anything that a man has to do in this life which is worth doing unless it be as a training for doing something yonder that shall more entirely correspond with his capacities. So what kind of work are you doing, friend? Is it the sort of work that you will be able to carry on when you pass beyond all the trivialities of this life? I beseech you, remember this, that life on earth is a bewilderment and an enigma for which there is no solution, a long piece of irony, unless beyond the grave there He fields for nobler work for which we are being trained here. And I pray you see to it that your life here on earth is such as to prepare you for the service, day and night, of the heavens. How can I drive that home to your hearts and consciences? I cannot; you must do it for yourselves.

III. Lastly, note their dress.

‘Clothed with white robes’ — the robe is, of course, in all languages, the character in which, as the result of his deeds, a man drapes himself, that of him which is visible to the world, the ‘habit’ of his spirit, as we say (and the word ‘habit’ means both custom and costume). ‘White’ is, of course, the heavenly colour; ‘white thrones,’ ‘white horses’ are in this book, and the white is not dead but lustrous, like our Lord’s garments on the Mount of Transfiguration, such white as sunshine smiting a snowfield makes. So, then, the dress, the habit of the spirits is of lustrous purity, or *glory*, to put it all into one word. But more important than that is this question: How came they by such robes? The expansion of our text, to which I have already referred more than once, and which immediately follows, answers the question. ‘They washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’ ‘washed’; then there is something for them to do. ‘The Blood of the Lamb’ was the means of cleansing; then cleansing was not the result of their own effort. The cleansing is not the mere forgiveness, but includes also the making of the character, pure, white, lustrous. And the blood of the Lamb does that. For Christ by His death has brought to us forgiveness, and Christ by His imparted life brings to each of us, if we will, the cleansing which shall purify us altogether. Only we have something to do. We cannot indeed cleanse ourselves. There is no detergent in any soap factory in the world that will take the stains out of your character, or that will take away the guilt of the past. But Jesus Christ by His death brings forgiveness, and by His life imparted to us, will change the set of a character, and make us gradually pure. He has ‘washed us from our sins in His own Blood.’ We have to wash our garments, and make them ‘white in the blood of the Lamb.’ He has brought the means; we have to employ them. If we do, if we not only trust Him for pardon, but accept Him for purifying, and day by day honestly endeavour to secure greater and greater whiteness of garments, our labour will not be in vain. If, and only if, we do that, and see stain after stain gradually fade away from the garment, under our hands, we may

humbly hope that when we die there will be one more added to the palm-bearing, white-robed multitude who stand Before the Throne and before the Lamb. 'Blessed are they that wash their robes that they may have right to the Tree of Life,' and may enter in through the gate into the City.

Revelation 15:2, 3--THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE LAMB

'And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image,... and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. 3. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.' — Revelation 15:2, 3.

THE form of this vision is moulded partly by the circumstances of the Seer, and partly by reminiscences of Old Testament history. As to the former, it can scarcely be an accident that the Book of the Revelation · bounds with allusions to the sea. We are never far from the music of its waves, which broke around the rocky Patmos where it was written. And the 'sea of glass mingled with fire' is but a photograph of what John must have seen on many a still morning, when the sunrise came blushing over the calm surface; or on many an evening when the wind dropped at sundown, and the sunset glow dyed the watery plain with a fading splendour. — Nor is the allusion to Old Testament history less obvious. We cannot but recognise the reproduction, with modifications, of that scene when Moses and his ransomed people looked upon the ocean beneath which their oppressors lay, and lifted up their glad thanksgivings. So here, by anticipation, in the solemn pause before the judgment goes forth, there are represented the spirits that have been made wise by conquest, as gathered on the bank of that steadfast ocean, lifting up as of old hymn of triumphant thankfulness over destructive judgments, and blending the song of Moses and of the Lamb, in testimony of the unity of spirit which runs through all the manifestations of God's character from the beginning to the end.

Ever His judgments are right; ever the purpose of His most terrible things is that men may know Him, and may love Him; and ever they who see deepest into the mysteries, and understand most truly the realities of the universe will have praise springing to their lips for all that God hath done.

I. Notice the Triumphant Choir.

‘I saw them that had gotten the victory over the beast and over his image, and over the number of his name.’ Now I am not going to plunge into Apocalyptic discussions. It is no part of my business now either *to ask or* answer the question as to whether this Beast of the Revelation is a person or a tendency. I do not care, for my present purpose, whether, supposing it to be a person, an embodiment of certain tendencies, it is a person in the past or in the future; whether it was a veiled designation of the Emperor Nero, or whether it is a prophecy of some yet unborn human embodiment of transcendent wickedness. The question that I would ask is rather this, — Whoever the beast is, what makes him a beast? And if we will think about that, we may get some good out of it. What is the bestial element in him, whoever he be? And the answer is not far to find — Godless selfishness, that is ‘the mark of the beast.’ Wherever a human nature is self-centred, God-forgetting, and, therefore, God-opposing (for whoever forgets God defies Him), that nature has gone down below humanity, and has touched the lower level of the brutes. Men are so made as that they must either rise to the level of God or certainly go down to that of the animal. And wherever you see men living by their own fancies, for their own pleasure, in forgetfulness and neglect of the sweet and mystic bonds that should knit them to God, there you see ‘the image of the beast and the number of his name.’

But besides that godless selfishness, we may point to simple animalism as literally the mark of the beast. He who lives not by conscience and by faith, but by fleshly inclination and sense, lowers

himself to the level of the instinctive brute-life, and beneath it, because he refuses to obey faculties which they do not possess, and what is nature in them is degradation in us. Look at the unblushing sensuality which marks many 'respects his people' nowadays. Look at the foul fleshliness of much of popular art and poetry. Look at the way in which pure animal passion, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the love of good things to eat, and plenty to drink, is swaying and destroying men and women by the thousand among us. Look at the temptations that lie along every street in our great cities, for every young man, after dusk. Look at the thin veneer of culture over the ugliest lust. Scratch the gentleman, and you find the satyr. Is it much of an exaggeration, in view of the facts of English life to-day, to say that all the world wonders after and worships this beast?

Further, notice that to escape from the power of the beast it is needful to fight one's way out. The language of my text is remarkably significant.

This Apocalyptic writer does not mind about grammar *or* smoothness so long as he can express his ideas; and he uses a form of speech here that makes the hair of grammatical purists stand on end, because it vigorously expresses his thought. He calls these triumphant choristers 'conquerors out *of* the beast,' which implies that victory over him is an escape from a dominion in which the conquerors, before their victory, were held. They have fought their way, as it were, out of the land of bondage, and, like revolted slaves, have won their liberty, and marched forth triumphant. The allusion to Israel's exodus is probable. 'Egypt was glad when they departed.' So the bondsmen of this new Pharaoh recover freedom by conflict, and the fruit of their victory is entire escape from the tyrant.

That victory is possible. The Apocalypse shows us that there are two opposing Powers — this said 'beast' on the one side, and 'the Lamb' on the other. In the Seer's vision these two divide the world between them. That is to say, Jesus Christ has conquered the bestial

tendencies of our nature, the selfish godlessness which is apt to cast its spells and weave its chains over us all. The Warrior-Lamb, singular and incongruous as the combination sounds, is the Victor. He conquers because He is the Lamb of sacrifice; He conquers because He is the Lamb of innocence; He conquers because He is the Lamb of meekness, the gentle and, therefore, the all- victorious. By Christ we conquer. Through faith, which lays hold on His power and victory, we too may conquer. 'This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith.'

Young men and women, may I make my appeal specially to you? Do not let yourselves be led away captives, like cattle to the shambles, by the fascinations and seductions of this poor, fleeting present. Keep your heel on the neck of the animal that is within you; take care of that selfish godlessness into which we all are tempted to fall. Listen to the trumpet-call that ought to stir your hearts, and summons you to freedom and to victory through the blood of the Lamb. And by humbly clasping Him as your Sacrifice, your Leader, and your Power, enrol yourselves amongst those who, in His own good time, shall come victorious out from the beast and from his image.

II. Still further, notice the position of this victorious chorus.

'I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire; and they stand on the sea of glass.' Of course the propriety of the image, as well as the force of the original language, suggests at once that by 'on the sea of glass' here, we must understand, on the firm bank by its side. As Moses and the ransomed hosts stood on the shore of the Red Sea, so these conquerors are represented as standing on the safe beach, and looking out upon this sea of glass mingled with fire, which, calm, crystal, clear, stable, and yet shot through and through with the red lines of retributive judgment, sleeps above the buried oppressors.

Observe that besides its picturesque appropriateness and its historical allusion, this sea of glass has a distinct symbolical

meaning. We find it appearing also, in the great vision in the fourth chapter, where the Seer beholds the normal and ideal order of the universe, which is — the central throne, the ‘Lamb that was slain’ in the interspace between the Throne and the creatures as mediator; and round about, the four Living beings, who represent the fulness of creation, and the four-and-twenty elders, who represent the Church in the Old and the New Covenants as one whole.

Then follows, ‘before the Throne was a sea of glass,’ which cannot be any part of the material creation, and seems to have but one explanation, and that is that it means the aggregate of the Divine dealings. ‘Thy judgments are a mighty deep.’ ‘Oh! the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God; how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out.’ Such a signification fits precisely our present passage, for the sea here represents that beneath which the tyrant lies buried for evermore.

That great ocean of the judgment of God is crystalline — clear though deep. Does it seem so to us? Ah! we stand before the mystery of God’s dealings, often bewildered, and not seldom reluctant to submit. The perplexity arising from their obscurity is often almost torture, and sometimes leads men into Atheism, or something like it. And yet here is the assurance that that sea is crystal clear, and that if we cannot look to its lowest depths, that is not because there is any mud or foulness there, but partly because the light from above fails before it reaches the abysses, and partly because our eyes are uneducated to search its depths. In itself it is transparent, and it rises and falls without ‘mire or dirt,’ like the blue Mediterranean on the marble cliffs of the Italian coast. If it is clear as far as the eye can see, let us trust that beyond the reach of the eye the clearness is the same.

And it is a crystal ocean as being calm, They who stand there have gotten the victory and bear the image of the Master. By reason of

their conquest, and by reason of their sympathy with Him they see that what to us, tossing upon its surface, appears such a troubled and tempestuous ocean, as calm and still As from some height, looked down upon, the ocean seems a watery plain, and all the agitation of the billows has subsided into a gentle ripple on the surface, so to them looking down upon the sea that brought them thither, it is quiet — and their vision, not ours, is the true one.

It is a ‘sea of glass mingled with fire.’ Divine acts of retribution as it were flash through it, if I may so say, like those streaks of red that are seen in Venice glass, or like some ocean smitten upon the one side of every wave by a fiery sunlight, while the other side of each is dark. So through that great depth of God’s dealings there flashes the fire of retribution. They who have conquered the animal, the godless self, see into the meaning and the mercifulness of God’s dealings with the world; and we here, in the measure in which we have become victors over the rude animalism and the more subtle selfishness that tend to rule us all, and in the measure in which we bear the image of Jesus Christ, and therefore have come into sympathy with Him, may come to discern with some clearer understanding, and to trust with more unfaltering faith, the righteousness and the mercy of all that God shall do.

III. Lastly, notice the occasion of the song, and the song itself.

‘They sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb’ The Song of Moses was a song of triumph over destructive judgment; the Song of the Lamb, says the text, is set on the same key. The one broad, general lesson to be drawn from this, is one on which I have no time to touch, viz., the essential unity, in spite of all superficial diversities, of the revelation of God in the Old Covenant by law and miracle and retributive acts, and the revelation of God in the New Covenant by the Cross and Passion of Jesus Christ. Men pit the Old Testament against the New; the God of the Old Testament against the God of the New. They sometimes tell us that there is antagonism. Modern

teachers are wanting us to deny that the Old is the foreshadowing of the New, and the New the fulfilment of the Old. My text asserts, in opposition to all such errors, the fruitful principle of the fundamental unity of the two; and bids us find in the one the blossom and in the other the fruit, and declares that the God who brought the waters of the ocean over the oppressors is the God that has mercy upon all, in Jesus Christ, His dying Son.

And there is another principle here, 'upon which I need not do more than touch, for I have already anticipated much that might have been said about it, and that is the perfect harmony of the retributive acts of God's destructive dealings in this world, and the highest conception of His love and mercy which the gospel brings us. 'When the wicked perish,' says one of the old proverbs, 'there is shouting.' And so there ought to be. When some hoary oppression that has been deceiving mankind for centuries, with its instruments and accomplices, is swept off the face of the earth, the more men have entered into the meaning of Jesus Christ's mission and work, and the more they feel the pitying indignation which they ought to feel at seeing men led away by evil, and made miserable by oppression, the more they will rejoice. God's dealings are meant to manifest His character, and that in order that all men may know and love Him. We may, therefore, be sure, and keep firm hold of the confidence, that whatever He doeth, however the methods may seem to vary, comes from one unalterable and fixed motive, and leads to one unalterable and certain one. The motive is His own love; the end the glory of His Name, in the love and knowledge of men whose life and blessedness depend on their knowing and loving Him.

So, dear friends, do not let us be too swift in saying that this, that, and the other thing are inconsistent with the highest conceptions of the Divine character. I believe, as heartily as any man can behave, that God has put His witness in our consciences and minds, and that all His dealings will comply with any test that man's reason and man's conscience and man's heart can subject them to. Only we

have not got all the materials; we look at half-finished work; our eyes are not quite so educated as that we can pronounce infallibly, on seeing a small segment of a circle, what are it, diameter and its sweep.

I am always suspicious of that rough-and-ready way of settling questions about God's revelation, when a man says: 'I cannot accept this *or* that because it contradicts my conception of the Divine nature.' Unless you are quite sure that your conceptions are infallibly accurate, unless you deny the possibility of their being educated, you must admit that agreement with them is but a leaden rule. And it seems to me a good deal wiser, and more accordant with the modesty which becomes us, to be cautious in pronouncing what does or does not befit God to do, and, until we reach that loftier point of vision, where being higher up we can see deeper down, to say 'the Judge of all the earth must do right. If He does this, then it is right.' At any rate let us lay hold of the plain truth: 'O Lord! Thou preservest man and beast,' and then we may venture to say, 'Thy judgments are a mighty deep,' and beneath that deepest depth, as the roots of the hill, beneath the ocean, is God's righteousness, which is like the great mountains.

The last thought that I would suggest is that, according to the teaching of my text, we may take that old, old story of the ransomed slaves and the baffled oppressor and the Divine intervention and the overwhelming ocean, as prophecy full of radiant hope for the world. That is how it is used here. Pharaoh is the beast, the Red Sea is this 'sea of glass mingled with fire,' the ransomed Israelites are those who have conquered their way out of the dominion of the beast, and the song of Moses and of the Lamb is a song parallel to the cadences of the ancient triumphant chorus, and celebrating the annihilation of that power which drew the world away from God. So we may believe that as Israel stood on the sands, and saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore, humanity will one day, delivered from all its bestiality and its selfishness, lift up a song of thanksgiving to the

conquering King who has drowned its enemies in the depths of His own righteous judgments.

And as for the world, so for individuals. If you take the Beast for your Pharaoh and your task-master, you will 'sink' with him 'like lead in the mighty waters: If you take the Lamb for your sacrifice and your King, He will break the bonds from off your arms, and lift the yoke from your neck, and lead you all your lives long; and you will stand at last, when the eternal morning breaks, and see its dawn touch with golden light the calm ocean, beneath which your oppressors lie buried for ever, and will lift up glad thanksgivings to Him who has washed you from your sins in His own blood, and made you victors over 'the beast, and his image, and the number of his name.'

Revelation 21:1-7; 22-27--THE NEW JERUSALEM ON THE NEW EARTH

'And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. 2. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold. the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. 4. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 5. And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make in things new. And He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. 6. And He said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 7. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and He shall be My son.... 22. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the

Lamb are the temple of It. 23. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. 24. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. 25. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no might there. 26. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. 27. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.' — Revelation 21:1-7; 22-27.

THE 'new Jerusalem' can be established only under a 'new heaven' and on a 'new earth.' The Seer naturally touches on these before he describes it.

And the fact that they come into view here as supplying the field for it makes the literal interpretation of their meaning the more probable. If 'a new heaven and a new earth' means a renovated condition of humanity, what difference is there between it and the new Jerusalem planted in it? We have to remember the whole stream of Old and New Testament representation, according to which the whole material creation is 'subject to vanity,' and destined for a deliverance. Modern astronomy has seen worlds in flames in the sky, and passing by a fiery change into new forms; and the possibility of the heavens being dissolved, the elements melted with fervent heat, and a new heavens and new earth emerging, cannot be disputed. In what sense are they 'new'? 'New' here, as the application of it to Jerusalem may show, does not mean just brought into existence, but renovated, made fresh, and implies, rather than denies, the fact of previous existence. So, throughout Scripture, the re-constitution of the material world, by which it passes from the bondage of corruption into 'the liberty of the glory of the children of God' is taught, and the final seat of the city of God is set forth as being, not some far-off, misty heaven in space, but 'that new world which is the old.'

‘And the sea is no more’ probably is to be taken in a symbolic sense, as shadowing forth the absence of unruly power, of mysterious and hostile forces, of estranging gulfs of separation. Into this renovated world the renovated city floats down from God. It has been present with Him, before its manifestation on earth, as all things that are to be manifested in time dwell eternally in the Divine mind, and as it had been realised in the person of the ascended Christ. When He comes down from heaven again, the city comes with Him. It is the ‘new Jerusalem,’ inasmuch as the ideas which were partially embodied in the old Jerusalem find complete and ennobled expression in it. The perfect state of perfect humanity is represented by that society of God’s servants, of which the ancient Zion was a symbol. In it all the glowing stream of prophecy dealing with the ‘bridal of the earth and of the sky,’ the marriage of perfect manhood with the perfect King, is fulfilled.

II. The vision is supplemented by words explanatory to the Seer of what he beheld (vs. 3, 4), and all turns on two great thoughts — the blessed closeness of union now perfected and made eternal between God and men, and the consequent dawning of a new, unsetting day in which all human ills shall be swept away. The former promise is cast in Old Testament mould, as are almost all the symbols and prophecies of this Book of Revelation. In outward form the tabernacle had stood in the centre of the wilderness encampment, and in the symbol of the Shekinah, God had dwelt with Israel, and they had been, in name, and by outward separation and consecration, His people. In the militant state of the Church on the old earth, God had dwelt with His people in reality, but with, alas! many a break in the intercourse caused by His people defiling the temple. But in that future all that was symbol shall be spiritual reality, and there will be no separation between the God who tabernacles among men and the men in whom He dwells. The mutual relation of possession of each other shall be perfect and perpetual. That is the brightest hope for us, and from it all other blessedness flows. His presence drives away all evils, as the risen moon clears the sky of clouds. How can sorrow, or

crying, or pain, or death, live where He is, as He will be in the perfected city? The undescrivable future is best described by the negation of all that is sad and a foe to life. Reverse the miseries of earth, and you know something of the joys of heaven. But begin with God's presence, or you will know nothing of their most joyful joy.

III. The great voice speaks again, proclaiming the guarantees of the vision, and the conditions of possessing its fruition (vs. 5-7). How can we be sure that these radiant hopes are better than delusions, lights thrown on the black curtain of the unknown future by the reflection of our own imaginations? Only because 'He that sitteth on the throne,' and is therefore sovereign over all things, has declared that He will 'make all things new.' His power and faithful word are the sole guarantees. Therefore seers may write, and we may read, and be sure that when heaven and earth pass away His word shall not only not pass away, but bring the new heavens and the new earth. So sure is the fulfilment, that already, to the divine mind, these things 'are come to pass.' Faith may share in the divine prerogative of seeing things that are not as though they were, and make the future present. He who is Alpha, the beginning, from whom are all things, is Omega, the end, to whom are all things. There lies the security that the drift of the universe is towards God, its source, and that at last man, who came from God, will come back to God, and Eden be surpassed by the new Jerusalem.

The conditions of entering the city are gathered up in words which recall many strains of prophecy and promise. Thirst is the condition of drinking of the water of life — as John the Evangelist delights to tell that Jesus said by the well at Samaria and in the temple court. Conflict and victory make His children heirs of these things, as the Christ had spoken by the Spirit to the churches. The Christian victory perfects the paternal and filial relation between God and us. And all three promises are but variations of the answer to the question: How can I become a citizen of that city of God?

IV. A fuller description, highly symbolical in colouring, of the city, comes next (vs. 22-27), on which space will only allow us to remark that we have, first, two representations, in each of which the city's glory is expressed by the absence from it of a great good, occasioned by the presence of a greater, of which the lesser was but a shadowy similitude. There is no temple, no outward shrine, no place of special communion, no dependence on externals, because the communion with God and the Lamb is perfect, continuous, spiritual. There is no sun, moon, nor artificial light, for far brighter than their feeble beams is the light in which the citizens see light. That light is perpetual, and no night ever darkens the sky. That light draws all men to it. Possibly the Seer thinks of kings and nations as still subsisting, but more probably he carries over the features of the old earth into the now, in order to express the great hope that all shall be drawn to the light, and royalties and nations be merged in citizenship. One solemn word limits the universality of the vision. Nothing excludes but uncleanness, but that does exclude. The roll of citizens is the Lamb's book of life, and we may all have our names written there. Only we must be pure, thirsty for the water of life, and fight and conquer through Jesus,

Revelation 21:1-- NO MORE SEA

‘And there was no more sea.’ — Revelation 21:1.

‘I JOHN,’ says the Apocalypse at its commencement, ‘was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the testimony of Jesus.’ In this, the one prophetic book of the New Testament, we find the same fact that meets us in the old prophecies, that the circumstances of the prophet colour, and become the medium for, the representation of the spiritual truths that he has to speak. All through the book we hear the dash of the waves. There was ‘a sea of fire mingled with glass before the throne.’ The star Wormwood fell ‘upon the sea.’ Out of the sea the beast rises. When the great angel would declare the destruction of Babylon, he casts a mighty stone into the ocean, and

says, 'Thus suddenly shall Babylon be destroyed.' And when John hears the voice of praise of the redeemed, it is 'like the voice of many waters,' as well as like the voice of 'harpers harping on their harps.' And then, when there dawns at the close of the vision, the bright and the blessed time which has yet to come, the 'new heavens and the new earth' are revealed to him; and that sad and solitary and estranging ocean that raged around his little rock sanctuary has passed away for ever. I suppose I need not occupy your time in showing that this is a symbol; that it does not mean literal fact at all; that it is not telling us anything about the geography of a future world, but that it is the material embodiment of a great spiritual truth.

Now what is meant by this symbol is best ascertained by remembering how the sea appears in the Old Testament. The Jew was not a sailor. All the references in the Old Testament, and especially in the prophets, to the great ocean are such as a man would make who knew very little about it, except from having looked at it from the hills of Judea, and having often wondered what might be lying away out yonder at the point where sky and sea blended together. There are three main things which it shadows forth in the Old Testament. It is a symbol of mystery, of rebellious power, of perpetual unrest. And it is the promise of the cessation of these things which is set forth in that saying, 'There was no more sea.' There shall be no more mystery and terror. There shall be no more 'the foods lifting up their voice' and the waves dashing with impotent foam against the throne of God. There shall be no more the tossing and the tumult of changing circumstances, and no more the unrest and disquiet of a sinful heart. There shall be the 'new heavens and the new earth.' The old humanity will be left, and the relation to God will remain, deepened and glorified and made pure. But all that is sorrowful and all that is rebellious, all that is mysterious and all that is unquiet, shall have passed away for ever.

I. Let us then, by way of illustrating this great and Messed promise, consider it first as the revelation of a future in which there shall be no more painful mystery.

‘Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known.’ ‘Thy judgments are a mighty deep.’ ‘O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!’ Such is the prevailing tone of expression when the figure appears either in the Old or in the New Testament. Most natural is it. There are, too, sources of obscurity there. We look out upon the broad ocean, and far away it seems to blend with air and sky.

Mists come up over its surface. Suddenly there rises on the verge of the horizon a white sail that was not there a moment ago; and we wonder, as we look out from our hills, what may be beyond these mysterious waters. And to these ancient peoples there were mysteries which we do not feel. Whither should they come, if they were to venture on its untried tides? And then, what lies in its sunless caves that no eyes have seen? It swallows up life and beauty and treasure of every sort, and engulfs them all in its obstinate silence. They go down in the mighty waters and vanish as they descend. What would it be if these were drained off? What revelations — wild sea-valleys and mountain-gorges; the dead that are in it, the power that lies there, all powerless now, the wealth that has been lost in it! What should we see if depth and distance were annihilated, and we beheld what there is out yonder, and what there is down there?

And is not our life, brethren, ringed round in like manner with mystery? And, alas! wherever to a poor human heart there is mystery, *there will be* terror.

The unknown is ever the awful. Where there is not certain knowledge, imagination works to people the waste places with

monsters. There is a double limitation of our knowledge. There are mysteries that come from the necessary limitation of our faculties; and there are mysteries that come from the incompleteness of the revelation which God has been pleased to make. The eye is weak and the light is dim. There is much that lies beyond the horizon which our eyes cannot reach. There is much that lies covered by the deeps, which our eyes *could* reach if the deeps were away. We live — the wisest of us live — having great questions wrestling with us like that angel that wrestled with the patriarch in the darkness till the morning broke. We learn so little but our own ignorance, and we know so little but that we know nothing. There are the hard and obstinate knots that will not be untied; we bend all our faculties to them, and think they are giving a little bit, and they never give; and we gnaw at them, like the viper at the file, and we make nothing of it, but blunt our teeth!

Oh! to some hearts here, surely this ought to come as not the least noble and precious of the thoughts of what that future life is — ‘there shall be no more sea’; and the mysteries that come from God’s merciful limitation of our vision, and some of the mysteries that come from God’s wise and providential interposition of obstacles to our sight, shall have passed away. It is no dream, my brethren! Why, think how the fact of dying will solve many a riddle! how much more we shall know by shifting our position! ‘There must be wisdom with great Death,’ and he ‘keeps the keys of all the creeds.’ Try to conceive how some dear one that was beside us but a moment ago, perhaps but little conscious of his own ignorance, and knowing but little of God’s ways, thinking as we did, and speaking as we did, and snared with errors as we were, has grown at a bound into full stature, and how a flood of now knowledge and Divine truth rushes into the heart the moment it tresses the grave! If they were to speak to us, perhaps we should not understand their new speech, so wise have they become who have died.

What mysteries have passed into light for them? I know not. Who can tell what strange enlargement of faculty this soul of ours is capable of? Who can tell how much of our blindness comes from the flesh that clogs us, from the working of the animal nature that is so strong in us? Who can tell what unknown resources and what possibilities of new powers there lie all dormant and unsuspected in the beggar on the dunghill, and in the idiot in the asylum? This, at least, we are sure of: we shall 'know, even as also we are known.' God will not be fathomed, but God will be known. God will be incomprehensible, but there will be no mystery in God, except that most blessed mystery of feeling that the fulness of His nature still surpasses our comprehension. Questions that now fill the whole horizon of our minds will have shrunk away into a mere point, or been Answered by the very change of position. How much of the knowledges of earth will have ceased to be applicable, when the first light-beam of heaven falls upon them I Those problems which we think so mysterious — why God is doing this or that with us and the world; what is the meaning of this and the other sorrow — what will have become of these? We shall look back and see that the bending line was leading straight as an arrow-flight, home to the centre, and that the end crowns and vindicates every step of the road. Something of the mystery of God will have been resolved, for man hath powers undreamed of yet, and 'we shall see Him as He is.' Much of the mystery of man, and of man's relation to God, will have ceased; for then we shall understand all the way, when we have entered into the true sanctuary of God.

Men that love to know, let me ask you, where do you get the fulfilment, often dreamed of, of your desires except here? Set this before you, as the highest truth for us: Christ is the beginning of all wisdom on earth. Starting thence I can hope to solve the remaining mysteries when I stand at last, redeemed By the blood of the Lamb, in the presence of the great light of God.

Not that we shall know everything, for that were to cease to be finite. And if ever the blasphemous boast come true that tempted man once, 'Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil,' there were nothing left for the soul that was filled with all knowledge but to lie down and pant its last. It needs, by our very nature, and for our blessedness, that there should be much unknown. It needs that we should ever be pressing forward. Only, the mysteries that are left will have no terror nor pain in them. 'There shall be no more sea,' but we shall climb ever higher and higher up the mountain of God, and as we climb see farther and farther into the blessed valleys beyond, and 'shall know, even as we are known.'

II. Secondly, the text tells us of a state that is to come, when there shall be no more rebellious power. In the Old Testament the floods are often compared with the rage of the peoples, and the rebellion of man against the Will of God. 'The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters; yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.' 'Thou stillest the noise of the waves, and the tumult of the people,' In like manner that symbolic reference surely supplies one chief meaning of Christ's miracle of stilling the tempest; the Peace-bringer bringing to peace the tumults of men. Here, then, the sea stands as the emblem of untamed power. It is lashed into yeasty foam, and drives before it great ships and huge stones like bulrushes, and seems to have a savage pleasure in eating into the slow-corroding land, and covering the beach with its devastation.

'There shall be no more sea.' God lets people work against His kingdom in this world. It is not to be always so, says my text. The kingdom of God is in the earth, and the kingdom of God admits of opposition. Strange! But the opposition, even here on earth, all comes to nothing. 'Thou art mightier than the noise of many waters'; the floods' have lifted up their voice'; but Thou 'sittest upon the floods, yea, Thou sittest king for ever.' Yes, it is an experience repeated over and over again, in the history of

individuals and in the history of the world. Men, fancying themselves free, resolved to be rebellious, get together and say, mutteringly at first, and then boldly and loudly, 'Let us break His bands asunder, and cast away His cords from us.' And God sits in seeming silence in His heavens, and they work on, and the thing seems to be prospering, and some men's hearts begin to fail them for fear. The great Armada comes in its pride across the waters — and the motto that our England struck upon its medal, when that proud fleet was baffled, serves for the epitaph over all antagonism to God's kingdom, 'The Lord blew upon them, and they were scattered.' The tossing sea, that rages against the will and purpose of the Lord, what becomes of all its rosining fury? Why, this becomes of it — the ark of God 'moves on the face of the waters,' and though wild tempests howl to beat it from its course, yet beneath all the surface confusion and commotion there is, as in the great mid-ocean, a silent current that runs steady and strong, and it carries the keel that goes deep enough down to rest in it, safely to its port. Men may work against God's kingdom, the waves may rave and rage; but beneath them there is a mighty tidal sweep, and God's purposes are wrought out, and God's ark comes to its desired haven,' and all opposition is nugatory at the last.

But there comes a time, too, when there shall be no more violence of rebellious wills lifting themselves against God. Our text is a blessed promise that, in that holy state to which the Apocalyptic vision carries our longing hopes, there shall be the cessation of all strife against our best Friend, of all reluctance to wear *His* yoke whose yoke brings rest to the soul. The opposition that lies in all our hearts shall one day be subdued.

The whole consent of our whole being shall yield itself to the obedience of sons, to the service Of love. The wild rebellious power shall be softened into peace, and won to joyful acceptance of His law. In all the regions of that heavenly state, there shall be no jarring will, no reluctant submission. Its 'solemn troops and sweet societies'

shall move in harmonious consent of according hearts, and circle His throne in continuousness of willing fealty. There shall be One will in heaven. 'There shall be no more sea'; for 'His servants serve Him,' and the noise of the waves has died away for ever.

Before I pass on, let me appeal to you, my friend, on this matter. Here is the revelation for us of the utter hopelessness and vanity of all opposition to God. Oh! what a thought that is, that every life that sets itself against the Lord is a futile life, that it comes to nothing at last, that none hardens himself against God and prospers! It is true on the widest scale. It is true on the narrowest. It is true about all those tempests that have risen Up against God's Church and Christ's Gospel, like 'waves of the sea foaming out their own shame,' and never shaking the great rock that they break against. And it is true about all godless lives; about every man who carries on his work, except in loving obedience to his Father in heaven. There is one power in the world, and none else. When all is played out, and accounts are set right at the end, you will find that the power that seemed to be strong, if it stood against God, was weak as water and has done nothing, and is nothing! Do not waste your lives in a work that is self- condemned to be hopeless! Rather ally yourselves with the tendencies of God's universe, and do the thing which will last for ever, and live the life that has hope of fruit that shall remain. Submit yourselves to God! Love Christ! Do 'His will! Put your faith in the Saviour to deliver you from your sins; and when the wild tossing of that great ocean Of ungodly power and rebellious opposition is all hushed down into dead silence, you and your work will last and live hard by the stable throne of God.

III. Lastly, the text foretells a state of things in which there is no more disquiet and unrest. The old, old figure which all the world, generation after generation in its turn, has spoken, is a Scriptural one as well, and enters into the fulness of the meaning of this passage before us. Life is a voyage over a turbulent Sea; changing circumstances come rolling afar each other, like the

undistinguishable billows of the great ocean. Tempests and storms rise. There is wearisome sailing, no peace, but 'ever climbing up the climbing wave.' That is His! But for all that, friends, there is an end to it some day; and it is worth while for us to think about our 'island home, far, far beyond the sea.' Surely some of us have learned the weariness of this changeful state, the weariness of the work and voyage of this world.

Surely some of us are longing to find anchorage whilst the storm lasts, and a haven at the end. There is one, if only you will believe it, and set yourselves towards it. There is an end to all 'the weary oar, the weary wandering fields of barren foam. On the shore stands the Christ; and there is rest *there*. There is no more sea, but unbroken rest, unchanging blessedness, perpetual stability of joy, and love in the Father's house. Are we going there? Are *we* living for Christ? Are we putting our confidence in the Lord Jesus? Then, 'He brings us to the desired haven.'

One thing more: not only does unrest come from the chaos of changing circumstances, but besides that, there is another source of disquiet, which this same symbol sets forth for us. 'The wicked is like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.' That restless, profitless working of the great homeless, hungry, moaning ocean — what a picture it is of the heart of a man that has no Christ, that has no God, that has no peace by pardon! A Soul all tossed with its own boiling passion, a soul across which there howl great gusts of temptation, a soul which works and brings forth nothing but foam and mire! Unrest, perpetual unrest is the lot of every man that is not God's child.

Some of you know that. Well, then, think of one picture. A little barque pitching in the night, and one figure rises quietly up in the stern, and puts out a rebuking hand, and speaks one mighty word, 'Peace! be still.' And the word was heard amid all the hurly-burly of the tempest, and the waves crouched at His feet like dogs to their

master. It is no fancy, brethren, it is a truth. Let Christ speak to your hearts, and there is peace and quietness. And if He do that, then your experience will be like that described in the grand old Psalm, ‘Though the waters roar and be troubled, and though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, yet will we not fear,’ for the city stands fast, in spite of the waves that curl round its lowest foundations.

‘Death, death itself, will be but the last burst of the expiring storm, the last blast of the blown-out tempest. And then, the quiet of the green inland valleys of our Father’s land, where no tempest comes any more, nor the loud winds are ever heard, nor the salt sea is ever seen; but perpetual calm and blessedness; all mystery gone, and all rebellion hushed and silenced, and all unrest at an end for ever! ‘No more sea,’ but, instead of that wild and yeasty chaos of turbulent waters, there shall be ‘the river that makes glad the city of God,’ the river of water of life, that ‘proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.’

Revelation 22:1-11--THE CITY, THE CITIZENS, AND THE KING

‘And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out Of the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: 4. And they shall see His face; and His name shall he in their foreheads. 5. And there shall he no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they a hart reign for ever and ever. 6. And He said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to shew, unto His servants the things which

must shortly be done. 7. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book. 8. And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. 9. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God. 10. And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. 11. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.’ — Revelation 22:1-11.

Is the vision of the new Jerusalem to be realised in the present or in the future? Such features as the existence of ‘nations’ and ‘kings of the earth’ outside of it (vs. 21, 24), and leaves of the tree of life being ‘for the healing of the nations,’ favour the former reference, while its place in the book, after the first and second resurrections and the judgment and at the very end of the whole, seems to oblige us to hold by the latter. But the question must be answered in the light of the fact that the Christian life is one in essence in both worlds, and that the difference between the conditions of the society of the redeemed here and there is only one of degree. The ‘city’ has already come down from heaven; its perfect form waits to be manifested.

The passage is partly the close of that vision (vs. 1-5), and partly the beginning of the epilogue of the whole book (vs. 6-11). The closing description of the city is saturated with allusions to Old Testament prophecy.

It is like the finale of some great concerto, in which the themes that have sounded throughout it are all gathered up in the last majestic, melodious crash. Here at the farthest point to which mortal eyes are allowed to pierce, the ‘tree of life’ that the first of mortal eyes had

looked on waves its branches again. The end has circled round to the beginning. But now there is no more prohibition to pluck and eat, stud now it grows, not in a garden, but in a city where the perfection of human society is entered into.

Here, on the last page of Scripture, the river, the music of whose ripple had been heard by Ezekiel and Zechariah bringing life to everything that it laved, and by the Psalmist making 'glad the city of God,' flows with a broader, fuller stream, and is fouled by the stains, but is 'clear as crystal.' River and tree have the same epithet, and bring the same gift to the citizens. All the blessings which Jesus gives are summed up, both in John's Gospel and in the Apocalypse, as 'life.' The only true life is to live as God's redeemed servants, and that life is ours here and now if we are His. It is but a 'stream' of the river that gladdens us here, this fruit has not yet its full flavour nor abundance. 'It is life, more life, for which we pant,' and the desire will be satisfied there when the river runs always full, and every month the fruit hangs ripe and ready to be dropped into happy hands from among the healing leaves.

In verses 3 and 4 we pass from the city to the citizens. Perfect purity clothes them all. 'There shall be no more anything accursed; that is, any unclean thing drawing down necessarily the divine 'curse,' and therefore there shall be no separation, no film of distance between the King and the people, but 'the throne of God and the Lamb shall be therein.' The seer has already beheld the Lamb close by the throne of God, but now he sees Him sharing it in indissoluble union. Perfect purity leads to perfect union with God and (or rather in) Christ, and unbroken, glad submission to His regal rule. And that perfect submission is the occupation and delight of all the citizens. They are His 'bond-servants,' and their fetters are golden chains of honour and ornament. They 'do Him service,' ministering as priests, and all their acts are 'begun, continued, and ended in Him.' Having been faithful over a few things, they are made rulers over many things, and are yet bond-servants, though rulers.

In that higher service the weary schism between the active and the contemplative life is closed up. Mary and Martha end their long variance, and gazing on His face does not hinder active obedience, nor does doing

Him service distract from beholding His beauty. ‘His name shall be in their foreheads,’ conspicuous and unmistakable, no longer faintly traced or often concealed, but flaming on their brows. They are known to be His, because their characters are conformed to His. They bear ‘the marks of Jesus’ in complete and visible assimilation to Him.

The vision closes with an echo of Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 60:19). ‘No night’ — perhaps the most blessed of all John’s negative descriptions of the future state, indicating the removal for ever of all the evil and woe symbolised by darkness, and pointing to a state in which no artifices of ours are needed to brighten our gloom with poor, man-made candles, nor any created light, though mighty and resplendent as the sun, whose beams fade into invisibility before the immortal radiance that pours out for ever from the throne, brightening every glorified face that is turned to its lustre. Thus seeing, serving, and being like ‘God and the Lamb, they, as a consequence, ‘shall reign for ever and ever,’ for they are as He is, and while He lives and reigns they also live and reign.

With verse 6 begins the epilogue. An angel speaks, the same as in

Revelation 1:1 — is represented as ‘signifying’ the ‘revelation’ to John. He now, as it were, sets his seal on his completed roll of prophecy. To discriminate between the words of the angel and of Jesus is impossible.

Jesus speaks through him. ‘Behold, I come quickly’ cannot be merely the angel’s voice. As in verse 12, a deeper voice speaks through his lips. The purpose of that solemn announcement is to impress on the Asiatic churches, and through them on the whole

Church through all time, the importance of keeping ‘the words of the prophecy of this book.’ ‘Quickly’ and yet nineteen hundred years have gone since then? Yes; and during them all Jesus has been coming, and the words of this book have progressively been in process of fulfilment.

Again, the speedy coming is enforced as a reason for not sealing up the prophecy, as had been commanded in Revelation 10:4, and elsewhere in the Old Testament. And a very solemn thought closes our lesson — that there is a moment, the eve of any great ‘day of the Lord,’ when there is no more time or opportunity *for* change of moral or spiritual disposition. ‘Too late, too late, ye cannot enter now.’ Let us ‘redeem the time,’ buy back the opportunity while yet it is within our grasp.

Revelation 22:3, 4--THE TRIPLE RAYS WHICH MAKE THE WHITE LIGHT OF HEAVEN

‘... His servants shall serve Him: 4. And they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads.’ — Revelation 22:3, 4.

ONE may well shrink from taking words like these for a text. Their lofty music will necessarily make all words of ours seem thin and poor. The great things about which they are concerned are so high above us, and known to us by so few channels, that usually he who says least speaks most wisely about them. And yet it cannot be but wholesome if in a reverent spirit of no vain curiosity, we do try to lay upon our hearts the impressions of the great, though they be dim, truths which gleam from these words. I know that to talk about a future life is often a most sentimental, vague, unpractical form of religious contemplation, but there is no reason at all why it should be so. I wish to try now very simply to Bring out the large force and wonderful meaning of the words which I have ventured to read. They give us three elements of the perfect state of man — Service, Contemplation, Likeness. These three are perfect and unbroken.

I. The first element, then, in the perfect state of man is perfect activity in the service of God. Now the words of our text are remarkable in that the two expressions for 'servant' and 'serve' are not related to one another in the Greek, as they are in the English, but are two quite independent words; the former meaning literally 'a slave,' and the latter being exclusively confined in Scripture to one kind of service. It would never be employed for any service that a man did for a man; it is exclusively a religious word. and means only the service that men do for God, whether in specific acts of so-called worship or in the wider, worship of daily life. So that if we hate not here the notion of priesthood, we hate one very closely approximating towards it; and the representation is that the activity of the redeemed and perfected man, in the highest ideal condition of humanity, is an activity which is all worship, and is directed to the revealed God in Christ.

That, then, is the first thought that we have to look at. Now it seems to me to be a very touching confession of the weariness and unsatisfactoriness of life general that the dream of the future which has unquestionably the most fascination for most men, is that which speaks of it as Rest. The religion which has the largest number of adherents in the world — the religion of the Buddhists-formally declares existence to be evil, and preaches as the highest attainable good, something which is scarcely distinguishable from annihilation. And even though we do not go so far as that, what a testimony it is of burdened hearts and mournful lives, and work too great for the feeble limits of our powers, that the most natural thought of a blessed future is as rest! It is easy to laugh at people for singing hymns about sitting upon green and flowery mounts, and counting up the labours of their feet: but oh! it is a tragical thought that whatsoever shape a life has taken, howsoever full of joy and sunshine and brightness it may be, deep down in the man there is such an experience as that the one thing he wants is repose and to get rid of all the trouble and toil.

Now this representation of my text is by no means contradictory, but it is complementary, of that other one. The deepest rest and the highest activity coincide. They do so in God who ‘worketh hitherto’ in undisturbed tranquillity; they may do so in us. The wheel that goes round in swiftest rotation seems to be standing still. Work at its intensest, which is pleasurable work, and level to the capacity of the doer, is the truest form of rest. In vacuity there are stings and torment; it is only in joyous activity which is not pushed to the extent of strain and unwelcome effort that the true rest of man is to be found. And the two verses in this Book Of Revelation about this matter, which look at first sight to be opposed to each other, are like the two sides of a sphere, which unite and make the perfect whole. ‘They rest from their labours.’ They rest *not*, day nor night.’

From their labours — yes; from toil disproportioned to faculty — yes I from unwelcome work — yes! from distraction and sorrow — yes! But from glad praise and vigorous service — never! day nor night. And so with the full apprehension of the sweetness and blessedness of the tranquil Heaven, we say: It is found only there, where His servants serve Him. Thus the first thought that is presented here is that of an activity delivered from all that makes toil on earth burdensome and unwelcome; and which, therefore, is coincident with the deepest and most perfect repose.

It may seem strange to think of a blessed life which has no effort in it, for effort is the very salt and spice of life here below, and one can scarcely fancy the perfect happiness of a spirit which never has the glow of warmth that comes from exercise in overcoming difficulties. But perhaps effort and antagonism and strain and trial have done their work on us when they have moulded our characters, and when ‘school is over we burn the rod’; and the discipline of joy may evolve nobler graces of character than ever the discipline of sorrow did. At all events, we have to think of work which also is repose, and of service in which is unbroken tranquillity.

Then there is further involved in this first idea, the notion of an outer world, on which and in which to work; and also the notion of the resurrection of the body, in which the active spirit may abide, and through which it may work.

Perhaps it may be that they who sleep in Jesus, in the period between the shuffling off of this mortal coil and the breaking of that day when they are raised again from the dead, are incapable of exertion in an outer sphere.

Perhaps, it may be, that by reason of the absence of that glorified body of the Resurrection, they sleep in Jesus in the sense that they couch at the Shepherd's feet within the fold until the morning comes, when He leads them out to new pastures. It may be. At all events, this we may be sure of, that if it be so they have no desires in advance of their capacities; and of this also I think we may be sure, that whether they themselves can come into contact with an external universe or not, Christ is for them in some measure what the body is to us here now, and the glorified body will be hereafter; that being absent from the body they are present with the Lord, and that He is as it were the Sensorium by which they are brought into contact with and have a knowledge of external things, so that they may rest and wait and have no work to do, and have no effort to put forth, and yet be conscious of all that befalls the loved ones here below, may know them in their affliction, and not be untouched by their tears.

But all that is a dim region into which we have not any need to look. What I emphasise is, the service of Heaven means rest, and the service of Heaven means an outer universe on which, and a true bodily frame with which, to do the work which is delight.

The next point is this: such service must be in a far higher sphere and a far nobler fashion than the service of earth. That is in accordance with the analogy Of the Divine dealings. God rewards work with more work. The powers that are trained and exercised and proved in a narrower region are lifted to the higher. As some poor

peasant-girl, for instance, whose rich Voice has risen up in the harvest-field only for her own delight and that of a handful of listeners, heard by some one who detects its sweetness, may be carried away to some great city, and charm kings with her tones, so the service done in some little corner of this remote, rural province of God's universe, apprehended by Him, shall be rewarded with a wider platform, and a nobler area for work. 'Thou hast been faithful in a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.' God sends forth His children to work as apprentices here, and when they are 'out of their time,' and have 'got a trade,' He calls them home, not to let their faculties rest unused, but to practise on a larger theatre what they have learned on earth.

One more point must Be noticed, viz., that the highest type of Heaven's service must Be service for other people. The law for Heaven can surely not be more selfish than the law for earth, and that is, 'He that is chiefest amongst you let him be your servant.' The law for the perfect man can surely not be different from the law for the Master, and the law for Him is, 'Even Christ pleased not Himself.' The perfection of the child can surely not be different from the perfection of the Father, and the perfection of the Father is: 'He maketh His sun to "shine," and His blessings to come — -on the unthankful and on the good.'

So then the highest service for man is the service for others ; — how, where, or whom, we cannot tell. We too may be 'ministering spirits, sent forth to minister' (Hebrews 1:14), but at all events not on ourselves can our activities centre; and not in self-culture can be the highest form of our service to God.

The last point about this first matter is simply this — -that this highest form of human activity is all to be worship; all to be done in reference to Him; all to be done in submission to Him. The will of the man in His work is to be so conformed to the will of God as that, whatsoever the hand on the great dial points to, that the hand on the

little dial shall point to also. Obedience is joy and rest. To know and to do His will is Heaven. It is Heaven on earth in so far as we partially attain to it, and when with enlarged powers and all imperfections removed, and in a higher sphere, and without interruptions we do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word, then the perfect state will have come. Then shall we enter into the liberty of the glory of the children of God, when, as His slaves, we serve Him in the unwearied activities done for *Him*, which, make the worship of Heaven.

II. Next, look at the second of the elements here: — ‘They shall see His face.’ Now that expression ‘seeing the face of God’ in Scripture seems to me to be employed in two somewhat different ways, according to one of which the possibility of seeing the face is affirmed, and according to the other of which it is denied.

The one may be illustrated by the Divine word to Moses: ‘Thou canst not see My face. There shall no man see Me and live.’ The other may be illustrated by the aspiration and the confidence of one of the psalms: ‘As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness.’

A similar antithesis, which is apparently a contradiction, may be found in setting side by side the words of our Saviour: ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,’ with the words of the Evangelist: ‘No man hath seen God at any time.’ I do not think that the explanation is to be found altogether in pointing to the difference between present and possible future vision, but rather, I think, the Bible teaches what reason would also teach: that no corporeal vision of God is ever possible; still further, that no complete comprehension and knowledge of Him is ever possible, and, as I think further, that no direct knowledge of, or contact with, God in Himself is possible for finite man, either here or yonder. And the other side lies in such words as these, which I have already quoted: ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’ ‘As through a glass darkly, but then face to face.’ Where is the key to the apparent

contradiction? Here, I think. Jesus Christ is the manifest God, in Him only do men draw near to the hidden Deity, the King Invisible, who dwelleth in the light that is inaccessible.

Here on earth we see by faith, and yonder there will be a vision, different in kind, most real, most immediate and direct, not of the hidden Godhood in itself, but of the revealed Godhood manifest in Jesus Christ, whom in His glorified corporeal Manhood we shall perceive, with the organs of our glorified body; whom in His Divine beauty we shall know and love with heart and mind, in knowledge direct, immediate, far surpassing in degree, and different in kind from, the knowledge of faith which we have of Him here below. But the infinite Godhood that lies behind all revelations of Deity shall remain as it hath been through them all — the King invisible, whom no man hath seen or can see. They shall see His face in so far as they shall hold communion with, and through their glorified body have the direct knowledge of Christ, the revealed Deity.

Whether there be anything more, I know not; I think there is not; but this I am sure of, that the law for Heaven and the law for earth alike are, ‘He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.’

But there is another point I would touch upon in reference to this second thought of our text, viz., its connection with the previous representation, ‘They shall serve Him’ — that is work in an outer sphere; ‘they shall see

His face’ — that is contemplation. These *two*, the life of work and the life of devout communion — the Martha and the Mary of the Christian experience — are antagonistic here below, and it is hard to reconcile their conflicting, fluctuating claims and to know how much to give to the inward life of gazing upon Christ, and how much to the outward life of serving Him. But, says my text, the two shall be blended together. ‘His servants shall serve Him,’ nor in all their activity shall they lose the vision of His face. His servants ‘shall see His face’; nor in all the still blessedness of their gaze upon

Him shall they slack the diligence of the unwearied hands, or the speed of the willing feet. The Rabbis taught that there were angels who serve, and angels who praise, but the two classes meet in the perfected man, whose services shall be praise, whose praise shall be service. They go forth to do His will, yet are ever in the House of the Lord. They work and gaze; they gaze and work—Resting they serve, and serving they rest; perpetual activity and perpetual vision are theirs. ‘They serve Him, and see His face.’

III. The last element is, ‘His name shall be in their foreheads.’ That is, as I take it — a manifest likeness to the Lord whom they serve is the highest element in the perfect state of redeemed men. We hear a good deal in this Book of the Revelation about writing the names and numbers of persons and of powers upon men’s faces and foreheads; as for instance, you remember we read about the ‘number of the beast’ written upon his worshippers, and about ‘the name of the new Jerusalem, and the name of my God’ being written as a special reward, ‘upon him that overcomes.’ The metaphor, as I suppose, is taken from the old, cruel practice of branding a slave with the name of his master. And so the primary idea of this expression: ‘His slaves shall bear His name upon their foreheads,’ is that their ownership shall be conspicuously visible to all that look.

But there is more than that in it. How is the ownership to be made visible? By His name being in their foreheads. What is ‘His name’? Universally in Scripture ‘His name’ is His revealed character, and so we come to this: the perfect men shall be known to belong to God in Christ, because they are like the ownership shall be proved by the likeness and that likeness shall no longer be hidden in their hearts, no longer be difficult to make out, so blurred and obliterated the letters of the name by the imperfections of their lives and their selfishness and sin; but it shall flame in their foreheads, plain as the inscription on the high priest’s mitre that declared him to be consecrated to the Lord.

And so that lovely and blessed thought is here of perfect likeness in moral character, at all events, and a wonderful approximation and resemblance in other elements of human nature to the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ our Lord, which shall be the token that we are His.

Oh! what a contrast to the partial ownership, proved to be partial by our partial resemblance here on earth! We say, as Christian men and women, that we bear His name. Is it written so that men can read it, or is it like the name of some person traced in letters of gas jets over a shop-front — half blown out by every gust of wind that comes? Is that the way in which His name is written on your heart and character? My brother, a possibility great and blessed opens before us of a nobler union with Him, a closer approximation, a clearer vision, a perfecter resemblance. 'We shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is'!

One last word. These three elements, service, contemplation, likeness; these three are not different in kind from the elements of a Christian man's life here. You can enjoy them all sitting in these pews; in the bustle and the hurry of your daily life, you can have every one of them. If you do not enjoy them here you will never have them yonder. If you have never served anybody but yourself how shall death make you His servant? If all the clays of your life you have turned away your ear when He has been saying to you 'Seek ye My face,' what reason is there to expect that when death's hammer smashes the glass through which you have seen darkly, 'the steady whole of that awful face' will be a pleasant sight to you? If all your life you have been trying, as some of you men and women, old and young, have been trying, and are trying now, to engrave the name of the beast upon your foreheads, what reason have you to expect that when you pass out of this life the foul signs shall disappear in a moment, and you will bear in your brow 'the marks of the Lord Jesus' in their stead? No! No! These things do not happen; you have got to begin here as you mean to end yonder. Trust Him

here and you will see Him there. Serve Him here and you will serve Him yonder. Write His new Name upon your hearts, and when you pass from the imperfections of life you will bear His name in your foreheads.

And if you do not — I lay this upon the consciences of you all — if you do not you will see Christ; — and you will not like it! And you will bear, not the Image of the Heavenly, which is life, but the image of the earthy, which is death and hell!

Revelation 22:14--LAST BEATITUDE OF THE ASCENDED CHRIST

‘Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the Tree of Life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. — Revelation 22:14.

THE Revised Version reads: ‘Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the Tree of Life.’

That may seem a very large change to make, from ‘keep His commandments,’ to ‘wash their robes,’ but in the Greek it is only a change of three letters in one word, one in the next, and two in the third. And the two phrases, written, look so like each other, that a scribe, hasty, or for the moment careless, might very easily mistake the one for the other. There can be no doubt whatever that the reading in the Revised Version is the correct one. Not only is it sustained by a great weight of authority, but also it is far more in accordance with the whole teaching of the New Testament than that which stands in our Authorized Version.

‘Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the Tree of Life,’ carries us back to the old law, and has no more hopeful a sound in it than the thunders of Sinai. If it were, indeed, amongst Christ’s last words to us, it would be a most sad instance of His ‘building again the things He had destroyed.’ It is

relegating us to the dreary old round of trying to earn Heaven by doing good deeds; and I might almost say it is ‘making the Cross of Christ of none effect.’ The fact that that corrupt reading came so soon into the Church and has held its ground so long, is to me a very singular proof of the difficulty which men have always had in keeping themselves up to the level of the grand central Gospel truth: ‘Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by His mercy, He saved us.’

‘Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have right to the Tree of Life,’ has the clear ring of the New Testament music about it, and is in full accord with the whole type of doctrine that runs through this book; and is not unworthy to be almost the last word that the lips of the Incarnate Wisdom spoke to men from Heaven. So then, taking that point of view, I wish to look with you at three things that come plainly out of these words: — First, that principle that if men are clean it is because they are cleansed; ‘Blessed are they that wash their robes.’ Secondly, It is the cleansed who have unrestrained access to the source of life. And lastly, It is the cleansed who pass into the society of the city. Now, let me deal with these three things: —

First, If we are clean it is because we have been made so. The first beatitude that Jesus Christ spoke from the mountain was, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit.’ The last beatitude that He speaks from Heaven is, ‘Blessed are they that wash their robes’ And the act commended in the last is but the outcome of the spirit extolled in the first. For they who are poor in spirit are such as know themselves to be sinful men; and those who know themselves to be sinful men are they who will cleanse their robes in the blood of Jesus Christ.

I need not remind you, I suppose, how continually this symbol of the robe is used in Scripture as an expression for moral character. This Book of the Apocalypse is saturated through and through with Jewish implications and allusions, and there can be no doubt

whatever that in this metaphor of the cleansing of the robes there is an allusion to that vision that the Apocalyptic seer of the Old Covenant, the prophet Zechariah, had when he saw the high priest standing before the altar clad in foul raiment, and the word came forth, 'Take away the filthy garments from him.' Nor need I do more than remind you how the same metaphor is often on the lips of our Lord Himself, notably in the story of the man that had not on the wedding garment, and in the touching and beautiful incident in the parable of the Prodigal Son, where the exuberance of the father's love bids them cast the best robe round the rags and the leanness of his long-lost boy. Nor need I remind you how Paul catches up the metaphor, and is continually referring to an investing and a divesting — the putting on and the putting off of the new and the old man. In this same Book of the Apocalypse we see, gleaming all through it, the white robes of the purified soul: 'They walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.' 'I beheld a great multitude, whom no man could number, who had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

And so there are gathered up into these last words, all these allusions and memories, thick and clustering, when Christ speaks from Heaven and says, 'Blessed are they that wash their robes.'

Well then, I suppose we may say roughly, in our more modern phraseology, that the robe thus so frequently spoken of in Scripture answers substantially to what we call character. It is not exactly the man — and yet it is the man. It is the self — and yet it is a kind of projection and making visible of the self, the vesture which is cast round 'the hidden man of the heart.'

This mysterious *robe*, which answers nearly to what we mean by character, is made by the wearer.

That is a solemn thought. Every one of us carries about with him a mystical loom, and we are always weaving — weave, weave, weaving — this robe which we wear, every thought a thread of the

warp, every action a thread of the weft. We weave it as the spider does its web, out of its own entrails, if I might so say. We weave it, and we dye it, and we cut it, and we stitch it, and then we put it on and wear it, and it sticks to us. Like a snail that crawls about your garden patches, and makes its shell by a process of secretion from out of its own substance, so you and I are making that mysterious, solemn thing that we call character, moment by moment. It is our own self, modified by our actions. Character is the precipitate from the stream of conduct which, like the Nile Delta, gradually rises solid and firm above the parent river and confines its flow.

The next step that I ask you to take is one that I know some of you do not like to take, and it is this: All the robes are foul. I do not say all are equally splashed, I do not say all are equally thickly spotted with the flesh. I do not wish to talk dogmas, I wish to talk experience; and I appeal to your own consciences, with this plain question, that every man and woman amongst us can answer if they like — Is it true or is it not, that the robe is all dashed with mud caught on the foul ways, with stains in some of us of rioting and banqueting and revelry and drunkenness; sins of the flesh that have left their mark upon the flesh; but with all of us grey and foul as compared with the whiteness of His robe who sits above us there?

Ah! would that I could bring to all hearts that are listening to me now, whether the hearts of professing Christians or no, that consciousness more deeply than we have ever had it, of how full of impurity and corruption our characters are. I do not charge you with crimes; I do not charge you with guilt in the world's eyes, but, if we seriously ponder over our past, have we not lived, some of us habitually, all of us far too often, as if there were no God at all, or as if we had nothing to do with Him? and is not that godlessness practical Atheism, the fountain of all foulness from which black brooks flow into our lives, and stain our robes?

The next step is, The foul robe can be cleansed. My text does not go any further in a statement of the method, but it rests upon the great words of this Book of the Revelation, which I have already quoted for another purpose, in which we read ‘they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’ And the same writer, in his Epistle, has the same paradox, which seems to have been, to him, a favourite way of putting the central Gospel truth: ‘The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.’ John saw the paradox, and saw that the paradox helped to illustrate the great truth that he was trying to proclaim, that the red blood whitened the black robe, and that in its full tide there was a limpid river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the Cross of Christ.

Guilt can be pardoned, character can be sanctified. Guilt can be pardoned! Men say: ‘No! We live in a universe of inexorable laws; "What a man soweth that he must also reap." If he has done wrong he must inherit the consequences.’

But the question whether guilt can be pardoned or not has only to do very remotely with consequences. The question is not whether we live in a universe of inexorable laws, but whether there is anything in the universe but the laws; for forgiveness is a personal act, and has only to do secondarily and remotely with the consequences of a man’s doings. So that, if we believe in a personal *God*, and believe that He has got any kind of living relation to men at all, we can believe — blessed be His name! — in the doctrine of forgiveness; and leave the inexorable laws full scope to work, according as His wisdom and His mercy may provide. For the heart of the Christian doctrine of pardon does not touch those laws, but the heart of it is this: ‘O Lord! Thou wast angry with me, but Thine anger is turned away, Thou hast comforted me!’ So guilt may be pardoned.

Character may be sanctified and elevated. Why not if you can Bring a sufficiently strong new force to bear upon it? And you can Bring such a force, in the blessed thought of Christ’s death for me,

and in the gift of His love. There is such a force in the thought that He has given Himself for our sin. There is such a force in the Spirit of Christ given to us through His death to cleanse us by His presence in our hearts. And so I say, the blood of Jesus Christ, the power of His sacrifice and Cross, cleanses from all sin, both in the sense of taking away all my guilt, and in the sense of changing my character into something loftier and nobler and purer.

Men and women! Do you believe that? If you do not, why do you not? If you do, are you trusting to what you believe, and living the life that befits the confidence?

One word more. The washing of your robes has to be done By you. 'Blessed are they that wash their robes.' On one hand is all the fulness of cleansing, on the other is the heap of dirty rags that will not Be cleansed by you sitting there and looking at them. You must bring the two into contact. How? By the magic band that unites strength and weakness, purity and foulness, the Saviour and the penitent; the magic band of simple affiance, and trust and submission of myself to the cleansing power of His death and of His life.

Only remember, 'Blessed are they that *are washing*,' as the Greek might read. Not once and for all, but a continuous process, a blessed process running on all through a man's life.

These are the conditions as they come from Christ's own lips, in almost the last words that human ears, either in fact or in vision, heard Him utter.

These are the conditions under which noble life, and at last Heaven, are possible for men, namely, that their foul characters shall be cleansed, and that continuously, by daily recurrence and recourse to the Fountain opened in His sacrifice and death.

Friends, you may know much of ‘the beauty and nobleness of Christianity, you may know much of the tenderness and purity of Christ, but if you have not apprehended Him in this character, there is an inner sanctuary yet to be trod, of which your feet know nothing, and the sweetest sweetness of all you have not yet tasted, for it is His forgiving love and cleansing power that most deeply manifest His Divine affection and bind us to Himself.

II. The second thought that I would suggest is that these cleansed ones, and by implication these only, have unrestrained access to the source of life: ‘Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have right "to the Tree of Life."' That, of course, carries us back to the old mysterious narrative at the beginning of the Book of Genesis.

Although it does not bear very closely upon my present subject, I cannot help pausing to point out one thing, how remarkable and how beautiful it is that the last page of the Revelation should come Bending round to touch the first page of Genesis. The history of man began with angels with frowning faces and flaming swords barring the way to the Tree of Life. It ends here with the guard of Cherubim withdrawn; or rather, perhaps, sheathing their swords and becoming guides to the no longer forbidden fruit, instead of being its guards. That is the Bible’s grand symbolical way of saying that all between — the sin, the misery, the death — is a parenthesis. God’s purpose is not going to be thwarted, and the end of His majestic march through human history is to be men’s access to the Tree of Life from which, for the dreary ages — that are but as a moment in the great eternities — they were barred out by their sin.

However, that is not the point that I meant to say a word about. The Tree of Life stands as the symbol here of an external source of life. I take ‘life’ to be used here in what I believe to be its predominant New Testament meaning, not bare continuance in existence, but a full, blessed perfection and activity of all the faculties and

possibilities of the man, which this very Apostle himself identifies with the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ. And that life, says John, has an external source in Heaven as on earth.

There is an old Christian legend, absurd as a legend, beautiful as a parable, that the Cross on which Christ was crucified was made out of the wood of the Tree of Life. It is true in idea, for He and His work will be the source of all life, for earth and for Heaven, whether of body, soul, or spirit. They that wash their robes have the right of unrestrained access to Him in whose presence, in that loftier state, no impurity can live.

I need not dwell upon the thought that is involved here, of how, whilst on earth and in the beginnings of the Christian career, life is the basis of righteousness: in that higher world, in a very profound sense, righteousness is the condition of fuller life.

The Tree of Life, according to some of the old Rabbinical legends, lifted its branches, by an indwelling motion, high above impure hands that were stretched to touch them, and until our hands are cleansed through faith in Jesus Christ, its richest fruit hangs unreachable, golden, above our heads.

Oh! brother, the fulness of the life of Heaven is only granted to them who, drawing near Jesus Christ by faith on earth, have thereby cleansed themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.

III. Finally, those who are cleansed, and they only, have entrance into the society of the city.

There again we have a whole series of Old and New Testament metaphors gathered together. In the old world the whole power and splendour of great kingdoms were gathered in their capitals, Babylon and Nineveh in the past, Rome in the present. To John the forces of evil were all concentrated in that city on the Severn Hills. To him the antagonistic forces which were the hope of the world

were all concentrated in the real ideal city which he expected to come down from Heaven — the new Jerusalem. And he and his brother who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, whoever he was — trained substantially in the same school — have taught us the same lesson that our picture of the future is not to be of a solitary or self-regarding Heaven, but of ‘a city which hath foundations.’

Genesis began with a garden, man’s sin sent him out of the garden. God, out of evil, evolves good, and for the lost garden comes the better thing, the found city. ‘Then comes the statelier Eden back to man.’ For surely it is better that men should live in the activities of the city than in the sweetness and indolence of the garden; and manifold and miserable as are the sins and the sorrows of great cities, the opprobria of our modern so-called civilization, yet still the aggregation of great masses of mere for worthy objects generates a form of character, and sets loose energies and activities which no other kind of life could have produced.

And so I believe a great step in progress is set forth when we read of the final condition of mankind as being their assembling in the city of God.

And surely there, amidst the solemn troops and sweet societies, the long-loved, long-lost will be found again. I cannot believe that, like the Virgin and Joseph, we shall have to go wandering up and down the streets of Jerusalem when we get there, looking for our dear ones. ‘Wist ye not that I should be in the Father’s house?’ We shall know where to find them.

‘We shall clasp them again, And with God be the rest.’

The city is the emblem of security and of permanence. No more shall life be as a desert march, with changes which only bring sorrow, and yet a dreary monotony amidst them all. We shall dwell amid abiding realities, ourselves fixed in unchanging but ever-growing completeness and peace. The tents shall be done with, we

shall inhabit the solid mansions of the city which hath foundations, and shall wonderingly exclaim, as our unaccustomed eyes gaze on their indestructible strength, ‘What manner of stones and what buildings are here!’ — and not one stone of these shall ever be thrown down.

Dear friends! the sum of all my poor words now is the earner beseeching of every one of you to bring all your foulness to Christ, who alone can make you clean. ‘Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord.’ ‘The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.’ Submit yourselves, I pray you, to its purifying power, by humble faith. Then you will have the true possession of the true life today, and will be citizens of the city of God, even while in this far-off dependency of that great metropolis. And when the moment comes for you to leave this prison-house, an angel ‘mighty and beautiful, though his face be hid,’ shall come to you, as once of old to the sleeping Apostle. His touch shall wake you, and lead you, scarce knowing where you are or what is happening, from the sleep of life, past the first and second ward, and through the iron gate that leadeth unto the city.

Smoothly it will turn on its hinges, opening to you of its own accord, and then you will come to yourself and know of a surety that the Lord hath sent His angel, and that he has led you into the home of your heart, the city of God, which they enter as its fitting inhabitants who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb.

Revelation 22:17--CHRIST’S LAST INVITATION FROM THE THRONE

‘Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will let him take the water of life freely. — Revelation 22:17. last verses of this last book of Scripture are like the final movement of some great concerto, in which we hear all the instruments of the orchestra swelling the flood of triumph. In them many voices are audible alternately. Sometimes

it is the Seer who speaks, sometimes an angel, sometimes a deeper voice from the Throne, that of Christ Himself. It is often difficult, therefore, amidst these swift transitions, to tell who is the speaker; but one thing is clear that, just before the verse from which my text is taken, our Lord has been proclaiming from the Throne His royalty and His swift coming 'to render to every man according' to his work, and to gather His own into the city.

After that solemn utterance He is silent for the moment, and there is a great hush. Then a voice is heard saying, 'Come!' It is the voice of the Bride in whom the Spirit speaks. What should she say, in answer to His promise, but pour out her wish for its fulfilment? How should the Bride not long for the bridegroom? Then apparently the Seer breaks in, summoning all who have heard Christ's promise, and the Church's prayer, to swell her cry of longing. For, indeed, His coming is the Divine 'event to which the whole Creation moves'; and in it all the world's dreams of a golden age are fulfilled, and all the world's wounds are healed. 'Let him that heareth say, Come!'

But who speaks my text? Apparently Christ Himself, though its force would not be materially modified if it were the voice of John, the Seer. It is His answer to the cry of the Church. He delays His coming; for this among other reasons that all the world may hear His gracious invitation. Then there are two comings in this verse — the final coming of Christ to the world; the invited coming of the world to Christ.

Now, it is obvious, I think, that such a way of understanding our text, with its vivid interchange of speakers and subjects, gives a far richer meaning to it than the interpretation which is so common amongst us, which recognises in all these 'Comes' only a reference to one and the same subject, the approach of men to Jesus Christ through faith in Him.

Let us, then, listen to this Voice from the Throne, almost the last recorded words of the ascended Jesus, in which are gathered all His love for men and His longing to bless them.

I. Now, first let me suggest the question — To whom Christ from the Throne thus calls?

The persons addressed are designated by two descriptions: they that are ‘athirst,’ and those that ‘will.’ In one aspect of the former designation it is universal; in another aspect it is by no means so. The latter designation is, alas! anything but universal, because there are many men that thirst; and, strange as it seems, will not to be satisfied. But we take these two apart, and look at them separately.

The first qualification is need, and the sense of need. These two things, alas! do not go together. One is universal, the other by no means so. When a man is thirsty he knows that he is. But it is quite possible that your soul’s lips may be cracking and black with thirst, and you may be all unconscious of it. There is a universal need stamped upon men, by the very make of their spirits, which declares that they must have something or some one external to themselves, on whom they can rest, and from whom they can be satisfied. The heart yearns for another’s love; the mind is restless till it grasps reality and truth. The will longs to be mastered, even though it rebels against the Master, and the whole nature of man proclaims, ‘My soul thirsteth for God; for the living God.’ No man is at rest unless he is living in conscious amity with, and in possession of, the Father’s heart and the Father’s strength.

But, brethren, half of you do not know what ails you. You recognise the gnawing discontent, the urging restlessness, the continual feeling after something more than you have, and it often impels you on the wrong road. There is such a thing as misinterpreting the cry of the Spirit, and that misinterpretation is the crime and the misery of millions of men and of many in this building this evening. That they shall stifle their true need under a pile of worldly things, that they

shall direct their longings to what can never satisfy them, that they shall put away all thoughts of the one sufficient anchorage, and hold, and nourishment, and refreshment, and gladness of the spirit, is indeed the state and the misery of many of us.

Perverted tastes are by no means confined to certain forms of disease of the body. There is the same perversion of taste in regard of higher things.

You and I are made to feed upon God, and we feed upon ourselves, and one another, and the world, and all the trash, in comparison to our immortal desires and capacities, which we find around us. It seems to me sometimes, looking upon the busy life in the midst of which we live, and the way in which, from Monday morning to Saturday night, each man is hurrying after his chosen pursuits, as if we were all stricken with insanity, and chasing after dreams; or as if, if I might take such an illustration, we were like the actors upon a stage, at some banquet in a play, pretending with great gusto to be drinking nothing, out of cups tinselled to look like gold, but which are only wood. Do you interpret aright the immortal thirst of your soul? Having the need, brother, are you conscious of the need; and, if conscious, do you know where the fountain bubbles up that will supply it? I fear — I fear that there are many who, if they would interrogate their own hearts honestly, and look this question in the face, would have to answer, No! It is ‘as when a thirsty man dreameth, and behold! he drinketh; but he awaketh; and, behold! he is faint, and his soul within him hath appetite.’

Now, I dare say there are many who are not aware of this thirst of the soul. No! you have crushed it out, and for a time you are quite satisfied with worldly success, or with the various objects on which you have set your hearts. It will not last! It will not last! It is not likely to last even the length of your life. It will not last any longer. Some of us may be like the cactus that grows in hot, light soil in eastern lands, having a considerable store of moisture in the fleshy

spike that will help it through a long time of drought, but the store gets used up. Be sure of this, that, until you go to Jesus Christ, you dwell in 'a dry and thirsty!-and where no water is.' So far as the sense of need goes this text may not appeal to you. So far as the reality of the need goes it certainly does.

Then, look at the other designation of the persons to whom Christ's merciful summons comes: 'Whosoever will let him take.' Now, I said that the former designation, in one view of it, covered the whole ground of humanity. We cannot say that of this other one, for we are brought face to face with that strange and most inexplicable and yet most certain and tragic of all facts in regard to men, that they do turn away their wills from the merciful call of God, and that some of them, gnawing their very tongues with thirst, yet put away with impatient hand the sparkling cup that He offers to them freely. There is nothing sadder, there is nothing more certain, than that we poor little creatures can assert our will in the presence of the Divine loving-kindness, and can thwart, so far as we are concerned, the council of God against ourselves. 'How often would I have gathered,' said the foiled, long-suffering Christ — 'how often would I have gathered... and ye would not!' Oh! brethren, it is an awful thing to think that with this universal need there is such a partial yielding of the will to Him.

I do not enter here and now upon the various reasons or excuses which men offer to themselves and one another for this disinclination to accept the Divine mercy, but I do venture to say that the solid core of unwillingness to be saved upon Christ's conditions underlies a vast deal — not all, but a vast deal — of the supposed intellectual difficulties of men in regard to the Gospel. The will bribes the understanding, in a great many regions. It is a very common thing all round the horizon of thought and knowledge that a man shall believe or disbelieve largely under the influence of prejudice or inclination. So let no man be offended if I say that what we have to guard against, in all regions of thought, we have also to

guard against in our relation to the truths of the Gospel, and make very sure that, when we think we are being borne along by pure, impartial reason, the will has not put a bridle in the nose of the steed, and is guiding it astray.

But for the most of you who stand apart from Jesus Christ this is the truth, that your attitude is a merely negative one. It is not that you will not to have Him but that you do not will to have Him. But that negative attitude, that passive indifference which largely comes from a heart that does not like to submit to the conditions that Christ imposes, makes a positive hindrance to your getting between your lips the water of life. You know the old proverb: One man can take a horse to the water, ten cannot make him drink. We can bring you to the water, or the water to you, but neither Christ nor His servants can put the refreshing, life-giving liquid into your mouth if you lock your lips so tight that a bristle could not go in between them. You can thwart Christ, and when He says, 'Take, drink!' you can shake your head and mumble, 'I will not.' So, dear friends, I beseech you to take this solemnly into consideration, that the operative cause why most of us who are not Christians are not, is simply disinclination. Wishing is one thing; willing is quite another. Wishing to be delivered from the gnawing restlessness of a hungry heart, and to be satisfied, is one thing; willing to accept the satisfaction which Christ gives on the terms which Christ lays down is, alas! quite another.

Seeing that to know our need and to be willing to let Him supply it in His own fashion are the only qualifications, then how magnificently from this last word of the Christ from the Throne comes out the universality of His Gospel. 'Whosoever will,' that is all. If you choose you may. No other conditions are laid down. If there had been any which were beyond the power of every soul of man upon earth, then Christianity would have dwindled to a narrow, provincial. sectional thing. But, since it only demands the need, which is universal; the sense of need, which every man may feel;

and willingness, which every man ought to, and can, exercise, it is the Gospel for the world, and it is the Gospel for me, and it is the Gospel for each of you. See that ye refuse not the offered draught.

II. That brings me, secondly, to say a word about what Christ from heaven thus offers to us all.

This book of Revelation, as I have already remarked, in another connection, is the close of the great Revels-tion of God; and it is full of the echoes of His earlier words. The river of the water of life hem been rippling and tinkling from the first chapter of Genesis to the hast of Revelation. It is the river that flowed through Eden; the river which makes glad with its streams the City of God, the river of the Divine pleasures, of which God makes His children drink; the river which the prophet saw stealing out from under the Temple doors, and carrying life whithersoever it came; the river which Christ proclaimed should flow from because it had flowed into, all that should believe upon Him,' the river of the water of life, clear as crystal,' which the Seer had just seen proceeding from the Throne of God and of the Lamb. Our Lord's words to the Samaritan woman, and His words on that last great day of the feast, when He stood and cried, ' If any man thirst let him come to Me and drink,' and many another gracious utterance, are all gathered up, as it were, in this last Voice from the Throne.

The water of life is not merely living water, in the sense that it flashes and sparkles and flows; but it is water which communicates life. ' Life' here is to be taken in that deep, pregnant, comprehensive sense in which the Apostle John uses it in all his writings. It is his shorthand symbol for the whole aggregate of the blessings which come to men through Jesus Christ, and which, received by men, make them blessed indeed.

The first thought that emerges from this 'water of life,' considered as being the sum of all that Christ communicates to humanity is — then, where it does not run or is not received, there is death. Ah,

brother, the true death is separation from God, and the true separation from God is not brought about because He is in heaven, and we are upon earth; or because He is infinite and incomprehensible, and we are poor creatures of an hour, but because we depart from Him in heart and mind, and, as another Apostle says, are dead in trespasses and sins. Death in life, a living death, is far more dreadful than when the poor body is laid quiet upon the bed, and the spirit has left the pale cheeks. And that death is upon us, unless it has been banished from us by a draught of the water of life. Dear brethren, that is not pulpit rhetoric; it is the deepest fact about human nature. It is not a mere metaphor. I take it that the death of the body is metaphor, so to speak, the embodiment in material *form*, as a parable of the far grimmer thing which goes on in the region of the spirit. And I beseech you to remember that according to the whole teaching of Scripture, which I think is countersigned by the verdict of an awakened conscience, death is the separation from God by sin; and the only quickening potion is the water which Christ gives; or rather, as He Himself said, 'He that drinketh of My blood hath life indeed.'

But, then, besides all these thoughts, there come others, on which I need not dwell, that in that great emblem of the water that gives life is included the satisfaction of all desires, meeting and over-answering all expectations, filling up every empty place in the heart, in the hopes, in the whole inward nature of man, and lavishing upon him all the blessings which go to make up true gladness, true nobleness, and dignity. Nor does the eternal life cease when physical death comes. The river — if I might modify the figure with which I am dealing, and regard the man himself in his Christian experience as the river — flows through a narrow, dark gorge, like one of the canons on American streams, and down to its profoundest depths no sunlight can travel. But the waters are not diminished though they are confined, nor are they arrested by the black rocks, but at the other end of the defile they come out into flashing sunset and sparkle and flow. And away somewhere in the dark gorge mighty

tributaries have poured in, so that the stream is broader and deeper, and pours a more majestic volume towards the great ocean from which it originally came.

Brother, here is the offer — life eternal, deliverance from the death of sin both as guilt and power; the pouring out upon us of all the blessing that our thirsty spirits can desire, and the perpetuity of that blessed existence and endless satisfaction through the infinite ages of timeless being. These are the offers that Christ makes to each of us.

III. Lastly, what Christ from heaven calls us to do.

‘He that is athirst let him come; and whosoever will let him take!’ The two things, coming and taking, as it seems to me, cover substantially the same ground. You often hear earnest, evangelical preachers reiterate that call — ‘Come to Jesus! come to Jesus!’ with more fervour than clearness of explanation of what they mean. So, I would say, in one sentence emphatically, and as plainly as I can put it, that Jesus Christ Himself has told us what He means. Because when He was here upon earth He stood and cried, ‘If any man thirst let him come to Me and drink.’ And He explained Himself when He said, ‘He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.’ So let us put away the metaphors of ‘coming’ and ‘taking’ and lay hold of the Christ-given interpretation of them, and say the one thing that Christ asks me to do is to trust my poor, sinful self wholly and confidently and constantly and obediently to Him. That is all.

Ah! All! And that is just where the pinch comes. ‘My father! my father!’ remonstrated Naaman’s servants, when he was in a towering passion because he was told to go wash in the Jordan; ‘if the prophet had bidden thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?’ Naaman’s strange reluctance to do a little thing in order to produce a great effect whilst he was willing to take a mint of trouble in order

to produce it, is repeated over and over again amongst us. You will see men buy damnation dear who will not have salvation because it is a gift and they have nothing to do. I do believe that great multitudes of people would rather, like the Hindoos, stick hooks, in the muscles of their backs, and swing at the end of a rope if that would get heaven for them, than simply be content to come in *forma pauperis*, and owe everything to Christ's grace, and nothing to their own works.

Why! what is the meaning of all this new vitality Of sacerdotal notions amongst us to-day, and of the efficacy of sacraments, and all the rest of it, except the purblindness to the flashing glory of the central truth of the Gospel that not by anything that we do, but simply by His Cross and passion received by faith into our hearts, are we saved? Brethren, it is not theology about Christ's sacrifice, but it is the Christ whom the theology about His sacrifice explains that you must get hold of. And if you trust Him you have come to Him in a very real sense, and have His presence with you, and you are present with Him far more really than were the men who companied with Him all the time that He went in and out amongst them here on this earth. So much for the 'come.'

'Let him take.' Well, that being translated, too, is but the exercise of lowly trust in Him. Faith is the hand that, being put out, grasps this great gift.

You must make the universal Messing your own. The river flows past your door, broader and deeper and more majestic than the 'father of waters' itself. But all that is naught to you unless you take your own little pitcher to the brink and fill it, and take it home. 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.' Do you say that?

Dear brother! are you athirst? I know you are. Do you know it? Are you willing to take Christ's salvation on Christ's terms, and to live by faith in Him, communion with, and obedience to Him? If you are, then earth may yield or deny you its waters, but you will not be

dependent on them. When all the land is parched and baked, and every surface well run dry, you will have a spring that fails not, and the water that Christ ‘ will give you will he in you a fountain of water leaping up into everlasting life.’ Nor will your supplies fail when death cuts off all that flow from earthly cisterns, for they who here drink of the river will hereafter go up to the Source, and ‘they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, for the Lamb that is in the midst of the Throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of water, and God the Lord shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.’