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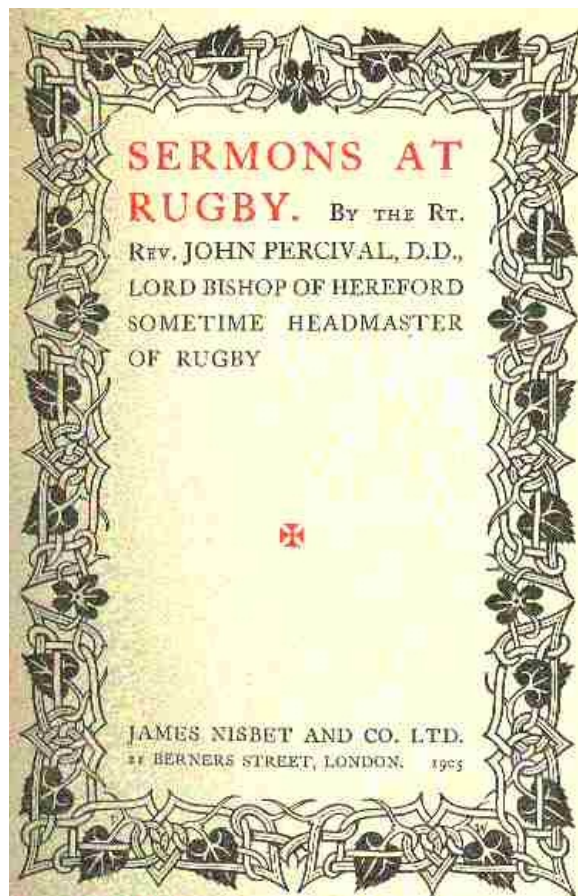
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# SERMONS AT RUGBY

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*Hereford*

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

p. v

This little group of Rugby Sermons is to be taken and read as being nothing more than a few stray chips from the workshop of a busy schoolmaster, brought together by a kindly publisher, and arranged as he thought best.

They represent no body of continuous doctrine. In one case the subject may have been suggested by the season of the Christian year; in another it was the meeting or the parting at the beginning or the end of a term that suggested it; or more frequently some incident in the school life of the moment.

Such, indeed, almost inevitably is the teaching of a schoolmaster, engrossed in the training of the boys committed to his charge and growing under his hand towards the destiny of their endless life.

To those boys, and to the masters, my colleagues, and to other fellow-labourers—some gone to their rest, some still doing their appointed work—I dedicate this brief reminder of our common life in days of happy fellowship.

p. vi

J. HEREFORD.  
*July 1905.*

## I. RELIGIOUS PATRIOTISM.

p. 1

“Jerusalem is built as a city that is at unity in itself. . . . O pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and plenteousness within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions’ sakes I will wish thee prosperity. Yea, because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek to do thee good.”—PSALM cxxii. 3, 6-9.

As we draw near to the end of our summer term, when so many are about to take leave of their school life, there is sure to rise up in many minds the thought of what this life has done for them or failed to do, and of what the memory of it is likely to be in all their future years as they pass from youth to age.

And it should be our aim and desire, as need hardly be said, that from the day when each one comes amongst us as a little boy to the day when he offers his last prayer in this chapel before he goes out into the world, his life here should be of such a sort that its after taste may have no regrets, and no bitterness, and no shame in it, and the memories to be cherished may be such as add to the happiness and strength of later years. And if, as we trust, this is your case, your feeling for your school is almost certain to be in some degree like that which is expressed in this pilgrim psalm. Its language of intense patriotism, steeped in religious feeling, which is the peculiar inspiration of the Old Testament Jew, will seem somehow to express your own feelings for that life in which you grew up from childhood to manhood.

p. 2

Indeed, the best evidence that your school life has not failed of its higher objects is the growth of this same sort of earnest patriotic enthusiasm. Do you feel at all for your school as that unknown Jewish pilgrim who first sung this 122nd Psalm felt for the city of his fathers and the house of God? "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. For my brethren and companions' sakes I will wish thee prosperity. Yea, because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek to do thee good."

p. 3

Experience shows us that those English schools have been the best in which this feeling has been strongest and most widely diffused; and that those are the best times in any school which train up and send forth the largest proportion of men who continue to watch over its life, and to pray for it in this spirit: "For my brethren and companions' sakes I will wish thee prosperity. Yea, because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek to do thee good." On the other hand, if this feeling is weak in any school, or among the former members of it, or if it assumes debased forms, as sometimes happens, we see there a sure sign of degeneration. He who, having grown up in any society like ours, is possessed by no such love for it, and stirred by no enthusiasm for its good name, and no desire to do it good, and to see good growing in every part of it, such an one has somehow missed the chief blessing that his membership of his school should have brought to him. He may have been unfortunate, or he may have proved unworthy. The atmosphere of his school life, and the associations amidst which he grew up, may have been such that the best thing he can do is to shake himself clear of them and forget them. To such an one his school time has been a grave and lifelong misfortune; and it is the condemnation of any society if there are many such cases in it.

p. 4

It is, however, exceptional in English life for men who have grown up in a great school to be stirred by no glow of patriotic feeling for it. Whatever their own experience of it may have been, they are not altogether blind to the things that constitute its greatness, and they love to hear it well spoken of.

But the quality of their patriotism will depend very much on the quality of their own life; so that the task we have always before us is to be infusing into our community such a spirit and purpose, as shall infect each soul amongst us with those higher aims, and tastes, and motives, with that hatred of things mean or impure, and that love of things that are manly, honest, and of good report, which distinguish all nobler characters from the baser, and which are produced and fostered, and made to work strongly in every society that has any claim to good influence.

p. 5

Seeing, then, that a man's patriotism is to a great extent the expression of his personal life, how instructive is this picture of the patriot which the 122nd Psalm sets before us. We see thus first of all how he feels the unity of his people—their one pervading life, and himself a part of it, though possibly far away—"Jerusalem is built as a city that is at unity in itself: thither the tribes go up." Those were times when Israel suffered from division of tribe against tribe, times when the pulse of common life hardly beat at all, times of isolation or of jealousy; but the true patriot in Israel, as everywhere, was always possessed by the intense feeling of the oneness of his people under one Lord; and whenever this feeling fails, we look in vain for the higher forms of common life.

p. 6

But we note, too, this Psalmist's passionate personal devotion to the object of his patriotic love—"They shall prosper that love thee"—"For my brethren and companions' sakes I will wish thee prosperity." Who can read unmoved these noble and generous outpourings?

We see, moreover, how his feeling expresses itself, as true love always does express itself in the desire to do good to its object, and, above all, how it breathes the spirit of moral and religious earnestness. "Yea, because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek to do thee good." If ever you desire to test the sincerity and the worth of any love you bear to person, place, institution, or society, you have only to turn to this Psalm, and see if these words fit your thoughts, desires, and endeavours—"They shall prosper that love thee—For my brethren and companions' sakes I will wish thee prosperity—Yea, because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek to do thee good." Here are the notes of true patriotic feeling—personal love, public spirit, sanctified by moral and religious purpose, desire to do good. These are the qualities which are the salt of all societies, and it is by virtue of these that they win their good name, if they do win it.

p. 7

In the history of our own school we can point to abundant illustrations of this truth. I will mention one only, familiar to those who know our history. "I verily believe," wrote a School-house boy to his friend fifty-three years ago—"I verily believe my whole being is soaked through with wishing and hoping and striving to do the school good, or, rather, to hinder it from falling in this critical time, so that all my cares, and affections, and conversation, thought, words, and deeds, look to that involuntarily."

Such was one of your predecessors as he sat here Sunday by Sunday, a boy like any of you.

He was eager to follow those friends who had preceded him to Oxford as scholars of Balliol; he was keenly interested in all intellectual pursuits; he turned for his daily pleasure to literature or history; but alongside of it all, or rather through it all, underlying it all, giving earnestness and fervour, the true unselfish quality, to it all, there was burning in his heart a consuming zeal for the good of his house and school. "For my brethren and companions' sakes I will wish thee prosperity. Yea, because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek to do thee good."

p. 8

It was through the spirit and the lives of such as he, growing up here, and leavening all the life around them, and then going forth in the same spirit, to live the noble and earnest type of life

elsewhere, that the name of Rugby School became honoured among schools, and this chapel came to be looked upon as a sacred home of inspiring influences; and it is only through an unending succession of such Rugbeians—growing up here in the same spirit, and going forth endowed with the same character and the same purpose— that this honourable name, this tradition of good influences, can be perpetuated.

p. 9

And, if we desire to see how close this is to the spirit and the work of our Lord, how it is, in fact, one manifestation of that spirit which is the saving influence in human life; we have only to turn from the text with which I started to that with which I may conclude, from the Psalmist meditating on the city and temple of his heart's affections, to the Saviour, as He drew near to the Cross, praying for His disciples—"Father, the hour is come. . . . I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work Thou gavest Me to do. I have manifested Thy name unto the men whom Thou gavest me out of the world." . . . "And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word."

The only change we see as we step from the Psalms to the Gospel, from the Jewish pilgrim to the Saviour whom we worship, is that religious patriotism has expanded into the love of souls, the love of Him who laid down His life to save us from the power of sin and death.

p. 10

It was for you and me that Christ was praying; and His prayer for us will be answered so soon as it inspires us to follow in His footsteps, so that we too, as we kneel before God each morning, each night, and think of our duty to those around us, may be able to say, in these words of His, which are at once a prayer and a consecrating vow—"For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified."

## II. THE CHILD IN THE MIDST.

p. 11

"And He took a child and set Him in the midst of them: and when He had taken him in His arms, He said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in My name, receiveth Me: and whosoever shall receive Me, receiveth not Me, but Him that sent Me."—ST. MARK IX. 36, 37.

It is one of the characteristics of our time, one of its most hopeful and most encouraging signs, that men are awaking to higher and purer conceptions of the Christian life and what it is that constitutes such a life. We are beginning to feel, as it was not felt by former generations, that the only true religion, the only Christianity worthy of the name, is that which aims at embodying and reproducing the spirit, the thought, the ideas of the Saviour.

Through and underneath all ecclesiastical and mediæval revivals, and all vagaries of church tradition or of ritual, this feeling seems to be growing with a steady growth, that the real test of a man's religion is the evidence which his life affords of the Christ-like spirit. And this growing feeling gives an ever-fresh interest to the words and the judgment of the Lord on all matters of individual conduct and daily intercourse; so that if we are possessed at all by it, the Saviour is becoming more of a living person to us, and we ask ourselves more frequently, more earnestly, with more of reality and more of practical meaning in the question, how He would judge this or that side of our life, whether our conduct is in harmony with His spirit, and whether the standards of our life fit at all with His teaching and injunctions.

p. 12

And how full of new meaning every familiar chapter of the Gospel becomes to you, if you are once roused to this kind of feeling; if you are feeling all the time, here is the spirit which should be dominating my own life and determining it, here are the thoughts, ideas, and views of conduct which should be mine also. How does my common life fit with all this? And it is with something like this feeling in your minds that I would ask you to consider the text I have just read to you. "Jesus took a child and set him in the midst of them. He took him up in His arms and said, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in My name, receiveth Me." And while we are considering it, let us notice also that in St. Matthew's narrative there are two other very emphatic expressions. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven"; and "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones that believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. . . . Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven."

p. 13

Here, then, is the child taken up by Jesus and set in the midst; we know nothing more of him but this one thing, that he represents to us our Lord's Divine love of little children, and His high estimate of childhood, as the mysterious embodiment of that character and those qualities which bring us close to the Divine life.

p. 14

But this is quite enough to make us listen to the lessons of thought and warning and hope, which Jesus expounds to us as He stands with the child in His arms. His words may very well set every one of us thinking about our own life and conduct. We look at this scene—the disciples standing round, their hearts occupied, as ours are apt to be, with their own ambitions, rivalries, and jealousies, and Jesus in the midst with the little child; and we cannot mistake or misinterpret the lessons He teaches us, the lessons which welled up in His heart whenever He saw, or met, or

took up in His arms, and blessed a little child.

“Let every child you meet,” he clearly says to us, “remind you that if you desire to be My disciple and to win a place in My kingdom, you must fling off selfishness, and put in its place the spirit of service and tenderness.” “He that would be first must be servant of all.” “You must humble yourself as this little child.” p. 15

And then He adds the blessing and the warning:—“Whoso shall receive one such child in My name receiveth Me; but whosoever shall offend one of these little ones, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.”

We may pause for a moment to consider what it is in childhood, what are the gifts, qualities, characteristics of the child, that drew from our Lord this special love and care and these injunctions to His followers. We do well to bear them in mind, because He has declared with such emphasis that we have no part in His kingdom unless we retain or recover these gifts. And we should bear them in mind, because of the blessing promised to those who help to preserve these qualities in others. Receive, help, cherish, or protect a child, make the way of goodness easy to him, and shield him from evil, and Christ declares that inasmuch as you have done it to the least of all His little ones, you have done it unto Him. p. 16

On the other hand, offend any such child, that is to say, hinder, or mislead, spoil or degrade him in any way; do anything to rob a child of any of these Divine gifts, rob him of his innocence, or trustfulness, or his guileless heart, and sow the seeds of evil habits or tastes in their place, and you know the denunciation or curse which the Divine voice has laid upon you for your evil deed.

A child, then, is, as it were, a living symbol of that which draws to us the love of Christ, and we cannot doubt that he is so by virtue of his innocence, his obedient spirit, his guilelessness, or simplicity of character, his trustfulness, and by all the untarnished and unspoilt possibilities of goodness in him.

It is in the blessed endowment of such gifts as these that the little child looks in the face of Christ, and is embraced in the arms of His love.

And these are, or they once were, your gifts. As you love the better life, and hope for good days, hold them fast and cherish them, or if any of them be unhappily lost, let it be your endeavour to recover it. p. 17

As we contemplate such a scene as this in our Lord’s life with the little child in the midst, and listen to the Saviour’s words, all the commands and injunctions to keep innocency, to keep the spirit of obedience, to keep a guileless and trusting and loving heart, gain a new force. They seem to speak to us with new voices; for if the true life, the life that has in it the hope of union with Christ, must be a life endowed with these gifts, whether in youth or age, what a blessed thing it will be for you if you have never lost or squandered them. We cannot too soon learn this lesson; for if under the influence of any wrong motives, or following any wrong ideals, or misled by any bad example, you go astray and rob your young life of these divine gifts, no man knows how, or when, or where you will recover them, and become again as a little child. p. 18

And if we turn our thoughts from our own separate personal life, and look for a moment at our duty as members of a society, how this picture of Christ embracing the little child, and blessing those who receive or help one such, should stir us to new and keener interest in social duty! Does it not carry in it, this example and teaching of the Lord, does it not carry in it the condemnation of a great many of our traditional notions about our duty to the young? We see the Lord’s tenderness and love and care for the little child; we see how He values the childlike qualities; and how He enjoins the nursing and the cherishing of these. If, then, we have really learnt the lesson which He thus presses upon us, we shall feel something like reverence for every young life, as it begins its perilous and uncertain course on the sea of man’s experiences; and with this feeling we shall be eager to help and protect such lives whenever we have the chance of doing it, and we shall be very careful to do them no wrong. p. 19

But when we turn from the Gospel and these thoughts which it stirs in us to our common life of every day, does it not rather seem sometimes as if this teaching of the Lord were all a dream and had no reality? And yet there is hardly one of us but would confess that, having once seen this revelation of the Lord, we are put to shame if, as happens sometimes, a young soul comes amongst us endowed with these very gifts of innocence, and high purpose, and trust, and promise of all goodness, which so won the Saviour’s heart, and is met, when he comes, in school or house, not by care, or sympathy, or guidance, or protection, as of an elder brother’s love, but by experiences of a very different sort. You would agree that it is a shame to us if such an one comes only to find the misleading influence of some thoughtless or bad companion, or to have held up before him some bad tradition as the law which should rule his life here.

I have known—which of us in the course of years has not known?—such cases in our school experience. A child has come from a refined and loving home, but only to meet with roughness or coarseness; and instead of retaining those gifts and qualities of childhood, which are the godlike qualities of life and meant to be permanent, he has been led to grow up utterly unchildlike, depraved, debased, hardened; and there is no sadder sight to see than a growth of this kind. And if you have ever seen it; if you have ever noticed the falling away from childlike innocence to sin, from purity to coarseness, from the open, ingenuous, trusting spirit to sullen hardness, from happiness to gloom, you know how terribly in earnest the Saviour must have been when He denounced that woe on any one who causes such debasement of a young soul—“Whoso

shall offend one of these little ones, it had been better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

### III. THE BREVITY OF LIFE.

p. 21

"I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh."—ST. JOHN IX. 4.

There are few things more commonly disregarded by us in our early years than the brevity of our life through all its successive stages, and the fleeting nature of its opportunities.

In childhood we are almost entirely unconscious of both these characteristics of life. Indeed, it would hardly be natural if it were otherwise. That reflective habit which dwells upon them is the result of our experience, and comes later. It is enough for a child if he follows pure and safe instincts, and lives without reflection a healthy, unperturbed life, under wise guidance and good teaching. Growing in this way, free from corrupting influences or the contagion of bad example, and poisoned by no bad atmosphere, he develops naturally towards a manhood which is rooted in healthy tastes, affections unspoilt, and in good habits. Thus you see what the very young have a right to claim at the hands of all their elders—that they should be careful not to mislead them, and should see that they live in pure air, and feed their growing instincts and activities in wholesome pastures.

p. 22

During the stage of earliest growth it would be a sign of unhealthy precocity if a child were much occupied with the continuity of things, or the close union of to-day with to-morrow, or of all our thoughts, acts, pleasures, and tastes, with the bent of character which is being silently but surely formed in us; and it would be equally unnatural if his thoughts were to dwell much on the essential shortness of our life, and the flight of opportunity which does not come back to us.

It is part of the happiness, or, I fear, it must be said sometimes, part of the pain of early life, that the time before it seems so long. The day is long with its crowded novelty or intense enjoyment, or possibly with its dreary and intolerable task-work; to-morrow, with all its anticipations of things desired or to be endured, seems long; and the vista of years, as they stretch through boyhood and youth, manhood and age, seems to lose itself in the far distance of its length. So, viewed from its beginnings, life is long.

p. 23

But with the approach of manhood all this begins to change. As we grow out of childhood our self-conscious and reflective life grows; and thus there rises in us the feeling of moral responsibility never to be shaken off again. Not, however, that we should leave all our childhood behind us. It hardly needs to be said that there are some characteristics of our earliest years which every man should pray that he may retain to the end. Unless he retains them his life becomes a deteriorating life.

And first among these is the reverential or filial habit. This deserves our careful attention, because we sometimes see an affectation of silly and spurious manliness, which thinks it a fine thing to cast it off. This reverential or filial feeling, which is natural to the unspoilt and truthful nature of the child, is preserved in every unspoilt manhood; only with a difference.

p. 24

It is raised from the unreflective, instinctive trust in a father's guidance or a mother's love to that higher feeling which tells us that, as is the child in a well and wisely ordered home, so is each of us in that great household of our heavenly Father. This spirit of true piety, which uplifts, refines, strengthens, and gives courage to manhood, as nothing else can do, is the natural outcome and successor of a child's trustfulness, as we rise through it to the feeling that we are encompassed by a Divine consciousness, and that our life moves in a holy presence. Or again, we pray that we may not lose that simplicity and freshness of nature which is at once a special charm of childhood, and, wherever it is preserved, the chief blessing of a man's later years.

p. 25

These qualities and characteristics of our infancy—trust, filial reverence, freshness, simplicity—are not qualities to be left behind, but the natural forecast of that religious spirit which is the highest growth of maturity, and our own safeguard against the hardening and debasing influences of the world and the flesh. And this was the Saviour's meaning when He said, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in nowise enter therein." And if there is one thing more than another that constitutes the special curse of any depraved influence acting on young lives, it is that it robs the later life of these childlike qualities which are the gifts of God to bless us in youth and age.

But assuming that we bear all this in mind, and hold fast to these fundamental gifts, and so escape those lower and baser forms of life which we meet all about in the world, spoiling the manhood and embittering the age of so many men, we cannot forget the essential difference between mature years and the years of early growth.

p. 26

As we grow towards manhood our life necessarily loses its childlike and unreflecting spontaneity in the ferment of thought, desire, and passion, and in the light of experience; and therefore it becomes a matter of no slight importance to estimate the value of that which we hold in our hands to-day, the nature of the web which our conduct is weaving, and the fateful character of

any mistake in the purposes, notions, ambitions, or tastes that are, as a matter of fact, fixing the drift and direction of our life. But to do this amidst all the daily temptations of life is not always an easy matter; and it is certain that we shall not do it if we do not fully recognise, while our life is still young and unhampered, the importance of these two very obvious reflections, which, in fact, resolve themselves into one, that our time is essentially short, and that our opportunities are very fugitive.

In one sense, no doubt, there is a long stretch of time before most of you. As yet hope has more to say to you than memory. Some of you will look back on these early days from the distant years of another century. Your life's journey may extend far away over the unexplored future, and may in some cases be a very long one; but, although this is possible, we are not allowed to forget that it is always precarious—unexpected graves are constantly reminding us how short may be the time of any one of us—how the night cometh.

p. 27

But it is not merely of the literal shortness of our time, or the possible nearness of death, that our Lord's words should set us thinking, when He warns us that the night cometh, and we must work while it is day.

If we measure our life by the things we should accomplish in it, by the character it should attain to, by the purposes that should be bearing fruit in it, and not by mere lapse of time, we soon come to feel how very short it is, and the sense of present duty grows imperative. It is thus that the thoughtful man looks at his life; and he feels that there is no such thing as length of days which he can without blame live carelessly, because in these careless days critical opportunities will have slipped away irrecoverably; he will have drifted in his carelessness past some turning-point which he will not see again, and have missed the so-called chances that come no more.

p. 28

But even this is only a part of the considerations that make our present life so precious; for this is only the outer aspect of it. What makes our time so critically short, whether we consider its intellectual or its moral and spiritual uses, is that our nature is so very sensitive, so easily marred by misuse, and spoilt irretrievably. The real brevity of the time at your disposal, whether for the training of your mind, or for your growth into the character of good men, consists in this, that deterioration is standing always at the back of any neglect or waste. Deterioration is the inseparable shadow of every form of ignoble life.

p. 29

“Our acts our angels are, for good or ill,  
Our fatal shadows that walk with us still.”

Leave your faculties unused and they become blunted and dulled; leave your higher tastes uncultivated and they die; let your affections feed on anything unworthy and they become debased.

To those who do this it may happen that whilst, so far as years go, they are still in all the freshness of youth, they are already dying that death to all higher capacity which is worse than any decay of our physical organism. Such an early death of higher tastes and faculties, and of hope for the future, is sometimes effected even before schooldays are over. And the mere possibility of such a fate overhanging any of us should stir us like a trumpet-call to take care that we do not surrender our life to any mean influence, and that we are very zealous for all that concerns the safety of the young.

p. 30

“I send out my child,” I can imagine the parent of any one of you having said, “to be trained for manhood; I send him to his school that his intellect may be cultivated, his moral purpose made strong, and that all good and pure tastes may be fostered in him; but it is dreadful to think that instead of this he may, by his life and companionship there, be hardened and debased, or even brutalised; he may become dead to the higher life even before he becomes a man.” Seeing, then, that there is this possibility of death even in the midst of life—a possibility, we would fain hope, seldom realised in this school, but still a possibility—shall we not be very careful, men and boys alike, so to do our part in this society, so to shelter the young and strengthen the weak, and to keep the atmosphere of our life a pure atmosphere, that every sensitive soul which comes amongst us may grow up here through a healthy and wholesome boyhood, and go out to the duties and the calling of his life, strong, unselfish, public-spirited, pure-hearted, and courageous—a Christian gentleman.

p. 31

#### IV. THE INFLUENCE OF TRADITION.

p. 32

“Making the word of God of none effect through your traditions: and many such like things ye do.”—ST. MARK vii. 13.

Such was our Lord's word to the Pharisees; and if we turn to our own life it is difficult if not impossible for us fully to estimate the influence which traditions exercise upon it.

They are so woven into the web of thought and opinion, and daily habits and practices, that none of us can claim to escape them. Moreover, as any institution or society grows older, this influence of the part which is handed on from one generation to another tends to accumulate; so that the weight of it lies heavier on us in an old place than in a new one, and it is obvious that

there is both loss and gain in this.

A good tradition is a great help and support, giving a strength, or firmness, or dignity to our life which it would not otherwise have had.

p. 33

We often see or feel the value of such a tradition as it acts upon the members of a family, or of a college, or of a regiment, or of a school.

And this influence of a tradition, inasmuch as it has become impersonal, and rooted in the general life, is apt to be very persistent, so that the man who establishes a good tradition anywhere begins a good work, which may go on producing its good results long after he himself is in his grave.

Many of you must have felt the power of such an influence, handed on to you as if it were a part of your inheritance, when thinking of a brother, or father, or other relative or ancestor, who by some distinction of character, or by some inspiring words or some brave or generous act, has left you a good example, which seems somehow to belong to you, and to stir you as with an authoritative call to show yourself worthy of it.

p. 34

Similarly in a society like this school you can hardly grow up without sometimes being stirred by the tradition of the noble lives that have left their mark upon its history.

So a man's good deeds live after him, and become woven as threads of gold into the traditions of the world.

And we are equally familiar with traditions that are bad, and with their pestilent influence; for we are constantly made to feel how much of the good that men endeavour to do is thwarted, counteracted, or destroyed by influences of this sort, and how weak and imitative souls are entangled in the network of traditional influence as in a spider's web. Tradition, in fact, represents to us the accumulated power of past lives as it acts upon us from the outside, just as what men call heredity represents this same influence in our own blood.

And we have seen that this power may be, and often is, a real advantage and support to our life. We feel also that as the Divine light shines stronger and steadier in human affairs the traditional influence of each generation ought to become more and more helpful to those that follow.

p. 35

And yet, you observe, the Saviour gives us no encouragement to depend upon those helps that tradition might bring us. On the contrary, His language shows how dangerous He felt the influence of tradition to be. How are we to account for this? His strongest denunciations are reserved for the Pharisaic party; and yet a historian would describe them as in many respects the best elements of Jewish life. They were earnest, patriotic, religious, many of them wise and holy men; but their judgment was held in bondage by the influence of tradition, and in this lies the cardinal defect of their life. They had set up between their souls and the spirit of God a sort of graven image of ritualistic observances, and traditional usages and interpretations. They depended on externals, or what came to them from the past or from the outer world, and their eyes were blinded, and their hearts hardened against every new revelation.

p. 36

Thus they stand before Christ, blocking His path, the very embodiment of that power which closes the soul against those inspiring and purifying influences that come from direct communion with God. They block the Saviour's path, because this personal communion is just what He represents to us—the direct revelation of the Spirit of God in man. He comes to reveal the Father to each of us, and to make us feel the presence of the Divine creative Spirit in every separate human life; and till we feel this personal illumination we have not realised the manifestation of the Son of God. But the Pharisee with his continual reference to tradition, his multiplication of external observances, and elaborate ritual, his reliance upon usage and external authority, knows little or nothing of the personal illumination by the direct influence of the Spirit of God upon our spirit. Hence this absolute and fundamental contrast between Jesus and the Pharisees. They represent two opposing principles in life. And it is this that gives such intensity to the words He addressed to them: "Ye have made the word of God of none effect through your traditions"; and it is a universal warning—never out of date.

p. 37

If the spirit of traditional usage and influence holds the citadel of a man's life, the spirit of Christian progress cannot gain an entrance.

That is the lesson which the Saviour presses upon our attention by His denunciation of the Pharisaic usage, habit, and attitude, and it is hardly possible to overestimate the importance of the lesson, because this same spirit of Pharisaic tradition is constantly laying its hand upon every human institution, and it has contributed to every abuse or perversion that has taken possession of the Christian Church.

Our life is, in fact, a continuous struggle between the two principles here represented. Which is to prevail in it, and fix its character—traditional custom, or personal inspiration? Are we to follow the world with its conventions and laws, or to live in personal communion with God? The tendency of our life will be determined in one direction or the other according as we surrender our will to the rule of traditional notions and usages, the power of the external world, or as we seek for direct illumination of mind, conscience, and spirit at the Divine sources of truth and light.

p. 38

Here, then, we have a principle to guide us in our relation to the traditions amidst which we live.



We do not expect to get away from them; we never dream of escaping from the influences of the external world, whether of the past or the present; but to move safely among them, we must have learnt and adopted this primal lesson, that no tradition, and no external practice or custom, has any authoritative claim upon us, simply from being established as a tradition or a custom.

And as we stand amidst all the conventions and practices that have come down to us, we should be able to say of every one of them—

p. 39

“Every good tradition, and every wholesome and beneficent usage, I accept thankfully as part of the inheritance which good, or wise, or brave men have left as their legacy for my use and assistance; but it is my bounden duty to measure them all by the standard of God’s unchanging law: by it I will prove them; I will use them or reject them according as they fit or fail in this measurement, and I will not be brought under the power of any of them.”

Whether, then, we think of our separate personal life or of our life in its social relationships, we must think of it in this way if we are to be in any real sense followers of Christ. Each of you, as he steps into the world, is not merely an inheritor of certain accumulations of life and tradition, which he should follow as a matter of course. He is not born to tread a certain track of conduct or behaviour because others have trodden it before him, following it without thought like the sheep on the mountain, or like the ants as they travel from one ant-hill to another.

p. 40

Your estimate of your life should be fundamentally different from this. You are primarily a child of God, illumined by direct communion with the Spirit of God; and your first duty, therefore, whenever and in whatever place or circumstances you may chance to be, is not to follow this or that tradition or usage which may meet you; but to stand up and show that you are God’s child, and therefore a judge of all traditions or customs, and not their slave.

This is the revelation which Christ declares to us as the one first requisite of the Christian life. So you see the Christian man’s attitude towards all traditions or customs is that of independence; his thought and his judgment are as free in regard to them as if they were newly born. He is, in fact, bound to judge them according to their deserts; and no society can hope to prosper unless this is recognised, so that evil customs may not corrupt the common life. It is the danger of such corruption that makes the Saviour denounce the traditional habit, and summon His followers to live by the rule of close personal communion with God. Thus the life that goes forward and rises to higher and yet higher levels is always a life of new revelations, a life which is being illumined and illumined afresh by those flashes of Divine insight, and strength, and courage, which come to men only as they came to the Lord Himself in the secret communion of prayer and meditation, and through that independence of spirit which arises from the sense of God’s presence to guide us and to uphold.

p. 41

Take your own case. If you are living here simply according to traditional rules, doing this or that because, as you may be told, everybody does it; accepting standards of conduct and rules of practice, because, as you understand, or, as some one undertakes to persuade you, they have always been so accepted, why, then, you are growing up to be one of that never-ending succession of men who are the Pharisees, the opponents of the Christ, in every generation, who live with tame conscience in any sort of company, and perpetuate the bad traditions of the world.

p. 42

But if you listen to the call of Christ, and have truly learned to feel that the only real man’s life is that which you live with the light of God’s law shining upon it, then, as a matter of course, you will rise superior to the influence of any tradition or custom, no matter what its authority may seem to be.

And it will indeed be a happy thing for you if you grow up with that God-given strength of character and purpose which can treat all traditions, and all usages, or fashions, or customs as things that should be subordinated, and should not rule us, as things to be used by us if they help us to a better life, but to be flung aside and rejected, if they contradict the voice of God in our hearts.

## V. VAIN HOPES.

p. 43

“And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. But he said, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”—ST. LUKE xvi. 30, 31.

It is by no means uncommon for any one who is living a life which does not satisfy his own conscience to console himself with the fancy that if only such and such things were different around him he would be a new man, filled with a new spirit, and exhibiting a new character. But is it so very certain that this would be the case?

Such persons are apt to dream of some goodness or some virtue which under other circumstances they would make their own; and there are, in fact, few conditions more dangerous than that of this class of dreamers, whether among boys or men. To all who may be tempted in this way, our Lord’s words in the parable come with a very significant warning: “Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. But he said, If they hear not

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Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

When insidious and delusive hope would draw us on and beguile us in any sinful way, whispering that God will some day send special gifts and messengers of grace to inspire us with new life, this is his plain answer: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

And hardly any one can say that he is altogether free from this tendency to lean upon the future with vain hopes, and is in no need of the warning which this text conveys to us.

In serious moments, when the mind is calm, and neither passion nor appetite is stirring, we feel how good a thing it is to have crucified the flesh and to be living close to Christ; but when we are within the fiery circle of trial or temptation, when sinful desires arise, or passions are strong, or solicitations to evil are subtle and enticing, then we are only too ready to catch at any hopes about the vague future. To the unstable and incontinent, to those whose nature is weak while their conscience is not dead, this hope is a dangerous temptation, beguiling them with the suggestion that some day there will open before them an easy path to that virtue or self-denial to which the way is too rough at present. “Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.” By-and-by, they say, as they dream about the future, God will lay His hand upon them; the Holy Spirit will touch their souls with new life; they will receive in some inscrutable way new power, and in the exercise of this power they will cast off the bondage of sin or weakness; but how and by what means this great and necessary change is to be brought about they do not stop to think, and meanwhile they yield to worldly or fleshly appetite, trusting vaguely to an uncertain future for some Divine gift. p. 45

If you look into the thoughts and habits of your life, some of you may be compelled to acknowledge that this case is not unfamiliar to you. So men sometimes dally with a temptation, and linger beside it, courting its company, instead of flinging it away from them, as the snare of the devil, because of some secret hope that by-and-by God will place them out of the way of it, or give them some new strength against it, which as yet has not been given. How easy it is for us to entice ourselves in this way out of the narrow path of present duty into the tangled wilderness of a weak and sinful life, from which escape becomes every day more difficult. p. 46

And this enticement along the ways of sin being so easy, it may be happening to some of you. You may feel that, judged even by your own standard, which is more likely to be too low than too high, your life is somehow unsatisfactory; your better instincts may be telling you that you were born for something higher, purer, stronger than what you are or have been; and you are cherishing the hope that it will be different with you some day; your circumstances, you think, or your occupation, or your companionship will have changed, and so you fondly imagine that you yourself will be sure to change, as if your soul were just a weathercock that answers to every changing breeze. So perhaps you hope that some habit of self-indulgence or idleness will drop off, or some evil temper be eradicated; and whilst all this vague and mischievous dreaming goes on you yield very likely to some besetting sin, making no serious effort to get away from it now, and you yield all the more because of this misleading hope that some day you will be touched by a supernatural hand, and will rise up to a regenerate life. And yet our reason tells us that all this is the very essence of self-deceit, and that such dreams and hopes are the devil’s most subtle temptation. This kind of vain hope is based on a complete misconception of the nature of our conflict with sin, and the way to escape from it. To think thus of spiritual gifts and the growth of the spiritual life, is to follow a very dangerous delusion. It was just such a misunderstanding that is expressed in the hope of Dives about his brethren: “If one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.” Their ordinary daily teachings, he seems to say, the voice of Moses and of the prophets, the examples of good men around them, the warnings, the exhortations, these, being so familiar, may not have startled them out of their sin; but if only one were to go to them from the dead, some messenger of strange voice and aspect, who had seen hell, and could paint its horrors, then surely the course of their life would be checked and changed, and their spirit would wake up in them, and they would sin no more. But to all this comes back the stern warning of the Divine answer: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” p. 47

And we may profitably consider what this means in its application to our own life. Such a warning is evidently meant to remind us that the mystery of sin in human life is not to be got rid of by any such reliance on vague hopes. This mystery of sin in the heart and life, misleading, weakening, dragging us down, means in fact the subtle, poisonous, creeping power which evil inclinations exercise over a weak and depraved will. Are we, then, to trust to some sudden visitation from above, for which we make no preparation, to break down or overthrow a power of this kind? On the contrary, the words of this parable stand here to declare to us that it is nothing less than perversity and folly in any man to go on either defiling his nature, or degrading it, or even neglecting to strengthen and support it, under this delusion that some day the breath of Heaven will sweep it clean or give it new vigour. And your own experience is in exact accordance with these parabolic warnings of the Saviour. You know that your moral and spiritual nature is now at this present time undergoing a process of continual and momentous change, that every day, or week, or month leaves its mark upon it; and that your soul’s life means not waiting for some angel of God’s providential grace to visit you and carry you up into a new air; but it means that you are weaving the web of your unchangeable destiny by your use or abuse of the gifts of God that are in your hands to-day. p. 48

Born into the world with the taint of inherited corruption in us, as also with the germs of pure p. 50

affection and high instinct and purpose, we have to take care for ourselves and for each other that the taint does not eat out the good, by growing into sins of boyhood or of youth, or by hardening into depraved habits in our manhood. If we let our youth take an unhappy downward course, whether in taste or habit, every day puts salvation farther off from us, because every day any fault which is indulged or nursed tends to grow deeper and more inveterate; and yet, forgetting this, how many, while their early years are running to waste, nurse the vain hope that some day they will receive the sudden baptism of a new birth.

p. 51

So, then, instead of vaguely trusting, any of us, to the hope of what some future call or help or happy visitation may do for us, let us obey the Divine injunction, which, when rightly understood, is very pressing, urging us, as we hope to see good days, to be very jealous of our present life and its tendencies; let us do this, standing always firm and immovable in the things that are pure and of good report.

However it may be in some other matters, in this matter of our moral and spiritual life, the greatest, the most important, the most serious thing of all, it is almost invariably true that the child is father of the man, and we feel that we have no right to expect it to be otherwise. In our everyday consideration of life, we recognise all this: we speak of growth in character and formation of habit as facts which no one would ignore, and which cannot be overestimated. But to acknowledge these, and at the same time to trust that God will hereafter arrest any stream of sinful tendency in us which we ourselves do not attempt to stop now, is to add presumption to sin.

p. 52

When we speak of Heaven and Hell, we have in our thoughts the vision of those ultimate points towards which the diverging courses of men's lives are slowly tending day by day. And the question rises: "On which of these lines is my life travelling at the present time, and towards which side of the impassable gulf?"

p. 53

At present we know that the way of Christ is still open before us, and that He calls us with a voice which never grows weary; but we feel equally that the future is dark, if we waste or misuse the present, and we do not know how long the heavenward path may be as open, or as easy, as it is to-day. For the question is not a question of God's untiring patience or the never-failing love of Christ. It is not how long will His Spirit continue to strive with us, as it has striven hitherto, through the care and love of parent or friend, through the exhortations or efforts of a teacher, or the example of a companion, or in a thousand other ways. The question is rather whether it is not folly to expect that God will send upon us some other more powerful regenerating and strengthening influence, if we are now neglecting all this care and love and patient striving on our behalf. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

p. 54

Consider these things while life is fresh, and good influences are present with you. Whatever our faults may be, they all come under this one rule, that to-day is given us to win our freedom from their power—to-day and not to-morrow. The question which is pressed home through the warning of this parable is thus a very plain one: "What is my future hope or prospect, if I let this or that particular sin lurk and linger in my heart, feeding upon me every day, and growing stronger in consequence? What if I do not resist any fault that has a hold upon me? What if I do not pray to be delivered from it? What if I do not flee from it?"

If you hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will you be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

## VI. WHAT DOEST THOU HERE?

p. 55

"And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?"—1 KINGS xix. 9.

There is a sound of rebuke in these words. They seem to imply that the lonely mountain of Horeb was not the place in which God expected to find such a servant as Elijah, and that there should be no indefinite tarrying, no lingering without an aim in such a solitude.

As you read the familiar history you see how the record of the prophet's retirement and his vision in Horeb is a record, first of all, of reaction after fierce conflict; it exhibits the picture of a strong man in a moment of weakness ready to give up the hopeless struggle, crying to God, "It is enough, now, O Lord, take away my life;" and then it shows us how God dealt with him in that solitude; we hear the Divine voice pleading in him again, bearing its Divine witness, putting its searching questions, teaching him the universal lesson that despondency, weakness, solitude, shrinking and retiring, if they have any place in our life, are only for a time, and must not be allowed to rule in it.

p. 56

That Divine vision which came to Elijah in the recesses of the mountain is, in fact, the voice of God summoning him back to the duties that were waiting for him, and the renewal of his strength for the new work he had to do. And the interest of such a vision never fails, because, like Elijah, all men come to times when they too lie under the juniper tree in the wilderness longing to be set free from the burden which is too heavy for them, be it the burden of some call, or work, or duty,

or of resistance to some temptation, or the struggle against sin or vice. It comes to all of us, and not once only, but many times over, this hour of darkness; and it will continue to come so long as the flesh is weak. And it is at such moments that a man is the better for going with the prophet into this Horeb, the mount of God, making Elijah's vision his own vision, and renewing his strength, at the same Divine source. How often it happens to men, to boys, to all alike, that they flee into the desert, away from the post of present duty, away from the face of difficulties which they cannot or will not stand up against, away from the moments of trial and discipline. And, seeing that our life is not and cannot be a solitary thing, seeing that the pulsations of each individual's life are creating other pulsations which answer them back in other lives, we know not where or how many, whenever we thus shrink away from our duty, when we turn our back upon it, or despond about it, when we become deaf to the higher calls, we are, in fact, crying to God to be relieved of our service to Him and to our fellows. And it is a happy thing for our life if He does not answer us according to our cry, and let us go into the wilderness, and leave us alone there.

p. 57

This voice, following us with the question, "What doest thou here?" is the evidence that God has not abandoned us.

p. 58

"What doest thou here, Elijah?" How often must this voice have followed the monk into his solitude, refusing to be silenced, piercing through all the false notions about a man's relationship to his fellow-men, warning each soul that it cannot separate itself from the great tide of universal life.

And the voice comes to us, the same warning voice of God, whenever we stand aloof and let the tide around us run on anyhow, as if we didn't care how it ran, or whenever in obedience to any impulse, whether of selfishness or of timidity, we try to persuade ourselves that some duty may be left alone.

"What doest thou here, Elijah?" The quality of our life depends on the answer we give to such spiritual questioning day by day; for the Divine voices are never silent.

"What doest thou here?" The voice cries to us when we linger in the neighbourhood of any sin, or when we waste our opportunities in some form of idleness, or when we stand by in cold or timid indifference, refusing help or consolation to any soul which seems to need it.

p. 59

"What doest thou here?" It is possible that some of us hardly like to shape our answer in plain words lest we might have to say: "I am here lingering in my present way of life, not because I feel it to be the right way, but because it is the easy way, and I cannot bring myself to face the harder and more manly course of duty. I hear the voice; I cannot get away from it; it haunts me with its inquiries, when my heart is hot within me, as it is sometimes, while yet I am burying the light that is in my soul." If it should be so with any of you, consider, I pray you, how by such hanging back you strengthen the force of evil in the world and weaken the good.

As the hour of reaction, weakness, flight, came to Elijah, so we must expect it to come to any of us; but the aim and purpose of our life should be that in such an hour we may be able to answer our Heavenly Father when He questions us, as Elijah was able to answer: "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts." If we live as those who are jealous for God and His law, letting it be known and felt that we are thus jealous for His honour, not one of us could fail to make the life around us in some degree better, brighter, happier.

p. 60

It is in this way that he who is strong and true makes truth and honour and uprightness stronger in those beside him; it is in this way that he who is industrious, as a duty, makes industry more prevalent; it is in this way that he who shows his hatred of impurity makes the atmosphere pure in his society.

And in so far as any of you are acting in this way you are doing a prophet's work, and you, too, may claim to have been jealous for the Lord God of Hosts. So the youngest boy and the oldest man may become fellow-labourers—*Θεου γὰρ εσμεν συνεργοι*—fellow-labourers in the harvest-field of God, and it is a great privilege to claim.

But the blessing of it is greater still. Very often, if you are known to be thus jealous, even your presence will banish sin, silencing the evil tongue, strengthening the weaker brother, and making the sunshine of a new life to shine all round you.

p. 61

But what if sometimes you feel that you are not equal to all this? if when the voice cries, "What doest thou here?" you have no answer to give? It is good for us in such a case to turn and see how God dealt with His prophet, how He made him come forth and stand on the mount before him. The Lord passed over him, revealing His presence in the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, revealing it yet more intimately in the sound of the still small voice. So He sent Him out again with a new commission; and so we, too, may learn our lesson, if we care to learn it. And the lesson is this, that God renews our wavering strength, that He lifts up our drooping spirit, and opens our dull eyes and gives us afresh the hearing ear, by communion with Himself. In the solitude of the mount of God, through the symbols of His power, and in the sound of the inner voices, in meditation, in prayer, we may find those refreshing influences which give us new strength, new thoughts, new notions of God and duty, and send us out afresh to do His work in new service to Him.

p. 62

We may follow His teaching to Elijah a little further. The new message to him began, "Return on thy way"—do such and such things. The new message is, in fact, just as always, a new call to old duties—"Return on thy way." And so it is for you and me. After the vision of God comes the plain

and homely work to do, as we walk in old ways, and have to meet all our old dangers and difficulties. Has any one of us ever shrunk from any post of duty in life, or strayed from any straight course? Then if God has in His mercy visited us with the warning call, "What doest thou here?" or laid the call of a new message upon us, it is almost sure to have been a call to return and take the straight path, or to take our stand at the deserted post. And if it should ever happen to us that the duty which looks too hard is, as indeed it happens very often, some duty of our social life, should we feel as if the world were against us, and we were standing alone, let us not forget God's word of final encouragement to his prophet, "Yet have I left me seven thousand in Israel who have not bowed to Baal."

p. 63

It is a word for all time. If ever you are fighting for the good, and growing weary in the fight, the thought may rise in you that you seem to be fighting alone, and that everything is against you, just because you cannot see the seven thousand who are in the same ranks, and on your side.

In the darkest hour of Israel's history we are thus told of an indefinite multitude who had stood firm in the faith of their fathers, untouched and untainted by adverse influence, and the recollection of it should serve to strengthen and encourage every individual who is really jealous for that which is good.

Let us, then, take the warning, and nurse it as a gift of God, and go forward where duty calls us, sometimes faint, it may be, and sometimes weary, but still pursuing.

## VII. PRIVATE PRAYER, AND PUBLIC WORSHIP.

p. 64

"And, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day."—ST. LUKE iv. 16.

"He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there He prayed."—ST. MARK i. 35.

These two texts set before us our Saviour's habit in regard to public and private spiritual exercise; and they suggest to us the question, What have we, on our part, to say of these two elements in our own life? These texts, we bear in mind, represent not something casual or intermittent in the life of our Lord. They stand in the record of it as a typical, essential, inseparable part of His habitual practice. What we have to remember about them is that, whereas all men recognise in the life of Jesus the one unique example in human history of a life which is morally perfect and immaculate, if we were to take these out of it, the customary share in all common worship, and the private, separate communing with God, it would be an altogether different life—different in its attitude towards the common life of ordinary men, and different in its own quality and influence.

p. 65

We might still admire—nay, we could not but admire—all the beauty of moral qualities, the purity, the sympathy, the love and self-devotion of it; but it would have lost its spiritual atmosphere. It would no longer be for us the life of the Divine Son, recognising and ready to share in all our attempts at worshipping the Father, however poor they may be, and living through the separate life in daily communion with Him.

Here then is His practice, written for our guidance, given that we may be stirred by it to aim upwards, inviting us to set our own practice side by side with it, and see how it looks in such a juxtaposition. Let us glance for a moment at each of these texts separately.

As regards the one which I have taken from St. Mark—"He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there He prayed"—we have only to turn over the pages of this Gospel and note, as we go, the similar allusions, and we feel that we have here what is in fact an incidental glimpse into the habitual practice of His secret and separate life.

p. 66

In this passage we read that He departed into a solitary place, and there He prayed; in another by-and-by that He departed into a mountain to pray; and then again that He spent the whole night in prayer; and we see all this not in some crisis of His life, but as a part of that which corresponds to the common daily round in your life or mine.

And the inference to be drawn, the lesson to be learnt from it, is, I think, sufficiently obvious.

This secret separate devotional exercise of the soul was His habitual spiritual food.

It was thus that He recruited His moral and spiritual forces, those forces of the spiritual life which constitute at once the beauty, the attraction, the power of His character, and His divine and awe-inspiring separateness.

And as we read and consider, the thought must surely be pressed upon us that if He needed these exercises, these secret and silent hours, what shall we say of our own lives?

p. 67

And what do we expect to make of our moral and spiritual character unless we too are careful to cherish under all circumstances some such recurring moments in our round of life and occupation, at which we retire into the sanctuary of separate communion with God the Father?

You may take it as a moral certainty, proved by all experience, that unless you hold to a fixed

habit of thus bringing your life into the secret and separate presence of God, in private prayer and thought, you incur the risk of sinking to any levels that happen to be the ordinary levels, and of drifting with any currents that happen to prevail.

If we turn now from this to the other text—that which refers to His customary attendance on public prayer and at the common meeting—“He went, as His custom was, into the synagogue”—the questions suggested are very pertinent and practical.

p. 68

Just consider the circumstances under which, as we are told here, “He went, as His custom was, into the synagogue on the Sabbath day.” The earlier part of the same chapter tells us of His fasting and temptation in the wilderness, of the commencement of His public mission, and his return to Nazareth. And, on His return, this is what we are told of him—“He went, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the Sabbath day.”

Thus we see Him, fresh from the great crisis of His early manhood; the long, protracted struggle of His soul in the lonely wilderness; the subtle voices of manifold temptation; the hardly won victory and the ministering angels; all this we must suppose to be still flashing across His vision, as the scenes of any such crisis must always continue to flash through the quivering and responsive organism of the soul.

If ever any man might have claimed to need no longer the customary worship of common men, it was surely Jesus, as we see Him here on this occasion, with the breath of His own heart-searching worship still upon Him, and the light of new revelation burning in His thoughts.

p. 69

Among all the significant and instructive parts of the Saviour’s example this is not the least instructive; that on this occasion, as on all others, he went as a matter of regular custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, thus putting the seal and stamp of His own practice for all of us who believe in His name upon the duty of joining in habitual and stated spiritual exercises.

Had the Lord’s example been different in this respect, how easy it would have seemed to set up a string of what we should have called sufficient reasons.

The old-fashioned routine, it might have been said, of synagogue worship, with its mechanical dulness and its mistaken interpretations of God’s word, its shallow and superficial and tedious traditional commentaries, its formalism and vain repetitions; all this, whatever might have been its value for the ordinary unenlightened Jew, how could it have been necessary and what profit could there have been in it for the divinely gifted Son of man?

p. 70

So it might have been argued; so indeed it would seem men who consider themselves enlightened sometimes argue in support of their own neglect of the religious life.

But it may well make us more than doubtful as to the issue of any such neglect, when we see the mind of Christ thus exemplified in His habitual observance.

We all recognise His moral and spiritual superiority. Whether His spirit has taken possession of our spirit or not, He stands out as our undisputed guide to the practice of a good life.

In vision, in insight, in purity, in stainlessness, in all that we reverence in human life and that good men strive to attain, we have no model to set beside His example. All the more, then, this fact deserves our notice, and calls us to follow Him, that we find Him, as His custom was, in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He was there Sabbath after Sabbath listening to the provincial teacher, worshipping with the village labourer, praying with the ignorant and the foolish, there as a matter of life custom and for His soul’s benefit.

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I have said that it deserves our notice; but more than this—it should be graven on the minds of the young, so that they may never lose the impression of it, so that it go with them through all their years of manhood, to preserve in them the devotional and reverent habit.

It is indeed good for all of us to think of Him there in that primitive and unattractive house of God, listening to the rude Galilean accents, and bowing His head in the habitual worship of that obscure community.

I do not think it is possible for us, unless we are quite indifferent about our moral and spiritual condition—unless, that is, we have low notions about our life, a low aim and a low standard—to be unaffected in our practice by this example of the Lord. We can hardly believe that those exercises of the spirit which were so fruitful in His life will fail to bear their fruit in ours also.

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What have we to say as we picture Him with all the great thoughts of His new work swelling up in His soul, the divinely appointed teacher of new wisdom and new faith, the bringer of new light among men, the voice of a new world, and yet, being all this, at the same time, and as a means for working out His mission more completely, a regular and devout worshipper in a village house of prayer?

If it should ever happen to any of us that we come to fancy we do not need such common prayer, or that because of defects in public worship we do not profit by it, does not this example of the Saviour rise up and rebuke us? Yes, you may rest assured, if that day ever comes to you, that you are in danger of drifting away from the great saving tides of the human spirit into some shallow or artificial stream of your own time and generation. But, on the other hand, it is a happy thing for our life if, growing up in the habitual use of time-honoured spiritual exercises, we have truly learnt to know by our own experience, as by the example of the Saviour set before us in the

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Gospel, that they are the support and safeguard of all that is highest and purest and best in us, if only we are careful to use them with sincerity and reverence.

## VIII. AN UNANSWERABLE QUESTION.

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“Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.”—JOB xiv. 4.

This is one of those simple questions which, by their very simplicity and directness, set us thinking about the importance of our personal life.

“Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” But all our common life is somehow the outcome of our separate individual lives—of your life and mine. Therefore how important it is in the common interest that each of us should look above all things to his own life and its character, for this will determine his contribution to the life of his society.

Nearly all men are keen about the reputation of their society, about the name it bears, about the way in which men think and speak of it.

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Thus you are no doubt sensitive, almost every one of you, about the good reputation of your school or your house, or any society with which you may happen to be closely connected or identified.

And this is a healthy and praiseworthy feeling. It would indeed be a bad sign if such a feeling were wanting or weak in any society.

But I am not sure that we keep it before us—all of us—as clearly as we ought to do, that this reputation of the society is simply the outcome of our separate lives and habits.

The reputation is the reflex of the life; hardly ever, perhaps, an exact reflex, very often a distorted reflex with this or that feature exaggerated; but yet always a reflex.

The reputation you bear is the impression made by your common life on the minds of those who see it from the outside, or who hear men’s talk about it.

And we do well to be sensitive on such a subject; but we do still better if we bear in mind that this common life is what comes out of our own life, and is the result of its contact with that of our neighbour.

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And with this thought in our minds we feel how searching and how directly personal is this primitive and childlike question, Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?

Societies, especially young societies, are very impressible, and their character—the quality, that is, of their life—is fixed by prevailing influences, which show themselves in fashions, habits, and tendencies, in the common types of thought, or taste, or behaviour, or conduct.

This is obvious enough to every one; but what we do not seem always to consider is the extent to which these influences or fashions have their origin, so far as our own society is concerned, in our own lives. They are, in fact, in the main the general outcome of our separate lives.

Do you, then, think of yourselves—this is the practical question to which these considerations lead up—as sources or centres of such influence, contributing your personal share to this common life?

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It may make an immense difference to all your thoughts about your common habits, and your standards of daily conduct and duty, if you remember this ancient saying, that no man can bring a clean thing out of an unclean. And so I have to ask you to consider a little how the common life of this society is dependent upon your life.

Every individual acts upon the life of the community around him as a power or influence in it. This seems so obvious when mentioned as hardly to deserve the mentioning, and yet in practice we are very apt to overlook it.

You and I, all of us, without any exception, are endowed with some share of this power.

In this respect, as in other ways, there is, of course, every possible difference in degree between one and another, between the strong and the weak, between those who are conspicuous and those who are obscure; but there is no other difference.

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Every one of you possesses some share of this mysterious, and undefined, and immeasurable gift of influencing his neighbour’s life. Every sin that may have a root in your heart is acting, though you may not think of it or intend it, as a pestilent influence outside your own life; every virtue you exercise may be causing similar virtues to take root and grow in some one near to you.

The tone of the society or life around you is, in fact, just the sum and expression of such individual influences as these.

We may not be able to trace all the various and multitudinous germs or seeds of such influence as they flow out from us in our daily round of common life; but we are conscious that each and every

single soul, all through its earthly course, in the family and in the outer world, from youth to age, is, in fact, a sower scattering these germs of good or evil unceasingly. We know, also, that when they are once scattered they cannot be gathered up again. They are yours to scatter—these seeds that you are adding to the common life—and you are responsible for the fruit they bear; but having sown them, you are powerless afterwards to prevent them from bearing fruit after their kind in other lives. Once launched in the air around you, they spread their contagion of evil or their stimulus to good, their savour of life or death.

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The mere suspicion of this undefined power over other lives which is inherent in our own life should surely make us very careful about it.

It gives a new sense of personal responsibility; it lays its hand upon us to check us in any vice, or folly, or sin; and it is a stimulus to every virtue and to all good purposes.

But the thing which of all others it is perhaps of most importance for us to remember about it is that this stream of our personal influence which flows out of our life is a double stream. It is of two kinds. One part of it flows unconsciously, whether we think of it or not; it streams out from our personality as sunlight from the sun.

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The other is that which we exercise by some conscious effort of the will, and with some deliberate purpose or intention.

Now, in the case of most of us, this tide of unconscious influence flowing from us without any deliberate or set purpose on our part, our involuntary contribution to the common life, is far more powerful for good or for evil than anything which we ever do by way of active purpose to influence another's life, and this because our unconscious influence is the reflex on the outer world of what we are in ourselves; it is the projection, or shall we say the radiation, of our own life, its tastes, tempers, habits, and character, upon the lives around us.

What we do or intend to do, what influence we endeavour to exercise, is very likely to be at the best intermittent, but this door of involuntary communication between every man's life and his neighbour's life is always standing open; and so it comes about that your life, whether public or private, is of more importance to others than anything else about you.

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At a time when so many things contribute to fix men's thoughts on externals, and we are all tempted to think more about our work than about our life, more about what we are doing or intending to do, than of what we are in ourselves, these considerations assume an unusual importance.

Moreover, in a society like this, where you live so close to one another, and so much in public, there is a special reason for giving to such considerations some special attention; and the thought suggested by this world-old inquiry—Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?—becomes a very direct warning to look well to our separate life, and take care what sort of unconscious influences it is spreading around it.

A moment's reflection will remind you how quick and strong such influences may easily prove, independent of all intention or desire on our part, or even in spite of our deliberate wishes or hopes. One man is careless or irreligious, and his weaker neighbours catch the infection of his example; another indulges in some bad habits of language or conduct, or he is addicted to some low taste, or he lives by some low standard, and this or that companion is drawn down to his level; and so the evil of his life takes fresh root in another life, and it gets into the air, and it is impossible to predict the limit of its influence.

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Or, on the other hand, one man is intellectual or refined in his tastes, and by merely living in a society he creates an atmosphere of intellect or of refinement around him; or, it may be, he is earnest and courageous, and others are drawn to admire and imitate, and so he proves a centre of courage and earnestness. Such is the solidarity of your life, as men call it, and there is no escape from it, or from the responsibilities which it lays upon you.

As the tree is known by its fruits, as men do not gather grapes of thorns, as the same fountain does not send forth sweet water and bitter, so we have to remember, when we think of the tides of unconscious influence that are continually streaming out from us, that they are wholesome, or the reverse, according to the character of our secret and separate life.

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Through them any one of us may become to his neighbour or his friend a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death.

There are sure to be many in such a congregation as this who have visions of the good they hope to do; and there is a spirit of native generosity in almost all which makes them shrink from the thought of doing harm to another soul.

Well, then, in this thought of your influence, conscious and unconscious, your first and constant prayer will surely be: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

The effective servant of God is always the man who has been prepared and purified by the vision of God in his own soul.

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If, then, we desire to contribute some good to our society and no evil, we must take care to keep our hearts open to the cleansing influences of the spirit of holiness, so that no habit of sin shall cast its dark shadow around us, or vitiate that atmosphere which is inseparable from our



## IX. SOWING BESIDE ALL WATERS.

“Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters.”—ISAIAH xxxii. 20.

These words form part of a great prophetic vision. The prophet is standing among his countrymen like a watchman on the walls of Jerusalem. And far away, as he looks, the distant horizon of his stormy sky is bright with Messianic hopes, but around him the shadows lie dark and heavy.

It was his destiny to speak to a people whose ears were dull of hearing and their hearts without understanding; but he never lost the conviction that the holy seed of God’s spirit was alive in them. Amidst all present discouragement he lived in the hope of a brighter and better day, when the eyes of those around him would be opened, and their hearts changed, and a new spirit would take hold of them, and righteousness, peace, prosperity, and gladness would prevail. And no man’s life is worth much which is not inspired by some such hope.

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What Isaiah saw immediately around him was sin and moral blindness. What he saw immediately in front of him was the consequence of these in woe and desolation. “Year upon year,” he cries, “shall ye be troubled, ye careless ones: thorns and briers shall come upon the land of my people: until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness shall become a planted field.” But in the day of that outpouring, the heart of the people would turn and be uplifted, renewed, and purified, the wilderness would become a planted field. And this thought brings him to the final outburst of the text I have just read to you, which is a blessing on those true Israelites who realised the high calling of God’s people, and were inspired to fulfil it, sowing everywhere and always the seeds of Divine influence. The whole vision is highly instructive, for it is the vision of what occurs again and again in all human history; but it is of this blessing with which it closes that I desire to say a word or two to-day.

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Amidst all the threatening and discouraging symptoms of the national life, Isaiah turned to the bright vision of those servants of God whose faith should never fail, and in whom there should be no variableness, and no wavering. “Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters.” Sow your seed of good influence, he seems to say to them, in good times, in bad times; sow it in this place, and in every place, sow it in the wastes of the moral wilderness, sow it in the face of every enemy, sow it in faith and hope and without fear. It is on them he depends to prepare for that happier season when the wilderness of the spiritual life around him should become as a planted field; and with prophetic insight he perceives that it is on such as these that the Divine blessing always rests. “Blessed are they that sow beside all waters.” It is a text to be taken with us whenever any change comes over the circumstances of our life. If we are changing from a life of rule or discipline to a life of free choice, from school to home, from boyhood to manhood, this blessing declares that there should be no change in the attitude and purpose and aim of life.

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It is another way of saying that the laws which should guide our conduct, and the principles which should inspire and direct us, are of universal application; that they know no difference of time or place, and that if they bind you here they should bind you everywhere. And simple and obvious as this may seem, it is not altogether an easy truth to carry into practice. “Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters.” Your seed field is not here or there only; it lies on every side of you, and in all places; it spreads into the future farther than your eye can travel, and it will extend itself before you as you go; and the reality and vigour of good purpose in you will be determined by your recognition of this truth.

Let us consider it with reference to our own case at such a time as this.

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There are always growing up here in every generation those who feel a pride in their school, and in the spirit of it, who strive honestly and earnestly to sow in their society the seeds of manliness, and truthfulness, and good tone, and purity. It would soon go very ill with this or any other society if it were not so. And those who grow up in this way are continually leaving us in their turn, and they will remember with affection the place of their high purposes and earnest and manly efforts. They go out into a new world, and travel along other streams; and blessed are they, if they continue faithful, sowing still beside all waters.

But every change brings with it some element of risk. There is nearly always something of surprise to us in the new forces that confront us in any society which we enter as strangers; and the first feeling that rises is sometimes a feeling of our own weakness or insignificance.

In such a case it is well if we have realised beforehand that our laws of conduct should not vary, and that the call of God, which we have recognised once, is a call which never ceases, and which no circumstances should make inaudible.

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When we approach any change we all need this kind of warning; because there are so many things in our life which we are apt to allow our circumstances to regulate for us. Experience tells us only too plainly how much we depend upon the influences that are around us, and how often we fail to carry with us the strength we have gained in one field when we pass over to the next.

With the holy we learn in some degree to be ourselves holy; with a perfect man we too are able to walk perfectly; but on the other hand, in our imitative way, as the scene changes, we sometimes find ourselves learning frowardness with the froward, practising indifference with the indifferent, if not actually slipping with the vicious into some vicious way. There is always some risk of such changes; and it is always well for us to be taking care that our better life has its root in our own heart and spirit, and that we do not wear it as a garment suited to the society in which we happen to be, and change it for the worse, if there comes any corresponding change in outward influences.

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Hence it is that at these times, when we are about to separate, these words of Isaiah come to us with a very appropriate reminder: "Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters."

To those who are leaving our society to begin a new life elsewhere, as to those of us who go in the hope of returning by-and-by, they are charged with the same lesson. They bid us all alike take care and see that what is good in our present life has become our own personal and permanent possession, independent of surroundings; that it has sunk in some degree into the fibre of our character; that it is settled in us by conviction and principle, to guide and direct us everywhere, and is not merely a circumstantial garment, a sort of livery of this or that particular place, which will slip off us as we leave it.

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Many of you have learnt, I feel sure of it, to feel during these your school days, the satisfaction of living here a true and worthy life; you have tasted of that pleasure which the careless, the indifferent, and the sinful hardly taste at all, the pleasure that dwells with the consciousness of earnest effort and sincere striving after the best things within us. The love of Christ may have taken hold upon you; the associations of your school and its inheritance of great and good examples, or the sense of honour may have stirred you; the feeling of your closeness in life to those around you, and of the strong currents of mutual influence, may have opened your eyes to what you owe to your neighbour and to the claims of social duty. Some one of these causes, or it may be some other cause, may have given you strength and power to walk amongst us in the narrow way of good habit and good influence. And wherever this is so, we thank God. But the question to-day is, What assurance do you feel that this will continue? When we go elsewhere, what habits, what tendencies, what fixed bent of spirit and character shall we exhibit? Knowing as we do how strongly the forces of the outer world will act upon us, it is never a useless warning which bids us take care that in new spheres we do not forget our old principles, or lay aside any good habits. "Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters."

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We have learnt to look upon certain laws of conduct and feeling, certain duties, certain standards of life, as beyond dispute, and fundamental. If so, they are also of universal application; and we should hold them as things which are altogether independent of the customs, traditions, or tone of any society into which we may go.

It is probable that some of you may find this doctrine not altogether free from difficulties before many weeks are over. You may find yourselves young and apparently uninfluential members of some society in which the standards of life are low, and you may be tempted to think, under the pressure of surrounding opinion, that you are not called upon to set up or display any standard of your own; and there is always a chorus of voices ready enough to echo any such tempting suggestions.

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But if ever you are tempted thus to let slip the things you have learnt and accepted, the voice of Isaiah should prove a help and a safeguard. And its exhortation is supported by the respect and admiration you feel for any one who has the courage to stand alone in such a case, true to his rooted convictions.

Another word may be added. We met, a great many of us, this morning at that table to which men do not come unless they entertain the purpose of treading in the footsteps of Christ, and of nursing His Holy Spirit in their hearts. As we lifted up our hearts there, as we ate of that bread and drank of that cup, as we prayed to be kept safe from the sins that most easily beset us, as we sealed in each other's presence the resolutions which are to direct our steps in safe paths, it was not of circumstances or places that we were thinking—it was the vision of Christ our Saviour that was before our eyes, and we pray that this vision may remain with us. When we think of all our diverging paths as we separate just now, and of the uncertainty how many of us may meet again in that far horizon, and how many may have wandered out of the way in the wilderness, we do not doubt that we shall often need the strengthening influence of this vision of Christ, if we, too, hope to inherit the blessing which is reserved for those who are faithful under all circumstances, and who sow beside all waters.

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## **X. THE PRESENCE OF GOD.**

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"And Jacob awakened out of his sleep and said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not."—GENESIS xxviii. 16.

These words indicate the beginning of a new life in the patriarch Jacob. They tell us of the moment when, as it would appear, his soul awoke in him. And they surprise us in some degree, as such awakenings of spiritual capacity often do; for Jacob's recorded antecedents were not

exactly such as to lead us to expect the dream and the vision, and the awakening which are described in this passage.

He had cheated his brother out of his father's blessing; he was leaving his father's house in consequence, to avoid this brother's threatened vengeance; and as he slept at Bethel he dreamed his dream of the ladder set up on earth and reaching to heaven; and he saw the angels ascending and descending, and the Lord standing above it, and he heard the Divine voice charged with promise and with blessing: "I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest." This, taking it in all its parts, is a very surprising narrative; and the point in it on which I desire to fix your attention for a moment is this, that this vision startled him into a new consciousness—"Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." It was the beginning of a new life.

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That vision, we may be sure, never entirely faded. He was never afterwards the same man he had been before it. It had awakened the divine capacity in him; and it remained with him as a constant reminder of the presence of God in his life, to protect and to inspire him—"I am with thee, and I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest." Such a voice as this in a man's heart gives his life a new quality; it puts him in a new relation to all common things.

We may well believe that it was this more than anything else which drew Jacob apart from the common heathen life around him, from that day onwards. It was this which, in spite of all his weaknesses, defects, and failures in life and character, gradually raised him to a different level.

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It was this which finally culminated in transforming him from Jacob the supplanter to Israel the prince of God.

So far as appears, he had gone out from his home, as so many go forth in all ages, a dull soul, though with latent capacities, his thoughts bent on securing his personal safety and his worldly success. But he woke in the desert after that vision, with the seeds of the new life rooted and growing in him.

It is this moment of awakening on which I desire to fix your thoughts—this moment of his transfiguration; when he saw and felt a heaven above him, and yet very close, with its ladder of angelic communication, which he had not *so* seen or felt before; the moment when a new consciousness flashed through his soul, and illumined unsuspected chambers in it, stirring new thoughts and new aspirations. He woke up to be a new man henceforth, moving in a new presence, and having always in his ears the voice of a Divine call.

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Do you ask why I dwell on this familiar history, or desire that you should contemplate and realise this change in the young man Jacob? It is because there is just the same soul, the same capacity of higher life in every one of us: in some it is awake already and transfiguring their life; in others still latent, sleeping, undiscovered.

I dwell on it because it makes and will make all the difference in the world to your life whether in your case this capacity is awakened or not. This, then, is what I have to postulate as giving a value beyond the power of words to describe to every soul amongst us.

It bids us recognise and keep always before us that in every common life, of child or man, even in the most worldly or the hardest, the most frivolous, the most cynical, the most sensual, or the most degraded, there is latent, it may be altogether unfelt and disregarded through long years, giving no sign of its presence, it may be, it often is, overlaid, trodden down, even at the point of death, but still there, this living soul with all its possibilities. It is within every one of us, stamped with the image of God, and charged with unimagined possibilities.

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And it must be obvious that the whole difference between any two lives, between your life and your neighbour's life, may depend on this awakening of the soul in one of you and its not awakening in the other.

Of the two brothers, Esau and Jacob, I suppose we are all drawn at the outset to Esau; our heart goes out to him, as we read, the impulsive, the impetuous, the affectionate, and we feel a corresponding dislike of Jacob's craft and cunning, and selfish calculations. There can be no doubt, we say, which was the meaner character to begin with.

But neither is there any doubt why it was that it came to be written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau have I hated." The one was just the child of the world around him, yielding to its temptations, living by its standards. The soul in him never awoke, so as to transfigure his thoughts and purposes. The other is a man of Divine visions, inspired with the sense of a Divine presence and a Divine purpose directing him.

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Nowhere do we see more clearly than in this narrative how great a change may come to any of us, if the unawakened capacities of our soul are touched by the breath of some uplifting inspiration.

As we read of this contrast between Esau and Jacob, and their destinies, we feel—and we feel it all the more because Jacob to begin with seems to be made of such common clay—we feel what a transforming power in a man's life this awaking of the soul may be.

A life which is without the inspiration that takes possession of us in the moments of this awakening, and is consequently without these visions that flash before the soul as it awakens, a life that is not deeply stirred by spiritual hopes or Divine thought, or the call to new duty, remains in one man a selfish and worldly life, in another a frivolous, in a third a sensual life. But

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the very same life—and here is the practical value to us, here is the hopefulness of such considerations—the very same life, when the breath of God’s spirit or His penetrating voice has stirred and roused the soul in it, is felt to be transformed. The man is born anew.

“There is nothing finer,” some one has said, “than to see a soul rise up in men, which amazes the very men in whom it rises.” They are surprised to find that these new capacities were in them, unnoticed through their careless days, yet in them all the time. This birth of the new life, with all its promise of new tastes, new ambitions, new thoughts, new purposes, may indeed come to you without your feeling all at once how great a thing it is. At first it may be nothing more than some vision of the possibilities of your life, or some electric flash of new consciousness that runs through you, or the sharp pang of remorse for some sin or some neglect, or the flush of shame or repulsion as you think of something or other in your life, or the glow of some good resolution to begin some new life or new duty, or take some new turn, or pursue some new aim. You hardly think perhaps of this as the awakening of your soul. It may never have occurred to you to think of it as being just as sacred a thing as was Jacob’s vision at Bethel, as being indeed the work of the same Divine spirit.

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But let us consider it a little further. Whatever it is that is thus stirring in your heart, it comes and it comes again; it lingers in your thoughts and feelings; it haunts, it impresses and awes you; it rises before you suddenly and stops you from some sin, or, if it fails to stop you, it turns the pleasure for which you craved into wretchedness; or it encourages and consoles you in some hour of weakness or sorrow. I suppose there is hardly one of you who has not had some such experience as this. And if you ask. What is it? It is, I repeat, the awakening of the soul in you—nothing less than this—and happy is it for you, if you recognise that it is the soul striving to win its proper place in the regulation of your life.

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When Moses saw the vision of the burning bush, and suddenly felt himself on holy ground; when Elijah heard the still, small voice calling, “What doest thou here, Elijah?” when Saul, on his way to Damascus, fell to the ground conscience-smitten, crushed, blinded, rebuked; when the child Samuel heard the Divine voice calling to him in the darkness of the night;—in each case it was the awakening or the reawakening of the soul—the uprising of the spiritual capacities, the vision of the higher life—and so exactly with all of *you*. Are you not sometimes conscious of the uprisings in you of a spirit calling upon you to recognise the angels’ ladder that connects *your* life also with the heaven above us?

If so, there is this further thing to note about such moments of experience.

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This feeling of some spiritual capacity in you, this call to some higher view of life and duty, this uprising of the moral sense and the repulsion towards the lower forms of life which comes with it—this is God’s personal gift to us, and we pray that you may possess it early; for it is not only a new consciousness, it is itself a new power in your life.

You cannot have it, feeling its presence and hearing its suggestions, and debase your life in any way, as you might have done, but for its presence. It is so very true that, in the life of the Spirit, looking up means lifting up. As the plant turns to the sun, it grows towards the sun; as it looks up to the light, it grows towards the light; so it is with us. We feel that we are sons of God, and we tend to become so. Through some influence or other, we awake to a vivid consciousness that God has created us in His image, endowed us with Divine capacities, and this consciousness becomes a purifying and inspiring force in our life, and it is a new life in consequence.

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Pray that such influences may prevail around you here, and that you may hold them fast until they have blessed your life.

## **XI. “MEMBERS ONE OF ANOTHER.”**

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“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”—ROMANS xii. 5.

There are some moral and spiritual truths which it seems to be almost impossible to impress upon the practical life of the world, although they meet with a sort of universal acceptance.

Men agree with them, they re-echo them, they applaud them; they do everything, in fact, but exhibit them as the moving, inspiring, and guiding truths of their daily practice.

And among these I fear we must still class that one which is expressed in the text I have just read, a text which sets forth the fundamental fact that whatever else Christianity may teach, it teaches as one of its first and principal lessons that a Christian man has to live in Christ for his neighbours.

If such a text means anything, it means that Christianity is essentially a religion of society, that it sets before us social claims as standing before all other claims; that, starting from the Divine Sacrifice as the central fact of human life, it was intended to root out of our hearts the noxious weed of selfishness by the power of the Divine love, and to build up the organisation of men in their common relationships upon this new basis.

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It may sound somewhat strange to speak at this time of day of what Christianity is intended to do, rather than what it has done already.

But it is even more strange to read the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, and all the other words of the Lord; all the lessons of His life and His sacrifice; the history of the first generation of Christians; the descent of the Spirit upon them; and the teaching of the apostolic brotherhood—to remember that all this is our accepted faith; that it has been the faith of one generation after another for eighteen hundred years; that we grow up in this faith, live in it, and die in it; and at the same time to contemplate side by side with it all the elements of the common life, all the rules and customs of society, all the standards of conduct which ordinary men take as their measure of daily duty and purpose.

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Thus, whilst on the one hand Christian influences, and all the changes in the world's life which are due to them, fill us with wonder and gratitude, the failures of Christianity are scarcely less impressive.

When we consider the ordinary run of men's lives, so different for the most part in spirit, and in aim and guiding rules, from that type which the New Testament sets before us, it would almost seem as if to the majority their religion was not a ruling and dominating principle, pervading this present life, but only an *ideal*, shedding around us a glow of indefinite hopes and possibilities, an ideal hardly to be realised, laid up somewhere in the heavens—εν ουρανῳ ἰσως παρακειται. These contrasts between the revelation of the Gospel and the standards of the Christian world have always troubled the most earnest spirits in every generation. Some of you remember, no doubt, how this contrast between Christian profession and the life of selfish sin and waste flashed into fierce poetry in one such spirit of the last generation, who grew up in this school.

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“Through the great, sinful streets of Naples, as I passed,  
With fiercer heat than flamed above my head  
My heart was hot within me, till at last  
My brain was lightened when my tongue had said  
Christ is not risen.”

And men who are truly in earnest about faith and life, and who are perplexed and distressed by the contradictions and insincerities that meet them, must often be moved as he was.

And yet, when we look closer, and consider that the battle of spiritual progress has this peculiarity attached to it, that it has to be fought over again, in every generation, and in every separate individual soul, the result is less surprising. Remembering this, we do not expect the victory of the last generation to save us from defeat or failure.

And this has to be borne in mind equally in regard to the continuous life of societies and to our own separate lives. Thus in such a society as this, if our predecessors uplifted the standards of conduct, inculcated high principles, and inspired their generation with a strong pervading spirit, this should make it easier for us to do likewise; but it does not insure our doing it. All this higher life will die in our hands if the same regenerating spirit is not alive and working in our hearts also. So, again, your individual victory over sin in the power of the Spirit in you, does not save my life from having to fight the battle for itself and win its own victories.

p. 111

So that, however perplexing the phenomena of life may seem whilst we look at them in the mass or from the outside, if we read the Gospel of Christ as a message to our own souls a great deal of the perplexity disappears. And it was with this personal message that Christ came, and there is no hope of our understanding His mission, or of living in the light of His transforming spirit, if we think of it in any other way than this.

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The purpose of His revelation is to crucify the selfish instinct in us, and to rouse us to the life of self-devotion, to the idea of consecrated energies; and this being so, all Christian life is of the nature of a warfare; and a warfare which begins afresh with each generation of men; because selfishness, with all its tribe of attendant appetites and passions, springs afresh in every single soul, and is nurtured, strengthened, cultivated, by so many of the conditions of life.

If, then, the Spirit of Christ is really to prevail in our life, it must be by effecting our emancipation from selfish instincts, and rousing in us the spirit of devotion to the good of other lives.

In proportion as you diminish selfishness in your own life or in any other, by fostering generous affections and cultivating the spirit of social duty and religious aspiration, by walking in the footsteps of Christ and living in the light of His presence, you are laying the only possible foundation of any lasting progress, you are following the one true method by which the mystery of sin is to be overcome.

p. 113

We may wonder that this should be so difficult; for of selfishness we should say that we all dislike it. In its grosser forms we repudiate it. The very word is one which we articulate with a certain accent of contempt.

But when we come to its refined and subtle workings in our nature, when we think of its Proteus-like changeableness, its power of assuming the various guises even of duty or religion; when we reflect how it can clothe itself in the choicest garb of art, or science, or divine philosophy, we find very likely that we are always in danger of being enslaved by it.

And we do well to pray in all sincerity that grace may expel our selfishness; for indeed the

influence of true religion is to be gauged by the extent to which this prayer is being fulfilled in us. The fulfilment of it is what we mean by the regenerate life.

I need not ask you how you feel in the presence of any character which you recognise as cleansed from all taint of selfishness, a character, softened, refined, purified, inspired, consecrated. I would rather ask whether you know of any personal influence to be compared with that of such a character. p. 114

And if, as I anticipate, you would answer that there is none like it, I would ask you to bear in mind that this influence may be yours. You are invited by all the highest calls within and around you to make it yours. "What is the aim and purpose of his life?" is a question which men are justified in asking about us; and they are justified in passing their verdict upon us by the answer which our life gives.

Does he live for himself, they will ask, for his own pleasures, his own delights, be they coarse or refined, his own indulgence, his own particular interest? Is there anything of the spirit or enthusiasm of sacrifice visible in the ordinary tenor of his actions?

The world, this Christian world, is full of those concerning whom the answer to such questions can only be a distinct negative; and yet we know that in all such characters, whether in youth or age, Christianity is a failure. p. 115

Therefore we shall accept it as our primary duty, the purpose of our existence as a Christian school, to train up men who shall be penetrated by the spirit of unselfishness, possessed by the feeling that their lives are to be consecrated to the common good.

Societies differ very widely in the type of character they impress.

Here and there we see a society, here and there a school, which has somehow acquired the power to stamp on those who go out from it a certain impress of nobility.

They go forth like the knights of our famous English legend—imperfect no doubt and erring, but each one of them inspired with the consciousness that his life is a holy quest.

There are other societies and schools among them which seem to possess everything but this one power. p. 116

What, then, are we to say of our hopes? What is to be the mission of our generation here? Shall we contribute anything to raise the common type? Or shall we drift on as the world drifts, a little better, or a little worse?

Shall we not rather pray and hope as we begin once more to weave the web of mutual influence, that you may grow up here not altogether like the herd of common men, but emancipated early from the life of selfish desire, feeling the spirit of Christ within you, remembering your baptismal vows, with eyes open to heavenly visions, and not disobedient unto them?

## **XII. THE SOWER AND THE SEED.**

**p. 117**

"A sower went out to sow his seed."—ST. LUKE viii. 5.

It is significant that the first of the Saviour's parables is the parable of the sower, that the first thing to which He likens His own work is that of the sower of seed, the first lesson He has to impress upon us by any kind of comparison is that the word of God is a seed sown in our hearts, a something which contains in it the germ of a new life.

It is no less significant that He returns so often to this same kind of comparison for the purpose of impressing us always with the primary fact, that our relationship to God, the Father of Spirits, in other words our spiritual condition at the present moment, our hope for the time to come, does not depend upon some body of doctrine, but on our having received into the secret places of the heart the seeds of a new life. p. 118

This is suggestive of a great many considerations which touch our life very closely; but I will not turn aside to them at this moment, as my desire is to fix your thoughts for the present on this one fundamental thing, that the principle of moral and spiritual life in you is a seed, and as such it is endowed with a power of independent separate growth; it was intended to grow in you.

The sower casts his seed upon the earth and goes his way, and, once sown, it springs up and grows, as Jesus said in another parable, "he knoweth not how." This, then, is the truth which He is impressing on our attention, when He speaks of His revelation as a seed, a seed to be sown by hands which have no control over it except to sow it. The soul of each and every one of us is a seed-field, and the seeds of new life and purpose should be growing in it.

As we recall the other parable of the seed growing secretly, recorded in St. Mark's Gospel, we feel even more strongly how the essence of all our life is in seeds of influence. "So is the Kingdom of Heaven as if a man should cast seed upon the earth, and the seed should spring up and grow, he knoweth not how." It grows in us mysteriously we know not how. p. 119

And I am not sure that we all, indeed I think it likely that we do not all, take it home to our thoughts with sufficient seriousness that this mysterious growth in the thing sown implies a mysterious vital power or force which is inherent in it.

I call it a mysterious vital power, because all life is a mystery to us. The very thought of life lands us in mystery, in mystery which defies analysis. We know that all the life in us and around us follows certain laws, as we call them, the life of plants, the life of animals, the life of man, each following its own laws after its kind, and that is all we know about it. We can observe its action, its uniformities, its sequences, and variations, but beyond this we cannot penetrate its secret. It grows mysteriously, we know not how.

But this much we know, that no life is spontaneously generated. The science of our day has demonstrated it, as we believe, beyond dispute, that you cannot create life out of dead matter. All life comes from some antecedent life. Wherever you see life of any kind, you know that there must have been before it some form of life which was its parent.

p. 120

Yet again, the scientific investigator points out another suggestive fact, that the lower creature does not of its own lower nature expand into the higher, but that life is lifted up and grows by the infusion of something higher than itself. So, too, we believe that the Spirit of God touches with its mysterious power the dead souls of men; it transforms them, it uplifts them, they are born again. They are roused and stirred to new capacity by the touch and inspiration of this Divine life. This is what is meant when it is said that if any man be in Christ he is a new creature. He has received into his nature this mysterious gift, or rather this seed of the new life.

Such is the Christian doctrine of the new birth, or of the life-giving breath of the Spirit, or of the sowing the seed of Divine life in us. You may describe it how you please, if only you take due note of this, that in proportion as you realise or accept this truth as in any way intimately connected with your own personal life and conduct, all the common things around you acquire a new importance, and I might even say some touch of sacredness, because they are felt to be strewn with these seeds of influence which God is sowing around us, with a hand that never rests, through all our years, in uncounted ways.

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This seed of new life which is to save you from the power of sin and the flesh and give you new aspirations, purer tastes, stronger purposes, need I remind you how it is sown, in what manifold and various ways? It must be within the personal experience of some of you to testify how your meetings in this chapel every morning may sow it. One day it falls on your heart in some word of some hymn or prayer, or in some thought or feeling which flashes through you, or some pricking of conscience for no other knows what sin or fault, or in some new resolve.

Sometimes it is found that a passing word of a preacher sows it (it is in this hope I preach to you), or again it is sown in the common ways of daily life, by the reading of some book, or by the word or example of a friend, or by some casual sight or experience. We remember how the seed of an unresting and beneficent life, a life devoted to the good of the poor and the suffering, was sown in Lord Shaftesbury by the shocking sight of a pauper funeral when he was a boy at Harrow. So it may be sown in your hearts you know not beforehand when or where, to grow up and bear fruit an hundred fold.

p. 122

The wind bloweth where it listeth—so is every one that is born of the Spirit. You never know what Divine seed it may deposit in your heart at any moment; but this you do know, that if the word of Christ be true, whenever this gift of life comes to you it is a new birth.

And there is all the more mystery and sacredness about our common life just because we never know how or when these seeds may fall upon our life to bless it, and because men are often altogether unconscious of the beginnings of their growth in them. Some seed of good influence falls into the soil of their heart, and seems to lie there buried in the winter of neglect or waste.

p. 123

Thus some men may carry the seeds long and far, not knowing the power or the potency of the life that is in them; but some day they strike root and grow and bear fruit in new convictions, or in new desires and purposes; and this may be the case with any one amongst us, and hence it is natural that we should press the question on ourselves and on each other—What are you making of those seeds of higher life which have been sown in you by your mother's love, by your father's words, by all the lessons and influences of such a place as this, seeds which are falling around you continually, and may possibly be trodden down or overlaid?

As we look at these parables of the Lord telling of this sowing and this growth of seeds, they bring it home to us very forcibly that the only true test of life in Christ is growth in Christian graces. And this brings us to a consideration of grave practical importance. It bids us be very careful to distinguish between seeds of life taking root in the heart and springing up into new activities, and mere waves of impression. The seed springs up and grows in you, the wave merely flows over you, lifting and moving you for a moment, and then leaving you as before. Thus, and it is a warning which is not unneeded in our day, a day of much emotional religion, there is all the difference in the world between a religion of moods and a religion of growth. The one is the plaything of the winds, the other is rooted in Christ.

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Thus I am brought to two reflections, one on the function and aim of the preacher, the other the duty of the hearer of God's word. The preacher—and the same might be said of every master in such a society as this—the preacher has to think of himself primarily and chiefly as a servant of Christ charged with the duty of sowing the seeds of spiritual life in your hearts. And the thought that the Saviour has revealed to us seeds of life which have this regenerating power in them, and

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that in Him we see what possibilities of growth there are in these seeds—this is our constant encouragement.

The sower's hand may be feeble, and his sowing may be awkward, or halting, or uncertain, but there is a Divine force or possibility in all seeds of truth, or purity, or right feeling which he scatters among you, independent of his sowing, and he never knows in what soul some seed may lodge and germinate and grow up and bear fruit here and hereafter, even to the endless life.

So we believe that every work of good influence, whether of man or boy, will prosper, because we remember it as a part of God's providential law, that His seed if sown grows of itself, mysteriously. And we need not wonder at the mystery, for it is the Spirit of God which is in the seed; and it is ready to swell and grow and bear new fruits as it lodges in your heart.

Through and in that seed of good influence it is God Himself who is working in you.

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Such, as we learn from the word of Christ, such, as we see it exemplified in His person, is the mystery of the Divine life in the hearts of men—not in some other lives, but in your life and mine.

But this only leads us to another vital question—a question which I leave with you for the present, and to which we may return another day—What is your share of active duty in regard to these seeds of good influence and good purpose that are sown in you; what are you doing, and what are you intending to do, to secure that they shall be bearing some fruit in your own daily life?

### **XIII. THE LENTEN FAST.**

p. 127

“This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer.”—ST. MARK IX. 29.

You remember the narrative from which I have taken this verse. Jesus, as we read, had just come down from the Mount of Transfiguration, and when He was come to the multitude, a certain man besought him saying, “Have mercy on my son, for he is lunatic and sore vexed, and I brought him to Thy disciples, but they could not cure him.” Then Jesus rebuked the devil, and the child was cured from that hour. Thereupon His disciples came to Him with this inquiry—“Why could not we cast him out? And He said to them, Because of your little faith. This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer;” or, as our Authorised Version has it, “by prayer and fasting.”

Here, then, we have set before us a very striking and significant contrast: the contrast between the spiritual power of Jesus fresh from the Mount of Transfiguration, and the want of such power in His disciples, who represent to us the common life of the multitude and the plain. His reply to their question was clearly intended to suggest to them the cause of their spiritual feebleness. Do you wonder at your lack of power over the diseases of the soul? “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer.” Now, this suggestive answer is very appropriate for our consideration at the present time when we are approaching the season of Lent, which has been observed century after century as a special season of fasting, prayer, and penitence for sin, through all the Christian Church.

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When we think of these weeks, it is reasonable to believe that such observance, so universal, so long continued, must have satisfied some deep need of the heart, especially as it is not based on any particular dogma. And this incident in the Saviour's life, and these emphatic words of His, may help us to a clearer understanding of the value of such times. They declare to us the principle of the spiritual harvest, that, in the spiritual life as in all else, we reap as we sow. They are intended to convey to us this plain lesson, that if any of us give little thought, attention, or effort to that side of our life which we speak of as the spiritual, if there is in our daily habit and practice little real prayer or self-denial, or devotion, little communing with God, little endeavour to live in the spirit of Christ, and if, this being so, we find ourselves weak or vacillating in our struggle against sin or evil, whether in our own life or in society, there is nothing surprising in such a result.

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It is in our religious life just as in everything else—spiritual carelessness or neglect must mean spiritual weakness. In all other matters we look for results in some proportion to our efforts. As we sow we expect to reap.

Here, for instance, in your daily life, if you wish to excel in any particular game or pursuit, you practise it with diligence. You know that, without such practice or concentration of effort upon it, any expectation of excellence is simply foolish.

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In your school work you recognise the same conditions. Intellectual growth may seem sometimes to come slowly, in spite of all your efforts; but it comes with certainty if you persevere, and it is equally certain that it hardly ever comes at all to those who use no effort.

If, then, you look for progress or distinction, you know that you must fix your thoughts upon your work, and practise industry, and, above all, that you must cultivate a love of learning, so that your mind lingers over it with some sense of enjoyment.

You do not expect a harvest where you have not sown. And it is just this same law which you recognise and accept in other matters that our Lord is here declaring to us as the law of spiritual power.



Do we desire to cast any evil influence or any weakness out of our life? Do we ask despairingly how it is that we have not been able to cast it out? Our Lord's answer comes to us in these emphatic words—"This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer."

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In other words, if we really desire that our soul shall be cleansed and strengthened, we must surrender it to Him in prayer and self-denial, in spiritual exercises and communion, that He may cure it of its sin or its weakness, and inspire us with new life.

Prayer and fasting are in this word of His the symbol of all special exercises of the spirit, as it strives to get free from the burden of the flesh and to come nearer to God; and without such exercises, He presses it on us if we stand in need of such reminders, we cannot hope for any harvest of spiritual strength.

And we can hardly have failed to notice how His own practice corresponds with His warnings and injunctions.

Before He began His ministry we read of His forty days' fast in the wilderness; and at every turn, in the course of it, we read again and again incidentally of His constant withdrawals into privacy with God.

His short life on earth was a life of spiritual ministry. All the common things of life were to Him so many illustrations of some spiritual lesson of the Father's love and care, or of man's dependence on Him. In every voice of the world there was the undertone of some spiritual suggestion. So that we might say—Surely His days were one unbroken course of spiritual work and communion, and He could need no special seasons or exercises; but His example teaches us a different lesson.

p. 132

As if to bring it home to us beyond all possibility of doubt or question, that the most devoted, the most active, and most powerful spiritual characters, will always be those whose communion with God in private prayer and exercise is most constant and intense, He Himself was continually withdrawing for such communion; and there are no more suggestive passages in the Gospels for our guidance than those incidental references which tell us, as if by chance, giving us passing glimpses into the unrecorded portions of His life, how on one occasion He retired into a mountain apart to pray, or how on another he spent the whole night apart in prayer, or how he was in a desert place apart in prayer.

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These withdrawals of Jesus into the solitude of the desert or the mountain, these hours in which He was alone with the Father, are but another name for those exercises of prayer, fasting, meditation, communion with God, without which, as He tells His followers in the text I have read to you, it is not possible to eradicate from the soul those influences of sin which destroy its harmony and undermine its strength.

These withdrawals were His times of spiritual refreshment; and by His practice He declares to us His need of them. And if in His case they were necessary, much more are they necessary for you and me, entangled as we are amidst all the varied influences of our common life, and with natures prone to sin.

Hence it is that the Church has set apart this season of Lent to come round to us year by year as a season of special thought and prayer and self-denial. Many other times and seasons come to us laden with the same spiritual influences, and to be used by us as times of reflection, inspiration, purification, and strengthening. This is the purpose which the quiet of these recurring Sundays should be fulfilling in our lives, or our gatherings for Holy Communion.

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And once and again there comes to us in the course of life some time or season which is sure to make its impression upon our soul as having brought us in a special sense into the presence of God, and within the overshadowing influences of His Spirit.

So it may happen to us that some family bereavement, the death of father or mother, of brother or sister, or child of our affections, draws us away from the world into a closer communion with our Father in Heaven, a communion which is never entirely lost again or forgotten. So, too, comes the season of confirmation, as to many of you just now, with all its thoughts, feelings, prayers, and resolutions.

And it is a happy thing for our life when any of these seasons leave an indelible mark upon our memory and our spirit.

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But as we think of these words of Jesus, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting"—the question for each of us here to-day is, what practical daily meaning we hope to give to this season of Lent which is to begin on Wednesday.

Let us not fancy that we can allow such seasons to come and go, year by year, giving them no thought or attention, without some corresponding loss.

The voice of humanity, and the experience of centuries, the practice of holy men, and the example and the words of Christ Himself, have all testified to the need there is for the spiritual observance of such times, if men are to keep their soul alive in them—and who are we that we should venture to set ourselves against such overpowering testimony?

Let us rather address ourselves seriously to making these weeks a time of some special exercise or discipline such as our life may need.

There is hardly one of us but will confess, if he thinks of the matter at all, that the world is too much with us; that its influence is too strong upon us; that we are too ready to conform to its ways and follow its indulgences. And such a confession is equivalent to an acknowledgment that we need these Lenten seasons. And if with this feeling in our hearts we use the coming weeks with any definite purpose, praying to be rid of some temptation or weakness, or to be endowed with some strength, or to be supported in some good purpose, we are sure to recognise with thankfulness, when the time is over, that it has indeed proved a time of some dislodgment, that some temptation or habit has fallen away from us and left us free, so that some new spirit or purpose has begun to grow in us.

p. 136

We shall, in fact, be conscious, as the weeks go on, that a new life of new tastes and new satisfactions has sprung up, as the first fruits of our prayer. If we doubt the need of such exhortations as these, let us reflect for a moment—Does it not sometimes happen to us that our souls are only too like the soul of that sick child in the Gospel?

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Good instincts, and intentions, and tendencies, are clearly felt and recognised, but they are fitful, weak, and intermittent. Another spirit seems to lay hold of us and carry us whither it will.

If in any sense this can be said to be your case, then remember, that just what the Saviour's healing word was to that child, sick and possessed, as He met it on His way from the Hill of Transfiguration, and breathed over it the spirit of the higher life, reducing the chaos of the soul to harmony, and bringing reason out of madness, and freedom out of demoniac possession, these holy seasons of time-honoured observance may be to your soul, if you use them reverently, and as God's appointed means for your growth in the Spirit.

#### **XIV. GOD'S CURSE ON SIN.**

**p. 138**

“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.”—EZEKIEL xviii. 30.

These words of Ezekiel may be understood as expressing in the prophet's language what the Book of Deuteronomy expresses in such denunciations as those which were read to us the other day in the Commination Service.

They correspond also to the warning of St. Paul when he says—“Be not deceived; God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh shall reap corruption; and he that soweth to the spirit shall reap everlasting life.” Or again they correspond to that question which is put to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews—“If every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense and reward, how shall we escape?”

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Thus we find in the Pentateuch, in Ezekiel, and in the apostolic writings the representatives of three very different stages of religious enlightenment, all teaching us in effect the same lesson, to remember the recompense that sin never fails to bring upon him who commits it. As we listen to the curses of Deuteronomy on one sin and on another, and then read the language of Ezekiel or St. Paul, we are conscious of a difference in the modes of thought and expression. The thought of the apostle is separated from that of the lawgiver or the prophet of the Old Testament by the new revelation and the sacrifice of Jesus; but yet underneath all differences their judgment on every sinful act or habit remains spiritually the same. They all alike bid us, when we think of our sins, to think also of the inevitable punishment which rises behind them like their shadow; and to bear in mind that the root of the whole matter is the one incontrovertible and never-changing fact of human life that as you sow you must expect to reap—he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.

p. 140

Now, inasmuch as your early years are the seed-time of your life, these stern reminders that if you sow any sin in your soul you will some day reap its curse, that God will judge you every one according to his ways, all this is very appropriate for your consideration. And you are likely to be all the more serious about your present life and its habits, tastes, and purposes if this thought really takes possession of you, that there is in fact a very close analogy between the life of the soul and life around us in the outer world, and that every seed we sow in it grows after its own kind.

In the region of animal or vegetable life you see and recognise this law on every side. You trace it sometimes as the law of improvement by culture, sometimes as the law of degeneration.

You cultivate and tend a garden or a field, sowing, planting, eradicating, and the growths of flower or fruit improve in proportion to your care; but leave it to itself and the weeds choke it, and the very fruit degenerates; your rose becomes a dog-rose—it reverts, as men say, to a lower type.

p. 141

So exactly is it with your own life; so long as it is grafted into a life higher than your own, so long as good purposes are being sown in it and good habits cultivated, and the bad weeded out and the Spirit of God breathes through it, it is growing nearer to the Divine type; but neglect it, or follow sinful impulse or low taste, and it becomes like the garden of weeds; degeneracy begins at

once, it is changing to something worse, it is reverting to a lower type.

This is a way of expressing it which is sufficiently familiar to you. But this is only our modern way of looking at those facts of life which were eloquent to men of earlier times as the curse of God.

As, then, it is undoubtedly true that—

“Our acts our angels are, for good or ill,  
Our fatal shadows that walk with us still,”

these stern warnings which our Lenten services hold up before us are of the greatest value.

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Keeping before us this law that in every region of life it is the tendency of everything to bear fruit after its kind, we shall feel that we can hardly impress it too deeply upon our minds that there is no sin which we commit but will assuredly return upon our own heads. The Israelites in the Old Testament saw the hand of God thus visiting their sins upon them in many ways. They thought of Him as smiting them for their sins with consumption or with fever, with plague or mildew, or the sword of the oppressor. These are not our expectations. We have learnt that it is not with such visitations that God punishes us for our sinful indulgence or neglect, but that He does it with a punishment which may be less obvious but is often more ruinous than these.

Neglect the opportunities of good with which He strews your path in early life, let some sin strike its roots in your heart and take possession of it, and the curse of God for that neglect or that sin will overtake you, no doubt of it; coming not perhaps as the Israelite on Mount Ebal expected it to come for any sin of his, but coming, you hardly know how, as the change for the worse, the sinking to lower levels of thought, and taste, and aim, and practice, the reversion to lower types, which is the end of neglect, coming as the creeping and insidious growth of the power of sin working ever stronger in us as the natural fruit of indulgence. So the curse of that ancient Jewish law turns out to be a terrible and unchanging truth, written in a law which is never obsolete and grows not old, a law which calls on us for our Amen! as it cries to us equally in the language of Divine revelation and of the latest scientific discovery: “Sow neglect,” it says, “and you will reap deterioration; sow sin, and you will reap corruption.”

p. 143

This vision of the ultimate results of evil is a very ugly one, put it in whatever shape you will, and we are naturally somewhat loth to look it in the face. We would rather not think of any sin of ours as entailing such consequences. This conception of Divine justice or retribution embodied in the action of unbending laws and declaring that death is the fruit of sin, and that death must come of it, this is no doubt a conception which inspires awe. We shrink from it; we hardly dare to say Amen! to its dread utterances. We should like, it may be, to shut our eyes to the fact and dwell rather on the thought that our God is long-suffering and of great kindness and of tender mercy. It is more soothing to think of love than of retribution, or of the arm that shelters or upholds us than of the hand that smites; but the real question should be—“Is it true, this declaration that as we sow we reap, that the wages of sin is death, death of faculty, death of hope?” It is foolish to blink the sterner aspects of life. The fruit of such blinking and turning aside is very often the very thing we do not like to think of—indulgence and its retribution. Divine love and goodness and long-suffering cannot occupy too much of our thoughts and prayers; for it is through these that the heart is touched, and the spirit is fostered in us, and we awake to the new life in Christ.

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But if we shrink from contemplating that law of Divine retribution, which works in men’s lives side by side with the law of mercy and love, it is time for us to ask ourselves—“How is it that I thus shrink from the thought of these penalties?”

There is indeed one sense in which we naturally shrink from the thought that the wages of sin is death, even while we acknowledge that it is so. It is inexpressibly sad to dwell on the infinite mass of sin which is daily bearing its bitter and deadly fruit in the world, and propagating itself after its kind; to think of the untold number of darkened or misguided souls that have sown to the flesh, and are going in consequence down to failure and death, blighted, corrupted, ruined. From this thought we naturally turn to the thought of God’s mercy, and pray that He may yet sow the seeds of new hope in the dismal waste of such lives.

But it happens to us, I fear sometimes, that this thought of God’s curse on sin sends a chill through the heart, and we shrink away from it, because of our own unregenerate life, because of the fascination which sinful impulse or habit exercises over us.

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If the warning voice of our Lenten Communion Service has convicted any one of us of this motive for shrinking from its stern sentence, it has come to us as a true messenger of the God who has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. We need the voice of these threatenings, because the heart has such a great power of self-deception in it. Men find it so easy to thrust away into the dim background of their thoughts all the dark but sure consequences of present sins, treating them as a debt which will come up no doubt for payment some day, but may be put aside just now.

And one virtue of our stern plain-speaking Lenten services is this, that they will not allow us to forget that fated reckoning day—they put us, whether we like it or not, face to face with the sure consequences of sin; and they compel us to listen to the question—“What is the choice of thy life?”

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For you will bear in mind that we read all these decrees of Divine law with our eye fixed on our own life and not on our neighbour. They are meant to help us to judge ourselves, and not some other person; they lead us to penitence and not to criticism, so that our readiness or our unwillingness to meet and to weigh them, and to respond to them with definite prayer and penitence, may be taken as an index of our religious sincerity, and of our readiness to consecrate our lives to the service of our Saviour Christ.

And it is well for us that we should ask ourselves these questions; for if indeed it is true that every transgression and disobedience shall receive its just recompense and reward, how else shall we escape?

## XV. THE CONFLICT WITH EVIL.

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“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”—ST. MATTHEW vi. 13.

It is good for us sometimes to stand still for a moment and consider our use of very familiar words. And this petition may appropriately illustrate our need of such an exercise.

It is on your lips every day. Every Sunday you offer it you hardly know how many times, in private and in public prayer: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” And the moment you stop to think about it you feel—who does not?—that it is a very solemn and moving petition if you offer it before God in sincerity, and with an honest desire to be kept out of the way of sin; but it becomes a fearful mockery if it is offered with unclean lips, or by one who is living in any sort of sinful practice, either secret or open.

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And yet, as we all know, it is possible to do this, making the prayer mere lip service, under the influence of daily custom. This, then, is the question it suggests to us whenever we stop to think about it: How far are we endeavouring to keep our lives in accordance with the spirit of such a petition? “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Most of you, I can well believe, would not voluntarily or deliberately step out of your way to meet a temptation, or to seek any evil course of life. You would not do it of your own free choice, or in cold blood, as we say. This, at any rate, is your own feeling about sin, whether the feeling is consistent with your life or not. As you contemplate any low form of life in another, you recognise its ugliness and its degrading character, and you call it very likely by the name it deserves. If, then, you find yourself involved in any sin, in spite of these feelings, and although you take this daily prayer upon your lips, how comes it to be so? How comes it that you remain in this pitiable condition?

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Your answer is, perhaps, that temptation comes upon you unawares, and that it takes you by surprise; or it seems to watch for some moment of forgetfulness or weakness; or you fight against a temptation, but still it clings to you as if it had a life of its own and were independent of you; or you are drawn into sin you scarcely know how; or you are driven into it by some one whom you fear although you despise him; or it seems to you to be in the very air you breathe. And although such answers explanatory of a life of sin or waste are no real excuse for it, they are very often quite true. If it were not so, the devil would not be the dangerous enemy that he assuredly is to our spiritual life; our risk of failure in our battle with sin would not be so great as experience shows it to be. We must therefore expect that temptations to sin will sometimes come upon us quite by surprise and at unlocked for moments, and that some temptations will linger and cling to us with a hateful persistence; you must be prepared also to find that some companion may draw you towards a sin, or a bully may endeavour to drive you into it. Your life is a happy one if it is free from all such risks, but you cannot count upon such freedom. So that, if any one begins his life thinking that his conflict with evil and its manifold temptations is going to be an easy one, he begins under a dangerous delusion, and he is likely to end in some disastrous failure.

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You desire, let us hope, to keep your soul unstained by evil ways. If, then, you remember that to secure such a stainless and unpolluted life you have not only to fight with some external enemy now and then, but against dark and insidious powers of evil which seem to start up around you and in the very citadel of your heart unawares, and that except through a constant sense of God’s presence in your life you cannot hope to keep free from their influence, this feeling should give reality and earnestness to our daily prayer to be delivered from the evil.

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And, indeed, this feeling that our life is set in the midst of many and great dangers is one of the first requisites for its moral safety. It stands beside us with its warning, whenever a temptation to some sin besets us, reminding us that, no matter how pleasant or attractive the temptation may seem to be, or how trifling the sin that it suggests, it is in fact an outpost of a great army, whose name is legion, and that we should hold no parleyings and have no dealings with it, for it breathes corruption, and it brings degradation and death behind it.

“*Obsta principiis*” may indeed be said to be a warning specially needed by us in regard to every kind of temptation. But we may go further than this. Our safety from particular sins depends very often and very largely, at a critical moment, upon our general attitude and feeling towards sin in every shape.

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It must be acknowledged, I think, that most sins which lay their hold upon us and master us, or struggle long and hard for the mastery, make their first entrance into the soul so easily, because

they find it swept and garnished for their reception, and its doors wide open. With reference to this you have only to reflect on some chapter of your own experience. Has it never happened that, when some wrong or sinful act or thought or speech was first presented to you, it stirred a feeling of shrinking, or strong dislike, or fear, or uneasiness, or, it may be, disgust; but instead of listening to that warning voice, and spurning the temptation utterly, as your feeling bade you do, you were attracted somehow to turn and gaze upon it. You knew it to be sin, but you felt no repulsion. Your soul was not garrisoned and defended by any strong sense of the hatefulness and deadly influence of all sin as such; so if you fled from it it was with a backward look; and then you allowed yourself to think of it in others, or you lived on friendly and familiar terms with those who were stained by it; possibly you even jested about it; you let your thoughts feed upon it; you expressed no stern disapproval of it; you allowed the atmosphere of your life to be tainted by it; and at last your adversary the devil, having rejoiced to see his wiles thus gathering round you, saw you slip or plunge into the sin, and go one great step nearer to becoming his bondslave—just as some foolish bird, fluttering this way and that instead of spreading its wings for a heavenward flight into the pure and safe upper air, might plunge into the snares of the fowler. And yet all the while, although you were living this weak and vacillating life, which is the seed-field of sin, you were praying to God every day—“Lead us not into temptation.”

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If we remember any such experience we may at least gather from it some lessons of safety and strength for the time to come. It reminds us first of all how vitally important is our general attitude towards every form of sin and its allurements. On this attitude it very often depends whether your life is to be comparatively free from pitfalls, or whether it is to be beset with dangers at every turning. If by your attitude and behaviour you cause it to be felt that sin is hateful to you, and that you are sincere when you pray that God may keep you from all evil, a great many of the temptations that would otherwise make your life difficult and dangerous will shrink away abashed; or if the tempter ventures to assail you, he will do it half-heartedly when he sees that you repel him with a whole-hearted repugnance. It is this attitude even more than individual acts which fixes the tone of a society.

When there is no prevalent sense that there are those present who maintain this attitude of hatred and contempt for sin and everything that breeds or fosters it, the tone, as men say, becomes low, or lax, the air becomes corrupt, and life in such surroundings becomes full of peril. If the good are timid, shrinking, showing no positive fervour, no zeal for virtue, and no moral indignation against evil influence, then the bad in their society will lift up their heads and walk boldly. But when, on the other hand, they who are in their hearts convinced of the sinfulness of sin, and of the infinite mischief that may arise out of any form of it, are not ashamed to show it by their attitude, they cause the base to hide itself in its proper darkness, and they create an atmosphere around them in which temptations lose a great deal of their force and strength.

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Let this, then, be your feeling about your life—that when it is assailed by any sin, that sin is not something isolated or insignificant; it is not something which may be indulged or accepted, as if it had no relation with other sins; it is a part of an infinite brood of evil; and that if you admit it within the circle of your life, or tolerate it in the air you breathe, you never know where its pestilent germs may fall, and breed, and multiply, and what mischief may come of it.

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It is this feeling of the mysterious vitality of sin, and the subtle kinship of one form of sin with other forms, and its destructiveness when it seizes on a life or poisons an atmosphere, that helps us more than anything else to feel the force and the intensity of the Saviour's prayer for us: “Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me. I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from evil.” It is this same feeling of the spreading, insidious, infectious and destructive nature of sin that makes us echo this as our first and most earnest prayer for all we love, that God may keep them from evil; and it is this that makes us value so highly and recognise with thankful hearts every example of a pure and strong life, which gives inspiration and strength to those around it.

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## **XVI. SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.**

**p. 159**

“As it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear.”—ROMANS xi. 8.

“Blindness in part is happened to Israel.”—ROMANS xi. 25.

It is a sad and painful reflection, and one which is continually forced upon us as we read the New Testament, that the long training and preparation of the Jews brought them at the last not to the acceptance but to the rejection of Jesus.

They had been taught, generation after generation, that they were the called and chosen people of God. Psalmists and prophets had enriched their life with the outpouring of their moral and spiritual revelations, and fired their hopes with promises. They lived in the expectation of the Messiah who was to complete these revelations of the God who had led them and taught them ever since the days of their Egyptian bondage.

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Yet, when this crowning revelation came to them, they could not even recognise it. The Son of God “came unto His own and His own received Him not.” As St. Paul expresses it in my text,

while grieving for them with all the intensity of his fervid affection, their life was overgrown with a sort of spiritual dulness. They were suffering from a sort of ossification of the spirit, so that the last and greatest revelation of God could make no impression upon them.

But this picture of the Jews rejecting and crucifying their Saviour, and unable to appreciate or to receive the gift of new life which was offered to them, blind to its beauty, unattracted by its charm, is not only one of the saddest sights in history, it is very instructive for every one of us, because it is charged with warnings that are never out of date. For there is no individual life, and no society, that is not liable to drift into a similar dulness of vision, and so to reject or disregard what God gives for its enlightenment. The great critical events in the world's history, the events that make epochs in the consciousness of men, are not different in kind from those of our own obscure lives. They are, as it were, our own familiar experience, written prophetically and written large.

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So the blindness that happened to Israel, and arrested their spiritual growth, may be happening no less to any of us. As God gave them the spirit of slumber, so it may be with our lives.

And the very thought of our possible risks in this respect is valuable to us.

To be conscious that in regard to any of the higher and better things of life our eyes may possibly be growing dim, and our ears dull of hearing, and that God may be pressing upon us gifts of great price which we are too dull to see or to accept—if our soul is sufficiently awake to feel this, then the very feeling may of itself be the germ of new life in us.

And it is very certain, on the other hand, that if we are altogether without any such feelings there is a risk, which even amounts to a probability, that the hardening or deadening influences of custom and tradition will sooner or later degrade our life. And if it should be asked,—How comes it that we are so liable to be affected by this dulness of spirit and of general habit?—we have to reply that it is because of the sensitiveness of the human soul to surrounding influences.

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It is because our souls are so receptive, so imitative, and in consequence so easily perverted, darkened, blinded, or misled. I suppose we are all of us conscious of this sensitiveness of the moral and spiritual nature; we should all say, if questioned, that we are quite aware of it, and that no one would dispute it. The soul of every child or man, we should say, is a fine and delicate and sensitive instrument, with the possibilities in it of we know not what Divine harmonies, but easily spoilt.

And yet, when we look at all the common and traditional ordering of daily life, whether in our educating of the young or in the influences that we allow to prevail among young and old, it would seem sometimes as if this thought of the soul's sensitiveness had never dawned upon us. When we once really grasp this thought, or, let us rather say, when this thought has once really fastened upon our mind, and fixed itself there, so that it remains with us, and goes about with us; and when, in consequence, we come to feel how easily any soul may be perverted, or rendered hard or dull; in one word, how easily it may be degraded; then it follows that we look with new eyes on many things, many customs, many influences which the unthinking hardly notice, or notice only to misjudge.

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In the light of this feeling of the soul's sensitiveness, the thoughtful man is very often intolerant of things which to others seem of little moment, because he sees how they are tending to dull or deaden the eye of the soul, or to pervert or to kill its finer instincts; and how, in consequence, though tradition may have given them a sort of spurious consecration, or the world in its blindness may have come to honour them, they are in fact laden with mischief to the general life.

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It was the thought of this sensitiveness of the soul to external influences, and of the ease with which any bad influence, or bad custom or practice or fashion, perverts common lives, and of the untold mischief which is consequently latent in it, that winged the words of a well-known writer when she protested, some years ago, against what she designated as debasing the moral currency.

That writer was thinking primarily of vulgar jesting on great subjects, which should stir us to admiration and reverence, and so debasing men's tastes. She had in her mind the class of persons who have the art of spoiling things that are noble or beautiful by their vulgar handling of them; and of the mischief which is done by such persons to public taste and tone and character.

But we may widen the reference. Whosoever, in anything that concerns the conduct of life, spreads low notions, or drags down men's opinion or taste, thus helping to pervert ordinary minds from those higher aims and motives and those reverent views of character and life which should be cherished for our common use and service, is debasing the moral currency.

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Here, then, we have a very practical question for our consideration and answering. "Is there anything in my life"—so the question comes to us in our self-examination—"which could be so described? any influence, spreading from my conduct, of which men might truly say that it also is helping to debase the moral currency? Is there to be seen in it anything that tends towards the lowering of common standards? any misuse of things sacred or holy? any foolish or vulgar estimate of the higher things of life?" And if we are in any doubt how to put these questions in a concrete and practical shape, we have only to remember how any one who helps to lower any standard of taste or conduct is debasing the moral currency of life; how, for instance, all those are debasing it who substitute any wrong notion of honour for right notions of honour, or who put roughness and coarseness in place of manliness, or who set the fashion of cynical judgments on

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good and bad characters.

Or we might take an illustration from what is, unhappily, a very common element in English life: the habit of gambling sport. Wherever this habit spreads, in any class of society, from the highest to the lowest, its effect is invariable; it undermines integrity, it hardens the heart and debases taste, and is the willing handmaid of other vices. Moral degradation is its inseparable companion. Therefore, if you mix in it, or share in it, or give any adhesion or countenance to it, which helps, as men say, to make it respectable, and so to spread its influence, you are debasing the moral currency.

Or take another common case. You are familiar with the poet's description, "And thus he bore without abuse the grand old name of gentleman." That is a noble thing for any man or boy to have said of him; and there is not one among you who does not desire always to be able to claim that name as his own. p. 167

But, wherever we go in the world, how many men there are who claim it and yet debase it by ignoble use! They help to spread the notion that a man may be a man of low morality and still a gentleman; that his gentlemanliness may be a mere varnish of culture and manners, a thin veneering having underneath it only meanness, or coarseness, or corruption; and that, notwithstanding this, he may still claim to be called a gentleman. Those who spread such doctrines are debasing the moral currency of English life. And it should be the mission of schools like this, and of those who grow up in them, to pour upon all such persons the contempt which they deserve, and to restore the currency of common life to something of Christian purity.

Remembering, then, how sensitive the soul is, and how easily by example, or conduct, or fashion it may be so perverted as to lose its clear vision and higher aims, its pure tastes and ennobling emotions, we have to make it our ambition and endeavour that our life may be kept free from such debasement. p. 168

But, if we are to succeed in this, we must make it our daily prayer that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ will enlighten the eyes of our understanding, and give unto us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge and love of Him.

## **XVII. A NEW HEART.**

**p. 169**

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you."—EZEKIEL XXXVI. 26.

In the beautiful and suggestive dream of Solomon, which is recorded in the third chapter of the First Book of Kings, God appears to him, saying, "Ask what I shall give thee"; and Solomon's answer is, "O Lord, I am but a child set over this great people, give me, I pray Thee, a hearing heart." And God said to him, "Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life, nor riches; behold, I have done according to thy words. I have given thee a wise and understanding heart, and I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour." And the record of this vision was clearly meant to indicate that the supreme gift of the wisest of men was the hearing or understanding heart. On the other hand, there is nothing against which our Lord in the Gospels utters stronger warnings than that dulness or deadness of spirit which is described as having eyes that see not, and ears that are dull of hearing, and hearts that do not understand. And in illustration of this we read how, while the crowds throng or press upon Jesus, it is the stricken woman who, with soul sensitive to His influence, feels the virtue come out of Him though she only touches the hem of His garment. p. 170

Thus we are warned to beware lest that should come upon us which was the ruin of the Jews, dulness or deadness of spiritual faculty; and we are exhorted to pray for and to cherish the hearing heart, the soul that sees and feels spiritual influences, and is sensitive to every high call. And if your soul is thus open and receptive, it is marvellous how full the world becomes to you of Divine voices. They come upon you unexpected, unsought, sending through your heart some illuminating flash of surprise, so that you wonder at your previous dulness; they strike you with the sudden shock of some new knowledge or insight, and make you feel, as never before, the true nature of your daily conduct or your duty and your relation to other men; or they come as the unresting presence of some new thought, which, once roused, haunts and troubles you with questions which you cannot answer, or feelings which you cannot get rid of. p. 171

When the soul is roused in this way we see and feel the hatefulfulness of any sin that may have tempted or beset us; or we contrast our own life with that of those whose lot is so much harder than ours, and we are struck with shame at our selfishness, or waste, or our indifference to the privation, and sin, and suffering that are all around us in the world.

Or sometimes these Divine voices in our ears bring it home to us how much we are losing out of our life's higher possibilities, if from sinful or selfish habit, from dulness of spirit or lack of sympathy, we cut ourselves off in thought and feeling and interest from the great needs, the great sorrows, the great pulsations of the larger world. p. 172

But why, you may ask, do I dwell on all this? It is because these are the true Advent voices for

us, coming as they do to rouse us out of narrow preoccupation, to open our eyes to the sinfulness of sin, to make us feel that the self-centred, isolated, self-seeking life is a life of a low type, and to stir us with social and religious interests and enthusiasms.

These calls that come to you, whether invited or not, and that stir your heart, speaking to you out of the multitudinous life of the time you live in, are like the watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem, which never hold their peace day nor night.

This ferment of higher life within us and around us, these voices of the Spirit in us, as it struggles to lift us out of the region of fleshly influences, is renewed in every generation and in every single life. If you hear no such voices, if the phenomena of life make no such impression upon you, if you are deaf to all these calls, and care for none of these things, then it is clear that your soul is not yet awake in you; you are living with a dull or darkened heart. It is a sort of cave life, or subterranean life, you lead in such a case, a life of lower rank and lesser hopes.

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Yet these voices from above, that come as the witness of the Divine Spirit with our spirit that we are the children of God, never fail us. They do not belong only to times far off. We are not to think of them merely as enshrined in the Bible and peculiar to it; but as living voices that are speaking to us to-day out of the depths of the Divine life, in which our life is sustained.

But we have always to bear this in mind, that the Divine voices speak to men with most stirring effect in every generation when they speak to them through the pressing needs of their own day. To the Jews the voice of God came in the inspired language of their deliverers and prophets—in their unceasing warnings, and their impassioned appeals, and their revelations of new truth. To the first generation of Christians these same voices came in the shape of strong Advent hopes. Many things contributed to lift the Apostles and their followers nearer to God than men of ordinary times. They had seen the Lord; they had lived in His presence; they had gone through much tribulation; the tongue of fire had rested on them; the Spirit had taken full possession of them; but we cannot read the New Testament without feeling that the most stirring, the most regenerative influence in their society was the vividness and intensity of their Advent hope. Their expectation of the Lord's return lifted them out of the temptations of the world and above the trials of it. It took hold of their active powers, and made them new men.

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Their Advent expectation was not the vague, half mystic, half sentimental movement of the heart, which just touches the lives of so many Christians during our Advent seasons, while it does not really alter any of their earthly concerns.

Christ was very near to the Apostolic Christians. As the eastern sky brightened every morning they felt that it might be the light of His coming; they thought of Him as only hidden from them by the neighbouring cloud. They looked for Him to return at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the noonday, and none could say how soon. And so it came to pass that this expectation made those first believers, those humble followers of Christ, those Galilean fishermen, those obscure provincials, instinct with that great life which lifts men above the world, and constitutes them a new power in it.

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Our lives are largely influenced by the thought of slow development; but we miss a great deal of the secret of all higher life if we forget this wonderful exaltation of the poor and ignorant and obscure by this gift of the Spirit and the inspiration of Divine hope. It was not by any method which we could have forecast that those men found out this charm which takes the heart captive and regenerates the life. In their presence we feel the force of the prophet's words, "Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord."

But then there rises the question, How are these Divine influences to become powerful in us also?

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On the one hand, we are conscious that as we live involved or entangled in the worldly life, or in any form of external life around us, the spiritual part of us slumbers or is overlaid. It loses its practical power over our thought, our feeling, and our conduct—our lamp goes out. Whilst on the other hand we are conscious that the special form of Advent expectation which inspired and possessed the first generation of Christians is gone from us past recovery. We see clearly enough as we read the New Testament what that first generation expected, and how the expectation transformed their lives; but we see also that they were mistaken in their hope, and that God's providential plan proved to be far greater than their human conception of it. What, then, are our Advent hopes?

There are two things which we should keep clear in our minds concerning them. One, that they must be based upon our feeling of the living influence of Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit; and the other is that the voices of the Spirit must come to us out of the needs of our own life and of the time we live in if they are to lead us to practical issues. When we look out upon the world and its life we feel that Advent hopes must take some new form if they are to preserve reality and to be fulfilled.

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We see decaying faith in some quarters, and selfishness growing where faith decays; we see ignorance and want and all their crop of sin and misery deep-rooted in the life of every city; and the prospect which these things suggest, the problems that meet us as we think of them, might well fill us with misgiving. And they would indeed do so were it not for the fact that the revelation of such things brings with it another revelation also; it seizes on men's souls and stirs them as with a Divine summons. And thus we have these hopeful signs for the future rising around us, even where things look darkest, that the great problems of humanity are felt in our



day to be above all things its social and religious problems. And seeing that the aspirations of the time—the feelings, the purposes, the aims, and hopes that lift men—grow out of the needs of the time and the problems of its life, we look forward—we have good ground for looking forward—to a generation of men who shall be distinguished by religious earnestness and by social enthusiasm. p. 178

But if this be so, what will your share be in this coming life? The Spirit of God, as we now understand it, comes to us with calls of this kind.

If you would hasten the Advent of Christ in your own soul and in the souls of others, you must discard selfishness, you must rise above self-indulgence, you must prepare to merge yourself in the social life, for the social good; seeing that the growth of this good is the only sure and certain sign of the coming of the Lord. So, then, the Angel of the Advent is thus calling us. The future before you is big with social and religious issues, and the Spirit of Christ is brooding over it, and you and such as you are to be His chosen instruments in helping forward these issues.

## XVIII. SPIRITUAL POWER.

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“And behold I send *the promise of My Father upon you*; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be *endued with power from on high*.”—ST. LUKE XXIV. 49.

“Ye shall receive *power*, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.”—ACTS i. 8.

To-day we are celebrating the last of the series of historical festivals which mark the springtime of our Christian year. And without this one the rest would leave us with a sense of incompleteness; for we should be without its gift of the abiding and indwelling Spirit, and the fulfilment of the last promise.

What, then, are we learning of its practical lessons, and gathering into our life? We have read the Pentecostal narrative, and others that illustrate it. We have sung Pentecostal hymns. We have joined in special prayer for the light of the Holy Spirit to shine in our hearts, giving us a right judgment; and if we are led to ask, “To what purpose is all this?” the answer is to be seen in the texts I have just read to you, the burden of which is the gift of power from on high. Do we not recognise this as the end of the New Testament revelation? And do we not acknowledge that this revelation fails, so far as we are concerned, if it gives us no such *power*? It is, indeed, in considering this power of the Spirit that we touch the quick the real influence of religion in the practical life of men; for experience shows that it is possible for a man to be endowed with almost every other gift and yet to lack this one—this indwelling gift of the Holy Ghost the Comforter. p. 180

Our life is filled with almost everything we could ask or require to enlighten us or to guide and direct, and yet it fails sometimes.

It may be failing in some of us here to-day, just from want of this Divine spark, this influence of a Spirit from above taking up His abode in us, burning and shining in our hearts so as to purge our affections from sinful taint and purify our tastes, lifting up and enlarging our capacities, and rousing our energies—in one word, fusing all our life into a new form with its refining power. p. 181

And the question of all questions for each of us to consider is, “How am I to make my life the home and embodiment of this power from above?” If we turn to our Lord’s own example, or to the life of Paul or any other of His followers, or to any life we have known and felt to breathe around it this same power of the Spirit, some things become at once very obvious and clear to us.

That supreme example and those lives declare that whoever desires to have his soul purified and invigorated, to be charged with this Divine electric influence, must have something of separateness and independence in his life; he must feel himself as not merely one of a crowd moved by the desires, aims, hopes, tastes, and ambitions which may chance to prevail around him, but as a separate soul in direct communion with the Spirit of God. p. 182

But if we are to realise this in our own life, it means that our times of daily prayer, whether in private or in public, are times at which we lay open our secret life to the Divine presence and influence; it means that we give some real thought and meditation to this presence of God in our life, and that we thus feed our souls continually on wholesome spiritual food. It is in this way that men’s lives become in a real sense the temples of the Holy Spirit, and the influences of sin fall away from them.

But the hindrances that are always acting to undermine or destroy any such spiritual power in us are manifold, and seldom far away from our life.

The world outside is always with us and acting in this way, distracting thought, setting up its own standards, drawing us into its channels, and deadening the Spirit in us. This is one of the inevitable conditions of life as you will have to live it, and the man who is in earnest recognises it as a paramount reason why he should never drop out of his personal practice the habit of separate prayer and communion with God. Or again, we may, and often do, let these hindrances grow up within us through our own fault, and quite apart from any active influences of the outer world. p. 183

We contract a dulness of spirit, so that spiritual things have no interest and faith has no living power in the heart; and all this very often not because any person, or anything outside of us, can be said to have led us away and entangled us, but simply because we have taken no pains to keep our life within the range of spiritual influences; we have let prayer slip out of it; we have lived in no spiritual companionship; we have done nothing to keep our soul alive in us. This is how men choose the lower life, and surrender their birthright out of pure inertia, so that they lose their spiritual capacity.

p. 184

But worst of all hindrances to the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit in any life is the harbouring of sensual appetite or craving, passion, or indulgence. No man can expect the Holy Spirit of God to make its home in such unclean company. It is on this account that there is nothing which so soon grows to depraved habit, to God-abandoned state, as sensual appetite; nothing which so rapidly dulls the higher affections in the heart and saps all the finer elements of life.

Therefore, when we are thinking of God's gift of the Holy Ghost, and of spiritual power as the saving and uplifting influence in our soul, we do well to reflect a little on those hindrances which will be fatal to all such power in us, if they are allowed to take possession of our life and to prevail in it.

We do well to reflect in this way, because such reflection will make us very careful against harbouring or encouraging any of these fatal hindrances, and careful also against any other form of spiritual waste.

p. 185

There is no surer guide to a right use of all liberty than this reflection upon the power of the indwelling spirit in us, and the things that add to it or destroy it.

Recognising that this Spirit, which, in the language of your confirmation prayer, is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the Spirit of knowledge and true godliness and of holy fear; recognising that this Spirit, with its sevenfold gifts, is the saving element in all free life, you begin to look with fresh feelings on all your leisure hours, on all your hours of liberty, when you are released from task work or supervision, when your life is what you yourselves are making it, and you begin to consider whether these times, as you spend them, are indeed times of growth or, it may be, of waste, times of genuine freedom or of slavery to some form of lower life. When you think of this Holy Spirit of God as a power in every good life, it becomes a very real question what and of what sort is the *power* that is holding sway over you in your leisure hours.

p. 186

This is indeed a question which never sleeps, and to-day we ask, What is your Whitsuntide answer to it?

If there be any one to whom such a question is not yet a matter of living concern, it is the purpose of this Pentecostal festival to rouse him to new thoughts about it.

If there be any older person in this congregation who lets his years slip from him, not caring or forgetting the importance of it, and not striving to leaven all his hours of work or leisure with the thought of this indwelling Spirit from above; or if there should be any young boy who, in utter thoughtlessness, or from perversity or coarseness, or any induced depravity of taste, allows any evil spirit to bear rule in his life, our prayer for such an one to-day is that the baptism of fire may descend upon his soul, and the power of a new spirit be felt in it.

p. 187

And indeed there is not one of us but needs to come at such a time with this same prayer for his own life; for our own experience is too often very like the vision of Ezekiel. Under the influences that come between us and the Spirit of the living God, our soul is in continual danger of being like the prophet's valley of dry bones, which lay lifeless, unmoved, till the breath of the Lord breathed over them, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

So we pray that our life may prove responsive to these influences of the Pentecostal season. And the first response it gives is when it rises up in the consciousness of the Spirit of God as a living power in the heart, a power to drive out evil, and to inspire and strengthen us for what is good.

p. 188

And if, under the inspiring associations of this historic and holy day, you feel your soul touched with a new spirit or consciousness rising up in you from the grave of its own dead self to new desires and new thoughts, and a new sense of the living nearness of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, then you know—and you need no prophet to tell you—that the Pentecostal gift has not failed, and there is good hope that you will not spoil either your youth or your manhood with any form of ignoble life.

## **XIX. SANCTIFIED FOR SERVICE.**

p. 189

"We are labourers together with God; ye are God's husbandry; ye are God's building."—  
1 COR. iii. 9.

In this passage St. Paul is rebuking the Corinthians for that spirit of party which was dividing them into followers of this or that teacher and so destroying their unity in Christ. You do not

belong, he says, to Paul or to Apollos; *we* have no claim upon you; ye are not to be called by *our* name: you are *God's* husbandry, and *God's* building, not ours; we are but labourers in His service and ministers for your good. Therefore, see to it that you live as one society in Christ Jesus, discarding all divisions, factions, and party passions and watchwords, imbued with one spirit. It is a noble exhortation to unity of life and purpose; but we may notice in it more than this.

As Paul himself disclaims all personal merit—as he presses it on their attention that neither is he that planteth anything nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase, he is unconsciously exhibiting to us an example of that rare humility which is characteristic of all the greatest and most effective workers; whilst in the vivid and expressive metaphors of my text—ye are God's husbandry, God's building—he makes us to feel the value and the dignity of each human soul.

p. 190

It would be interesting to dwell on these calls to unity of life in Christ, and the close connection between such unity and the spirit of humility; in fact, we might say, the absolute necessity of the spirit of humility and self-forgetfulness in individuals if there is to be unity in the society. And we might apply the thoughts with much profit to our own social relations, for they are never out of date; but I desire to turn to-day to that which is suggested by these descriptive metaphors, the value and dignity of each human life.

St. Paul pressed it on these Corinthians that their souls were nothing less than the seed-field of which God Himself was the Husbandman, or the temple built by His hand; and they could hardly have listened to such language without being stirred to take care how they sowed in that field, or without feeling the consequent value of their life in the sight of God.

p. 191

If they were thus the objects of the Divine care they could not be thought of as insignificant units in a crowded city; or as living an obscure life which was of no particular importance, as they might otherwise have been tempted to fancy, as we are still sometimes tempted to think about an individual life. This picture of each life amongst us in its relation to God, as His seed-field or His temple, is a continual reminder that where a human soul is concerned there is no such thing as insignificance or obscurity.

As St. Paul thought of that little company—a company small and obscure to the outward eye—what he saw in them was the temple of the Holy Ghost, and the spiritual life that was breathing there was a Divine life; and this intense conviction of the value of each soul and each society and its consequent sanctity was a never-failing inspiration to him.

p. 192

Through it he saw in every one who listened to his words, as he went from city to city, a man created and endowed with a Divine mission and Divine capacity, if they could only be roused.

It transformed every soul that crossed his path, so that he looked on life with new eyes. The common crowd had a new interest for him, the suffering poor, the downtrodden slave, the heathen in his blindness, the degraded sinner.

And it has been so with all the great servants of God; out of this feeling the love of souls has grown in men.

But this feeling of the value of each individual life, because of the Divine element and presence in it, is a peculiar gift of the Christian revelation.

In the ancient pagan world a man's life was of little account; it is out of the Bible that this new thought has come that every soul has in it an indefinite element of Divine possibilities, and is therefore of value in the sight of God. It is by virtue of this contribution to our thought that the Bible is truly described as the Great Charter of human rights, and as the source of the great stream of charity and self-sacrifice, of that enthusiasm of humanity which more than all else separates and distinguishes our life from that of heathen antiquity.

p. 193

It would indeed be difficult to point to any one single thing which makes so great a difference between the quality of one man's life and another's as the presence or absence of this feeling about the value, the possibilities, the sanctity of each individual soul.

"Let man estimate himself," said Pascal, "let him estimate himself at his true value, honour himself in his capacities, and despise himself in his neglect of those capacities." Yes, if a man is once brought to this condition that he feels the greatness of the ends for which God has made him, and that he estimates his life by the possibilities of growth that are in it, and by the thought of the Divine influences that work in it; and if he despises himself for neglect of these capacities or possibilities and of these influences, he has awoken to a sense of the first word of Christ and His Apostles.

p. 194

Your soul is God's seed-field, God's building; we are labourers together with God. Such a description of each individual life is very significant everywhere, and not least in such a society as ours.

To us who are here in this society as masters they are just a parable of our own life; setting forth to each of us what should be his estimate of his own work and aim and purpose, exhibiting to him his field of work with the Divine light on it, and interpreting to him his own endeavours as a fellow-labourer with God, hoping to contribute in some degree towards the filling in and completing that Divine plan, that ideal picture of the life of every one of you which is in the heavens, and which in imagination he sees as a thing some day to be realised, and the realisation of which, or its failure, may largely depend on his own share in our life and work. It is this feeling that every heart contains the germ of some perfection that makes our life so profoundly

p. 195

interesting, and, it may be added, our responsibilities for the cultivation or neglect of any such germ or capacity so serious and engrossing.

But to you, too, these apostolic suggestions about the Divine influences at work in each heart, and the value of each life in God's sight, and the Divine voices claiming to be heard in it, should be quite as stimulative as they are to us.

They have in them the germ of all striving after purity and goodness, and of all hatred of sin, and enthusiasm for the uplifting of social life.

The words of Paul to his Corinthian converts may furnish you with new interpretations of your own daily life and duty.

If they were God's husbandry, or God's building, are not you? If the Spirit of God dwelt in them, how does He not dwell likewise in you? striving for your growth in holiness and good purpose, and for your salvation from sin and its defilements, as he strove for theirs? p. 196

And if it was good for every man in that Corinthian community to be warned how he built upon the foundation of life that had been laid in Christ; if it was good for them to be reminded that every man's work would be made manifest, and that the fire would try it, of what sort it was; it is good also for us, masters and boys alike, to remember that we are living under the same law, and that we should take care lest haply we be found to be working against God.

That Epistle of St. Paul's was written in pain and anguish of heart. The seeds of Christian life which he had sown among them, the purifying influences of the Holy Spirit which were working among them through him and his fellow-labourers, all these ought to have produced fruits easily described, such as peace and love, and purity, and good works; but instead of these, and threatening their destruction, there had sprung up dissension and strife, party spirit, self-conceit, and gross sins which I need not name. p. 197

In all this there was grief, disappointment, bitterness; for did they not prove that his work was threatened with failure?

Yet in all that storm of feeling his chief exhortation is this reminder of the dignity of their calling. In the midst of all their sin and failure, though he does not spare rebuke and warning, he always aims at inspiring them by uplifting. And we know that this is the true method, because there is nothing which exercises an influence so strong to uplift and purify as the feeling of our kinship with the life above us, and that we are degrading our life when we forget this or ignore it. And herein is the value of this word of his that God is dwelling and working in us. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, that the Holy Ghost dwelleth in you, and that God's temple is holy? and if any man destroy the temple of God, him shall God destroy." p. 198

Let us then begin again our common life with a determination to bear in mind the possibilities and the sanctity of each separate soul that comes amongst us.

Living in crowds, we are apt to forget this; and, forgetting it, some treat their own souls as if they were of no value, and some the souls of others, and so the work of sin and waste goes on from generation to generation.

But in our best moments, in our times of serious thought, if we have been once enlightened, we can never again cease to feel the dignity and the value of each human life.

When we think of God's care for us we feel it; when we think of the possibilities He has ordained for us we feel it; when we think of the endless life that lies before us we feel it; above all, we never fail to feel it when our thoughts revert to any life that has been snatched away from us. Some of you are thinking to-day of the master whose home is darkened by the presence of the angel of death. You think of her whom God has taken, who was moving among you not so long ago, as your tender, considerate, and helpful friend. It may be that you were not uninfluenced by her self-devotion and holiness. p. 199

When you think of such an one you feel no doubt about the value and the sanctity of each human life.

Well, then, transfer this feeling to your own life, or to the life of the boy who sits beside you, or who lives as your companion. In the purpose of our common Father, your lives also are destined for holy uses.

To remember this may be a safeguard against temptation or sinful habit; it may inspire you with a new feeling of the value of *all* the lives around you, and a new sense of the duty you owe to the good life of this society in which God has placed you, that you may prove a vessel of honour sanctified for His service.

## XX. HE THAT OVERCOMETH.

p. 200

"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son."—REVELATION XXI. 7.

Year by year as at this time, when the week of our Saviour's Passion and Death is just in front of us, and the shadow of His Cross is falling over us, one generation after another of the boys of this school gather here, and in the face of the congregation, young and old, they take upon them the vows of a Christian life. So we met last Thursday, and your vow is still fresh upon a great many of you, as indeed it can hardly fail to be fresh in the memory of every one in this congregation who has ever taken it. Let us pause for a moment and repeat its plain words. You have declared your faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, the Father, the Redeemer, the Sanctifier of your life. You have vowed that you renounce the devil and his works, that you renounce covetous desires, that you renounce the carnal desires of the flesh, so that you will not follow nor be led by them. And you have vowed that you will keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in them all the days of your life. And you take this upon you, let us hope, in sincerity and honesty of purpose.

p. 201

And, if so, the text I have read to you declares God's promise, if you persevere, just as another text in the same chapter declares that into the City of God there shall not enter anything that defileth or worketh abomination or maketh a lie. This, then, is the promise—"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son." But as we think of this and look forward, we have to remember that this life to which you are dedicated is not an easy matter. If you are to succeed in it, you have to think of it always as a life under a vow, as in fact a consecrated life, consecrated by your own promise and profession. And this is a great safeguard if you bear it always in mind.

p. 202

It is indeed the first condition of safety from the attacks and the impulses of sin, this consciousness which you will carry about with you, that you are self-dedicated—that there was a day on which you said "I will"—so that if you are to be true to your profession and declared purpose, you will strive to keep near to God in the spirit, and you will have no dealings with the devil and his works, and you will resist all the degrading solicitations of the flesh, and will live in the atmosphere of things that are pure and of good report.

To have conceived such a purpose as this, to have opened your heart to its influence, to have lived in it even for a little while, to have felt its purifying and strengthening breath upon your soul even for a few weeks, may be enough, as some of you know very well, to lift your life up to a new level, so that it becomes and is felt by you to be a quite different life from what you lived before—a life of new thoughts, of new notions about what is good or what is evil, about the degrading character of sin and the misery and hatefulness of it, as also about the happiness of a life that is inspired by good aims and purposes, and is free from a sense of God's wrath upon you for some low standard of conduct, or some sinful appetite or passion. If you have once felt the influence of this change in your heart, you know the difference henceforth between the higher life and the lower, the life that is clinging to God, however feebly, and is in the way of salvation, and the life of sin which will inevitably end in degradation and in death.

p. 203

But this life in Christ to which you are dedicated is not an easy one; let us not suppose it. It is a noble life, and every one who strives to live it is doing something to ennoble his society; but it is not an easy life. It is never so represented to us in the Bible. There is a sense no doubt in which our Lord invites us to see how easy is His yoke compared with the yoke of sin—but He Himself calls upon every believer to take up his cross and follow Him. That call may bring to any of us not peace but a sword. St. Paul sets the Christian life before us as a race to be run with patience; as a conflict which will sometimes be very hard. In St. James we see it as the discipline of sore temptation, and in St. Peter it is the fiery trial that is to try us.

p. 204

And again, in the Revelation of St. John, we have this picture of blessing only to those that endure, and to those who have not defiled their garments, and those who have come through great tribulation.

And all our personal experience confirms this language of Holy Scripture, reminding us, as it does, how hard it is for an individual to keep in the narrow way of the spotless Christian life, and how it is still harder to stamp the mark of Christian purpose upon a society.

Yet these are the two things to which God is calling us. These you have in fact vowed that you will strive after; and if you are unfaithful in either respect, if you give up your effort for an easy, drifting life, you are letting go your confirmation vows; and whereas you were intended to be the salt of your society, your salt will lose its savour. To consider this just now may save some of you from discouragement and some from waste and failure.

p. 205

Men are stronger to meet their difficulties if they know that they have to meet them or else to fail and sink. And so it will be with you. You will be more likely to go forward strong in earnest purpose, strong in the strength which God supplies, if you bear it in mind that, as St. Paul would have expressed it, we are appointed unto these trials; and that a soldier of Christ must expect to have to endure hardness; and in fact that it is a law of our spiritual life that one of the chief roots of all growth in strength and goodness is suffering. We grow through trial and suffering to true manhood in Christ.

So, if you look at your own life and experience, you will find that some suffer through a sore struggle with their own temptations, or their own weaknesses—their desires, their appetites, their fears, or the habits they have contracted, and their struggle may be so hard that it needs all the grace of God to keep them firm in their purpose. Some again suffer not from internal but from external hindrances. Companions may be against them, or a low public opinion may be against them, and they may feel as if they could hardly stand firm in isolation, or under suspicion,

p. 206

or mockery, or enmity; and some may suffer because the conscience around them is depraved, and they feel too weak to fight against it, though they know and acknowledge its depravity. But however hard may be the fight there should be no discouragement, if only you are able still to say in all honesty that you are holding fast to the good purpose which you uttered in your confirmation vows. Two quite simple warnings may sometimes do us great service—one, is that we are very apt to exaggerate the forces against us. They seem very strong when we are feeling weak; but they sometimes break up and disappear if they are met with a little courage. And the other warning is this, that we sometimes let ourselves sink and drift into sinful ways or moral cowardice, by neglecting the helps which God gives us for the strengthening of a good life in us.

p. 207

Thus if we neglect real prayer, or do not seek the support of good companionship, if we take no pains to live in a good atmosphere and amidst good surroundings, if there is little of devout thought or habitual worship in our life and still less of Holy Communion, if we thus allow ourselves to drift out of the range of the higher moral and spiritual influences, our vows are forgotten and our good purposes fade away, our will becomes weak, and the world with all its temptations is very likely to overcome us.

Feeling the infinite issues that hang on such considerations as these, let us carry about with us the inspiring and invigorating call and the promise contained in the text with which I began this sermon—"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son."

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