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Title: Sermons: Selected from the Papers of the Late Rev. Clement Bailhache

Author: Clement Bailhache

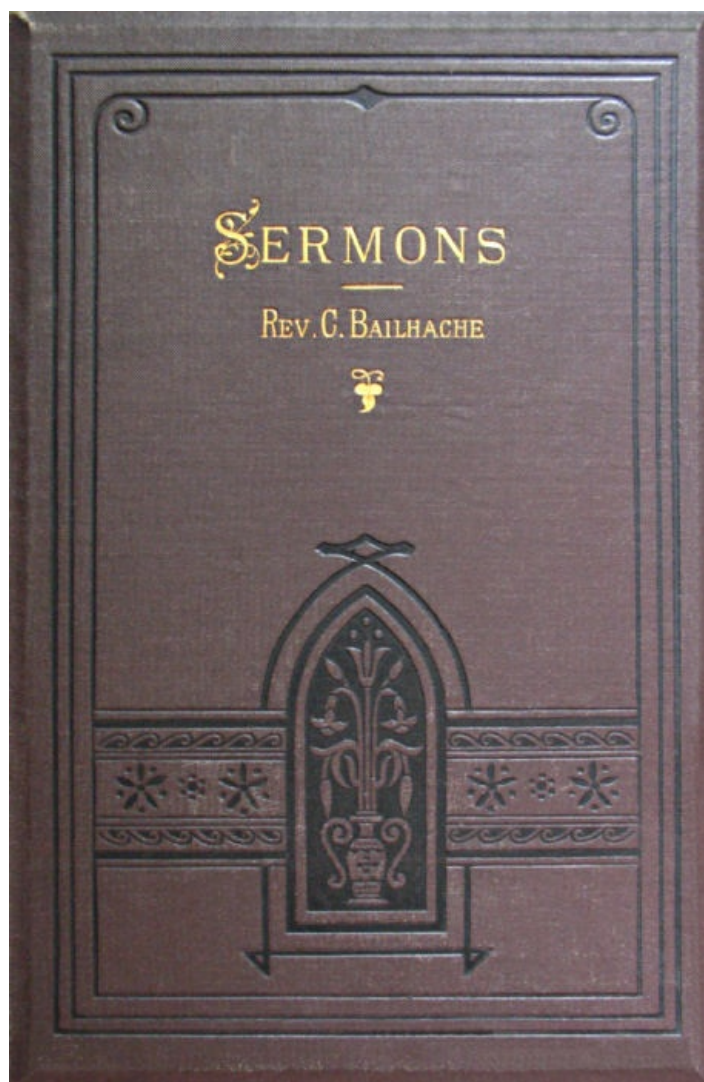
Editor: J. P. Barnett

Release date: October 27, 2013 [EBook #44053]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Sam W. and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

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"WORK TOO FAIR TO DIE."

SERMONS
SELECTED FROM THE PAPERS
OF THE LATE REV.
CLEMENT BAILHACHE.

EDITED BY THE
REV. J. P. BARNETT.

THE HOLY CAUTIONS THAT HE GAVE,
THE PRAYERS HE BREATHED, THE TEARS HE WEPT,
YET LINGER HERE, THOUGH IN THE GRAVE,
THROUGH MANY A YEAR THE SAINT HAS SLEPT.

London:
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW.
MDCCCLXXX.



Photographed by S. S. Priestley, Huddersfield.

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The preparation of this volume for the press, whilst it has necessarily entailed considerable labour, has happily been attended with little difficulty. None of these sermons were prepared for the pulpit with any idea of publication, and only a few of them, which need not be specified, should be taken as finished compositions. Their author, however, never allowed himself to think superficially or to write carelessly. His MSS. are easily read, and are in such a state as to leave almost nothing to be done in the way of revision.

Many other sermons equal to these in power and interest might have been included, if space had served. I ought, perhaps, to say that the selection has been determined by a wish to place before the reader, in the order of a series, Mr. Bailhache's thoughts on Christian Doctrine, Faith, Duty, Privilege, Experience, and Hope. I trust that the collection, as it stands, will give as [viii]

comprehensive an idea, as any posthumous publication *could* give, of the character and style of a ministry to which, under God, many souls—some in heaven, and some still on earth—owe their truest spiritual light and their best spiritual strength.

It must have been a privilege of no ordinary value to listen Sabbath after Sabbath to preaching such as this. No one could read, as I have had to read, the whole mass of sermons entrusted to me, without perceiving that he who wrote and spoke them was "a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." He was penetrated to the very centre of his being with a sense of the grandeur of the Bible as a Divine Revelation, and of the glory of the Gospel as a Divine remedy for the sin and sorrow of the world. He had his own way of developing religious truth, and of applying it to the mind, the conscience, and the heart. He preserved his individuality of thought and of method in every part of every discourse. But he was no theological speculatist. With all needful fearlessness in his thinking and reading, his constant endeavour was to ascertain [ix] "the mind of the Spirit," and to present *that*, in its enlightening and sanctifying power, to his hearers in all their manifold spiritual conditions. He was familiar with the forms of scepticism prevalent in our time, and with the reasonings which give to them more or less of plausibility. "The riddle of the world" had its saddening aspects for him, as it has for all earnest souls. But the anxieties which spring from such sources found in his mind an all-sufficient solace in the beautiful adaptations and the splendid triumphs of the truth as it is in Jesus. He could see clearly enough that, by the Gospel, God was filling the world's darkness with light, and turning its curse into a blessing. Science might advance, and in its advance might seem to set itself against Biblical facts, and against the principles founded upon them; but he was all along calmly and intelligently assured that Science rightly so called, and Revelation rightly interpreted, so far from meeting in antagonism, must meet in cordial and comely agreement, and take their place side by side for the higher instruction of mankind. He did not preach on these matters controversially, but contented himself with the quiet announcement, on all appropriate occasions, of the results of his own studies; and those results were always on the side of an implicit faith in Evangelical [x] Christianity. One of the most marked characteristics of his ministry was the uninterrupted and profound reverence he paid to what he believed, on honest and mature investigation, to be the Divine authority of Scripture teaching. He knew, of course, that a conscientious and enlightened criticism has its work to do upon the Book; but his comprehensive and careful reading only strengthened his conviction that such criticism, so far from invalidating its authority, must render the nature of that authority increasingly transparent, and its basis increasingly firm. Thus he could draw forth from the Book the teaching contained in it, and could present it to the reverent faith of his congregation, without misgiving. His ministry was eminently evangelical, in the broadest and best sense of the word. It was this all-pervading quality which gave to it its special beauty and impressiveness. He wanted to be wise, and to make his people wise, *up* to what is written; above that he did not attempt to soar.

Mr. Bailhache was an able Biblical Expositor. I find amongst the papers before me, expositions of the Decalogue, the First Psalm, the Lord's Prayer, the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, the [xi] Messages to the Seven Churches, and the Epistles to the Galatians and the Philippians. These comprise eighty discourses, and many of them are so good that they ought not to remain in seclusion. Possibly some channel of publicity may yet be found for them.

The estimate in which Mr. Bailhache was held as a Christian teacher by those best fitted to judge, is fitly expressed in the following extract from the Address which was presented to him by the Congregation at Islington, on his retirement from the pastorate there in the autumn of 1870:—"During a period of six years and a half, you have ministered to us in holy things, and, as the servant of the Lord Jesus, you have sought our highest spiritual good. In all your ministerial work in our midst, you have so impressed us with the conviction of your entire devotedness to our interests, and to the exaltation and glory of Christ, that our minds have been the more easily constrained to give heed to your instructions, and we have the more deeply felt the force of your influence and your example. The thought has often occurred to us (and it has been often expressed), that if we were not becoming better Christians—more conformed to the image of [xii] Christ—our shame was the greater, considering how constantly you have been the faithful and able exponent of the mind of the Spirit, and with what freshness, variety, and power, you have been enabled to set before us things new and old out of the treasury of the Lord's word. Nor have you ever permitted us to feel that you occupied a region remote from ourselves, or that the isolation of the study and of your official character, made you self-absorbed or unsympathetic. The very contrary of this has been our happy experience. With an almost surprising power of appropriation, you have made our doubts and difficulties, our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, all your own, and, with a whole-hearted sympathy that has entered into all the experiences of the Christian life, you have, in the pulpit and in the class, and in the more private opportunities of the family and of friendship, been made eminently useful in the communication

of help and strength. To not a few your ministrations have been made the savour of life unto life, who will be your crown and rejoicing one day, since through your word they have been reconciled to God by Jesus Christ. We magnify the grace of God in you, and none the less when we declare that your life and labours in our midst have placed us under lasting obligations of gratitude and love.”

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I regret that I have not space for a few pages of pithy, condensed jottings extracted from the Author's "Diary," and written by him during hours of private devotion. They would testify, in common with every other part of the volume, to the atmosphere of piety in which our beloved friend habitually lived. In social life, he was playful and jocose; and many who have thought that they knew him well, knew him almost exclusively as he was in such moods as these. He was however emphatically a man who "walked with God." Many others knew him only in connection with his official work, and gave to him their unstinted admiration for his plodding, almost pertinacious industry. He had "a mind to work," but he sanctified and ennobled all his work by prayer. I have often had, as, no doubt, many more have had, the privilege of his society in the lone hours of the night, when he could talk with the unreserved frankness of a confiding friend; and I never left him after such hallowed times as these without feeling that I had been drawn nearer to him, and through him, nearer to the Saviour, by the modest, holy, Christian beauty of his spirit.

Alas, that so comely and benignant a life should have closed so early! He died at forty-eight years of age. We have no right, nor have we any disposition, to repine; but we cannot refrain from mourning.

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He began life well, sacrificing fair interests as a member of the legal profession in Jersey, with the Island Bar in view, and was soon preparing for the Christian ministry at Stepney College. His preaching was attractive, and at the termination of his academic course, he became the pastor of the influential church at South Parade Chapel, Leeds. Four years later, he removed to Watford, and from thence, in 1864, to Cross Street, Islington, where his ministry may be said to have approached, if it did not actually reach, its maturity. In 1870 he relinquished the pastorate for Secretarial work at the Baptist Mission House, into which he threw all the steady, quenchless enthusiasm of his nature, and upon which the blessing of God conspicuously rested. Discharging his duties with a fidelity and a skill which were as effective as they were modest, he was equally beloved by the Missionaries abroad, and by his colleagues and the constituencies at home; and he had the satisfaction of knowing that, notwithstanding many difficulties, he was contributing in various ways to the advancement of the great enterprize. The toil and anxiety entailed upon him were onerous in the extreme, and after a time it became obvious to his friends that his multifarious exertions were undermining his strength. He went to the Baptist Union meetings in Leeds in the October of 1878, when he ought to have been taking repose; and, though seriously ill, he there preached what proved to be his last Sermon, in the chapel of his first pastorate—the Sermon on "Immortality" in this volume—and read his last paper, on "Our Missionary Principles and Motives." It is remarkable that he should thus have finished his public course in the town of his first ministerial settlement, and that he should have there spoken his last public words on behalf of that great department of Christian work which had engaged his best thoughts and his warmest sympathies for many years, and to his holy zeal for which it may be truly said that he sacrificed his life. At those Leeds meetings, he was "already within the shadow of death," and returned home to sink gradually but surely beneath the distressing malady which took him to heaven on the 13th of the following December.

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To his widowed companion and helpmeet, whose faithful affection he prized as his most precious earthly treasure—to his children and kindred, who so fondly loved him, and so deeply revere his memory—to the churches which he so wisely and so zealously served in the work of the Gospel—to the Missionary Society in the sacred interests of which he lived and died—and to the numberless personal friends to whom he was so dear, and who will ever thank God that they were permitted to enjoy his genial confidence and sympathy—these productions of his brain and heart are dedicated, with the grateful assurance that, through them, he, being dead, will yet continue to speak, and, speaking thus, will still be the helper of many in "the way everlasting."

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J. P. BARNETT.

OXFORD, *August, 1880.*

[1]

I.

SALVATION.

"The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."—TITUS ii. 11-14.

Briefly stated, the consequences of the Fall were these—that man became unholy in point of character, and guilty in point of law. The first covenant God made with man was a covenant of law, and the two “trees” shadowed forth, the one the condition, the other the benefit, of such a covenant. “The tree of the knowledge of good and evil” points to obedience as the condition; and “the tree of life” points to life, in its fullest and most spiritual sense, as the benefit. Man disobeyed. He failed to fulfil the condition, and thus he lost the blessing. Henceforth, if there is to be any blessing for him, it must come on some other ground, and from some higher source. Having forfeited all hope from law, his only possible hope must come, if it come at all, from mercy.

[2]

We thus perceive that when the great salvation wrought by Christ is announced to us, we have to do at the outset with what on God’s part is

1. An act of pure sovereignty. Condemnation was the righteous award of a just law to a creature who had broken it, and who could not plead any admissible excuse for his sin. The law might, therefore, have been allowed to take its course, thus receiving honour before the whole intelligent universe. Only one Will in the universe was free to interfere; the will of the Lawgiver and Creator Himself. Interference on His part, however, could not be under the pressure of legal obligation, but must be in the exercise of a sovereign right. Hence, the key-note of the gospel is “the *Grace* of God.”

2. An act of boundless love. It is obvious that salvation cannot have proceeded from any other motive in the Divine Mind. “God *so loved* the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The Bible has no other solution of the origin of salvation to offer than this.

Now, that which proceeds from sovereignty and love on the part of God must absolutely preclude all claim or thought of merit on the part of man. Merit leaves no room, no occasion for grace. Grace begins where merit ends, if grace be given at all.—What, then, *is* the “great salvation”?

[3]

Man, being unholy and guilty, needed a salvation which would include his justification or his forgiveness, and one which would culminate in his sanctification by the restoration to him of his lost spiritual power. In other words, he needed a deliverance from the curse of sin, and also from sin itself.

This deliverance, man cannot find within his own nature. He cannot save himself from the curse of sin; for inasmuch as the law righteously demanded a perfect and constant obedience, he could never blot out the guilt of former sins by acts of obedience at a later period of life. Moreover, such later acts of a perfect obedience are impossible to him, for holiness does not proceed from a sinful nature. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” Men do not “gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles.” Man is as depraved and as weak as he is guilty. Self-salvation is impossible; salvation is of the Lord alone. The gospel is the announcement of the fact that God saves, and of the method in which the great work of salvation is done by Him.

[4]

I. The Word of God, both in the Old and in the New Testament, proclaims a dispensation of Divine mercy. So unexpected and so cheering is this proclamation that it has given the gospel the name it bears. It is emphatically “good news”—good news from God to man. This good news announces that the first deliverance which man requires is provided for. God remits the penalty of sin. But how?

He does this in such a way that, so far from weakening law, or invalidating the condemnation of sin, He shows more clearly than ever, how holy is the law, and how just the condemnation. Hence, though this forgiveness is an act of pure mercy, it is mercy exercised in a righteous way through the wonderful sacrifice of Christ. This was the meaning of the promise that accompanied the curse; and so clear was it that it was apprehended in the first sacrifices men ever offered. The Jewish sacrifices shadowed it forth. The Scriptures teach this method of Divine forgiveness in the plainest terms. I quote two or three passages in proof: Rom. iii. 23-26; John i. 29; 1 John ii. 1, 2; 1 Peter ii. 24; Isaiah liii. 4-6.

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This is Scripture, and we must not dare to trifle with it. These declarations can have but one meaning. Christ has suffered in our stead the penalty we had all deserved, that we might receive, for His sake, that eternal life and blessedness which *He only had deserved*. On this point all the types and teachings of both Testaments speak with one voice.

There are, no doubt, in this substitution of the innocent for the guilty, some difficulties for human reason. But *we* have to do with the Bible. It meets conscience; and reason must bend in submission before a grace the deeper meaning of which it does not see. Observe, however, that according to the Scripture representation, the substitution was divinely appointed, and the Substitute Himself was a willing victim. We accept the doctrine, (1) Partly in virtue of human need. Conscience points to the necessity of a satisfaction. (2) Partly in virtue of the peace and the joy to which faith in the doctrine gives rise.—“Scripture always lays stress upon the Saviour’s humiliation and bitter sufferings. We are not said to be redeemed by His incarnation, by His birth, by His miracles, by His doctrine, not even by His agony in the garden, though all these were necessary to the ransom; but by His blood.” On this ground of the Atonement, the first part of salvation—forgiveness—is secured.

[6]

II. Man needs also to be redeemed from sin. This need, like the former, he is unable to meet of himself, but God meets it on his behalf. How? By putting into the heart a fertile germ of holiness.

Freedom from condemnation and regeneration are indissolubly connected together in God's idea of salvation, and He achieves both by the work of Christ His Son. This redemption from the love, and consequently from the power of sin, is accomplished by Him on a principle which is divinely simple and efficacious; a principle which lies at the root of the theory of evangelical sanctification. This principle is the love which He excites *in* us by the manifestation of His own love *to* us. Thus the Apostle John writes: "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him" (1 John iii. 6). "He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love" (1 John iv. 8). To love God, and, under the constraining influence of love, to serve Him, we have need to know and to realise how great is the love of God to us. [7]

Now this Divine love has been revealed to the world through the medium of that same Saviour, who by His sacrificial death has opened up the way for our pardon and our restoration to the Divine favour. The Son of God came into the world to reveal the heart of the Father. What greater gift could God have bestowed than that of His Divine Son? What greater proof of love could He have exhibited than that which this greatest of all possible gifts presents? "God *so* loved." And Christ has perfectly performed His mission. His whole ministry was a declaration of the Divine love. Of that love His death on the cross was the sublimest expression. We learn therefrom not only that God manifests to us His mercy, *but also at what cost*. Our debt must be paid; and as we are bankrupt, He pays it on our behalf. And who is our Substitute? Not a man, not an angel, not any creature; but the Divine Son, "by whom God made the worlds and upholds them by the word of His power," "who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person"—it was *He* who "by Himself purged our sins." Such is the love of God. We cannot fathom it, for it is Divine; but in proportion as we are enabled to "know" it, we say "We love Him because He first loved us;" "We are bought with a price: we are not our own." And we say our devout "Amen!" when the chiefest Apostle of mercy says to us: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." [8]

This Divine love, however, wonderful as it is, is offered to unsusceptible hearts. Hence the necessity—hence also the gift—of the Holy Spirit, through whom God strives with man. The Holy Spirit is the gift of Christ; and He convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us.

See, then, the completeness of the Divine plan of salvation. To undeserving hearts God offers His love in Christ; to unsusceptible hearts He explains and commends it by His Spirit.

III. The only remaining question is as to our own part in the great plan of mercy. Because we are intelligent and moral creatures, God does not save us without our own concurrence. To every one who desires to receive this twofold gift—the gift of pardon and of sanctification—a certain disposition is necessary. That disposition is in the Scriptures called "faith." Faith is the divinely-appointed condition of salvation. The terms are simple, but they are indispensable. Scripture, in every part, recognises and imposes them. From the earliest times they have been complied with, as in the sacrifices of Abel, Noah, and Abraham. It was this same principle of faith that gave validity to the worship under the Mosaic dispensation. So the Lord Jesus Christ, who healed men's physical diseases as types of the diseases of the soul, always demanded faith as the condition of His working. As it was with Christ, so it was with His apostles. Thus Paul said to the Philippian jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." All this shows to us that whilst, on the one hand, we are saved by grace; on the other, we have no participation in the grace which saves, except by the exercise of our own faith in the Saviour. [9]

What is this faith? It may be considered in its principle, and in its application.

In its principle, it is a general conviction that the Bible is the Word of God, and that what He says therein should receive our assent; or, in other words, should be accepted by us as *true*. In its application, it is the belief of God's Word as it respects *ourselves*. It is this which Paul commends to the Philippian jailer. When a man, under the burden of his sin, says, "I am lost; I cannot save myself; save me, Lord!" we have an illustration of this applied faith—a sense of personal misery, a sense of personal helplessness, a sense of a Saviour willing to save him personally, and a direct appeal to that Saviour for salvation. From the moment of such a prayer, there is not a single promise of Scripture that such a man may not make his own. A promised pardon, a promised Spirit, a promised heaven—all are his! The essence of the faith is in the conviction which expresses itself thus: "Jesus Christ is not only able and willing to be the Saviour of all men, but He is my Saviour." Such a faith brings Christ and the soul together in precisely those relations in which He is the Saviour, and in which the soul is saved. [10]

But how is this faith obtained? Must not God give it? Yes. So Paul, writing to the Philippians, tells them it was "given" to them "to believe in Christ." Must we, then, listlessly wait until it comes to us? No. Paul again says to these same Philippians, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." The reconciliation of these two truths into one theory may be difficult, but in practice it is easy enough. *We recognise them both when we ask for faith*. For to ask is to recognise our need of that for which we ask; it is also to recognise the fact that we do not possess it of ourselves; and it is also to seek and to act. Ask, then, for faith, and God will say: "Wilt thou be made whole?" Will you—not as a vague desire, but as the most earnest determination of your heart and will? Ask for faith; God will grant it. Ask largely; you cannot ask too much. And even if you sigh over the weakness of desire, press the old and never-failing prayer: "Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief." [11]

Faith saves, and grace saves. This is scarcely a contradiction in terms, and certainly it is no

contradiction in principle. Faith is the instrument; grace is the primary and efficacious power. Faith is the channel; grace is the stream. Faith touches the hem of the Saviour's garment; grace is the virtue that passes forth from Him in response to the touch. Christ reaches down from heaven; faith reaches up from earth; each hand grasps the other—the one in weakness, the other in power—and salvation is in the grasp. Take—oh, take that pierced hand! Amen. [12]

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II.

PROPITIATION.

"He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."—1 JOHN ii. 2.

It is easier to attack than to defend. An objection may be stated in a single sentence which shall require many pages for an adequate reply. Those who reject Christianity generally adopt this method, but I know not why they should be allowed to monopolise it. Why should not believers, instead of simply proving that there is a God, and that the Bible is His Word, insist upon positive proof from their opponents that there is no God, and that the Bible is nothing more than a human book? Why should we not impose upon them the more difficult task of defending their position, by attacking it with all earnestness at every point? For Christian defence, we have need to be both really and consciously very strong in the truth. On the other hand, to be an unbeliever, a man can do without either knowledge or goodness. He has only to ply you with his eternal "*Why?*" *Why*, because the universe exists, must it have ever been *created*? *Why* may it not have always existed? *Why* are we bound to accept the teaching of the Bible? *Why* was it necessary that Christ should suffer to expiate our sins? *Why* did Christ come so late in the history of the world? *Why* are there no miracles now? *Why? Why? Why?*— [14]

As Christians, however, we take the position open to us, whether of attack or defence. We do so because the salvation of our adversaries is dear to us, and because we are so sure that the course they adopt injures, not ourselves, but them. We bring to them a priceless treasure—salvation through, and from, the crucified Christ. If they hinder us, the loss is theirs.

On the present occasion we deal with one of the questions often propounded: "Why was it necessary that Christ should die for our sins, in order that we may be saved?" or, "How can the sufferings of the innocent atone for the sins of the guilty?"

To make our answer more clear, we begin by saying: "We do not know." Why should we insist—why should any one insist—upon understanding the "*why*" of this arrangement? Why should not every one be content to know the *fact*? If the reason of the fact were obvious, we should, of course, gladly accept it; but if it be hidden from us, whilst the fact itself is disclosed, why should we complain? We cannot fully understand the Divine purposes. We can only guess. Even angels study, and wonder, and adore, but do not fully know. Let it be observed that the real question here is not exactly as unbelievers put it. Thus: I do not know how the rays of the sun enlighten my eyes, nor how my enlightened eyes transmit ideas to my mind. Does it follow that the sun does not enlighten, or that my mind does not receive impressions through what I see? The imperative question is, not, "How is the thing done?" but, "*Is it done?*"—not as to the *reason* of the fact, but the *reality* of it. So in the matter before us. It is surely enough for us to show that redemption through the sacrifice of Christ, like the sun, comes from God, and that it gives light, life, and fruit. This being done, nothing more can be reasonably asked. [15]

To know whether this doctrine of redemption is God's truth, it is sufficient to know whether the Bible is God's Word. And here we ask, What will you do with ancient prophecies and their fulfilment?—with confirmations of Bible history which are continually accumulating?—with the conspicuous excellence of the moral teaching and influence which the Bible supplies?—with the sublimity of Christ's character?—with the miracles He wrought?—with the marvellous effects of Christianity upon the world, notwithstanding the strongest inducements, in human prejudice, to its rejection? Settle such questions as these according to the admitted laws of evidence, and then there will be no reason to contend as to the "*why*" and the "*how*" of redemption. [16]

Such, however, is not the method which the unbeliever pursues. He turns away from the Record as a source of instruction. It is hard to convince a man who begins by closing his ears with his own pride. To whatever study a man addresses himself, he will never advance in it in *spite* of himself. His progress will be proportioned, among other things, to the amount of honest effort he makes to learn. That is, he must feel the fact and the disadvantage of his own ignorance. Who could study mathematics by beginning at the outset to dispute its axioms? Just so with Christian truth. Put aside prejudice and pride. Do not take it for granted that you have light enough in your mind, at starting, to pronounce upon the truth or the falsity, the reasonableness or the unreasonableness, of the doctrine of salvation through the cross of Christ. Listen attentively. Look for more light, and receive it when it comes. We do not say: "Believe before you have read;" but we do say: "Don't contradict before you have read." [17]

I have already said that we are not obliged to *explain* the philosophy of the redemption which is

taught in the Scriptures. Let me now say that that redemption is itself the best solution of the great difficulty which is felt by the believer and the unbeliever alike. It is this: Conscience tells us that God is just; the heart tells us that He is good;—how then can a God whose justice and goodness are equal, *i.e.*, both of them infinite, escape from the position in which sinners have placed Him? I put the difficulty in this bold form in order that it may be the more distinctly apprehended. We have sinned, and a just God must punish. We sigh after happiness, and a good God—a God who is infinitely kind—may be expected to bestow happiness upon us. But how can God deal with us in both these ways at one and the same time?

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We know instinctively, of course, that there is no real dilemma to God Himself; but those who reject the atonement of Christ are bound to deal with what presents itself as an inevitable dilemma to *them*.

The unbeliever says: "God is too good to punish." What then becomes of His justice, since conscience testifies that we are sinners, that sin deserves punishment, that vice and virtue are not one, that God cannot deal in the same way with both without encouraging the vice which needs to be suppressed, and discouraging the virtue which needs to be upheld? Take away the fear of punishment under the pretext that God is good, and you deprive conscience of its meaning and its power.

Shall it be said, then, that God will punish every transgressor? Have the numberless generations which have been upon the earth gone to an inevitable doom? This conclusion is as hard to admit as the other. The instincts of the heart are against it.

No; men do not accept either conclusion to the exclusion of the other. They say God will adopt a mean between His justice and His mercy so as to bring them into harmony. But how? Here is the crucial difficulty. Is it to be solved by the principle of mutual concession?

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Let me remind you, again, that the difficulty is not created by God, but by man. In Him, justice and mercy are really one: it is only to us that they are seen to be two; and it is our sin which disturbs and confuses our conception of their union with each other. He might indeed annihilate us, and so leave us no opportunity to complain. But our whole moral and emotional nature repels with horror the thought of such a termination to our sin, as being unworthy of the God who has to govern us. No! when we reflect seriously upon the question, we cannot resist the feeling that God must have some plan of rescuing us from the doom we merit which shall give equal expression to His justice and His mercy.

Men in general, alas! hold justice cheaply, and, lowering the Divine standard of human character, they easily persuade themselves that they may enter heaven through the breach they have made in the Divine attributes. They think that God is indulgent, and will forgive, forgetting that indulgence is weakness. God *will* forgive, but His forgiveness must stand on safe ground. It cannot apply indiscriminately to all men. Men think they have said all when they have said, "God will forgive." Such a forgiveness would aim a blow at His justice. No matter; He will forgive! Such a forgiveness is without motive—an effect without a cause. No matter; He will forgive! Such a forgiveness has its root in sentiment, not in reason. It matters not; He will forgive! Such a forgiveness imposes no obligation on the forgiver, and encourages sin. Never mind; He will forgive!

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Surely this is the spiritual blindness which comes from the perversion of the conscience and the heart.

Some say, "God forgives; but the condition is that we turn away from sin and live a life of holiness." There are many answers to this; but I will only ask those who thus speak, "Are you now living in such a way as to have in your present holiness, and on the ground of it, the assurance of your pardon?" That is a question which conscience may be safely left to answer.

At this point Christianity comes professing to reveal to us the Divine plan of salvation. It tells us that God forgives for the sake of Jesus Christ, who is Himself, in His sacrifice, the gift of the Father's love. A debt has been contracted; the insolvent debtor presents in payment the money which a friend has freely contributed for the purpose; the creditor is satisfied. In this way goodness and justice are reconciled. It is Divine love which meets the claim of the Divine Righteousness. The redeemed soul, redeemed by the blood of Christ, is led to obedience by a love which responds to the love which has redeemed him. This last result none can dispute. Does it spring from error? No; it is too pure, too blessed for that. The redemption that produces it is a true principle founded in the nature of God—sublime in its working—like sap, inexplicable, but justified by the beauty of its foliage and the goodness of its fruits.

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Let us look a little more closely into this principle of Propitiation. Suppose we were reading the gospel for the first time, free from prejudice, and from the deadening influence of habit; we should be struck with the prominence everywhere given in it to the death of Christ. Ask a Christian child, or an aged saint, "What did Christ come on earth to do?" The answer from each will be, "He came to die for us." The child finds his answer on the very surface of Scripture; the aged man finds it in that same Scripture when he has studied it to its very depths. The one quickly learns that this death of Christ was often predicted by Christ Himself, that it holds the most prominent place in each of the four Gospels, that it is constantly referred to in the Epistles, that it is the text of all the preaching of the apostles, and that it is symbolised in both the sacraments, for "we are buried by baptism into His death," and whenever in the Supper we partake of the bread and wine, we "show forth His death till He come." The mature Christian, in

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his turn, learns to look upon the death of Christ as the centre and the soul of all the great acts of the great work of our redemption, which seem, whether they preceded or followed, to have been done in direct view of it, and in indissoluble connection with it. The incarnation was designed to open up the way for it. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." The resurrection was intended to attest its meaning and its value. For Christ was "delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." The object of the ascension was to secure the precious fruits of it. "For He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

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The remarkable thing in all this is that in the gospel, the aim of which is to reveal eternal life, the Prince of Life is always offered to us as dying upon the cross. *Death in order to life!* What can be the meaning and the bearing of a death which God has placed in so exalted a position? We can only get our answer from Scripture; and we can only get it from Scripture as we read in the simple, unsophisticated humility of mind and heart of which Christ Himself and His apostles give us the example.

"*Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins.*" We have sinned against God, and our sins have been so many *offences* to Him; offences which must be dealt with. Christ averts the penalty from us by taking it to Himself. The Holy One consents to suffer for the sake of the guilty. The apostle who styles Christ as the "Propitiation" has said, in a sentence immediately preceding: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Almost numberless passages teach the same doctrine. If we were engaged in an exercise of Biblical criticism, we should have to discuss each of these passages minutely in its turn. But the general idea we gather from them is definite and clear. A ransom paid, our sins borne, the wrath of God appeased, an offered sacrifice—all these contain one idea: Jesus Christ freeing us from the desert of our sin by Himself satisfying Divine Justice on our behalf.

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Hence the two great facts of our religious history. We were under the condemnation of a holy law. He who was "the Life," *for our sake* endured death that we who deserved death might have life *for His sake*. And God is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

To a simple-hearted Christian all this is clear. Men may be scandalised at the exchange (as they term it) between justice and sin, between life and death; but Paul knows how to state the matter: "God hath made Him (Christ) to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Men may be indignant (as they often profess to be) at the thought of the innocent suffering for the guilty; but Peter does not hesitate to say: "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."

What is it, moreover, that *connects* the teaching of the Old Testament with that of the New? The doctrine of sacrifice, as thus explained, is not simply *attested* by Scripture: it is the *soul* of it; its bond of unity. The death of Christ is *the* sacrifice "once offered in the end of the world," in which all the sacrifices of the Old Testament find their common destination; to which they correspond, as the figure to the reality. The cross is the end, the key, the meaning, the value of all of them. Without this we cannot understand them. They were types: the cross is the antitype. What they *represented*, the cross *achieved*. The cross procured the pardon which they proclaimed. And so the cross has always been the symbol of the Christian Church. The Jews understood it, and were scandalised; the Greeks understood it, and sneered.

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And now what ends does this sacrifice of Propitiation serve? Mainly two, which are inclusive of all the rest.

I. It is the fullest revelation of the Divine character. Leaving aside all questions of abstract and technical theology, we observe that it sets before us, in one great act, the righteousness and the mercy of God. The cross proclaims the pardon for which infinite love solicits. *The heart of God yields to itself.* But how can this be? It is because the pardon solicited by love is obtained by a sacrifice which equally exhibits God's righteousness. If we seek the universe through for the greatest proof we can have of the love of God to the sinner, we shall find it in the cross; for we there see not only that God forgives, but also that He is *so resolved* to forgive that, rather than that the sinner shall be left to perish, the stroke of the offended law shall fall on the willing head and heart and life of "His only begotten and well-beloved Son." On the other hand, if we want to know something of God's abhorrence of sin, we shall find it in the cross; for we there see that, so impossible is it for Him to allow it to go unpunished, that He secures for it a Divine expiation in the willing sacrifice of His Divine Son. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Most persons can see in the cross a demonstration of Divine love; in the light of Bible teaching, they may also see in it a demonstration of Divine justice more marked and telling than in a closed Eden, in the waters of the Deluge, in the overthrow of the cities of the plain, in the destruction of Jerusalem, or in the punishment of the wicked in eternity.

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II. If men are to be saved at all, they must be saved *to holiness*; they must be sanctified as well as forgiven. The result cannot be otherwise for those who truly believe in the sacrifice of Christ as thus explained. Holiness and love, the two great elements of the character of God; these are expressed in the cross, and they must be reproduced in the character of those for whom the cross does its appointed work. How can we believe, as the cross teaches us to believe, in God's hatred to sin, without feeling that we must hate it also, and, hating it, must forsake it? And how can we believe, as the cross teaches us to believe, in the love which has obtained our salvation, without giving our own love as a genuine, though feeble, return? Let a man, struggling with the sins which he condemns, but which he cannot shake off, learn that the Son of God came into the

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world to die for him; and he will find in that revelation a strength for conflict with sin which he never had before. Speak to him of the beauty and dignity of the law, of the righteousness of God's claims, of the penalties of transgression; and, though his conscience may assent to all you say, his heart will not yield. Can he refuse when he sees Jesus on the cross, and knows what, for him, that spectacle means? The cross is an argument presented to his reason, his conscience, his will, his heart, his whole being; nay, it is more than an argument, it is an appeal; and the response must be: "We love Him because He first loved us." "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again."

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And now it only remains to be said that this Propitiation is needed by all, that it is sufficient for all, and that it is free to all. Let all receive it.

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III. *FAITH IN THE SAVIOUR.*

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."—Acts xvi. 31.

A startling providential dispensation was one of the means by which the spiritual nature of this jailer was roused. Only one, effectual so far as it went, but not complete in itself. It was preparatory and auxiliary to the action of the Holy Spirit, the instrument by which the Spirit did His special work of convincing the man of sin. Thus it is that outward events and circumstances are made to co-operate with God in the conversion of a soul. The way in which the Spirit works is a mystery, akin to that in which one human mind acts upon another. But the *means* of this spiritual action is no mystery. We use speech, external appliances of various kinds; the Divine Spirit does the same. In the case of the jailer he employed the earthquake together with the calm faith, the perfect serenity, of the apostles at a moment which was to himself a moment of terror, and which would also have been a moment of terror to them had they not been the Christians they were. A great joy; a great sorrow, commotion, loss, alarm, the apparent nearness of death; daily mercies, the "means of grace," the Word of God, the ministry of the gospel—through all these the Spirit works. They are powerless in themselves; they can only become mighty as used by Him.

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It is obvious at a glance that this man's spiritual nature *was* roused. Spiritual realities burst in upon his mind in all their awful momentousness. His whole soul was suddenly concentrated in a sense of his ruin. Hence the short, sharp question—the question which sprung from an inward agony—"What must I do to be saved?" That question must be answered, if it can be—answered on the instant! There is a tremendous depth of meaning in it. It is as though a lightning flash had in a moment illuminated the man's whole spiritual condition, bringing out every feature of it into startling distinctness. All the fears and the aspirations of his immortal being are here; his past life with all its sin, his remorse, his dread of judgment, his terror in the presence of God—all are here; he feels himself to be a lost man. How can he be saved?

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In his question there is no hint of self-righteousness or of self-confidence, or even of the remotest hope in himself. He does not ask, like "the young man in the gospel," "What good thing must I do that I may inherit eternal life?" The question of the young man is leisurely; the question of the jailer is hurried, under the feeling that there is not a moment to be lost. Helpless and hopeless, he wants but one thing, and that is to be "saved." Of course his "What must I do?" indicates that he is willing and ready to comply with any possible terms; yet it is not a question of conscious strength—it is rather the question of despair.

Such a question shows that a great point—an essential point—had been gained. The gospel is a sovereign remedy designed and constructed to meet a desperate case. Not only do they that are whole stand in no need of a physician, but wherever there lingers an idea of spiritual strength, or a dream, of self-righteousness, the condition necessary for the reception of such a salvation as that which the gospel proclaims is entirely wanting. Christ is an exclusive Saviour, and "looking to Him" is an exclusive hope.

"What must I do to be saved?" Clear, quick, unhesitating, comes the answer of Paul: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Both the question and the answer strike the point—the centre of the soul's supreme need, and the centre of the gospel message.

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This answer of Paul's is not simply his own. It is the answer of God to every man who wants to know how he can be saved. It is the answer of the whole Bible. It is the pre-eminently, distinctively Christian answer. All revelation has one great object—Jesus Christ, promised, announced, expected, seen by faith beforehand; then Jesus Christ actually come, His life told, His mission developed, Himself presented to the world as the one and only Name whereby men can be saved;—always Jesus Christ. Patriarchs and prophets, Moses and David, Christ Himself, His apostles and disciples after Him, the whole Church—all unite to say to the awakened soul:

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

But this answer, though not Paul’s alone, is nevertheless his in such a sense that an immense weight belongs to it. What does Paul himself understand by it? We know something of his experience, and that will tell us the meaning of these words as spoken by him. He spake that which he knew, and testified that which he had seen. He felt that he could offer to the spiritual need of every man that which had so fully met his own. [33]

Read Paul’s life. Read his epistles. You see at a glance what Christ was to *him*—a Redeemer. And what to him was the very centre of Christian truth? “Christ crucified.” He had been so roused as to see clearly the relation between himself and God. The true sense of sin had been awakened within him. No man had made more strenuous efforts to obtain justification by the works of the law than he had; and no man had more deeply realised his helplessness. How does he describe the struggle? “I had not known sin, but by the law.... When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.... Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.... That which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.... I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) there dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.... O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” [34]

“I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

We all know how God arrested, overcame, and subdued him, by showing him in that same “Jesus Christ our Lord” the mystery of the Divine love. God taught him that he must no longer expect righteousness and eternal life to come from his own works, to be wrought by his own strength. Eternal life is the free gift of God. Look to the cross! Listen to the Spirit! Learn in “the folly of the cross” to adore the wisdom and the power of God—a forgiveness that glorifies justice as well as mercy; a forgiveness that kills sin as well as removes its penalty; a salvation that harmonises man with God as well as forgives him; a salvation that implies a perfect holiness, the motive being love, and the effectual power being that of the Holy Spirit. Deep as his want had been, it was now completely met by the revelation of the Saviour. To that revelation his response was prompt, complete, irrevocable. He says that it was as though scales had fallen from his eyes, this disclosure of the Divine plan of salvation to his mind. It was full of light, full of mercy. The manifestation of the risen Christ was the instrumentality which enlightened him. He saw straightway the nature and purpose of “the cross,” the certainty of justification through faith, the believer’s completeness in Christ. “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” “There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” The natural result of these convictions in the apostle’s own case was his consecration to the Saviour. Bought with a great price, he felt that he was no longer his own, but that, in life and death, he belonged to Him who had given Himself for him. In Christ he had found peace for his conscience, light for his mind, love for his heart. And what was the secret of it all? Simply “believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.” [35]

This, then, was Paul’s gospel to the jailer, and there is no other gospel to-day. We know that sin incurs condemnation—the displeasure of God. The universal conscience gives testimony to that fact. We know that man cannot, in his own person, satisfy the claims of the Divine law. But there comes down to us the old truth that Christ is “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” He “finished the work which His Father gave Him to do,” and the whole benefit of that work is given to faith.

It is in the name of this perfect system of truth—which, observe, is a perfect series of facts—consecrated by the trial of ages, by the experience of an incalculable number of souls in all times, places, and conditions, and by the world’s own verdict on Christian character wherever it is found—that we speak to you with a confidence equal to that with which Paul spoke to the jailer. And let me add that we so speak because we have made the experience of it our own, and that it is as sure in our hearts as our very existence. Yes, a perfect series of facts as well as a perfect system of truth. Men sometimes object that we put before them hard and abstruse systems of theology, and that we condemn them for not believing things which they cannot understand. There is no need to do anything of the kind, and when it is done a grave mistake is committed. I preach no “abstractions” to you when I urge you to faith in Christ for salvation. I deal with facts and their deductions—deductions which are as inevitable as the facts are real—deductions which follow the facts as the shadow follows the substance. Deny the deductions? You must first deny the facts. The jailer, poor man, was no theologian, and Paul did not perplex and mystify him. He placed the person of Christ immediately before the soul. Faith in a person; that is *first*—not faith in a creed. A creed will follow; for there cannot be faith without thought, and thought always strives to formulate itself. But, blessed be God, millions have been saved with next to no “theology.” Having Christ for its object, and salvation for its aim, faith reposes in the facts of His mission and work; but as He is a living Christ, it emphatically reposes in *Him*. This is the [37]

commonest form of the believer's experience. In our social life we know what faith in a person means. We confide in known goodness; and therefore we believe words, promises, acts, and we do so because we trust *him* from whom they come. This is the last and most perfect stage of the faith men place in one another, and it includes a confidence which is not impaired by what, in the person who is trusted, seems startling, unexpected, mysterious, contradictory, inexplicable. Just so with the gospel. It meets our needs by telling us what God has done for us in Christ. We believe the record which fits our want, and we put our trust in the Saviour. Confiding in Him, we can accept such mysteries as we may discern in His dealings, and faith in a holy and loving Saviour is henceforth the true rest of life, and the true foretaste of heaven. [38]

Such being the nature of faith unto salvation, we see how it contrasts (1) with indifference. Indifference is commonly supposed to be a mental state, in which a man neither believes nor disbelieves; whereas it is really a state of spiritual deadness. (2) With mere opinion, which is nothing more than an inclination in favour of, or against, a thing, and not an earnest practical conviction about it. (3) With presumption, which is a prepossession with no sufficient basis of evidence. [39]

It may, perhaps, be said that, in this representation of faith in Christ as the one all-comprehensive condition of salvation, we have left no room for penitence, holiness, devotedness. But think again for a moment. Were not all these in this man? Did not his conduct to the apostles show, so far as the opportunity was given him, the fruits of faith in the various ways of grateful love? Faith is the starting-point; but when we are told to "believe in Christ" an appeal is made to us in response to which there is a whole career to be filled up. Faith, like everything else in life, has its beginning, and its development is progressive. It means thought, and thought means contrition, gratitude, and a glad and loving obedience. It requires time, but we have eternity before us. In some, the result of years is accomplished in a day. Simple-hearted men generally receive by a sort of intuition what others take a long period to elaborate. The one thing essential to all is that they be faithful to the light and the love they have received.

"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." We do not call you to a learned and critical study. The life and teachings and redeeming work of the Saviour are put before us with a simplicity that brings them within the reach of a peasant or a child. Attention, earnestness, sincerity, prayer, will do all that is needed. Seek the faith that will make Christ yours. Do you not already, under the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, feel your need of Him? Oh, whilst mercy calls, and the throne of grace is accessible, pray and yield! [40]

Ye that in these courts are found
Listening to the joyful sound,
Lost and helpless as you are,
Sons of sorrow, sin, and care,
Glorify the King of kings!
Take the peace the gospel brings.

Turn to Christ with longing eyes,
View His bleeding sacrifice.
See through Him your sins
 forgiven,
Pardon, holiness, and heaven.
Glorify the King of kings!
Take the peace the gospel brings.

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IV.

SINCERITY OF HEART NECESSARY TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL.

"If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."—JOHN vii. 17.

The Jews, marvelling at Christ's teaching in the temple, exclaim, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" They do not mean to ask whether Christ is competent to teach, for they *see* that he is so clearly enough; but they thus express their astonishment at the authority and the ability with which He deals with the Scriptures, considering that He has never received the instruction of the Schools.

In His reply, Jesus fully enters into the thought of His questioners. That thought is this: "In order to teach, one must have been taught." He intimates to them that He meets this requirement. As though He had said: "It is true that I have not been in the schools of your Rabbis, but I have been taught in a better school than theirs. He who has given me my mission, has also given me my [42]

message. So that my teaching does not proceed originally from myself. I have only to lay hold of my Father's thought, and then to reproduce it faithfully to you."

But how is this to be verified? The answer to this question is found in the text: "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Christ's teaching, in its highest aim, is a Divine method of sanctification. Whoever, then, earnestly seeks to "do the will of God"—that is, to be holy—will soon recognise the Divine adaptability of the gospel to its end. The meaning of the verse is the same as in chapter v. and verse 46: "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me;" and also in chapter iii. and verse 21: "He that doeth truth cometh to the light." On the one hand, the holy sublimity of the gospel flashes irresistibly on the soul that longs for holiness; on the other hand, the soul, in its inability to attain its ideal, seeks peace and strength at the hands of the Saviour. Faith, therefore, is not the result of a logical operation; it appears to the soul as the best means of realising the satisfaction of its deepest want—holiness. The word "will" points to the loftiness of the aspiration and to the earnestness of the effort. [43]

Our Lord's words, then, mean this, that if any man be supremely anxious to do the right, he will find in Scripture sufficient proof of its divinity, and, as a consequence, of its adaptability to the soul's deepest need. Christ was dealing with men who were disposed to cavil about His authority and about the truth which He taught. These men were acquainted with the Mosaic law, which enjoined not only purity of life, but also purity of heart. It was a law therefore which, if honestly studied, must lead to those convictions which would enable them to see the necessity and the wisdom of the gospel which Christ was preaching. And so He lays down the principle that sincerity in regard to the *known* law of God determines the real position of the mind *towards* God, and prepares it for deeper and still deeper penetration into all necessary spiritual knowledge. On the contrary, he who is insincere, and does not practise what he knows, but endeavours to evade it by sophistry, blinds himself until even the brightest light can be of no service to him. This was the case with the majority of the Pharisees with whom Christ had to do. [44] This passage is therefore of the highest practical importance, since it teaches that man's capacity for spiritual knowledge is dependent upon his inclination. If the will be opposed to God, the understanding becomes clouded; if it be inclined towards God, the ability to know increases. That the inclination is the door to the intellect is a fact universally recognised. It is expressed in the proverb: "None are so blind as those who will not see." In every department of learning, a man, in order to attainment, *must make up his mind to it*. For good or ill, the will is a quickening power.

It would be interesting and instructive to discuss this question in connection with religious error, both in and out of the professing Christian Church. My present purpose, however, is a more simple and elementary one—namely, to indicate the bearing of the question upon man's reception of the gospel for his salvation. I say, then, that honesty, sincerity, integrity of heart is the required and indispensable condition for perceiving and feeling the divinity and suitability of the gospel; and that even an ignorant man, if he be but sincere, and devoutly anxious to know the will of God, that he may do it, may discover in the Bible those traces of moral beauty and of Divine truth which a learned but unconscientious man will almost certainly fail to find therein. Sincerity of heart—this is the wisest, most natural, and most comprehensive means of access to the inner spirit of that gospel which is the power of God unto salvation. A few remarks in proof of this. [45]

I. Suppose the gospel to be so manifestly filled with the proofs of its divinity that all hearts, even the most obdurate, could not refrain from yielding to its claims. Suppose it to be *self-evidencing*, in the same way and to the same extent, as the sun is self-evidencing by its shining, or fire by its known power to burn. In this case, no moral or intellectual disposition would be necessary in order to its reception. It could no more be denied than the light of the sun, or the consuming power of fire. But what, with such a gospel, would be man's position? Forced to assent to an imperious obligation, he would be, in relation to the gospel and to the salvation provided in it, nothing more than a machine, acting under the impulse of an irresistible necessity. There could, under these circumstances, be neither praise nor blame attached to him. He could no longer be accounted a moral agent—could not be regarded as free, inasmuch as it would not be possible for him to choose error or evil without obvious and startling folly. He could no longer be responsible, because he would have to yield to a necessity. There could be no free thought in his creed, no free love in his heart, and consequently no virtue in his life. [46]

II. Since, then, some disposition is necessary in order to a man's coming to the gospel, suppose that God had imposed an *intellectual* qualification—such, for instance, as is required for the learning of art or of science, or for the understanding of any difficult problem in philosophy. Observe what in that case must follow. If, to discover the truth necessary to salvation, a large measure of natural genius or of accumulated knowledge be required, we must consider as excluded from salvation the immense majority of the human race! Men cannot in any large numbers abandon the common, legitimate, indispensable pursuits of secular life in order to become students of theology. Such an arrangement would shut out from heaven all who have neither time, nor fortune, nor energy of intellect sufficient to enable them to follow our profounder investigations. The poor man for want of means, the sick man for want of strength, the old man for want of time—all, being unable to explore and to make their own the prescribed science, would be lost! The fearfulness of the consequences shows how false the supposed principle must be. [47]

III. Take another supposition; viz., that, in order to a man's being convinced of the truth of the gospel, he should be required to purify his heart from all evil, so that with a clear moral vision he

should be able to see the beauties which have been obscured by his sinful passions. Doubtless this means of appreciating Christianity would be efficacious, were it practicable. But it is not so; for evidently the *knowledge* of the truth must precede the *practice* of the truth. A creature without wings might as well be told that he should go to heaven on condition that he would fly thither!

IV. See now, not what *our* plans might be, but what *God's* plan is. He does not influence man so as to degrade him into a machine: He simply and uniformly demands the worship and the service of willing hearts. He does not require of him the genius or the learning which is the privilege of only a few. He does not ask in advance the goodness which is impossible as a spontaneous production of his degenerate nature. He just requires of all that which they can give, if they will—viz., simple, devout honesty of purpose. Christ's words are not, "If any man *does*;" but, "If any man will do"—*desires* to do—is supremely *anxious* to do—*wills* to do—"the will of God he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." Who, then, has a right to complain? Who cannot be sincere? Who is unable to set before himself the purpose of living up to the light he has in order that he may be in the surest position for receiving more? Who will say, "This condition is too hard?"

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Observe, then, how your case stands. Are you, or are you not, anxious to please God in any way which He may appoint and reveal to you? If you are not, His gospel must be a sealed and unmeaning book to you. Your mind is not open to the faith which unites the soul to the Saviour. You are altogether destitute of the motive which would lead you to the cross. But if you are, what then? You must see at once that you are sinners, that you are guilty, and that you are hopeless. In the light of these convictions, look at the gospel. It tells you of the Divine Saviour who died for you and who rose again, who paid your debt, who took to Himself your penalty, and who has therefore done all that was necessary to set you free. To meet your helplessness, He only asks for your faith, and offers to you the quickening and guiding and upholding influences of His Holy Spirit.

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V.

THE HUMBLE TAUGHT THE LORD'S WAY.

"The meek will He teach His way."—PSALM XXV. 9.

Instead of "meek" read "humble," and then connect the verse with the preceding, so as to see who and what are the persons to whom the Psalmist refers. The righteous Lord will teach sinners His way; but the sinners, in order to be thus divinely taught, must be humble.

Probably this text of Scripture does not seem at first sight to be very promising to some of you. If so, the reason probably is that one at least of the subjects it brings to our notice is not a favourite or inspiring one. Men are comparatively little attracted by the more quiet and passive virtues of life, and among these the virtue of humility is one of the least popular. The truth is that we are still under the influence of Pagan notions about it. The philosophers of the past never understood it. To them it was a mean and despicable thing—the evidence of weakness and poverty of soul, the necessary virtue of the enslaved and the helpless. This notion exists now. The world has far more respect for the self-confident, the noisy, the bombastic, than for the humble. Of course the world's ideas of humility are at fault, and have need to be corrected. We cannot enter upon that task now, except incidentally and very partially. One thing only let me say—namely, that Christianity has transformed and ennobled the despised word by giving us the thing itself. The life of Christ comprises the perfection of humility as well as of every other virtue. In Him we see that humility makes no man contemptible. He was no less a king because He was a servant. And the virtue that was perfect in Him is one of the essential qualities of the Christian character—one of the essential elements of the Christian life, whether in its high enjoyments or in its high achievements.

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The words before us present this virtue of humility under one special aspect. Man has something to learn, and God has something to teach; and humility is *teachableness*. Christianity demands of its disciples that disposition of heart which is the indispensable condition of all learning whatsoever. No more objection can be urged against Christianity for this, than against any art or science or philosophy which men seek to acquire. All these might say to their disciples, "Unless you give up your prejudice, your conceit, your self-will, your presumption, you have no business here; we have nothing to teach you." And so, "poverty of spirit," as Christ intimates in the "Beatitudes," is the strait gate into "the kingdom of God."

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It is only as respects religion that this principle is seriously misunderstood, and a little reflection will show why it is that outside Christianity humility is misapprehended. Humility is the result of self-knowledge, and this cannot be obtained until man has learned to know himself in the light of God's wisdom and holiness. So long as he compares himself with his fellow-creatures around him, it may seem to him that there is no necessity for such an element of character as this. Nor is it in

this way that the virtue is commended and enforced. Whilst the standard of excellence remains merely human, it is quite clear that a man may say, "I am as good as my neighbours; at least, I am no worse." But put before him a holy God and a holy law! In this new light all becomes changed. Apart from that revelation, many flatter themselves that they have lived respectably. They are not conscious of any serious defection in the common, every-day duties of life. Let the great revelation come to them, and they must make wonderful self-discoveries. How many forgotten sins are then brought to mind! How many secret sins are then brought to light! How many temptations have been yielded to for convenience' sake! How much coldness and indifference towards the right, the true, and the good! How much selfishness! How much cowardice! How many meannesses! How many secret and contemptible dishonesties! What culpable ignorance of God! What rebellion against His known will! Is not all this enough to humble a man? Where is the man amongst us who would not rather die than have all his sins brought to light before his fellow-men? Thus, to make us humble, God teaches us, first of all, truly to know ourselves. This is that "conviction of sin" which is wrought by His Holy Spirit.

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God teaches us this in His law, but chiefly by the life of Christ His Son. Who can remain proud when he compares his own life with that? Before men we may, perhaps, hold our own; but before Him there is nothing left for us but self-abasement.

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In presence of such a conviction as this, it is vain for the world to flatter a man, for he has learnt his own misery. He wants to know the truth, for it is only the truth that can save. He knows too much of himself to accept any teaching that would exalt *man*, for he could not accept that without dishonouring God. He wants a frank, firm voice that will trouble him, and to which his conscience will respond. The first question for us is: Have we so learnt to know ourselves, or do we obstinately shut our eyes against God's light? Such a knowledge of sin brings with it a sense of deserved condemnation.

And here God comes in to teach us humility in another way. He shows us His love in Christ. It is not possible that a sinner who has come to the knowledge of himself should discover that he is the object of a love on the part of God such as that which the gospel reveals without being overwhelmed. Show to man a God who judges and condemns, and the sinner must shrink from before Him under the sense of a deserved doom; but show to him a God who comes to him graciously, who loves him, who has provided redemption for him, and who is waiting to receive and to help him, and all the pride of his heart at once breaks down. The prodigal son was most humble when he received his father's kiss of welcome. How can we be proud when we know that God has loved us, and that Christ has died for us? Unbelievers sometimes call the Christian's faith presumption; we know, on the contrary, that the feeling produced is as unlike presumption as it can be. The very faith which accepts the gospel has its root in lowliness of mind. Pride would reject it. And it is at the foot of the cross that humility grows. If not there, then nowhere.

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Thus we see that all our Christian life, in one aspect of it, is a growth in humility. This beautiful virtue affects our whole being, rescuing for God all that has been usurped by sin.

Our reason must be humble. We are living in an age of criticism and discussion; and, both in the Church and out of it, human thought is prone to pride and self-sufficiency. There is work, of course, for thought to do, and we must do it; for thought is God's gift. But it can only be done aright as it is done in humility. We must never touch religious questions with profane hands. Let us rather remember that all our researches into truth should be conducted with a view the better to adore and to obey. We should examine truth only with a desire to perceive, acknowledge, and reverence it. Our Lord teaches us that the gospel both enlightens and blinds. "For judgment I am come into this world, that they who see not might see, and that they who see might be made blind." The first part of this great statement is easily understood; it is the second which startles. But why so? Is it not like Simeon's prediction that Christ would be for the "fall" as well as for the "rising" of many? Is it not like what Paul said of the gospel, that it is a "savour" both of "life unto life" and of "death unto death"? So long as the gospel is not preached in a church or a house, all is quiet—with the quietness of death! As soon as it is preached, some accept it, and say that they have passed from darkness to light; others reject it, and are made angry by its teaching and its claims. If these latter were quiet, we might suppose the gospel to be without effect upon them; but they show that, by hardening themselves against it, they are becoming blinder than ever. Recall other words which point to the same result—words spoken by our Lord: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight." This should be a joyful truth to us, for Jesus had joy in declaring it. Wherein is its worth? The "things" of which He speaks are the doctrines of salvation. "The wise and prudent" are self-satisfied men who think that they can comprehend all religious truth by their own reason alone. The "babes" are humble souls, who, in the consciousness of their ignorance and weakness, look to God for wisdom. Thus Christ says that Divine teaching is necessary for the understanding of gospel truth, and this fact humility alone enables us to feel. Man's intelligence can do many wonderful things, but God Himself must come to our help if we are ever to know the things that pertain to our salvation. Our reason must bow to Him.

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The heart must be humble. We may profess entire mental submission to God, and yet be under the influence of pride. There is a humility which is spurious as well as a humility which is real. It is possible, and not very uncommon, for a man to cherish a false consciousness of merit even in the disbelief and denial of merit! If a man is proud who puts confidence in his self-righteousness, so also is he who puts confidence in his intellectual orthodoxy.

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Our conduct must be humble. This grace of humility must not only dwell in the inner spirit, but be manifested in our outer life. It is vain to come to the cross with the offer of a bending reason, a subdued will, and a broken heart, and then go out into the world intent on the accomplishment of our own purposes. If we are truly humble, we shall be *seen* to be so in the way in which we accept the teachings of events; in our reverent waiting for the signs of the Divine will; in the faithful, unreluctant fulfilment of the humblest duties; in our resignation to, and our acquiescence in, the trials and afflictive dispensations which come upon us. We often see this grace in its greatest beauty at the close of the most eminent lives. God's most gifted men, as a rule, advance in humility as they grow in experience. They are like boughs that bend the lower the more fruit they bear. Like John the Baptist, they say, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

This, then, is the *disposition*, and to it God makes a great *promise*. He will *teach His way* to the humble. This applies [59]

To our knowledge of Divine truth. How uniformly have God's truest witnesses upon earth consisted of men conspicuous for their lowliness of mind. It was to such that the Saviour was first announced and that He first came. Such were the people who listened to Him and accepted Him, whilst the "learned" and the "great" rejected Him. His apostles were humble men; and it has always been by the humble that the strong and the proud have, in the end, been vanquished. Every bright page in the history of the Church is a commentary on our text. To-day, in spite of the progress of thought in our world, we, in regard to the matters that belong to our spiritual life and salvation, have to sit as disciples at the feet of the humble men who themselves sat at the feet of the Divine Teacher who said, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Our views of the truth as it is in Jesus may be modified and corrected; yet the pages of these same humble men are still the standard of our faith and of our teaching. Religious opinions change, not because we have gone beyond Paul and Peter and John, but because we understand them better. This is no plea, no apology, for mental weakness. On the contrary, pride is rather the characteristic of mental weakness and of ignorance than of mental strength and enlightenment. We may search, but we must remember that we always depend upon God for light. In religion the condition of the heart is the condition of knowledge. Proud, haughty, self-sufficient Saul of Tarsus had to be humbled before he could become Paul the Believer and the Apostle. [60]

To the every-day dispensations of life. In this world we are the subjects of God's discipline, and that discipline is for the most part mysterious. The course of events with us is often varied. We are subjected to vicissitudes of every kind—vicissitudes of thought, of impression, of feeling, and of experience. We are troubled in life, in heart, in the cultivation of Christian excellence, in the maintenance of life's relationships, in the performance of duty. Whilst we try to bear in mind the glorious issues to which we are destined, we are often perplexed in our endeavours to ascertain how the discipline we are undergoing tends towards their realisation. We are puzzled by the prevalence of wickedness, by the disappointment of hopes, the apparent futility of many of our prayers; and we say, "I am blind, and the way in which I am walking is unknown to me." Humility will help us to think that God has *His own way* among all these perplexities of ours, though we are unable to trace it. "All things work together for good to them that love God." [61]

God works not as man works, nor
sees
As man sees, though we mark
Ofttimes the moving of His hands
Beneath the eternal Dark.

* * * *

And He who made both life and
death,
He knoweth which is best.
We live to Him, we die to Him,
And leave Him all the rest.

Thus the humble are taught trust, patience, resignation, obedience, peace of heart, and daily advancement in sanctification.

To our bearing towards others. Humility will qualify us cordially to recognise whatever worth they have, to show gentleness and charity to those among them who are faulty and weak, and thus will take us along a line of conduct which will lead to the strengthening of the bonds of brotherhood. "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." The word here rendered "Be clothed" occurs nowhere else in Scripture. It is borrowed from a piece of dress worn by servants when they were doing menial offices, which at once intimated their station, and fitted them for the performance of the duties attached to it. Remember that it is Peter who gives this advice—the Peter who in former days so often brought himself into trouble by his want of humility. Notice, too, the special point he now has in view. He is pleading for harmonious action in the Church, a result which can only be obtained by observing the law of voluntary subordination to established authority—an observance to which the habit of humility will most effectually contribute. Humility is one of the chief social and ecclesiastical virtues, through the medium of which God teaches us what is the attitude we are to [62]

maintain towards those who are around us.

To our Christian work. All the heroes of the faith in past times avowed their personal infirmities. Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul—each, in one form or another, confessed: “When I am weak, then am I strong; I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me. I glory in mine infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” We must lay hold of this thought, for it alone can guard us against discouragement. As long as we depend on ourselves, God will break down our confidence by repeated failures; but when His wisdom has humbled us, His mercy will lift us up. Why should it not be so? We may well be humble in our work when we remember how far we are from being indispensable to God. He can work either with us or without us, as He pleases. It is His own order to achieve mighty moral results through the humblest instrumentalities; and frequently His independence of us is taught in a very striking way—as, for example, when He calls to Himself some great preacher, or some man who is doing wide-spread good, in the midst of his activity and his usefulness. Besides, we have no monopoly of any one gift of the Christian life—either as regards the gift itself or as regards the quality and extent of the service which it can be made to render. Others excel us in the very thing of which we are most proud. Many of our fellow Christians are doing the same kind of works as ourselves, only far better. And as to our “gifts,” let us not forget that they *are* gifts. We have “received” them; and why, then, should we boast as if we had not received them, but were ourselves the creators of them? Moreover, in proportion to our gifts, so is our responsibility, and “to whom much is given, of him shall much be required.” Have we used such gifts as we have as nobly as we might? Have we fallen into no needless errors, no selfishness, no half-heartedness? So then, while everything calls us to duty, there is much to fill us with contrition; and mingling fidelity and humility together, our exclusive confidence must be in God. This is the Divine way which the Divine Teacher teaches to the humble. [63]

The Lord’s way. This is a beautiful and lovable expression. It links earth with heaven. There *is* a way which leads to God; a way in which God walks with us, and we with Him; a way that is peaceful here, while it leads to the land of rest above. We begin it in humility, confessing our sins at the cross, and accepting God’s mercy there. We end it before the throne, casting our crowns at the feet of Him who died to save us. [64]

Hark! universal nature shook and groan’d,
’Twas the last trumpet—see the Judge
enthroned:

Rouse all your courage at your utmost need,
Now summon every virtue, stand and plead.
What! silent? Is your boasting heard no more?
That self-renouncing wisdom, learn’d before,
Had shed immortal glories on your brow,
That all your virtues cannot purchase now.

All joy to the believer! He can speak,
Trembling yet happy, confident yet meek.
Since the dear hour that brought me to Thy
foot,

And cut up all my follies by the root,
I never trusted in an arm but Thine,
Nor hoped but in Thy righteousness divine:
My prayers and alms, imperfect and defiled,
Were but the feeble efforts of a child;
Howe’er perform’d, it was their brightest part,
That they proceeded from a grateful heart:
Cleansed in Thine own all purifying blood,
Forgive their evil, and accept their good:
I cast them at Thy feet, my only plea
Is what it was, dependence upon Thee:
While struggling in the vale of tears below,
That never failed, nor shall it fail me now.
Angelic gratulations rend the skies,
Pride falls unpitied never more to rise,
Humility is crown’d, and Faith receives the
prize. [65]

VI.

THE GRATITUDE OF THE PARDONED.

“Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.”—LUKE vii. 47.

It has been observed that the Bible records with great minuteness events which a secular historian would deem beneath his notice, whilst, on the other hand, matters of great secular importance are passed over unmentioned. What ordinary historian would think of narrating such a story as the one we have in the verses before us? The Bible records it because it is a history of souls. To a Bible historian, the conversion of a soul is an event of unique sublimity, and everything that can illustrate it is felt to be a source of deepest interest. The history of outward events will pass into oblivion; the history of souls will be read in eternity.

The narrative before us is one of the most beautiful and touching in the gospel record. It was a saying of Gregory the Great: "Whenever I think of this story I am more inclined to weep over it than to preach upon it." It is just the tale to prompt deep, quiet feeling rather than elaborate disquisition. It contains an illustration in real life of the old promise: "A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench." It declares the Saviour's matchless sympathy for the sinner, and the most broken-hearted sinner's hope in Him. It teaches these lessons for all time, since in Christ and in His system of Redemption there can be no change. Let us look at the narrative somewhat closely, and may God help us to see in it Christ as the refuge of the lost, and the thankfulness to Him which must possess the soul whom He has saved. When we have said all we can, there will yet remain much more to be felt. [67]

Before I proceed, however, let me say that this narrative must not be confounded with another which is in many respects like it, and which has been told by the other evangelists. In both cases, the name of the host is Simon, and in both a woman anoints the Lord Jesus, and wipes His feet with her hair. But the differences are numerous. In this case, the host is a Pharisee living in Galilee, and he looks on Christ with mistrust; in the other case, the host is a healed leper in Judea, bound to Christ by grateful love. In this case, the anointing proceeds from personal and grateful love, and has no other specialty of motive; in the other case, Jesus says: "Let her alone; against the day of my burying hath she kept this." Here, Jesus is blamed by the Pharisee; there, the woman is blamed by the disciples. Pride is the root of Simon's objection; the objection of the disciples springs from selfishness. Here a sinner is pardoned; there a disciple is honoured. Here, in all probability, the woman was Mary Magdalene; there, the woman was the sister of Lazarus. [68]

We have no information as to the reason which induced this Pharisee to invite Christ to his house. The verse I have read as a text may obscurely hint to us, perhaps, that he himself had come under some obligation to Jesus, and not feeling any true gratitude, he thought he might acquit himself of his obligation by a compliment of this kind! Or the invitation may have sprung from curiosity, or from vanity, or from ambition. Possibly he may have wished to play the *patron*. Anyhow, we have no sign that he was urged by spiritual considerations. Many men come—if one might so say—*locally* near to Christ, who have no faith in Him, and no love for Him. [69]

Neither have we any information as to the reason or reasons which induced Christ to accept this invitation. Several reasons might be imagined. He may have hoped, as the opportunity was specially favourable, to bring a blessing to the Pharisee's heart. Men are never more open, or more submissive, or more susceptible to the word of love, than when they themselves are showing kindness in the form of the hospitalities of home and of the family circle. Perhaps, too, He may have felt that to decline the invitation would be to lay Himself open to an accusation on the part of the Pharisees that He neglected or spurned them, whilst He could put Himself in close communication with "publicans and sinners." At any rate, we have here a beautiful instance of the self-denial of His love. He knew what awaited Him, and yet He went.

And now we have to notice that when Jesus had passed over the threshold of the Pharisee's house the door was open to "a woman who was a sinner." How was this? The simple and sufficient answer is that Jesus was there. Otherwise she would not have dared to enter within the perfumed respectability and sanctity of such a place. That would have been a terror to such a fallen one as she. But redeeming love had already begun its work upon her heart, so that she could come without misgiving, could enter with a holy confidence. When Christ appears, grace bears the sceptre, and the law loses its power to alarm. [70]

We may take this incident, therefore, as a striking illustration of the spirit of Christ and of His true followers, as contrasted with Pharisaism in its suspiciousness, its blindness, its narrowness, and its ascetic scrupulosity.

The woman, probably under the pressure of gratitude for some act of compassionate love already received from Christ, is full of the holiest and tenderest emotions. In a fine, sacred humility, she weeps, and washes His feet with her tears. True tears they are, for they are the tears of penitence—and not of penitence only, but of thankfulness also. Confused and bewildered, perhaps, she wipes the feet on which they have fallen with her hair, and then kisses them, and anoints them with costly ointment! Such is the gratitude of the pardoned—deep, strong, irrepressible. And she expresses it in touchingly significant ways. [71]

The woman's action was distasteful to the Pharisee. The touch of a Gentile, or of a notoriously wicked person, was supposed to leave pollution behind it, and therefore by the Pharisees it was scrupulously avoided. Thus Simon had no understanding whatever of the scene before him. He had no eyes to see, no ears to hear, how the angels were filling heaven with the music of their joy over this poor sinner who had repented. A weak human virtue might be contaminated by contact with such an one as she had been; but not His who was the Christ of God. No doubt, apart from the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, apart from the strength which God imparts to the soul by His grace, a man does run the risk of polluting his morality by allowing it to be touched

by the impure streams of his fellow-creatures' vices. This has always been so fully recognised that we have a whole system of proverbial philosophy on the point. Christ, however, was perfect, and His purity was such that it could not incur this danger. Outward contact with "sinners" could bring no contamination to Him.

Simon took offence at the conduct of the woman, and began at once to indulge in dark, though unspoken, suspicions against Christ for permitting it. His suspicion took this form: "This man professes to be a prophet, and is regarded as a prophet by His followers. But surely, if He were a prophet, He would have known this woman's character, and would have repelled her from Him, instead of permitting such demonstrations of affection as these." Simon's notion of a "prophet" was that he must possess at least two qualifications. (1) He must have a knowledge of the characters of the persons with whom He has to deal. On behalf of merely ordinary, human prophets, this was an exaggerated claim. To what prophet could Simon point who was able to read the heart? How did he know that Christ had ever seen this woman before? And on the supposition that He had not, on what ground could Simon demand that, in order to be entitled to the designation of a prophet, He should show an insight into her character at the commencement of the very first interview. Christ had the insight; but Simon felt constrained to doubt it for no other reason than that He did not instantly repel the woman from Him. (2) And so, in Simon's judgment, the second qualification of a "prophet" consisted in such a moral exclusiveness as would forbid contact with sinners. He thought that, if Christ did know what manner of woman this was, His tolerance of her conduct at this time was sufficient proof that He could not be a good man, and was not, therefore, to be regarded as a prophet. A prophet's sanctity would have forbidden such a scene as this. But again we ask, Whence could such a notion have sprung? Who among the "prophets" ever stood aloof from sinners? Was it not emphatically to sinners that they were sent? [72]

Simon's reasoning was full of sophistry, and the sophistry came from a defective heart. Had he known the nature of the Saviour's mission—as one which demanded a perfect knowledge of all hearts, combined with grace, love, and power to save the worst—he might perhaps have felt and reasoned differently. [73]

His thoughts were unspoken, but Christ divined them, and proceeded to deal with them. To the personal imputation He made no reply. It was a little thing to Him to be judged by man. It was sufficient for Him to aim at two points. One was to vindicate the woman on well-known principles, and the other, to lead the Pharisee to self-examination. With these two objects in view, He utters a parable, and applies it to the case in hand. The parable and its application are both marked by a mingled faithfulness and love. He makes Simon himself to be the judge in the case He describes, and on the basis of Simon's own judgment He brings the practical point right home to the proud heart of the man. By a few sharp and striking contrasts, He shows that the woman, sinful as she has been, has manifested more love to Him than Simon Himself whose guest He is! Though a discredited stranger, she has done for Him what Simon, His host, had failed to do. [74]

"Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee."

"Master, say on."

"There was a certain creditor, who had two debtors: the one owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"

"I suppose, he to whom he forgave most."

"Thou hast rightly judged. Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house; thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." [75]

Having said this, Christ crowns His work of love by saying to the woman, "Thy sins are forgiven."

Now in all this we have an explanation and a vindication of the grateful love to Christ which fills and animates the pardoned soul. This love is shown to us—

I. *In its source.* The grace of Christ in forgiving sins. Grace! How great! since it forgives all equally; the debtor who owes five hundred pence as well and as completely as the one who owes fifty—greater sinners and lesser sinners alike! For sinners of every grade there is but one relief, and that is Divine mercy—needed by those who have sinned least as well as by those who have sinned most, and equally sufficing for both. Grace! How free! since it forgives where no satisfaction can be made. "Nothing to pay;" such is the condition of every sinner before God. "Without money and without price;" such is God's gracious invitation. [76]

II. *In its law.* It is in the nature of things that love should beget love, and that the love thus originated should be measured by the extent of the favour which has been shown. "We love Him, because He first loved us." Hence, love does not precede pardon, but is the fruit of it, and is proportioned to the sense of obligation. This doctrine, clear as it is, is not apprehended by all, and is even contradicted by some. The inveterate spirit of self-righteousness has made men say: "See this woman. By loving much she obtains the forgiveness of many sins." This is palpably the reverse of *Christ's* teaching in this case. Love to God can never be the growth of unrenewed and

unforgiven hearts. "To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." This shows the true order: forgiveness and then love. So that love is no plea for pardon; Christ does not say, "Thy love hath saved thee," but "thy faith."

I love the Lord. He lent an ear
When I for help implored;
He rescued me from all my
fear;
Therefore I love the Lord.

III. *In its character.* It is an all-absorbing feeling, which prompts the offering of the best gifts to the Saviour, and which fills such offerings with the spirit of devoutness, humility, and self-denial. [77]

Two closing thoughts.

1. Men may be very near to the source of salvation and eternal life, without coming into the realisation of these blessings. In the outward sense, Christ was very near to this Pharisee and to his friends; but they did not perceive His spiritual power. They thought He was only a man like unto themselves; possibly, perhaps, on a somewhat higher plane of manhood, though many of them do not seem to have given Him credit even for that. His forgiveness was announced to this poor sinful, but contrite woman in their hearing; but the best effect it had upon them was to fill them with a dubious wonder, and to set them on questioning His authority. Near as they were to Him, they failed to see in Him, what "the woman who was a sinner" saw. Such is the position, practically, of multitudes to-day. Not, indeed, that their nearness to Christ is a local nearness, as in the case of those who were immediately around Him in the days of His flesh. They could look upon His outward form, could literally hear His voice. Not so now. But there is another nearness to Him which is moral and spiritual. We have His Word—the record of His life, the Divine repository of His teaching. We have the ordinances of His worship—ordinances by which His Word is brought more home to our understandings and hearts. We have the influences of His truth shed over all the scenes in which we move. The surface influences of Christianity modify and, to some extent, mould the whole of our social life. Moreover, Scripture takes account of the differences in human character. This woman, who was a sinner, and this Pharisee were not alike in their relation to Christ. There was one to whom He said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." Not far from it, and yet not in it. Are there no such cases now? All are sinners; but depravity is developed in much grosser forms in some than in others; and religious influences, which fall short of effecting a complete conversion, nevertheless often deter men from plunging into extreme vice. It is mournfully possible to be near to Christ, and yet not to come into the enjoyment of His salvation. [78]

2. On the other hand, there are instances in which people obtain salvation who seem, as to character, farthest away from it. The case of this sinful woman is an illustration in point. We have no right to mitigate or to extenuate her guilt. Let it be recognised in all its dark completeness. As an actual sinner she had sunk very low. Her sin was against nature's purest laws, and was of the kind that soon and effectually kills shame—one of the most fatal forms of sin, and declared to be such, not only by God's law, but by the common consent of the universal conscience of the civilised world; a sin committed against the strongest restraints—the restraints of sacred womanhood; perhaps against the memory of the holy associations of childhood, a father's tenderness, a mother's love, and all the joy of a happy home. Such was this woman—"a bruised reed." But she was brought to tears under a sense of Paradise lost, the tears of despair; and yet again to tears of joy under the sense of Paradise regained. How many more—far off as she—have been made nigh; treated by fellow sinners as the offscouring of the earth, yet drawn to the Saviour. They are brought to the cross; they repent, believe, are sanctified, and exult in the consciousness of eternal life. Constrained by the mercies of God, they yield themselves a living sacrifice to Him. [79]

The whole scene before us is one of the boldest triumphs of reconciliation and love, in contrast with Pharisaic suspicion and unforgiveness; and it supplies the fullest inspiration for the largest hope. [80]

May we all come to Christ as this woman did, and hear, as she heard, His gentle "Go in peace!"

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VII.

CONSECRATION.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."—ROMANS xii. 1, 2.

In bringing this passage before you, I have to dwell specifically on the motives to self-

consecration to God, and to what is involved therein; and I do so with the twofold object of reconsidering the sources of our Christian hope and strength, and the incentives to our growth in the Divine life.

The apostle commences his appeal with the word "therefore." This is a logical term, leading to a conclusion from premises which have been previously stated. It does not stand alone, but in an argument resumes in itself all that has been advanced. Take careful note of the simple words of Scripture. There is point in them all. If, for example, the use of the word "therefore" in this text be overlooked, we shall be unable properly to feel the force of the apostle's appeal. What is it, then, that the apostle has said in this epistle, and of which he intends, by this word "therefore," to remind his readers? He has been giving to them a large, full, grand exposition of the great truths of redemption. He has prepared the way for this by a graphic picture of the sinfulness and helplessness of human nature. He has shown that the heathen world is grossly depraved—in a state of alienation from God, which is to a certain extent wilful (chap. i. 29-32). He has proceeded to demonstrate that, with all their advantages, the Jews are no better *at heart* than the heathen, and as truly sinful, condemned, and hopeless as they (ii. 17-24). The conclusion supplied by these facts is, that none are righteous—that all, Jews and Gentiles alike, have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and that all stand on the same ground of spiritual danger. This brings out the fact that redemption is the pressing need of the whole world. The way is now clear for the presentation of the gospel. *The basis of redemption is Christ's work of atonement.* The foundation of the plan of salvation is God's free grace—His boundless, sovereign love. Christ came forth from the Father as the expression of this. He suffered, bled, died for us, to meet the claims of the Divine law on our behalf, and to procure our justification and peace. "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood" (iii. 24, 25). "Jesus Christ, who was delivered for our offences" (iv. 25). "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (v. 6-8). Salvation, then, is founded upon the atonement of Christ—a proper work of propitiation, providing for pardon and justification. *The condition of this salvation on our part is simply the acceptance of it by faith.* Faith is primarily the repose of the soul in Christ's redeeming work—a yielding to God's method of saving us. It operates to this end independently—yea, even to the exclusion—of all works of self-righteousness. "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified." It is inconsistent with all boasting. "Where is boasting, then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." This simple condition of salvation is the only one which can be adapted to our need. Sinners as we are, our condition is hopeless unless redemption be offered to us as a free gift. *This redemption is secured to all who believe by God's unalterable purpose and promise.* It is not vitally affected by recurring doubts and fears, nor even by our often insufficient struggles against sin (viii. 28-39). *The result is inconceivably glorious;* freedom from condemnation, adoption into God's family, joy, peace, full favour with God here, and heaven with its perfect glory, consummated in the resurrection, hereafter.

Now, it is at the close of all this that the apostle's "therefore" comes; and these are the facts and principles which give to it its point and force. It links all the disclosures of Divine love with the obligations of redeemed souls. Since God has done so much as this for you, what then? By the remembrance of the sin which left you without hope; by the greatness of the love of God who, to save you, gave His well-beloved Son to an atoning death on your behalf; by the greatness of the love of Christ who, to save you, consecrated Himself to this perfect sacrifice; by His birth and death, by His cross and passion, by His resurrection and ascension; by the freeness and the simplicity of the condition on which Christ's salvation becomes yours; by your present peace; by your hope which blooms with immortality and with eternal life; *by these, the mercies of God,* I beseech you, yield yourselves to God. That surrender must be the first, the natural, the inevitable result of any vivid and practical realisation of the Divine goodness. "Yield your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

The Apostle Paul was pre-eminently the teacher of what are called the doctrines of grace. In the system of Divine truth which he gives us, he leaves no room for the indulgence on man's part of the least sentiment of pride. The gospel, in his view, is the Divine expedient for what must otherwise have been a desperate and hopeless case; an expedient, therefore, which—since, from first to last, it is the expression of God's free and sovereign love—cannot allow of any self-glorying to man as unregenerate, or of any self-satisfaction to man as Christian. Hence the uniformity and consistency of his teaching with respect to "works." In the believer and the unbeliever alike, these "works," judged by "the law"—the standard of moral perfection—are all defective, and therefore unavailing. The same truth applies to them all at every stage of the Christian's progress towards heaven. In no sense does salvation come by "works," "lest any man should boast."

On this point, however, the apostle has always been misunderstood by persons who have pushed his teaching to an illegitimate conclusion. If all be of "grace," why insist upon "works"? The objection was made in his day, and he met it. It is made in our day, and has still to be met. It is sufficiently met by Paul's own method. Paul's doctrine of grace could never, in his mind, lead to "licentiousness," and it is one of the most remarkable phenomena of religious thought that it should have ever been suspected of doing so. The Christian man, in Paul's view, is the regenerate

man; and the regenerate man is the holy man. Without the spirit and life of holiness Paul would have deemed it absurd to consider a man a Christian at all. The passage before us, even if there were no others of the same kind, is sufficient to prove how indissolubly connected are privilege and obligation in the Christian life. As we have seen, the apostle draws the exhortations which commence with this chapter, and which are exhaustively presented in all their variety and comprehensiveness—exhortations to a complete consecration to God in all the practical forms which it can assume—from the great gospel system, the system of salvation by grace and by grace alone; evidently taking it for granted that, by the contemplation of the grace for man which is in Christ Jesus, the minds of his readers would be softened, and prepared to acknowledge the claim.

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What, then, is the nature of the consecration to which we are thus urged? “That ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” Every word in this description tells: and if we gather together the elements of the service commended, we shall find that nothing is wanting, and that under the various particulars we may range all the duties and beauties of a consecrated Christian life.

The only point on which a question might be raised is as to the meaning of the terms: “That ye present your *bodies* a *living* sacrifice.” Some have supposed a contrast here between the dead bodies of the animals offered in the old sacrifices and the living self-consecration of the Christian. If the supposition be just, the idea is both beautiful and suggestive. I think, however, that the ultimate meaning of the apostle is that the believer in Christ should devote *himself* wholly to God, and that the term “your bodies” is only another term for “yourselves.” We cannot imagine an acceptable bodily, or external sacrifice, without the participation in it of the conscience, the judgment, the heart, the whole man. The apostle puts his thought somewhat more fully in the kindred passage: “Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God’s.” Observe, then, the elements of this consecration.

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1. *Individuality*. It is to be a personal thing. “Present yourselves.” We cannot fulfil our Christian mission by transferring it to other hands. There are no proxies in religion. Organisations, committees, associations, the giving of money—all have their propriety, but none of them can take the place of personal “presentation.” For convenience’ sake, organisations of various kinds may be resorted to with a view to the maintenance and spread of the gospel in the world, and undoubtedly may be usefully employed in spheres beyond the reach of personal endeavour; but the individual Christian must *himself* be engaged in the service of God. Every believer in the Saviour has his own sphere of service, in which no fellow creature can be substituted for Him. The Christian law is: personal service always in so far as it is possible; vicarious service only in so far as personal service cannot be rendered.

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2. *Activity*. “A living sacrifice.” No man fulfils his Christian commission in mere retirement and contemplation. It is true that he is not to be “of the world;” but in the nature of the case he must be “in” it. Retirement and contemplation are, indeed, needed for the rest and growth of the soul; but action is at least equally indispensable. Our practical life is the chief part of our testimony for God, and the chief weapon of our aggressive warfare upon the unbelief and irreligion around us; and in order that it may be effective, it is required, in its fulness and in its energy, to be pervaded, invigorated, impelled, and directed by the Christian spirit. Every scene, every experience, every development of life is to be hallowed. If we “present ourselves a living sacrifice,” we relinquish all self-claim, and give ourselves up to God to be used by Him for the purposes of His glory. As Christ’s sacrifice began with the moment when He left His Father’s throne, so ours must begin with the first consciousness of our salvation—“a living sacrifice,” the consecration of the whole life with all its powers.

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3. *Holiness*. “Holy,” because *to God*, with the full intention and devotion of the soul. This scarcely needs to be insisted on. There may be an apparent religious devotedness which is not real, because it takes the form of ostensibly religious acts—acts, however, which have not their origin and their impelling force in grateful love to God for His saving mercy, but in some kind of selfishness, and which are therefore unholy in themselves, and unacceptable to God. The consecrated life is the life which is in sympathy with the whole character and will of Him by whom the supreme blessing of redemption has been bestowed.

4. *Reasonableness*. The true consecration is not the result of any mere positive or arbitrary enactment, the ground and propriety of which cannot be discerned. The true Christian does not spend his life upon a certain principle, and consequently in a certain way, merely because he is *told* to do so. The service which he renders to God rises out of his felt *relations* to God. If it were not commanded at all—if it were not even formally hinted at as an obligation—it would still be natural, “reasonable,” and therefore right. The realised “mercies of God” would be instinctively understood to claim it—instinctively felt to prompt it. “Your reasonable service.” The words are significant. “Service” is properly *homage*. “Reasonable” is that which pertains to the *mind*. So that the apostle’s phrase stands opposed to all mere religious externalism. It is the homage of the life to God with the full consent of the mind, in the consciousness of the sacred obligation arising out of the enjoyment of the Divine mercy in the salvation of the soul.

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Such service is declared to be “acceptable to God.” It is so for the sake of Christ whose grace has infused into the soul the life out of which it springs; it is so because the motives which determine it are right and good; and it is so because it is the loving gift of His own children.

But the apostle expands his thought, so as to set forth this consecration under other aspects—as, for example, that of *nonconformity to the world*. “Be not conformed to this world.” A word of

explanation is required on the meaning of the term, "this world." It is obvious that this term has no reference to the external frame of things, considered in itself. In a loose way we apply the term "world" to many things, and Nature is one of them. But full compliance with the apostle's admonition in the text is compatible with even an enthusiastic admiration of Nature. Nature is a mirror in which we may see the wisdom and the goodness of God. It is full of the beautiful to be loved—full of the sublime to be admired. Its phenomena, forms, and laws, are worthy of the most reverential and pleasurable investigation, not only for what they are in themselves, but because the most spiritual Christian can say, "My Father made them all: they are His." The term "world," again, sometimes means the aggregate of human beings; but nonconformity to the world is at the furthest remove from misanthropy. Human beings are proper objects of a Christian's love, and his love for them is shown in the best efforts he can make for their welfare. Every man is, to his mind, invested with a sacred importance. He endeavours to estimate men as fully as possible in the same way as God does, of whom it is said that "His mercies are over all His works," and that "He so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." At the lowest, man is God's image—mournfully defaced, it is true—but retaining in his nature traces enough of his original dignity to compel our recognition of him as God's handiwork; whilst also, even at the lowest, he may be brought under the influences of a gospel which despairs of none. Neither is there anything in the apostle's injunction to condemn the social relationships which prevail amongst us or to weaken our appreciation of them. The true Christian, indeed, will ever be the best husband, the best wife, the best parent, the best child, the best friend. All these natural relationships are capable of being ennobled by the holy, sanctifying influences of true religion. God Himself often appeals to them as types of the relations in which He stands to us, and as explanations of the tenderness of the love He cherishes for us. How prominent is the position they take in the epistles. The inspired writers thought none of them beneath their notice. God has given to us His will in connection with such humble things as domestic service, slavery, and the like. Neither does the apostle here call upon us to separate ourselves from the common business of secular life. Scripture again and again enforces the honest doing of the work of every day, on which the bread of every day depends. Nor is there here any prohibition of the enjoyment of the utmost happiness which the sinless pleasures of our outward life can afford. The Christian is peculiarly fitted for such enjoyment, because he can receive it with a devoutly thankful heart, and in a spirit which will keep it from being harmful. [92] [93] [94]

This term, "the world," means *the age*, or the temporal conditions now existing, considered from a moral and spiritual point of view. "The world," therefore, to which we are not to be "conformed" is the order and course of life followed by those to whom the present is all and eternity nothing. The Christian is to regard life from another, a higher—namely, a spiritual and eternal—point of view, and to live accordingly. It is the *wrong spirit* of life that the apostle calls us away from—the life which is governed by "worldly" impulses and motives. His injunction is like unto that of another apostle: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." "The lust of the flesh"—carnality—the lowest of all the forms of self-gratification—that which makes the drunkard, the profligate, the debauchee. "The lust of the eyes"—the disposition to attach ourselves to what is external, showy, dazzling. "The pride of life"—the tendency to glory in anything which ministers to our self-importance in our worldly position—wealth, rank, station. All these things are passing away, and are therefore unworthy of the supreme place in our hearts. Enjoyments springing out of them, hopes founded upon them, must perish. Only he that "doeth the will of God"—living above the love of the world, by living to God and in the supreme love of Him—"abideth for ever" in the higher and happier order of being. [95]

There is a proper "use" of the world, which is easily distinguished from its "abuse." The worldly spirit of an unchristian man says, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." The ascetic spirit in a Christian man says, "All contact with the world is dangerous: we must have nothing to do with it. Touch not, taste not, handle not." The true spirit of Christianity says, "Use the world, but do not abuse it." The Christian's inheritance is inclusive of "all things." All may be made to minister to his spiritual growth, and to become the means of blessing on his part to others. Avail yourself of all, then, but within the limits proper to each; never allowing any, by over indulgence, to check the development of the inner life. Use the world, but do not let the world use you. "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest *keep them from the evil.*" [96]

In looking, then, at the idea of nonconformity to the world, it was in the apostle's mind, we are impressed by one or two reflections.

1. The apostle takes a wide, free, and exalted view of his subject. He is in marked dissent from the spirit of Pharisaism, whether among the Jews, or in the Christian Church. His plan is different from the ordinary rules and restraints which men put upon themselves, and which attach (sometimes arbitrarily enough) merely to certain habits and forms of life which are of no moment. Paul's "world" does not mean certain conditions of society, certain amusements, or certain occupations, conventionally marked off from all the rest as being specially wrong. It is not a mere cleaning of the outside of the platter. He goes deeply into the heart of things. What he teaches is this: "Ye are God's redeemed, disciples of Christ, heirs of glory." Live under the inspiration of all this—all will then follow that ought to follow. You are no longer under law, which says, "Touch not, taste not, handle not—stand entirely aloof;" but under grace, with love to God as your [97]

motive, and the Spirit of Christ as your guide. He could say, "I am not of the world;" and yet He was no prophet of the wilderness, but a Brother and Sympathiser everywhere. The first great social act of His public ministry was to associate Himself with the joy of life. With its sorrow also He was equally at home. He lived His Divine life in every scene—in His childhood under the roof of His parents, in the toil for bread, in public, in private, in the temple, in the family at Bethany. There is no allowable scene in which we move, and with which we mingle, from which His sanctifying presence is withheld. We have no need to be afraid to go where He has been before us, if only we go in His spirit. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

2. This law lays no hard bondage on life. Not on its duties; for Christianity raises them all into consecration;—not on its affections; for Christianity purifies them all;—nor on its lawful enjoyments; for Christianity forbids nothing but sin. Worldliness is determined by the *spirit* of our life, not by the objects with which we have to do. It is only "the *lust* of the flesh, the *lust* of the eye, and the *pride* of life" that are prohibited. It is not a worldly object that makes us worldly, but the worldly spirit with which we regard it. [98]

3. It is easy to see that this principle of nonconformity to the world is in constant requisition. There is abundant scope for it. The opinions of men and the known will of God are often in competition; it ought never to be a matter of doubt as to which we prefer. We are often exposed to allurements into scenes which are notoriously unfavourable to the development of the spiritual life; there ought not to be even a momentary uncertainty as to our willingness to resist the allurements—not merely for our own sake, but for the sake of Him whose "mercies" we enjoy, whose we are, and whom we profess to serve. There should never be any room for the question as to whether we are on the side of right or wrong, holiness or sin, spirituality or carnality, [99] conscience or convenience, charity or harshness, faith or unbelief.

Thus we see that, whilst in one aspect of it Christianity is broad, in another it is narrow. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life." These are the words of the Divine Author of our faith. This is the chief ground of dislike which men of the world have to the practical claims of the gospel. Say with Paul that everything we do must be done to the glory of God; say with Christ that sin is in our secret thoughts as well as in our acts, and then the complaint of "strictness" is instantly heard. Yet is it not evident that an inward holiness is the only thing that can be taught, and that without inward holiness there is no real holiness at all? The truth is that men secretly want concessions to be made in favour of their favourite sins—one for his ambition, another for his unlawful or questionable attachments, another for his covetousness, another for his liberty to be dishonest in trade or insincere in society, another—where shall we stop? Concessions? Men may make concessions in these directions in the name of Christianity; but Christianity itself disowns them. "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." [100]

"Be not conformed to this world." So obviously true are the remarks which have been made, that one reflection might well excite a momentary surprise. It might be said, "Is not unworldliness of the very essence of the new life? And if it be, why recommend that which must follow in the due course of things?" It is true that unworldliness *is* of the essence of the new life; but we have to remember that we receive that life, not perfectly developed, but in its germ; and that the process of its growth is impeded by what remains of the old life which it is destined gradually, and by-and-by completely, to replace. This is the phenomenon which Paul describes when he speaks of the conflict between the "old" man and the "new." Our will is called upon at every point to decide between the impulses of our new condition and the habits of the old. [101]

In conclusion, how is this nonconformity to the world, in the spirit of a grateful consecration to God, to be attained? "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." This is the great desideratum—the great necessity. The primary change must take place in the mind—not in its nature, but in the kind and order of its *life*. It must be "renewed" in its bias, in its inclinations, in its aspirations, so that it may be able to understand and appreciate the Divine will, and to address itself to the order of service which the Father of mercies shall accept.

It may be said, "What do we know of the spiritual world? And how can we be conformed to a world of which we know nothing?" The answer is, that our very Christianity supposes the change which sets this objection aside. Our love to this present world can only be subdued by its being superseded *by* another, or subordinated *to* another. Our love to Christ is the great secret of our attachment to heaven and to heavenly things. Given a soul under the influence of love to God, and loyalty to God must follow. [102]

In order to this, however, there must be self-knowledge. We must see our "differences." There must be the study of the character of Christ. There must also be earnest prayer for, and trust in, the help of the Holy Spirit. The work before us is more than an occasional outburst of religious sentiment; more than spasmodic, self-denying charity under the influence of suddenly awakened emotion; more than scrupulosity about small matters of pleasure or pursuit. *It is a life*; and as such it has spontaneity, freedom, and blessedness. In many an instance it attains wonderful maturity on earth; it is perfected in heaven.

Is this life ours? Oh, accept the one and only Saviour—exclusive in His claims, yet offering His mercy to all. You are conscious of sin, and this makes you feel (if you reflect) your need of salvation. Take it from Him. All He asks is that you should turn from the sin that made Him bleed, and trust the love which for you was stronger than death. Strait as is the gate through which you must enter into “life,” that life is in itself one of holy freedom and holy joy. The “gate” opens into broad fields of exhaustless treasure. Whoever may represent the Christian life as monotonous and poor, we say it is not so. It is quietness of heart, loftiness of feeling, sweet submission, trust, loyalty to the highest, aspiration after the best, the abnegation of self in blessing others and in glorifying the God and Father of all; such is the life to which the Christian is called. We challenge the world to produce a single case of a Christian regretting his consecration, or confessing that he made a sorry exchange, when he left the world’s delusive hopes for pardon, peace, the Father’s smile, the way of holiness, and the assurance of heaven. The wholly consecrated Christian is the wholly happy one.

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Fling wide the portals of your heart;
Make it a temple set apart
From earthly use, for heaven’s
 employ,
Adorn’d with prayer and love and joy:
So shall your sovereign enter in,
And new and nobler life begin.

Redeemer, come! I open wide
My heart to Thee; here, Lord, abide!
Let me Thine inner presence feel,
Thy grace and love in me reveal;
Thy Holy Spirit guide me on,
Until the glorious crown be won!

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VIII.

CHRISTIANITY IN OUR DAILY LIFE.

“Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”—COLOSSIANS iii. 17.

One of the most striking characteristics of the Christian religion is what I may term its *universality*. I mean that its obligations and privileges cover the whole ground of human life—present and to come. This fact, which is abundantly illustrated and enforced in the New Testament, is also clearly hinted at in the Old. It seems to have been present to the Psalmist’s mind in the parallel he draws in the nineteenth Psalm between the sun, whose going forth is from the end of heaven, whose circuit is unto the ends of it, and from whose heat nothing is hid; and “the law of the Lord” which, in its perfectness, comes into satisfying contact with all human need. It converts the soul, turning it towards itself, the source of light. It makes wise the simple, who unreservedly yield to its influence. It rejoices the heart, anxious to be right, as it is itself perfect. It enlightens the eyes with a purity of truth which has no admixture of error. It cleanses from secret faults. It keeps back the servant of the Lord from presumptuous sins.

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This universality gives to Christianity its grand ideal character. It teaches that, morally considered, sin is the condition of *all men*; that condemnation is the result of sin to *all men*; and that the love of the Father, the sacrifice of the Son, and the regenerating and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit have direct bearings on the spiritual wants of *all men*. Christianity meets an absolute ruin by an absolute restoration; so that, as there is nothing in man and in his relations to the universe which sin has not defiled and degraded, so there is nothing in man and in his relations to the universe which Christianity is not designed and destined to uplift and to purify.

This element of universality comes out very strikingly in the chapter before us. The apostle is describing the spiritual life. In its essence, it is an abandonment of the “old”—“putting off the old man,” as a dress thrown completely aside; and an adoption of the new—“putting on the new man”—the prodigal’s rags exchanged for the best robe. In its range, it is universal—*within*, setting the affections on heavenly things; *without*, renouncing the deeds of the life of sin, and manifesting the virtues of the life of holiness. It is universal also in its application—involving personal purity, and giving its own tone and spirit to all the relationships, to all the worship, and to all the work, of life. The whole is summed up in the remarkable words of the text: “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do *all* in the name of the Lord Jesus.” We are the subjects of a Providence and a Grace inclusive of every moment and every incident. God, on His part, demands of us a consecration that shall leave nothing (however unimportant, relatively considered) unhallowed—not a single affection, no domestic or social relationship, nothing in speech, nothing in conduct. It is the same truth that the same apostle elsewhere expresses: “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

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I want to offer to your attention at this time a single application of this principle—its application to the common, secular work of life.

At first sight, it seems strange that by far the greater part of human life should be appointed by God to be spent in worldly toil. This strangeness is augmented in proportion as our aim is towards a life distinctively and completely Christian. Considering the supreme importance of the spiritual and the eternal; considering, too, the uncertain duration of our life, notwithstanding the fact that it involves the immeasurable interests of eternity; and considering, still further, the manifold obstacles in the way of a man's salvation—we might have supposed that God's providential arrangements would have secured to us far more freedom from worldly labour and care than we enjoy. It would not have been surprising if He had said to us: "Retire much; rest much—that you may have much time for thought and prayer." But it is not so. Six days for work; one day for rest and worship! Certain exceptions apart, toil is, for most men, the hard and unremitting condition of life; often indeed—especially in our cities, and in "hard times" like the present—toil that demands the straining of every nerve, the putting forth to the utmost of every energy, and the employment of every moment. The best of us come to our Sabbaths like wrestlers who sit and rest for a while between the conflict past and the conflict to come. This is the experience of most of us: business men who have to fight in the great competitions of trade; working men to strive for a sufficiency of bread and raiment for themselves and their families; fathers and mothers, masters and servants who have to meet the manifold duties and worries of domestic life. We come to our Sabbath-rest, probably with the feeling that, on the whole, during the week, we have *lost* rather than *gained* in relation to our spiritual interests. Are we right in the feeling? Must our daily work be a hindrance to us? Is it impossible for us so to engage in it as to find it spiritually helpful? The text before us settles the point. It presents to us an obligation that is inclusive of every word and deed, and which must consequently include the common toil of every day. It is an apostolic injunction, and the injunction presupposes its own practicability. "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all *in the name of the Lord Jesus*."

That secular work is not *necessarily* spiritually helpful we know too well. Idleness is always disastrous; but there is much worldly work which is more disastrous still. Tens of thousands pursue it daily in utter godlessness, and train themselves by it to intense selfishness and materialism. They "mind earthly things," and "glory in their shame." Even many professing Christians manifest an alarming craving for mere worldly enjoyment; and their luxuries tax them a hundred-fold more than their benevolence. But it need not be so. Secular work *can* be made the means of spiritual education, and the sphere for the development of piety.

The first great requisite is conversion. No obligation, indeed, rests upon Christians which does not rest upon all men, whether they be Christians or not. A perfect Christian is simply *man as he ought to be*. But in the unchristian man the disposition is wanting—he lives to himself. The Christian, on the contrary, has entered into a new life. By the Holy Spirit's grace, he has repented of sin; he is forgiven, accepted, justified, accepted into Divine sonship; he is under the influence of new principles—is essentially in a new world—acknowledges a holy law, which he now loves for its own sake—is consciously under the eye of a good Master, who is his Saviour as well as his Lord—and is thus moved by a living impulse of gratitude to Him who has died for him, and whose he is in life and death. Out of this there comes the conviction that the one object of life should be spiritual growth. Commonly men think of life as having two aims; or rather they try to solve the problem of living two lives—the one present, the other future; the one worldly, the other religious; the one affecting the body with its transitory interests, the other affecting the soul with its eternal interests. Hence the wide divorce between "the secular" and "the sacred," work and worship, holy days and common days. The more enlightened Christian knows that this is a radical mistake. The world, time, matter, the body—all have their relations and their obligations, their spheres and their claims; but they do not stand isolated from the spiritual and the unseen. Separate, they are godless. They are all intended to serve as instruments of moral discipline—to supply lessons in the school of life;—all tending, under God, to the great result. Failures they are, if regarded as *ends* in themselves; blessed they are in proportion as they are religiously used as *means*. Apart from the conviction that this should be our one great aim, it seems impossible to hope that the spiritual will predominate over the worldly; the six days' secular toil must be destructive of the day's spiritual culture. The "prosperous" will degrade life into a mere pursuit of earthly wealth with its associated advantages, whilst the rest will simply continue the hard struggle for daily bread—"the bread that perisheth."

The life of millions around us seems, religiously considered, to be an absolute blank. Mix with them, observe them, and you will be convinced of this. It is one of the sources of deepest sadness to a Christian to note the extent to which godlessness prevails in all ranks of society. Even amongst Christians themselves there are terrible invasions of the spirit of worldliness. Let *us* seek, by the help of God, the convictions by which this evil may be checked. The soul is greater than the body; eternity is greater than time. The material and the temporal sink into insignificance in contrast with the spiritual and the eternal. Let the lower interests serve the higher.

I have already referred to the universality of the claims which Christianity makes upon us. Its aim is not to induce us to assume a certain character merely at certain specified times and in certain specified places, and to be content with that. On the contrary, its purpose is to induce us to do everything in one specified spirit, which shall shape, give sanctity and consecration to, the whole. Hence, it is never represented as working first on the outward habits of men, but on their hearts. It does not cleanse the outside of the cup or platter, leaving corruption within; but it first

endeavours to establish purity within, and to give the purity which is within a force by which it shall work outwardly. The outward acts of the life are but the embodiments of the heart and will. Thus, whether we be scholars, or merchants, or preachers, or mechanics, or servants, we are to carry a soul, sanctified and governed by Christ, into all our occupations, even the commonest. Whether we pray or work, whether we be in the church or the shop, we are to be under the control of the one Christian spirit.

Undoubtedly, there are some occupations in which it is difficult for Christians to engage, and some which they ought never to touch. But apart from these, the work of life is not an evil. There is no need to retire away from it into solitude as the only suitable sphere for the development of piety. A wise Christian looks upon it as a mode of spiritual culture. It depends upon the man himself, upon the guiding principle of his life, as to whether work shall degrade or raise him.

Consider two or three points in illustration and proof of the truth I am endeavouring to enforce.

I. Secular work requires and cultivates certain active forces of character which are also required in the culture of the spiritual life, such, for example, as *clearness and definiteness of aim*: so that there shall be no working in the dark, or in ignorance of the special end to be attained. "This one thing I do." *Perseverance*, so that the end, once clearly ascertained and decided on, shall be steadily and unflinchingly pursued, until it is accomplished. *Prudence and foresight*, so that there shall be a wise adaptation of means. *Energy*, so that every opportunity and every appliance shall be used to the utmost. *Courage*, so that no difficulties shall dismay. All these forces acquire strength in the earthly sphere, which is a clear gain, and which may be brought to use in the spiritual. We, as Christians, have an end to pursue which must be clearly apprehended; we must not run uncertainly, or as one that beateth the air; we must persevere, running with patience the race that is set before us; our zeal must not be without knowledge; what our hands find to do we must do with our might; and we must be in nothing terrified by our adversaries. So far from being hindered in all this by the discipline of our common life, experience proves that indolence in secular business has a paralysing effect on spiritual exertion. In spiritual exertion man uses the same power as in secular, only the field of operation is different. But inasmuch as the same powers are wanted for both, the one may be a true auxiliary to the other. [113]

II. The same line of remark will apply to the *passive* forces of character. They are wanted equally in the secular and the spiritual, and their cultivation in the one prepares them for use in the other. For example: *Submission*. Many a position in life is irksome and uncongenial; but nevertheless it should be accepted as God's providential arrangement on our behalf. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."—*Patience*. Many a result has to be long worked for and long waited for, often with many disappointments and reverses.—*Contentment*. The worry of life, not its work, is that which burdens and kills. Looking on our position as one which God has appointed, we take it calmly as that which is best for us.—*Trust*. We have simply to rely on God for everything, remembering that our powers, opportunities, and results are all under His wise and loving control. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and sufficient also is the grace to bear it. Our hearts are wearied and worn only as we insist on carrying heavier burdens than God assigns to us. How clear it is that all these passive forces are needed in our secular work, if it is to be done well! But it is equally clear that they are needed just as much in our spiritual life. In it their growth is an essential element; and they have their bearing specially on Christian work—work done for the spread of religion in the world. [114]

III. Secular work offers important opportunities for spiritual usefulness. Our most effective preaching is often that of our unconscious influence. And let us remember that no amount of formal sanctity can prevail against the inconsistencies of our common days. Moreover, our daily, secular duties bring us into contact with men in ways which are least open to suspicion. Add to this, that they put into our hands, in a greater or lesser degree, resources by which we can materially help the cause of Christ, and so become, in heart, in interest, in devotedness, more and more closely identified with that cause. We can "honour the Lord with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase," and so find that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

The practical problem that God gives to every one of us to solve, is to get perfected in our hearts the feeling that we are doing His will in the common details of our ordinary vocation as well as in acts more ostensibly "religious." The conclusion is irresistible; the thing may be done—but how? It cannot be done without habitual self-examination; it cannot be done without prayer; it cannot be done without reliance on the help of the Holy Spirit. [115]

Let us be thankful to God for putting within our reach the high honour of glorifying Him, for introducing us to a life so pure in its springs, for His kindly help in every step of its progress, and for the hope that it will one day reach its happy consummation.

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IX.

UNCONSCIOUS INFLUENCE.

"I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."—MATTHEW xii. 36, 37.

This is a startling, terrifying text; one of many which tempt men to limitations and compromises of their meaning. Some persons would not hesitate to accuse it of extravagance, and even devout Christians sometimes pause and ask whether it is to be taken in its absolute literalness. "Every idle word." Is not this the kind of thing which is least amenable to a vigorous judgment? Is not the "idle," the vain, the worthless, at the worst, thereby negative? Christ says, No. Speech is a gift to be put to sanctified uses; and the non-use as well as the abuse of every gift is sinful. This utterance of our Divine Master, to be vindicated, needs only to be understood. Underlying it are vital moral considerations which should be devoutly studied. [118]

There are many ways in which a man can manifest himself. By his thought, he is always known to God and to his own heart, but not to his fellow men. To reveal himself to them, his thought must somehow find expression. His actions are mostly intentional and deliberate; but they are liable to be prompted, inspired, checked, or controlled by circumstances. So, too, may be his speech; but there is a spontaneousness, a freedom, in *that*, which belongs to no other manifestation of the man's inward self. Thus it is by his words that he is best judged. The largest part of our practical life is resolvable into speech.

Christianity itself is amenable to this law. Think of the streams of holy speech which have been flowing through the world for ages, and of the life they have conveyed to thirsty souls. Think of these streams as they are flowing to-day in tens of thousands of Christian congregations, and in innumerable Sabbath schools. Compare their influence with that of the dark utterances of heathenism, and the disturbing teachings of unbelief. Think of the countless rills of Christian speech which are flowing to-day from the lips of those who love the Saviour, and who are endeavouring to make Him known in the home, in the sick-chamber, in the prison-house, and in their various intercourse with those around them. Compare their influence with that of the idle, thoughtless, impious, profane talk of the millions who are living without God; and then say whether Christianity may or may not be judged by its words! Lord Jesus, Thou needest no justification from such imperfect creatures as we are; but if Thou didst, it would be enough for us to recall the gracious words that proceeded out of thine own mouth, and then to challenge the wisdom of the ages, saying, "Never man spake like this man!" [119]

The general drift of the passage before us is this, that man speaks as he is, and is as he speaks, and that, therefore, by his words he shall be judged. His words are signs which reveal his character. Whilst, at the last, he will be judged by his character, single words and unnoticed deeds will, if need be, be adduced as proofs of inner and underlying principles. Of course it is not meant that words will be the only tests; but our Lord's language shows that they form a far more important element of proof than is commonly supposed. In this light, no manifestation of character is insignificant. Everything tells. Words, looks, even gestures, have their meaning. Often to men's eyes, and always to God's (though He does not need them) they are as straws on the stream, showing the course of the current. [120]

These general reflections supply the basis of the further reflections I have to offer. My purpose is twofold: first, to show that, for good or ill, the life of every one of us is an incessant exercise of influence; and secondly, to deduce from this fact some important lessons.

I. Now, generally, when men speak of exerting influence, the thought present to their minds is of something exceptional, attractive, commanding, or formal. Thus, such a phrase as "a person of influence" is understood to denote a man who stands in a position of special advantage, either (for instance) of wealth, or of mental power, or of social importance. Hence the notion of influence is narrowed, and ultimately it becomes false. It does so in two ways: partly by restricting influence to a few, and then by confining it among these few to certain peculiarities of character or of circumstance. The truth is that influence is always going forth from every man, and from everything *in* man.

There are two ways in which men act upon one another. They do so either directly, deliberately, and intentionally, or, otherwise, indirectly and unconsciously. Thus, if I want to make men around me generous, I may write, preach, speak, use arguments, multiply incentives, enforce appeals. In all this I am conscious that I have a purpose to accomplish, and in everything I say I keep that purpose in view. If I succeed, I do so through the intentional influence I have put into operation. I have tried to realise a definite result, and I have not been disappointed. But I can teach generosity in another way. Obedient to the impulses of my own heart, I may relieve the need of some poor blind beggar on the road, who implores the passer-by to help him. This act may be noticed by a third person whom I did not know to be near, and it may so impress him as to open his heart and his hand to do the kindness he had not thought of doing. Now I had no such design with respect to *him*; for the time, I had nothing in view beyond meeting an appeal for help which came personally to myself. I was unconscious of the influence I exerted upon the person who followed my example, and yet I did for him as much as if I had set myself to develop an argument or to enforce a claim. [121]

Now, if at this point the question be asked: "Are we responsible for this undesigned influence?" the answer is that we certainly *are* so, inasmuch as it springs from, and manifests, character. We must not be misled by the fact that this quiet, unconscious action is not that of which the world takes much notice. Men do not speak of it, as they do of the striking and commanding agencies [122]

which form so large a portion of the history of the day. Some of these are powerful on a wide scale, as in the case of a popular preacher, or a great philanthropist. But the influence of which we are speaking is exerted within narrower circles. It acts, not upon the masses by wide-spread impressions, but upon individuals by single strokes; not upon the broad platform of public enterprise, but within the more contracted sphere of personal life. The supposition that it is feeble on that account is a grave mistake. Our personal relationships are more numerous and more continuous than our public avocations, and it is in the former rather than in the latter that we are most effectually training our fellow creatures for good or evil. Sometimes, too, this quiet influence is brought to light with important results, as when John Bright was discovered reading the Scriptures in the cottage of a poor blind woman. No public act of his—splendid as all his public acts are—could furnish a truer indication of character than this simple and, to most people's eyes, this unimportant incident in his history. [123]

That the value of direct influence in promoting the well-being of mankind is incalculable there can be no doubt. All our great undertakings—social, political, and religious—are of this kind. The progress which the world has made in every right direction is greatly due to the combined efforts put forth by societies or bodies of men who have had truth to propagate, or blessing to diffuse, and who have steadily directed their energies to the end in view. Associations for Political Reform, Temperance Societies, British Schools, Ragged Schools, Sunday Schools, Tract Societies, Missionary Agencies, Mothers' Meetings, Church, Chapel, out-door, and theatre services, are all of this sort; and the harvest of good reaped from them only God knows, at whose inspiration and in whose name all good is done. Statistics tell us much, but far more remains untold. All this well-directed action is in accordance with the Divine order. God wills that we should use judiciously and zealously applied effort for each other's welfare, especially in connection with the spread of His truth. Every Christian agency is a form of obedience to the great command: "Preach the gospel to every creature." Such action, moreover, is in accordance with our convictions. We *must* labour, formally and intentionally, on behalf of any and every cause which lies near to our hearts. Imagine all these direct agencies to be suddenly and completely withdrawn—what would then become of our poor world? Would it not speedily lapse into a mournful, moral waste—a training-school for present and everlasting perdition? Multiplied and energetically worked as these agencies are, the condition of the world is bad enough. The appalling needs of the world demand heroic effort; and, as I have said, the amount of good already wrought by this is beyond calculation. [124]

Nevertheless, the other kind of influence—the indirect and unconscious—is invested also with an importance which is incalculable; and it will be a blessed time both for the Church and for the world when this truth comes to be practically remembered as it should be. Let us consider this matter a little further, bearing in mind, as we do so, that the application of the subject must be to the Christian conscience of us all.

I. Notice some differences between the two kinds of influence which have been named. [125]

1. We have already said the influence which we consciously exert is the result of forethought, and deliberately contemplates an end, the attainment of which is steadily kept in view; whilst our unconscious influence is spontaneous, and has no premeditation or calculation about it. We need only add here, that the action of this unconscious influence is very immediate; a fact which is explained by the mysterious insight which enables men to look into, and to understand, one another. We form judgments of men every day without data that we can adduce. These judgments are instinctive, and they are more frequently right than wrong. How is it that we conceive a sudden repugnance to one, and at first sight fall in love with another? The impression made needed only a word, a tone, a look, a gesture, a smile, a tear; on so slender a basis a judgment was formed which will last a life-time, or which years will be required to modify.

2. Our unconscious influence is a perpetual emanation from ourselves. Direct effort need not truly express us at all. It may be imposed upon us by circumstances which we cannot control. Often we should avoid it if we could. Moreover, when it is voluntary and unconstrained, it is a thing of times, seasons, places, and conditions in life, and is therefore more or less fitful, partial, and intermittent. The other kind of influence acts continuously—without pauses, without breaks, without paroxysms. It is thus that every man—high or low—in spheres extended or narrow, without intention, forethought or consciousness of the fact, is always leading some one more or less closely after him: it may be wife, friend, little child, or stranger; but some one most surely. [126]

3. This unconscious influence is necessarily simple. It makes its appeal to all kinds of human judgment, and to all degrees of human insight. It is quickly apprehended, by the ignorant and the young as well as by the learned and mature. Many of our direct and most definitely-arranged efforts are misunderstood. They tax people's thought; they demand reflection; and they frequently excite differences of opinion. How many instances there are in which the most cogent and strongly-urged arguments are lost, while the quiet and undesigned force of example succeeds.

4. Our unconscious influence is the more powerful because it excites no suspicion. It is intuitively felt to represent our inner self in the direction, and within the range, of its present meaning. Many of our direct efforts put men upon their guard. If they are hostile to our intentions, they resist our formal endeavours; if they are indifferent, they become impatient of our zeal. But direct efforts, moreover, are often thought to be mainly *professional*, and this impression concerning them places them at a disadvantage. On the other hand, our unconscious influence wins men unconsciously to themselves—wins them when they are off their guard—and thus wins [127]

them in spite of themselves.

II. How, then, does this fact of our unconscious influence touch the question of our responsibility? In what sense, and on what grounds, are we accountable for it?

1. It is conditioned by our character. It reproduces outwardly what we are within. If our character, or, as the Divine Master terms it, our "heart" be good, then our unconscious influence must be good likewise; if our character—our "heart"—be evil, our unconscious influence must also be evil. As we are responsible for the motives which actuate us, so are we responsible for every form of conduct that proceeds therefrom. It must, of course, be admitted that even in a fundamentally holy character there are ever and anon exceptional mistakes, inconsistencies, and flaws. How many of these, He only knows who forgives all. But we are speaking of great moral tendencies; and concerning these we are in no doubt. They reveal *character*, and they share the responsibility, in regard to their influence, which belongs to character. [128]

2. It is by this unconscious influence that we act most on those who are nearest to us. Children, members of our families, fellow-workmen, and acquaintances—all these are much more affected by the general tenour of our conduct, and the so-thought trivial indications of our character, than by our more formal efforts. Alas, it often happens that these latter are made ineffectual by the operation of the former. A practical inconsistency in a parent's life at home will drive away from the mind and conscience of a child the force of the best and most frequently repeated precept. Even when direct and well-meant effort is put forth, it is often comparatively powerless apart from the help it derives from the unconscious influence that accompanies it. A smile, a look, a sigh, a tear, will often put life into an argument which may be sound enough in itself, but which, without such an auxiliary, would be dry, uninteresting, and therefore ineffective. Is all this influence outside the range of our responsibility? [129]

3. Our indirect influence is our *truest*. It best represents *us*. In formal effort, there is room for a more or less transient enthusiasm, love of excitement, love of applause, self-seeking, hypocrisy. But our unconscious influence belongs to us at all times—follows us, and is as true to us as the shadow follows, and is true to, the substance. We cannot escape from it. It proceeds from us spontaneously, without our volition; and it mirrors externally what we are radically and in the recesses of our real being. If we be responsible for what we really are, we must be responsible for the influence we thus spontaneously and inevitably exert.

4. Another ground of this responsibility is that, on reflection, we know that it is by these unconscious exhibitions of character that the world is constantly judging us. Often the judgment of the world is harsh, and commonly uncharitable; but it is shrewd, and generally there is a rough justice about it which marks its worth.

These considerations, and many more that might be adduced, show how solemn is our responsibility with respect to the impressions we are constantly and unconsciously producing on those around us. As in nature, so in human life, the most unobtrusive and silent forces are the strongest. The nightly dew effects more good than the occasional storm-shower, and light works more wonders than lightning. [130]

III. From all this we learn some weighty lessons. It teaches us—

1. The importance of each act in our life. The text before us is no exaggeration. Everything tells, because there is character in everything, and consequently *power* for good or ill. It is impossible for any one of us to be in the world without responsibility. There is no escape for us. Simply to be *in* the world, whatever we may be, is to exert an influence, subtle, quiet, powerful—an influence compared with which argument and expostulation and entreaty are feeble. We say we mean well; we think that at least we are injuring nobody and doing no harm; *but is it so?* It cannot be so, unless our influence be always on the side of God and of goodness. By looks, glances, unpremeditated words and deeds, we are perpetually exerting an influence which may turn the scale of some man's eternal destiny!

2. The necessity of conversion. If our unconscious influence is to be of a wholesome kind, we must undergo a radical moral change, out of which will proceed an all-pervading sanctification. Blessed be God for the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Up to this point, the consideration of our subject may have prompted some to ask: "Are we, then, to be anxiously, feverishly, incessantly watching ourselves in order that we may make no mistakes, and do no evil? Such vigilance—would it not take all our time, and absorb all our strength? Such a life—would it not be a terrible bondage? Is it necessary?" We reply, "Yes, and no." That is to say, there will always be the necessity for watchfulness and prayer; but the true secret of *doing* good lies in *being* good. The path of the just is as a shining light; he shines because he is luminous. The tree is known by its fruit; not by the fruit which is tacked on, as in the case of a Christmas tree, but by the fruit which is the produce of the tree's own interior life. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." Before a man can impart the higher order of blessing to his fellow men, he himself must receive the blessing of a new nature from God. [131]

The question is often asked why the triumphs of Christianity are not more marked in the world, and why spiritual growth is not more marked in the Church. The answer is found partly, no doubt, in the imperfections of the direct efforts which are put forth with these ends in view; but not in these alone. No small portion of it is to be traced to the deleterious elements which mingle with the undesigned influences which emanate from many of the professors of Christ's religion. [132]

When Moses was on the Mount with God, his face became luminous. Was he conscious of its shining? Not until the people were "afraid to come nigh him." Then he had to cover his face with a vail! How few are "luminous" enough to need "vailing" now!

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X. *SECULAR ANXIETY.*

"Take no thought for your life."—MATTHEW vi. 25.

"Take no thought for the morrow."—MATTHEW vi. 31.

Let us survey the entire passage of which the first of these texts is the commencement, and of which the second is the close. It brings before us a common evil, and for this evil it proposes a sovereign remedy.

The evil is *secular anxiety*. Perhaps we need not be greatly surprised at its prevalence, when we consider what the life-experience of most of us is. Think of the uncertainty of almost everything we know—life, health, friendship, domestic relationships and affections, riches, commerce. Life has many sad surprises and disappointments. Our own day is especially full of care. The age is mad with speculation—thousands making haste to be rich, and so bringing upon themselves many temptations. For many others, the time is full of hard necessities, and the outlook is one of possible or even probable poverty. The admonitions given by our Lord in the verses before us are needed now more than ever.

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There are persons who, under the influence of pride and false notions of manliness, consider careworn Christians—Christians labouring and struggling amid the difficulties of the way—undeserving of sympathy. "After all," they say, "what are the ills of life, that we should make so much ado? Be men!" Sometimes we meet with superficial Christians who profess that this life is really so insignificant, that it shows a low state of piety to be painfully affected by common ills. As to the first, nothing but stoicism, or the hard-heartedness which is sometimes the result of prosperity, can make the soul unsusceptible to the ordinary troubles of life, or independent of the antidote which the religion of Christ supplies. As to the second, do not let them talk in a way which implies that they are wiser than their Lord. He knew how heavily care pressed upon the hearts He loved, and condescended to offer them the appropriate and all-sufficient relief.

And how does the great Teacher speak to the careworn in these verses? Is it not unspiritual to take arguments for the comfort of our Christian life from lower things? Must we go to the irrational and inanimate creation for gospels of blessing for our spiritual need? Christ drew His arguments from the birds and the flowers; clearly showing that we should accustom ourselves to see God's hand, His love, His teaching, in all things. Let Him not be excluded from the least part of His creation. Every part of it may subserve the purposes of His grace. "*Consider*" the fowls of the air and the flowers of the fields; make them objects of study. To the thoughtful they often suggest "thoughts that lie too deep for tears;" to the Christian they may well suggest thoughts which shall inspire thanksgiving and prayer.

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Note the condescension, the simplicity, and the power of our Lord's argument. His appeals are homely. He seeks no far-fetched reasonings or facts from antiquity. He points to birds and flowers; an argument for simple people, but equally effective for the learned and the refined. We have no need to go far for lessons of comfort.

We must not overlook the necessary limitations of our Lord's teaching in these verses. Those limitations are found in the nature of things. Observe, then,

I. Christ does not forbid all anticipations of the future. He cannot mean so much as this when He says, "Take no thought for the morrow." Man is an inhabitant of two worlds—one material, the other spiritual. This being so, two distinct sets or classes of wants press upon him—the wants of the body, and those of the soul. The wants of the soul point to a future state of existence, for which we must prepare. In relation to these, carelessness—the absence of forethought—would be fatal. According to the state of our souls, the thought of the future gives us terror or joy. To the Christian, the future is the scene of his perfected spiritual growth, and of his consummated happiness. Every aspiration of his soul bounds joyfully towards it, and he instinctively leaves the things that are behind to press forward. In the words before us, Christ does not touch such matters as these. It is not *fore-thought* which is condemned, but *fore-boding*.

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II. Nor does He discountenance earnest activity in the duties of the present. Work is God's oldest law. It is only in wilful blindness or in unaccountable delusion that men can plead this teaching as an excuse for indolence. "If any man will not work, neither shall he eat." Work is often spoken of as a curse; but it is a blessing. With a Christian spirit, it may be gloriously consecrated. It links us in our activity with God who "worketh hitherto," and with Christ who worked His full day.

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III. Christ does not even condemn a legitimate forethought in connection with secular interests. There *is* a legitimate forethought such as this. Nature teaches it. We must sow in order to reap. We must toil to-day for results which cannot come till to-morrow. "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever." The faith to live by is that which prompts not to sitting down and doing nothing, but to trustful and persevering enterprise. Keep in mind the distinction between forethought and foreboding. It is forethought in a man which leads him to sow for a future harvest; it is foreboding that would fill his heart with fears that the harvest will be a bad one. Forethought is the grand distinction between the civilized and the savage; foreboding is the weakness of distrust.

What the Lord bids us guard against, then, is conjectural brooding over the possible necessities of the future, and our possible lack of the resources required for their supply. "Taking thought" means giving way to anxiety—the constant occupation and worry of the heart in looking forward, gazing into, and dreading the possibilities of the days and years yet to come. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Be warned against forebodings of evil to-morrow. The lesson is, "Do the day's work as it is appointed by God; accept the day's mercy, bear the day's evil; and be not anxious about the evil which to-morrow may bring." [138]

How common a weakness—nay, rather let us say, how common a sin—this taking anxious thought for the morrow is! We see the lines of care in thousands of faces every day. Anxiety has marked its furrows round lips which every morning say, "Give us this day our daily bread." It is a calamity as well as a sin. It disturbs the heart, so that there can be no enjoyment of present mercies. It adds to the present the weight of an unknown but dreaded future. It paralyses religious feeling, and checks religious activity. It defeats its end by shortening the life it would fain prolong.

Now Christ shows that this kind of anxiety reckons falsely, because it is founded on a false estimate of life; and He further shows that to gauge our position aright we must reckon according to the Divine thought respecting it. The whole of the teaching before us on this subject is perfectly plain, consisting of a few simple and obvious points. We cannot hope, indeed, to bring it within the understanding of the mere worldling. The man who has no filial confidence in God has no antidote for care. Anxiety can only be subdued in the heart of him who can look upward, and say, "Father, I trust in Thee!" [139]

What, then, is the first point? It is this, that God—the Author of our life, the Creator of our bodies—will surely give that which, however necessary, is yet less important and less valuable. In bringing us into existence, He has done more than He can do in giving to us any secular blessing which we can need. "Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" We have our life from Him; our bodies are His handiwork. Why should we suspect that He will be indisposed to give us whatever may be needful for the existence thus created? Will He, by neglect, frustrate His own purpose? The greater gift can only be sustained and made valid by the lesser ones. Without food and raiment the body must decay, and its life must perish. God does not give imperfectly. [140]

Another point is this, that anxious care answers no good purpose. It is useless. If we could by means of it gain an exemption from future evil, common prudence would dictate it as a wise expedient. But it is not so. Christ puts this consideration very strongly. No amount of foreboding can add a single moment to our life, for the boundaries of our life have been fixed by God. The future is utterly unknown to us; and foreboding will not help us in the least degree to forecast its difficulties and its trials, though it may unfit us for the endurance of them. Whether we are cognizant of it or not, God will take His plan with us, and will carry it out. If we could not believe in the love that He hath towards us, the thought of this would be a dark sorrow; but, assured of His love as we *may* be, we can also be assured that He will do all things well. At any rate, no over-anxiety of ours will facilitate the order of life we long for. "The morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." It will have anxieties enough of its own in spite of every effort of ours to set it free from them. Every day, to the end, will have its own "evil," and the "evil" of each day will require all our strength for coping with it. So that anxiety *for* the morrow will not remove care *from* the morrow; it will only take strength and joy from to-day. Trust in God, and all that He gives you of trouble for to-day will be accompanied by the gift of the strength necessary to enable you to bear it. But do not expect Him to give you strength to bear unnecessary sorrows—sorrows of your own making—the sorrows which spring from worldliness and unbelief. "As thy day"—the day that now is—"so thy strength shall be." [141]

A third point is, that, reasoning from analogy, we may be sure that God will provide for us. He feeds the birds, and He clothes the lilies. They can do nothing for themselves; yet how well are they provided for! "Are not ye much better than they?" A wonderfully simple, beautiful, and effective argument this! How grand the view it gives us of God's position in His universe! What knowledge must be His! What power! What vastness—what variety of resource! What minuteness of kindly, loving interest! Who would not gladly entertain such a conception of God and of His Providence as this, in preference to the atheism and the materialism which have intruded so grievously into the science of our times? "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" Thus, God is not content with giving what is simply necessary for life; He gives for *beauty* also. Showing His goodness in such a manner to [142]

objects inferior to man, why should man suspect that the same goodness will be denied to *him*? Observe, that Christ does not teach that birds and flowers are better than men because of their immunity from toil. His meaning is, that creatures which do not and cannot toil—creatures which do not and cannot forecast the future—are clothed and fed; will God neglect the nobler creatures to whom He has given the power of thought, and whom He has put under the obligation to labour? Even with these higher powers, man is still as dependent as any of the inferior creatures around him. Will his needs be overlooked, while theirs are supplied? Such a question is all the more pertinent when we remember, that whilst they live for a day, he was created for eternity, and needs the special gifts which can shape his present life into a preparation and a discipline. [143]

An additional point is, that unholy anxiety is essentially ungodly, irreligious, unworthy of the position and the professions of a Christian man. "Take no thought," no anxious thought, "saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? *For after all these things do the Gentiles seek.*" Anxious thought, therefore, is the characteristic of heathenism, and must be excluded from the religion which is true. It is the spirit of the world, not the spirit which is of God. We see this clearly enough when we compare the amount of thought and care which we bestow upon our earthly interests with that which we devote to the interests which are spiritual and eternal. What anxiety we give ourselves about the future of our health, the future of our business, the future of our worldly position, the future of our children's secular education, the future of their rank in society! Is it not ten times as great as that which we bestow upon our Christian consistency, our religious usefulness, our growth in grace? If we could hold the balance steadily, which would prove to be the preponderating scale? Our Lord puts the case in an indirect manner, no doubt; nevertheless, it is impossible to avoid the implied conclusion. That conclusion is this: "If you suffer yourself to be anxiously absorbed in earthly things, you rank yourself with 'the Gentiles,' to whom this world is all."—Besides, such anxiety is ungodly because it is *untrustful*. Heathens, who cannot blind themselves to the fact that their gods leave them for the most part, if not entirely, to themselves, may be excused if they feel that there is room, yea even necessity, for anxious foreboding. But how different should it be with those who know the one living and true God, and who can recognize Him as their Father! Surely He may be trusted as knowing His children, recognizing their needs, loving them, and tenderly caring for them. Taking anxious thought implies the weakness, if not the extinction, of faith.—Moreover, its impiety is seen in the fact that it is a practical subordination of the spiritual to the secular. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Let the most important things have the first attention. Give due scope to the higher aspirations of the soul, and the lower ones will shrink into their due proportions, and will take their proper place. God will give the earthly as it is needed to those who first seek the heavenly, and the true spirit of religion will make us rich by making us content. [144]

To Christians this teaching, taking it as a whole, covers the entire ground of their secular life, and much more than that. Look at two or three samples of the cases to which it applies. [145]

1. To personal secular positions. "What will the future be? Shall I live to be old? When I am old, shall I be provided for? Will health and strength be continued to me according to my years?" Leave that! Do your work *to-day*. For this you may have the needful strength from God. Do not trouble about anything further. Use prudently the means which God has put into your hands for providing for the future, and then commit their safe keeping to Him. If you have no such means, still trust. There are many promises on which you may implicitly and calmly rely.

2. "How about my children? Will they grow up to be manful, good, godly; a seed to serve the Lord, and a generation to call Him blessed; my comfort, my pride? Or will they take evil ways; prove, like so many more, vicious, ungodly, and bring down my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave?" Leave that! Do your duty to your children to-day. Train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Use a wise and godly forethought on their behalf. Pray for them. Instruct them. Set before them a Christian example. You may trust the rest with God, calmly and thankfully expecting the fulfilment of the words: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." [146]

3. "What about my religious future? If I make a Christian profession, shall I be able to live consistently with it? Shall I have strength to resist temptation? What if I should fall? Can I so live as not to dishonour the Church and the cause of Christ?" Leave that! Nurse your Christian graces to-day. Lay up spiritual strength in reserve. That is required by a wise forethought. But having done so, leave the rest. God will take care of it all. You may steadfastly trust that He will gloriously complete the work which He has graciously begun.

4. "My Christian work—what about that? Shall I be permitted to go on with it for a few years longer, and thus to have some opportunity of realizing my ambition as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ? Or shall I be called away comparatively early? And if so, what will become of all the plans and projects upon which I have expended so much thought and prayer and toil?" Leave that! Do your work to-day, and be not anxious about the rest. When to-day merges into to-morrow let the new to-day bring its own work with it, to be done in the day. Nothing more of solicitude than that is needful. You are not indispensable to God; nor are you essential to the work which by His will you are doing. If it be worth doing, and you be separated from it, He will find a suitable successor, or as many successors as the accomplishment of the work may require. [147]

5. "How about the prosperity of the cause of Christ in the world? Will it go steadily forward, or will new and fiercer foes rise up against it?" Leave that! Do all you can for it whilst you are here, and entrust the rest, as you entrust your own work, to God. Do not hinder it by wasting time in

forebodings which ought to be spent in service.

6. "What of death—my own death? Shall I have grace enough to support me when the time comes?" Leave that! No doubt you will; but do not be anxious about it. To-day you are "the living;" be "the living to praise the Lord," and trust the needs of your dying hour to Him. [148]

The words of Christ recorded in these verses must have startled His hearers. They taught new truth concerning life, and, beautiful as they were, the truth they taught was strange. It would have been so strange as to be without weight, if He had not first taught equally new and equally beautiful truth concerning God. How does Christ here speak of God? "Your heavenly Father." The heathen instructors had not taught that! Pharisees and Sadducees had not taught that! But Christ was now in the world; He had come forth from the Father, and He could say to men: "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." Thus the whole teaching of these verses on the subject of Providence and of Faith becomes plain and demonstrative. The great requirement is for us to love Him filially as He loves us paternally; and then, from that point, all is clear. We are dependent, but He will provide. There are present difficulties, and probably there will be future trials; but all takes the form of wise and holy discipline under His guiding and beneficent hand. [149]

How do we arrive at the conviction of the Fatherhood of God? Sin stands in the way, and conscience craves something more than a mere authoritative announcement. Sin is the forfeiture of all claim to the Divine favour. What right have we to expect that His providence will be to us a providence of love? There is but one answer: to trust a God of providence, we must believe in a God of grace. Paul puts the whole philosophy of this in a single sentence: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Our present subject, therefore, calls for the gospel, and cannot be completed without it. "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." And, "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" But let us ever remember that we have higher wants than those of the body. The soul needs food, and God has supplied "the bread of life"; it needs raiment, and God has given to us the robe of righteousness wrought by Christ; it needs a home, and we have "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." With these provisions, then, shall we forecast the future with fear, or with hope? Which shall it be? [150]

O holy trust! O endless sense of rest,
Like the beloved John,
To lay my head upon the Saviour's
breast,
And thus to Journey on!

[151]

XI.

CONTENTMENT.

"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."—PHILIPPIANS iv. 11-14.

My purpose is to define and to recommend the Christian virtue of contentment. I shall endeavour to show that its acquirement is a duty, and that its possession is a joy; but I shall also have to show that as a duty it is not practicable, and that as a joy it is not attainable, except on Christian grounds. I trust that all this will be made abundantly clear by the following observations.

I. Let us glance at the character of the man whose words are now before us. There is in the words the ring of a high moral tone which is irresistibly attractive. Yet the effect they produce upon us must depend very much upon the kind of man who wrote them, and the condition or conditions of life through which he had to pass. [152]

We should be pained by such words as these if they came from the lips of a man whom the world would consider prosperous. When the conditions of a man's life are easy and comfortable, to make a profession of contentment would be an abuse both of language and of sentiment. Such a case is not one for content, but for devout and hearty gratitude mingled with a sense of humiliation under the thought, which ought to be present to every such man, that he deserves no more than others, though God gives him more than many others possess.

We should think sadly of these words if they came from a stoical man. Contentment is not the listlessness of indifference. It is self-conscious, and finds in itself its own joy. Indifference is loss—deterioration. It implies the blunting of sensibility. The heart that is callous to grief is closed against gladness also.

We should pity the man who uttered these words from mere weakness of character, devoid of aspiration, enthusiasm, or resolve. In his case, content would be mere good-for-nothingness. The world is full of uncomplaining men and women who do not cry, not because they are content, but because they are spiritless, and consequently because they are crushed down and hopeless. [153]

There are other circumstances which would disparage contentment. We will not mention them now; they will be suggested as we proceed.

Now Paul was every way the kind of man to give the noblest meaning to the words we are considering. His whole constitution, make, rendered him susceptible of the highest earthly enjoyment. Mentally, morally, and socially, he was prepared to accept and to appreciate the best that this world could offer to him. He had great powers of thought, reflection, imagination, and will. He had great tenderness and generosity of heart. Proofs abound that his social instincts were full of life and strength. He was pre-eminently a man to be touched by kindness or unkindness, by gratitude or ingratitude, by love or hatred.

And what was his experience? It was not the one-sided experience of a man who has known only one condition in life. On the contrary, he had been familiar with almost the highest and the lowest. On the one hand, he had enjoyed the love, and the tender, fervent gratitude, of many of his converts; and on the other hand, he could speak of the bad conduct, the ingratitude, and the vexatious opposition of others. He had the manifold sorrows of a martyr's life of bonds, imprisonments, scourgings, and stonings, to which must be added the prospect of a martyr's death. He was not a man of one kind of experience only, to which habit had accustomed him. He had known the terrible alternations of life, and had learned to be content under them all. "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." [154]

Moreover, Paul was a man of prodigious activity. Contentment is easy to a sluggish nature, but it must have been a difficult acquirement to one in whom brain, heart, hands, and all the powers of life were continually on the move. Couple with this incessancy of action the loftiness and ardour of his aspirations. He was not only capable of an intense enthusiasm in any work which he took in hand, but his whole impulse was an energetic straining forward and upward.

These considerations give something of *marvellousness* to the contentment which the apostle here avows for himself; and they suggest that it must have rested on some underlying conviction—some established condition of soul which it is desirable for us to discover and identify. [155]

The language he uses is in the utmost degree significant. There is no haste about it, nor is there any exaggeration. It is the expression of the result of a severe and protracted mental and moral training, under the influence of the Spirit of God. "I have *learned*." The lesson has been a difficult one, but I have mastered it. "I have learned." The "I" is emphatic. "Whether others have learned the lesson or not, I have learned it." The apostle does not speak either hesitatingly or slightly of his attainment. Thus, when he says, "I know both how to be abased, and how to abound," he goes on to use a word which means, literally, "I have been taught the secret," "I have been initiated into the mysteries"—both of satisfaction and of hunger, both of plenty and of want. Such language implies that his contentment was one which had not been easily acquired. He had not passed into it by a single step only. I do not suppose the process was a very slow one, but it *was* a process. The lesson had to be spelt out, word by word, often syllable by syllable, perhaps sometimes with tearful eyes and a bleeding heart. And so these words are a record of attainment such as this world cannot snatch. The man who could so speak of himself was in possession of the best knowledge. He had graduated and taken honours in the highest university. [156]

II. The practical importance of this lesson of contentment must be obvious to all. Two considerations will enable us to see its importance clearly.

1. Our earthly life is a scene of change. No position is secured to any of us in this world, nor is it in the power of any of us to remain always, and safe from molestation, in a coveted state of action, or of existence, or of enjoyment. Some men never get into a state of positive happiness, and, in the experience of many, the transitions from high to low positions are startling, romantic, painful, mysterious. Events which men call accidents are constantly changing the aspects of things, and certainly the most marked characteristic of our life is vicissitude. This is a truth which is known and recognized by all, and possibly it is one which is felt acutely by not a few who are here at this time.

2. The changes to which we are exposed are temptations to disquietude of heart, and consequently to discontent. This is true in a peculiar sense of those who look only to the present world for satisfaction, but it is also true to a certain extent of the Christian. And why? Partly because he is seldom perfectly free from unworldliness of desire and of hope; partly because he does not always read aright the meaning of his discipline, and keep in mind the truth that because it is Divine it must be always wise and good; and partly because he looks too much to "second causes," not only in disappointment and sorrow, but also in success and joy, forgetting the hand and the purpose of God. [157]

So that a Christian who has passed through the numerous and various vicissitudes of life, and whose faith, like a tree in successive storms, has gained strength from every blast—whose hopes have brightened while the clouds of life were lowering, and whose experience by discipline has become enlightened, rich, and mature—is one of the noblest, though, alas! one of the rarest, sights in the world. Such a man was Paul in a pre-eminent degree. Reverses did not sour him. He

had often to contend against the hostile hand of his fellow man, but persecution did not embitter him. He could retain through all his absorbing interest in the salvation of human souls and in the glory of God. His troubles did not shut him up in himself. He did not always talk about them, as though he wanted everybody to pity and help him; on the contrary, he was a peculiarly brave and joyful man. He looked upon joy not simply as a possibility, nor simply as a privilege, but as a duty, the neglect of which by a Christian was shameful. He knew that whatever of earthly good might slip away from him, or be snatched away, there was something immeasurably better which was his for ever—God, Christ, immortality, heaven. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [158]

III. What has been said will help us to form a true idea of the state of mind which the apostle here avows for himself, and in doing so to avoid some mistakes. We have seen that contentment is neither stoicism, nor want of interest in life nor sluggishness of temperament, nor weakness of character. We further say, that Paul does not mean that he considers all conditions in life alike desirable, that there is nothing to choose between them, that it is altogether immaterial whether men be well or ill, strong or weak, rich or poor, high or low, masters or slaves. Paul was not insensible to the advantages of outward comfort, or to the disadvantages of poverty. Nor does he mean to teach that a Christian may not use all means which are intrinsically legitimate and right for improving his condition, in so far as he has those means at his command, or the possibility of obtaining them. What he means is that his happiness is not essentially dependent on external circumstances. An illustration of Solomon’s words, “A good man is satisfied from himself,” he carries within him everywhere the elements of his own well-being. So that being the man he is, being the man God has made him to be, being the man whom the Holy Spirit is fashioning by His grace, through the instrumentality of the discipline of life, with a hope that does not make him ashamed, because he has the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him—he is happy enough even in the midst of privations and difficulties. His contentment is not indifference to his work, but industrious fidelity. It is not the narcotizing of aspiration; for a man may ardently aspire, and yet be content until it is time to rise. Still less is it complacency with his own moral and spiritual condition, or with that of the world around him; for he says that he “forgets the things that are behind, and reaches forth to the things that are before,” and he “greatly longs after men in the bowels of Jesus Christ.” But with all his appreciation of life’s comforts, with all his aspirations after personal perfection, and with all his longings to be useful in his day, he is not disconcerted by difficulties and disadvantages;—he has learned in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content. [159]

We must guard ourselves, however, from applying this example of contentment to troubles of our own making. God entrusts every man, more or less, with the means of blessing himself, and of maintaining his own honour among his fellow men. But by sin, or by mistakes of conduct arising from a culpable carelessness, we may lose our position of advantage; and when we do so, we are not entitled to the comfort arising from the thought that, as all events are in God’s hands, we must just take things as they come, and be satisfied! The sin which has brought mischief must be deplored; its consequences must be accepted as a Divine correction, and Divine help must be sought so that the chastisement may be sanctified. And if on the lower ground we become less worldly, holier, and more Christ-like, God will have the greater glory and will give the deeper peace. [160]

IV. And now for the secret of the apostle’s contentment, and the lessons that we are to learn therefrom for ourselves. Paul says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.” The language is peculiar; what does it mean? It means that, in whatsoever condition he might be, he had Christ for a Helper and a Friend; that Christ’s companionship with him was constant, full, tender; that His sympathy was great, minute, comprehensive, cheering, exalting, all-sufficient. So complete was his identification with Christ that he tells these Philippians that living or dying he was Christ’s. But how did this come about? Once he persecuted the Christ whom he now glorifies. And even now his happiness has nothing of the *miraculous* in it. It does not belong to him merely as an apostle, or in the same way as his “inspiration” or other special, supernatural gifts with which he is endowed. It is the work of God’s grace—grace imparted to him through the same channels along which it may come to us. The secret is this: Paul was a Christian—a converted, regenerated man, a believer in Christ, under the influence of the Holy Ghost; and the result was accomplished by such simple means as faith and hope and prayer. [161]

Paul had felt, as we all feel, that there is in man a soul as well as a body, an eternal life as well as a temporal. He had also felt, as we all feel, that he was a sinner, condemned and hopeless before that holy law which he had broken, and the judgment of which he must one day meet. But, in obedience to the message of the gospel, he had accepted Christ as his Saviour, through whom he had received the forgiveness of sins, Divine sonship, and sanctifying grace. So that he had to regard himself as henceforth under training for heaven, the training administered by a Divine hand. He knew that the present life, with all its changes, was the thing that was wanted for his spiritual education, that nothing was accidental, that no changes were chances, and that all changes made up one great organized system of discipline, in which “all things were working together for good.” Thus he could cherish in his heart a contentment which would cover all his experiences. There are ills which certain men can bear patiently, but a Christian contentment learns to bear all ills cheerfully; unmurmuring and acquiescent when sorrows multiply, and when [162]

mercies one by one are taken away.

This contentment under Christian conditions is a duty, not perhaps of very easy attainment—Paul himself does not say that it is that—but it is a duty, as being the natural fruit of faith and trust. Every Christian should be able to say:

I will not cloud the present with the
past,
Nor borrow shadows from a future
sky:
'Tis in the present that my lot is cast,
And ever will be through eternity.
"Sufficient to the day the present ill,"
Was kindly utter'd by a heavenly
Voice,
And one inspired to tell his Master's
will
Hath bid us alway in the Lord
rejoice.

[164]

XII. *JOY.*

"Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say rejoice."—PHILIPPIANS IV. 4.

Whatever may be the impression produced by these words, no one can read them attentively, and be indifferent to the admonition they convey. They speak to our most real life, a life of mingled sunshine and shadow; and they speak in the name of a religion which is divinely holy and solemn. They have a marvellous power in awakening feeling, and if we could but know the emotion they excite in each of us, we should find them to constitute a perfect test of our actual experiences, as well as of our religious condition. In any religious assembly, there must of necessity be two widely different states of feeling. Some souls are happy, and others are depressed. To the first class, the words before us come with sweetness, adding joy to joy; to the second, they come with pain, the pain of contrast and of longing. Hence the question might be asked, "To whom are they addressed? Are they spoken to the happy alone? Must they be suppressed when we speak to the sad or to the miserable?" They are addressed neither to the one class alone, nor to the other alone. They were spoken to *all* hearts in the Philippian church, without distinction of condition; and without distinction they are also spoken to us. If there be any special stress in them at all, it is when they are addressed to the sorrowing, as we shall see by-and-by. The words themselves supply a hint as to how this may be. The joy that is recommended is "*joy in the Lord.*" It is therefore a Christian joy; and those to whom the apostle recommends it, whatever may be the diversity of their circumstances, are first of all, last of all, anyhow, under any condition, Christians. Paul knows that joy is an inevitable consequence of the possession of true Christianity in the heart, that it is the natural outcome of Christian faith, that it ought to be a pervading experience of the Christian soul through all the forms and circumstances of its life. And so he offers the same exhortation to all. Nor is it a recommendation merely: it is a command, and it strikingly takes its place among the great Pauline precepts. For the proof of this, turn to these precepts as we have them at the close of his first epistle to the Thessalonians. (See chap. v. 14-22.)

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No one will suppose for a moment that the exhortation to rejoice can be applied in any sense to unbelieving men, to men of the world, to the ungodly. Granting that they have a joy peculiarly their own, it is of such a nature, and is so conditioned by the life of every day, that it would be cruel to bid them "*rejoice evermore.*" The worldling has too many disappointments, struggles, and cares, for a permanent and unbroken joy such as that. He may think himself fortunate for rejoicings that come now and then! Besides, how could Paul recommend a rejoicing which is not "in the Lord," which is the only rejoicing possible to the unbeliever? Paul's joy is consistent with every duty of the religion he preached; but to that religion the unbeliever is opposed. His rejoicing cannot be acceptable to the Lord. It is spurious. It has no true, substantial source. To such a man the apostle might rather have said, "Weep!" Christian joy is an inheritance closely fenced around; and hard as it seems to enjoy any good things in which others cannot share, we must say, "Unbelieving men and women, it is not for you." The way here is through the strait gate, and along the narrow road.

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No joy can be "joy in the Lord" which does not contain the following elements—

1. *Purity.* The objects that excite it must be pure. It must be free from all carnality and from all sin; it must spring from the soul's sympathy with God, with His truth, with His goodness. Holy in

its objects, it becomes a sanctifying power.

2. *Calmness*. It is freedom from turmoil of heart, from disquietude of life. It suffuses our feeling and our conduct with peace—peace that “flows like a river.” Hence, it is the condition of a quiet, steady Christian experience.

3. *Seriousness*. It does not depend on self-forgetfulness, or on a forced thoughtlessness. It is deepest in the most reflective, and is strengthened in all by an honest and habitual self-examination.

4. *Humility*. There is a sort of arrogance and self-sufficiency in worldly joy. Christianity puts man in his true place, and teaches him to refer all his peace to God.

5. *Love*. Love to man and to God; the latter as the natural effect of gratitude, the former from deep pity for his spiritual destitution, or from sympathy in a common experience of happiness.

6. *Permanence*. It is not a fitful, occasional, moody thing. Secondary sources of joy may fail, but God, the primary Source and Giver of all joy, remains; and the relationship between the believer and Him abides, so that the grounds of peace and of hope are everlasting. [168]

Now it is clear that these are not the elements of a worldly joy. We do not care to reduce all that joy to a common level, and to say that it is invariably and equally destitute of all these qualities of purity, calmness, seriousness, humility, love, permanence. It is enough to say that it is not “joy in the Lord.” It does not consciously or actually spring from Him; it is not maintained by communion with Him; and it does not pay to Him its tribute of love, consecration, and praise.

This exhortation to Christian joy is one of the most common in the writings of Paul. Happy Christians may wonder why it is repeated so often. Why urge it at all? Is it not the first, the necessary, the constant result of faith? Why specially insist upon it as a duty? If faith be weak, give us reasons by which faith may be strengthened; but, once in the conscious possession of eternal life and of peace with God, let the results naturally follow. Are they not sure to come?

One would suppose so; but, alas! Paul knew, and we have reason to know, that we are very inconsistent! There is often a divorce between our professed beliefs and the results that should flow from them. Then, too, our faith is often unconsciously held. It is too merely traditional; it lacks freshness and vitality. We may well, therefore, be thankful that God, who has given us such motives for joy, should still recommend it to us. Even with a very sincere faith may circumstances arise which shall trouble our hearts. Our joy is constantly threatened, and almost unconsciously we sometimes come to feel that we have none. I know many Christians of whom the last thing we could affirm would be that they are joyful Christians. Hence the exhortation. It takes the form of a command. Why? [169]

1. We owe it to the love and mercy of our God. Joy is the sign, the expression, and the ornament of gratitude. A faith without joy is an altar without perfume. God’s abounding grace realised in the heart demands this return. If we be not joyful, what does the fact mean? Do we lightly esteem His great love? Are we afraid it may fail?

2. Joy is a means of *testifying* our gratitude. Without joy, faith is barren and inefficient, or else its fruits are rare and without savour. The gospel represents good works as the fruits of faith, and fruits grow not on the trunk, but on the branches; and joy is one of these. A worldly joy gives vigour to the heart in the pursuit of worldly objects. Christian joy prompts the heart to devotedness to God. [170]

3. The world is mightily influenced by our joy. The idea that religion is a sad, gloomy thing is widely spread, and is a hindrance in the way. Men know that our beliefs ought to produce joy, and, if they fail to do so, they become themselves discredited. A true Christian is really at the source of all true joy. The world yields him most because he is nearest heaven. *Joy is a proselyting power*.

4. True joy cannot be imitated. The world’s gaiety is the effect of temperament and circumstances, not of reflection; it repudiates and shrinks from thought. Christian joy deepens the more thoughtful men become. The grounds on which it rests are felt to be the surer the more they are examined.

Let us look at one or two more of the characteristics of Christian joy.

1. It does not avoid contact with men, but it can, if need be, live alone. It can flourish in the heart that is alone with itself and with God, and can find its food in meditation and prayer. It blossoms where other joys fade. [171]

2. It is devout. It loves the places where its Author is worshipped, but it can sing its praises everywhere. The heart in which it resides is a temple. It sings even in the midst of cares and tribulations, like Paul and Silas in the midnight gloom of the prison at Philippi.

3. It is at the furthest remove from frivolity. It rejoices in serious things, even in such serious things as sorrow and death. It looks up and on with hope. It rests in God. It knows that Christ, its Source, can never be separated from it. It thinks itself rich enough in the possession of God’s great love.

4. It triumphs over the hindrances by which all other joy is thwarted. As to remembrances of the past, all that needed to be forgiven *is* forgiven. As to actual trouble, it can take hold of God. As to

forecasts of the future, *that*, in its truest blessedness, is secure.

Who would not be a Christian? And who, being a Christian, can refuse to be glad?

Eternal Source of Life and Light,
From whom my every blessing flows,
How shall my lips extol aright
The bounty that no measure knows?

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Sweet are the gifts Thou dost accord;
Still best when best we love Thy ways:
But one yet add, all bounteous Lord,
And teach me as I would to praise.

To praise Thee ofttimes with my tongue;
To praise Thee ever with my heart;
And soon, where heavenly praise is
sung,
Oh, let me take my blissful part!

Then, Lord, not one of all the host
That hymn Thy glory round the
Throne,
How e'er exalted there, shall boast
A strain more fervent than mine own.

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XIII. *SICKNESS.*

"Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick."—JOHN xi. 4.

Much contact with sickness of late has set me thinking about it; about the place it occupies in the Divine dispensations of our life, and the lessons it may teach. The subject will find an easy entrance into our meditations. Most of us have known what sickness is, and all of us have in prospect that which will prove to be our last.

In all the sorrow that affects the people of God there is more or less of mystery, which deepens in proportion as those who suffer become mature in their Christian life, and advanced in holiness. Yet there are some obvious truths in relation to it which are not hard to discern, and to some of these it will be profitable to turn our thoughts now.

I. Sickness, in common with all our ills, is a solemn witness to the existence of sin. If we trace it back to its first cause, we shall find it to have originated in "the transgression of the law." It would be contrary both to the letter and to the spirit of the gospel to see in each sickness the direct result of a particular sin. Yet cases of this kind are not so rare as we suppose. Many men, even professing Christians, suffer in consequence of sins known only to God and to themselves; secret luxuries and excesses, or a trifling, perhaps half unconscious, with some of the simplest laws of Nature. Let not this be altogether overlooked. Moreover, whilst we are not at liberty to suppose an immediate connection between some particular sickness and some particular sin, there is a general connection between sin and suffering. There would have been no sickness in the world if there had been no sin. There was none in Eden: there will be none in heaven. Sickness is a witness to the disorder which sin has created. The Christian is a forgiven man, but the secondary consequences of sin remain. In a sinful world, the sins of others react upon him in various ways. He himself, though forgiven, is not yet perfect. There will always be enough of the sense of sin even in the most devout heart, to bend the sufferer in humiliation beneath the thought that in a thousand ways he has deserved the discipline of sorrow.

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II. Sickness, however, affords equal testimony to the love of God. The Christian has ample reason for knowing that it is a Father's hand that smites, and that the blow is tempered with gentle mercy. We suffer less than many have suffered before: less than many are suffering now. The Old Testament gives us some notable examples of suffering—Job, David, etc.; so also does the New Testament—Paul, for instance. And what were the sufferings of these compared with those of Christ, who wept and bled and died, not for Himself, but for us? In all ages better men than we have suffered more. Consider what we have deserved, and what, but for the mercy of God, we must have had to bear. If the sufferings of life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to follow, neither are they worthy to be compared with the doom which *must* have followed, if God had not loved us with an infinite and everlasting love. Nor is it beneath the subject to mention the alleviations which are granted to us, and which we must all trace to the Divine Hand—sleep, the suspension of pain, sympathy, and, most of all, the hopes of the gospel. These are common-place considerations, but we must entertain them, if our gratitude and trust are to be

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strong and simple.

But we must enter into particulars a little further for the sake of evolving truth still more immediate and personal. [176]

III. Sickness is often a special grace from God, and is a providential answer to the secret desires of our own souls. Not, indeed, the answer we ask, or the answer we expect; rather, indeed, the answer we would gladly avoid: but still an answer. The cardinal want of man is salvation. Who does not know that sickness has often been sanctified to that end? The cardinal want of the Christian is sanctification—preparedness for heaven; and every Christian knows how seriously this is impeded by a crowd of difficulties, real enough, but which we have a propensity to exaggerate; generally, the daily occupations and cares of life—a family to be provided for, a competency to gain, favourable opportunities to be looked for and seized, daily mischances, and the like. Meanwhile we are conscious of our spiritual wants, and there is a painful conflict between the claims which are temporal, and those which are spiritual. How many Christians are living a life of absorption in the world, yet harassed with occasional regrets, fears, desires, connected with better things? To these sickness is a Divine reply. It is as though God said: "Dear child, I know thy difficulty. Thou canst not of thine own determination leave the world; come away now. Leave thy labour, thy anxiety, thy dreams. Shut out from the world's noise, listen to Me, to thy soul, to heaven, to eternity. Not that thou mayest do thy duty less faithfully do I thus check thee, but that thou mayest learn the true subordination of things to one another; not the spiritual to the temporal, but the temporal to the spiritual. That is why I put this affliction upon thee." Oh, verily, blessed is sickness when viewed from the station where we rest and refresh in the fevered journey of life—a truce after battle, a parenthesis in life's tale, into which God puts His own deep-meaning and gentle word. Let us remember this for our brethren's sakes and for our own. [177]

IV. Sickness, as a special proof of God's love, is charged with a mission to bring to us some special gifts and graces. It is above all things a means of blessing when we associate with it the idea of discipline, however stern. There is not a single Christian virtue that may not acquire strength on a bed of sickness, and there are not a few Christian virtues which probably must be learnt there, if they are ever to be learnt perfectly at all. Among these note the following:

1. *Patience*. This is specially the fruit of sorrow. No soul can know what patience is until it has learnt what suffering is. To this effect Paul and James both teach, putting suffering before the Christian as a veritable cause of joy because it produces patience. How many elements in sickness would be aggravated by the absence of this beautiful grace! How quickly we come to feel that all worry is useless, and that we must simply wait the good pleasure of the Lord! How commonly too, the existence of this virtue strikes the beholder. It is not apathy, it is not stoicism; it is submission. When the sickness is past there will still remain much in life to try us; but if we have learnt the lesson, we shall know how to apply it. [178]

2. *Entire dependence upon God*. This is sometimes hard to realize in days of health and vigour, but in days of sickness we feel that the sentiment is impressed upon us with especial weight. We know that it is He who casteth down and lifteth up. We use means for recovery, and this is right; but we learn that without His blessing the best and the most skilfully applied of these are of no avail. This sense of dependence on God should be the habit of the mind; and having acquired it in sorrow we shall not repudiate or forget it in joy. [179]

3. *Unworldliness*. In a sickness which is protracted, and the issue of which is uncertain, we learn to put the proper estimate on things. We find and we feel that we have here no true home and no true satisfaction, and that we must look above. At such a time we perceive that the *real* is the *spiritual* and the *eternal*. As we groan in this tabernacle, we obtain our true relief in the contemplation of things unseen.

4. *The confidence of faith*. The possible issues of our sickness are momentous, and the question comes: "Of what quality are my hopes? Is the religion that has given me joy and strength in health able to support me now?" And how often the blessed answer is "Yes!" God gives us strength equal to our day. The Father's smile, the presence of the Saviour, simple trust in the Cross—these are realized as they never have been before. And if health should return, it will be with the calmly, soberly delightful feeling of a religion in the heart that has stood the test. This is the experience of not a few whom I have known.

All this has a mighty influence on others besides the sufferers themselves. They preach, and preach effectively, through their sorrow and the grace by which they bear it, and get blessing out of it. Thus their sickness becomes an occasion on which, an instrumentality by which, God conveys the blessings of His grace to their brethren. [180]

To all of us, whether in sickness or in health, the subject suggests some important lessons. It suggests thankfulness for such health as we have. Others are suffering: why not we? Multitudes are languishing in pain to-day; most of us are well. Let us bless God, and seek His grace that we may use this gift of health, with all His other gifts, to His glory. It suggests sympathy for those who suffer. How dependent they are on our kindness, our gentleness, our love. Let us give it to them in full measure. Specially, let us give expression to our sympathy for them by prayer on their behalf. It suggests faithfulness to the vows made in the time of our trouble. How much holier would all of us be to-day if none of those vows had been forgotten!

XIV. *JESUS ONLY.*

“And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.”—MATTHEW xvii. 8.

The visible glory has vanished; Moses and Elias have disappeared; the cloud is gone; the Voice has been heard; and Jesus has assumed again the form of His lowliness. A few moments ago Peter, in a half-unconscious ecstasy, was saying: “Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias.” And now they are coming down from the mountain to the turmoil at its foot, and they who wished to tabernacle so gloriously above must descend again to their fishing-nets below. The change seems sudden and sad. We feel inclined to exclaim, “What a loss!” But though they come down, Jesus is with them. Herein lies the substance of what I want now to develop. Our life has its resting-places, exposed to startling, rude alternations; but it has also, in the midst of all, its grand solace.

I. The first of these truths is one of such common experience, that we have no need to do more in support of it than to point to well-known facts. I shall try to generalize them by referring merely to three points. [182]

1. To our external personal circumstances. Sometimes we are prosperous, cheerful, happy. We say, “The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.” Incidents occur which seem to transform our ordinary life. We succeed in our pursuits. We are in health. Our domestic happiness is undisturbed. We have been delivered from impending ill, and, instead of suffering what we have feared, we realize more than we have hoped for. We are thankful; we are content; and we want to build our tabernacle on the green mount of our prosperity.

May we not indulge this feeling without any suspicion that our prosperity may too much absorb and unspiritualise us? But the time for disenchantment comes, and if we have grace enough in our hearts, we find that a drawback is put in the way of our fancied happiness, the tendency of which is proving a strong temptation to worldliness. And then, though we do not court reverses—for they, too, have their temptations—we begin to feel that this position of fancied happiness is not so perfect as we thought. Besides, the novelty passes away, and the satisfaction becomes less. We had forgotten our higher needs whilst we were absorbed in our external well-being. And so we come to acknowledge once more that this is not our rest. Sometimes, too, a veritable reverse takes place; like the disciples, we have to come down from the mount. The alternations of grief, disappointment, and care follow our joy, and we get a further confirmation of the truth that there is no resting-place to be found in any of the circumstantial of life. [183]

2. To our intercourse with men. We have reason to be thankful for all the blessing which reaches us through this channel, and especially so for all sanctified human relationships. To men of confiding, generous natures, it is natural to repose in their contact with certain of their fellow creatures. Some of our brethren wield a marvellous charm over us. We trust their character; we are not conscious of their defects; we are entirely at home with them.

But here, again, we find that we must come down from the mount. It would be a sad story if we could all tell our surprises and disappointments in this matter. How many apparently beautiful friendships have passed away! How many defects have we discovered in those whom we have implicitly trusted, when we have been brought into a closer acquaintance with them? How many have others discovered in us? Do we not see here one reason why men become cynical and misanthropic? The greater the confidence, the greater the subsequent distrust. The greater the joy, the deeper the grief which has followed it. Let us thank God for the friendships that abide; but let us remember that human love can never be a perfect resting-place for our hearts. [184]

3. To our Christian feeling. In the early days of our Christian life especially, and often afterwards, all seems to be “transfigured” before our eyes. We see a new earth and a new heaven. We breathe a life-giving atmosphere as we ascend the hills from whence cometh our help. Moses and Elias—the law and the prophets—have undergone the same transformation. Desires which are earthly have given place to desires which are spiritual. We seem to be in closest contact with the Saviour, and we pity the small pre-occupations of the world. We say, “Let us build here our tabernacle, and rest.”

But changes await us! First the heights, then the depths! To-day, the unutterable words from heaven; to-morrow, the thorn in the flesh and the messenger of Satan to buffet! The one is not without the other. Hence the lesson comes home to us: “Do not depend too much on your heart-states.” These high joys seldom last long. Jesus, so to speak, loses His splendour, and comes down again from the mount, as a man, to His humiliation. [185]

II. The facts I have adverted to are such as only experience teaches. The prosperous and the immature may suppose that I take too gloomy a view of life. By no means. Life has brought its trials to me; and, like many others, I have been again and again on the mount to come down afterwards into the valley. And, were it not for one crowning consideration, there has been enough of change to some of us to make us sad and gloomy enough. What has prevented it? *This*,

that Jesus has come down from the mount along with us. We have learnt to prize Him in proportion as we have learnt the deceptiveness of all beside!

As Jesus humbled Himself, so He humbles His own. He wants us to walk by faith, not by sight, nor by sentiment. What should we become on our Tabor, if we were allowed to build our tabernacles there? Certainly proud; perhaps foolish; perhaps self-sufficient. Paul was in danger of being exalted above measure by the glory of the revelations which came to him; have we any reason to be more certain of ourselves? The greater the height the more destructive the fall. We might also mistake religious ecstasies for religious firmness or religious growth. Yes, the true discipline is that which makes us come down. [186]

All this looks like the disenchantment of our cherished illusions. What have we to put in their place? Man does not live alone by what is taken away from him, but by what is given to him. Have we taken away all? Have we given nothing? We read that a Voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.... And when the disciples had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only." What does that teach us?

It teaches that out of these ecstasies, which often hide the reality, there comes a gift of God more precious than all—*Jesus Himself*. Whatever form He may assume, He is still the same; still the same whether He goes up the mountain with us, or comes down with us from the mountain. Our illusions vanish, but Jesus does not disappear. It is to Him that God directs us when the dreams of life are gone. Events deceive us, men change, the joy of our own hearts subsides; but these things happen that we may lift up our eyes and see Jesus only. [187]

And so the illusions which depart give place to a permanent good. Do not be afraid to descend from the mountain-tops into the low valleys which lie beneath. Neither height nor depth need separate from the love of Christ. A mighty and gracious Hand guides you, whether you see it or not. Lay hold of it with confidence. Though your ecstasies vanish, the great gain of your faith will be a sober, deep repose.

Do not confound this repose with a want of life or of interest. A staid, strong, sober Christian is a man who has learnt in whatsoever state he is therewith to be content. A staid, strong, sober Christian is one who can do all things through Christ, who is ever near and ever strengtheneth.

Is not such a condition a blessed one? It is that which gives to faith its permanence and its calm. Instead of ascending to heaven and descending to the abyss to find Christ, we find Him here, and remain with Him in peace and assurance. Having found Him, and being united to Him, we may, if need be, do without the rest. On the mount and in the plain we have the same Saviour. In any case, our hearts are on a sure foundation. [188]

The tabernacles Peter wanted to erect on Tabor let us erect in the valley. Let us keep near to Jesus; near to His law, near to His promises, but emphatically near to Him. This, too, will be a transfiguration, the transfiguration of our common life. The light of the Divine glory will shine about us; and in the light, and out of the cloud, the Voice will speak. We shall tabernacle with Moses and Elias only above; but we may tabernacle with Jesus below. Let us tabernacle with Him most at the cross; for it is there that we shall find most of our holiness and our hope.

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XV.

PRAYER.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened."—MATTHEW vii. 7, 8.

Prayer is one of the vital elements of the Christian life. It mingles with its first impulses; it is the secret of every step in its development, the hidden germ of the grain of mustard-seed, the sap that nourishes the growing and the perfected tree from the furthest fibres of its roots to the topmost shoot of its branches. A sapless tree is not a living one, but dead; a prayerless Christian cannot be.

As might have been expected, the New Testament is remarkably plain in its teaching on this subject of prayer. The difficulties connected with it which exist in our minds are not difficulties which it creates or even sanctions. A simple reverence for its utterances is almost all that we need for their removal. Let us inwardly pray for this while we study the question now. [190]

The form in which our Lord presents His exhortation in the text is interesting and suggestive. He uses three words—"ask," "seek," "knock," which seem to intimate a gradation, and to lead up to a climax. The word "ask" indicates the felt want of a good which may be obtained; not purchased, but obtained as a free gift. The word "seek" indicates the continuance of the asking, with the added idea, perhaps, that our need is our fault, and that what we seek has been previously lost. The word "knock" supposes a difficulty in obtaining, the delay of the answer, a blessing shut up,

and not immediately forthcoming. Here, then, is a hint of possible difficulties. Nevertheless, a promise is annexed, which is all-sufficient. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Christ's word is assurance enough for us; but He condescends to append an argument drawn from a comparison between man and God, between imperfect earthly parents and the infinitely perfect Father in heaven; an argument which ought to be conclusive. "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?"

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The facts as they lie open on the surface of the text are among the most solemn and momentous facts of our life and thought. There is a God, holding in the universe a position which is exclusively His own, the great and only Giver of all good. Man's position is one of dependence; in no sense is he self-sufficient. As it is God's prerogative to give, so it is man's duty and interest to ask. There is a possibility of communion between Him who gives and him who needs; the hand of want brought into contact with the hand that supplies. Then we have the fact that God is both able and willing to satisfy man's want out of His own fulness. Further, we have the tender solicitation to trust on our part—the absolute promise that such trust can never be misplaced—and the encouraging assurance that the God who gives is moved towards His creatures who ask by all the sympathies of a Divine Fatherhood. Every ground of the confidence that children have in their parents is consolidated into a rock of immovable repose when the Heavenly Father comes in question.

These facts enter into the common substance of our Christian belief and thought. As Christians, we never deny and never dispute them. We hold them in a measure unconsciously till the crises of life bring them into prominence. But they are inconceivably marvellous. As mere conceptions they are grand; as realized grounds of hope they are inexpressibly helpful. They are full of greatness and tenderness. Each of us may say to himself: "My soul, with all thy manifold infirmities and littlenesses, thou canst pray to the great God! Ay, thou canst come to Him as to an infinite Father!" Surely that is distinction and consolation enough.

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Comparatively few Christians, however, understand prayer as they should—either as a duty or as a privilege. With tens of thousands amongst them it is to a great extent an unappreciated boon. Even many devout Christians—anxious to use it to more effect—have their difficulties. I want to offer some help to such as these. The scope of prayer, unanswered prayer, delayed answers, etc., all are subjects of anxious questioning.

I. Prayer, according to the teaching of Scripture and of experience, is a simple transaction of asking and receiving. It indirectly serves other ends, as we shall see shortly; but it is first of all, and all through, just what I have stated. We pray because we want; we pray in order to get what we want; and we pray with the feeling that we shall not get it unless we pray. There is no mystery in such a view as this. The transaction between the Christian and God, involved in prayer as thus described, is as natural, as simple, as well defined, and as easily understood, as the action of a child when it asks its parents for what it needs, and when its parents give what it needs in answer to the asking. The holy men of Scripture understood prayer in this way. Their prayers are full of simplicity, both as to their structure and their spirit. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, Elijah, all simply asked for such blessing as they felt they needed; asked for the sake of receiving, and feeling that the reception of what they wanted was dependent upon their asking. They unquestionably believed in an invisible Hand, and felt that the Heart that guided that Hand delighted to be trusted and appealed to in every, and for every, kind of human need.

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II. The simplicity of their view of the *nature* of prayer is no greater than that of the view they took of the *scope* of prayer. A feeling has grown up in the minds of many that we cannot ask with confidence for temporal blessings, and that the only blessings for which we may be sure that it is right to ask are those which are spiritual. But that was not the idea of the praying men of the past. There was not a blessing, material or spiritual, for which they hesitated to pray—life, health, food, rain, fruitful seasons, success in battle, peace of soul, forgiveness of sins, strength for holy work—all these, and indiscriminately as to any special privilege attached to the prayer for one or another. Just so taught Christ. "The Lord's Prayer" asks not only for the glory of God and the forgiveness of trespasses, but also for "daily bread."

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These considerations must neither be misunderstood nor overlooked. Prayer is a direct, specific, simple act. Men say that well-wishing, right-living, work, and such like, are prayer. Not so. A prayerful spirit may be, and ought to be, blended with the whole of our life; but we must not so shade off the act into something else as to take away its point and its reality. Prayer is the concentration of the soul upon its present need, whatever that may be, and then bringing it to God, naked and undisguised, for Him to meet it. The faith that prompts and backs up such prayer hangs every circumstance of life, the most minute and the most momentous alike, on the direct and immediate control of God, in whose great foresight all our little plans are lost, and in whose hands we become the instruments of our own well-being.

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III. It is demanded by such a view of prayer as that which has now been given, that we should confidently expect the answers to our petitions. This seems a simple, trite thing to say; but it is here especially that we fail. The attitude of looking for answers to prayer is not a common one. How is this? Partly because our prayers are often so vague that we do not know precisely what to expect; partly because the habit of prayer is largely formal—a mere piece of religious routine; sometimes because we misapprehend the form in which the answer may come; and sometimes

because, in impatience, we lose heart and hope. We should ever remember, however, that the promise to hear and to answer is positive and unrestricted. This fact leaves ample room for the truth, which we should also ever remember, that the mode and time of the answer remain with God, and must be left to His loving wisdom. If He should see that what we ask will strengthen our faith in Him, bring our hearts nearer to Him, and help us to fulfil His will, He will grant the answer directly, and in the form in which we look for it. He has done so in numberless cases. Sometimes He does so in special and unmistakable instances, of which, perhaps, George Müller and his orphanage is the most prominent in our time. On the other hand, if He should see that an answer of this kind would encourage worldliness, or in any way lead to evil, as it might sometimes do, then He will delay the answer, or will change its form into one of greater safety for us, at the same time speaking with His "still small voice" words of peace to our hearts. One thing is certain; namely, that if the worldly advantage be first in our view, it will be well for our prayer to be denied, and God will deny it.

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IV. One condition, then, of answered prayer is that we must be loyal to God, and this loyalty includes submission to His will—a willingness to receive, and a willingness to be denied. We may ask what we will in such a spirit as this; for in such a spirit we shall be sure that any refusal from Him will be a blessing to ourselves.

V. One difficulty in relation to prayer of which anti-christian people make much, and which often occurs even to the most devout, is as to how these specific answers to prayer can be made to agree with the regularity of God's laws and the order of His Providence. This question introduces us to a mystery which we cannot hope fully to solve. We have no idea that prayer alters either the perceptions or the will of God; neither do we imagine that it interferes with natural laws, so as to prevent their due and natural operation. The operations of nature are often affected by the human will, both directly and indirectly; yet no one supposes that to that extent the order of nature is disturbed. Why may not the influence of the human will upon nature act through the medium of prayer to the great Author of nature, as well as in any other way? No objection of this kind lies against prayer which does not equally lie against all human enterprise; yea, even against the daily work by which we live! It is a sufficient reply to every objection of this kind that it is founded in a philosophy of fatalism. Surely if man, within the limits of his power, can use nature for himself, God, whose power is infinitely greater, can use nature for him, if He be pleased on any terms to do so; and there is no more interference with the order of nature in the Divine use of it than there is in the human. Prayer may have its part to play in the great system of causation as well as work. It may be a part of the foreseen chain of causes and effects by which God unfolds His eternal purposes. The good order of a family is not disturbed by the margin given to the children's wishes and requests; and when we are wise enough to know, we shall see how it has been even so in the greater family of God. God is love before we pray as well as when He answers; and yet it may be according to His will, because it is according to His beneficent wisdom, that there shall be many blessings unreceived by us until we ask for them.

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VI. How do these thoughts bear upon the subject of importunity in prayer? Such importunity is not discountenanced, but rather encouraged, by the very form of our Lord's exhortation. "Ask; seek; knock." I have said that this series of words intimates a gradation, and constitutes a climax. Seeking is more than asking; knocking is more than asking or seeking. "Ask and ye shall receive." Yes, but the "asking" which is to be followed by receiving may be such as to include both "seeking" and "knocking." God is not reluctant to hear and to answer; but that is no reason why He should not require sometimes to be importuned. Christ gives His special sanction to this importunity through the medium of two parables, both of which were spoken for the express purpose of urging it. The first of these is the parable of the man who disturbs the repose of his friend at midnight for the purpose of obtaining from him the means of showing hospitality to an unexpected wayfarer; the second is the parable of the injured widow and the unjust judge. In both these parables, the suppliants are represented as prevailing; but the point to be noted is that the power by which they prevail is their earnest and persistent importunity. Why does Christ illustrate prayer to God by the pertinacity which is needful to arouse the affections of sinful man? We may be sure that He does not ascribe any thing of human imperfection to God. Our Father in heaven slumbers not, and is never weary. He is love. Christ simply puts Himself in the feeling of the man who knows by experience that God often delays the fulfilment of prayer, and shows, by parabolic teaching, that to pray well we must be fervent and not "faint." The lesson is impressive. If between man and man importunate prayer prevails, how much more will it prevail with God who is perfect, and who will not make us wait except for the sake of our highest well-being. The man goes to his friend with confidence because he has faith in the friendship; how inconceivably strong may this confidence be when we repose it in God! The plea was the stress of his need; the same stress belongs to many of the needs which only God can supply. Our praying-time, like that of the friend at midnight, is often that of the deepest darkness; but we pray to God and not to man, and need not fear that He, in His deep, heavenly repose, will fail faithfully to hearken to our supplications—supplications which, because they proceed from the holiest solitudes of love and duty, are inspired by Himself. Christ bids us reason from both bad men and good men to God, and it is well for us that He does so. On the bad side, man's love is weak, his judgment faulty, and his selfishness deep-rooted; God is infinite both in His wisdom and His love. On the good side, earthly fathers give bread, not stones, to their children; how much kinder is He to whom we look up and say, "Our Father which art in heaven!" "Yes," you say, "He is good and kind; but He makes us wait." It is so; and why? We are feeble in our desires, and changeful in our purposes. We soon give up. We want faith, patience, perseverance. The uniformly immediate fulfilment of our petitions would leave no room for the cultivation of these quiet, unobtrusive virtues of the Divine life within us. God makes us wait, that we may become importunate, and that importunity

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may nourish the virtues which are as yet too feeble. Besides, delay gives purity to our motives, and intensity to our desires. A blessing which is easily won is likely to be unappreciated. God would not have us treat His gold as though it were stones. Delay is not refusal; it is discipline. Moreover why speak we of delay at all? What we so designate is not delay from the Divine point of view. He never postpones any asked-for good for one moment beyond the fit time for bestowing it.

God's help is always sure,
His methods seldom guessed;
Delay will make our pleasure
pure,
Surprise will give it zest.

His wisdom is sublime,
His heart profoundly kind;
God never is before His time,
And never is behind.

VII. What, then, is the character of the prayer which avails? That some prayers are "hindered"—so hindered as to be unsuccessful—we know full well. This may be accounted for partly by [202] mistaken notions about the Scripture theory of prayer. For example, Jesus says, "What things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." The teaching of these words is that the inspiration to true prayer is God's pledge of the blessings sought, and that we must be prepared to take it as such. The prayer of a man who has not full faith in prayer falls short of its mark. Hindrance may also arise from mistaken notions as to the primary use of prayer. Prayer is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. It is true that the holier we become the more shall we find ourselves accustomed to an atmosphere of prayerfulness as the normal condition of the soul. But we shall not pray aright, if we pray under the impression that we are holy because we pray. We must rather pray in order to be holy. The hindrance may also arise from the absence of a supreme anxiety and of a constant effort to honour God in all our relations. Peter speaks of obedience to the duties which spring from the conjugal relation as being necessary to prevent the "hindrance"—the ineffectualness—of family prayer. This is but a special application of a great general principle—namely, the connection between holy conduct in society [203] and the efficiency of our social devotional exercises. These two act and re-act upon each other. To secure the true, full benefit of prayer, we must strive to live holily in all the society with which we mingle. This point touches upon the value of intercessory prayer. Suppose that there is a want of correspondence between the interest in the welfare of those around us which we express in our prayers on their behalf, and that which we show in our intercourse with them; can we rightly expect such prayers to prevail? The deficiency is too frequently manifest in our relations both to the Church and the world. How often is Church brotherhood nominal rather than real! How many pray for the salvation of souls, without caring to do anything else! There is one thing which will always, in so far as it exists, be a barrier to the acceptableness of prayer, and that is the wilful and persistent violation of any of the Divine commands—the refusal to perform Christian duties incumbent upon us, or the cherishing of some habit or propensity known to be wrong. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." The success of our prayers does not depend upon our learning, or upon the skill with which we can express our petitions, or with which we can string them together. It depends rather upon the state of our hearts—the vivid consciousness of need, the deep feeling of dependence on God, the supreme desire of the heart to be right with Him, faith in His promises, trust in His power and His love, gratitude for His goodness, an unfainting perseverance in appealing to His throne, and a willingness to wait His time for the blessings thus humbly, trustfully, and earnestly sought. These are the elements of the true spirit of prayer. "Ask" thus "and it shall be given you;" "seek" thus, "and ye shall find;" "knock" thus, [204] "and it shall be opened unto you."

I alluded in the beginning to the indirect effects of prayer, and these are too valuable to be overlooked. Prayer, pervaded by humility and trust, is always strengthened by its own exercise. All Christian graces are beautified by it; all Christian virtues are stimulated by it. It is a Divine provision for rousing the slumbering affections of the renewed heart, and keeping them awake. Prayer, too, is its own reward, and a blessed one. How holy and how happy must they be who are on intimate terms with God! Their faces catch His glory, and their every tone and step the impress of the sanctity of the Divine companionship. The Christian can tell his Father all! And because he is so near to God and to heaven, he can put and keep the world beneath his feet. [205]

Even delays and seeming refusals are not without their salutary influence. Some persons pray for specific blessings year after year—"pray without ceasing"—and are often staggered at the fact that their prayers remain unanswered; and yet we see them growing in spirituality, purity, fortitude, faith, and we hear them say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." And so their faith—the most precious thing they have—is tried and refined as in a furnace. Surely such an answer to prayer is sublime!

I have been speaking to many a doubt, to many a perplexity, with which I am familiar in my own experience and in that of others. God grant that my words may be helpful! What we all want in regard to this great subject is clearer views and a more unquestioning trust. God courts our utmost confidence, and He will not fail to reward it.

XVI. *ASSURANCE.*

"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."—2 TIMOTHY i. 12.

These are among the last words the apostle wrote. He is now at Rome, in prison, and within a few days of the tragic end. He is worn down by age; still more so by a constant, toilsome, suffering ministry of some thirty years, a ministry which has obtained for him, at the hands of men, stones and stripes, and now a dungeon, with the immediate prospect of a violent death. He is bound with chains, and compelled to be silent just where and when he has so long been anxious to speak, in the metropolis of the world! He is, moreover, forsaken by his friends, who, though they love him, have not courage to go and visit him now! Outwardly, no sadder condition could well be imagined. Yet Paul is filled with a deep and holy peace. How is this? The answer is that he feels within himself the approval of his God. He is in prison, but that is because of his obedience to His Saviour. He has worn himself down in a Divine service. Behind him he sees a long train of woes and sufferings, but he also sees many churches which he has founded, and many unknown regions open to the gospel. Before him he sees an unrighteous judge and a painful martyrdom, but he also sees heaven, Christ, and the unfading crown. If he says, "All have forsaken me," he can also say, as his Master did, that he is not left alone. All this is enough to account for the calmness and hopefulness of this his last epistle, and especially of the words before us to-day.

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I will not trouble you with the critical difficulties of the text. On only one preliminary question I would say a word. What does Paul mean by the expression, "that which I have committed unto Him"? Some urge that it was the Church which he was about to leave; others, that it was the result of his labours; and others, that it was his final salvation. I prefer to combine all these into one general whole, and to say: "All his Christian interests, the hopes on which his spirit rested for his personal salvation, and every other interest that was dear to his heart." He had "committed" to Christ himself, the church he had loved and served, the results of his labour, and the final reward to which he was looking forward. If, within the vast scope of his desires, there had been one thing which he could not commit to Christ, his rest would have been incomplete, and his joy would have been marred. But for *everything* he was able to say: "Saviour, I have committed this to Thee."

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Observe how Paul puts this great matter. He was the greatest *doctrinal* writer of the New Testament; but he does not say that he believes in *doctrines*, but that he believes in a *Person*. "I know *whom* I have believed." All doctrinal belief follows, and is comprised in, that. Faith everywhere in Scripture is confidence in Christ. He who believes in Christ must come sooner or later to believe in the doctrines which cluster around Him. But our experience grows beyond these into the realisation of Him as being so actual, so near, and so sufficient, as to be our true rest. Who among us can tell *all* the reasons why he believes in Christ? Many of them cannot be put into words. They belong to our most secret thoughts, to the emotions of our happiest hours, to a hidden, silent history, which, if the world heard, it could not understand. Yet these proofs multiply in proportion as the Christian advances in life. How many times have we found the words of Christ adapted to our wants! How many unexpected deliverances has He wrought on our behalf! How many answers to prayer have we received at His hands! How much peace has He breathed into our hearts! "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

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What a grand confirmation have we here of the faith Paul preached! Had his trust been misplaced, surely he had suffered enough to disabuse him of it, and that most completely. But his faith grows the more he suffers. No mere party zeal could stand a test like this; no, nor any delusion either. And so we say that such a man as Paul was, under the circumstances in which he maintained his trust, could not be deceived. Thus Paul's faith becomes a confirmation of our own, and, with him on our side, we may face a world of doubt.

But I wish to use the text chiefly for the elucidation of a single subject. Paul's words express *the assurance of his faith*. How does this subject strike us? Does not the very mention of it give rise to sad reflections in many hearts? "The assurance of faith." "Ah, I knew it once," we say; "it was the experience of earlier days, and has been the experience of some special days since then, still more so of some specially holy moments. But it is not my normal state. Would it were!"

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We are living in a period in which there seems to be a general disinclination towards whatever is firm and precise in religious creed, feeling, and life. This may not be an altogether unhopeful state of things. Respect for truth may keep some minds silent concerning their beliefs, or at least may prevent them from avowing those beliefs too dogmatically. Anxiety and doubt may even in some cases be a sign of spiritual earnestness. Yet the tendency we speak of is on the whole to be deeply deplored. The truth is that the world has invaded us. Men shrink from great precision of conviction because they shrink from great consecration of life. How few the lives that are pre-eminently Christian, as Paul's was! On the other hand, our day is remarkable for its craving for mere religious excitement. In many cases, it is not so much the desire for truth, as the desire to

be excited and pleased, that prevails. Neither of these tendencies can build up the faith which finds its grand avowal in the words: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." [211]

The remedy for the state of things upon which I have touched cannot now be pointed out, because it would lead me away from my purpose. But I want to show the effect of it upon ourselves, and upon those who are without. There are certain aims common to the Christian life of all of us, and these cannot be reached so long as our faith lacks steadiness and stability.

1. Our great mission is to convert souls. We are avowedly the instruments of the Spirit of God in this momentous work. But what is the conversion of a soul? It is a radical change in its affections and its life. But this change never takes place apart from the influence of deep convictions. Men will not exchange the known for the unknown: actual life with its passions and its pleasures for the weak and cold abstractions of a faith with no precision in its principles, or for the worship of a God who is vague and problematical. How are we to succeed in winning souls to the truth we profess unless we can produce something which ought to convince them that we have the right of it? An unstable faith will be of little use to us here. There must be no hesitation in our avowal that our transition from the world to God is a blessed one. In other matters, a man of strong beliefs has half won us to his side. In religion, it is notoriously so. Paul's grand words have been a source of strength to us. Let us make them our own—the expression of our own faith—and they will become, through us, a source of strength to others. Let us have this same Christianity in its fulness and its power; and having it, let us avow it without timidity and without reserve. [212]

2. Our personal obligation, as Christians, is to be holy; and we want the assurance of faith for that. We may be deceived about our conversion. At the outset of our Christian life we may be the subjects of many illusions. But men are not mistaken when, day by day, they are fighting their passions, bringing the will into subjection, conquering the flesh, and submitting the whole life to the long, slow, toilsome discipline of obedience. This kind of work is never accomplished by a vague and undecided religion. Men do not deny themselves without an equivalent. You cannot persuade them to give up their illusions, their pleasures, their passions, nor even their vices, unless you show them something else which may, must, and ought to take their place. If you empty the heart of one set of elements, you must fill it with another. So it is that we want a living God, a living Christ, close to us; loving us, forgiving us, helping us, comforting us, and opening before us the prospect of glory and of happiness for eternity. Let us know and feel ourselves able to say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day," and the struggle with inward evil will be simplified, and will become comparatively easy. [213]

3. We stand in daily need of strength and consolation, and for that nothing but a firm and settled faith will suffice. There are great sorrows and great anxieties to which we are all exposed, in the face of which nothing will do for us but sovereign words of life and of hope in which we can implicitly trust. There are great wrongs under which we cannot be comforted except by the constant conviction of a righteousness which will one day vindicate the right, and redress the wrong. There are great losses in which we want the promise and the certainty of an immense and restoring love. Souls will seek this strength, this consolation, here, there, everywhere; but they will never find it until they can say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." [214]

4. The assurance of faith is necessary to all earnestness of effort in the spread of the gospel. A church or a Christian, subsiding into uncertainty of religious belief, has no motive for zeal in the propagation of religion. We preach because we believe. Let the idea, that the Christianity of Christ or of Paul or of the New Testament needs modification, become prevalent in the professing church, and the secret of every true impulse in missionary work, whether abroad or at home, will be gone. It is the men who share Paul's stable, grand faith who can take their stand as the preachers of Christ. It is only they who can rise to the sacrifices necessary for the promotion of His truth in the world.

Have we such a faith as this? If not how can we obtain it? This latter question will be best answered by a close adherence to the text. We must say a few words respecting the faith itself, and also respecting Christ, who is the object of it.

What is faith? A common answer is that faith is an act of intellectual submission to the teachings of another—that it is in matters of the mind what blind and unquestioning obedience is in matters of practice. This account of faith was early imposed by the Papal Church, and it is not repudiated even now by some evangelical churches. The root of all doctrines of sacramental efficacy is the renunciation of private judgment in matters of faith. No wonder that with such a definition of faith Christianity should be held in derision, and regarded as the special privilege of the young, the immature, the aged, and all whose weaknesses and disappointments leave them no other consolation and no other resource! This is not the teaching of Scripture. Of course in faith there is submission, for there are many things to be believed which we cannot understand. Nevertheless, faith is much more than submission, and there is not a case of faith in the whole Word of God which presents to us the believing life as a thing of mere blind credulity. Was it so with Abraham, with Job, with David, with Paul, or with any of the others? Even in relation to the dark things, faith rests upon convictions which make submission the only rational, the only possible attitude of the mind. According to Scripture, faith is the soul laying hold of the invisible God—laying hold of Christ as His Son and our Saviour. There is no abdication of any one of the powers of the soul. In believing, the soul is entire with its reason, its thought, its love, and all its [215]

spiritual energies. Nor is there any weakness. When a man is hesitating between surrender to the voice of conscience, and surrender to the voice of passion, he performs an act of faith if he yields to the voice of conscience, for he is ruled by the invisible; yet the last thing we dare say of such a man would be that he is weak. Rightly considered, every such act is a triumph of the soul. The conscientious man is the representative of the greatest moral strength we know. Imagine a soul with all its life under the constant thought of God and of Christ. Surely such an order of life as his affords scope enough for intellectual strength and for moral heroism.

Much must be taken for granted, we said. Reason has its sphere, and to it a truly noble task is assigned. The visible world belongs to it, and it is subjecting that world to itself more and more every day. But how powerless it is when man asks of it a response to the aspirations of his conscience and his heart. What can it say to a soul weighed down by a sense of guilt? What to the heart that is torn by calamity? What to any man when death draws nigh? Oh, no! Unless we are to abandon ourselves to despair, there must be faith—some truth in which, or some Being in whom, the whole soul can repose. And mark, this was just the light in which the apostle looked at the matter. He was near the end. Eternity was close before him. He knew that endless issues were at stake. He was nerved to confront it all by faith. *What faith?* What was he trusting in?

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Paul believed in Christ. On what grounds? Can we believe in Christ? If so, again I ask on what grounds?

1. Christ stands before us in our darkness in a position which is exclusively His own. Of all men, He alone knew whence He came and whither He went. Without hesitation, and with tones of sovereign authority, He points out to us the way to God. He speaks of heaven as one who has come from thence. Everywhere He calls Himself the Sent of the Father, His only-begotten Son, the Lord of souls. His word was with power; sweet with intensest human tenderness, influential with Divine authority. What was it that gave Him this power? Not human reasoning, not eloquence. It was the light of Truth reaching the conscience, and penetrating the heart. We see in Him God as He is, and we also see in Him man as he ought to be. We do not reason about this influence. Apprehending Him, we instinctively accept it. It is thus that millions have said: "To whom can we go but unto Thee? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

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2. This influence of Christ has been exerted on every variety of human soul. His followers, in ever-increasing numbers, come from all conditions on earth—rich and poor, learned and ignorant, young and old, hardened sinners and men blushing with their first sins: all find from Him peace and light and hope. Especially is this so with those who suffer and weep; those who have felt the poverty of mere words, and who are now beyond the reach of any illusion. For the first time they have been comforted, and the comfort has satisfied them.

3. Still we want further to know by what authority He wields this influence. We ask, "Does He come from God?" The reply is that He does before our eyes the works of God. Not miracles merely, for though these constitute a powerful testimony, there is yet something more. He has revealed God in His own person, and the proof of His Divine mission has been given in His life. In Him, holiness has been at once realised and exhibited. Eighteen hundred years ago His enemies could find no fault in Him. Since then humanity has progressed, but Christ still leaves the noblest sons of men amazingly far behind Him. A hostile criticism has been indefatigable in its attempt to discover flaws in His character, and yet that character still stands before us as the ideal of the good and the true. His is a holiness before which the conscience of the world is accused and judged. Irresistibly the answer of the heart comes: "He who is so holy must be worthy of all our faith."

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4. Moreover, there is the sense of sin and of the need of pardon and salvation. Here after all, and more than anywhere else, is the secret of confidence in Christ. We seek salvation in works—anywhere out of Him—but we cannot find it. He who is holy and true tells us that He came into the world to save us, that He is our sacrifice and our peace, and that the love and the righteousness of God are manifest in Him and in the redeeming work He has undertaken on our behalf. This exactly meets our case. We say: "This is what we want, but what we have elsewhere sought in vain. At His hands we accept it with implicit trust and with fervent thankfulness."

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Are not these reasons enough? Is not the response of every heart, "Yes, they are." Can it be less than the utmost folly and guilt for men to resist the voice of a conscience which tells them that it is only in Christ that the soul can find its rest? Is all this concurrent testimony to be set aside?

This assurance of faith, however, can only be the result of intense earnestness. We do not forget the necessity of the agency of the Spirit of God; let us never forget it; but let us also remember how constantly and how fatally that agency can be contravened. Paul held the great truths he preached with so tenacious and so unquestioning a faith, because he had begun by consecrating his heart to them under the intuitive perception that they were the truths which his nature as a man and his condition as a sinner so imperatively needed, and because all his experience of them did but confirm their sufficiency. "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God," or whether it be of men. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

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For the unbeliever there are grounds enough for faith, both within and without. And if, even with the desire, faith be still found to be beset with difficulties, there is one unfailing prayer which will make it easy—the prayer, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

XVII. *IMMORTALITY.*

“What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?”—PSALM viii. 4.

One or two remarks on the meaning of certain expressions in this Psalm are necessary before we proceed. The second verse is pictorial, and has a martial character. Two hosts are seen facing each other. A beautiful world and a wonderful universe are in view of both. Children, in their conscious or unconscious admiration of what they see, and in the early and universal instinct by which they attribute it to the hand of a great God, effectually rebuke the unbelief of scoffers and all haters of God, who persistently refuse to recognise Him in His works. So, even to-day, the simple and pious intuitions of the race face, fight, and conquer all materialism. The beautiful and significant application of these words found in the account of our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem points for all time to the duty of giving Christian teaching to the young. In our Christian homes and our Sunday-schools lies the great bulwark against the spread of infidelity. Such teaching acts on the future. “Instead of the fathers shall be the children,” a generation to serve God. These will become fathers in their turn. “Take care of the children, and the adults will take care of themselves.”

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“What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?” At first sight, it would seem as though the Psalmist were contrasting the littleness of man with the greatness of the universe. And, indeed, he does use a word to denote man which points to his weakness. But this is only David's starting-point in his aim to correct the impression. The Psalm reveals, not the littleness, but the greatness of man. “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?” How little he looks! Yet how great he must be! “For Thou makest him to want little of a Divine standing; Thou crownest him with honour and glory; Thou makest him to have dominion over the work of Thy hands; Thou puttest all under his feet—all sheep and oxen, and also beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea—whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea.”

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One of the subtlest, and, to a certain degree, one of the most plausible of the objections of unbelief has been the attempt to instil into men's minds the idea that it is presumptuous on their part to put confidence in the apparently sublime, but really fallacious, prospects which Christianity offers to them with regard to their destiny beyond this world. God is too great, it is said, and man is too little for us to admit the thought that God takes such an interest in man, both for this world and for the next, as the Bible affirms. The tendency of modern thought is largely in the direction of this view.

It would be easy to overtax our attention by going into too wide a field. I will speak only of the Christian idea of an immortal and heavenly life hereafter. It is this which is imperilled; it is this which is called in question. I have nothing to do now with the debated question of future punishment. Let me re-state the form of scepticism with which I have to deal. It is said to be presumptuous to suppose that we, the creatures of a day, are to be hereafter lifted up to a state of perfect blessedness, which is to last for ever, in the presence of God; and we are recommended to leave this dream aside, and to be content with the position we occupy here and now. “You have much to be thankful for, even as things are. Let it not be thought a hardship, if death should prove to be the end of man.”

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The lines of thought as they start from this point are numerous, and one is tempted to follow them out. But we must forbear, for the sake of attending simply to our one purpose. I may, however, point out to you how partial and unreal is the view which is thus taken of man's position and of his aspirations. Given the utmost of outward and present satisfaction, man universally is not content with this. But how many millions of human beings there are in the world at this moment to whom the present life can scarcely be said to have been any boon at all! How many more millions of such beings have lived in the past. The very ground we tread everywhere cowers beneath human sorrow. Is it not a cruel mockery to say to the suffering, the enslaved, the down-trodden: “Be grateful for what you have; it is vain, foolish, wrong for you to expect or to wish for more”? Some such advice as this may be given if our Christian hopes are tenable; but if they are not, we do but insult the suffering if we speak to them in this fashion.

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The kind of unbelief we are anxious to check is spreading. Among the masses, in many directions, the desire to apprehend spiritual realities, and to be ruled by them, is increasingly small; the battles of life and thought are on behalf of the interests of a day; and even among well-disposed persons the hold of fundamental truth is seriously relaxed. Hence the necessity for our seeking to strengthen our cherished convictions, and to discern clearly and grasp firmly “the faith once delivered to the saints.”

If the views we animadvert upon were entertained merely by the ignorant and the uncultured, we should not so much wonder; but we *are* perplexed when we find them so prevalent amongst the wise of this world, and even by not a few who are reputed to be masters of human science. It is

true that their advancing knowledge gives them vaster conceptions of the universe which they so unweariedly explore; but is it not strange that that vaster knowledge does not enhance their estimate of man, since he *can* explore so widely and *can* comprehend so much? Why should religious faith decrease in proportion as human knowledge is accumulated? [227]

I take the psalm before us as furnishing a triumphant and lasting reply to the kind of unbelief in question. In Nature, first, God shows us His estimate of man. The ascent is easy from Nature to Grace, in which the Divine estimate is raised to its highest point.

We are invited to look around. Can there be any doubt that this beautiful world, with its immense treasures known and unknown, its bountiful harvests of every order on land and sea, and its marvellous variety of life, animate and inanimate, was formed for our sakes? Was not everything the earth contains made for our use and enjoyment, in measure increasing with every new discovery? The fruits of the ground, with each returning season, are prepared for our wants, and in that preparation, every season, with its sunshine and its shade, its dryness and its rain, its dews and its storms, is incessantly engaged. All nature is occupied in the successful attempt to answer the initial question, "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" The dress we wear brings innumerable animals under tribute. "We have dominion over all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beast of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea." Everything tells us that, in this world, we are kings—"a little," only a little, "lower than the angels"—the gods. Between man and the inferior animals there is as great a distance as between the master and his slave;—nay more, as between the artizan and his instruments. The irrational animal is much nearer to the inanimate creation than to man since the end and purpose of both is to minister to man. This world, therefore, was manifestly made for us. Who ventures to doubt it? Least of all can it be doubted by the discoverers of earth's profounder secrets. [228]

We are invited to look still further afield. This world, which is made for us, is not independent or alone. It is in no sense self-sustained. It is part of a wonderful and incomprehensible whole. Other great creations concur in its maintenance. The sun enlightens, warms, and fertilizes it. The moon and the stars exert manifold influences upon it. The whole host of heaven has been brought into co-ordinate and helpful relation to it—yes, *it*: the world which exists *for us*! "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained;" when I consider the manifold bearings of Thy universe upon man—what *is* man! What *must* he be! In certain aspects, indeed, apparently small; but, by all these tokens, how great! We do not say that we are the only moral and spiritual beings in the midst of so many worlds. We do not know, but we may accept the probability that God has created beings capable of adoring and loving Him everywhere. But we do say—and science combines with Scripture to compel us to say—that these worlds have been in part created for us, just as our world has been in part created for them. This is clear. The most sceptical of men cannot venture to doubt it; nor do they. It is only needful that we should carefully observe in order to become convinced of this marvellous fact. [229]

So much, then, for what nature teaches. The psalmist sought to learn the lesson, and it is right that we should seek to learn it too.

This first step being taken, another follows. Man is an object of the manifold agencies of myriads of worlds. He is so *as man*; and the relative position he holds, intellectually, morally, or socially, to his fellow men, has nothing to do with the fact. Nature ministers to the Caffre and the Hottentot as truly as to the man of most advanced civilization; the only difference being in the use which the two opposite classes can make of nature. Why, then, should man refuse to believe that he is an object of solicitous love to that God who created him, who made him what he is, and who thus crowned him with glory and honour? Why should he refuse to believe that God loves him enough to send His Son to die for him, and thus to save him from the wreck of his being through sin? Especially, why should he refuse to believe this when he is assured of it by Him who testified that He was that Son of God—by Jesus, the man *par excellence*, the God-man? Why should it be doubted that man is an object of interest to angels, who are said to rejoice over every sinner that repenteth? Why should it be doubted that God has provided for him a fairer home than this, that immortality and heaven are the things which God has in reserve for him? Why should it be doubted that an everlasting salvation has been provided for him through such a sacrifice as that of Christ? If sun, moon, and stars have been made for the service of man, why should it be hard to believe that God, who counts the stars, and calls them all by their names, should also heal the broken in heart, and bind up their wounds? [230]

The prospect of human destiny as opened up by Christianity is grand; but not too grand to be ascribed to Him who created the universe, and so arranged it that it should constitute one vast system of ministration to us. When we see God thus working for man, we cannot be surprised that angels should be glad to serve him too. Neither can we wonder that the Son of God should come to save him. The wonder begins with man's primary relation to the "all things," for our knowledge of which we are not dependent upon revelation at all. Science teaches us that; and revelation only endorses it. That is wonderful enough; but accepting it as a fact, all that revelation teaches, but which science could not have discovered, follows naturally enough. The facts of revelation concerning man may be accepted the more implicitly because they really have their basis in the facts of science. The whole is in perfect harmony. The one and the other are both represented—and consistently so—as concurring in the great cause of human happiness. [231]

Try now from the greatness of the means to estimate the greatness of the end. Is eternal life too much for a being whom the worlds combine to sustain, to feed, and to bless? Is a heaven of [232]

holiness and of love too much for a being whom angels are delighted to protect? No! The wonderful thing would be if, after having combined these vast and various forces to maintain our earthly existence, an Almighty and All-good God should for ever quench our life after its brief day upon the earth!

It may be objected that this is a low and selfish view to take of the matter. It may be said that it is not the life of the individual, but the life of the race that has to be considered; and that it is enough for us to live, after we are gone, in the good remembrances of those who will survive us, and to hope that what we are doing will advance the interests of those who will follow us. An immortality such as this is in reality no immortality at all. An unconscious immortality! A public recognition of what we have been when we shall be no longer! A public gratitude, which may at best be but precarious to those to whom it is due, when they are believed to have dropped into nothingness and thus to be no longer capable of receiving and enjoying it! A progress merely confined to material interests! And who are sharing in it to-day? The few who are strong enough to hold their own in the battle of life! They, and only they! All this is supreme nonsense. The aspirations of the heart are against it. If man's life ends here, it was not worth while for him to be born. Millions, in that case, might justly look up to God and say, "Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast Thou made all men in vain?" [233]

Nevertheless, lest we should be exalted to pride and self-importance, let us remember that the grandeur of our destiny is not determined and measured by our merits, but by the immensity of the Divine goodness. What have we which we have not received? And since we have received it, why should we boast as if it were all of our own making?

Ah, it is because Satan can compare our hopes with our rights, and can help us to do so too, that he succeeds in injecting doubts into our hearts. Our reply must be, that the eternal and blessed life which we anticipate is not of *reward*, but of *grace*; not a payment, but a gift—a gift in harmony with all God's other gifts, but still the greatest gift of all; and that instead of inflating us with pride, it may well place us at His feet in lowliest, devoutest thankfulness. By sin we had forfeited all; but "where sin hath abounded, grace doth much more abound." God loved the man whom He had created with such power, and whom He had placed in so commanding a position; and because He loved him, He resolved to provide a great redemption for him. [234]

What a ground have we here for hope! And what a plea for evangelisation!

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XVIII. *HEAVEN.*

"Therefore are they before the throne of God."—REVELATION vii. 15.

Let us think of Heaven this morning. The verses of which the text is a fragment will help us to do so.

The hope of heaven is the crowning hope of the Christian. It ought at all times to be an important element in his joy. All the pleasant things of earth should be made brighter by the reflected light of the world beyond the grave. It is common, however, for us to live in a sort of unconsciousness of this. Within proper limits this is not to be complained of. For our duties are *here*, and we are not fitted for there by "looking too eagerly beyond." Besides, earth is the training-school for heaven, and unless we would enter into heaven as into "a vast abrupt," obviously our present duty is by all means to cultivate that life which shall fit us for it.

There are, however, certain lulls in the rush of life which seem to draw us to the contemplation of the future. We find them sometimes in seasons of repose, but more especially in seasons of sorrow, and more especially still in seasons of bereavement. [236]

I am not anxious to form an argument this morning. I have little disposition to *argue* about heaven. But I want to express some thoughts, disjointed perhaps, but I trust suggestive, and each one carrying its message to our weary hearts.

What may we know? We often ask this question with hope that is tremulous—or it may be with tremulousness that is hopeful. What may we know? Certainly not all that we sometimes wish to know; but then we sometimes wish to know things the knowledge of which would be useless, or curious, or beyond our reach until we can see with tearless eyes, and realise with sinless hearts. There are certain aspects under which heaven seems to be altogether visionary. Where is it? We are not told. What are the dimensions and outlines of it? We do not know. It is described under a great variety of material figures. We read of its gates of pearl, its walls of jasper, its streets of gold, its river of the water of life, its tree of life; but we know that these descriptions symbolise the spiritual. Not that they are mere riddles, however. Some of their truth may be confidently guessed. There is one important fact of which we cannot be in doubt. Heaven is the place in which will be developed and perfected a certain character—certain moral and spiritual qualifications. Heaven is where perfect goodness is, just as on earth happiness is where godliness [237]

and Christlikeness are. We may, therefore, put heaven where we will, and think about it almost as we please, provided we put the right sort of character there, and remember what sort of discipline here must prepare for it. This is the essential point in the revelations of this book: "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." There *must* be a heaven for the good.

I shall not stop to point out what a wreck our common Christianity would be if there were no future life of blessedness for the Christian. In contemplating such a possibility, the apostle Paul exclaims: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." *We*: for we have expected heaven; the fair vision has been put before us as a great hope, and we lose in proportion to what we thought we had gained. *We*: for we have prepared for it, through a life—in many instances a *long* life—of self discipline, of loyalty to God, of the mortification of sin, of the cultivation of goodness. *We*: for we have suffered for it, sometimes directly through ills endured for Christ's sake, and always indirectly by the sacrifice of that which the world distinctively calls its own, and on which it sets its supreme regard. Our Christianity has promised this heaven to us; and the promise has enhanced many an earthly joy, and charmed away many an earthly sorrow. No heaven? Then we have been shamefully deceived—miserably disappointed; and there is no hope for us any more! But no! The words of the great consolation are sounding still, and we can trust them: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: *if it were not so, I would have told you.* I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also."

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It is one of the characteristic glories of the Bible that it meets the renewed heart's desires in regard to the future, by revealing, not only the fact of the future, but also some of its resplendent mysteries; so that, after taking man through the several stages of his progress on earth, it conducts him at last to the heaven of his hopes, the home of the good. Perhaps no Scripture disclosure of Heaven is more wonderful, more complete, more entrancing than the one we have in the vision of the apostle John as recorded in the verses before us. True, it is put before us, like the other revelations of this book, in poetical and pictorial form. Nevertheless, the spiritual teaching is sufficiently plain. Let us seek the help of that good Spirit by whom John was inspired, whilst we try to learn something of that which is revealed to us in this chapter. In the light of it we see an innumerable multitude of persons who, having travelled this world in trial and in sorrow, are now before the throne of God, safe in the heaven of the redeemed.

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So we see, at the very beginning, that the Heaven which is here presented to our view is no solitary place. It is not peopled merely by a few. John says he saw "a great multitude whom no man could number." In the Old Testament a similar phrase is used to denote Israel, the representative of the Church of later times. The numberless stars of heaven, and the sands on the seashore are the parallels of the idea we find here. The Church on earth, sometimes not unfitly described as "a garden walled around," and as "a little flock," is not, in this sense, the representation of the Church in heaven. We see, further, that the heavenly territory embraces the representatives of every earthly human condition: they gather from all ages and all climes of the world—from all "nations and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues." In this great fact we have the basis of the theory of our mission work, and our hope of its ultimate success.

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We see, again, that the relation of the saints to Christ in heaven is essentially the same as that of the saints on earth. They stand before the throne and before the Lamb, and cry with a loud voice: "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

They sing the Lamb in hymns
above,
And we in hymns below.

Self-confidence, self-righteousness, self-exaltation have no place *there*. All the glory of salvation, all the glory of heaven, is due to God and to the Lamb from first to last. Every step of the way, right on to its termination, has been arranged by His wisdom and accomplished by His grace.

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With these facts before us, there ought to be no strangeness connected with our conception of Heaven. Its inhabitants are our friends transferred, and the elements of its perfected life and joy are the same as we are, in our measure, familiar with in the imperfect state through which we are now passing. Perhaps the most comprehensive, and most spiritually attractive and influential idea of it is that of *entire satisfaction*. In this aspect of it, it meets the demands of our experience, fulfils our hope, and draws us upward. Satisfaction! How beautiful the thought! To the weary and the heavy laden it comes as rest. To the aspiring it comes as a sphere of boundless opportunity. To the sad and troubled, it is "a land of pure delight." To those who groan under present spiritual short comings and frailties, it is the home of the spirits of the just made perfect. We are often staggered at the faults of Christians; they will be "without fault" there. Here our faults dissociate us more or less from our brethren; faultlessness there will make the union complete. Here darkness, there light; here sowing, there the harvest; here a wilderness, there the garden of the Lord. Heaven contains all our ideals of the true, the beautiful and the good; and one day we shall realise them! The description which we have before us warrants all this, and much more. How much more? The redeemed in Heaven live a life of immunity from suffering. No hunger; no thirst; no oppression from the heat of the sun. No faintness; no pangs. John seems, from the form of expression he uses, to have beheld them as they were "coming out of great tribulation." Whatever may be the prophetic reference in these words, we may understand them as having

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some meaning appropriate to all the redeemed. All life, with its varied experience may be called (and that too in no fanciful sense) a tribulation; in this sense at least, that it is a probation, a trial, a testing-time in view of the great awards of the future. From this all come, gradually, successively, one by one, passing from the school of earth to the home of heaven. Trial is the common discipline of the good, and it comes in many forms;—sometimes in the form of bodily pain and sickness; sometimes in the form of trouble, disappointment, loss in the household and in the social circle; sometimes in the form of persecution; often in the form of a struggle with temptation springing up from within or from without; often, it may be, in the form of conflict with doubt. Sorrow, trial, tribulation—from all this the redeemed in heaven have emerged. But they have not only escaped from evil; they have risen into a perfect blessedness—the blessedness which comes from the satisfaction of every want. They not only hunger no more, neither thirst any more; but the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne feeds them, and leads them to living fountains of waters. Their blessedness is all the richer because not only are all their tears wiped away, but wiped away by the hand of infinite gentleness and love—the hand of the Best Beloved in all the universe! Well may they be glad! Well may they sing loud ecstatic songs of praise to their Redeemer. Well may they serve Him day and night in His temple—perfected powers rejoicing evermore in a perfect consecration. They are a company living, dwelling, at the very centre of joy: no care upon them, no labour weighing them down; their Lord in the midst of them, their satisfaction complete.

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The contrast between their condition on earth and in heaven is full of wonder to us as we muse upon it. How was the change wrought? What must we learn concerning this from what is here revealed?

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They were prepared *here* for the state beyond. The life of heaven is the continuation and the result of the earthly life. “They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,” and they “came up out of great tribulation.” Here we have the process of the cleansing, “the great tribulation” being comprehensive of the whole discipline by which God purifies human souls. Here we have also the purifying element, “the blood of the Lamb,” the atoning power to wash out all stains, the stimulating power to inspire to all holiness. And we also have the final result—“white raiment.” So, doctrinally, the “robes” stand for the whole character, the tribulation for the process of purification; “the blood of the Lamb,” for the cleansing element in its justifying and sanctifying effects. Their holiness is not merely passive. There is a righteousness which is imputed; but there is also a righteousness which is acquired—acquired in the might of the Saviour, and through the influences of His Spirit. Those who do not aspire to the latter have no hope from the former, except a hope which must make them ashamed. But inasmuch as both aspects of salvation are to be referred to the Lamb, they give to Him the glory. It is all His from beginning to end. “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Thus their salvation was effected on earth. Heaven has introduced no new moral element into their condition. Heaven is essentially the full realisation of what a Christian expects and hopes this side the grave. It is the inheritance of the man who has the kingdom of God *within* him.

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There is one part of the description which requires a little explanation, and all the more so as it bears upon the aspects given to us of heavenly blessedness. The redeemed are represented as standing before the throne with palms in their hands. Many explain this by the heathen use of the palm as the emblem of victory, and they quote the declaration: “In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” I would rather, with some, refer this emblem to a much sweeter and holier reminiscence. The figure seems to be taken from the Feast of Tabernacles, which commemorated two things—God’s care for, and protection of, Israel during their wanderings in the wilderness, and His continued Providence in the supply of the fruits of the earth in their season. It was held at the close of the year’s out-door labours, and with it the season of rest began. And so with the ransomed above, the troubles of the wilderness are ended, and the harvest-home has come.

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Such is the heaven to which God has removed our dead. May we not with thankfulness leave them there? Must we not feel that by death, they have made a glorious exchange? In their case, it would be wrong to call death by hard names. It is the message which comes to the child at school to go home. I know that we often fail to apprehend this. Bound by time and sense, we want to build our homes here, and our structures have one after another to be overthrown that we may the better learn to think of “the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Heaven is best seen by the graves of those we have loved; and not till earth becomes poor to us is Heaven felt to be rich. There our loved ones are in raiment white and clean, and they are happy. Let it be our constant endeavour to rejoin them there. The same blood still atones; the same all-holy Spirit still purifies; the same process of trial leads to the same issue. For ourselves, we should ever keep in mind the connection between discipline here and glory hereafter. Present darkness may be interpreted by future light. Even now, the sanctified effects of trial are such as to suggest to us what its final issues will be. It subdues us, makes us gentle, reveals us to ourselves, reveals God to us, spiritualises us; so that we may well be more anxious to have our troubles blessed by God than to have them taken away. As the discipline of earth is fashioning us for heaven, so our conceptions of heaven are continually re-acting upon us, and moulding our life.

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One thought more. The seer beholds the immense multitude of the redeemed. The angel asks him who they are; but he does not know them. Many of them perhaps are persons whom he had known on earth; but they are so changed that he does not recognise them now. He used to know them by their imperfect Christian virtues; but now they are “without fault.” And so they seem

strange to him, just as sometimes even here the transformations of virtue and of joy make us say of well-known faces that we hardly recognise them again. A hint of this we often see in the faces of the dead; so like, yet so unlike. Is there any doubt, then, as to our recognising them at the last? None. We may, perhaps, fail to identify them at once, but they will not be strangers to us long. We shall look upon them with opened and purified eyes, and shall know them, even as the disciples on the mount knew Moses and Elias, notwithstanding the glory. Oh, it will be good for us to be there! Good for us to remain there for ever!

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Read: "These are they who *are coming*"—not "who came." They began to come with Abel; and the procession is not yet closed. Among the last are those over the loss of whom we are weeping now. Let us brush away our tears; for at least we may say to ourselves this—

One sweetly solemn thought
Comes to me o'er and o'er:
I'm nearer my home to-day
Than I've ever been before!

Nearer my Father's house,
Where the many mansions
be;
Nearer the great white Throne;
Nearer the jasper sea!

Nearer the bound of life,
Where I lay my burden
down!
Nearer leaving my cross!
Nearer wearing my crown!

Transcriber's Note

Archaic and variable spelling is preserved as printed.

The following typographic errors have been fixed:

Page [xiv](#)—repeated 'not' deleted—... if it did not actually reach, its maturity.

Page [46](#)—repeated 'in' deleted—Observe what in that case must follow.

Page [62](#)—repeated 'are' deleted—... towards those who are around us.

Page [195](#)—inmediate amended to immediate—... on the direct and immediate control of God, ...

Page [227](#)—trimpliant amended to triumphant—... furnishing a triumphant and lasting reply ...

The frontispiece has been moved to follow the title page.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SERMONS: SELECTED FROM THE PAPERS
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