Christ and His Salvation In Sermons Variously Related Thereto

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CHRIST

AND HIS

SALVATION:

IN SERMONS VARIOUSLY RELATED THERETO.

BY

HORACE BUSHNELL.

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TO

JOSEPH SAMPSON, Esq.,

OF NEW YORK.

MY DEAR FRIEND:

WHEN resigning my pastorship, five years ago, you will remember that

you put it before me to consider myself engaged now in a "Ministry at

Large;" serving in it, by the pen, or by whatever method, according to

the ability left me, the cause we both have made our own. In this

modified ministry, I have had the sense of a worthy and sacred charge

upon me still as before, and in it, as I have occupied, I seem also to

have prolonged, my life. This, with another volume, on The Vicarious

Sacrifice, which is ready in due time to follow, are the principal

fruit of my broken industry. Without consent obtained, I venture to

connect them with your name, as the spontaneous tribute of my true

respect and strong personal friendship.

HORACE BUSHNELL.

Hartford, June 10, 1864.

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I.

CHRIST WAITING TO FIND ROOM.

"And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling

clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them

in the inn."--Luke ii. 7.

In the birth and birthplace of Jesus, there is something beautifully

correspondent with his personal fortunes afterward, and also of the

fortunes of his gospel, even down to our own age and time. He comes

into the world, as it were to the taxing, and there is scant room for

him even at that.

A Roman decree having been issued, requiring the people to repair to

their native place to be registered for taxation, Joseph and Mary set

off for Bethlehem. The khan or inn of the village is full, when they

arrive, and, being humble persons, they are obliged to find a place in

the stall or stable, where the holy child is born. It so happens, not

by any slight of the guests, in which they mock the advent of the

child, for he makes his advent only as the child of two very common

people. But there is a great concourse and crowd--senators, it may be,

landowners, merchants, money-changers, tradesmen, publicans, peddlers,

men of all sorts--and the most forward, showiest, best attended,

boldest in airs of consequence, take up all the places, till in fact no

place is left. What they have secured too it is their conceded right to

keep. If the carpenter and his wife are in a plight, people as humble

as they can well enough take the stable, when there is nothing better

to be had.

So it was, and perhaps it was more fitting to be so; for the great

Messiah's errand allows no expectation of patronage, even for his

infancy. He comes into the world and finds it preoccupied. A marvelous

great world it is, and there is room in it for many things; room for

wealth, ambition, pride, show, pleasure; room for trade, society,

dissipation; room for powers, kingdoms, armies and their wars; but for

him there is the smallest room possible; room in the stable but not in

the inn. There he begins to breathe, and at that point introduces

himself into his human life as a resident of our world-the greatest and

most blessed event, humble as the guise of it may be, that has ever

transpired among mortals. If it be a wonder to men's eyes and ears, a

wonder even to science itself, when the flaming air-stone pitches into

our world, as a stranger newly arrived out of parts unknown in the sky,

what shall we think of the more transcendent fact, that the Eternal Son

of God is born into the world; that proceeding forth from the Father,

not being of our system or sphere, not of the world, he has come as a

Holy Thing into it--God manifest in the flesh, the Word made flesh, a

new divine man, closeted in humanity, there to abide and work until he

has restored the race itself to God! Nor is this wonderful annunciation

any the less welcome, or any the less worthy to be celebrated by the

hallelujahs of angels and men, that the glorious visitant begins to

breathe in a stall. Was there not a certain propriety in such a

beginning, considered as the first chapter and symbol of his whole

history, as the Saviour and Redeemer of mankind?

But I am anticipating my subject, viz., the very impressive fact that

Jesus could not find room in the world, and has never yet been able to

find it.

I do not understand, you will observe, that this particular subject is

formally stated or asserted in my text. I only conceive that the birth

of Jesus most aptly introduces the whole subsequent history of his

life, and that both his birth and life as aptly represent the spiritual

fortunes of his gospel as a great salvation for the world. And the

reason why Jesus can not find room for his gospel is closely analogous

to that which he encountered in his birth; viz., that men's hearts are

preoccupied. They do not care, in general, to put any indignity on

Christ; they would prefer not to do it; but they are filled to the full

with their own objects already. It is now as then and then as now; the

selfishness and self-accommodation, the coarseness, the want of right

sensibility, the crowding, eager state of men, in a world too small for

their ambition--all these preoccupy the inn of their affections,

leaving only the stable, or some by-place, in their hearts, as little

worthy of his occupancy and the glorious errand on which he comes.

See how it was with him in. his life. Herod heard the rumor that the

Messiah, that is, the king, was born, and it being specially clear that

there was no room for two kings in Galilee, raised a slaughter general

among the children, that he might be sure of getting this particular

one out of the way. Twelve years later when Joseph and his mother

turned back to seek the child at Jerusalem, where they had left him,

and found him sitting with the doctors of the temple, asking them

questions and astonishing their comprehension by his answers; when also

his mother, remonstrating with him for remaining behind, hears him say

that he "must be about his Father's business," and goes home pondering

his strange answer in her heart; how clear is it that they, none of

them, have room, even if they would, to take in the conception of his

divine childhood, or the history preparing in it. John the Baptist,

again, even after he has testified in the Spirit on seeing him

approach--"Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the

world!" and has all but refused to baptize him because of his superior

dignity, grows doubtful afterward, yields to misgivings, gets

perplexed, like any poor half-seeing sinner, with his mystery, and

finally sends to inquire whether he is really the Christ, or whether

some other is still to be looked for! is great ministry, wonderful in

its dignity and power, wins but the scantiest hospitality; he journeys

on foot through many populous towns and by the gates of many palaces,

sleeping in desert places of the mountains, as he slept his first night

in a manger, not having where to lay his head. Nicodemus, and many

others probably in the higher conditions of life, felt the sense of

some mysterious dignity in him, and went, even by night, to receive

lessons of spiritual instruction from him, yet never took him to his

house, and too little conceived him to so much as break silence at his

trial by a word of vindication. The learned rabbis could have bid him

welcome, if he had come teaching "corban," or the precise mode or merit

of baptizing cups, or tithing anise, but when he spoke to them of

judgment and mercy and the right of doing good on Sundays, they had no

room, in their little theologies, for such a kind of doctrine. His own

disciples got but the slenderest conception of his person and mission

from his very explicit teachings. They still wanted even the

explanations of his parables explained. It was as if the sun had broken

out upon a field of moles--there was a wonderful incapacity and

weakness in all their apprehensions; he shone too brightly and they

could see only the less. The priests, and rabbis, and magistrates, saw

enough in him to be afraid of him, or rather of his power over the

people. They charged him, before Pilate, with a design to make himself

king instead of C�sar, and when he answered, in effect, that he came

only to be king of the truth, Pilate, greatly mystified by his answer,

and the more that he had the sense of some strange power in his person,

wanted still, like a child, to know what he could mean by the truth? On

the whole it can not be said that Christ ever once found room, and a

clear receptivity for his person, any where, during his mortal life.

Mary and Martha did their best to entertain him and give him a complete

hospitality, and yet their hospitality so little conceived him as to

assume that being nicely lodged, and complimented with a delicate

housewifery, was a matter of much more consequence than it was; even

more, a great deal, than to fitly receive the heaven-full of honor and

beauty brought into their house in his person. And so it may be truly

said of him that he came unto his own, and his own received him not.

lie was never accepted as a guest of the world any more than on that

first night in the inn. There was not room enough in the world's

thought and feeling to hold him, or even to suffer so great a presence,

and he was finally expelled by an ecclesiastical murder.

At the descent of the Spirit there was certainly a great opening in the

minds of his disciples concerning him, and there has been a slow,

irregular, and difficult progress in the faith and perception of

mankind since that day, but we shall greatly mistake, if we suppose

that Christ has ever found room to spread himself at all in the world,

as he had it in his heart to do, when he came into it, and will not

fail to do, before his work is done.

Were a man to enter some great cathedral of the old continent, of which

there are many hundreds, survey the vaulted arches and the golden

tracery above, wander among the forests of pillars on which they rest,

listen to the music of choirs and catch the softened light that streams

through sainted forms and histories on the windows, observe the company

of priests, gorgeously arrayed, chanting, kneeling, crossing

themselves, and wheeling in long processions before the great altar

loaded with gold and gems; were he to look into the long tiers of side

chapels, each a gorgeous temple, with an altar of its own for its

princely family, adorned with costliest mosaics, and surrounded, in the

niches of the walls, with statues and monumental groups of dead

ancestors in the highest forms of art, noting also the living princes

at their worship there among their patriarchs and brothers in

stone--spectator of a scene so imposing, what but this will his thought

be: "surely the infant of the manger has at last found room, and come

to be entertained among men with a magnificence worthy of his dignity."

But if he looks again, and looks a little farther in--far enough in to

see the miserable pride of self and power that lurks under this

gorgeous show, the mean ideas of Christ, the superstitions held instead

of him, the bigotry, the hatred of the poor, the dismal corruption of

life--with how deep a sigh of disappointment will he confess: "alas,

the manger was better and a more royal honor!"

So if we speak of what is called Christendom, comprising, as it does,

all the most civilized and powerful nations of mankind, those most

forward in learning, and science, and art, and commerce, it may well

enough seem to us, when we fix. the. name

Christendom--Christ-dominion--on these great powers of the earth, that

Christ has certainly gotten room, so far, to enter and be glorified in

human society. And it is a very great thing, doubtless, for Christ to

be so far admitted to his kingly honors--more, however, as a token of

what will sometime appear, than as a measure of power already exerted.

Still what multitudes of out-lying populations are there that have

never heard of him. And the states and populations that acknowledge

him,--how unjust are their laws, how intriguing and dishonest their

diplomacies, how cruel their wars, what oppressions do they put upon

the weak, what persecutions raise against the good, what abuses and

distortions of God's truth do they perpetrate, what idolatries and

mummeries of superstition do they practice, and, to include all in one

general summation, how little of Christ, take them all together,

appears to be really in them. Now and then a saint appears, a real

Christly man, but the general mass are sharp for money and dull to

Christ, and whether sharp or dull, are for the most part extremely

ignorant as regards all spiritual knowledge, even if they happen, as

men, to be specially intelligent, or practiced much in philosophy. The

savor of Christ, in short, is so weak that we can scarcely get the

sense of it once in a day. A wind blowing off from his cross might

almost be expected to carry as much grace with it--so slight,

evanescent, scarcely perceptible, doubtfully real is the evidence shown

of a genuine Christly power, even in just those upper tiers of

humanity, which are called the Christendom, or Christ-dominion itself.

But we must take a closer inspection, if we are to see how very little

room Christ has yet been able to obtain, and how many things conspire

to cramp the efficacy and narrow down the sway of his gospel. Great

multitudes, it is well understood, utterly reject him, and stay fast in

their sins. They have no time to be religious, or the sacrifices are

too great. Some are too poor to have any heart left, and some are too

rich--so rich, so filled up with goods, that a camel can as well get

through a needle's eye, as Christ get into their love. Some are too

much honored to receive him, and some too much want to be. Some are in

their passions, some in their pleasures, some in their expectations.

Some are too young and wait to give him only the dry remains of life,

after the natural freshness is gone. Some are too old and are too much

occupied with old recollections and stories of the past forever

telling, to have any room longer for his reception. Some are too

ignorant, and think they must learn a great deal before they can

receive him. Others know too much, having stifled their capacity

already in the dry-rot of books and opinions. The great world thus,

under sin, even that part of it which is called Christian, is very much

like the inn at Bethlehem, preoccupied, crowded full in every part, so

that, as the mother of Jesus looked up wistfully to the guest-chambers

that cold night, drawing her Holy Thing to her bosom, in like manner

Jesus himself stands at the door of these multitudes, knocking vainly,

till his head is filled with dew, and his locks are wet with the drops

of the night.

So it should be, as you will easily perceive beforehand; for

Christianity comes into the world by supposition, just because the

world is not ready to receive it. The very problem it proposes is to

get room where there is none, to open a heart where there is no heart,

to regenerate opposing dispositions, to sweeten soured affections, to

beget love where there is selfishness, to institute peace in the

elemental war of the soul's disorders. This being true, we can see

beforehand that the grand main difficulty of the gospel in restoring,

the world, is to get room enough opened for its mighty renovations to

work. It will come to be received where there is no receptivity.

Mankind will even seem to be shutting it away by a conspiracy of

littleness and preoccupied feeling, when formally preparing to receive

it.

What shall Constantine, the first convert king do, for example, when he

enters the fold, but bring in with him all his regal powers and

prerogatives, and wield them for the furtherance of the new religion;

never once imagining the fact that, in doing it, he was bringing church

and gospel and every thing belonging to Christ, directly into the human

keeping and the very nearly insulting patronage of the state. And so

the gospel is to be kept in state pupilage, in all the old-world

kingdoms, down to the present day--officered, endowed, regulated, by

the state supremacy. Spiritual gifts have no place under the political

regimen of course. Lay ministries are a disorder. No man comes to

minister because he is called of God, or goes because he is sent of

God, but he buys a living, or he has it given him, as he might in the

army or the post-office. And so the grand, heaven-wide, gospel goes

into quarantine, from age to age, getting no room to speak, or smite,

or win, or save, beyond what worldly state-craft gives it. Call we this

making room for the gospel?

Church-craft meantime has been quite as narrow, quite as sore a

limitation as state-craft. Thus instead of that grand, massive,

practically educated, character, that Christ proposes to create in the

open fields of duty, by sturdy encounter with wrong, by sacrifices of

beneficence and the bloodier sacrifices of heroic testimony for the

truth, it contrives a finer, saintlier, more superlative, virtue, to be

trained in cells and nightly vigils!--poor, unchristly, mean imposture,

it turns out to be of course. To give the church the prestige of a

monarchy, under one universal head, a primacy is finally created in the

bishop of Rome, and now, behold the august father, occupied, as in

Christ's name, in blessing rosaries, preparing holy water, receiving

the sacred puffs of censers, and submitting his feet to the devout

kisses of his people! O how wretched and barren a thing, how very like

to a poor mummery of imposture, have these ecclesiastics, contriving

thus to add new ornaments and powers, reduced the gospel of heaven's

love to men!

And the attempted work of science, calling itself theology, is scarcely

more equal to its theme. The subject matter outreaches, how visibly,

and dwarfs all the. little pomps of the supposed scientific endeavor.

What can it do, when trying, in fact, to measure the sea with a spoon!

A great question it soon becomes, whether Christian forgiveness covers

any but sins committed before baptism; as if the flow of God's great

mercies in his Son could be stopped by the date of a baptism, and the

sins of his children, afterward, left to be atoned by purgatorial

fires! The death of Christ is conceived and taught, for whole

centuries, as being a ransom paid to the devil; then, after so many

centuries have worn the superstition fairly out, as an offering, or

suffering, to appease the wrath of God.. Meantime it is carefully held,

to save God's dignity in him, that he does not suffer at all as divine,

but is even impassible; so that what he certainly suffers in his moral

sensibilities, even because they are perfect--all to make the cross an

expression of divine feeling powerful on the heart of sin--subsides

into a stifled, unmoved, immovable mercy that, in fact, belongs to the

stones. It becomes a great article of opinion also, that God only wants

to save a particular number, and that exactly is the number He

predestinates. Next, to coincide with this, Christ is shown to have

died only for this particular part of mankind. Next to coincide with

this, a limited or special grace is affirmed under the same

restrictions. Regeneration, again, is wrought by baptism. Repentance

subsides into doing penance. And the forgiveness of sins becomes a

priestly dispensation.

But the most remarkable thing of all is that, when the old, niggard

dogmas of a bigot age and habit give way, and emancipated souls begin

to look for a new Christianity and a broader, worthier faith, just

there every thing great in the gospel vanishes even more strangely than

before. Faith becomes mere opinion, love a natural sentiment, piety

itself a blossom on the wild stock of nature. Jesus, the Everlasting

Word, dwindles to a mere man. The Holy Spirit is made to be very nearly

identical with the laws of the soul. God himself too is, in fact, put

under nature, shut in back of nature and required to stay there; the

incarnation, the miracles, the Gethsemane, the Calvary, all the flaming

glories of the gospel are stifled as extravagances, and the new

Christianity, the more liberal, more advanced, belief, turns out to be

a discovery that we are living in nature, just as nature makes us live.

Salvation there is none, nothing is left for a gospel but development,

with a little human help from the very excellent person, Jesus.

Now the blessed Lord wants room, we all agree; we even profess that we

ourselves want mightily to be enlarged. Why then is it always turning

out, hitherto, that when we try to go deepest, we drag every thing down

with us? What, in fact, do we prove but that, when we undertake to

shape theologically the glorious mystery of salvation by Christ, we

just as much reduce it, or whittle it down, as human thought is

narrower and tinier than the grand subject matter attempted.

But saddest of all is the practical depreciation of Christ, or of what

he will do as a Saviour, experimentally, from sin. The possibilities of

liberty, assurance, a good conscience, a mind entered into rest, are,

by one means or another, let down, obscured, or quite taken away. To

believe much is enthusiasm, to attempt much, fanaticism. The assumption

is, that Christ will, in fact, do only a little for us, just as there

is only a little done; when the very sufficient reason is, that there

is only a little allowed to be done. As to any common footing with the

ancient saints in their inspirations, guidances, and gifts--it is even

a kind of presumption to think of it. They had their religion at first

hand, we are now a degree farther off. They had the inbirth of God, and

knew him by the immediate knowledge of the heart. We only read of him

and know about him and operate our minds, alas! how feebly, toward him,

under the notions, or notional truths, gotten hold of by our

understanding. O it is a very sad picture! Dear Lord Jesus can it never

be that better room shall be given thee?

True there is no grace of Christ that will suddenly make us perfect;

but there is a grace that will take away all conscious sinning, as long

as we sufficiently believe, raising us above the dominating power of

sin into a state of divine consciousness, where we are new-charactered,

as it were, continually, by the righteousness of God, spreading itself

into and over and through the faith, by which we are trusted to his

mercy. All this Christ will do. In this state of power and holy

endowment, superior to sin, he can, he will establish every soul that

makes room wide enough for him to enter and bestow his fullness. He

will be a Saviour, in short, just as mighty and complete as we want him

to be, just as meager and partial and doubtfully real as we require him

to be. O what meaning is there, in this view, in the apostle's

invocation--"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his

glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted

and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, with all saints, what

is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height; and to know the love

of Christ that passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the

fullness of God." This heavy, long-drawn sigh, whose wording carries

such a weight of promise still--what does it invoke but that Christ may

somehow, any how, get fit room, as he never yet has done, in these

stunted human hearts.

And this same sigh has been how fit a prayer for all ages. Probably

nothing comparatively of the power of Christ, as a gift to the world,

has ever yet been seen or realized in it. And a main part of the

difficulty is, that Christ is a grace too big for men's thoughts, and

of course too big for their faith,--the Eternal Word of God robed in

flesh, the humanly manifested love and feeling of God, a free

justification for the greatest of sinners and for all sin, a power of

victory in the soul that raises it above temptation, supports it in

peace, and makes obedience itself its liberty. Such a Christ of

salvation fully received, embraced in the plenitude of his gifts--what

fires would he kindle, what tongues -of eloquence loosen, what heroic

witnessings inspire! But, as yeti the disciples are commonly men of

only a little faith, and it is with them according to their faith. They

too often almost make a merit of having no merit, and think it even a

part of Christian modesty to believe that Christ will do for them, only

according to what they miss, or really do not undertake for themselves.

And so it comes to pass, my brethren, that our gospel fails, hitherto,

of all its due honors, because we so poorly represent the worth and

largeness of it. What multitudes are there, under the name of

disciples, who maintain a Christian figure scarcely up to the line of

common respect--penurious, little, mean, sordid, foul in their

imaginations, low-minded, coarse-minded every way. Until Christ gets

room in the higher spaces of their feeling, and their consciousness

gets ennobled by a worthier and fuller reception, it must be so. Others

are inconstant, falling away so feebly as to put a weak look on the

gospel itself; as if it were only able to kindle a flare in the

passions, not to establish a durable character. This too must be so,

till Christ is fully enough received to be the head of their new

capacity and growth. Multitudes, again, are not made happy as they

should be, wear a long-faced, weary, dissatisfied, legally constrained

look, any thing but a look of courage and joy and blessed contentation.

Yes, and for the simple reason that there is nothing so wretched, so

very close to starvation, as a little, doubtfully received grace. True

joy comes by hearts'-full and when there is room enough given for

Christ to flood the feeling, the peace becomes a river--never till

then.

Discordant opinions and strifes of doctrines endlessly propagated are

another scandal. And since heads are little and many, full of fractious

and gaunt notions, all horning or hoofing each other, as hungry beasts

in their stall, what wonder is it if they raise a clatter of much

discord? No, the true hospitality is that of the heart, and if only the

grand heart-world of the race were set open to the full entertainment

of Jesus, there would be what a chiming of peace and unity in the

common love.

Why, again, since Christianity undertakes to convert the world, does it

seem to almost or quite fail in the slow progress it makes? Because, I

answer, Christ gets no room; as yet, to work, and be the fire in men's

hearts he is able to be. We undertake for him as by statecraft and

churchcraft and priestcraft. We raise monasteries for him in one age,

military crusades in another. Raymond Lull, representing a large class

of teachers, undertook to make the gospel so logical that he could

bring down all men of all nations, without a peradventure, before it.

Some in our day are going to carry every thing by steam-ships and

commerce; some by science and the schooling of heathen children; some

by preaching agents adequately backed by missionary boards; some by

tracts and books. But the work, however fitly ordered as respects the

machinery, lingers, and will and must linger, till Christ gets room to

be a more complete inspiration in his followers. They give him the

stable when they ought to be giving him the inn, put him in the lot of

weakness, keep him back from his victories, shut him down under the

world, making his gospel, thus, such a secondary, doubtfully real,

affair, that it has to be always debating in the evidences, instead of

being its own evidence, and marching forward in its own mighty power.

But what most of all grieves me, in such a review, is, that Christ

himself has so great wrong to endure, in the slowness and low faith of

so many ages. Why, if I had a friend, who was always making me to

appear weaker and meaner than I am, putting the flattest construction

possible on my words and sayings, professing still, in his own low

conduct, to represent my ideas and principles, protesting the great

advantage he gets, from being much with me, in just those things where

he is most utterly unlike me--I could not bear him even for one week, I

should denounce him utterly, blowing all terms of connection with him.

And yet Christ has a patience large enough to bear us still; for he

came to bear even our sin, and he will not start from his burden, even

if he should not be soon through with it.

All the sooner, brethren, ought we to come to the heart so long and

patiently grieving for us. Is it not time, dear friends, that Christ

our Master should begin to be fitly represented by his people--received

in his true grandeur and fullness as the Lord of Life and Saviour of

all mankind; able to save to, the uttermost; a grace all victorious;

light, peace, liberty, and power; wisdom, righteousness,

sanctification, and redemption. Be it yours then so to make room for

him, even according to the greatness of his power-length, breadth,

depth, height. Be no more straitened in your own bowels, stretch

yourselves to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Expect to be all that he will make you, and that you may be, open your

whole heart to him broad as the sea. Give him all the widest spaces of

your feeling--guest-chambers opened by your loving hospitality.

Challenge for him his right to be now received by his disciples, as he

never yet has been. Tell what changes and wondrous new creations will

appear, when he finally breaks full-orbed on human experience--his true

second coming in power and great glory. For this great consummation it

is that every thing is preparing, and if there be voices and calls

chiming through the spaces round us, which, for deafness, we have all

these ages failed to hear, what is their burden but this--Lift up your

heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the

King of Glory shall come in.

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II.

THE GENTLENESS OF GOD.

"Thy gentleness hath made me great."--Ps. xviii. 35.

Gentleness in a deity--what other religion ever took up such a thought?

When the coarse mind of sin makes up gods and a religion by its own

natural light, the gods, it will be seen, reveal both the coarseness

and the sin together, as they properly should. They are made great as

being great in force, and terrible in their resentments. They are

mounted on tigers, hung about with snakes, cleave the sea with

tridents, pound the sky with thunders, blow tempests out of their

cheeks, send murrain upon the cattle, and pestilence on the cities and

kingdoms of other gods--always raging in some lust or jealousy, or

scaring the world by some vengeful portent.

Just opposite to all these, the great God and creator of the world, the

God of revelation, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

contrives to be a gentle being; even hiding his power, and withholding

the stress of his will, that he may put confidence and courage in the

feeling of his children. Let us not shrink then from this epithet of

scripture, as if it must imply some derogation from God's real

greatness and majesty; for we are much more likely to reach the

impression, before we have done, that precisely here do his greatness

and majesty culminate.

What then, first of all, do we mean by gentleness? To call it sweetness

of temper, kindness, patience, flexibility, indecisiveness, does not

really distinguish it. We shall best come at the true idea, if we ask

what it means when applied to a course of treatment? When you speak,

for example, of dealing gently with an enemy, you mean that, instead of

trying to force a point straight through with him, you will give him

time, and ply him indirectly with such measures and modes of

forbearance as will put him on different thoughts, and finally turn him

to a better mind. Here then is the true conception of God's gentleness.

It lies in his consenting to the use of indirection, as a way of

gaining his adversaries. It means that he does not set himself, as a

ruler, to drive his purpose straight through, but that, consciously

wise and right, abiding in his purposes with majestic confidence, and

expecting to reign with a finally established supremacy, he is only too

great to fly at his adversary, and force him to the wall, if he does

not instantly surrender; that, instead of coming down upon him thus, in

a manner of direct onset, to carry his immediate submission by storm,

he lays gentle seige to him, waiting for his willing assent and choice.

He allows dissent for the present, defers to prejudice, watches for the

cooling of passion, gives room and space for the weaknesses of our

unreasonable and perverse habit to play themselves out, and so by

leading us round, through long courses of kind but faithful exercise,

he counts on bringing us out into the ways of obedience and duty freely

chosen. Force and crude absolutism are thus put by; the irritations of

a jealous littleness have no place; and the great God and Father,

intent on making his children great, follows them and plies them with

the gracious indirections of a faithful and patient love.

It is scarcely necessary to add that there are many kinds of

indirection, which are wide, as possible, of any character of

gentleness. All policy, in the bad sense of the term, is indirection. A

simply wise expedient has often this character. But the indirections of

God are those of a ruler, perfectly secure and sovereign, and their

object is, not to turn a point of interest for himself, but simply to

advance and make great the unworthy and disobedient subjects of his

goodness.

This character of gentleness in God's treatment, you will thus

perceive, is one of the greatest spiritual beauty and majesty, and one

that ought to affect us most tenderly in all our sentiments and

choices. And that we may have it in its true estimation, observe, first

of all, how far off it is from the practice and even capacity generally

of mankind. We can do almost any thing more easily than consent to use

any sort of indirection, when we are resisted in the exercise of

authority, or encounter another at some point of violated right.

There is a more frequent approach to gentleness, in the parental

relation, than any where else among men. And yet even here, how common

is the weak display of a violent, autocratic, manner, in the name of

authority and government. Seeing the child daring to resist his will,

the parent is, how often, foolishly exasperated. With a flush of anger

and a stern, hard voice, he raises the issue of peremptory obedience;

and when, either by force or without, he has carried his way, he

probably congratulates himself that he has been faithful enough to

break his child's will. Whereas, raising an issue between his own

passions and his child's mere fears, he is quite as likely to have

broken down his conscience as his will, unnerving all the forces of

character and capacities of great manhood in him for life. Alas how

many parents, misnamed fathers and mothers, fancy, in this manner, that

when self-respect is completely demolished in their poor defenseless

child, the family government is established. They fall into this

barbarity, just because they have too little firmness to hold their

ground in any way of indirection or gentleness. They are violent

because they are weak, and then the conscious wrong of their violence

weakens them still farther, turning them, after the occasion is past,

to such a misgiving, half apologizing manner, as just completes their

weakness.

It will also be observed, almost universally, among men, that where one

conies to an issue of any kind with another, matters are pressed to a

direct pointblank Yes or No. If it is a case of personal wrong, or a

quarrel of any kind, the parties face each other, pride against pride,

passion against passion, and the hot endeavor is to storm a way through

to victory. There is no indirection used to soften the adversary, no

waiting for time, nothing meets the feeling of the moment but to bring

him down upon the issue, and floor him by a direct assault. To redress

the injury by gentleness, to humble an adversary by his own

reflections, and tame his will by the circuitous approach of

forbearance and a siege of true suggestion--that is not the manner of

men, but only of God.

True gentleness, we thus perceive, is, a character too great for any

but the greatest and most divinely tempered souls. And yet how ready

are many to infer that, since God is omnipotent, he must needs have it

as a way of majesty, to carry all his points through to their issue by

force, just as they would do themselves. What, in their view, is it for

God to be omnipotent, but to drive his chariot where he will. Even

Christian theologians, knowing that he has force enough to carry his

points at will, make out pictures of his sovereignty, not seldom, that

stamp it as a remorseless absolutism. They do not remember that it is

man, he that has no force, who wants to carry every thing by force, and

that God is a being too great for this kind of infirmity; that, having

all power, he glories in the hiding of his power; that holding the

worlds in the hollow of his hand, and causing heaven's pillars to shake

at his reproof, He still counts it the only true gentleness for Him to

bend, and wait, and reason with his adversary, and turn him round by

His strong Providence, till. he is gained to repentance and a volunteer

obedience.

But God maintains a government of law, it will be remembered, and

enforces his law by just penalties, and what room is there for

gentleness in a government of law? All room, I answer; for how shall he

gain us to his law as good and right, if he does not give us time to

make the discovery of what it is? To receive law because we are crammed

with it, is not to receive it as law, but only to receive it as force,

and God would spurn that kind of obedience, even from the meanest of

his subjects. He wants our intelligent, free choice, of duty--that we

should have it in love, nay have it even in liberty. Doubtless it is

true that he will finally punish the incorrigible; but He need not

therefore, like some weak, mortal despot, hurry up his force, and drive

straight in upon his mark. If he were consciously a little

faint-hearted he would, but he is great enough in his firmness to be

gentle and wait.

But some evidence will be demanded that God pursues any such method of

indirection, or of rectoral gentleness with us. See then, first of all,

how openly he takes this altitude in the scriptures.

When our first father breaks through law, by his act of sin, he does

not strike him down by his thunders, but he holds them back, comes to

him even with a word of promise, and sends him forth into the rough

trials of a world unparadised by guilt, to work, and suffer, and learn,

and, when he will, to turn and live. The ten brothers of Joseph are

managed in the same way. When they could not speak peaceably to him, or

even endure his presence in the family, God lets them sell him to the

Egyptians, then sends them down to Egypt, by the instigations of

famine, and passes them back and forth with supplies to their father,

allowing them to feed even the life of their bodies out of Joseph's

bounty, till finally, when he is revealed as their brother and their

father's son, they are seen doing exactly what they had sworn in their

wrath should never be done--bowing their sheaf to the sheaf of Joseph.

Here too is the solution of that very strange chapter of history, the

forty years' march in the wilderness. The people were a slave-born

people, having all the vices, superstitions, and unmanly weaknesses,

that belong to slavery. God will not settle his land with such, and no

thunders or earthquakes of discipline can drive the inbred weakness

suddenly out of them. So he takes the indirect method, puts them on a

milling of time and trial, marches them round and round to ventilate

their low passions, lets some die and others be born, till finally they

become quite another people, and are fitted to inaugurate a new

history.

But I need not multiply these minor examples, when it is the very

genius of Christianity itself to prevail with man, or bring him back to

obedience and life by a course of loving indirection. What we call the

gospel is only a translation, so to speak, of the gentleness of God--a

matter in the world of fact, answering to a higher matter, antecedent,

in the magnanimity of God. I do not say that this gospel is a mere

effusion of divine sentiment apart from all counsel and government. It

comes by counsel older than the world's foundations. The salvation it

brings is a governmental salvation. It is, at once, the crown of God's

purposes and of his governmental order. And the gentleness of God must

institute this second chapter of gracious indirection, because no

scheme of rule could issue more directly in good without it. For it was

impossible in the nature of things that mere law--precept driven home

by the forces of penalty--should ever establish a really principled

obedience in us. How shall we gladly obey and serve in love, which is

the only obedience having any true character, till we have had time to

make some experiments, try some deviations, sting ourselves in some

bitter pains of trials, and so come round into the law freely chosen,

because we have found how good it is; and, what is more than all, have

seen how good God thinks it himself to be, from what is revealed in

that wondrous indirection of grace, the incarnate life and cross of

Jesus. Here the very plan is to carry the precept of law by motives

higher than force; by feeling, and character, and sacrifice. We could

not be driven out of sin by the direct thrust of omnipotence; for to be

thus driven out is to be in it still. But we could be overcome by the

argument of the cross, and by voices that derive a quality from

suffering and sorrow. And thus it is that we forsake our sins, at the

call of Jesus and his cross, freely, embracing thus in trust, what in

willfulness and ignorance we rejected.

Nor does it vary at all our account of this gospel, that the Holy

Spirit works concurrently in it, with Christ and his cross. For it is

not true, as some Christian teachers imagine, that the Holy Spirit

works conversion by a direct, soul-renewing fiat or silent

thunder-stroke of omnipotence. He too works by indirection, not by any

short method of absolute will. Working efficiently and, in a certain

sense, immediately in the man, or subject, he still circles round the

will, doing it respect by laying no force upon it, and only raising

appeals to it from what he puts in the mind, the conscience, the

memory, the sense of want, the fears excited, the aspirations kindled.

lie moves upon it thus by a siege, and not by a fiat, carries it

finally by a process of circumvallation, commonly much longer even than

the ministry of Jesus. He begins with the child, opening his little

nature to gleams of religious truth and feeling--at the family prayers,

in his solitary hours and dreams, in the songs of praise that warble on

the strings of his soul, and among the heavenly affinities of his

religious nature. And thenceforward he goes with him, in all the future

changes and unfoldings of his life, turning his thoughts, raising

tender questions in him, working private bosom scenes in his feeling,

forcing nothing, but pleading and insinuating every thing good; a

better presence keeping him company, and preparing, by all modes of

skill and holy inducement, to make him great, So that, if we could

follow a soul onward in its life-history, we should see a

Spirit-history running parallel with it. And when it is really born of

God, it will be the result of what the Spirit has wrought, by a long,

and various, and subtle, and beautiful process, too delicate for human

thought to trace.

Holding this view of God's gentleness in the treatment of souls, and

finding even the Christian gospel in it, we ought also to find that his

whole management of us and the world corresponds. Is it so--is there

such a correspondence?

See, some will say, what terrible forces we have ravening and pouring

inevitably on about us day and night--roaring seas, wild hurricanes,

thunder-shocks that split the heavens, earthquakes splitting the very

world's body itself, heat and cold, drought and deluge, pestilences and

deaths in all forms. What is there to be seen but a terrible,

inexorable going on, still on, everywhere. The fixed laws everywhere

refuse to bend, hearing no prayers, the great worlds fly through heaven

as if slung by the Almighty like the smooth stone of David, and the

atoms rush together in their indivertible affinities, like the simples

of gunpowder touched by fire, refusing to consider any body. Where then

is the gentleness of such a God as we have signaled to us, in these

unpitying, inexorable, fated, powers of the world? Is it such a God

that moves by indirection? Yes, and that all the more properly, just

because these signs of earth and heaven, these undiverted,

undivertible, all-demolishing and terrible forces permit him to do it.

He now can hide his omnipotence, for a time, just at the point where it

touches us; he can set his will behind his love, for to-day and

possibly to-morrow; simply because he has these majestic

inexorabilities for the rear-guard of his mercies. For we can not

despise him now, when he bends to us in favor, because it is the

bending, we may see, of firmness. Able to use force, he can now use

character, and time, and kindness. Real gentleness in Him, as in every

other being, supposes counsel, order, end, and a determinate will. A

weak man can be weak and that is all. Not even a weak woman can be

properly called gentle. No woman will so much impress others by her

gentleness, when she is gentle, as one that has great firmness and

decision. And so it is the firm, great God, he that goes on so

inflexibly in the laws, and the inexorable forces and causes of the

creation--He it is that can, with so much better dignity, gentle

himself to a child or a sinner.

See then how it goes with us in God's management of our experience.

Doing every thing to work on our feeling, temperament, thought, will,

and so on our eternal character, He still does nothing by direct

impulsion. It is with us here, in every thing, as it was with Jonah

when the Lord sent him to Nineveh. It was a good long journey inland,

but Jonah steers for Joppa, straight the other way, and there puts to

sea, sailing off upon it, and then under it, and through the belly of

hell, and comes to land nobody knows where. After much perambulation,

he gets to Nineveh and gives his message doggedly, finally to be tamed

by a turn of hot weather and the wilting of a gourd. Just so goes the

course of a soul whom God is training for obedience and life. It may be

the case of a young man, setting off willfully, with his face turned

away from God. Whereupon God lets him please himself a little in his

folly, and finally pitch himself into vice, there to ]earn, by the

bitter woes of his thraldom, how much better God is to him than he is

to himself, how much worthier of trust than he ever can be to himself.

Or he takes, it may be, a longer course with him--gives him a turn of

sickness, then of bankruptcy, then of desertion by friends, then of

slander by enemies, taming thus his pride, sobering his feeling, making

the world change color, but not yet gaining him to the better life.

Then he fetches him out of his disasters by unexpected. vindications

and gifts of mercy, such as soften unwontedly the pitch of his

sensibilities. A faithful Christian wife, gilding his lot of adversity

before, by her gentle cares, and quite as much, his recovery now, by

the beautiful spirit she has formed in his and her children, by her

faithful training--making them an honor to him as to herself--wins upon

his willful habit, melts into his feeling, and operates a change in his

temperament itself. Meantime his years will have been setting him on,

by a silent drift, where his will would never carry him, and changing,

in fact, the current of his inclination itself. Till at length,

dissatisfied with himself, as he is more softened to God, and more

softened to God, as he is more diverted from the satisfaction he once

had in himself, he turns, with deliberate consent, to the call of

Jesus, and finds what seemed to be a yoke, to be easy as liberty

itself.

The change is great, nay almost total in his life, and yet it has been

carried by a process of indirection so delicate, that he is scarcely

sensible by what steps and curiously turned methods of skill it has

been brought to pass. And so God is managing every man, by a process

and history of his own; for he handles him as he does no other,

adapting every turn to his want and to the points already gained, till

finally he is caught by the gentle guile of God's mercies and drawn to

the rock of salvation; even as some heavy and strong fish, that has

been played by the skillful angler, is drawn, at last, to land, by a

delicate line, that would not even hold his weight.

In a similar way God manages, not seldom, to gain back infidels and

doubters. First he commonly makes them doubt their doubts. Their

conceit he moderates, meantime, by the sobering effect of years and

sorrow. By and by he sharpens their spiritual hunger, by the

consciously felt emptiness of their life, and the large blank spaces of

their creed. Then he opens some new vista into the bright field of

truth, down which they never looked before, and the mole eyes of their

skepticism are even dazed by the new discovered glory of God's light.

Disciples who are lapsed into sin, and even into looseness of life, are

recovered in the same way of indirection. God does not pelt them with

storms, nor jerk them back into their place by any violent seizure. He

only leads them round by his strong-handed yet gentle tractions, till

he has got them by, or out of, their fascinations, and winnowed the

nonsense out of their fancy or feeling, by which they have been

captivated. And so at length he gets their feet upon the rock again

never to be moved.

Indeed I may go farther. Even if you desire it, God will not thrust you

on to higher attainments in religion, by any forcible and direct

method. He will only bring you out into the rest you seek, just as soon

as you are sufficiently untwisted, and cleared, and rectified, under

his indirect methods, to be there. Commonly your light will spring up

in quarters where you look not for it, and even the very hidings and

obscurations you suffer, will give you out some spark of light, as they

leave you. The obstacles you conquer will turn out to be, in some

sense, aids, the discouragements that tried you will open, when they

part, as windows of hope.

Having traced the manner and fact of God's condescension to these

gentle methods, let us now pass on to another point where the subject

properly culminates; viz., to the end he has in view; which is, to make

us great. He may have a different opinion of greatness from that which

is commonly held by men--he certainly has. And what is more, he has it

because he has a much higher respect for the capabilities of our human

nature, and much higher designs concerning it, than we have ourselves.

We fall into a mistake here also, under what we suppose to be the

Christian gospel itself; as if it were a plan to bring down, not the

loftiness of our pride, and the willfulness of our rebellion, but the

stature and majesty of our nature itself. Thus we speak of submitting,

or losing our will, being made weak and poor, becoming little children,

ceasing to have any mind of our own, falling into nothingness and

self-contempt before God. All which are well enough: as Christian modes

of expression; but we take them too literally. They are good as

relating to our wrong will and wrong feeling, not as relating to our

capacity of will and feeling itself. On the contrary, while God is ever

engaged to bring down our loftiness in evil and perversity, he is just

as constantly engaged to make us loftier and stronger in every thing

desirable--in capacity, and power, and all personal majesty. We do not

understand him, in fact, till we conceive it as a truth profoundly real

and glorious, that he wants to make us great--great in will, great in

the breadth and honest freedom of our intellect, great in courage,

enthusiasm, self-respect, firmness, superiority to things and matters

of condition; great in sacrifice and beneficence; great in sonship with

Himself; great in being raised to such common counsel, and such

intimate unity with him in his ends, that we do, in fact, reign with

him.

Take, for example, the first point named, the will; for this, it will

be agreed, is the spinal column even of our personality. Here it is

that we assert ourselves with such frightful audacity in our sin. Here

is the tap-root of our obstinacy. Hence come all the woes and disorders

of our fallen state. Is it then His point to crush our will, or reduce

it in quantity? If that were all, he could do it by a thought. No, that

is not his way. His object is, on the contrary, to gain our will--gain

it, that is, in such a manner as to save it, and make it finally a

thousand fold stouter in good and sacrifice, than it has been, or could

be, in wrong and evil. He will make it the chariot, as it were, of a

great and mighty personality, inflexible, unsubduable, tremendous in

good forever.

So of the intellect. Blinded by sin, wedded to all misbelief and false

seeing, he never requires us to put violence upon it, never to force an

opinion or a faith, lest we break its integrity; he only bids us set it

for seeing, by a wholly right intent and a willingness even to die for

the truth; assured that, in this manner, Time, and Providence, and

Cross, and Spirit, will bring it into the light, clearing, as in a

glorious sun-rising, all the clouds that obscure it, and opening a

full, broad heaven of day on its vision. Recovered thus without being

forced or violated, it feels itself to be a complete integer in power,

as never before; and having conquered such obstacles under God, by the

simple honesty of its search, it has a mighty appetite sharpened for

the truth, and a glorious confidence raised, that time and a patient

beholding will pierce all other clouds, and open a way for the light.

And so it is that God manages to save all the attributes of force and

magnanimity in us, while reducing us to love and obedience. Take such

an example as Paul. Do we speak of will? why he has the will-force of

an empire in him. Of intelligence? let it be enough that he goes down

into Arabia, and that in three years' time his mind has gone over all

the course of Christian truth and doctrine, helped by no mortal, but

only by God's converse with him, and his own free thought. Of courage,

firmness, self-respect? what perils has he met, what stripes endured,

and what offscouring of the world has he been taken for, unhumbled

still, and erect in the consciousness of his glorious manhood in

Christ--sorrowful yet always rejoicing, poor yet making many rich,

having nothing yet possessing all things; confounding Athens and

Ephesus and the mob at Jerusalem, out-pleading Tertullus the lawyer,

convincing Felix and Agrippa, commanding in the shipwreck, winning

disciples to the faith in the household of C�sar, and planting, in

fact, all over C�sar's world-wide empire, the seeds of a loftier and

stronger empire by which it is finally to be mastered.

Such now are God's mighty ones--humble it may be and poor, or if not

such by social position, most effectually humbled, some will think, by

their faith, yet how gloriously exalted. God renounces all the

point-blank methods of dealing, that he may give scope and verge to our

liberty, and win us to some good and great feeling, in glorious

affinity with his own. He wants us to be great enough in the stature of

our opinions, principles, courage and character, that he may enjoy us

and be Himself enjoyable by us. Hence also it is that, when we are born

of God, and the divine affinities of our great nature come into play

unbroken, unimpaired, and even wondrously raised in volume, we, for the

first time, make discovery of ourselves. Our heads touch heaven, as it

were, in the sense of our regenerated dignity, and joys like the ocean

roll through our nature, that before could only catch some rill or

trickling drop of good. And with it comes what strength, a mighty will,

a sense of equilibrium recovered, an all appropriating faith,

superiority to things, immovable repose.

And now at the crowning of this great subject, what shall more impress

us than the sublime and captivating figure God maintains for Himself

and his government in it. Easy enough were it for him to lay his force

upon us, and dash our obstinacy to the ground. He might not thrust us

into love, he could not into courage and confidence, but he might

instantly crush out all willfulness in us forever. But he could not

willingly reduce us, in this manner, to a weak and cringing submission.

He wants no slaves about his throne. If he could not raise us into

liberty and make us great in duty, he would less respect both duty and

Himself. He refuses therefore to subdue us unless by some such method

that we may seem, in a certain other sense, to subdue ourselves. Most

true it is that he carries a strong hand with us. He covers up no

principle, tempers the exactness of no law. There is no connivance in

his methods, no concealment of truths disagreeble and piercing, no

proposition of compromise or halving, in a way of settlement. His

Providence moves strong. His terrors flame out on the background of a

wrathful sky. He thunders marvelously with his voice. And so his very

gentleness stands glorious and strong and sovereignly majestic round

us. Were he only soft or kind, bending like a willow to our wicked

state, there were little to move and affect us even in his goodness

itself. But when we look on Him as the Almighty Rock, the immovable

Governor and Keeper of the worlds, girding himself in all terrible

majesty, when he must, to lei us know that impunity in wrong is

impossible, then it is that we behold Him in the true meaning of his

gentleness--how good! how firm! how adorably great! Come nigh O thou

sinning, weary prodigal, and acknowledge and receive, in blissful

welcome, the true greatness of thy God! Be not jealous any more that

religion is going to depress your manly parts, or weaken the strength

of your high aspirations. In your lowest humiliations and deepest

repentances, you will be consciously raised and exalted. Every throb of

heaven's life in your bosom will be only a throb of greatness. Every

good affection, every holy action, into which your God may lead you,

all your bosom struggles, your hungers and tears and prostrations, will

be the travailing only of a princely birth, and a glorious sonship with

God.

Holding such a view too of God's ends and the careful indirections by

which he pursues them, we can not fail to note the softened aspect

given to what are often called the unaccountable severities of human

experience. The woes of broken health and grim depression; the pains,

the unspeakable agonies by which human bodies are wrenched for whole

years; the wrongs of orphanage; pestilence, fire, flood, tempest and

famine--how can a good God launch his bolts on men, we ask, in

severities like these? And the sufferers themselves sometimes wonder,

even in their faith, how it is that if God is a Father, he can let fall

on his children such hail-storms of inevitable, unmitigated disaster.

No, suffering mortal! a truce to all such complainings. These are only

God's merciful indirections, fomentations of trouble and sorrow that he

is applying, to soften the rugged and hard will in you. These pains are

only switches to turn you off from the track of his coming

retributions. If your great, proud nature could be won to the real

greatness of character, by a tenderer treatment, do you not see, from

all God's gentle methods of dealing with mankind, that he would gladly

soften your troubles? And if diamonds are not polished by soap, or oil,

or even by any other stone, but only by their own fine dust, why should

you complain that God is tempering you to your good, only by such

throes and lacerations and wastings of life, as are necessary?

Again, to vary the strain of our thought, how strangely weak and low,

is the perversity of many, when they require it of God to convert them

by force, or drive them heavenward by storm. You demand, it may be,

that God shall raise the dead before you, or that He shall speak to you

in an audible voice from the sky, or that he shall regenerate your life

by some stroke of omnipotence in your sleep--something you demand that

shall astound your senses, or supersede your freedom. You require it of

God, in fact, that He shall manage you as he did Sennacherib, that He

shall put his hook into your nose, and his bridle into your lips, and

lead you back, in that manner, out of sins you will not consentingly

forsake. How preposterous and base to ask it thus of your Father, that

He will storm you with his power and thrust you into goodness by his

thunder-bolts! Instead of being jealous, with a much finer class of

souls, that God and religion are going to reduce your level, you even

require to be made little by Him, nay, to be unmade, and even thrust

out of your personal manhood. How much better to give a ready welcome

to what God is doing for you and in you, without force, doing in a way

to save and even to complete your personal manhood.

Last of all let us not omit, in such a subject as this, the due

adjustment of our conceptions to that which is the true pitch and scale

of our magnanimity and worth as Christian men. It is easy, at this

point, to flaunt our notions of dignity, and go off, as it were, in a

gas of naturalism, prating of manliness, or manly character. And yet

there is such a thing to be thought of, revelation being judge, as

being even great--great in some true scale of Christian greatness. A

little, mean-minded, shuffling, cringing, timorous, selfish soul--would

that many of our time could see how base the figure it makes under any

Christian name. I will not undertake to say how little a man may be and

be a Christian; for there are some natures that are constitutionally

mean, and it may be too much to expect that grace will ennoble them all

through in a day. Judging them in. all charity, it must none the less

be our conception for ourselves, that God is calling us even to be

great, great in courage and candor, steadfast in honor and truth,

immovable in our promises, heroic in our sacrifices, right, and bold,

and holy--men whom He is training, by His own great spirit, for a world

of great sentiment, and will, and might, and majesty. For when we

conceive the meeting in that world, and being there compeers with such

majestic souls as Moses, and Paul, and Luther, and Cromwell, nay with

thrones and dominions otherwise nameless, we do not seem, I confess, to

be so much raised in the sense of our possible stature in good, as when

we simply meditate God's gentle methods with us here, to raise our

fallen manhood to its place; his careful respect for our liberty, the

hidings of His power, the detentions of his violated feeling, the

sending of his Son, and his Son's great cross, the silent intercessions

of his Spirit--all the changes through which he is leading us, all the

careful trainings of care and culture by which he is bringing us back

at last, stage by stage, to the final erectness and glory of a perfect

life. Even as when the mother eagle lifts her young upon the edge of

her nest, holding them back that they may not topple of, and puts them

fluttering there and waving their pinions that they may get strength to

lift their bodies, and finally to scale the empyreal heights. And when

we shall be able, ascending thus our state of glory, to look back and

trace all this, in a clear and orderly review, what a wonderful and

thrilling retrospect will it be.

Conscious there of powers not broken down or crushed into servility,

but of wills invigorated rather by submission, with what sense of

inborn dignity and strength shall we sing--Thy gentleness hath made us

great. All the littleness of our sin is now quite gone. We are now

complete men, such as God meant us to be;--great in the stature of our

opinions, great in our feelings, principles, energies of will and joy;

greatest of all in our conscious affinity with God and the Lamb. Be it

ours to live, then; with a sense of our high calling upon us, abiding

in all the holy magnanimities of love, honor, sacrifice and truth;

sincere, exact, faithful, bountiful and free; showing thus to others

and knowing always in ourselves, that we do steadily aspire to just

that height of good, into which our God himself has undertaken to exalt

us.

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III.

THE INSIGHT OF LOVE.

"She hath done what she could; she is come aforehand to anoint my body

to the burying."--Mark, xiv. 8.

It takes a woman disciple after all to do any most beautiful thing; in

certain respects too, or as far as love is wisdom, any wisest thing.

Thus we have before us, here, a simple-hearted loving woman, who has

had no subtle questions of criticism about matters of duty and right,

but only loves her Lord's person with a love that is probably a kind of

mystery to herself, which love she wants somehow to express.; She comes

therefore with her box of ointment, having sold we know not what

article, or portion of her property, to buy it, for it was very costly,

and pours it on the Saviour's head--just here to encounter, for the

first time, scruples, questions, and rebuffs of argument. For though

she is no casuist herself, no debater of cases of conscience, there are

abundance of such among the Lord's male disciples present, Judas among

them, and they have more reasons, a great many, to offer than she, poor

child of love, has ever thought of. "Hold woman," they say, and

particularly Judas in the representation of John, "Why this

extravagance and foolish waste? Is not the Lord always teaching us to

consider the poor, and do good in every thing, and what immense good

might you have done, had you sold this ointment and put it to the uses

of beneficence; why, the trains of benefit you might have set agoing by

the money are even endless, and now it is thrown away for just

nothing." She makes no answer, has nothing at all to say, and does not

see, most likely, why she has not been as foolish as they think.

But Christ answers for her. "No, children, no," he says, "do not

trouble the woman, she has an oracle in her love wiser than yours that

you have in your heads; she has done a good work on me, fitting,

altogether, to be done by her, if not by you. [Nay, she has even

prophesied here, taken hold practically of my future--just that which I

have never been able to make you conceive, or guess. The poor you have

always with you, be it yours to bless them, but me ye have not always.

She is come aforehand--dear prophetic tribute!--to anoint my body for

the burying. Is it nothing that I die in the fragrant odors of this

dear woman's love? Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall

be preached throughout the whole world, this also that this woman hath

done, shall be told for a memorial of her."

No such commendation was ever before or after conferred by the Saviour

on any mortal of the race. He testified for the Gentile centurion, that

he had found no such faith as his even in Israel. He tacitly commended

his three favorite disciples, Peter, James and John, by the peculiar

confidence into which he took them. But the little gospel, so to speak,

of this loving woman's devotion, he declares shall go forth with his,

to be spoken of, and felt in its beauty, and breathed in its fragrance,

in all remotest regions of the world, and latest ages of time.

And what is the lesson or true import of this so much commended

example? What but this?--do for Christ just what is closest at hand,

and be sure that you will so meet all his remotest, or most unknown

times and occasions. Or, better still, follow without question the

impulse of love to Christ's own person; for this when really full and

sovereign, will put you along easily in a kind of infallible way, and

make your conduct chime, as it were, naturally with all God's future,

even when that future is unknown; untying the most difficult questions

of casuistry without so much as a question raised.

And precisely here, not elsewhere, is the great contribution Christ has

made to morality, or the department of duty. He inaugurates, in fact, a

new Christian morality, quite superior to the natural ethics of the

world. Not a new morality as respects the body of rules, or code of

preceptive obligations, though even here he instituted laws of conduct

so important as to create a new era of advancement, but new in the

sense that. he raised his followers to a new point of insight, where

the solutions of duty are easy, and the otherwise perplexed questions

of casuistry are forever suspended; even as this woman friend of Jesus

saw more through her love, and struck into a finer coincidence with his

sublime future, than all the male disciples around her had been able to

do by the computations of reflective reason. Nay, if Judas who,

according to John, was the more forward critic, had been writing just

then a treatise on the economies of duty, her little treatise of

unction was better.

But we shall not understand either her, or the subject we are proposing

to illustrate, if we do not--

I. Bring into view the inherent difficulty that besets all questions of

casuistry that rise under the laws, or precepts of natural morality. By

casuistry we mean, as the word is commonly used by ethical writers, the

settlement of cases, sometimes called cases of conscience. The rules or

precepts of morality are easy for the most part, it is only their

applications to particular cases that are difficult. And they are often

so difficult as to cause the greatest perplexity in the most

conscientious and thoroughly Christian minds; as many of you will know

perhaps from the struggles of your own moral experience. Ready to do

any thing which duty requires, ready to fulfill any precept, or law,

which is obligatory, you have yet been tormented often with doubts, it

may be, regarding what this or that rule of duty required of you, in

the particular case which had then arrived. For the rules, or precepts

of obligation, are all general or generic in their nature, while the

cases are particular, and appear to even run into each other, by subtle

gradations of color, so as to be separable by no distinct lines. Every

case is peculiar, it is more, it is less, it is different--does the

rule of duty apply?

Take for example, the statute "thou shalt not kill," either as a

statute of the decalogue, or of natural morality. Under this, as an

accepted law, there will come up, in the application, questions like

these--Whether one can rightly be a soldier for the defense of his

country? Whether he can rightly execute a criminal under the sentence

of death? Whether it is murder to shoot a robber at one's bed-side in

the night? Whether one can rightly defend a poor fugitive, hunted by

his master, by assailing the master's life? Whether as a christian he

may rightly pursue the murderer of his child, and bring him to trial,

under a charge that subjects him to capital punishment? Whether he may

order a surgical operation done upon a child, which there is much

reason to fear will only shorten life? Whether he can run this or that

considerable risk of his own life for purposes of gain, without

incurring the guilt of suicide?

The same is true of any other main precept of morality or statute of

the decalogue. Accepting the law general, endless questions arise

regarding its particular applications, which it seems impossible to

solve.

Or we may take the great principle which requires doing good, the

utmost good possible. And then the question will arise continually, in

new forms endlessly varied, what is best to be done? And here we find

ourselves thrown at every turn, upon a search that requires an immense

fore-reaching, or impossible, knowledge of the future. What are God's

plans in regard to the future? shall we meet them and chime with them,

by this course or by that? Or, if we only try to find what will be most

useful, we can see but an inch forward, and how can we decide. Thus if

the woman had been asking how she could use her box of ointment so as

to do most good with it, she would either have fallen into utter doubt

and perplexity, or else she would have taken up the same conclusion

with Judas, and given it to the benefit of the poor. And so if you have

on hand the question, whether, in the way of being useful in the

highest possible degree, you will educate your son as a Christian

minister? there come up immediately questions like these--Whether he

will live to be of any service to the world? Whether he has talents to

be useful? Whether he will maintain a character to be useful? Whether

even God will make him eloquent, or keep him grounded thoroughly in the

truth? A thousand unknown matters regarding his future, baffle you in

coming to any intelligent solution of your duty, Any sort of business

you propose to undertake as a way of usefulness, depends in the same

way on a thousand unknown contingencies--the probable characters of

partners and customers, the winds, wars, fires, seasons, markets of the

years to come. In this measure you are brought up shortly, under the

questions of duty, by the discovery that you can see but a little way,

what ever you propose, and that all your computations of usefulness or

means of usefulness to be obtained, are too short in the run to allow

the satisfactory settlement of any thing.

These difficulties, it is true may be exaggerated. Some men never have

a trouble about duty in their lives, just because they have practically

no conscience about it. Really conscientious persons, too, settle most

of their questions as they rise, without debate. It is here exactly as

it is in the law; for what is called the common law is a product of

pure moral casuistry from beginning to end--ten thousand obligations

are discharged without litigation to one that is settled by it, and yet

the few to be thus settled are how many and troublesome. The reported

volumes multiply till no one can read them, and yet the new cases come;

the work is never done--never in fact to be done. Just so it is with

our troubles of casuistry. The really conscientious man will be

continually graveled by some question he can not solve by his reason,

and one such question is enough to break his peace. However perfect and

simple the code of preceptive duty, the applications of it will often

be difficult, and sometimes well nigh impossible, without some better

help than casuistry, which better help I now proceed,

II. To show is contributed by Christ and his gospel. By him is added to

the code of duty, what could, by no possibility be located in it, a

power to settle right applications to all particular cases, without

casuistry, or any such debate of reasons, as allows even a chance of

perplexity.

Thus, begetting in the soul a new personal love to himself, practically

supreme, Christ establishes in it all law, and makes it gravitate, by

its own sacred motion, toward all that is right and good in all

particular cases. This love will find all good by its own pure

affinity, apart from any mere debate of reasons; even as a magnet finds

all specks of iron hidden in the common dust. Thus if the race were

standing fast in love, perfect love, that love would be the fulfilling

of the law without the law, determining itself rightly by its own

blessed motions, without any statutory control whatever. It is only

under sin, where the love is gone out as a principle, that we get up

rules, work out adjudications, creep along toilsomely into moral

customs and codes, contriving in that manner to fence about life and

make society endurable. These are laws that God enacts for the lawless

and disobedient; or which they, under God, elaborate for their own

protection. But who will go to love and say, thou shalt not steal, or

kill, or lie--does not love know that beforehand? These decalogue

statutes--love wants none of them, she fulfills them before they are

given. She can shape a life more beautifully by her own divine impulse,

than it could be done by any and all ethical statutes, or refinements

under them. And accordingly when Christ restores this love in a soul,

it will be a new inspiration of duty, just according to its degree of

power. In so far as the love is weak, or incomplete, the fences of

precept and rule will be wanted. But the new affinity it creates, ought

to be so clear as to make all questions of duty more and more easy,

till finally the sense of all such rules is nearly or quite gone by,

leaving only the love to be its own interpreter and light of guidance.

Again it is a further consideration, drawing toward the same

conclusion, that Christ incarnates a perfect and complete morality in

his own person, so that when the soul in its new love embraces his

person, it embraces, or takes into its own affinities, a complete

morality. Consider who Christ is; the eternal Word of God for whom, and

by whom, all the worlds were made; in whom as being in the form of God,

all God's ends, creations, principles, counsels, providences, and

future ongoings, are in a sense contained and totalized. Whoever loves

him, therefore, loves in fact, all that he is in his perfection, and

all that he means in the world, all that he is doing and going to do in

it; and so loving him, all the currents of his soul run out with his,

to meet as by a true inspiration, all his deepest purposes and most

future and remotest appointments. He is in a state of mind that cleaves

instinctively, and by hidden sympathies, to all that is in the Lord's

person. Where the reasons of the understanding are short of reach, and

ethical solutions of all kinds doubtful, he is drawn by the

indivertible affinities of his heart, into easy coincidence with all

that Christ means for him, and so into a certain divine morality. He is

not a philosopher, not wise, as we commonly speak, and yet Christ, who

is being formed in him, is made unto him wisdom. As the worlds are

fashioned to serve His plans, and work out, in the sublime progression

of ages, all His counsels of good, he falls into that same progression

to roll on with it, not knowing whither, and how, and why, by any

wisdom of the head, yet chiming faithfully with all that Christ is

doing, or wants to be done.

At the risk now of a little repetition, let us recur a moment to the

singularly beautiful example of the woman, whose conduct gives us our

subject, and see how completely these suggestions are verified. The

wise male brethren who stood critics round her, had till the casuistic,

humanly assignable, reasons plainly enough with them. And yet the

wisdom is hers without ally reasons. She reaches further, touches the

proprieties more fitly, chimes with God's future more exactly, than

they do, reasoning the question as they best can. It is as if she were

somehow polarized in her love by a new divine force, and she settles

into coincidence with Christ and his future, just as the needle settles

to its point without knowing why. She does not love him on debate, or

serve him by contrived reasons, but she is so drunk up in his person,

so totally captivated by the wondrous something felt in him, that she

has and can have no thought other than to love him, and do every thing

out of her love. To bathe his blessed head with what most precious

ointment she can get, and bending low to put her fragrant homage on his

feet, and wind them about in the honors of her hair, is all that she

thinks of, and be it wise or unwise, it is done. Whereupon it turns out

that she has met her Lord's future, as no other one of his disciples

had been able; anointed his brow for the thorns, his feet for the

nails, that both thorns and nails may draw blood in the perfume of at

least one human creature's love. And this she has done, you perceive,

because her life is wholly in Christ's element; tempered to him more

fitly and totally than it could be by her understanding. By a, certain

delicate affinity of feeling that was equal to insight, and almost to

prophecy, she touches exactly her Lord's strange, unknown future, and

anoints him for the kingdom and the death she does not even think of,

or know. Plainly enough no debate of consequences could ever have

prepared her for these deep and beautifully wise proprieties.

Now in just this manner it is, that Christianity comes to our help, in

all the most difficult, most insoluble questions of duty, those I mean

which turn upon a computation of consequences. To compute such

consequences, we need to know, in fact, a thousand things that belong

to the future, and we know scarcely one of them--on what particular

ends God is moving, by what means he will reach them, what effects will

follow, or not follow, a supposed act of usefulness, what trains of

causes will be put agoing, what trains checked and baffled. Here it is

that our casuistry breaks down continually. At this point, all merely

preceptive codes are inherently weak and well nigh impracticable. They

command us to good, or beneficence, and leave us to utter perplexity in

all computations of consequences that reach far enough to settle the

real import or effect of any thing. Nothing plainly but some

inspiration, or some new impulsion of love, such as puts the soul at

one with all God's character and future, as when it embraces Christ and

a completely incarnated morality in his person, can possibly settle our

applications of duty and give us confidence in them. Just what helped

the woman to come aforehand in the anointing of the Lord's body, is

wanted by us all, at every turn of life.

And this I will now add, as a last consideration, is what every

Christian has found many times, if not always, in his own experience.

Thus, in some trying condition, where he has not been able, by the

understanding, to settle any wise course of proceeding, how very clear

has everything been made to. him, step by step, by the simple and

consciously single-eyed impulse of love to his Master. And when all is

over, when his crisis is past, his course fought out, his adversaries

confounded, his cause completely justified, his sacrifice crowned, how

plain is it to him that he has been guided by a wisdom in his loving

affinities, which he had not in the reasons of his understanding; all

in a way so easy as even to be an astonishment to himself. Not to say

this, my brethren, out of my own experience would be to withhold a good

confession that is due. And I can not persuade myself that any

thoroughly Christian person is ignorant of the experience I describe.

All our best determinations of duty are those which come upon us in the

immediate light of our immediate union to Christ.

I ought, perhaps, to add that the doctrine I am wishing to unfold, does

not exclude the use of the understanding. It is one thing to use the

understanding under love, as being liquified and molded by it, and

quite another to make it the oracle or sole arbiter of duty. Christ

himself gives precepts to the understanding, just because we are not

perfected in love, and require, meantime, to have the school-master's

keeping, under a preceptive and statutory control. Nothing was further

off from God's design than to add so many preceptive regulations by

Christ and the apostles, to help out the natural code of morality, and

be applied as that code is, and with it, by natural reason. He gives

them only because we are not ripe enough in the good impulse of love to

be kept right by that alone. We might take our passions for love, and

become fanatics and fire-brands of duty. The false heats of our

indignations against wrong, too little qualified by love, might fill us

with personal animosities. Our lusts might steal the name of love and

fool us by the counterfeit. Therefore he puts dry precepts in the

understanding for a time, where, if they are legal and precisional in

their way, the fogs of distemper and passion will be just as much less

able to reach them.

Let me add now, a few distinct suggestions that crowd upon us,

naturally in the closing of such a subject. And--

1. The great debate which has been going on for some time past, with

our modern infidelity, is seen to be joined upon a superficial and

false issue. The superior preceptive morality of the Gospel of Christ,

which used to be conceded, is now denied, and the learned champions of

denial undertake to refute our claim, by citing from the explored

literature of the ancient Pagan writers, every particular maxim, or

precept that we most value, or suppose to be most original, in the

teachings of Christ. Which if they can do, as they certainly can not,

their argument is only a very transparent sophistry. For, when they

have hunted all treasures of learning through, picking up here one

thing and here another, to match the teachings of Christ, and claim as

the result, that they have matched every thing, their conclusions

amounts to simply this, not that Christ is the equal of some man, but

that he is just as competently wise as all men taken together. Besides

they make him none the less original; for no one can pretend that

Christ obtained, or raked together so many precepts, by any such hunt

of learned exploration as is here resorted to; he must have given them

out of his own creative intelligence. And then again, what signifies a

great deal more, it is not here after all, that he made his grand

contribution to the life of duty. The issue tried is wholly one side of

his chief merit; viz., that he brings relief and clearness where all

the natural codes of duty break down. These codes are grounded in

natural reason, by that also to be applied. The chief maxims may be

right, but the applications are still to be settled as no mortal man

can settle them--by analogies, by subtle distinctions, drawn where

there are no definite lines of distinction; by computations of

usefulness depending on a knowledge of the future that is impossible.

Every maxim wants a volume of casuistry to settle its application to

this or that case in practice; and then new cases, equally difficult,

will be rising still--even as they do at common law, which covers only

a very small corner of the general field of duty. Baxter wrote an

immense folio on cases of conscience, thinking, I suppose, that he had

made every thing clear to the end of the world; when in fact he had

started more questions in doing it than twenty folios could settle.

Handled in this way, the law of duty runs to endless refinements; and

as men are corrupt, to endless sophistries and abortions; yielding

codes in fact, that are codes of immorality, framing mischief by a law;

codes of Jesuitry, codes of hideous and disgusting practice, such as

heathen peoples propagate with endless perversity. How much then does

it mean that Christ has a perfect morality incarnated in his

person--all beauty, truth, mercy, greatness, wise counsel of life; so

that when he is embraced, all casuistries are well nigh superseded, and

the humblest, most unreasoning disciple, is able by a course of

applications, wiser than he knows himself, to fill up a beautiful life,

meet, with a glorious consent of practice, all the grandest meanings,

and remotest future workings of God. The life of duty passes in a clear

element, tossed by no perplexities, happy and sweet and strong, because

the soul in Christ's love has a light of immediate guidance. In

presence of this manifestly divine fact, how weak and sorry is the

attempt to break down Christ's sublime superhuman evidences, by showing

that his contributions to the mere preceptive code of duty, have been

more or less nearly anticipated.

2. All conscientious Christian persons who get confused and fall into

painful debates of duty in particular cases, may here discover the

secret of their trouble and the way to have it relieved. Their

difficulty is that they fall back on the modes of casuistry, and

attempt to settle their question of duty, as Jesuits or heathens do, by

computations of reason. Shall I do this? shall I do that? shall I give

myself, or my son, or my husband to the army of my country? keeping one

day in seven, how shall I keep it? training up my child for God, what

indulgences shall I give, what pleasures shall I allow? having

adversaries, shall I be silent? willing to make every thing a sacrifice

for God, shall I give or not give all my time and talent to the

immediate duties of religion?--ten thousand such questions are rising

every hour, this with one person, this with another. The debate is

begun and kept up day and night, till the soul is weary. The darkness

increases, the confusion grows painful, the longer and more critical

the debate is, till finally the soul, thrown back upon itself, sinks

into a kind of nervous dread, close akin to horror. How many such cases

have I met, in past years, and they are among the saddest to which I

have been called to minister. The question of duty was turned round and

round, till the multitude of reasons made distraction. It was even as

if duty were the only thing impossible to be found. Have I any such

afflicted soul before me now? O, my friend, that I could show you the

root of your difficulty. You carry your case to the wrong tribunal, to

the casuistries of ethics and not to Christ. You get tangled in

questions, when you should be clear in love. Go where Mary went, or

rather where Mary's heart went. Cease from your refinements, refuse to

be caught any more in the mouse-trap questions and scruples of duty,

and let it be enough to lay your soul on Christ's bosom. Resting

quietly thus, in the sacred bliss of love to Christ's person, wanting

nothing but to be with him and for him, your torment will soon be over.

The question of duty will be ended even beforehand, just because the

soul of all duty is in you. The current of your feeling will run to it

and settle it, even before you ask where it is.

3. It is no good sign for a Christian person, that he is always trying

to settle his duty by calculations, and wise presagings of the future;

and it is all the worse, if he pleases himself in the confidence that

he succeeds. Doing nothing by faith, making no room for impulse or the

inspiration of christian love, he takes the easy method of

sagacity--easy to the fool as to the wise. man--determining his

questions of course mostly in the negative; for, if there is any doubt,

it is always a brave thing, and always looks sagacious to say, No; and

then, since he undertakes no duty which he can not see to the end of,

even by his eyes, which is about the same as to undertake no duty at

all, he conceives that he has a more solid way of judging than others.

He will do nothing out of a great sentiment of course, he will break no

box of ointment on the head of anybody; he will educate no son for the

ministry, for example, lest possibly he should be only a martyr for the

truth, and all that has been spent upon him, should only be anointing

him for his burial. Meantime, what is the love of Christ doing in him?

what great impulse of love does he trust enough to follow it? He makes

a winter in the name of piety, and because nothing is melted in the

heat of it, blesses himself in the solidity of his practice! Possibly

there may be a little of the christian love in such a person, but the

signs are bad. To be politic is no certain way of being good, and the

man who tries it, perils every thing.

4. We have a striking, and at the same time, most inviting conception

here given us, of the perfect state of society and character in the

future life. Calculation, criticism, moral codes and precepts, none of

these are wanted longer to regulate the conduct, all the legalities are

gone by. There is no debate of reasons, no casuistry. The reign of

simple love has come. The impulse that moves has its law in itself, and

every man does what is good, just because only good is in him. There is

no scruple, no friction, no subtlety of evil to be restrained. The

conduct of all is pure water flowing from a pure spring. And as springs

are unconscious of their sweetness, thunders of their sublimity,

flowers of their beauty, so the perfection of character and conduct is

consummated in a spontaneous movement that excludes all

self-regulation, and requires no dressing of the life by rules and

statutes. All best and noblest things are done, as it were naturally;

for Christ, who is formed within, must needs appear without in acts

that represent himself. All acts of beauty and good are like that of

the woman, coming to anoint her Lord--inspirations of the beauty she

loved, wise without study or contrivance, unconscious, spontaneous, and

free. This now is society, this is character, to this heighth of

perfection, this blessedness in good, our God is raising all that love

him.

After having sunned ourselves, my friends; in this bright picture

above, some of you, it may be, will now return to the earth with a

feeling more wearied and worn by duty than ever. This everlasting and

compunctious study of duty, duty to children, husband or wife, duty to

poor neighbors, and bad neighbors, and impenitent neighbors, duty to

Sunday Schools, duty to home missions and missionaries, duty to

heathens and savages, duty to contrabands and wounded soldiers, and

wooden legs in the streets, and limping beggers at the door, duty to

every body, everywhere, every day; it keeps you questioning all the

while, rasping in a torment of debates and compunctions, till you

almost groan aloud for weariness. It is as if your life itself were

slavery. And then you say, with a sigh, "O, if I had nothing to do but

just to be with Christ personally, and have my duty solely as with him,

how sweet and blessed and secret and free would it be." Well, you may

have it so; exactly this you may do and nothing more! Sad mistake that

you should ever have thought otherwise! what a loss of privilege has it

been! come back then to Christ, retire into the secret place of his

love, and have your whole duty personally as with him. Only then you

will make this very welcome discovery, that as you are personally given

up to Christ's person, you are going where he goes, helping what he

does, keeping ever dear, bright company with him, in all his motions of

good and sympathy, refusing even to let him suffer without suffering

with him. And so you will do a great many more duties than you even

think of now; only they will all be sweet and easy and free, even as

your love is. You will stoop low, and bear the load of many, and be the

servant of all, but it will be a secret joy that you have with your

Master personally. You will not be digging out points of conscience,

and debating what your duty is to this or that, or him or her, or here

or yonder; indeed you will not think that you are doing much for Christ

any way--not half enough--and yet he will be saying to you every hour

in sweetest approbation--"Ye did it unto me."

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IV.

SALVATION FOR THE LOST CONDITION.

"For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost."--Math. xviii.

11.

Every kind of work supposes something to be done, some ground or

condition of fact to be affected by it; education the fact of

ignorance, punishment the fact of crime, charity the fact of want. The

work of Christ, commonly called a work of salvation, supposes in like

manner the fact of a lost condition, such as makes salvation necessary.

So it is that Christ himself conceives it, "For the Son of Man is come

to save that which was lost." He does not say, you observe, "that which

is about to be, or in danger of being, lost," but he uses the past

tense, "was lost," as if it were a fact already consummated, or, at

least, practically determined. This work, therefore, is to be a

salvation, not as being a preventive, but as being a remedy after the

fact; a supernatural provision by which seeds of life are to be

ingenerated in a lapsed condition where there are none. At this point

then Christianity begins, this is the grand substructural truth on

which it rests, that man who is to be saved by it, is a lost

being--already lost.

And yet there will be many who recoil from this assumption of Christ,

and, without any willing disrespect to his person, take up a suspicion

that he somehow over-states the fact of our condition. They could

admit, without difficulty, that they are imperfect, that they sometimes

do wrong, and that there is often great perversity in men, or it may be

in themselves. It would not shock them, if it were declared that every

human being wants forgiveness; but to say that we are lost beings,

appears to be an extravagance. They do not see it in the tolerably

comfortable state of the world, and they are not conscious of it in

themselves; they think they have even a kind of instinctive conviction

against it, and feel obliged to repel it as injurious and without

evidence.

Probably some of you before me are in just this position of mind

regarding the great point stated. You feel obliged to make issue with

the Lord Jesus in respect to it--doing it, as you believe, not from any

disposition to have a conflict with him, but simply because you can not

assent to his words, and seem even to know that the fact he assumes can

not be true. The disagreement you will admit is very unequal, but how

can you assent to a position that so far violates your honest

convictions.

What I propose then at the present time, not in the way of controversy,

but for your sake and Christ's sake, is to go over this matter in a

careful revision, offering, if I can, such a statement of it that,

going out as it were from your own center and sentiment, you will meet

the mind of Christ approvingly. Perhaps you will so take his meaning as

to meet him with a felt tenderness in it, such as he most certainly

reveals to you; concluding this friendly negotiation, so to speak, in a

reverent, believing acceptance of him as your own great, necessary

Saviour. To this end let us,

I. Clear away some obstructions, or points of misconception, that may

put your feeling at unnecessary variance with Christ's doctrine, or

give you a sense of revulsion from it that is not really occasioned by

any thing in it.

Thus, when he says "was lost," using the past tense, as if the lost

condition were a fact accomplished, you do not see that either you, or

the world is in a state of undoing so completely reprobate. But he does

not mean, when he says "was lost," that the lost condition is literally

accomplished in the full significance of it, but only that it is begun,

with a fixed certainty of being fully accomplished; that, as being

begun, the causes that are loosed in it contain the certainty of the

fact, as truly as if the fact were fully executed. Thus if you see a

man topple off the brink of a precipice a thousand feet high, you say

inwardly, the moment he passes his center of gravity, "he is gone;" you

know it as well as when you see him dashed in pieces on the rocks

below; for the causes that have gotten hold of him, contain the fact of

his destruction, and he is just as truly lost before the fact

accomplished as after. So if a man has taken some deadly poison and the

stupor has begun to settle upon him already, you say that he is a lost

man; for the death-power is in him, and you know as well that he is

gone, as if he lay dead at your feet. So a soul under evil once begun,

has taken the poison, and the bad causation at work is fatal; it

contains the fact of a ruined immortality, in such a sense that we

never adequately conceive it, save as we give it past tense, and say,

"was lost."

Again, you have heard of such a thing as "total depravity," and the

declaration of Christ may be somehow associated with such a conception;

a conception which you instinctively repel as unjust and extravagant,

and contrary plainly to what you know of the many graces and virtues

that adorn our human life. But this notion of total depravity is no

declaration of Christ, and he is not responsible for it. It is only a

speculated dogma of man, which can be so stated as to be true, and very

often is so stated as to be false. You have nothing to do with it here.

It has much to do, again with your impressions on this subject, that

you are so completely wide of all sensibility to, or consciousness of,

the lost condition Christ assumes. Have you considered the possibility

that you may be rather proving the truth of it in that manner? "If our

gospel be hid," says an apostle, "it is hid to them that are lost." If

you have no sense of being in the lost condition Christ speaks of, if

the salvation he proposes seems, in that view, to be an exaggeration, a

fiction, it may be true and is very likely to be, that the want of

proportion is in you and not in it. I say not that it is, I only

suggest that it may be. If it is, then it will appear by the positive

evidence hereafter to be given.

Again, your mind is an active principle, and it keeps suggesting, or

putting in your way, thoughts that run, as it were, to a contrary

conviction; as that God is good, and will not put a race in being, to

be lost regarding all good ends of being, or that he is a great being,

competent every way to keep his foster children safe. The argument is

short and easy, it seems even to invent itself. But there is another

counter suggestion that is quite as likely to be true, and has weight

enough certainly to balance it; viz., that God wanted possibly, in the

creation of men, free beings like himself, and capable of common

virtues with himself--not stones, or trees, or animals--and that, being

free and therefore not to be controlled by force, they must of

necessity be free to evil; consequently never to be set fast in common

virtues with himself, except as he goes down after them into evil and a

lost condition, to restore them by a salvation. This being true,

creatures may be made, that perish, or fall into lost conditions.,

Besides the world is full of analogies. The blossoms of the spring

cover the trees and the fields, all alike beautiful and fragrant; but

they shortly strew the ground as dead failures, even the greater part

of them, having set no beginning of fruit. And then of the fruits that

are set how many die as abortive growths, strewing the ground again.

How many harvests also are blasted, yielding only straw. In the immense

propagations of the sea, what myriads die in the first week of life.

Thus we find nature everywhere struggling in abortive growths,

fainting, as it were, in the perfecting of what her prolific intentions

initiate. And all these abortions are so many tokens in the lower forms

of life, of the possibility that there also may be blasted growths in

the higher.

Once more the amiable virtues, high aspirations, and other shining

qualities, you see in mankind, make the assumed fact of our lost

condition seem harsh and extravagant--you could not believe it if you

would. But considering how high and beautiful a nature the soul is, it

should not surprise you that it shows many traces of dignity even after

it has fallen prostrate, and lies a broken statue on the ground.

Besides, Christ himself had even a more appreciative feeling, in

respect to what may be called our natural character than you. When a

certain young man, rich, but conscientiously upright and nobly

ingenuous, came to him asking what he should do "to inherit eternal

life?" though he was obliged in faithfulness to answer, "one thing thou

lackest,"--requiring him to suffer a total change of life, in the

sacrifice of all he had, and the assumption of his cross--his manner

and look were so visibly and affectingly tender, nevertheless, as to

attract the special attention of his disciples, and from them it passed

into the narrative, as a distinctly noted element of description--"Then

Jesus beholding him, loved him." You might not yourself have put any

such terms of requirement upon him; I fear that you would not, but

would you, with all you sensibilities to natural excellence, have loved

him as much, or shown it by signs as beautifully impressive?

Having noted, in this manner, so many points of unnecessary revulsion

from the fact of a lost condition, assumed by Christ in his work of

salvation, I think I may take it for granted that you are ready--

II. To look at the evidence of the fact and accept the conclusion it

brings you.

And the first thing here to be considered is, that our blessed Master,

in assuming your lost condition, is not doing it harshly, or in any

manner of severity. He is no dogmatist, making out his article of

depravity. He is not a teacher of that light quality that permits him

to be pleased with appalling severities of rhetoric, and over-drawn

allegations of fact, without any due sense of their meaning. His

feeling is tender, never censorious. Sometimes, by a kind of divine

politeness so to speak, he puts a face on human character and relations

that avoids a look of impeachment where impeachment would be true; as

when he speaks of "laying down his life for his friends." He could have

said "enemies" quite as truly, or even more so, but did not like to put

that now upon his disciples. In the same kind way of consideration, but

with a deeper feeling, he apologizes to God for his murderers, even in

the article of death, and apparently comforts himself in the

allowance--"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." Is it

such a being that will thresh you in random charges, the severity of

which is apparent to you and not to him? You can not say it, or even be

willing to think it.

Furthermore, it must be evident to you, as it has been to all most

unrestrained critics and deniers, that his moral sentiments and

standards are high and sharp beyond comparison--higher and sharper

certainly than yours. He has also a most piercing insight of all that

is deepest in character and its wants; as, by force of his most

singular purity alone, he must of necessity have; what then will you

sooner think of, when he calls you a lost man, than that, possibly, he

knows you more adequately than you know yourself? Having then some

better right than you to know, what does he in fact say?

I might go to the other scriptures, citing declarations from them; and

especially from the writings of Paul, who discusses this very point

many times over, showing by the most cogently close and formal

arguments, the fallen state of disability and subjection to evil, out

of which Christ has undertaken to raise you; but I prefer to keep the

question still and altogether between you and him, and therefore I

shall not cite any words but his. Notice then his parables of the lost

sheep, and the lost piece of money, not omitting to observe that he is

here sharpening no point of allegation against men, but only setting

forth the joy that will accrue to the angels of God, and all good

beings, when they are restored. Is it in this attitude of feeling that

he is launching hard or unjust judgments upon them? He also speaks of a

state of "condemnation," declaring in a manifestly gentle feeling, that

he has not come to condemn but to save the world, yet still obliged to

add--"he that believeth not is condemned already." What is this state

condemned of God but a lost condition under another figure? He uses

also the figure of death, spiritual death, in the same manner,

saying--"I am the life." "My Son was dead and is alive again, was lost

and is found." "Is passed from death unto life." "For God so loved the

world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on

him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Death is the

condition of disorder and spiritual dissolution, which is a lost

condition. Life is salvation, because it is the condition of harmony

restored; where part answers again to part, function to function, in a

complete living order. The lost condition he also calls a state of

"darkness" and "blindness," and to it he comes as "the light" and "the

way." Who is more profoundly lost than he that walks groping for the

wall? He conceives the lost condition as a state of moral disability,

in which men "have eyes" which "can not see," and "ears which can not

hear," and are able no longer to convert, or heal themselves. It even

requires a divine power in us, he conceives, if we are to make any real

approach to good--"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath

sent me draw him." Not to multiply citations further, take the one

practical exhibition of his discourse on regeneration. The doctrine is

that man, as he conceives him, is in such a condition that nothing

short of a divine movement upon him, can bring him back, into that

character and felicity for which he was made. "Verily, verily I say

unto you, except a man be born again"--"born of the Spirit,"--"he can

not see the kingdom of God."

These now are Christ's convictions, most tenderly, faithfully, and

variously expressed, concerning man, or the lost condition of man--your

lost condition. He does not come to some very bad men, saying these

things, but he speaks comprehensively to the race, and grounds his work

of salvation fixedly upon the lost condition affirmed.

You will not hear them disrespectfully. Still it will not be strange if

your feeling is unsatisfied. "If it be so with me," you will ask, "why

may it not somehow be made to appear?" Let me take you then a step

further, into another field, where I think it will appear.

As the matter lies between you and Christ, and he has spoken already, I

will take you now to yourself. Think it not strange, if your heart

answers, after all, to the heart of Jesus, and re-affirms exactly what

he has testified.

You live in a world where there is certainly some wrong--you have seen

it, suffered from it, and consciously done it. But all wrong, it will

be agreed, is something done against the perfect and right will of God,

and a shock must of necessity follow it. Suppose a machinist to produce

a machine, some one wheel of which will somehow run directly the other

way from what was intended--does run the other way for some space,

longer or shorter, every few hours. It will go into confusion of course

and become a total wreck. So a soul going against the will of God, in

acts of wrong, breaks God's order in it. Taken as a functional

structure, all the parts of which are to play harmoniously into each

other, disorder and ruin begins just when wrong begins, and all its

goings on afterward accelerate and aggravate the disorder. As the

junctures and functions are no more in heaven's order, it is

practically undone. Then, as the body is the soul's organ, the damage

is propagated as disease in that. And then, as society is made up of

souls and bodies, that also becomes an element of discord, infested

with lies, grudges, enmities, jealousies, breaches of trust and of

contract, deeds of injustice and robbery; history itself a volume, the

main chapters of which report the conflicts of war, the oppressions of

slavery, the wrongs of woman, the hard fortunes of industry, the

corruptions of courts and governments, the intrigues of diplomacy, the

persecutions of the good.

But I refer you to society thus only in a way of transition, and return

immediately to the main question as it stands in the revelations of

your own personal consciousness. It has always seemed to me that

whoever will accurately note his own inward working, for but one half

hour, must even be appalled by the discoveries he will make. You

distinguish first of all a certain shyness, or feeling of recoil from

God--why should you withdraw instinctively thus from a being wholly

good and pure? It was just this feeling that Adam had, after the sin,

when he withdrew and hid himself in the garden. Guilt is at the bottom

of this shyness. And what is a more certainly lost feeling than the

feeling of guilt? Who can stop it, or smooth it away, by any thing done

upon himself? It testifies to a fact--can you ever annihilate that

fact? No more can you stop the guilt which is only a fit remembrance of

it.

You discover also a certain look of disproportion, that is painfully

significant. Your ambition is too high for your possibilities and your

place. Your passions are too strong for your prudence. Your prudence

too close for your affections. Your irritabilities too fiery at times

for both. Your resentments are too impetuous for your occasions. Your

appetites too large for your possibilities of safe indulgence. Your

will over-rules your conscience. Your inclinations master the dictates

of your reason. And what is more sadly humiliating than any thing else,

your great aspirations have some weight upon them which they can not

lift, falling back baffled and spent, with no power left but to notify

you of their constant failure. Your great ideals too, revealing, as it

were, the summits of a magnificent nature, and lifting their flags of

inspiration there, are yet draggled somehow and drugged by low

impulses, that make you a mockery to yourself in your attainments. A

kind of inversion appears in every thing--sure indication of disorder.

There is disagreement also, as well as disproportion. Your practical

judgments of things disagree with your real wants, magnifying toys of

sense, to leave you aching for God and the unseen good of the mind.

Your eyes discover good in shows and outward preferments, your

convictions place it in truth and character. Your generous and high

sentiments look down with scorn upon the sordid and cowardly impulses

of your selfishness, to be, in turn, alas! how often, mastered in the

conflict with them. Your feeling of independence knuckles to

conventionalities, and what begun as a war, is ended as a truce, in

which you agree, as a kind of independent abject, to hold every thing

in scorn that is not under the fashion. Your eternal convictions

quarrel with your passions, and your will quarrels feebly with both,

misgiving under one, succumbing to the other. The whole internal man is

a troubled element. You hardly know, many times, what to think, on the

plainest subjects of duty and religion, and are most facile to what you

least approve. You ask where you are? and think you do not know; what

to believe? and say you can not find; what to do? and do what you would

not; what to avoid? and do it. Your mind is full of distraction--in

endless mazes lost.

Take another and simpler view of your disorder, do just what so few men

ever did, sit down for an hour, and watch the run of your thoughts.

Nothing flows in regular causation, no law of suggestion can be more

than faintly traced. As a man who is lost in a deep forest, turns

confusedly one way and the other, unable to set his mind in a train of

deliberative order, so it is with you. Your thoughts huddle on,

crossing all lines, breaking through all trains, refusing all terms of

order, uncontrolled, uncontrollable; even as droves in the jostle of

panic before a prairie fire. The law of right proceeding appears to be

somehow broken, the suggestions are, how often, base, impure, and low,

and withal defy any look of system. What jumps of transition! how

incongruous, unaccountable, and wild! Could the internal picture be

mapped to the eye, what eye could trace it! It is as if the soul were

an instrument played by demons. How unlike to the sweet flow of order

and health in the mind of an angel. The metaphysicians do indeed make

up their solutions, showing how every thing goes on by a law of

suggestion or association in a strictly normal process. Their farthing

candle gives a very little faint light, wholly insufficient, however,

as regards the main question. The single word disease tells more than

all their speculations. Watching these wild ways of thought, we

distinguish a ferment of death, and not the flow of life. The look is

abnormal; as if the soul were in a kind of dissolution. No man, duly

observing thus himself will easily doubt that he is somehow lost. The

appalling doubt, whether he can ever be saved will be more natural.

What a work indeed to save him, restore him, that is, to the state of

inward health, raise him up into the orderly movement of angelic life,

and make the currents flow melodious and clear.

Glance now a moment, at the disabilities that have somehow come upon

you, in what the Saviour calls your lost condition. You never

encountered any trouble, it may be, on this point, never thought of

being under any such disability as he speaks of. Have you not your

will, your strong will left? Yes, but the difficulty is to execute, or

carry through what you will to be done. When you resolve to govern

yourself, thus or thus, or to be this or that, according to some ideal

conceived, does your soul mind you? do you become forthwith such as you

undertook to be? Are there no currents of habit encountered, no floods

of contrary impulse, no volcanic fires of irritation, that prove quite

too strong for you? Suppose you determine with all seriousness, now, or

at some future time, to begin a religious life. Is it begun? You find

base motives creeping into your mind, which you disrespect and

determine to shut them away. Do you succeed? You grow sick of the world

in one form or another, and rise up to cast it out. Does it go? You

conceive a true notion of spiritual dignity and beauty of character,

and set yourself to the attainment. Do you reach it? Try a thing more

brave and certainly not less necessary; take stiff hold of your

thoughts, set your will down upon them and still their tumult, and tame

their wild way, into the sweet order of health and rational proceeding.

Can you do it? Could any thing be more preposterous even than to try?

And yet there is no true perfection of soul that does not include even

this; including also, in the same way, all that belongs to internal

order, proportion, agreement, and a full consent of all functions and

powers. Have you courage to undertake such perfection? This now is the

very profound disability in which Christ finds you yourself. Perhaps

you never saw it before, but be looks upon you tenderly in it, and

counts you to be lost--is any thing more certainly, manifestly true?

This brings me to speak--

III. Of the salvation--what it is, and by what means or methods it is

wrought. Too short a space is left me, you will see, to allow any thing

but a very condensed statement. Excluding then all that may be held, or

contended for, as regards the matter of expiation for sin, or the final

satisfaction of God's justice, in the death of Christ--which can, at

the most, be no proper salvation from the inward disorder and

disability we have discovered--we come directly to the question, how

the death is quickened, bow the lost condition of the old man is, or is

to be, renewed by Christ, in his work considered as a salvation?

Manifestly this can be done only by some means, or operation, that

respects the soul's free nature, working in, upon, or through consent

in us, and so new ordering the soul.

Not then, by some divine act in the force principle of omnipotence,

some new creating stroke from behind, that restores our disorder; the

change thus accomplished is a mending by repair, and not a recovery;

omnipotence, not Christ, is the Saviour.

As little is it by some help given to your development, or

self-culture, or even self-reformation. When Lord Chesterfield gives

disquisitions on the elegant properties of good manners and polite

conduct, he speaks to men as having a power to fashion themselves by

his rules. Christ is no professor of goodness in that way. He calls you

never to go about being better. He does not so much as call upon you to

stifle your deep hunger, by satisfying your own wants. He does not even

put you climbing after the glorious ideals you have, and the still more

glorious he gives you from his own life and person; as if you could get

inspiration from these to raise yourself. The Chesterfieldian method,

and the merely moral of Socrates, are not his. These were instructors,

not Saviours, speaking both to men, not to lost men--what you want, and

what Christ undertakes to be, is a Saviour for lost men. No scheme of

Christianity, so called, includes a gospel, which does not include

this. Any Christ, who does not come to save lost men, is antichrist, or

at best no Christ at all; for who can be the Lord's true Christ, not

coming, as life to death, peace within to discord within, order to

disorder, liberty to bondage.

We must look, in fact, for some such being as can be a World's

Regenerator; making good the fact that God has not created us for a

lost condition, but for salvation. Doubtless it may be true that God

could not bring us on as free, by any straight line progress of

development, into the character he meant for us, and the relation to

Himself, that was to be our joy and his. As the ancient poets tell us

of this or that hero of their's, who went down to hell, fought away the

three-headed dog at the gate, and passed the Stygian river, and when

the grim reconnoisance was over, forced his way back, even by the

judgment bar of Radamanthus, out into the light; so there was to be, we

may believe, an epic descent of souls into the hell-state of disorder

and judicial condemnation, and a bursting up again, out of their penal

imprisonment, into life and free dominion. But if the soul-history

could not be a simply quiet educing of good, if it must be inherently

terrible, plunging down through gulfs of disaster and loss, in the mad

experiment of wrong, even as it is itself inherently free; then a

Saviour is required who can sound the bottom of such gulfs, and bring

up the lost ones, into that good and glory eternal for which they were

made. This is Christ the Lord, coming, as in everlasting counsel, to

execute a salvation prepared before the foundation of the world.

He works by no fiat of absolute will, as when God said "let there be

light." He respects your moral nature, doing it no violence. He moves

on your consent, by moving on your convictions, wants, sensibilities,

and sympathies. He is the love of God, the beauty of God, the mercy of

God--God's whole character, brought nigh through a proper and true Son

of Man, a nature fellow to your own, thus to renovate and raise your

own. Meeting you at the point of your fall and disorder, as being

himself incarnated into the corporate evil of your state, he brings you

God's great feeling to work on yours. He is deeply enough entered into

your case, to let the retributive causes loosened by your sin roll over

him in his innocence, doing honor thus to God's judicial order, that

you may see it sufficiently hallowed without your punishment. And that

he may get the greater and more constraining power over you, he reveals

to you by his suffering death, the suffering state of God's

perfection--stung by the wrongs, and moved in holy grief for the sad

and shameful lot of his fallen children. His suffering is in fact the

tragic hour of divine goodness; for what to our slow feeling, is even

eternal goodness, till we see it tragically moved? Nay, it was even

necessary, if transgressors were to have their dull heart opened to

this goodness, that they should see it persecuted and gibbeted by

themselves. Thus, and therefore, he dies, raising by his death at our

hands, those terrible convictions that will rend our bosom open to his

love--dies for love's sake into love in us. So he will become the power

of God unto salvation, gathering you in, as it were, with all your

disorders, into the infolding, new-creating sympathy of his own

character in good; so that being thus infolded in him, all your

disproportion, discord, disability, and all wild tumult of the mind

will be new crystalized in his divine order. Thus ends the ferment of

death, succeeded by the harmony and health of new born life. In this

view it was that Christ said, "I am the life." And the same thing was

differently put, when he said "and I, if I be lifted up, will draw all

men unto me." He would draw by his death, moving on consent and choice,

so to gather in all our disorder, into the molds of his own perfect

life.

And this is salvation, the entering of the soul into God's divine

order; for nothing is in order that is not in God, having God flow

through it by his perfect will, even as he sways to unsinning obedience

the tides of the sea, and the rounds of the stars. As we are lost men

when lost to God, so we find ourselves when we find God. And then, how

consciously do the soul's broken members coalesce and meet in Christ's

order, when Christ liveth in them. In this new relationship, the spirit

of love and of a sound mind, all strength, free beauty, solid vigor,

get their spring--we are no more lost. All that is in God or Christ his

Son, flows in upon us--wisdom, righteousness, sanctification,

redemption. We are new men created in righteousness after God. Even so,

"in righteousness;" for we are new-charactered in God, closeted so to

speak in God's perfections--in that mariner justified, as if we had

never sinned, justified by faith. We have put on righteousness, and in

it we are clothed; even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of

Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe.

This is the salvation that our God is working in his Son, but as the

great apostle here intimates, it is, and is to be, by faith; for the

result can never be issued save as we, on our part believe. The very

plan, or mode of his working supposes a necessity of faith in us. For

as God comes nigh us in his son, he can be a salvation, only as we come

nigh responsively to Him, yielding our feeling to the cogent working of

his. And this we do in faith. Faith is the act by which one being

confides in another, trusting up himself to that other, in what he is

and undertakes. And there is nothing that puts a man so close to

another's feeling, principle, and character, as this act of trust. When

you put such faith in a man, his opinions, ways, and even accents of

voice have a wonderfully assimilative power in you. It is as if your

life were overspread by his, included in his. To be nigh a great good

mind, accepted in trust and friendship, is, in this manner, one of the

greatest possible advantages, and especially so for a young person. In

this fact you have the reason of that faith in Christ which is made the

condition of salvation. For it is even your chance of salvation, as a

lost man, that a being has come into the world, so great in character

and feeling, that turning to be with him, he shall be in you. And

therefore, it is that his apostle says--"Christ the power of God to

every one that believeth;" and he himself--"he that believeth shall be

saved." He can be no sufficient power, work no principle of life, save

as he is welcomed to the heart by faith. In the same way, he calls you

to "come," for coming is faith. And when he says, "come unto me all ye

that are weary and heavy laden, learn of me and ye shall find rest to

your souls," he does not speak, as many think, to such as are only

afflicted, world-sick, tired, pining in weak self-sympathy, but to them

who are weary of their own evils, tossed and rent by their own

disorders, thrown out of rest by the tumult of their thoughts and bosom

troubles, starving in their own deep wants, crushed by their felt

disabilities to good--in a word, lost men. Thus he speaks to you. And

you come when you truly believe in him. Then you rest, rest in God's

harmony, rest in peace--knowing in the blissful revelation of fact, how

much it means that the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost.

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V.

THE FASTING AND TEMPTATION OF JESUS.

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted

of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he

was afterward an hungered."--Math. iv. 1-2.

I think I do not mistake, when I assume that this particular chapter of

the gospel history, commonly called the temptation, is just the one

that a good many theologians, and a much larger number of Christian

disciples, do really, if not consciously, wish had not been written;

that which most stumbles their speculation, and least fructifies their

spiritual impressions; that which wears the most suspiciously mythic

look, that which they skip most frequently in the reading, or, if they

read, only gather up their minds to go on with due attention, after

they are through with it.

Jesus Immanuel, the eternal Word incarnate, innocence itself and

purity, the only perfect being that ever trod the earth, fasting!

opening his great ministry of life in a fast of forty days, and a

conflict with the devil for so long a time! Coming down, as he himself

declares from heaven, to set up the kingdom of God among men, he goes

to his work as if it were a deed of repentance--out of a desert, out of

a fast--inaugurating his sublime kingship by austerities and fierce

mental conflicts, such as guilty souls might undergo for their

chastening. The picture is incongruous, many think, and revolting to

faith. Besides they have a settled disrespect to fasting itself.

What I propose then at the present time, is a careful inquiry into the

matter.--The fasting of Jesus in the wilderness. My hope is, that I

shall be able to clear this remarkable scene of what many regard as its

forbidding, or unwelcome aspect. I even hope to open up a conception of

it that will place it along side of the agony and the cross, and will

make it correspondently dear to all most thoughtful, practically

earnest souls.

In the descent of the Spirit upon him at his baptism, he passes his

great inward crisis of call and endowment, the effect of which the

gospels report, in terms that require to be distinctly noted; saying,

one that he is "led up," [transported,] another, that he is "led,"

[taken away,] another, that he is "driven" by the Spirit into the

wilderness. Under all these rather violent forms of expression, the

fact is signified, that the Spirit, coming here upon him in the full

revelation of his call, raises such a ferment, in his bosom, of great

thoughts and strangely contesting emotions, that he is hurried away to

the wilderness, and the state of privacy before God, for relief and

settlement. He was not wholly unapprised of his Messiahship before, but

had come to no adequate impression of what, as Messiah, he was to do

and to be. He began at twelve years of age, to talk, in words

profoundly enigmatical to his friends, of being "about his Father's

business." He was reading also, from that time onward, the prophets, so

often quoted by him afterward, and his soul was making answer more and

more consciously to their words, even as a bell that chimes

responsively to some quivering harmony of sound that is felt upon the

air. Still he was so far from expecting a public inaugural in John's

baptism, that when John objects, saying "comest thou to me?" he only

pleads the common reason of the multitude, a desire "to fulfill all

righteousness," in the accepting of John's righteous ministry.

As he was human, so there was to be a humanly progressive opening of

his mind, and a growing presentiment of his great future. All which

makes the revelation, when it comes, only the greater and more

astounding, because he is just so much more capable of taking the fit

impression of it. Nor does it make any difference what particular

account we frame of his person. If there is a divine-nature soul, and a

human-nature soul, existing together in him as one person, that one

person must be in the human type, unfolding by a human process, toward

the consciously great Messiahship he is going to fulfill. If he is pure

divinity incarnate, he is not simply housed or templed in the flesh,

but inhumanized, categorized in humanity, there to grow, to learn, to

be unfolded under human conditions of progress.

And then it is only a part of the same general view, that when his

endowment settles upon him, as it does in the scene of his baptism, it

raises in his feeling just the same kind of commotion that is raised in

any very great and really upright human soul; as for example, in that

of a prophet when his call arrives. There has been a mighty

apprehension waking gradually in him before, and now there is a mighty

breaking in, as it were at once, of the tremendous call; all the great

movings attendant--sentiments, misgivings, joys of hope, agonies of

concern--coming in with it, like the coming in of the sea. The surges

break all round him, and the little skiff of humanity that he has taken

for his voyage quivers painfully--quivers even the worse that it feels

the heavy armament aboard of so great purpose and power.

An amazing transformation is suddenly wrought in his consciousness. As

heaven opens above to let forth the voice, and let down the power, and

the gate is set open before him to let him forward into his great

future as a world's Redeemer; as every thing opens every way to prepare

his mighty kingship, and he feels the Messianic forces heaving in his

breast, he reels so to speak, under the new sense he has of himself and

his charge, moved all through in a movement so tremendous that every

faculty groans in the pressure, like a forest swaying in a storm. And

the result is that he does what he must--tears himself utterly away

from the incontinent folly of human voices, and the sorry conceit of

human faces, and plunges into the deep silence and solitude of the

wilderness; there to settle his great inward commotions and compose

himself to his call. He is "driven of the Spirit," only in the sense

that the crisis brought upon him by his call and felt endowment drives

him. And he goes "to be tempted of the devil," only in the sense that,

being so mightily heaved by his inward commotion, he both is and will

be tempted thus, till he finds his point of rest, and settles into his

plan of sacrifice.

As to the fast itself, it is not likely that he had any thought of

fasting, when he betook himself to the retirement of the wilderness; he

only found, when there, that a fast was upon him, and since it might

help him to subdue his partly intractable humanity more completely to

his uses, he took it for his opportunity, refusing to come out into the

sight of the world's works and faces, to obtain his customary food. The

great inward tumult he was in held him thus to his fasting for a whole

forty days, and so deep was the stress of his feeling, that he does not

appear to have been particularly conscious of hunger, till the very

last of it; when as we are told "he began to be an hungered"--all

which, as many are forward to say, is a myth, or, if not, a perfectly

incredible story; no mortal organization being able to subsist for so

long a time without food. And yet we hear every few months, of cases

well attested that correspond. There appears in fact, to be a possible

state of mental and nervous tension, that allows the subject to

maintain life without food, for a much longer time than he could in the

quiet equilibrium of a more natural state.

But what is Christ doing in this long solitude and silence of the

wilderness? To say that he is fasting does not satisfy our inquiry. The

fast we can see, is total; not a fasting from food only, but from the

comforts of human habitations, from conversation, from society, and

even from public worship in the synagogue, where "his custom" was, even

from his childhood, to be always present. Isolated thus from the great

world, and closeted with God in that grim wilderness, there is of

course, no one to report him and he has not chosen to report himself;

save that, in the very closing scene of his exhaustion, which is often

called "the temptation," he allows the veil to be lifted.

Who has not wished many times, that he could have the record of these

forty days? And yet they may be worth even the more to us, that the

record is not given--left with a veil hung over it, left to the

imagination; by that only, as the purveyor to faith and sympathy, to be

explored and pictured as it may be in its scenes, for there is nothing

so fructifying as the supplying fondly of what is not given us in our

Master's history, but is left, in this manner, to our creative liberty.

In this view, certain blank spaces were even necessary, it may be to

our complete benefit in the record of his life. Had he kept a complete

diary for us of the forty days experience, it might have been a far

less fruitful chapter, than the almost total blank he has left us to

range in, loosing our love in tender explorations and reconnoisances,

and constructing a history for our faith, out of the scantiest helps

given to our understanding.

Among the few things given, or which we sufficiently know, are such as

these; that he is not bewailing his sins; that he is not afflicting

himself purposely in penances of hunger and starvation; that he is not

wrestling with the question whether he will undertake the work to which

he is called. The first he can not be doing, because he has no sins to

bewail; nor the second, because he is no believer in the doctrine of

penance; nor the third, because his choices are concluded always, by

the simple fact that any thing right or good is given him to do. If by

reason of his human weakness he suffers, for a time, great revulsions

of body and mind, that do not pertain to his voluntary nature, that is

quite another matter. We shall find reason to think it may be true.

But these, are negations only, and I think we shall be able to fix on

several very important points, where we know sufficient in the

positive, to justify a large deduction, concerning the probable nature

of the struggle through which Jesus is here passing.

1. He has a nature, that in part, is humanly derived, so far an

infected, broken nature. He has never sinned, he has lived in purity,

under this humanly impure investment; growing more and more distinctly

conscious of those higher affinities by which he thus dominates over

the human, unable to be soiled by its contact. But now it is opened to

him in his call, that he is here not as here belonging, that he is

sent, let down into the world, incarnated into human evil, into the

curse. There must have been some time at which the sense of this fact

became fully developed in him; doubtless it was partly developed

before, but it could not be completely till now, because his

Messiahship, or mission of salvation to sinners, requiring him to be

incarnated into the very fall and broken state of sin, was not before

opened to him. Now it is opened, and the whole relation he is in

flashes upon him. Before he had the contact of evil in a simply quiet

mastery, now he has it in the grim discovery, that he is membered into

it! Feeling himself incorporated thus into the corporate evil of the

world, to bear its woe and shame, and hate and wrong, as being of the

common humanity, he shudders in horrid recoil and revulsion--takes

himself away into the desert, there to wrestle with his feeling, till

he gets ready to bear the sin of the world with a mind leveled to the

burden of its ignominy. For a time, he is just as much more disturbed

and revolted, probably, as he is more consciously divine. In those

forty days of trial, instinctively withdrawn from men, how often

looking out upon them, did his divine chastity recoil from the fearful

and even shocking relationship into which he was come. This in great

part is the cross--not the wood, nor the nails, nor the vinegar, but

the men, and the breath of hell, their malignity is breathing upon him.

2. It is not to be doubted that he had internal struggles of a

different nature, growing out of his hereditary connection with our

humanly disordered and retributively broken state. I refer, more

especially, to what must have come upon him under the law of bad

suggestion. How it was with him in the closing scene, after he began to

be an hungered--the bad thoughts that came to him, as by satanic

suggestion--we are expressly told. And it is not to be doubted that his

very call and spiritual endowment, raising, as they did, the sense of

his kingly dignity and power, would also call out from his infected

humanity, whole troops of bad thoughts or treacherous suggestions, even

as the history declares. Raised in order and power, it is only human to

be tempted by suggestions of the figure he can make, and the prodigious

things he may do. It is not probably true that Jesus was contending,

for the whole forty days, with such kind of temptations as came upon

him at the close. But as certainly as his mind had a man-wise way of

thinking, he must have had many thoughts coming upon him that required

him to repeat his "get thee behind me," and turn his great nature home

upon God and his work closely enough to pre-occupy it, and take away

the annoyance. Neither let us shrink from such a mode of conceiving

him, as if it were a derogation from his perfect character. Mental

suggestion is not voluntary, but takes place under mental laws, going

where it will, and running more or less wildly, where there is any

contact of the nature with disorder. No crime is incurred by evil

suggestion, when there is no encouragement of it, or yielding of the

soul to it. As then Jesus was to be tempted in all points like as we

are only without sin, it is even a fact included, that, when his

tremendous call took him, an immense irruption of evil suggestions,

bursting up from his low born humanity, must have taken him also. And

this, I conceive, is what is meant, when he is declared to have been

driven of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

The very call of the Spirit brought this contest upon him. I do not

exclude the possibility of some access of bad spirits concurrently

working with the bad thoughts; for he was tempted just as men are, and

as being a man. And he gained his victory, doubtless by a struggle

often renewed and variously protracted.

3. It is not to be doubted that his human weakness made a fearful

recoil from the lot of suffering, and the horrible death now before

him. Human nature is keenly sensitive to suffering; but we manage often

to bear a great deal of it, because we do not know of it beforehand,

but have it coming upon us by surprises, or turns of Providence not

expected. Hence there is nothing so common as the remark, from one or

another, that he could not have borne such trials as have come

successively upon him, if he had been advised, of them and had them in

full view beforehand.

But the call of Christ, as it now opened, was a call to suffering; a

call to be fulfilled by sorrow and pain, and consummated by the

ignominy of a cross. The great Messiahship in which he was inaugurated,

was to be a power of salvation for the world, as being a sublime

tragedy of goodness. In this respect, his career of suffering was

different, widely, from that of any mortal of the race, in the fact

that he came into it with a full knowledge flashed upon him, of all

that he was to bear from the sin he was to conquer. As we hear him

speak in one of his earliest discourses of being "lifted up," recurring

more than once to the same thing afterward, and using the same

expression, calling his disciples also, many times over, to "take up

the cross" and follow him, we can see for ourselves how the sorrow, and

buffeting, and shame, and cross, all met him and stood in their

appalling certainty always before him, from the first hour of his call

onward. The recoil of his human nature from such a prospect must have

been dreadful--mortally regarded, insupportable.

Let us not be misled, at this point, by the fact that be is a superior

nature incarnate, imagining that he must also be superior, in that

manner, to suffering. He has taken the human nature, and taken it as it

is, by inheritance, and though it is good for symbol, as being the

express image of God--better than all nature up to the stars

beside--still it is weak for the matter of suffering, and is, in fact,

only the more perfect for his uses on that account. Good, therefore, as

symbol, it has to be conquered as organ. It wants staunching, for so

dreadful a service, by some strong mastery, be it that of a fast, or of

any other kind of discipline. Otherwise, being all weakness, it would

even be treason if. it could. Nothing could be farther off from the

heroic in sacrifice, more susceptible to fear, more instinctively

averse to the hatred of men, more unwilling to die, and die hard, and

die low. And what shall he do more naturally, in the confused struggles

of his feeling, than withdraw till the terrible revulsion is quelled

or, what is the same, till he gets the poor, unsteady, low bred organ

of his life brought up, into the scale of his sacrifice.

4. There comes upon him also, at the point of his call or endowment,

still another and vaster kind of commotion, that belongs even to his

divine nature, holding fit proportion with the greatness and perfection

of it. The love he had before to mankind, was probably more like that

of a simply perfect man. Having now the fallen world itself put upon

his love, and the endowment of a Saviour entered consciously into his

heart, his whole divinity is heaved into such commotion as is fitly

called an agony; answering, in all respects, to the agony of the

garden. How differently do we feel for any subject of benevolence the

moment we have undertaken for him. He lies upon our heart-strings night

and day, as a burden. We watch for him with a painful concern, we

agonize for him. So when Jesus takes the world upon his love, it

plunges him at once, into what may be called the suffering state of

God; for it belongs to the goodness of God, just because it is good, to

suffer, as being burdened in feeling for all wrong-doers and enemies.

Every sort of love, the maternal, the patriotic, the christian, has for

its inseparable incident, a moral suffering in behalf of its subjects.

God has the same, in a degree of intensity equal to the intensity and

compass of his love. And it is this moral suffering that now comes upon

Christ, and is to be revealed by his incarnate ministry. The stress

upon his feeling is too heavy to be supported by the frail and tender

vehicle of his humanity. It rolls in like a sea, and his human nature

can not breast the heavy surge of it. He goes apart in the terrible

recoil, both of his divine feeling and his human nature, sinks away

into the recesses of the wilderness, crushed by the burden that has

come upon his agonizing heart. As was just now intimated, his

experience corresponds with that of his agony; for it was the same

burden returning upon him, at that crisis, that threw him on the

ground, and wrenched his feeling, in such throes of concern for his

enemies, that his too feeble body gave way, and the gates of the skin

flew open before the terrible pressure on his heart. I do not say that

any such scene is transacted here in these forty days. I only know that

Christ has the same weak body, and the same great feeling, burdened now

for men, and, what is much to be considered, it has come upon him just

as suddenly as the investiture and official endowment of his call. I do

not see his prostrations. I do not catch the wail of his prayer, "let

this cup pass from me," I only see that a great and dreadful commotion

must be upon him--leaving him to cope with it as he best may, in that

mysterious silence and solitude into which he has retreated from our

human inspection.

Once more, the mind of Jesus, in his forty days retirement and fasting,

must have been profoundly engaged and powerfully tasked in the

unfolding of the necessary plan. He can not bolt into such a work,

embracing such an immense reach of territory, and time, and kingly

rule, without considering, beforehand, and distinctly conceiving the

what, and how, and when, and why, of his work. Doubtless there is a

divine plan ready for him, and has been even from before the world's

creation, but he, as being man, must think it consecutively out, step

by step, in a certain human way of reception, or development, else he

is not in it. No matter if the plan lay perfect in him as the Ancient

of Days before he came into the world, still the counsel of it lay, not

in words, or specific judgments, but in the infinite abyss of his

boundless intuition. Now, in consenting to be man, he consents to be

unfolded gradually in body and mind, to grow as he feeds, and know as

he thinks. Nor does it make any difference if his thinking draws on the

infinite; for to think the infinite into the finite, deific light into

form and particularity, is a very considerable work that will not soon

be done. His plan, therefore, must be thought, in order to be humanly

had. Yesterday he had it not, to day the call has come that requires

it, and a great soul-labor begins. Doubtless he has thought much,

coasting round the subject before; he has read the Messianic prophets,

and had their visions opened to his understanding, probably, as no

other ever had before; his every faculty is clear, and broad, and deep,

and rapid, in a degree surpassing all genius. Still, making all such

allowance, how far off is he, at the coming of his call, from having

any complete fact-form plan ready for it. The matter of it includes

even the reasons of the creation, also the last ends of the creation,

what between has been already done and what remains to be, in the great

new future; all that affects God's relations to men, and men's to God,

and the eternal kingdom as connecting both. In this great

salvation-problem, therefore, touching always the infinite and finite

together, what he shall do and teach; what, and when, and how, he shall

suffer; by whom he shall organize, and for a time how long--in this

problem, to be wrought out in a train of finite human thinking, his

forty days will have enough to do, pour in fast and free as the

stupendous revelation will. Full of all heaviest commotion therefore,

on the side of his feeling, the great deep of intelligence also in

Jesus must be mightily heaved, that his counsel may be adequately

settled. O thou grim solitude of wilderness, what work is going on,

these days, in thy silence!

How great and rapid the movement of his counsel has been, we may see,

when coming out, after the forty days, into his ministry, he opens his

mouth in his beatitudes and goes on with his wonderful first sermon,

speaking, how decisively and calmly and with what evident repose; then

beginning straightway his miracles, calling his apostles, and

organizing his cause; evidently master of his plan even as a practiced

general of his campaign-ready in all ripe counsel, to spread himself

out on the great world-future of his kingdom.

Beginning thus at the call of Jesus, and making this large induction

from what we know concerning him, I think you will agree, my friends,

that these forty days of his in the wilderness must have been the most

eventful days of his Messiahship, including beyond question, a vast,

unknown, scarcely imaginable, but necessary and sublime, preparation

for his work. No other chapter, I may safely say, in the whole history

of Jesus, has a more fascinating and mysterious interest to our

feeling, covered though it be in dimness and silence.

I have alluded once or twice to the agony of Jesus. I might also refer

you to hours when the same deep conflict more than once, rolls back on

him for a space, and his mighty "soul is troubled," venting itself in

words. I can not resist the impression that the real agony of Jesus

took him at the very first. How he bore himself in it for so many days

in those desert wilds, his attitudes, his sleep or want of sleep, his

prostrations and prayers, his groanings in spirit, his spaces of

brightness and victorious courage and peace, his deep ponderings by day

or night, sitting under the grim rocks--none of these are given us, but

our heart will indulge itself in them and rightly may.

Some few incidents are given us which, taken together, signify much.

Thus, he is not hungry, he is too powerfully wrought in by his thoughts

and emotions to have the sense of hunger.

He is also alone. In the agony of the garden he has his friends with

him, and looks to their sympathy for support. Here he has no friend

with him, because he has not yet any friend enlisted, who can at all

understand him, or yield him even a word of comfort. I said he was

alone--no he is not alone, but as Mark very casually intimates, "he is

with the wild beasts." And this word with indicates a strange

concomitancy, by which they are somehow drawn to come about him and be

with him, in a way of harmless attention. For the term "wild beasts"

does not mean simply wild animals, but the savage beasts of prey, such

as lions, panthers, wolves, and the like. These are with Jesus, coming

about him. in his prostrations, drawing near in the moanings of his

sleep, fawning about him tenderly when he sits in silence; going back,

as it were, to the habit of paradise, and symbolizing, by their

harmless companionship, that future paradise which he is to restore.

Glad sign most surely, they, to his struggling heart.

Still another and very different class of beings come to him--I mean

the angels. These we are told ministered unto him. Great joy was that

to the angels! and it must have been as great to him! In such a state

of long, long conflict and trial, how blessed were these visitors from

the great world of peace above, their communications how sweet, how

rich in assurance! So between the beasts and the angels, men being

wholly away, Jesus gets tokens of sympathy that minister comfort, and

help him to compose himself to the opening tragedy of his life.

We come, at last, to the final crisis of the trial, which many, by what

appears to me a very great mistake, call the temptation; as if it

covered the whole ground of the forty days. Exactly contrary to this

the history says expressly--"And when he had fasted forty days and

forty nights he was afterward an hungered." Or according to another

gospel,--"when they were ended, he began to be an hungered." The three

temptations follow. So powerfully had his mighty soul been wrought in,

that he had not, till this time, been conscious of hunger. But now, at

last, he is spent, and nature breaks under exhaustion. The

representation appears to be that the fevered, half delirious state of

hunger is upon him; and the phantoms of lying suggestion rush into his

weakened brain, to bear down, if possible, his integrity. But it is not

possible; even his broken, reeling, faculty is too strong in its purity

for the utmost art of his enemy. And his triumph is thus finally

completed, in the fact that any shred of his sinless majesty is seen to

be enough to hold him fast, when the shattered vehicle of his humanity

has quite given way.

That this, or something like it, is the true account to be taken of the

story, is hardly to be questioned. It must have been derived from his

own report; for no one else was privy to the matter of it. And he

simply meant, I have no doubt, in the three temptations recited, to

report what appeared to him, visionally speaking; or how they stood

before his fevered brain. To believe that he was actually taken up by

the devil, and set on the pinnacle of the temple, when fifty miles

away; or that he was taken up into a mountain so exceedingly high, that

he could see all the kingdoms of the round world from the top, is

fairly impossible. He only reported the seemings of his hunger-fevered

state. All temptations are but seemings. The devils bait their hook,

never with truths, always with illusions. Nor were the temptations any

the less real, or satanic, as being phantoms of exhaustion. This, in

fact, was to be his victory, that not even his unsettled, weakened,

faculty could be seduced by such phantoms, whether of internal or

external suggestion. In this victory the trial of Jesus was

finished--"And when the devil had ended all the temptations, he

departed from him for a season." Now therefore he is ready, and the

great Messianic ministry begins.

Scarcely necessary is it, my brethren, to say that it will be such a

ministry as the great first chapter of the fast prepares--such and no

other. I know not any point beside, in the history of his life, where

you may take your stand and see the whole course of it open, with such

intelligible unity and clearness. As the dawn prepares the day, so the

forty days prepare the three wonderful years. Taking the fast for your

initial point, and carefully distinguishing what goes on there, and is

done or made ready, every thing appears to come out naturally, in a

sense, from it. Here, in fact, as you may figure, Christ officially

young, levels himself to his aim; and then, as age is not the count of

years but of works, puts himself into his great ministry with such

momentum and constancy, giving so much counsel, expending so much

sympathy, suffering so great waste of sorrow, that he dies, at the end

of three years, like one ripened by full age. The unsteadiness, the

overdoing, the romance, of unpracticed energies, nowhere appears, but

the regular gait of sagacity, patience, sound equilibrium, as of one

who has his counsel ready, brings him on to his close. Whether this

maturity is unfolded by the very rapid development of his crowded,

heavy-pressing, all-doing ministry, or was really prepared, for the

most part, in the fiery forty days of his trial, it may be difficult to

say. Only this is abundantly clear, that he came out of that trial, to

make his beginning, both strong and ready. If he did not seem to be as

old when he gave the sermon on the mount as when he answered before,

Pilate, he was as thoroughly assured, and as completely master of the

situation. From that time onward his equipoise is perfect, and his

movement restful and smooth--never hurrying after counsel not yet

arrived, but visibly set on by counsel, such as leaves no room for

surprise, or a moment's faltering. The sweetness, and repose, and

readiness he is in, are such as indicate a mental graduation into

counsel, and victory already accomplished--as he had, in fact,

conquered, beforehand, the world, and the devil, and his own humanity,

and had come to such kind of settlement as a victor only gets. Many

martyrs have borne themselves heroically when the doom was on them, and

the pressure of the hour riveted their firmness. But Christ was a

martyr at large and beforehand, who had taken the sentence of death in

the wilderness, and bowed himself in consecration upon it, coming out

to live martyr-wise; but as strong, as steady, as free, as the felt

mastery both of death and of himself could make him. Figuring himself

to himself, deliberately, as a grain of wheat falling into the ground

to die, and so to live again more fruitfully, he settles calmly into

his appointment, without misgiving or regret. Having also a great

baptism, as he knows, to be baptized with, he is no wise appalled by

the prospect, but only oppressed by the delay; exclaiming, "how am I

straitened till it be accomplished." In all which we may see, that the

highest nerve of courage, endurance, and resolute equability, may be

set, only in the silence and solitude of a complete self devotion,

never in the noisy tumult of commotions and great throes of public

excitement. What other being among men ever graduated into such glory

of public life as Jesus, when he came out of the desert and his forty

days of silence!

I do not mean, of course, in hanging so much upon the temptation of the

forty days, to say that Jesus was never tempted before, or after that

time. All such temptations were casual, matters by the way, having a

certain consequence, but no principal consequence in fixing the tenor

of his life. But the forty days temptation had this distinction, that

it took him at the point of crisis, so that every thing was turned by

the settlement, and went with it. There could be only one such crisis,

and the turning of it rightly was the grand inaugural of all that came

after, in his wonderful and gloriously consecrated ministry.

In just the same manner, there is, I conceive, in the life of almost

every Christian disciple, a crisis, where every thing most eventful, as

regards the Christian value of his life to himself, and of his

consecration to God, especially hinges, and where, as we may figure,

his grand temptation meets him. Other temptations have gone before,

others will come after, here is the temptation of his personal call,

and opportunity. What it will be, or in what form it will come, can not

of course, be specified; enough that it will commonly bring the strong

present conviction with it of a great Christian crisis arrived, on

which all the heaviest results of character and service done for God

are depending. At such a time, there is to be no haste or

precipitation. The time for a grand, practical, settlement of the life

has come, and if the man has any gravity of meaning or high aspiration,

he will meet the crisis practically, and if possible, understandingly.

To let go society, pleasure, profit, and the table, nay, to get away

from them, will be a kind of relief. Any thing, any campaign of prayer,

and thought, and self-devotement, will be accepted heartily, and be

long enough protracted to settle the result finally and firmly. One

great reason, brethren, why we make so poor a figure of fitfulness and

inconstancy, is that we go by jets of emotion, or gusts of popular

impulse, or sallies of extempore resolve; we do not settle our question

upon a footing of counsel, and inward consecration, and, in fact, do

not take time to settle any thing; least of all, any such great crisis

of life. Moses drew off into the wilderness and was there forty years,

getting ready for the call that was already half uttered in his heart.

Paul retired into Arabia, and was there three years, gathering up his

soul and soul's fuel, for the grand apostleship of word and sacrifice.

So the Christian, every Christian, who has come to his crisis, will

take time for the settlement of his plan, and the equipment of his

undertaking--if not forty days, then as many as are wanted.

Having this high work upon you, brethren, silence and solitude will be

congenial, and the fasting of Jesus will be remembered by you with a

strange sympathy--all in the endeavor to come out on your future,

thoroughly consecrated to it, even as he was to his. Drawn to him in

such profoundest sympathy with his temptation, O how tenderly and

approvingly will he be drawn to you, pouring, as he best may, all the

riches of his forty days struggle and consecration to sacrifice upon

you. "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to

succor them that are tempted." Any life is great and blessed, into

which you are entered, upon this high footing with Christ your Master.

You can not be worse handled by men, or by what is called fortune, than

he was; can not be more faithful to God's high purpose in you, or more

consciously great, and happy, and true; and that, if I am right, is the

only kind of life at all worthy of you. And then, at the end, it will

be yours to say, in the sublime confidence also of your Master--"I have

glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest

me to do."

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VI.

CONVICTION OF SIN BY THE CROSS.

"Of sin, because they believe not on me. Of righteousness, because I go

to the Father, and ye see me no more. Of judgment, because the prince

of this world is judged."--John, xvi. 9-11.

In the convincement of sin, the Holy Spirit is to be the agent, and

Christ rejected the argument--so Christ himself conceives the promise

of the Spirit which he is here giving. The convincing work is to be

wrought by no absolute method of force, but by truths and reasons drawn

from Christ's person, and the treatment he received from the world. "Of

sin," he says, "because they believe not on me." The two other points

that he adds--"Of righteousness because I go to the Father and ye see

me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is

judged;"--appear to be only amplifications of the first, or points in

which the guilty convictions of his rejectors will be raised to a

higher pitch. Thus when he is gone out of the world to be seen here no

more, gone up to the Father in visible divine majesty, they will begin

to conceive who he was--the Son of God, the righteousness itself of

God. He will be no more the man or the prophet, poorly apprehended,

doubtfully conceived; all their. opinions of him will undergo a

revision, and their minds be quickened to a new sense even of what

righteousness is; so, to a deeper more condemning, more appalling sense

of their sin. Then again this conviction will be set home with a still

heavier emphasis, by the fact made visible in his death and

resurrection, that the "prince of this world is judged," and forever

cast down. For if evil, when triumphant by conspiracy, still can not

triumph, but falls inevitably doomed, how certainly doomed is every

soul that meets the Just One it rejected, on its final day. When the

bad empire called the world, is itself cloven down, visibly, by the

rising and the over-mastering kingship of God's Messiah, the conviction

of sin will be as much more appalling, as the general defeat and

overthrow requires it to be.

It is then a fixed expectation of Christ himself, and that is the truth

to which I am now going to call your attention--that his mission to the

world will have a considerable part of its value, in raising a higher

moral sense in mankind, and producing a more appalling conviction of

their guilt or guiltiness, before God.

A widely different, or even contrary, impression appears to be

generally derived from certain things said in the scripture, concerning

the law; taken as they are, in a less qualified manner than they should

be, or the facts of the gospel require them to be. Thus it is declared

that, "by the law is the knowledge of sin." It is also described in its

relation to the gospel, as the letter that killeth," "the ministration

of death," "the ministration of condemnation;" that on the other hand,

being "the Spirit that giveth life," "the ministration of

righteousness." On the ground of such representations, an impression is

received, that conviction of sin is distinctively "a law work." As such

it is specially magnified, and it is even abundantly insisted on, that

the effective preaching of the law is the prime condition of all

genuine success in preaching. The conception is that what is called

"the law" is a certain battery side of government, before which guilty

minds are to be shot through with deadly pangs, and then that the

ministration of life, in Jesus and his cross, coming on the gentle side

opposite, does a work of pure healing and life. On that side, all is

condemnation. On this side, all is forgiveness. There is guilt, here is

peace. Bondage only is there, liberty only is here.

Now this impression is so far true, that conviction of sin doubtless

supposes the fact of some. rule or law, broken by sin; and that, when

such law is broken, it can, as law, do nothing more than condemn--can

not help, or save. God only can do that, and that he does in Christ.

But, in a certain other view, there is more law in Christ, more, that

is, in his character and life and doctrine, then there is in all

statutes beside. The law of Eden is to the law of the sermon on the

mount, as a jewsharp to an organ. The ten commandments, mostly

negative, or laws of not doing, are not, all together, as weighty and

broad upon the conscience, as Christ's one positive law, "Do ye unto

others as ye would that others should do unto you." Not even the

thunders of Sinai are any match for the silent thunders of Calvary.

Besides, it is not so much the question, where most law is given, as by

what means the sense of law may be most effectually quickened, where

before it slept. And here it is that Christ's great expectation hinges,

when he says, "of sin," "of righteousness," "of judgment." For in him,

the law is more than a rule, or than all rules--a person, clothed in

God's righteousness, bearing God's authority, filling and permeating

all human relations with an exact well doing, and with all most loving

ministries, such as never before had been even conceived in these

relations. How much then will it signify, when guilty minds are so

painfully dazed by the glories of right in his person, that they. can

not endure the sight; conspiring even his death, and falling upon him

in their implacable malice, to thrust him out of the world! Why, simply

to have had such a being living in the world, doing his work, suffering

his pains at the hands of his enemies and breathing out his pure

untainted breath upon the poisoned air, changes it to a place of holy

conviction, where sin must be ever knowing itself, and scorching itself

in its own guilty fires!

Thus much it was necessary to say, in a way of general statement, or

adjustment, as respects the relative agency of Christ and the law in

the convincement of guilty minds. That Christianity was to have, and

has had, a considerable part of its value, in this convincing, as well

as in a forgiving and restoring agency, I will now proceed to show, by

arguments more special and positive. And--

1. Make due account of the fact, that conviction of sin is a profoundly

intelligent matter, and worthy, in that view, to engage the counsel of

God in the gift of his Son. If we have any such thought as that what is

called conviction of sin is only a blind torment, or crisis of excited

fear, technically prescribed as a matter to be suffered in the way of

conversion, we can not too soon rid ourselves of the mistake. It is

neither more nor less than a due self-knowledge--not a knowledge of the

mere understanding, or such as may be gotten by philosophic reflection,

but a more certain, more immediate sensing of ourselves by

consciousness; just the same which the criminal has, when he hies

himself away from justice; fleeing, it may be, when no man pursueth. He

has a most invincible, most real, knowledge of himself; not by any

cognitive process of reflection, but by his immediate consciousness--he

is consciously a guilty man. All men are consciously guilty before God,

and the standards of God, in the same manner. They do not approve, but

invariably condemn themselves; only they become so used to the fact

that they make nothing of it, but take it even as the normal condition

of their life. Their sin gets to be themselves, and they only think as

thinking of themselves. Living always in the bad element, they think it

is only their nature to be as they are. Their consciousness is frozen

over, so to speak, and they see no river underneath, but only the ice

that covers it. The motions of sins they do not observe, because the

standards they have always violated are blunted and blurred by custom.

They are only conscious, it may be, of a certain shyness of God, and

they come to regard even that as being somehow natural. Hence it comes

to be a very great point, in the recovery of men to God, to unmask them

to themselves, to uncover the standards and reopen their consciousness

to them; exactly what is done by Christ and his rejected Messiahship,

inwardly applied by the Spirit of God. The result is conviction of sin;

which is only a state of moral self-knowledge revived. Doubtless there

is a pain in this kind of self-knowledge, but it is none the less

intelligent on that account. The sense of guilt is itself a pain of the

mind, just as light is pain to a diseased eye; but light is none the

less truly light, and guilt is none the less truly intelligent, on that

account. This returning of guilty conviction is, in fact, the dawning,

or may be, of an everlasting and complete intelligence, in just that

highest, moral, side of the nature, that was going down out of

intelligence, into stupor and blindness. Is it then a severity in

Christ that he is counting on a result of his ministry and death, so

essentially great and beneficent?

2. It is quite evident that such a being as Christ could not come into

the world and pass through it, and out of it, in such a manner, without

stirring the profoundest possible convictions of character. If the

divine glory and spotless love of God are by him incarnated into the

world, the revelation must be one that raises a great inward commotion.

It should not surprise us that even the bad spirits were rallied, in

that day, to a pitch of unwonted disturbance and malign activity, much

more the bad mind of the race. The great standards of holiness, so

fatally blurred as rules, will be all brought forth again, speaking in

the doctrine, shining out in the perfect life. Every guilty mind will

feel itself arraigned, and brought to know itself, that beholds, or

looks into the perfect glass of history that describes this life. And

above all when it is ended by such a death, inflicted by a world in

wrong, who that knows himself to be a man, will not be visited by

silent pangs, not easy to be stifled.

3. Christ was a being who perfectly knew the pure standards of

character and duty, knowing, as well, just what sin is in the breach of

them, and what man is in the sin. He also knows of course, exactly what

is necessary to stir up the guilty consciousness of men; sometimes

doing it by instruction, sometimes by acts of unwonted patience and

beneficence, sometimes by terrible rebukes and lifted rods of

chastisement, and more than once by a divine skill of silence--as when

stooping down, once and again, he drew mystic figures on the ground;

sending out thus one by one, condemned and guilt-stricken, the

pretentious accusers of the woman; or when, scarcely speaking and

urging no defense, he so visibly shook with concern, the guilty mind of

Pilate, by the dumb innocence only of his manner. He knew exactly what

to do on all occasions, and with all different classes of men, to put

the sense of guilt upon them, and we can see ourselves, that he has it

for one of the great objects of his ministry; even as it was a great

expectation, in the matter of his death, that all enemies and rejecters

would discover, in bitter pangs of conviction, that, in what they have

done upon him, they have only let their sin reveal its own madness. Let

us turn now

4. To the scriptures and gather up some few of the tokens that Christ,

before his coming, was expected to come in this character; and also of

the declarations, by himself and his followers afterward, that he had,

especially in his death, accomplished such a result.

"They shall look on me whom they have pierced," says the prophet, "and

they shall mourn." Other expressions of the prophets correspond.

Accordingly when the infant Jesus was brought to Simeon, by his mother,

he said to her, "Behold this child is set for the fall and rising again

of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against, that

the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." His rejection was to

reveal the heart of his rejectors. John the Baptist conceives, in the

same manner, that he is coining with "the axe" of conviction, to be

laid to the root of all sin, and "the fan" of separation, to winnow out

the chaffiness of all pretense, so to unmask the secrecy of guilt and

place it in the open light of conviction.

Christ himself also testifies that he has done it, saying to Nicodemus,

"He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not

believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this the

condemnation (how deeply shall the sting of it some time pierce the

heart of my rejecters,)--this is the condemnation, "that light is come

into the world and men have loved darkness rather then light, because

their deeds were evil." On another occasion, he says, to the same

effect,--"If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin,

but now they have no cloak for their sin;"--they see now, by what they

reject and hate, precisely what they are--"If I had not done among them

the work which none other man did, they had not had sin, but now have

they both seen and hated both me and my Father;" intimating clearly

that their hatred of him, they will sometime see, is, at bottom, a

hatred of goodness itself. On still another occasion, he brings out the

same truth more argumentatively saying--"If God were your Father, ye

would love me; for I proceeded forth and came from God. He that is of

God heareth my words, ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of

God." Your rejection of me is nothing but an exhibition, without, of

that rejection of God in which you inwardly live. The bitterness of

their reply you know.

Take the trial scene of Jesus next, noting first, the bad spirit out of

which it comes, and then the guilty conviction that follows it. What

injury had Christ done to Caiphas and the managers of his party, that

they should be so bitterly exasperated against him? There was never a

more inoffensive being, save as goodness is itself an offense to sin.

Hence the violence of their animosity; for no man is so violent and

brutish in his animosities, as he that is storming against goodness, to

drown the disturbance, and redress the guilty pangs it creates in an

evil conscience. Hence the barbarous insults put upon the Saviour's

person. If these great people of Jerusalem--high-priests, rabbis,

scribes, and others--had been a tribe of Osages, or Dyaks, their

treatment of Jesus would have been exactly in character. The slap in

the face, the crown of thorns, the mock cries, the scourging, the

spitting, the wagging of the heads, and the jeer "let him come down,"

connected with a visibly conscious disrespect to evidence and justice,

and with outcries raised to stifle even the sense of justice; the

malignity and spite of the punishment itself, a slave's punishment, a

crucifixion put upon a man whose dignity and the power of whose

words,--"speaking as never man spake"--had been a principal part of his

offense--what does it mean that gentlemen, Jewish leaders of the

highest standing and culture, are found instigating these low

barbarities of spite and cruelty? What has he done to transform

civilized men, into savages in this manner? O it is the offense of his

character! He has raised up demons of remorse in the conscience of

these men, by the luster simply of his goodness. This it is that

rankles in their hatred, and hate, as against goodness, is a feeling

too weak to suffer the assumption even of dignity. Hence the simply

diabolical frenzy of their conduct.

Mark the result. The very moment after Jesus has commended his spirit

to the Father and ceased to breathe, the conviction of crime begins to

break through the enmity of his crucifiers. Their malignity is

discovered, they could hate a living enemy, but the helpless body of a

dead one over-masters their violence. Immediately the centurion himself

glorified God, saying, "certainly this was a righteous man." "And all

the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which

were done, smote their breasts and returned." This is the sign that was

"to be-spoken against," and now "the thoughts of many hearts" begin to

be "revealed." "They look on him whom they have pierced," and they are

pierced themselves.

Next we see the great principle of conviction--"of sin because they

believe not on me,"--beginning to be wielded with overwhelming energy,

by the apostles. This very truth charged home--you have rejected and

crucified Christ--is the arrow of the day of Pentecost. "Therefore let

all the house of Israel know assuredly," says Peter in his sermon on

that occasion, "that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye crucified

both Lord and Christ--he hath shed forth this which you now see and

hear. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and

cried--Men and brethren, what shall we do?'"

And the very next sermon of Peter hangs upon the same bitter truth of

conviction. "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a

murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of Life, whom

God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses."

And again, in the third sermon of the same apostle, he hurls the same

arrow. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast

anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and thy

people Israel, were gathered together."--all orders and nations,

because all alike are sinners--"and now behold their threatenings and

grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy

word." Whereupon the place is shaken again a third time. Under the

first sermon, three thousand souls have the thoughts of their hearts

revealed, and turn to seek salvation in Jesus Christ. Under the second,

the number is swelled to five thousand. Under the third, the count

ceases and the number becomes a multitude--"the multitude of them that

believed."

So it was that Peter, in his preaching, charged home upon his hearers

everywhere the rejecting and denying of Jesus the Saviour.

Paul too was traveling over all seas, and through all lands, telling

the story of his remarkable conversion--how at first he disbelieved and

hated the very name of Jesus, how he was exceedingly mad against his

followers, and went about dragging them to prison, till, at last, on

his way to Damascus, he was met by that word of irresistible

conviction, which had been so powerful many times before--"I am Jesus

whom thou persecutest." O what depths were opened now in the

persecutor's heart! All his bitter wrongs and fiery inflictions flame

back in that word--"I am Jesus whom thou persecutest!" showing him the

madness that reigns within. Thus begins the life in Christ of this

great apostle--itself an illustration how sublime of the Saviour's

thought! "Of sin because they believe not in me." But there is a

reason--

5. Back of this great fact, in the scheme of the gospel, in which it is

grounded; viz., that a very bad act often brings out the show of a bad

spirit within and becomes, in that manner, a most appalling argument of

conviction. Hence the immense convincing power to be exerted on mankind

through the crucifixion of Christ by his enemies. Even as a profligate,

unfilial son, discovers himself as he is, and receives the true

impression, for the first time, of his own dire wickedness and passion,

when he looks upon the murdered form of his father, and washes the

stains of parricide from his hands. In like manner Joseph's brethren,

when he stood revealed before them, as the brother whom they cruelly

sold, were struck dumb with guilt, and could not so much as speak to

ask his forgiveness. So also Herod, haunted by the sense of his crime

in the murder of John, imagined, in the wild tumult of his guilty

brain, that Christ must be the prophet's ghost, returning to be avenged

of his wrong.

The death, or public execution of Socrates affords, in some respects, a

more striking illustration. His pure morality of life, his sublime

doctrine of virtue, the discredit reflected on the gods of his country,

by his belief in a supreme, all-perfect God and governor of the world,

worthy of a better worship, raised up enemies and accusers, who

indicted him as a corrupter of the youth, and a denier of the gods of

his country. The people, artfully wrought upon, voted his death.

Shortly after, the dead teacher rose upon them mightier even than the

living, and a wave of conviction rolling back upon their consciences,

filled them with bitter distress. They voted his innocence; they

acknowledged the public misfortunes just then coming upon the state to

be judgments of heaven upon their crime; they put to death Miletus his

principal accuser, drove his subordinates into exile, and erected a

brazen statue to his memory. So the Saviour says, "of sin because they

believe not on me;" only the reaction of his cross begins more

immediately and extends through all the coming ages of time. No sooner

is he dead, than all the multitude present, not his accusers only and

his executioners, but the lookers on, were pricked with heavy

compunctions of feeling, and went home smiting their breasts, for

anguish they could not repress. And with better reason than they can

distinctly know; for it is the Holy one and the Just, the Perfect Son

of God, whom they have seen put to death; nay worse who has not been

permitted even to die respectably, but has been publicly stripped,

gibbeted, exposed to shame, compelled to die slowly, like a slave,

nailed fast upon a cross. He had come into the world on a mission of

love from the world above, a perfect character, clothed in the

essential glory of a divine nature, a being whom all the righteous

spirits--angels, archangels, and seraphim--had been wont to magnify and

adore--such was the visitant who lighted, for once, on the earth and

the race of mankind could not suffer him to live, tore him away in

their spite, from his acts of healing, and his gentle mercies even to

themselves, and thrust him out of the world, in mockeries that forgot

even the appearance of dignity.

I have spoken of this act, as the act of the human race, and such, in

some true sense, it was; and as such has been ringing ever sense in the

guilty conscience of the race; for it is, in fact, a proof by

experiment, of what is in all human hearts. Thus, if there should come

down from the upper sky some pure dove that has his home in that pure

element, and the birds of the lower air should be heard screaming at

all points, and seen pitching upon the unwelcome visitant and striking

their beaks into his body, we should have no doubt of some radical

unlikeness, or repugnance, between the creatures of the two elements.

And this exactly is the feeling that has been forced upon the world's

guilty mind, ever since, by the crucifixion of Jesus. It rolls back on

our thought in a kind of silent horror, that will not always be

repelled, that the manifested love of God, impartial and broad as the

world, a grace for every human creature, is yet gnashed upon by the

world and crucified. If we say that this act of crucifixion was not

ours, it certainly was not in the particular sense intended, and yet in

another and much deeper sense, it was; viz., in the sense that what it

signifies was ours. It was done by mankind, as Christ was a Saviour for

mankind, and we are men. It proves for one age all that it proves for

another; proves for the lookers on all which it proves for the doers.

In this manner it is yours, it is mine. I think it quite certain,

sometimes, that I should have had no part it, and it may be that I

should not. But again I sometimes shudder privately over the question,

whether if such a being were to come upon the earth now, in my own day,

one so peculiar, so little subject to the respectabilities and

conventionalities of religion, doing such miracles, becoming an offense

to so many religious schools and rabbis, charged so inevitably with

being a wild impostor, I should not be quite turned away from him.

Perhaps I should not join his crucifiers, but should I not as truly

reject him as they? O shame to say it, but it fills me with pain, or

even with a kind of horror, to conceive the possibility. Were not his

enemies religious men in their habit, serious, thoughtful men, exact in

the observances of their religion, many of them even sanctimonious in

their lives? Had they not religious pretexts for all that they did? At

any rate they had human hearts, and so have you and I. And will not

what they show for their own heart, be as good a proof for us? So felt

the multitude of spectators; and the feeling of the world has been the

same.

Lastly there is another and more direct kind of argument, that I mean

which we get from our own consciousness. I think I may assert, with

confidence, that there is no man living, who is not made conscious, at

times, of sin, as in no other manner, by the simple fact of his own

rejection of Christ. Nor does it make any great difference,. if his

belief appears to be hindered by speculative difficulties. He may

imagine, or distinctly maintain, that he rejects, or does not believe,

on the ground of sufficient evidence. Still Christ is Christ, and the

cross is the cross, and he can not so much as think of himself, before

the merely conceived image of a goodness so divine--be it really

historic or not--without a feeling of disturbance, in the not cleaving

to the profound reality of the truth discovered in him. No matter what

may be reasoned by infidels and Christian speculatists about, against,

or for, the historic person of Christ; if he is a fiction only, or a

myth, a romance of character gotten up by three or four of the most

unromantic writers of the world, still he is the greatest, solidest,

most real, truth ever known to man. The mere conception of such a life

and character is inherently eternal--more indestructible, and so far

more real than a mountain of rock. It affirms itself eternally as

light, by its own self-evidence, and the soul of guilt trembles

inwardly before it--trembles even the more certainly that it is a good

approved, but not welcomed, or embraced. Enough that the Christ of the

New Testament is the want, consciously or unconsciously, of every human

heart, and that aching secretly for him, it aches the more that it has

him not, and still the more that it will not have him. Who of you could

ever think of him rejected without a pang?

But the most of you are troubled by no such speculative doubts; you are

only selfish and earthly, want your pleasures, want other objects more,

that must be renounced to receive him--meaning still, at some time, to

do it, and become his disciples. Living in this feeble and consciously

false key, your courage wavers, and self-rebuking thoughts are, ever

and anon, making their troublesome irruptions upon you. When the

Saviour says--"Of sin because they believe not on me," the very words

sharpen guilty pangs in your bosom. Sometimes the question rises,

distinctly why is it, that beholding this love, I still do not embrace

it? why do I so profoundly admire this wonderful excellence and still

suppress the longings I so consciously feel? And then the goodness

rejected becomes a fire of Hinnom in your uneasy convictions. It is not

any particular sins that trouble you thus; consciously it is

sin--nothing else explains you to yourself. The conviction of it runs

quivering along your feeling in sharp pangs of remorse, and you half

expect to hear--"I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou rejectest." Even his

tenderest call comes to you, more as an arrow, than as a balm, and your

heart is inwardly stung, pricked through and through, with the rankle

of thoughts that are being revealed. How many have passed, or now are

passing through just this struggle of experience. To many too it will

have been, I trust, the gate of heaven.

But I must not close my argument on this great subject, without noting

a common objection; viz., that all such phases of mental disturbance

called conviction of sin, in the New Testament, are too weak for

respect, and should not be indulged, even if they are felt. But if they

are according to truth, if they are so far intelligent as to be modes

of sensibility accurately squared by the fact of character within, then

they are only a kind of weakness that is stronger to be allowed than

stifled. They are however, in some sense, moods of weakness I must

still admit; for they belong to sin and sin itself is weak. Nothing in

fact is weaker. Courage, repose, equilibrium, strength of will,

firmness of confidence--all these receive a shock under sin, and are

more or less fatally broken. Were not all those Athenians weak who wept

the death of Socrates, when they saw his place made vacant by

themselves? But that weakness it was even honorable to suffer, because

it was the very best thing left, after they had been weak enough to

vote his death. So, when the Son of God is crucified and expelled to be

seen no more, not the spectators only of the scene, but all we that

pierced him by our sin were to be visited with guilty, soul-humbling

pains in like manner--how much more that he is gone up visibly, as the

wonderful Greek was not, to be stated in the eternal majesty of

righteousness and judgment. All sin is weak, and the convincing cross

must needs bring out the revelation of weakness, even as it did at the

first. When the marshal's band, sent out to make the arrest, were

shaken out of courage and strength enough even to stand, they fitly

opened the scene that followed, by their backward fall and prostration.

Was not. Peter weak when he wept bitterly? Was not Judas weak when he

cast down the money for which he sold him? Were not the priests and

elders weak when they said "he stirreth up the people?" Was not Pilate

weak when he was "the more afraid?" Were not the multitude when they

went home smiting their breasts? Nay, were not the rocks themselves

weak when they shook, and the tomb when it opened, and the stone when

it rolled back? O, it was a mighty judgment day, that day of the cross;

token visible, to you and to me, of that other, higher, judgment which

our righteous Lord has gone up to assume! Hence the distress which

rises in so many hearts before the cross, and which some can think of

only with disrespect. Could they learn to disrespect the sin that makes

it necessary, they might even honor it rather, as the sign, or

beginning, of a return to righteousness and reason.

In what manner Christ was to convince of sin we have now seen, and no

farther argument appears to be needed. But the subject can not be fitly

concluded without noting a remarkable effect that has followed the

cross as a convincing power on the world; viz., the fact that, in what

is called Christendom, there has been a manifest uplifting of the moral

standards, and a correspondent quickening of the moral sensibilities,

both of individual men, and of whole races and people. In the people of

the old dispensation and of the great Pagan empires long ago converted

to the cross, moral ideas have now taken the place, to a great extent,

of force; the coarse blank apathy of sin is broken up; the sense of

duty is more piercing; and it is even as if a new conscience had been

given respecting the soul in its relations to God. It is as if men had

seen their state of sin glassed before them, and made visible in the

rejection of Christ and his cross. Jews and Pagans had before been made

conscious at times of particular sins; we are made conscious, in a

deeper and more appalling way, of the state of sin itself, the damning

evil that infects our humanity at the root--that which rejected and

crucified the Son of God, and is in fact, the general madness and lost

condition of the race. Thus, immediately after the departure of Christ

from the world, that is on the day of Pentecost, there broke out a new

demonstration of sensibility to sin, such as was never before seen. In

the days of the law, men had their visitations of guilt and remorse,

respecting this or that wrong act; but I do not recollect even under

the prophets, those great preachers of the law, and sharpest and most

terrible sifters of transgression, a single instance, where a soul is

so broken, or distressed, by the conviction of its own bad state under

sin, as to ask what it must do to be saved--the very thing which many

thousands did, on the day of Pentecost, and in the weeks that followed,

and have been doing even till now. So different a matter is it to have

rules in a book, or rules in the conscience, from having them bodied

into power, through a person, or personal character; that character,

hated, persecuted, murdered, by the public will and voice; that

murdered one rising again to be glorified in the triumphant

righteousness, of his life; that righteousness, after having cast down

principalities and powers, installed in the judgment bench of the

world. Hence an amazing accession of strength, in the moral standards

and convictions of all Christian peoples. It is all from the cross;

which has raised the sense of guilt in human bosoms to such a pitch,

that even strong men weep, and groan, and tremble for their sin. Every

sensibility that lies about the standards of the soul, and its fallen

possibilities in defection from them, is amazingly quickened. And it is

just this to which the apostle refers, when speaking to the Hebrews of

"the word of God"--he means the new word of Christianity, that which we

have now, and not the old word of the law--"For the word of God, is

quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to

the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow,

and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Having

this penetrating and convincing efficacy, the word of the cross is

capable of a most faithful and deep work in the character; no gospel

therefore of temporizing mercy, and slight healing, but a downright,

thorough-going, radical, life-renewing energy--a power of God unto

salvation. It bends to no false principle, deals in no mock sentiment,

hides no point of exactness, spares no necessary pain. It applies to

sin a surgery deep as the malady, it cuts the cancer clean out by

conviction, that a genuine, true healing may follow. Just so much

worthier is it of our confidence and respect. And what shall we do but

open our heart to it, counting it even good to be condemned before a

salvation so thorough, so deeply grounded in the unsparing severities

of truth. But this condemnation, these unsparing severities, it

behooves us to remember, will be not less piercing, when they cease to

come in the hopeful guise of a salvation. Doubtless Christ rejected,

will have a convincing power always, even in the future life. Moral

ideas and standards will be raised, and moral sensibilities quickened

still by the cross remembered. And the pangs of guilt will of course be

sharpened still farther, by the barren regrets and the hopeless future

of that undone state. O, that desert of guilt--to one that has

journeyed long ages in its fiery and thirsty sands, how dreadful the

words of the rejected Saviour still ringing and forever in his memory.

"Of sin because they believe not on me."

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VII.

CHRIST ASLEEP.

"And behold there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the

ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep."--Matt., viii. 24.

Christ asleep--the eternal Word of the Father, incarnate, lapped in the

soft oblivion of unconsciousness--a very strange fact, when deeply

enough pondered to reveal its significant and even singular

implications.

Where then do we go to look upon so great a sight, the sleep of God's

Messiah? Is he royally bestowed in some retired hall, or chamber of his

palace? Is he curtained about and canopied over on his bed of down, as

one retiring into the deepest folds of luxury, there to woo the

delicate approach of sleep? Must no doors be swinging, no feet of

attendants stirring in the halls? Are the windows carefully shaded,

lest some ray of moonlight streaming in may break the tender spell of

the sleeper? No, it is not so that Jesus sleeps, or with any such

delicate provisions of luxury to smooth his rest; but he is out upon

the Gennessaret, in some little craft that his disciples have picked up

for the crossing, and upon the short space of flooring, or deck, in the

hinder part, he sinks, overcome with exhaustion, and is buried shortly

in the deepest, soundest sleep. The open sky is over him, the boat

swings drowsily among the waves, and the boatmen, talking over the

miracles of the day, and all they have seen and heard, under the

wonderful new ministry, continue on, as we may suppose, till by degrees

the conversation lulls, the replies become slow and sepulchral, as if

coming from afar, and finally cease. Meantime Jesus sleeps, fanned by

the gentle breath of the night, rocked by the babbling waters, watched

by the stars, that brighten seemingly to a finer purity, reflected from

the sleeper's dreams.

By and by a change appears. A dark and ominous cloud, sailing up, shuts

in the sky. The lightnings begin to fall, crashing on the head of

Gerizim and Tabor, and very soon the tempest that was booming heavily

in the distance, strikes the little skiff, dashing the waves across,

and filling instantly the forward part with water. The little company

are thrown, as it would seem, into the greatest panic and confusion,

unable to manage the sinking vessel, and only mixing their cries of

distress with the general tumult of the storm. Still Jesus sleeps,

folded in that deep self-oblivion which no rage of the elements can

disturb. "And behold there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch

that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep." Even so,

no wildest tumult without can reach the inward composure of his rest.

The rain beating on his face, and the spray driving across it, and the

sharp gleams of the lightning, and the crash of the thunder, and the

roar of the storm, and the screams of the men--not all of these can

shake him far enough inward, to reach the center where sleep lodges and

waken him to consciousness. It is as if both consciousness and soul

were gone--gone up in holy dream, to bask in the divine peace,

breathing airs of music, and wandering along the rivers of paradise,

where angels moor their boats and watch the currents of eternity.

Finally some one touches him gently and says, "Master;" whereupon he is

roused instantly; for it is a tender word, spoken, too, distressfully,

in a manner of appeal, and there is no softest call of compassion that

is not louder in his ear than either tempest or thunder. So his sleep

is ended, and the storm, in turn, is laid in a deeper sleep than he.

The sleeping of Jesus I believe is mentioned nowhere else in the

gospels, and I do not recollect ever to have heard the subject

presented as a topic of discourse, or even distinctly noticed--an

omission the more remarkable that the theologic implications of the

fact appear to be so important.

Sleep is a shadow that falls on the soul, as well as on the body. It is

such a kind of state, or affection, as makes even the mind, or

intelligent principle, unconscious. What could be more in point, then,

for the speculative humanitarian, than to call this fact to his aid, by

raising the question, what can be made of the sleep of Jesus, on the

supposition that he is divine? Does sleep attack divinity? How can it

be conceived that deity, or a nature essentially deific, sleeps,

falling into the condition of unconsciousness? And then what next

should follow, in the common way, but that such as think to maintain

the divinity of Christ, only as they are able to explain it, will make

answer, that it is the human nature of Jesus that sleeps and not the

divine--giving up thus, for the time, the fact of the incarnation

itself; which, if it is any thing, is the absolute unity of the divine

and the human in one person.

It would carry me too far, to go into these questions here, taking me,

in fact, quite away from my subject. I most readily admit that Jesus,

being essentially a divine person, can not, in good logic, sleep; and

just as certain it is that, if we proceed logically, he can not, as

having a deific nature, be a man. And yet he both slept and was a man.

As being God incarnate, the Word made flesh, the infinite in the

finite, he is logically impossible. But God has a way of doing the

impossible. In the communication of himself to men, he tears away the

logical carpentry, refusing to put his glory into it. The truth is that

our laws of thinking are totally at fault, in regard to subjects of

this nature, speculatively handled. All that we can say of the

personality of Jesus is that he is a being in our plane, and yet not in

it--in it as a practical approach of God, not in it as being logically

resolvable by our scientific, or speculative deductions. The very thing

proposed in the person of Jesus is to make an approach transcending any

possible explication by us; viz., to humanize divinity; that by means

of a nature, fellow to our own, he may bring himself within our range,

and meet our feeling by a feeling formally humanized in himself. And in

order to this, there must be no doubt of his humanity; he must not be

simply templed in a human body, but he must make his humanity complete

by that last, most convincing evidence, the fact of sleep. If he were

exhaustible only, or weak, or frail, as other men are known to be, but

were never to sleep, we could scarcely feel that he is one of us; but

beholding his intelligence close up, his consciousness fall away, and

his prostrate body palpitating in deep slumber, we no longer question

his humanity. Call Him the Word incarnate, the Son of God, God

manifest: still he is none the less truly man to us, now that we find

him asleep. No matter if we can not explain the mystery, or seeming

contradiction, as we certainly can not. To say that only the human soul

sleeps, explains nothing, and it signifies nothing more to us, if it

does, than the sleep of any other human soul. To say that he is only

human,: is against the plainest declarations of scripture, and against

all that we know of his more than mortal bearing, or character. All

that we can do here is to confess that the incarnate Word is somehow

man, even one of ourselves, receiving and embracing in him the eternal

love, and fellowship, and fullness of God.

There is then a very great spiritual importance, in the fact that Jesus

sleeps. In it we behold the divine humanity sealed or set in complete

evidence. Divine he must be, for his character is deifically spotless

and perfect; human he must be for he sleeps like a man. O this Great

Benefactor and World's Redeemer in his sleep! just to look upon him

here, in this strange hour--the rain and the spray drenching his body,

his hair and pillow of plank washed by the driving storm, his calm

benignant face lighted by the glittering flashes that set the night

ablaze--thus to gaze upon him, king of angels and men, descended to

this mortal plight--how very nigh does it draw us to his humbled state,

how closely, and by what easy ties of sympathy, knit us to his person!

And yet more nigh, by a sympathy more tender, when we go over the count

of what he had been doing yesterday, and see how it was that he fell

into a sleep so profound. The warrior sleeps returning spattered and

spent from the bloody horrors of the field; the devotee of pleasure

sleeps, because he has drunk the cup dry and would fain forget himself;

one hasting to be rich, exhausted and spent by his overmastering cares,

and the strain of his mighty passion, sleeps a hurried sleep, fevered

by his price-current dreams; the hireling sleeps on his wages,

gathering strength for the wages of tomorrow; Jesus sleeps, because he

has emptied the fund of his compassions and poured himself completely

out in works of mercy to the sick and the poor. His giving way to sleep

is well accounted for, when we find him engaged the whole day previous,

in works of teaching, advice, counsel, sympathy, consolation, healing,

and rebuke, such as kept him in a constant expenditure of feeling and

strain of attention, that no mortal strength could support. According

to Matthew he heals the centurion's servant, and Peter's wife's mother,

and continues at his work of healing, thronged by multitudes pouring in

upon him, even till night. On the same day, according to Mark, he

appears to have given the parable of the sower, and that of a candle

hid under a bushel, and that of the earth as a harvest field sown by

the owner, and that of the grain of mustard seed, with a discourse on

hearing, and a private exposition of his parables to his own immediate

disciples. It is also understood by some, combining what is given in

the sixth chapter of Luke, and the third of Mark, that he was awake the

whole night previous to this day, engaged in prayer; that he chose the

twelve at day-break, and that coming down from the mountain, he was so

thronged, at that early hour, that he could not so much as eat bread,

and came near being trampled by the crowd; whereupon his friends laid

hold of him to bring him off, declaring that he was beside himself; his

mother and brethren also came to expostulate with him. However this may

have been, it is at least clear that every moment of his day is a draft

upon his physical resources, and the multitude are growing more

clamorous for attention as their number increases, till finally, unable

to bear the strain longer, he flies what he can not support. It even

appears to be intimated by Matthew, that he was obliged to effect his

escape, by hastening on board a vessel that lay near the place--"Now

when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to

depart to the other side." The greatness of the multitude, and their

pressing applications were rather a reason why he should stay, than why

he should try to escape. They were only not a reason, when he was just

ready to sink for exhaustion. Accordingly we see that, no sooner is he

entered into the boat and cleared from the shore, than he drops on the

deck of the skiff, apparently not minding the hunger of a whole day's

toil unrespited, perhaps, by food, and is buried immediately in a

slumber so profound that not even the hurricane wakes him.

In this sleep of Jesus therefore, as related to the works of the day, a

very great mistake, into which we are apt to fall, is corrected or

prevented; the mistake, I mean, of silently assuming that Christ, being

divine, takes nothing as we do, and is really not under our human

conditions far enough to suffer exhaustions of nature by work or by

feeling, by hunger, the want of sleep, dejections, or recoils of

wounded sensibility. Able to do even miracles--to heal the sick, or

cure the blind, or raise the dead, or still the sea--we fall into the

impression that his works really cost him nothing, and that while his

lot appears to be outwardly dejected, he has, in fact, an easy time of

it. Exactly contrary to this, he feels it, even when virtue goes out

only from the hem of his garment. And when he gives the word of

healing, it is a draft, we know not how great, upon his powers. In the

same way every sympathy requires an expenditure of strength

proportioned to the measure of that sympathy. Every sort of tension, or

attention, every argument, teaching, restraint of patience, concern of

charity, is a putting forth with cost to him, as it is to us. And yet

we somehow do not quite believe it. We read that he goes long journeys

on foot, but we do not conceive that he is weary and foot-sore as we

might be. We read that he is actually "wearied with his journey," and

sits him down by a well, while his disciples go into the town to obtain

food, but we do not seem to think that he is really way-worn, or faint

with hunger, in the proper human sense of these terms. We read that he

actually "hungered," and that having no table, or supply, he went aside

to explore a fig tree, and break his. morning fast on the fruit, but we

do not think that such a being as he could really care much for a

breakfast any way. He declares his poverty and his outcast lot on

earth, by protesting that he has not so much as a place for comfortable

and protected sleep--"the Son of Man hath not where to lay his

head"--but we think of him probably as meaning only to say, that he has

no property; never as testifying his privation of comfort in this first

article of civilized bestowment, a sheltered, in-door sleep--obliged,

like the dumb animals, to sleep where he may; in the mountains, on the

rocks, sometimes under the night rains, shivering often with cold.

Now all such miscolorings of his human experience take him, so far, out

of our tier of life, and slacken proportionally our sympathy with him.

And they are beautifully corrected in the night of the boat. Jesus had

become so exhausted that he could not, in fact, support himself an hour

longer, and dropped immediately down, mind and body together, into the

profoundest sleep. Is it really no true sleep, but only a divine

seeming? Is he conscious in it? Does he hear the storm? does he feel

the rain? does the plunging of the boat startle him? Ah! there is

reality enough here to make a sight how affecting.

Blessed be thy rough sleep, O thou great benefactor! thou that art

wearied and spent by thy particular works and the virtues that have

gone out of thee! What is it now to thee, that the waters drench thee,

and the fierce tempest howls in tumult round thee! Sleep on exhausted

goodness, take thy rest in the bosom of the storm! for it is thy

Father's bosom, where they that are weary for works of love, may safely

trust, and sink so deeply down into the abysses of sleep, that no

thunder even may rouse them.

Notice more particularly also the conditions, or bestowments of the

sleep of Jesus, and especially their correspondence with his redemptive

undertaking. Saying nothing of infants, which in a certain proper sense

are called innocent, there have been two examples of full grown

innocent sleep in our world; that of Adam in the garden, and that of

Christ the second Adam, whose nights overtook him, with no place where

to bestow himself. And the sleep of both, different as possible in the

manner, is yet most exactly appropriate, in each, to his particular

work and office. One is laid to sleep in a paradise of beauty, breathed

upon by the flowers, lulled by the music of birds and running brooks,

shaded and sheltered by the overhanging trees, shortly to wake and look

upon a kindred nature standing by, offered him to be the partner and

second life of his life. The other, as pure and spotless as he, and

ripe, as he is not, in the unassailable righteousness of character,

tears himself away from clamorous multitudes that crowd upon him suing

piteously for his care, and drops, even out of miracle itself, on the

hard plank deck, or bottom, of a fisherman's boat, and there, in

lightning and thunder and tempest, sheeted, as it were, in the general

wrath of the waters and the air, he sleeps--only to wake at the

supplicating touch of fear and distress. One is the sleep of the

world's father, the other that of the world's Redeemer. One has never

known as yet the way of sin, the other has come into the tainted blood

and ruin of it, to bear and suffer under it, and drink the cup it

mixes; so to still the storm and be a reconciling peace. Both sleep in

character. Were the question raised which of the two will be crucified

we should have no doubt. Visibly the toil-worn Jesus, he that takes the

storm, curtained in by it as by the curse--he is the Redeemer. His

sleep agrees with his manger birth, his poverty, his agony, his cross,

and what is more, as the curse that is maddening in his enemies is the

retributive disorder of God's just penalty following their sin, so the

fury of that night shadows it all the more fitly, that what he

encounters in it is the wrathful cast of Providence.

How fitting was it also, both that sleep should be one of the

appointments of our nature, and that Christ should be joined to us in

it. These rounds of sleep are rounds, in fact, of bodily regeneration,

and there is no better possible type of the regeneration of a soul,

than the recreating of a body, in the article of sleep. It was spent by

labor. All the functions were subsiding unto weakness. The pulse ran

low and slow, the gait was loose, life itself was ebbing consciously,

and a general ferment of disability was, in every faculty, from the

brain downward. The man said he was tired, and alas! he could do

nothing in himself to mend his condition. No surgeon's or physician's

art could put him up again equipped for action. But the silent

new-creator, sleep, could do it. Taking down the spent subject of

consciousness into his awful abyss of nihility and dark un-reason, he

will decompose him, so to speak, and put him together again, all

lubricated for new play, and send him forth to his old works, as it

were with a new nature. We are made familiar thus with great internal

changes and mighty new-creations, wrought by mystic powers, whose

methods we can not trace. And Christ the great moral Regenerator goes

the same rounds with us here; suffers the same exhaustion, sinks into

the same unconsciousness, rising to the same newness of life--himself

regenerated bodily with us, as he fitly should be.

But as I have spoken of the sleep, I must also speak of the waking; or

at least I must so far note the manner of it, as to draw from it some

deeper and more fit conception of the internal state of the sleep. It

is a matter of common remark that one who goes to his night's rest

charged with a purpose to rise at some given signal, or at some fixed

hour, will catch the faintest notification, and will almost notify

himself, by a kind of instinctive judgment, or sense of time kept ready

for the spring, even in his unconscious state. So Christ, whose love is

ready, and full-charged to catch the faintest note of human distress,

sleeps on through all the commotion of the elements, undisturbed; but

the first cry of panic, "Lord save us, or we perish"--louder to him

than all the tumult of the sky and the waters--strikes his inward ear

and brings him straightway to his feet. "Then he arose and rebuked the

sea, and there was a great calm." The tempest met his sovereign look

and fell abashed before him; type sublime of the diviner and more

difficult calm that he will bring to the storms of the mind. "What

manner of man," said they, "is this, that even the winds and the sea

obey him?" A far more wonderful and greater, that he can speak to man's

guilty feeling, and the turbulent storms of his remorse, and calm even

these into peace.

But observe specially his manner when he wakes. It is as if the great

commotion round him had been only a hymn lulling his slumber. He is not

flurried or startled by the tumult, shows no sign of confusion, or

alarm. If he sleeps, a man, he wakes, a God. You can almost see by his

waking, that his dreams have been thoughts pure and mighty, coasting

round the horrors of a guilty wrath-stricken world on errands of love

and peace. Indeed if it has ever occurred to you to wish that you could

once look in upon the sleep of Jesus, and distinguish accurately the

dream-state of his thought, even this you may sufficiently guess from

the manner of his waking. How majestic the tranquillity of it. The

tempest roaring, the men screaming, the vessel just ready to go

under--and yet, if his waking were the sunrise, it would not be less

disturbed, or less flurried by excitement. Could any thing make it more

certain that his sleeping mind has been flowing serenely, steadied and

evened by a mighty peace. Internal purity, order, and harmony have been

the paradise plainly of his rest. In all the wild confusion of the

night and the sea without, his self-approving mind has been sleeping,

as it were, in a chiming of sweet melodies. Thoughts vast, mysterious,

merciful and holy, have been coursing through his unconscious humanity,

as recollections, or recurrences of habit, from his august and

supremely good eternity; so that when he wakes, at the cry of his

disciples, it is only to say, "peace," to the raging elements, from

that transcendent peace that was bathing his spirit within. It was no

such waking as the bad and guilty mind, haunted all night by spectres,

pursued by murderers, dropping into pitfalls, throttled by serpents

round the neck, crushed by weights on the breast, scared by night-mare

shapes in the air--it was out of no such element of guilt, or dyspeptic

torment that Jesus waked. A sleep thus exercised prepares to fear and

the wildness of panic--if the house be on fire, to leap into the fire,

if the ship be sinking, to leap into the waters. A good pure mind

sleeps goodness and purity, and wakes in peace; a bad sleeps painfully,

conversing with internal horrors, ready, when it wakes, to meet the

images it has seen. Probably the sleep of a holy mind is even more

distinct from that of a bad, than its waking state is, because, in

sleep, the thoughts run just as the internal habit makes them; the

superintending will-power that musters, and drills, and artificially

shapes them, when awake, being now suspended. Hence the profound

philosophy as well as the beauty of the poet's prayer--

"Be thine the sleep that throws

Elysium o'er the soul's repose,

Without a dream, save such as wind,

Like midnight angels, through the mind."

I am fully conscious, my friends, that I have been discoursing on this

matter of the sleep of Christ, in a somewhat random way; for it is a

specially intangible, unexplorable subject. Not an unimportant subject

either in its theological implications, or its practical relations to

our Christian life, but one whose value does not so much depend on our

definite interior knowledge of it, as in the external and evident fact.

It does not definitely, or conclusively teach, but it suggests many

things, and things only suggested are often of as great consequence to

us as things proved. Let us note a few of the points suggested. And

1. The possible, or rather actual redemption of sleep. Sleep is just as

truly fallen as humanity itself. And who that knows the sleeping

thoughts of man, as they are, can have any doubt of it? Nay, who that

knows the waking thoughts of man, as they are, can be at all ignorant

how they will run when he sleeps? Gnawed by care, racked by ambition,

bittered by the gall of envy, sensual, selfish, fearful, hateful, a

prey to bad resentments, loaded and clogged by excesses, filled with

hypocondriac terrors from nerves that are shattered by abuse, what can

he be, in his sleep, but a faithful representative of what he is awake?

And hence it is even one of the saddest known facts of the world, that

it sleeps badly--one of the most grateful and most touching facts of

the world, that Christ will even be the Redeemer of sleep. He does not

of course offer himself to the state of sleep, for it would only be

absurd; but he does undertake the regeneration of the soul in

character, and that includes every thing; for when the soul's fearful

stricture is taken off by love, when it is rested in faith, fortified

by self-government, cleared by temperance and spiritual chastity,

cheered by hope, it falls into chime, inevitably, with the divine

order; so that, when the will is suspended, as in sleep, its internal

movement flows on still in the divine order, meeting only grateful

images and thoughts of peace. Hence partly it was that so much was made

of their dreams, by holy men of old. It was no superstition of

theirs--they had only come, so consciously, into the divine order of

health and sanctity, that when they went to their sleep, they seemed

even to be yielding themselves up to a sanctified flow of the mind, and

to the unobstructed sway of a really harmonic movement with God. Nor is

any thing more certain than that souls, advancing in holiness, will

advance proportionally in the quality of their sleep. As they are being

redeemed themselves, so it is a part of their divine privilege that

their sleep is also. Accordingly it is often reported by such as have

cleared the bondage of nature, and risen to a specially high pitch of

intimacy with God, that they find a remarkable change in their sleeping

thoughts. None but Christ can sleep the sleep of Christ, and they that

are nearest to him ill spirit will as certainly be most like him, in

the peace of their unconscious hours. Their very redemption is,

according to its measure, the redemption of their sleep.

2. It is another point suggested here, that there is a right and wrong

sleep, as well as a right and wrong waking state. Sleep is the

subsiding of soul and body into nature's lap, or the lap of Providence,

to recruit exhaustion, and to be refitted for life's works. But what

right has any one to be refitted for wrong; and above all refitted, by

the help of Providence? Such sleep is a fraud, and the fund of new

exertion obtained by it is actually stolen. Sleep was never appointed

by God, to refit wrong-doers and disobedient children, and enable them

to be more efficient against Him. Their very sleep they go to,

therefore, as a crime, and the dark shadow of guilt curtains in their

rest. O ye days-men, that a few hours hence, when your fund is spent,

will go to your sleep to be refitted for to-morrow, is it to be a lying

down upon wrong, upon sin, or will it be upon right--there is a very

serious meaning in the question. Will you suffer it to rise and be

distinctly met, when your head meets your pillow? How very hard a

pillow would it be to many, if they took it understandingly!

Observe, meantime, how free a guarantee Christ gives to sleep, when it

is right sleep. There have been multitudes of devotees under the

Christian name, that made a great merit of withholding sleep, in the

rigid observance of long vigils; as if the reduction of the soul's

quantity, and the obfuscation of its functions, were the same thing to

God as advancing in holiness. These vigils are about the most

irrational, most barren kind of fast, that was ever invented; for the

reason that, instead of clearing, or girding up the mind, they even

propose to make a penance of stupor and lethargy. It is a great mistake

also of some that they are jealous of sleep, and have it as a point of

merit to shorten the hours, by a regularly enforced anticipation of the

dawn. Any such rule for the reduction of quantity is doubtful. A much

better rule respects the quality. Make it your duty to prepare a

Christian sleep; that kind which the exhaustion of a righteous, or

right minded industry requires, and then you may know that Christ your

master is with you. It is remarkable that he actually tore himself away

from even his healings, and from vast multitudes of people crying

piteously for help. He did not reason as some very good men often do,

that he must go on, pressed by such calls of mercy, till he could stand

no longer. He was famished with hunger, his strength was gone, and

enough, to him, was enough. What merit could it be, if he should

continue into the night, and falling at last on the ground for

faintness, be carried off in that weak plight, to be himself

commiserated in turn? He plucked himself away, therefore, fled to the

boat, and casting himself down, fell, at once, into the soundest sleep.

So when a man's capacity, full spent in good, comes to its limit, and

conscience audits the reckoning of its hours, to fall back into God's

sole keeping, and be recruited by unconscious rest in his bosom, is the

true Christly sleep, at once a natural bestowment, and a supernatural

gift. Be it in a palace or a hovel, be it on the land or on the sea, be

it in outward calm or storm, be it with man's approbation or without,

the resting place is glorious, the rest itself a baptism of peace--"God

giveth his beloved sleep."

3. The associations connected with the sleep of Jesus induce a very

peculiar sense of his nearness to us in it. Only to have slept in some

fisherman's hut, or about some hunter's fire, in company with a noted

or publicly known person, gives a certain familiar kind of pleasure to

our remembrance of him. In the same way, when the Son of God is joined

to us here in a common sleep, subsiding nightly into unconsciousness

with us, under the same heaven, a most strange association of nearness

is awakened by the conjunction. In our very proper endeavor to exalt

God, and give him the due honors of majesty, we commonly push him away,

just so far, into distance; we seat him on the circle of the firmament,

we lift him, not above the clouds only, but even above the stars;

scarcely content, till we have found some altitude for Him, higher than

all points visible, and even outside of the creation itself. When,

therefore he comes down, as the incarnate One, to be a man with us,

tired and spent as we by life's toils, when he lies so humbly down that

even the waters of a lake some hundreds of feet below sea level, dash

over him, and there sleeps, even as a soldier, or a sailor might, our

feeling is in a strange maze of tenderness. Our God is so nigh, our

glorious tent-mate in a guise so gentle, that we come to look upon him

in his divine sleep, more tenderly than we could even in the waking

mercies and charities of his life. The very heaven of sky and star,

that ceils the august chamber of his sleep, is more sanctified from

underneath, than before, it was from above. The world is another

world--We are other ourselves. O this nearness, this daring

familiarity, shall I say, of God! When he says so evidently in this

dear, tender, mystery, "come," canst thou, guilty, fearing spirit,

reject an approach so lowly and so lovely! And thou disciple too, whose

faith is clouded, and upon whom the storms of the mind, as well as the

less terrible storms of Providence, are loosed, think it not strange or

disheartening, that thy Master sleeps--tender and great sign is it for

you that he does--only go to him and say "Master I perish," and have it

also to say, as the storm settles forthwith into peace, "What manner of

man is this?"

Once more the analogies of the sleep of Jesus suggest the Christian

right, and even duty, of those relaxations, which are necessary, at

times, to loosen the strain of life and restore the freshness of its

powers. Christ, as we have seen, actually tore himself away from

multitudes waiting to be healed, that he might refit himself by sleep.

He had a way too of retiring often to mountain solitudes and by-places

on the sea, partly for the resting of his exhausted energies. Sometimes

also he called his disciples off in this manner, saying--"come ye

yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile." Not that every

disciple is, of course, to retire into solitudes and desert places,

when he wants recreation. Jesus was obliged to seek such places, to

escape the continual press of the crowd. In our day, a waking rest of

travel, change of scene, new society, is permitted, and when it is a

privilege assumed by faithful men, to recruit them for their works of

duty, they have it by God's sanction, and even as a part. of the sound

economy of life. Going after a turn of gaiety or dissipation, not after

Christian rest, or going after rest only because you are wearied and

worried by selfish overdoings, troubled and spent by toils that serve

an idol, is a very different matter. The true blessing of rest is on

you, only when you carry a good mind with you, able to look back on

works of industry and faithfulness, suspended for a time, that you may

do them more effectively. Going in such a frame, you shall rest awhile,

as none but such can rest. Nature will dress herself in beauty to your

eye, calm thoughts will fan you with their cooling breath, and the joy

of the Lord will be strength to your wasted brain and body. Ah, there

is no luxury of indulgence to be compared with this true Christian

rest! Money will not buy it, shows and pleasures can not woo its

approach, no conjuration of art, or contrived gaiety, will compass it

even for an hour: but it settles, like dew, unsought, upon the faithful

servant of duty, bathing his weariness and recruiting his powers for a

new engagement in his calling. Go ye thus apart and rest awhile if God

permits.

But if you go to kill time, or to cheat the ennui of an idle life, or

to drown your self-remembrance in giddy excesses, or to coax into

composure nervous energies eaten out by the passion or flustered by the

ventures of gain, there goes an enemy with you that will bitterly mock

you, giving you the type, in what you seek but nowhere find, of that

more awful disappointment that awaits the rest of eternity. What, in

fact, are you dying of now, but of rest that is no rest--the inanity of

ease and idleness, the insipid bliss of cloyed, overworn pleasures,

nights that add weariness to the weariness of the days, sabbaths of God

that are bores and not restings under the fourth commandment. O I would

rather sleep in a fisherman's boat, in thunder and tempest and rain,

exhausted by a day of useful, Christly work, only dreaming there of the

good rest to come, than to never know the exhaustions of true industry,

and spend life, lolling in equipages, and courting pleasures that will

not come! For what too are such ready, dying in their pampered bodies

and worn out splendors, but to turn away heart-sick, as here, from the

golden sands of the river, and chill with nervous ague for the shades

of the trees of life. Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord; for

they rest from their labors. Blessed only they; for where there is no

labor, spending life's capacity for God, there is, of course, no rest.

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VIII.

CHRISTIAN ABILITY.

"Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven

of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm,

whithersoever the governor listeth." James iii. 4.

The ships that were "so great" in former days, were, in fact, scarcely

more than cock-boats, or small coasters, scraping round the shores of

the inland seas; whereas, now, what we call the great ships are big

enough to store in their hold, a whole armed fleet of the ancient time,

vessels and men together; and these huge bulks strike out on the broad

oceans defying their storms, yet still turned about, as before, with a

very small helm, whithersoever the helmsman will. There he stands at

his post, a single man, scarcely more than a fly that has lighted on

the immense bulk of the vessel, having a small city of people and their

goods in the world of timber under him, and perhaps with only one hand,

turning gently his lever of wood, or nicely guaging the motion of his

wheel, steers along its steady track the mountain mass of the ship,

turning it always to its course, even as he would an arrow to its mark.

Dropping now the particular reference had by our apostle, in his

illustration, to the tongue, or the power of the tongue, I shall take

it simply as an instance or exhibition of what is more general, viz.,

the fact--That man turns about every thing, handles all heaviest bulks,

masters all hardest difficulties in the same way; that is, by using a

small power so as to get the operation of a power greater than his own.

He gets an immense ability thus, where his sufficiency is most

restricted, and his Christian ability is of just this kind. We have no

power to handle ships at sea by their bulk; as little have we to do or

become, in the grand whole of character, what God requires of us. The

soul is a magnitude more massive than any ship, and the storms it

encounters are wilder than those of the sea. And yet there are small

helms given us, by which we are able always to steer it triumphantly

on, to just the good we seek and the highest we can even conceive.

In this mode of statement the very supposition is, you perceive, that

we have no ability in ourselves, more than simply to turn ourselves

into the track of another, more sufficient power, and so to have it

upon us. Helms do not impel ships, and if there were no other kind of

power moving on the sea, they would only swing dead-logged upon the

waters, making never a voyage. So the power we have as persons, in

religion, is not a power of self-impulsion, but only a steering power;

though it is a very great power at that. For when we so use it as to

hold ourselves fairly to God's operation, as we hold a ship to the

winds, that is sufficient, that will do every thing, turning even our

impossibles themselves into victory. Our inability to regenerate, or

new-create ourselves can not be too strongly stated. As little can our

ability, when regarding the fair adjustment and perpetual offering of

ourselves to God's operation.

Glance a moment here at the analogies of our physical experience.

Great, overwhelmingly great, as the forces and weights of nature are,

what do we accomplish more easily than to turn about their whole body

and bring them into manageable service?--doing it always by some

adjustment, or mode of address, which acknowledges their superior

force. We do not manage a horse by the collar, but by the bit. We do

not raise the winds that serve us by blowing on the mill ourselves, but

we let them blow as they list, only setting the fans of the wheel to

get advantage of them. The cliffs of rocks we do not tear open with our

hands, but we drill them and, by merely touching a little gunpowder

with a spark of fire, as we know how, let that blow them into the air

by a force of its own, repeating the operation till we have literally

removed mountains. Our many thousand wheels of manufacture we do not

turn by our arms, but we take the rivers, flowing as they will, and let

them flow, only cutting sluices for them and setting wheels before

them, or under them; whereupon they turn producers for us and even

builders of cities. We have a way too of taking that most fierce and

dreadful power called steam into service and management--doing it never

by gathering it up into our arms and holding it in compression, but by

raising it in heated folds of iron, and turning it through cocks and

conduit pipes, into points of lifting or expansion, where it does the

work of many winds and waters, conquering in fact both oceans and their

storms. The lightnings we do not catch by the chase and whip into

service, to be our couriers, but we just give them a wire and they run,

of their own accord, upon our errands, true and swift as we could wish.

We bring in thus all the great powers of nature and set them to doing

almost miracles for us, by only just offering ourselves to them, in a

way that steers them into our service. The great art now of all arts,

that which is changing and new-creating the modern world, is, at bottom

and in some real sense, a steering art. All our machineries--and where

is the end of them?--are only so many adjustments, by which the great

bulks and masses of force in nature are steered into methods of use.

Even our rail roads, which are revolutionizing, in a sense, all the

values and powers of the world, are in fact scarcely more than

adjustments for the steering of motions and forces. The very skill we

study most, and most continually practice is that of address to nature;

finding how, or by what means and arrangements, we may get the forces

of the creation to exert themselves in our behalf. Our ability thus

amplified stops at almost nothing. Neither have we any difficulty in

regard to this kind of ability, as if it were no ability at all. It is

precisely that in one view, and in another it is all ability. Having

got some force of nature, be it this or that, into use, we have it even

as a property, we make real estate of it, buy it and sell it and, when

we have it not, set our wheels of motion, raise our cylinders and

fires, to obtain it. And it never once occurs to us that the weakness

we thereby confess in ourselves is any real inability, or creates any

shade of discouragement to effort. On the contrary we call it our great

power over nature, and we have courage given us in it to attempt almost

any thing.

Prepared by such analogies, our dependence, in the matter of religion,

ought to create no speculative difficulty, and I really do not believe

that it does, unless it be in some few exceptional cases. There used to

be much debate over the question of ability and dependence, but as far

as my knowledge extends, such difficulties are not felt any longer as

they once were. And yet we seem to have as much difficulty as ever in

making that practical adjustment of ourselves to God, which is

necessary in any and every true act of dependence.

Thus a great many, admitting quietly the fact of some such ability as

makes them responsible, take it really upon themselves to do, out and

out and by their own force, all which they are responsible for. It is

as if they were setting themselves to steady and move on the general

bulk of the ship, seizing it by its body. What tremendous weights and

fearfully complex forces the soul contains, and how many and fierce the

storms may be that have broken loose in it, under the retributive

damage of sin, they do not sufficiently consider, daring even to hope

that they can gather it back into the sweet unity of order and health,

by their own self-governing power. It turns out of course, since they

can govern but one thing at a time, that while they are governing that

one, a hundred others are breaking loose--and all these lusting,

rasping, raging, tumultuous, wild, forces of evil, driving like fierce

winds and tossing like mountain seas, are too much, of course, for any

human power of self-government.

Besides we have no capacity, under the natural laws of the soul, as a

self-governing creature, to govern successfully any thing, except

indirectly, that is by a process of steering. We can not govern a bad

passion or grudge by choking it down, or master a wild ambition by

willing it away, or stop the trains of bad thoughts by a direct fight

with them--which fight would only keep them still in mind as

before--all that we can do in such matters, in a way of

self-regulation, is to simply steer the mind off from its grudges,

ambitions, bad thoughts, by getting it occupied with good and pure

objects that work a diversion; and then the danger is--only working

thus upon ourselves--that we shortly forget ourselves; when the sky is

filled, again, of course, with the old tumult. We ourselves, acting on

ourselves, institute harmony in the soul and establish heaven's order

in its working?--why if all its many thousand parts and forces were put

in a perfect military subjection to the will, we could not even then

conceive the state of internal order and harmony accurately enough to

command them into their fit places and functions.

Furthermore, if we could, our self-government would not be the state of

religion, or bring us any one of its blessed incidents. The soul, as a

religious creature, is put in affiance, by a fixed necessity of its

nature, with God. Having broken this bond in its sin it comes back in

religion to become what it inwardly longs for--restored to God, filled

with God's inspirations, made conscious of God. And this is its

regeneration; a grand, all-dominating, change that supposes a new

revelation of God in it, and is called, in that view, its being born of

God. Can it then reveal God in itself by its own self-regulative force?

Can it, in fact, accomplish any one thing that is distinctively

religious-the state of peace, the state of liberty, the state of light,

the state of assurance? "Impossible" is the word written over against

every character and condition of good it can, as a religious nature,

attempt. And yet these impossibles we can easily and surely master, by

only bringing ourselves into the range of God's operations. The

helm-power only is ours, the executive is God's. He can govern the

soul, its grudges, lusts, ambitions, bad thoughts, all at once. He

knows the state of harmony internally and can settle us in it as a

state of rest. He has inspirations, when he gets into our love, that

make all duty free. He can settle assurance and confidence in us. He

can be peace in the sealing of his forgiveness upon us. Revealing

himself in the soul, he can fill its horizon with light. He can be

angelic perfection in us, he can be purity, heaven, in his own fit time

and order.

What is wanted therefore in us, and nothing more is possible for us, is

the using of our small helms so as to make our appeal to God's

operation. Self-impelling, self-renovating power we have none; but the

helm power we have, and if we use it rightly, it will put us in the

range of all power, even the mighty power of God. Hence the great call

of the scripture salvation is, "come unto me," "come unto God;" because

the coming unto God is the coming unto God's operation, and the

receiving of what his divine power will work in the soul, when he is

templed in it. Hence also the call to renounce our own will, to

renounce the world, to renounce eternally sin; because whoever lives in

his own will--lives for the world as his end, lives apart from all

homage to God--can not be in God's will, or come at all into God's

operation. In the same way there must be a clearing of a thousand

particular and even smallest things that will steer off the soul from

God. When the helm of a ship gets foul, or so tangled in ropes, or

weeds, that it can not traverse freely, it will even steer the ship

into wreck instead of holding it to its course. So exactly it is with

the soul. An old grudge adhered to steers it forever away from God. Any

mode of profit, whose fairness or beneficence to men we distrust, but

will not give up, will do the same. Adhering only to a party that we

begin to doubt the merit of, takes away the possibility even of

confidence toward God. In the same way, the dread only of being

singular, the going after popularity, the fear of men's opinions, the

cringing of the soul to men's fashions--all these give over the helm of

one's life to others, that they may turn it where they will--always

away, of course, and still away from God. Every such thing must of

necessity be renounced or even denounced, as we hope to come into God's

operation, or come unto God. No soul is born of God till it comes into

his very mind and offers itself, as a really transparent medium, to his

light. When the helm is practically set, honestly guaged for God, God

will be a perfectly open harbor to it, but how can it think of entering

either this or any other harbor, when it is really steering itself

away?

Hence also that very positive matter called faith, or the fixed demand

of it as a condition of salvation. The conception of it is, not that we

are to do or attempt doing something great upon ourselves--regenerating

ourselves, sanctifying ourselves. All that we can do is to simply trust

ourselves over to God, and so to bring ourselves into the range of His

divine operation. In one view, or considered as including what God does

for it and by it, faith it is very true is every thing--the whole

substance and bulk and body of holiness; but considered in a manner

most analytical and closest to us, it is our act alone and a very small

one at that, to be the determining helm of a new life. Doubtless faith,

again, is some how wrought by God, but it is none the less acted by us,

being the sublimest and completest mortal act of dependence possible;

in which the soul, ceasing from itself, turns away to God--comes unto

God. Whereupon as God meets it, accepts it, and pours himself into its

open gates, it is filled with God's inspirations and the working of his

mighty power. Now the life proceeds again from God as it ought, being

instigated inwardly, by his divine movement. Peace, liberty, light are

its element; it is even conscious of God.

All human doings therefore, as regards the souls' regeneration, or the

beginning of a new-life, amount to nothing more than the right use of a

power that steers it into the sphere of God's operation. And the reason

why so many fail here is, that they undertake to do the work

themselves, heaving away spasmodically to lift themselves over the

unknown crisis by main strength--as if seizing the ship by its mast, or

the main bulk of its body, they were going to push it on through the

voyage themselves! Whereas it is the work of God, and not in any other

sense their own, than that coming in, to God, by a total trust in Him,

they are to have it in God's working. Let the wind blow where it

listeth--God will take care of that--they have only to put themselves

to it, and the impossible is done.

In just this way also it is that so many miscarriages occur, after

conversion. Nothing was necessary to prevent them, but simply to carry

a steady helm in life's duties. Thus there will be some who get tired

of the helm; to be always at their post, praying always, guaging their

motions carefully to meet their new conditions, keeping their courses

set exactly by their conscience, and allowing no slack times of

indulgence, becomes wearisome as certainly as they lose out the Spirit

that makes exactness liberty, and then they take away their hand, as it

were to rest themselves. Some too will have a way of persuading

themselves that the soul will get on well enough, at least for a time,

by the impulse it is under already, and so far will consent to do what

no sailor ever dares, let the ship steer itself; whereupon, when it

begins to wheel, and plunge, and go just nowhere, as regards the

voyage, they begin also to cry, "impossible!" "how can we stop it!"

"how can we turn it back!" They imagine some great fatality, impossible

to be controlled, when in fact the only fatality suffered is that of a

ship that can not keep, or get back into, its course without being

steered.

At the same time it must not be forgotten, that multitudes of disciples

fall out of course, for no less positive reason than that they actually

steer themselves out of God's operation. One goes into an employment

the right of which he is not sufficiently sure of to have a good

conscience in it. Another galls himself in a right employment, by the

consciously wrong manner in which he carries it on. A third goes into

company that consciously does him injury, yet still continues to go. A

male disciple turns himself to the pursuit of honor, a female disciple

to the worship of fashion; one to the shows of condition, the other to

the more personal vanities of dress. Thousands again will let their

lusts and appetites get above their affections, their bodies above

their minds. Some are nursing their pride and some their envy, driven

of fierce winds by the gustiness of one, eaten out and barnacled by the

water vermin of the other. These now and such like are the small helms,

which all you keep turning, who turn yourselves away. You ask why it

is, half grievingly, that you fall away from God so often, and loose

the savor of his friendship so easily? But the very simple fact, if you

could see it, is that you really steer yourselves away; allowing

yourselves in modes of life that even turn you off from God, as by your

own act. You not only forget, or neglect, the small helms of guidance,

but you actually turn them the wrong way--only making now and then some

clumsy effort, as you wake up in pauses of concern, to do some mighty

thing by your will; in which you virtually attempt to handle the slip

by its body--sighing piously in mock resignation, as you fail, over the

inevitable fact of your dependence! O, if you could but use your

dependence rightly, finding how to really and truly depend, what power

and victory would it bring! The very steering power you have, which is

the highest power God has given you to wield, is nothing but a way of

depending; that is of right self-adjustment to the gales of the Spirit

and the operating forces of God. How certainly too and tenderly would

your God be drawn to you, putting all his power upon you, if he only

saw you carefully guaging your small duties so as to guide yourselves

into his help. Remember his promise, "he that is faithful in that which

is least,"--nothing draws the heart of God like that.

Now it is very true that a man who is tending the small helm of duty

with great exactness may become painfully legal in it--a precisionist,

a Pharisee. But it should not be so, and never will be, save when the

precision is itself made a religion of. That precision which is only a

way of steering the soul, precisely and faithfully, into God's

inspirations, is but the necessary condition of liberty. No man ever

keeps the way of liberty in a heedless, hap-hazard life. Mere

strictness is only a mode of pain, but the strictness of a delicately

faithful and punctual address to God, has God's witness and free

blessing always upon it. Such a disciple consciously means to be

faithful and, as certainly as God is God, he will somehow have God's

power upon him. A very nice way of application, a steady, sleepless

watch of the helm, turning it moment by moment, by gentle

deflections--this navigates the ship and keeps it bounding on, as in

the liberty of the sea No Christian is ever driven loose from his

course, when he holds himself up to God, in the adjustment of a careful

trust.

Now in all that I have said, thus far, in the unfolding of this very

practical subject, I have been preparing a more distinctly Christian

view of it, that could not otherwise be given--this I will now present,

and with this I close.

I have been showing what power accrues, or will accrue, as we keep

ourselves in, or bring ourselves into, the range of God's operation;

and this word operation has been taken probably as referring only to

the omnipotent working of his will, or spiritual force. But there is a

power of God which is not his omnipotence, and has a wholly different

mode of working; I mean his moral power--that of his beauty, goodness,

gentleness, truth, purity, suffering compassion, in one word, his

character. In this kind of power, he works, not by what he wills, but

by what he is. What is wanted, therefore, above all things, in the

regeneration of souls, and their advancement toward perfection

afterward, is to be somehow put in the range of this higher power and

kept there. And here exactly is the sublime art and glory of the new

divine economy in Christ. For he is such, and so related to our want,

that our mind gets a way open through him to God's divine beauty and

greatness, so that we may bring our heart up into the transforming,

molding, efficacy of these, which we most especially need--need even

the more imperatively, that our -very conceptions of God, under the

lowness and blind apathy of our sin, are so dull, and dim, and coarse,

as to have little value and power.

The infinite perfection, or unseen beauty of God--how could we so much

as frame a notion of it, when even the being of God, as an unseen

spirit, has so little reality to our coarse and fearfully demoralized

apprehensions? Therefore understanding well our utter inability to so

much as conceive the perfect good in which we require to be fashioned,

or the moral excellence of God whose image is to stamp itself upon us,

He has undertaken to put even this before our eyes. To this end he

becomes incarnate in the person of His Son. As the incarnate Son, He is

God in the small, God in humanity, the Son of Man, bringing all God's

beauty and perfection to us in a personal being and life akin to our

own--powerful on our own, by the tragic tenderness of his cross; so

that if we simply love and cleave unto his human person, unto his

cross, we embrace in him all that is included in God's infinite feeling

and character. In this view it is, that he says, "I am the door;" for

he is just that opening into the infinite beauty that brings us to the

sense of it, and puts us in the power of it. Just this too was his

meaning when he said, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father"--he

has seen a man simply, in one view; yet, in another, he has seen even

God, in all those distant, impossible glories, and perfections, he

otherwise could not conceive. This too was what he had in thought when

he said--"He that believeth on me believeth not on me, but on him that

sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me." The omnipotence

of God works absolutely, the moral power of God by being seen, and

Christ makes it seen. By which means, as an apostle conceives, he

becomes the power of God--"Christ the power of God and the wisdom of

God." In short this exactly is Christianity--this thought labors all

through--that Christ in humanity is God humanized, divine feeling and

perfection let down into the modes of finite sentiment and

apprehension. In his human person, and the revelation of his cross, he

is the door, the interpreter to our hearts, of God himself--so the

moral power of- God upon our hearts. It is not necessary that we should

so much as frame the intellectual idea of God's perfection from him,

which multitudes could never do--we have simply to love him and cleave

to him as to a human person, and we have the very excellence of God

framing itself into us, by a most naturally relational, humanly real,

sympathy; the power, that is the moral power, of God is upon us, and

revealing itself in. us with all needed efficacy.

Christ then as the Son of Man, is that small helm put in the hand, so

to speak, of our affections, to bring us in, to God's most interior

beauty and perfection, and puts us in the power of His infinite, unseen

character; thus to be molded by it and fashioned to conformity with it.

And so we have nothing to do but to keep his company, and watch for him

in faithful adhesion to his person, in order to be kept in the very

element of God's character, and have the consciousness of God, as a

state of continually progressive and immovably steadfast experience.

The moral power of God and God's glory is mirrored directly into us, to

become a divine glory in us. Beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the

Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory. This it

is, working in our sin, that clears it all away--the power of God unto

salvation.

What now brethren and friends, is our conclusion? What have we seen but

that all condolings with ourselves, all regrets of failure, turning

upon the fact of our weakness, all protestations of inability, all

sighs and suspirations ending in the word "impossible," are without a

shadow of reason--utterly groundless. We can do and become just all

that we ought, and without so much as one strain of self-endeavor. It

is very true that God has not made us omnipotent--we can not manipulate

ourselves into holy character by our will, we can neither regenerate,

nor make free, nor purify, nor keep ourselves. And just so we can not

do any thing in the world of natural experience, without making our

address to the powers of nature. Do we mourn over this in listless

impatience, and call it our dreadful inability? Does the man who can

not navigate a ship by its body, or drag it through the sea by its

beak, set himself down upon the word impossible, and desist from the

voyage? No, but he takes the very small helm, heading bravely out into

the storms, compelling the huge bulk, in that easy manner, to go where

he sends it, dashing on still on, by night and by day, and week after

week, and month after month, till he has taken it possibly clean round

the planet he lives on, and brought it quietly in to the haven for

which he was set. Here, just here, is the mighty power of man, that he

can steer! Weak in himself, as regards most things, able to do almost

nothing in the gross, he can yet do almost any thing by only steering

it into the lines of forces that will do it for him. And the same holds

true exactly in religion. No man here is called to do some great thing

which he can not do. Nothing is necessary for you, in becoming a

Christian, or maintaining a triumphant Christian life, but just to stay

by the helm, and put yourselves in where the power is--then you have

all power, and every mountain bulk goes away at your bidding! Come unto

God, unite yourselves to God, and the doing power you have is

infinite!--and is none the less yours because it is His. Trim your ship

steadily to the course, and God's own gales will waft it. If you want

success enough to set yourselves for it, and guage your courses

accurately by a strict application, infallible success is yours. Or,

better still, if your mind is dark, if you do not even know how to

guage any movement rightly, or even what the words mean that speak of

it--then come to the man Jesus, your blessed, all perfect brother, ask

him to let you go with him and keep him company, cling fast to him, and

all the transforming moral power of God shall be with you. To

investigate much and know many things, is not necessary. Only to love

Jesus and adhere to him faithfully, knowing simply him, is wisdom

enough.

He will be the door, so that your heart will pass in, where your

understanding can not. reach. No matter how weak you may seem to be, or

how many impassable mountains to be before you, or how many fierce

storms to be raging round you, still you will go over mountains beaten

small as chaff, on through tempests that have heard the word "be

still." You will never fail or fall. Stay by your love to Jesus and the

power of God's infinite will is with you, and the still mightier, more

inconceivable, power of his greatness upon you. O this glorious fact of

our dependence--if we speak of ability, we have all utmost ability in

it. We come to no bar in it, brethren, as many are wont to speak. If

only we can rightly depend, we come into all power rather, and are able

to do all things! Here it is that so many of God's. mighty ones became

mighty--Moses, Elijah, Paul, Luther, Cromwell--all those efficient and

successful ones that we ourselves have met, wondering often how they

got such emphasis of action, such resistless sway. They were men who

kept company with God, and lived in the powerful element of his divine

operation. Here is the only way of success, whether of single men, or

of churches. How can a church get on in any great concern of religion,

when it is out at sea, beating about as it is driven, and steering just

no whither. Nor is it any better if we take the ship into our own

hands, to do all for it ourselves. Let us come into God's operation,

and God will know how to open a way for us. He will lead just where we

most want to go, and send us every gift even as he gives us a gospel.

So if we are baffled personally, in all our Christian aims and doings,

losing ground, weak and growing weaker, unhappy, dissatisfied, hopeless

of good--out upon this wild and dreadful sea, and driven by all fierce

winds and storms of the mind, we have only to steer ourselves on, by

the steady helm of dependence, and our way is clear to the harbor.

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IX.

INTEGRITY AND GRACE.

"Judge me O Lord according to my righteousness, and according to mine

integrity that is in me."--Ps. vii, 8.

A truly noble confidence!--and yet many of our time would call the

language very dangerous, or scarcely Christian, language, if it were

spoken by any but one of the scripture saints. What can be a slipperier

footing, they would say, for any sinner of mankind, than to be

appealing to God in the confidence of his own righteousness; or, what

is even worse, in the confidence of his mere integrity? What does it

show but a state of egregious, fearfully overgrown, spiritual conceit,

coupled with a prodigious self-ignorance? And what could evince a lower

sense of God and religion? We shall see whether it is so, or must needs

be so in all cases or not.

It may not be amiss to note that some Unitarian teachers, on the other

hand, charge it as a fault in our doctrine of salvation by grace, or

justification by faith, that it lets down even the standards of our

morality itself; making grace a cover for all defections from honor,

truth, honesty, and whatever belongs to the outward integrity of our

practices; allowing us to be selfish, heartless, perfidious, crafty,

cruel, mean, and all this in good keeping, because it is a part of our

merit under grace, to have no merit.

Let us pursue this subject, and see if we can find the true place for

integrity under the Christian salvation. And we shall best open the

inquiry, I think, by noting--

1. How the scriptures speak of integrity; how manifold and bold the

forms in which they commend it, and how freely the good men of the

scripture times testify their consciousness of it, in their appeals to

God. The text I have cited does not stand alone. In the twenty-sixth

Psalm, David says again--"Judge me O Lord; for I have walked in mine

integrity." And again--"But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity."

The Proverbs testify in language still more unqualified,--"that the

integrity of the upright shall preserve them," "The just man walketh in

his integrity." In the same view it is, that good men are so often

called "the upright" and "the just"--"Mark the perfect man and behold

the upright," "The way of the just is uprightness, thou most upright

dost weigh the path of the just." They are called "righteous" too and

"right" in the same manner, and it is even declared that they "shall

deliver their own souls by their righteousness." And lest we should

imagine that the integrity, honored by so many commendations and

examples, is only a crude and partial conception, belonging to the

piety of the Old Testament, the Christian disciples of the New are

testifying also in a hundred ways, to the integrity, before God and

man, in which they consciously live. They dare to say that they have a

conscience void of offense, that they serve God with a pure conscience,

that they count it nothing to be judged of man's judgment, when they

know that God approves them. They rejoice in the confidence that they

are made manifest unto God, and tenderly hope that they may be made

manifest also in the consciences of men. They are so assured in the

sense of their own integrity, as followers of Christ, that they even

dare to exhort others to walk as they have them for examples. And this

holy consciousness of being right with God, of being wholly offered up

to him, of wanting to know nothing but Christ, of losing all things for

his sake, appears and reappears in as many forms as language can

possibly take. They spend their life, as it were, in the testimony that

they please God. Making the strongest confessions of ill desert, and

resting their salvation everywhere on the justifying grace and

righteousness of God, they still are able, somehow, to be free in

professing their own conscious integrity in their discipleship, and the

sense they have of being right and true--whole men, so to speak, in the

service of their master. Whether we can explain the riddle, or not, so

it is. But the explanation is not difficult, and, before we have done,

will be made sufficiently clear. Consider then--

2. What integrity means, or what is the state intended by it. As an

integer is a whole, in distinction from a fraction, which is only a

part, so a man of integrity is a man whose aim, in the right, is a

whole aim, in distinction from one whose aim is divided, partial, or

unstable. It is such a state of right intention as allows the man to be

consciously right-minded, and to firmly rest in the singleness of his

purpose. He is a man who stands in the full honors of rectitude before

his own mind or conscience. It does not mean that he has never been a

sinner, or that he is not now, as regards the disorders and moral

weaknesses of his nature, but simply that whatever may have been his

life, or the guilt of it, he is now turned, as regards the intent of

his soul, to do and be wholly right; firmly set, of course, to receive

all the possible helps in his reach, for maintaining a life wholly

right with God and man.

But we must not pass over the distinction between what is called

commercial, or social integrity, and the higher integrity of religion.

This commercial integrity which is greatly affected and much praised

among men, relates, only to matters of truth and personal justice in

the outward affairs of life, and becomes integrity only because it is

measured by a partial and merely human standard, viz., the standard of

the market, and of social opinion. Such a character is always held in

high respect among men, and, what is more, it should be. It is really

refreshing in this selfish, scheming, sharp-dealing world, to meet an

honest man. Whether he be a Christian or not, we love to honor such a

man. It will also be seen that he is a man who means, at least so far,

to honor himself. But it does not follow that such a man's integrity is

complete enough even to give him a good conscience. He is, after all,

it may be, no such integer in his confidence, or the approbation of his

own mind, as he consciously might be. His intent is not really right,

that is to accept the principle of right doing in its breadth, as the

arbiter of all action, and do and be all right and forever. All that

can be said of him, all that he will say for himself, is that he has

had it for his law to speak the truth, fulfill his promises, and deal

fairly by his fellow men. Still it is not, and has never been his aim,

or object, to do what is right to God; and that if I am not mistaken,

is a matter of much higher consequence and more necessary to his real

integrity. God is a person as truly as men are, more closely related to

us than they, a better friend, one who has more feeling to be injured

than they all, claims of right more sacred. What then does it signify

that a man gives men their due, and will not give God his? Does it give

one a title to be called humane, that he will not stick a fly with a

pin because of his tenderness, and yet will stab, in bitter grudge, his

fellow man? Does it fitly entitle one to the name of a just man, that

he is honest and fair with men of one color, and not with those of

another, honest and fair on three days, or even five days in the week,

and not on the days that remain? What then shall we think of the mere

commercial integrity just described, taken by itself? Calling it

integrity, it is still integrity by halves, and, of course, without the

principle; integrity by market standards only, and not by any standard

that makes. a real integer in duty. Real integrity begins with the

principle, meaning to give every one his due; to be right with God, as

with men, right against popularity as with it, right everywhere, wholly

and eternally right.

You perceive, in this manner, how easy it is for a man to be in great

repute for this virtue, and yet be wholly uncommitted to principle in

it. Nay, he may even be a very bad man. Examples of the kind will occur

to almost any one. I knew in college, and afterward in a remote part of

the country, a man of such repute now in the law, that he was said to

have made the greatest argument ever presented before the Supreme Court

at Washington, whose reputation, as a kind of Cato in this matter of

market integrity, was scarcely less remarkable. He had more than once

kicked a man out of his office, who had come to engage him in a case

plainly tainted with fraud, and would never allow himself to gain a

point, by the least deviation from truth. And yet he was a man of many

vices, and a man, withal, of such infernal temper, that his wife and

children knew him only as a tyrant scarcely endurable. Getting

exasperated almost to the pitch of insanity, by what he conceived to be

a base attempt of his law partner to jew him, for he was a Jew, in a

matter of business, he drew off in disgust and anger from his practice,

determined to add nothing more to the profits of the concern, where

before he had, in fact, brought all. As the contract still existed in

law, the right of his proceeding might be questioned, but his almost

overgrown sensibilities to points of honor would no longer suffer him

even to look upon the face of such a man. Still he would not so far

disrespect the contract as to open a separate and rival office, but

hired himself out as a common laborer in unloading coal from one of the

ships in the harbor. While at work there, smirched and grimed by

coal-dust, there came to him, in a few days, a client who wanted to

engage him in a great cause involving the title to a vast property.

Inasmuch as he must live, apart from all profits, he finally consented

to undertake it, on condition that he should receive only a small

day-wages allowance. He won the cause. And then, five or six years

after, when he had his family with him, and was known to be short in

the means of living, his old client, whom he had made a rich man, sent

him a present of twenty thousand dollars. He was rather offended than

pleased--as if he would do so mean a thing as to cover up the fact of a

fee, under the semblance of a stipulation for day-wages! Forthwith he

returned the present, and when it was renewed as a present to his wife,

he required her also to send it back. If his partner had seen fit to

raise a legal claim for the money as a fee, he might easily have been

quieted by half the sum, but rather than consent to enrich a knave by

that amount, he preferred to rob his family of the same.

Now this man, so keenly sensitive to the matter of honor in business,

as to be well nigh demonized by it, was not even a virtuous man. He

was, in fact, the most magnificently abominable man I ever knew. And he

died as he lived. The steamer on which he was a passenger sprung aleak

at sea, and when they called him to the pumps, protesting, with an

oath, that he would do no so mean thing as to pump for his life, he

locked himself up in his state-room, and there he stayed, like a tiger

in his cage, till the ship went down.

Was he then a man of integrity? In one view he certainly was, and that

was his reputation. Still he was a man false to every right principle,

both of God and man, but just one; an example in which any one may see

how little the boasted integrity of commercial honor and truth may

signify, when taken alone.

I could easily have given you a thousand nobler and more beautiful

examples of integrity, in the spheres of business, and before the human

standards of commercial obligation. I give you this, just because it is

so nearly repulsive; showing, in that manner, how little true merit of

character belongs to this kind of virtue, when it stands by itself. How

far off is it then from being any true equivalent for that Broad,

universal, radically principled, integrity that includes religion.

Whoever is in the principle of right-doing, as a principle, will be

ready to do all right, always, and everywhere--to God as to men, to men

as to God. This it is and this only that makes a genuinely whole-intent

man, thus a man of integrity.

There is, then, a kind of integrity which goes vastly beyond the mere

integrity of trade, and which is the only real integrity. The other is

merely a name in which men of the market compliment themselves, when

they observe their own standards; though consciously neglecting the

higher standards of right as before God. This higher, and only real,

integrity, is the root of all true character, and must be the

condition, somehow, of Christian character itself. Let us inquire--

3. In what manner? Christ, we say, does not undertake to save men by

their merit, or on terms of justice and reward, but to save them out of

great ill desert rather, and by purely gratuitous favor. What place

have we then under such a scheme of religion, for insisting on the need

of integrity at all. Does it not even appear to be superseded, or

dispensed with?

I wish I could deny that some pretendedly orthodox Christians do not

seem, in fact, to think so. It is the comfort of what they call their

piety, that God is going to dispense with all merit in them, and this

they take to mean about the same thing as dispensing with all the sound

realities of character--all exactness of principle and conduct. They

are sometimes quite sanctimonious in this kind of faith. Cunning,

sharp, untruthful, extortious, they look up piously still, at the top

of what they call their faith, and bless God that he is able to hide a

multitude of sins--able to save great sinners of whom they are chief!

Submitting themselves habitually to evil, they compliment themselves in

abundant confessions of sin; counting it apparently a kind of merit

that they live loosely enough to make salvation by merit impossible.

Ten times a day they declare that they will know nothing but Christ and

him crucified, and lest they should miss of such a faith, they do not

spare to crucify him abundantly themselves!

It can not be that such persons are not in a great mistake. Any scheme

of salvation that undertakes to save without integrity, has, to say the

least, a very poor title to respect. And it ought to be evident

beforehand, that Christianity is no such scheme at all.

Yes doubtless, it will be said, there must be such a thing as

integrity--that is, commercial integrity--in Christian men, else they

would bring very great scandal on the cause. Is it then permitted that,

if they will be just and true in trade and in society, they may safely

consent to be out of integrity with God? Looking at the principle of

things, for there is nothing else to look at here, it would seem that

the Great God and Father of us all is certainly as much entitled to

consideration from us as we are from each other, and how can there be

any genuine principle at all in a disciple, who is not in that higher

integrity which includes doing justice to God--being right with God?

There must then be some place for the claim of integrity in our gospel,

even though it be a scheme of salvation by grace. Nor does the solution

of the matter appear to be difficult. Integrity, we have seen, is

wholeness of aim, or intent; but mere intent of soul does not make and

never could complete a character. It is even conceivable that a soul

steeped in the disorders of sin, might take up such a kind of intent,

on its own part, and, acting by itself, be only baffled in continual

defeats and failures to the end of life, There is no redeeming efficacy

in right intent, taken by itself--it would never vanquish the inward

state of evil at all. And yet it is just that by which all evil will be

vanquished, under Christ and by grace, because it puts the soul in such

a state as makes the grace-power of Christ, co-working with it,

effectual. Conscious of wrong, for example, and groaning under the

bitterness of it, I take it up as my intent to be and become wholly

right. Then I find Christ near me--O how near!--yielding me his divine

sympathy, and pouring his whole tenderness into my feeling. As regards

the guilty past, he will justify me freely, and hold me to account no

more. As regards the future, he will take me as a friend, raise my

conceptions of what is good by his own beauty, ennoble my feeling by

society with him, draw me up out of my lowness and my weak corruptions,

by his character great in suffering, and so enable me to conquer all my

evils, as he conquered his. As certainly then as I come into right

intent, I shall come into faith, and trust myself to him, as a means of

becoming what I have undertaken to become.

Here then is the place of integrity. It is even presupposed in all true

faith, and enters, in that manner, into all true gospel character. It

does not exclude the grace of Christ, or supersede salvation by grace,

but on the human side moves toward grace, and is inwardly conjoined

with it, in all the characters it forms. The sinning man, who comes

into integrity of aim, is put thereby at the very gate of faith, where

all God's helps are waiting for him. Now that he is so tenderly and

nobly honest, there is no grace of God, or help of his merciful spirit,

that will not flow into him as naturally as light into a window. By

this grace, in which he will now trust, his whole being, feeling,

aspiration, hope are invested, and the light of God, the brightness of

salvation, everlasting life, is in him--he is born of God.

His integrity, therefore, his new and better aim, is not any ground of

merit, or title of desert, which dispenses with faith, but his way of

coming into faith--thus into the helps, inspirations, joys and triumphs

that Christ will inwardly minister--in one word, into the righteousness

of God. And accordingly the scriptures formally condition all such

helps, on the integrity of the soul that wants them. "Ye shall seek me

and find me, if ye search for me with all your heart--that is with a

whole and single aim." "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will

not hear me." "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of

light." The scriptures, we may thus perceive, have no difficulty in

finding how integrity is needed in a way of salvation by grace, and

there is, in fact, no such difficulty, save as we make it ourselves.

Having discovered, in this manner, what, and how great a thing

integrity is, and the necessity of it on strictly Christian grounds,

let us note in conclusion, some of the practical relations of the

subject. And

1. Consider what it is that gives such peace and loftiness of bearing

to the life of a truly righteous man. What an atmosphere of serenity

does it create for him, that he is living in a conscience void of

offense. And when great storms of trouble drive their clouds about him,

when he is assailed by enemies and detractors, persecuted for his

opinions, broken down by adversities, thrown out of confidence and

respect even, as will sometimes happen, by false constructions of his

conduct and malignant conspiracies against his character, still his

soul abides in peace, because he justifies himself and has the witness

that he pleases God. These clouds that seem to be about him do still

not shut him in. He sits above with his God, and they all sail under!

Such a man is strong my brethren--how very strong! There is no power

below the stars that can shake him! The steaming vapors of a diseased

body can not rise high enough to cloud his sun. He is able still and

always to make his great appeal and say--"Judge me O Lord, according to

my righteousness, and according to the integrity that is in me." Who

can understand like him, the meaning of that word--"And the work of

righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness,

quietness, and assurance forever." Here too--

2. Is the ground of all failures, and all highest successes in

religion, or the Christian life. Only to be an honest man, in this

highest and genuinely Christian sense, signifies a great deal more than

most of us ever conceive. We make room for laxity here that we may let

in grace, and do not hold ourselves to that real integrity that is

wanted, to receive, or obtain, or be in, that grace. O how loosely,

irresponsibly, carnally, do many Christians live--covetous, sensual,

without self-government, eager to be on high terms with the world,

praying, as it were in the smoke of their vanities and passions, making

their sacrifices in a way of compounding with their obligations. Little

do they conceive, meantime, how honest a man must be to pray, how

heartily, simply, totally, he must mean what he prays for. Perhaps he

prays much, prays in private, prays in public, and has it for a

continual wonder that he gets on so poorly, and that God, for some

mysterious reason, does not answer his prayers! Sometimes he will even

be a little heart-broken by his failures, and will moisten his face

with tears of complaint. He has made great struggles, it may be, at

times, to freshen the fire that was burning in him, and yet, for some

reason, he is all the while losing ground. His faith becomes a hand, as

it were, without fingers, laying hold of nothing. The more he pumps at

the well of his joys, the drier he grows. It is as if there were some

dread fatality against him, and he wonders where it is. Commonly it is

here--that he wants rectitude. He is trying to be piously exercised in

his feeling, when he is slack in his integrity. He has been so much

afraid of being self-righteous, it may be, that he is not righteous, at

all. When he is loose at the conscience, how can he be clear in his

feeling?

Perhaps he has conceived a higher standing in religion, a state of

attainment where his soul shall be in liberty, and has tried for whole

months, possibly for years, to reach it, and yet he finds it not. He

begins to imagine, not unlikely, that no such thing is for him--God's

sovereignty is against him, and he must be content to stay in that

lower plane that God has appointed him. "God never means," he will say,

"that I should be much of a Christian--that is given to others that

have a higher calling." Now strange as it may seem, here again is the

root of his difficulty--that his projected attainments are clear ahead

of his integrity. Some traitor is hid in his soul's chambers that is

kept there, and carefully fed. What is wanting is the integer of a

clear, undivided intent. Honesty! honesty! O that Christian men, saying

nothing of others, could understand how much it means, and the

wonderful power it has! We connive at evil and do it so cunningly that

we do not know it. Our eye is evil, we regard iniquity in our heart,

therefore do we fail in our prayers, therefore do we lose ground,

therefore are we baffled and floored in all our attempts to rise. But

it is not so when we have the single eye. Such power is there in this

integrity, when it is real, that, making faith real, it makes all gifts

attainable. God loves the honest mind, hears the honest prayer, pours

all his fulness into the honest bosom. No great flights of ecstatic

feeling are wanted, frames carry nothing, but that silent, sound,

integrity, which poises the soul on its pivot of truth and

self-approbation, is so mighty that it wins its way to God through all

obstacles. Here is the secret after all, of the true success in every

case. Success is the fixed destiny of any soul that has once reached

the point of whole intent. No one need be troubled about his frames, or

fluctuations, or even what appear to be his losing moods, if only he

can stay by his conscience firmly enough to say, "Judge me O Lord

according to mine integrity." Here then, brethren, is the spot where

you are to make your revision, find what your intent is, whether it is

honest and whole and clean, warped by no ambiguities, divided and

stolen away by no idols. Here the Achan will be hid, if any where. Make

sure of his dislodgment, and your way is clear. Then your faith will be

faith, your prayers will be prayers; every thing will have its genuine

meaning, and God will be revealed in every thing you do. I proceed now

3. To another very important deduction, viz., that every man who comes

into a state of right intent, or is set to be a real integer in the

right, will forthwith also be a Christian. There is apt to be much

pride in men not religious, on the score of their commercial integrity.

They will find, if they search more narrowly, that they still have no

right conscience in it. They feel themselves to be inwardly wrong. They

live in a state of conscious disturbance. They are often consciously

disingenuous, as regards the truths and claims of religion. They have

consciously a certain dread of God which harrows their peace. What I

mean to say, at present, is that whoever gets a clear perception of the

state of wrong in which he lives, and comes back into a genuinely right

intent, to be carried just where it will carry him, sacrifice what it

will cost him--any thing to be right--in that man the spirit of all sin

is broken, and his mind is in a state to lay hold of Christ, and be

laid hold of by him, almost ere he is aware of it. Nor, when I say

this, do I throw discredit on the common modes of expression; for this

exactly is the point to which every converted person comes, though he

may not so conceive at the time. One may tell of his convictions,

another of his fears, another of his unspeakable wants, one of the

prayer that he made thus or thus, another of the restitution or

acknowledgment he made to some one he had wronged, many of their deep

sorrow that melted into joy, many others of the despair they came to in

their struggles, under which they fell off helpless in the hands of

God's mercy, and behold it was deliverance itself. But whatever may

have been the form of exercise, this most assuredly is in it always,

consciously, or unconsciously present, that there is a coming somehow

into a state of pure intent, a mind to receive all truth and do all

right forever. And no man ever came to this, who did not find himself,

at once, all over in the faith of Christ, a consciously and strangely

new man.

Let me give you a case, in which this particular point, in the matter

of conversion to God, will be clearly distinguished. There died, in the

city of New York, about ten years ago, a distinguished merchant, and:

much more distinguished saint of God, whose conversion was on this

wise. He was born and brought up in the island of Santa Cruz, belonging

to a wealthy and gay family, in which he received no religious

instruction at all. He had a naturally gay, light, forceful character,

and scarcely a religious idea. One Sunday, when the family and their

guests went out for a ride, he remained at home. Going to the library

for something to read, his eye fell on a book labeled "The Truth of

Christianity Demonstrated." He took it down, saying as he looked on the

back of it, "The truth of Christianity demonstrated--the truth of

Christianity demonstrated--well if it is, I ought to believe it and

live it, and--I will. Let me try the book and see." Sitting down, at

that point, he opened the book and began to read, and though it was an

argument only; giving no particular appeal to feeling, he was surprised

to find a strange brightness of light on the words. Holy conviction

flowed in upon him, a wondrous love waked up in his feeling, a still

more wondrous bliss dawned upon his love, and in a very few minutes, it

seemed that the helm of his nature was somehow taken by a mysterious

power he could not resist. The joy of the change, which he did not

understand, or conceive, was so great as to prove its reality; he could

never, from that moment, shake off the conviction of his being quite

another man. What it was to be a Christian he did not know, but he knew

that he was something, which to lose, or cease to be, he could as

little think of as losing his life. When the riding party came back, he

began forthwith to let out his joy, tell his wonder, testify of Christ,

just as he would of any good, gay time he had had before. They were

astonished, some of them doubted whether he was not somehow beside

himself. But there was no slack in his flame, he went on like the just,

growing brighter and brighter. There was no appearance of sanctimony,

no cant, he was the same outspoken, social, manly youth, that he had

been. Hungering finally after some religious society, he managed to

remove to Philadelphia, where he found teaching and sympathy; and great

works of duty. He went once to the theater, once to a ball, having no

scruples about the right of it, and scarce knowing that he could have.

But he never went again, simply because it did not meet his feeling,

and gave him no pleasure. He finally came to a settlement in New York,

where he was known many years as a man of dignity and power, nobly free

and joyous, fond of the young, and open to all humblest minds wanting

counsel, the most distinguished mark, and brightest ornament ever known

in the churches of that great city. From first to last his Christian

life was but a hymn.

At what point now did this remarkable servant of God pass his

conversion? Not when he was reading the book, but when he was looking

on the back of it; for there it was, in that little deliberation on the

label, and the nobly honest conclusion he accepted concerning it, that

his soul took hold of integrity, and sin was all reversed! The mere

resolve to accept it, if true, decided all. And therefore it was that

Christ met him in the book, with a revelation so blessed. Doubtless it

was the Spirit of God, working unseen, that drew him out in the

previous parley on the label; and every step of the change, nay, of his

whole life, was in some sense, worked by a power superior to his own

mere will. And yet he had a will, by that consented to believe what is

true, and live it in his life.

Now there is no man in this audience, however remote he may have been

from the thought of being a Christian, when he came into this place of

worship today, who has any thing more to do, in order to be one, than

to just come into the same really honest mind. You call not will to

believe what is true, and do all right, as fast as you can find it and

forever, and go out hence in your sins. Are you not ready my friends

for this new and nobler kind of life? Call you lie down tonight and

sleep outside of this blessed integrity? How can you think of yourself

with respect, as not being a Christian, when that which is demanded of

you is only what you think you are demanding of everybody. True, this

integrity we speak of is of a higher kind, and more real; is it

therefore less to be honored, and less promptly chosen?

And now in conclusion of my subject, I will only lay down God's

indorsement upon it and upon all that I have said, in a single, but

remarkable sentence of scripture. I wish it might be remembered, and

stay by you always, even from this hour till your last--"For the eyes

of the Lord run to and fro, through the whole earth, to show himself

strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." This

"perfect heart" means a right conscience, a clean, simple intent. And

the substance of the declaration is, that God is on the lookout always

for an honest man--him to help, and with him, and for him, to be

strong. And if there be one, that God will not miss of him; for his

desiring, all-searching eyes are running the world through always to

find him. And when he finds him, he will show himself to him in the

discovery even of his strength. I believe that he has sometimes found

such a man, even in the depths of heathenism, and to him been

discovered as the helping and strong friend he longed for. Many a

skeptic has he flooded with light, because he saw him willing, at last,

to be right, and hungering for something true. This perfect heart, this

soul of integrity, my friends--O if we had but this, what else could we

fail of? I repeat the word thus explained--put it down to be with you,

in your struggles with sin, your sickness, your poverty, your Christian

defects and drynesses, all the mind-clouds, all the guilt-clouds, of

your mortal state--"For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the

whole earth to show himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is

perfect toward him."

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X.

LIBERTY AND DISCIPLINE.

"As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they can not fast. But

the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them,

and then shall they fast in those days."--Mark ii, 19.

It is one of the honorable distinctions of Christ's doctrine that he is

never one-sided; never taken, as men are, with a half-view of a

subject, or a half-truth concerning it. If there is, for example, a

free side, or free element, in Christian life and experience, and also

a restrictive side; conditions and times of not fasting, and conditions

and times of fasting; he does not fall to setting one against the

other, but he comprehends both, and holds them in a true adjustment of

their offices and relations. John's disciples come to him in the

question, why he does not put his disciples to fasting, as their own

great prophet and the Pharisees do theirs? But instead of making light

of fasting, and calling it an old, ascetic practice, now gone by, as

many human teachers would have done, seeing only half the truth, and

rallying a party for the part they see, he simply replies--"every thing

in its time; the attendants of the bridegroom will, of course be wholly

in the festive mood, while the wedding is on foot, but when it is over,

they will fall into such other key as their personal condition

requires. My disciples can not fast while I am with them. But when I am

taken up they will turn themselves to such ways of fasting as their

deprivation, or bereaved feeling requires."

His answer, taken more spiritually, amounts to this: that when the love

is full, and the soul is consciously gladdened by the present witness

and felt impulse of God, any kind of restrictive, or severely

self-compelling discipline is inappropriate or uncalled for, and is

really out of place; but that when there is a failure of such divine

impulse, when the soul is losing ground, brought under by temptation,

groping in dryness and obscurity of light, then some sharp revision of

the life, some new girding up of the will in sacrifice and

self-discipline, is urgently demanded, and must not be declined. In

other words, let there be liberty in God while there may, girding up in

ourselves, by forced exercise and discipline, when there must; let the

soul go by inspiration when the gale of the Spirit is in it, and when

it has any way stifled or lost the Spirit, let it put itself down upon

duty by the will; when the divine movement is upon it, let it have its

festal day with the bridegroom, and when the better presence fades or

vanishes, let it set itself to ways of self-compulsion, moving from its

own human center.

Much the same general truth though differently conceived, is taught by

Paul when he represents the Christian soul as a coin having two seals

or mottoes, on the two sides; on the obverse, or face--"The Lord

knoweth them that are his;" on the reverse, or back--"Let every one

that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." It is as if

divine calling, endowment, and help were on one side; self-discipline,

watching, mortified lusting, and steady resolve on the other.

Liberty and discipline, movement from God's center and movement from

our own, sanctified inclination and self-compelling will, are the two

great factors thus of Christian life and experience. We may figure, in

a certain coarse analogy, that we live in a city having two supplies of

water for its aqueduct; one upon high ground back of it, whence the

water runs down freely along the inclinations of the surfaces; and the

other in some lake or river on its front; whence, in case that fails,

or the ducts give way, a supply is to be received by forcing, or the

dead lift of the pump. The water, however, is not created in this

latter case, you will observe, by the enforcement, but is taken, as in

the former, from the general supply of nature's store. So there are

ways of Christian living, where every thing goes by impulse, and a

gracious inspiration, flowing in, as it were, by its own free motion;

and other ways and times, where a self-compelling discipline of

sacrifice and painstaking are wanted to regain the irrigating grace

that was practically lost or shut away, by moods of inconstancy and

mixtures of subjection to evil.

It is very obvious that both these conceptions may be abused, or pushed

to excess, as in fact they always are when they are taken apart from

each other, and made a religion of. Thus we shall have, on one side,

just what has many times appeared in this or that variety, a school of

enthusiasts, living only in frames and for them, flighty, rhapsodical,

ecstatic, moving in the upper air on wings, till such time as they get

weary of their thin element, and consent, for comforts' sake, to light

upon the ground; when, of course, they do as the prophet's living

creatures did--"when they stood they let down their wings." Perhaps

they will spread them again, and perhaps not. They are all for

inspiration, or the state of divine impulse, and nothing else is to be

much accounted of. To be in this elysian state is piety, and if they

chance to fall out of it, or sink away, flagging and spent, as regards

their good excitabilities, they have no way of going on foot to think

of, that will prove their fidelity, and put them in a sober way of

blessing. They have no conception of a walking with God that is not

flying with him, and their high movement commonly ends, where

dissipation must, in a state of loose keeping, disability, and general

collapse.

On the other side, where every thing takes the shape of will-work and

discipline, the result will commonly be quite as bad. Sometimes the

word will be activity, and a general campaign of doing will set every

thing in a way of tumult, and aggressive motion. Responsible only for

action, action will come to be just the thing most irresponsibly done.

Hard, graceless, censorious, denunciatory, sometimes wild, and always

unchastened by the love it magnifies, it keeps the conflagration up

till the combustible matter is burned away, and then the fire goes out

of course. Sometimes the word is sacrifice, and then comes on the

dreary train of penances, vigils, vows of celibacy, mendicancy, and the

pallid funeral hosts marching out alive to be entombed in cells. All

these, making up a religion by their will, and the drill of their

passionless obedience, agree, in fact, to make as hard a time of it as

possible, and they will most fatally succeed; for it can not be long,

ere the discipline they covet as a religion, breaks down both will and

principle together, and shows them, alas! too perfect in the training

of uncharity, mendacity, sensuality, and lust.

I ought also, perhaps, to name two counterfeits that cover the ground

of both these particular excesses. Thus, on one side,: the argument

will be, "why should I do, or attempt to do in religion, what I can not

do in liberty, or from inclination? When I am not inclined to prayer

why should I pray? Why cross myself in duties which I only dislike? Why

put myself under service by rules that only annoy me, and do not bless

me? How can I imagine that God is pleased with me, when: he finds me

doing by compulsion, what he knows I distaste, and have really no heart

to?"

The assumption is, in this way of. speaking, that when there is real

inclination to the thing done, there is even something a little

remarkable in it; a kind of superlative, or superfine, merit, such as

discharges all thought of obligation respecting duties where such

inclination fails. And yet the supposed. inclination, having so great

value as to excuse all responsibility for inclination where there is

none, is even understood to be nothing but an occasional glow of

sentiment or desire, in the plane of nature; not any really divine or

supernaturally inbreathed impulse. It is not of the bridegroom, raises

no thought of any festal flow, in which Christ bathes their feeling. It

is even the end of the law, without Christ, in a much more summary and

complete sense that Christ himself could be; for it not only discharges

all obligation, but forbids any farther command--how can God command

what one is not inclined to already? and what he is inclined to needs,

of course, no command.

The counterfeit upon the other side, is that self-reliant morality,

which counts it a sufficient, or even a rather. superlative religion,

to live in correct practice under rules, and makes nothing of receiving

from God, or being in any consciously restored relationship with him.

Christ is engaged as a Saviour, I conceive, to connect human nature

with God, according to its normal idea, and have it regenerated, as by

God's restored movement in it--born of God. He wants to raise again the

very plane of our existence, lifting us up out of mere self-hood into a

state of divine consciousness and beatitude. This to him and this only

is religion. The beaver is not more certainly below humanity, than the

footing it along by mere rules, is a kind of life below the grade of

religion, or concourse with God. That high world of blessing too, for

which Christ has undertaken to prepare us, is not a world of good

morals, but of godly affinities and free inspirations, moved, and

lifted, and wafted, and glorified, and always to reign in God.

We have then two conceptions of Christian life and experience, which

Christ holds comprehensively together, but which his disciples are

often trying to hold separately, making a whole religion of either one

or the other; and then we have a counterfeit of each, contriving how to

make a religion of each, without the reality of either one or the

other. Let us see now if we can bring ourselves back into the

conception of Christ, and find how to hold with him both the two sides

at once; setting both in that genuine mutual relationship that belongs

to them. There is then

I. A ruling conception of the Christian life, which is called having

the bridegroom present; a state of right inclination established, in

which the soul has an immediate knowledge, or consciousness of God, and

is swayed in liberty, by His all-moving, supernatural, inspirations.

This kind of state, if it were complete, as it never is in this world,

would, of itself, be the all of perfection and of blessedness. The

whole aim of Christianity is fulfilled in this alone. No other kind of

service, taken by itself, at all meets the Christian idea.

Self-compelling ways of discipline, resolve, self-regulation,

body-government, soul-government, carried on by the will may be

wanted--I shall presently show in what manner--but no possible amount

of such doings can make up a Christian virtue, and, if such virtue were

perfect, they would not even be included in it. Every thing in genuine

Christianity goes for the free inclination. Here begins the true

nobility or princely rank of God's sons and daughters, and they will be

complete, when their inclination is wholly to good and to God. They

strike the point of magnanimity, when they do the right, as God does,

because they simply love the right--bearing burdens, because it is the

nature of love to bear them, making sacrifices, never from fear,

interest, self-consideration, always for God's great ends of mercy and

blessing. The bridegroom joy is now upon them, because their duty is

become their festivity with Christ. Perfected in this duty and joy,

they are complete in God's everlasting beatitude; for there is no wear

of friction in such duty, but eternal liberty and play rather. What

then

II. Is the place, or office, or value of that whole side of will and

self-discipline; which Christ himself assumes the need of, when the

bridegroom is to be taken away? Here is the main stress of our subject,

and upon the right solution of this point, its uses will principally

depend.

There is then, I undertake to say, one general purpose, or office, in

all doings of will, on the human side of Christian experience, viz.,

the ordering of the soul in fit position for God, that he may occupy

it, have it in his power, sway it by his inspirations. No matter what

the kind of doing to which we are called, or commanded; whether it be

self-government, or self-renunciation, or holy resolve, or fasting, or

steadfast waiting, the end is one and the same, the getting in position

for God's occupancy. As the navigator of a ship does nothing for the

voyage, save what he does by setting the ship to her course, and her

sails to the wind, so our human doings in religion, those I mean, which

make up our self-compelling, self-adjusting, self-constraining

discipline, are all to be concerned in setting us before God, in the

way to receive the actuating impulse of his will and character. We are

not called, of course, to work a religion thus, ourselves, Or by our

own will. Setting sails to the wind does not propel the ship, or give

it the least onward movement, as regards the voyage; and yet, without

such holding of it in position, the voyage could never be made. So also

a seed must have position, else it can not grow; if it is laid on a

rock, or buried in sand, or sunk in water, or frozen up in ice, it will

be inert as a stone; but in good warm soil, and sun, and rain; and dew,

it will quicken easily enough, because it is in position. A tree will

die out of position, a clock will stop out of position, a plough wants

holding, a saw wants guiding, a compass wants setting; nothing in the

world works rightly that has not position given it. And the reason is

that every thing to be operated upon must be fitly presented to that

which operates; telescopes to their objects, mills to water-falls, and

souls to God.

And here is our particular human part in religion--all that we can do

is summed up in self-presentation to God, or the putting of ourselves

in position for his operation. Hence the call to salvation is "come,"

and the complaint is, "ye will not come to me that ye might have life."

So also, when the casting down of pride and self-will is required, the

forsaking of all things, the yielding up of life and whatever is most

dear, these ways of self-renunciation are only the taking down of bars

that fence away God's entrance and free movement from the soul. Faith

again is made the condition of salvation, in just this view, and no

other; because, when a sinning soul trusts itself up to Christ, to be

cared for, regenerated in good, and saved by his mercy, it is put in

exactly the position toward God that is most open, and admits him most

freely; even as the brazen serpent, lifted up before Israel, was to be

effective in their healing, when looked upon. Out of position, with

their backs toward it, there was no virtue to be received from it,

because there was none expected or admitted.

So it is in the matter always of conversion, or the beginning of a new

life--it is always begun, just as soon as the subject comes into

position far enough to let it be. And then the same holds true of all

proper Christian doings afterward--they are all summed up, either in

keeping position toward God, or in regaining it after it is lost. Thus,

if by reason of a still partially remaining subjection to evil, the

soul should be stolen away from its fidelity and the nuptial day of its

liberty should somehow be succeeded by a void, dry state, without any

proper light or evidence left, then the disciple has it given him to

recover himself, by getting himself in position again before God. He

will take time by forcible resolve, and gird himself to a careful

revision. He will set himself upon his idols to clear them away, take

up his cross invoking sacrifice itself to be his helper, rectify his

misjudgments, make good his injuries, slay his resentments and grudges,

mortify his appetites, crucify his bosom sins, tear open all the

subtleties of distemper and treason--watching all the while his new

beginnings, saving carefully his little advances, doing first works

humbly and tenderly, and by this drawing into position, will, if

possible, make ready for the festal coming of his Lord, and the

restored liberty of a son.

In this kind of struggle the disciple will get on most effectively,

when for the time, he is much by himself, and much apart from the

world, and even its pleasurable scenes and gifts. In one view, there

will be a certain violence, or desperation sometimes in the fight of

his repentances. "For behold what carefulness it wrought in you; yea

what clearing of yourselves; yea what indignation; yea what fear; yea

what vehement desire; yea what zeal; yea what revenge." By these stern

rigors of will, these mighty throes of battle, the disciple out of

liberty will in fact be only putting himself in position to recover it.

He takes himself in hand in fiery self-chastening, and rigidly enforced

subjection, that he may prepare himself to God's help. He gets

confidence in this manner, by his thoroughness, to believe that God

accepts him, and has the testimony given him that he pleases God.

Restored in this manner to his liberty, the enemy that came in at the

postern goes out at the front, and God again will have his full

dominion.

Neither let any one object that all such stresses and strains of

endeavor must be without merit) because they are forced and are, in one

sense, without inclination. Such kind of endeavor God honors because it

is practical, and not for the merit of it. What should he more

certainly honor than the true endeavor of souls to present themselves

to him, and get position for the complete admission of his will. If

these struggles of enforcement do not belong to the perfect state of

good, it must be enough that they are struggles after that state. God

is practical; and without prudishness; if nothing is really good: to

him that is not from the heart's inclination, he will yet be drawn to

such struggles against inclination, as he is to the cries of the

ravens, and will put his benediction upon them, under that same

fatherly impulse, if no other.

Holy scripture has no such dainty way of reasoning in this matter, as

they give us, who, by affected reverence, excuse themselves from all

rough discipline, because they have no inclination for it. It even

commands us to serve, when we are not in a key to reign. "Mortify

therefore, your members which are upon the earth"--do men mortify

themselves by inclination? "Ye have crucified the flesh with its

affections and lusts"--do we this self-crucifying by inclination? "Deny

thyself, take up thy cross"--do we deny ourselves by inclination, or

take up the cross for inclination's sake? When Christ again, to get a

certain rich moralist or formalist into position for God, bids him sell

all that he has and give to the poor and come and follow--whereupon he

"goes away sorrowful"--does the sad questioner sorrow because he is

required to have his inclination? The Saviour too has even a more

cutting requirement than this--"And if thy right eye offend thee pluck

it out; if thy right hand offend thee cut it off." Is there any thing

in which we are farther off from inclination, than in plucking out

right eyes and cutting off right hands? What in fact is the very point

of the Saviour's meaning here but to say, put your will down upon

whatever is hardest and most against your inclinations--any thing for

position.

How feeble, superficial, sophistical, and withal, how very like to a

practical mockery of all deep movement in religion is that word so

often ventured, and of which I have already spoken--"Why should I pray

when I do not feel inclined to it? Why should I go to church, why

should I read the scriptures, why should I give alms, why should I hold

myself to observances, all which I am weary of, and in fact really

dislike? If I can not offer God from the heart, what better is my

offering given than withheld? Just contrary to all such feeble

platitudes Christ, we have seen, appoints a grandly rugged, thoroughly

real, massive, discipline, by which souls, at best only half inserted

into good are to hold on their way: and press themselves down upon the

constancy their fickle hearts would fly. Filling them to the full, if

he possibly may with holy inspirations and loving impulses, he counts

even this a gospel on one foot, if he may not also put them every man

to a hard fight of discipline, and watch, and drill and resisting even

unto blood. When the inspiration is upon them, he will let the festive

movement flow in its liberty. And when the grace-power lulls or is

gone, he will have them take their turn of discipline, to gather up by

their will, and bring into position for God's occupancy, all their

vagrant and unsteady functions; so to strengthen the things that remain

and are ready to die. These two things, in fact, he will hold, if

possible at all times, to a close and practically guarded

comprehension, the festive and the restrictive, the movement of love

and the self-girding watch.

But I should not produce any just impression of the immense reach of

this very practical matter--the so ordering of our life, on the side of

self-discipline, as to be always squaring ourselves to God, and holding

true position before Him--if I did not specify some of the humbler and

more common matters in which it is to be, or may be, done.

Order, for example--how great a thing is it for a Christian, or indeed,

for any one, to keep his life and practice and business in the terms of

order? Holding himself steady, and squaring his habit thus carefully by

system in God's will, his very order is itself position--the orbit he

traverses having God to traverse it with him; and the worlds of the sky

will not be more surely and steadily moved in their rounds, than he by

God's impelling liberty. Fallen out of this order into all disorder and

confusion, how can he ever be in position for God, till he comes back

into the exactness and true discipline of the same?

A responsible way has the same kind of value. An irresponsible man has

no place for God or God's liberty. But a soul that stays fast in

concern for all good things--responsible for the church, for the

brethren, for the welfare and salvation of perishing men, for the vices

and woes of society, for the good of the country--is just so far in

position with God, and ready for his best inspirations. God loves

responsible men, and delights to keep them in the full endowment of

strength and liberty.

Openness and boldness for God, the readiness to be found on God's side

in the full acknowledgment of his name and people, is an absolute

requisite, as regards the effective revelation of God in the soul.

Whoever will not thus acknowledge God, in a bold commitment of himself

before the world to his cause, wants the firm courage and manly truth

of feeling which puts him in position. Real and bold devotement is

magnanimity, and where there is nothing of one, there is nothing of the

other--as little receptivity therefore for God. God loves to be

trusted, and loves the men that can boldly take their part with him.

When they stand openly for his name, he stands by them, and puts his.

might upon them.

Descending to what is in a still humbler key, let me speak of

honesty--how a large and faithfully complete honesty puts every soul in

true position before God. A single eye--that is honesty; and "if thine

eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." But the honesty

of which I thus speak, is more and higher, you will observe, than mere

commercial honesty. That will do justice to customers and laws of

trade, but not to enemies, and least of all, to God. There is no

reality in it therefore, more than there would be in doing justice to

customers of one country, or color, and not to those of another. Called

honesty in the market, it still may, and, many times, certainly is,

hypocrisy and a lie. Real honesty takes in principle, engaging to do

justice every where, every way, every day, and specially to God's high

truth and God. O, what a presentation that to invite the incoming of

God! Who is in position for God but he that will clear himself, thus

impartially, of every wrong and injury; and how certainly will God's

spirit flow into such a bosom, in how full a. tide of liberty! How

completely open here is the gate of possibility for all greatest and

divinest things!

I could speak of things yet humbler and more common; such, for example,

as dress and society. These are matters which we commonly put even

outside of the pale of religious concern, or responsibility. And yet

there is how much in them to fix the soul's position toward God. How

perfectly evident is it that one may dress for the Holy Spirit and the

modest opening of the soul to God's manifestation; or so as to quite

shut away any possible visitation from the divine. In the same way,

society may be observed in such a way of sobriety and grandly true

hospitality, that angels, much more Christ and God, will gather to it

unawares; or in such a way of ambition, flashiness, and worldly

assumption, that the Holy Spirit can not get room in it for any

smallest dispensation of his gracious impulse. I speak not here for any

sumptuary, or morbidly scrupulous, restriction. I only say that there

may be enough, in the modes of dress and society, to quite settle the

matter of the soul's position toward God.

Not pursuing these illustrations further, it must be enough that we

have found, and practically verified two elements in Christian life and

experience, liberty and discipline, God's free movement and our own

self-constraining will. That is the heavenly state of blessing and

perfection; this our human concern to get, as in conversion, recover,

as in dryness and decay; or keep, as in all most ordinary goings on of

life, the position toward God that commands his bestowment of the

other.

But what, of fasting? the very thing about which my text is itself

concerned, and about which I have said as nearly nothing as possible.

In one view it is even so; in another I have been speaking of nothing

else; for the whole course of argument pursued has been tracing its fit

place and relationship, as an integral part, or factor, of the true

Christian discipline.

Are we then to allow, some will ask, that fasting belongs to

Christianity? I certainly think so. Did not Christ himself declare that

his disciples should fast after he was gone? Did he not also begin his

great ministry, by a protracted fast, which duly considered, and

rightly conceived, constitutes one of the grandest and most impressive

chapters of his story? It is easy, doubtless, to assume, in

self-compliment, that we have now come to an age of maturity that

permits us to conceive the Christian grace more worthily, but no such

assumption will be very impressive as against the example of Christ

himself! Some will also maintain, more argumentatively, that fasting is

a bodily penance, excluded by the genius of Christianity; but when

Christ is heard, in his great, first, sermon, discoursing of it just as

he does of prayer and of alms, and giving it exactly the same promise

of reward, the conclusion appears to be not far off that, either they

do not, or Christ did not, understand Christianity!

It is a great mistake of many, in our time, that they are so easily

carried by a certain half-illuminated declamation against asceticism.

Let us have nerve enough to withstand the odium of a word, and be less

superficial, and just as much stronger in our practical life. For there

is--I put the issue boldly that it may not be missed--a good asceticism

that belongs to Christianity, as a worthy and even rationally integral

function; the same which an apostle describes when he says, "I exercise

myself (asko) to have a conscience void of offense." By which he means

that he puts himself to it by the direct training of his will, even as

a rider trains a horse by the rein.

In this good asceticism, we take ourselves away purposely, when it

seems to be needed, from society, from gain, and from animal

indulgence, that we may assert, with more emphasis, the principle of

self-subjection to God, or gird ourselves anew to the divine keeping.

Thrusting down a whole side of our nature that habitually assumes to be

uppermost, we get in this manner a powerful shove of reaction; for the

great law of action and reaction holds universally, both in the worlds

of matter and mind. In this manner painstaking itself is a great

element of success; not because it is the taking of so much pain, as if

there were some merit in that, but because the mind gets a confidence

of honest meaning in it, such as nerves the soul to sacrifice, and

gives it assurance with God. Christianity, as I have Shown, takes in

this element. Filling us with great inspirations, it puts us to a stout

self-discipline also, that we may get position for still greater, and a

still more victorious liberty.

Over against this good asceticism, there is also a false and a bad, as

already intimated. It makes a virtue of self-torment, contrives

artificial distresses to move on God's pity, or pacify his resentments,

or purchase his favor. It macerates the body to make the soul weak and

tender. It dispenses, in fact, with faith itself, and even thinks to

square its account with God, by a due contribution of bodily pains and

privations.

This bad asceticism we exclude, the good we accept. And in this, we

shall train ourselves, sometimes even naturally, by a fast. If we are

mortified by the discovery that the body is getting uppermost, if our

Sundays are choked, our great sentiments stifled, by indulgences of the

body we meant not to allow, we shall turn upon it in this good

asceticism, and say to it, with a meaning--"I keep under the body." In

the same way, if we can not find how to bear an enemy, if we recoil

from sacrifices that are plainly laid upon us, if we have no great

courage to meet a great call, we shall emulate the example of

Cromwell's soldiers, who conquered first the impassive state, by their

fastings and prayers, and then sailing into battle as men ironclad,

conquered also their enemies; or better still, we shall emulate those

martyrs, who could sing in the crisp of their bodies, because they had

trained their bodies to serve. So again if we are losing ground,

getting under the world, heated by prosperity, soured by

disappointment, bittered by resentments and grudges, we shall do well

to seek the wilderness, taking our temptation with us to be mastered.

So again if we have some great crisis upon us, even as our Master had,

some turn of life to settle that will settle every thing; or if we have

great endowments coming upon us, or coming out in us, that we must be

responsible for--property, place, eloquence, fame, beauty, genius--what

a girding do we need to meet our occasions, or even to effectually

stifle the nonsense of pride and foolish suggestion. O, if we could set

ourselves in position thus for God's call and his Christly

inspirations, how cheap the discipline would be.

Observed on occasions like these, a fast will sometimes wonderfully

clear the atmosphere of the mind. The sentiments will be quickened in

their play. The imagination, which is a great organ for religion, will

get a more reverberative ring. The conscience will become at once more

rigid and more tender. All the powers will be girded up, and God will

have the soul in position, waiting to be filled with his eternal life

and vigor.

No such good results of fasting will follow, or will be expected, where

it is improperly observed. No one should ever go into a fast, when he

has the bridegroom consciously with him. Such fasting is untimely.

Turning sunshine into night, and making misery gratis, when we are not

miserable, is any thing but Christian, though alas! some very good

people do sometimes make a merit of it.

Some persons, who are not practiced in the art, so to speak, of

fasting, complain that they are only troubled and mentally confused by

their hunger, and get no advantage from it. But when they have learned

the way to set their mind facing Godward, instead of facing the body,

and moving in the low range of the gastric energy, it will not be

so--they will even forget to be hungry. It might be well for such to

begin with a prolonged half-fast, or Lenten reduction, instead of

abstinence. Feeding the body circumspectly thus, as between cage bars,

they may still the growling of nature, and learn, at last how to get a

spring of reaction for the mind. A prolonged bridle check upon the body

is good both for it and for the rider; for what both most especially

need is to get accustomed to the rein!

At the same time, fasting should always be a reality, never a

semblance. To pretend a fast, when all the routine of table, office,

and shop, is still going on as usual, is to make a cheat of it; such as

takes away the mind's honor, and leaves a most sorry conviction of

hypocrisy in place of any benefit. But let no one make the fast

excessive under pretense of making it real. It should never amount to a

maceration of the body; though sometimes the benefit gained by a

disciple will even tempt him to make a luxury of it. Let it be a rule

that the fasting should never be more frequent or more stringent, than

is necessary to maintain, for the long run of time, the very clearest,

strongest, healthiest, condition both of mind and body. For the

digestive function wants its Sabbaths, just as truly as any other, and

will keep the soundest health when it has them.

Instead of recoiling now, my brethren from this more rugged kind of

discipline, there ought even to be a fascination in the severities of

it. As it is profoundly real and earnest, it will also make us strong.

How often are we oppressed with the feeling that our modern piety wants

depth and spiritual richness. It is as if it were in the skin and not

in the heart--thin, flashy, flavorless, destitute of the heroic and

sturdy qualities. It never can be otherwise, till we consent to endure

some hardness, or at least to find some way of painstaking. The

gymnastic we are in must be strong enough to make muscle, else we shall

not have it. Hence the profound necessity, as I conceive, that there

should be an ascetic side or element in this free salvation, where the

disciple "exercises himself," as the apostle has it, putting himself in

training and self-chastening for success. For as the competitors in

games of wrestling, and rowing, and racing, do not despise the toughest

severities of training for the victory, no more should the Christian

repel that nobler discipline that is to be the girding of his

character. It would not do, for a way of grace, to only fondle or codle

us, in tenderings of favor and soft mercy and overflowing bounty; we

could not be floated into the heights of character by any such gentle

tide-swing as many look for, and conceive to be the grace offered to

their faith. Such a kind of treatment qualified by nothing more sturdy

and severe, might even soften the brain of our piety. No, there must be

an ascetic self-girding for us, as well as a gracious impulsion,

something which is more than fasting, but of which that is a type.

There needs to be a side of tough endeavor, in which we undertake a

mighty becoming,. even punishing ourselves, so to speak, into right

position for God. We must come into the vise of a rugged and fiery

self-discipline, where, if we wince for the severities suffered, we

still forbid our cowardly, soft, nature to yield. If there is to be any

fibre in our character, there must be a Spartan discipline to make it.

There was never a strong Christian, or a Christian hero, that did not

put himself to being a Christian with cost. To be merely wooed by

grace, and tenderly dewed by sentiment, makes a Christian mushroom, not

a Christian man. It is even difficult to conceive, how those angels

that excel in strength, and are called the chariots of God, ever got

their vigor without some fit training; nay, it is most certain that

they never did. So much meaning has our master, when charging it upon

us, again and again, without our once conceiving possibly what depth of

meaning he would have us find in his words--Deny thyself, take up thy

cross and follow me.

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XI.

CHRIST'S AGONY, OR MORAL SUFFERING.

"And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was, as

it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground."--Luke xxii,

44.

What Christian has not many times wished that he could lay hold of the

precise condition and feeling of Jesus, in this very remarkable scene

or chapter, commonly called his agony? And yet a suspicion may well be

indulged that we not seldom push it quite away from us, and make it

unrealizable, by dogmatic solutions that rather confound than solve it.

Mystery, in some sense, it certainly is, and must be; for the person

itself of Christ is, internally viewed, a mystery, and the What and

how, of his personal pains, in what part they affect him, under what

laws of intensity, and by what internal force he is able to support

them, we can never know, till we understand his psychology itself--as

we certainly shall not here on earth.

Still the agony is given us, because it can somehow be seen to be for

us; yielding impressions of Christ and of God, manifested in him, which

it is important for us to receive. And to receive these impressions

from it is, at least so far, to understand it. All the more to be

regretted is it, if we interpose theologic constructions that make it

impossible to all receptive sympathy. Thus if we conceive, or

dogmatically assume, that Christ is in this hour of distress, because

the sin of the world is upon him, to be punitively treated in his

person; that God withdraws judicially from him, to make him suffer, and

that the "cup" over which he groans is the cup of God's eternal

indignations; may it not be that we ourselves so far violate the

subject matter, as to make it an offense to our most inborn convictions

of right, and raise up mutinous questions that even forbid the

discovery of its meaning to our hearts?

A much less artificial, tenderer, and, I think I shall be able to show,

truer and more affecting conception of the agony is, that it rises

naturally out of the perfect feeling, and the personal relations and

exigences of the sufferer. Such. a being, on such a mission, meeting

such objects of feeling, at such a crisis, will have just this agony,

without any infliction to produce it.

The facts of the scene briefly and freely related are these. The

Saviour, attended by his disciples, goes up into a dell on the slope of

Olivet, and enters a certain garden or olive yard, where he had often

before communed with them apart. He requires them to sit down. But

there is something peculiar in his manner. A feeling of depression

makes him droop in his action, and gives a drooping accent to his

voice. He signifies to three of their number that he wants their

company while he goes forward a little way, to pray. Heretofore he has

commonly sought to be alone in prayer, going apart at dead of night,

and ascending this or that high mountain top, there to be closeted with

God in solitude. The depression that before appeared now becomes a

crushing weight upon him. In the language of the narrative, he begins

to be sorrowful and very heavy. He speaks too, unable to suppress his

feeling--"My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." And then he

adds what indicates even greater anguish, such as almost takes away his

self-possession--"do not leave me, do not sleep, stay here and watch

with me!" He goes forward a few steps, falling upon his face, which is

the eastern posture of extreme sorrow and despair, and there he cries

aloud--"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." He

rises and turns back to his friends, but the weight is still heavy on

his heart, and he throws himself again upon his face. And he does it

again, even a third time. There is also given us, in the narrative made

out by Luke, the pathology of his feeling--"And being in an agony, he

prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was, as it were, great drops of

blood falling down to the ground." Which is the same as to say, that

the agony of feeling he was in was so intense that, under the laws of

bodily affection, there were forced out, through the pores of the skin,

large drops resembled to blood. An ancient writer reports the fact of a

bloody sweat, or a sweat exceeding like to blood, produced by the bite

in India of a poisonous serpent, and the same thing is reported, I

believe, as a result of certain bodily diseases that produce very

intense suffering. But the symptom is none the less peculiar here,

since it is not the effect of any poison, or physical pain, but of a

purely mental anguish.

Thus far, as relates to the agony, or crisis of pain itself, reported

in the narrative. Other points relating to his conduct in the scene,

will come into view as we inquire into the causes of the agony, and

need not be recited. Whence and why, this very strange crisis of mental

anguish? According to a very common impression, as already intimated,

the suffering has a judicial character, and is to be taken as a

theologic factor, in a scheme of retributive justice. The conception is

that Christ has somehow come into the place of transgressors, to

receive upon his person what is due to them, and that God, accepting

him in that office, launches upon him the abhorrence or displeasure,

that is clue to them; inflicting upon him, as it were, deserved pains

by withdrawing from him and letting fall upon him the horror of

darkness under which he groans. The facts of the narrative have been so

frequently, or even habitually, submitted to this construction, that

our first concern will be to make a revision of the facts, ascertaining

how far they give it their support.

Thus it is alleged, as a striking peculiarity of the scene, that the

suffering appears, on a merely human footing, to be out of place.

Before the arrest, in a quiet place out of the city, at a still hour of

the night, when he has all his friends about him, and judging by

outward tokens, has far less reason to apprehend violence from his

enemies than he has had many times before--such is the time and place,

where Jesus falls into his dreadful agony and great horror of distress.

In which he certainly appears to be exercised in a way that is not

human, invaded by a suffering that can not on mere human principles be

accounted for. And this fact favors the conviction, it is imagined,

that he suffers because some mysterious judicial infliction is

descending upon him, from a source invisible. But such a conclusion is

rather made up theologically for the scene, than drawn from the facts

themselves. No single intimation of any such thing is, either contained

in the facts, or given out by the narrative.

Again his language, in the figure of the "cup"--"if this cup may not

pass away from me except I drink it"--is taken as favoring the idea of

some suffering, in the nature of infliction. But do we not use the same

kind, of language ourselves, having still no such thought as that the

cup of anguish we speak of, or pray to have taken away, is a judicial

infliction? This figure too of the cup is used, in scripture, for all

kinds of experience, whether joyful, or painful. Thus we have the "cup

of salvation," "the cup of consolation," "the cup of trembling," "of

fury," "of astonishment," "of desolation." Whatever God sends upon a

man to be deeply felt, and by whatever kind of Providence, whether

benignant, or disciplinary, or retributive, is called his cup. How then

does it follow, when Christ speaks of his cup, that it is a cup of

judicial chastening? Besides, does he not say to his followers--"ye

shall indeed drink of my cup;" and is any thing more fixed in this

penal view of Christ's agony, than that no human being can, at all,

participate in such matter of atonement? And, that being true, his cup,

as he himself speaks, can not, in this particular instance at least,

have reference to any penal suffering, and probably has not in any

other.

Again the agony is accounted for as having been caused by the judicial

withdrawment of the Father; leaving him to feel the weight, in his

human person, of that displeasure which is due to the sins of the

world, now upon him. There is no intimation whatever, to this effect in

the narrative, but his exclamation afterward, in the scene of the

cross--"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me,"--is carried back to

the agony to fix this construction upon it. But there is not the least

reason to suppose that Christ means literally to say, in the

exclamation referred to, that God has forsaken him. Did he not comfort

himself but a short time previous, in the assurance--"therefore doth my

Father love me, because I lay down my life for the sheep?" how then can

he imagine that God is forsaking him, in just the sacrifice for which

he loved him? Nay it was only an hour ago that he was saying, in the

dearest confidence, and in tender appeal even to the Father--"I have

glorified thee on the earth, and now I come to thee." Besides it is

represented by Luke, in his account of the agony itself, that an angel

is sent unto him to strengthen him; does God then send his angels to

support whom he himself forsakes? And again, when he says in his

prayer, three times repeated--"Not as I will but as thou wilt," what

does he indicate, according to all human methods of judgment, but the

dearest present confidence in God and repose in his favor? It must also

be noted, again, that, between the agony and the crucifixion, and even

before he leaves the garden, he formally declares just this confidence,

saying--"Thinkest thou that I can not now pray to my Father, and he

shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" The whole

account in short, is crowded full of the most decisive proofs that he

does not himself imagine any such thing as that he is forsaken of God

and judicially given up to suffering. Let it also be observed, that

when he utters the cry, "why hast thou forsaken me," he is just reeling

out of life; requiring his outcry therefore to be taken as a mere

interjectional utterance of distress. Nothing could be further from him

than to be protesting God's severity thus, in the article of death.

But he does it nevertheless, some one will say; for if we take his

words interjectionally, why should he vent his sufferings by the outcry

of what is not true? Because, I answer, the not true is often the most

vehemently, best uttered truth. Thus when Jonathan and his armor bearer

broke into the camp of the Philistines, the wild commotion, or panic,

they two raised in the army, and the garrison, and all the people, is

described by saying, "and the earth quaked; so there was a very great

trembling." Does any one suppose that the earth really quaked on that

occasion, or is it said only to set off the trembling? So when Paul, in

the shipwreck, says, "not one hair of your head shall perish," it is

not impossible that a good many hairs of the multitude were lost in

their drifting ashore. He only said there should not, as a way of

promising the safe landing more emphatically. Outcries too, of this

kind are always to be taken freely, as the utterance of tragic feeling,

or suffering, not as the language of historic allegation. Exactly so

Zion cries in her distress, "the Lord hath forsaken me;" when

immediately God answers, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my

hands." It will be a great day, I must add, for the scriptures, when

the dull soul of dogmatism has done with its undiscerning inflictions;

when poetry is taken for poetry, passion for passion, and the

hyperbolic intensities of interjection, never again for propositional

statements.

I will further add what ought, by a short method, to finish the

argument, apart from all criticism on the terms of the narrative, that

the absolute morality of God makes any such withdrawment of the Father

impossible. That eternal goodness should forsake goodness in suffering,

and even to make it suffer, in a way of gaining ulterior ends or

advantages however merciful, is to pawn the eternal chastities of

character for ends of beneficence; which, as certainly as God is God,

will never be done.

Dismissing now this artificial, over-theological, way of conceiving the

agony as a judicial infliction, let us endeavor

Secondly to find the spring of it, in a way that looks to the simple

character and conditions of the sufferer himself. I greatly mistake, if

it does not so become, at once, more intelligible, and as much more

effective on our feeling, as it is closer to the range of our human

sympathies.

That it is not resolvable into fear is, I think, sufficiently evident.

It is quite incredible that a character of such transcendent worth and

majesty should be thus appalled, thus miserably shaken, or dissolved,

by fear of any kind. Besides, in fear the blood flies the skin, rushing

back upon the heart, and leaving a deadly pallor over the whole

exterior aspect; while here we have a kind of agony that racks the

soul, in some way, at the very center of life, forcing the blood

outward and driving it even through the skin. In which we may see as

conclusively as possible, that fear, the common human weakness, had

nothing to do with his suffering. It must also be noticed that the

account given of his agony does not call it fear. It simply declares

that he was sorrowful, "exceeding sorrowful," a state which has nothing

to do with fear.

And yet he is shaken, somehow, in a degree that would not be considered

honorable in a man of ordinary spirit, when about to die. Not only does

the very great and wise man Socrates surpass him in the noble composure

of his last hours, but thousands of malefactors even have received the

sentence of death for their crimes, with a better show of serenity and

self-possession.

We have a great matter then to account for, viz., that Jesus Christi

the incarnate Word of God, a being who has never had to acknowledge a

sin, or had the feeling of it, a perfect character who has confronted

every sort of peril in his works of mercy, one who shows the most

perfect confidence in God and the final success of his cause, is yet

somehow shaken by the most dreadful agony--rent as it were asunder, by

his agitated sensibility--when he meets the prospect of death.

The first thing that occurs to us is that this agony can not be simply

human. It visibly exceeds, in its degree, all that we know of human

sensibility. Calling it then divine, if only we could think it possible

for the divine sensibility to be a suffering sensibility, the question

would begin to open. That this suffering sensibility should not

fearfully wrench, and burden even to crushing, the human vehicle it

occupies, is scarcely credible. A suffering that exceeds the

proportions of the vehicle must needs appear by violent symptoms--even

as a powerful engine in a frail, light-timbered vessel, must needs make

it groan heavily, or shake it even to wreck.

What then is the fact? Is there any sensibility in God that can suffer?

is He ever wrenched by suffering? Nothing is more certain. He could not

be good, having evil in his dominions, without suffering even according

to his goodness. For what is goodness but a perfect feeling? and what

is a perfect feeling but that which feels toward every wrong and misery

according to its nature? And thus it is that we freely impute to him,

whether we observe it or not, every sort of painful sensibility that is

related to bad and suffering subjects. We conceive of him as feeling

displeasure, which is the opposite of pleasure. We ascribe it as one of

his perfections that he compassionates, which means that he suffers

with, the fallen. We conceive that he loathes what is disgusting, hates

what is cruel, suffers long what is perverse, grieves, burns, bears,

forbears, and is even afflicted for his people, as the scripture

expressly declares. All which are varieties of suffering. We also

ascribed it to God, as one of his perfections, that he is impassible;

but here, if we understand ourselves, we mean that he is physically

impassible, not that he is morally so. Moral impassibility is really to

have no sensibilities of character, which is far as possible from being

any perfection. Indeed there is a whole class of what are called

passive virtues that can not, in this view, belong to God at all, and

his perfection culminates without including more than half the

excellencies demanded even of us, in the range of our humble, finite

capacity.

There is then, we conclude, some true sense, in which even God's

perfection requires him to be a suffering God--not a God unhappy, or

less than perfectly, infinitely, blessed; for, though there be many

subtractions from his blessedness, there is never a diminution; because

the consciousness of suffering well brings with it, in every case and

everlastingly, a compensation which, by a great law of equilibrium in

his and all spiritual natures, fully repays the loss; just as Christ,

assailed by so many throes of suffering sensibility--in the temptation,

in his ministry, in the garden--still speaks of his joy, and bequeathes

it as a gift most real and sublime to his followers.

Now it is this suffering sensibility of God that most of all needed to

be revealed, and brought nigh to human feeling, in the incarnate

mission of Jesus; not being revealed in any sufficient measure through

nature and the providential history of men. It was necessary for us to

feel God in his feeling, to know him in his passive virtues--his

patience, forbearance of enemies, compassion, pity, sympathy, and above

all, his deep throes of love, agonizing for the salvation of

transgressors and wanderers from his fold. This, accordingly, is just

what we are to look for in the agony so called, viz., a true discovery

to our hearts of God's intensity and depth, in those suffering virtues

by which his transcendently sovereign nature is exercised.

Christ then, we shall expect to find, suffers in his agony, not because

it is put upon him judicially from without, but only as his better

nature should and must in the crisis that has overtaken him. Not to

particularize further, two great sources, or causes of anguish open

upon him at once; firstly the chastity of his pure feeling recoils,

with horror, from the hell-gulf of wrong and wild judicial madness into

which he is now descending; and secondly the love he has for his

enemies brings a burden of concern upon his heart, that oppresses and,

for the time, well nigh crushes him. Of these two modes or kinds of

anguish I will speak in their order.

Christ, is a being of unsullied innocence, or even of divine purity,

though incarnated into the corporate evil and retributive disorder of

the world, to bear its liabilities and be himself a part of it. This

retributive disorder of the race is what is called in scripture "the

curse;" and, being himself a man, he is just so far in it as he is

human. In all his previous ministry--in his temptation, in his

healings, in the arts of hypocrisy and the cruelties of wrong he has

encountered, he has been struggling often with the sense of recoil, or

even with pungent visitations of horror difficult to be suppressed. But

now, as he nears the great crisis of his life, he beholds the corporate

evil, or curse, gathering itself up to a deed upon his sacred person,

that will display just all that is most horrible in it. He is not

afraid, but his pure feeling shudders at the madness which is ready to

burst upon him--shudders even the worse that it is to be judicial

madness. For, though God is not going to deal judicially with him, he

does perceive that the rage of sin, ordinarily restrained and

graciously softened by God's Spirit, is now to be let forth in his

betrayers and crucifiers, in just the madness that judicially belongs

to it--so to glass itself before conviction, in a deed of murder upon

the only perfect being that ever trod the world, nay a deed of murder

upon divine love itself! This it is that, in sad note of warning, he

testifies, when his enemies come shortly after, to arrest him--"For

this is your hour, and the power of darkness." He refers to no power of

darkness, as many contrive to understand, upon himself; it is darkness

upon them, his enemies--judicial darkness, the full, unmitigated,

natural curse of wrong. This is "the cup" over which he groans, and

which he is now to drink; the wormwood and the vinegar of the world's

wild malice. The suffering and death are penal upon him, only in the

sense that all martyrs suffer penally, when the corporate judgments of

God upon their wicked times and wicked fellow-men, infuriate and even

dehumanize their natural feeling. But the martyrs are sinners,

suffering as such at the point of their faith; he is the sinless,

suffering at the point of his innocence. They suffer as men, still

bronzed in their susceptibility, by the old demoralization of sin; he

as the celestial one, and as a pure superhuman feeling must. The recoil

of his horror is dreadful, quite unimaginable probably by us, and his

poor human vehicle breaks under the shock, even as a stranded ship

under the heavy blows of the sea. He groans aloud, falls upon his face,

calls to his friends to stay by him, utters anguished cries to God,

shows discolored drops resembled to blood exuding from his

face--suffers in a word more incontinently, a great deal, than either

soldier, philosopher, or man of spirit should, nay than many a

malefactor would! And so, it truly seems to me, that he ought: for who

of all mankind had ever a tithe of his sensibility to evil. Indeed one

of the most difficult things for us mortals is to be duly shocked by

wrong and feel a just horror of its baseness. Impassive to fear, even

as God himself, he is yet wrenched all through, in every fiber of

sensibility, by the appalling and practically monstrous scene before

him--human creatures!--creatures in God's image!--going to crucify

their Divine Friend from above!--God's messenger and their Saviour! By

their bloody hands he is himself to die! Verily it is given unto men to

die, but ah! it was not given unto him. Death has no rights against

him. Nothing but the corporate liability of his incarnation puts him

under it. He shudders in throes of recoil, even as God's pure angels

would, meeting such a death; nay more and worse, as he has a vaster

nature, and a deeper sensibility, with only a human apparatus to

support the shock!

Now this suffering of the agony is the suffering, in one sense, of

justice, answering doubtless many of the uses conceived by those who

contrive to make it a suffering divinely inflicted. It is a suffering

that he undergoes in God's retributive order. In one view it is the

curse that murders him, being that power of darkness and corporate evil

that has come upon the world, as disordered and shaken out of God's

harmony, by the recoil of transgression. His very incarnation had put

him into or under it, and he would not even by the power of miracle

push the liability away; for it was one of his purposes to offer such a

tribute of respect to God's retributive order, as would sanctify it in

the feeling, and fix it in the convictions of mankind. Thus, by his

power of miracle, he could have made to himself a testudo, so to speak,

of inviolable protection against the rage of his enemies, but he

preferred instead to suffer just what men are suffering, in that penal

disorder and social dislocation, which God, in judgment, has appointed

for the fact of sin. It was in his heart to let God's justice have its

due honors, breaking out, at no one point, from the fiery liability

into which he had come, in becoming a man. He consented thus to let the

hell which scorches wrong scorch him too, claiming no exception even

for his innocence. Behold, he would say, O man, God's sacrament of

wrath that is on thee, revealed by the wrath its poison stirs within

thee; and because it is the ordinance of his justice, bear witness that

I spurn it not, neither ask that my integrity excuse me from it! Sacred

it shall be because it is right; and being for man as man, a power of

darkness for all sin, I will take the bitter cup for thy sake! Only

this be noted, since the malediction working in thee will not suffer

even goodness to live, how certain it is that blindness, madness,

murder, all that is called hell, goes with thy sin, whose eternally

just and sufficient penalty it is that it shall live in its own fires,

and be itself!

After such a tribute paid to the instituted justice of God, who will

imagine that the forgiveness of penitent souls will loosen the joints

of governmental order? By this submission of Christ to man's curse or

lot of penalty--penalty in no other sense to him--an impression will be

made for God's justice, and a sting of conviction sharpened against

sin, that will even start a new sense of his law, and the penal order

of his rule in the hearts of all mankind. Even as Christ himself

anticipated when he said--"Of sin because they believed not on me."

Also as it was anticipated for him that under and by his suffering

mission, "the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed." And again,

still further back, in the ancient prophecy--"They shall look on me

whom they have pierced." All which was to be signally proved by the

result of his crucifixion--"And all the people that came together to

that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts

and returned." When had they ever felt the horrible nature and the

justly damning power of their sin as now?

It remains to speak of yet another and very distinct kind of suffering

included in the agony, viz., the suffering Christ bore on account of

his love. As he recoiled in horror from the spirit and deed of his

enemies, so he was oppressed by his anguish of concern for the men. He

had come into the world, in the fullness even of God's love, to unbosom

that love to the sight and feeling of mankind. As respects all enemies

and rejectors, it had been a suffering love even from eternity, and it

will be none the less a suffering love that it has taken humanity for

its vehicle. Every sort of love connects some kind of suffering greater

or less--desire, concern, affliction, anguish. A bliss in itself, it is

even a bliss intensified, by the burden it so willingly or even

painfully bears. Thus it is that friendship, charity, motherhood,

patriotism, carries each its burden, light or heavy, according to the

nature and degree of its love and according to the want, or woe of its

object. What then must the feeling of Christ be, when he looks upon his

enemies in the near prospect of death at their hands--death horrible to

him, and a sacrilegious murder in them. If the great liberator Moses,

discouraged and crushed in feeling by the perversity of his people,

cried--"I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too

heavy for me, and if thou deal thus with me kill me;" if Paul, himself

a man, was constrained, by the burden of a man's love, to say--"I have

great heaviness and continued sorrow in my heart; for I could wish that

myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according

to the faith;" who shall wonder at the anguish of Christ's burden, when

he bows himself under it to the ground, when he calls it his "cup,"

when he cries, "my soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death?" If the

love of a human benefactor will sometimes beget anguish, what will the

love of God do less than to create an agony?

And yet how little will our dull-hearted world bronzed in evil,

habitually unloving, unvisited or seldom visited, by a consciously

tender compassion; how little, indeed, will the most unselfish, or even

beneficently Christian of us, conceive this agony of the divine love

for men! Our hearts make feeble answer to it at the best; so feeble

that there even seems to be a kind of overdoing, or overfeeling in it.

Indeed we are even wont ourselves, for dignity's sake, to halve our own

little emotion and we do the same unconsciously for the emotion of God;

halving it also again, by the consideration here let in, that his love

is only love to transgressors and enemies. Ah! if we could think it,

that is just the fact, in which God's love becomes an agony; leaving,

as it were, the ninety and nine of his friends, to go after that one

who has gone astray, and rejoicing more over that, as he has felt the

loss with a more painful concern. God's love has no burden of pain for

the good; it sharpens to a pain only when it looks upon the evil. And

here precisely is the stress of Christ's agony.

When I consider thus who Christ was, what the love he bore, what the

crime his enemies were going to perpetrate, invoking, in horrible

delusion, his blood upon themselves and their children; I seem to get

some little, dim, conception of his anguish for them, in this dreadful

hour. I can not go to the depth of it, I can not ascend to the height

of it, but I can perceive why it should transcend my feeling and even

the possible reach of my conceptions. It is even the more credible too

that its tokens do so plainly exceed all human demonstrations. The most

adequate and complete thing we can say of it is, that it reveals the

Suffering Holiness of God.

The reason of the agony then--this is our conclusion--lies in the facts

themselves; in the sensibilities of the sufferer and the causes acting

on those sensibilities. No theologic reason, such as makes him suffer

by infliction, or by the judicial forsaking of God, has even a

tolerable pretext, aside from the theory that makes up such a

construction for its own sake. Even the justice of God is more

adequately impressed and set before the world more convincingly,

without any so revolting conception, than with it. Never was there made

before such an expression of God's abhorrence to sin, as in this recoil

of Christ's agony from it; never such honor put upon God's instituted

justice, as in Christ's submission to the corporate woe and penal

madness of it. Never was the horrible nature of sin so revealed to

human conviction, as by this agony of compassion, on one side, met by

such judicial blindness and even phrenzied malice, on the other.

Can there now my friends, be any thing more strange than that

multitudes of you, having had full time to ponder this scene, and take

its meaning after the fact, should still adhere to your sin, nay should

even be quite insensible to it and the feeling of God concerning it.

Beholding this immense sensibility of God, you still have none! O it is

even appalling! Rightly conceiving such a fact, you would even start

from yourself! Were you called by some angel, in the brightness of the

sun, or by voices of thunder in the clouds, it would signify much less;

but that you should not feel the silent call of God's feeling ought to

make you think even with dread of yourself. When the Christ of

Gethsemane meets you bathed in the sad drops of his divine sorrow,

there certainly ought, if there be any feeling left, to be some

answering sorrow in you. Is there still none? What a relation this

between your sensibility and goodness--functional death, lying as a

rock in Gethsemane, feeling as little that horror of sin, softened as

little by that sorrowing love! O thou highly gifted creature, what kind

of attainment hast thou made!

The lessons derivable to us, my brethren, from this subject are many; I

can only call attention specially to this one, that as Christ suffers

in his agony, not by the forsaking of God, not by any kind of

infliction making compensation to eternal justice; but naturally,

because of his character, and the crisis into which he has come, so

there will be times and conditions where we shall suffer in like

manner, according to our measures, and the degree of our likeness to

him. Purity in us will shudder, love in us will bear its burden of

sorrow. It is no presumption or profanation for us to think of being

with him in his passion, we shall even require it of ourselves, as a

necessary Christian evidence. Even as he himself declares--"ye shall

indeed drink of my cup." Not that we are to be as deep in the pains of

holy sensibility as he--that is impossible. Not that we are to make a

point of suffering much, and be always talking of some dreadful burden

that is on us, and having it as a point of merit to be always in a

groaning testimony. Christ did not make a three-years' funeral of his

ministry. Once he had a heavy struggle of temptation, telling never a

word about it but the close. Once, and again, he wept. Once he declared

that his soul was troubled. Once he fell into an agony, and was very

soon through with it. It was never his way to suffer more than he must,

or to call for sympathy by a show of his sorrows. On the other hand, no

disciple is to make a merit of being always floated in a luxury of

bliss, as if the gospel had no purpose more rugged and practical than

simply to beget an elysian frame. Much less may a disciple think it

well that he suffers nothing, or is never overcast in his feeling, when

the simple reason is that his soul is cased in the indifference of

sloth and worldly living. No pangs of life are suffered by the dead! As

certainly as your Master's love is in you, his work will be upon you.

His objects will be yours, and also his divine burden. And sometimes

that burden will be heavy. If your heart grows pure, it will just so

far be shocked and revolted by the wrath and wrong of evil-doers. As

certainly as you have feeling, you will have the pains of feeling.

Expect to have your part then with Jesus in his Gethsemane. Come in

freely hither, tarry ye here and watch. Out of his agony learn how to

bear an enemy; what to do for your enemies and God's. If your

intercessions sometimes turn to groans, if you sometimes wonder that

being a Christian you are yet so heavily, painfully, burdened, almost

crushed with concern for such as you are trying to save, let your

comfort be that so you drink indeed your Master's cup. If your love is

repelled with scorn, and your good work baffled, and your heart grows

heavy under sorrow and discouragement--ready to sink under its

load--come hither and pray with Jesus in his sweat of blood, "let this

cup pass from me." If wickedness grows hot in malice round you, if

conspiracy and violence array themselves against you, go apart into

this Gethsemane of your Lord's troubles, and be sure that some good

angel shall be sent to strengthen you; is not Christ's heart wringing

for you more bitterly than yours for itself--tarry ye here and watch.

If some demon of impatience whispers, here or there, "why not give it

up?" behold the agonizing obedience of Christ, faithful unto death, and

say, with him, "not as I will but as thou wilt." Look for no mere

holiday of frames, but for such kind of joy as a heart may yield that

is many times broken by sacrifice. Behold your Master prostrate on the

ground, and by his agony and bloody sweat, be girded for a passion of

your own. Consent with Christ to suffer; and when having gotten his

victory, he says "rise, let us be going," go, not faltering, even

though he lead you to the cross.

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XII.

THE PHYSICAL SUFFERING, OR CROSS OF CHRIST.

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things,

in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their

salvation perfect through sufferings.--Heb. ii, 10.

It is a fact worthy of distinct notice, that our apostle is here making

answer to the very same question that Anselm propounded for settlement,

a thousand years afterward, in his very famous treatise, the Cur Deus

Homo? And despite of the very great admiration won by this treatise, I

feel obliged to suffer an impression, that the apostle has greatly the

advantage; writing out his answer with a freer hand, and a far more

piercing insight, and presenting, in fact, the whole subject more

adequately, in a single sentence, than the much venerated father was

able to do in the high theological endeavor of his volume.

In the verse previous to this sentence, which is my text, finding Jesus

made a little lower than the angels, and, for the suffering of death,

crowned with glory and honor, it is as if his mind began to ask, even

as Anselm did, why should he suffer thus, or come, in the way of

suffering, at all? why could not God, the Almighty, strike out the

needed salvation by a shorter method, without suffering, viz., by his

omnipotent force? Whereupon he makes answer, virtually, that force is

out of the question; because the needed salvation is a purely moral

result, which can be accomplished only by moral means and motives--"For

it became Him"--it was even a fixed necessity upon Him, the

Almighty--"for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in the

bringing of many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their

salvation perfect through sufferings."

The words bringing and captain, here occurring, have a relationship in

the original, which would not be suspected, and which disappears in the

English; as if we should read--"in the bringing on of many sons unto

glory, to make the bringer on" &c. There is no importance however in

this reading, such as might be supposed, for a captain is a leader and

bringer on of course; only we conceive the passage more fitly, if the

family relationship of the two words is understood. The declaration is,

and that is the matter of chief importance, that God, the Almighty,

must needs work morally in such a case, and not by force: and that

Christ, the leader, is made perfect, or perfectly competent, as regards

the moral new creation, or bringing up unto glory, by his cross and the

tragic eloquence of his death.

That we may fully develop the apostle's meaning in this general

announcement, and verify it in the orderly exposition of the points

included under it, let us begin at the question where he appears to

have begun himself; viz., why should Christ, in the redeeming of souls,

and bringing then, unto glory, subject himself to physical

suffering?--what, in other words, were the necessities and uses of that

suffering?

I confine the question here, it will be observed, to his physical

suffering. He encountered two distinct kinds of suffering, as we

commonly use the term, viz., mental suffering, and bodily suffering;

that which belongs to burdened feeling and wounded sensibility, and

that which is caused by outward privation, or violence done against the

physical nature; that which appears more especially in the agony, and

that which appears in the death of the cross. The former kind of

suffering I believe is never called suffering in the New Testament, but

a being grieved; a bearing, or a burden, as in sympathy and loving

concern; a being troubled in spirit, or very heavy; sorrow; agony. The

word suffering is applied, meantime, I think, only to physical

suffering; and was doubtless used by the apostle, in the present

instance, as relating to Christ's physical suffering only.

It is obvious enough then, at the outset, and as the first thing to be

noted, that physical suffering, taken by itself, or as being simply

what it is in itself, is never a thing of value. On the contrary it is;

so far, a thing on the losing side of existence, a subtraction from the

general sum of good. It will not help a friend, or feed an enemy, or

stop a fire, or cool a fever. To the sufferer himself, looking never to

any thing beyond it, or consequent upon it, but simply at what it is,

it has no inherent value, like wheat and wool, anal no market value,

like gold. It is not, in fact, a commodity of any kind, exchangeable or

not exchangeable, but a simple incommodity--a quantity purely negative

and a worse than worthless fact.

And the same exactly is true of Christ's suffering. Taken as physical

pain simply, nothing is to be made of it. All the worse and more

deplorable is the loss or negation of it, that it is a suffering which

has no relation to personal desert; and still more deplorable in the

fact that, regarding the divine order of the sufferer, it is even a

shocking anomaly, which reason can not comprehend and faith only can

accept. God certainly did not want it as wanting to get so much

suffering out of somebody. He does not exact a retributive suffering,

even in what is called his justice, because he wants so much in

quantity to even the account of wrong, but only that he may vindicate

the right and testify his honor to it by a fit expression. Nothing

could be more horrible, or closer akin to blasphemy, than to say that

God wants pain for his own feeling's sake; or because he is hungry for

that particular kind of satisfaction. We have it as a proverb, that

"revenge is sweet;" but I recollect no proverb which avers that justice

is sweet; because the mind of justice is a right mind, as the mind of

revenge is not; and, being right, no pain is sweet to it, not even that

which chastises injustice and sin. Besides, there is, it is agreed, no

justice in the pains of Christ, as being due on his own account; and it

ought to be as well agreed that God could not take them as

compensations on account of others. That would be taking them as actual

somethings, or quantities having value in themselves, when, in fact,

they have, as we have seen, no value at all. Nay worse, if God takes

them, he gets only incommodities for his satisfaction, and makes a gain

that is purely harm and loss.

But some one will object in the question--are not the physical

sufferings of Christ what are called, in the scripture, his sacrifice

for sin? and what is the use of sacrifice but to atone God's justice? I

do not understand the scripture to speak of suffering and sacrifice in

that manner. Thus we hear an apostle say--"made perfect through

sufferings"--for what made perfect? for the satisfying of God's

justice? No, but "to bring many souls unto glory?" "Lamb of God that

taketh away"--what? the pains of justice? No, but "the sins of the

world." "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the

tree"--for what end? that God might be satisfied with his pains? No,

but "that we being dead unto sin, should live unto righteousness;" "By

whose stripes"--what of the stripes? do they pay off the release of

ours?--"by whose stripes ye were healed." "For Christ also Lath once

suffered for sins, the just for the unjust"--in what view? to satisfy

the justice of God? no, but "to bring us unto God." All the lustral

figures--those of washing, purging, sprinkling, purifying,

cleansing--set forth the sacrifice in the same manner, not as a way of

reconciling God to us, but of reconciling us to God. And so

universally--I do not know the instance where Christ's cross and

physical suffering are conceived as a making satisfaction to God's

justice.

Regarding Christ's sufferings then as having no value in themselves, on

the ground of which they may be accepted as compensations to justice,

we must not leap to the conclusion that Christ could do nothing in a

way of bringing men to God, without such sufferings. He could even have

been incarnated into the world, in such a way as to involve no physical

liability at all. He might even have been incarnated, I suppose, into

the family of C�sar, and strid into his mission, as a prince iron-clad,

in all the dignities and immunities of the Empire. He might have taught

the same doctrine, omitting only his call to take up the cross, which

he taught as the son of Mary. He might have healed as great multitudes,

with as kind a sympathy. He might even have been followed, if he chose,

by trains of great people, as he was by the humble and the poor, dining

at their tables, lodging in their palaces, receiving all the while the

highest honors of genius. Or if it should be imagined that, teaching

faithfully the same principles, and rebuking the same sins, and

offering himself to men as the incarnate Word and Lord, he must of

necessity provoke the hatred of enemies, and stir up powerful

conspiracies of violence and bigot zeal, what suffering could they

bring upon him, armed as he was with miracle, strongly enough even to

have routed the Roman army? As the posse that went out to arrest him

could not strengthen their knees to stand, or their hands to seize, but

fell backward on the ground even as moths fall off from flames they

attack; as the moneychangers and trafficking priests fled away before

him, taken by a strange panic that no single man ever raised before; so

he could have withered Caiaphas by a look, and dashed his accusers

away, as a rock tosses off the sea; making Pilate's wife dream a great

deal worse dreams than she did, and causing the poor servile magistrate

himself to be a good deal "more afraid" than he was; and as to being

gibbeted on the cross, if the conspiracy could have gone so far, he

probably enough could have changed the wood into water, as he did the

water into wine. There was, in short, no necessary condition of

physical suffering implied in his Messiahship. He probably could not

have been as complete a Saviour without physical suffering, but he

could have been a wonderfully great character and beneficent teacher,

as clear of spot or stain, as true in his truth, as wise in his wisdom,

as evidently, and some would say, a great deal more evidently, divine.

If then Christ's physical sufferings, taken as such, had no value, and

if he could have been incarnated in the human state without

suffering--doing and teaching, to a great extent, the same things--why

did he come under conditions of suffering, what uses did he expect to

serve by it, such as would compensate the loss? It was done I answer,

that he might be made perfect by such suffering--perfect, that is, not

in his character, but in his official competency; perfect as having

gotten power over men, through his sufferings, to be the sufficient

bringer on, or captain, he undertakes to be, in bringing many sons unto

glory.

Does he then, it may be asked, undertake the suffering as having that

for his object or as consenting to it for effect's sake? He of course

knows that he will suffer, and how, and when, and by whom, arid with

what result, but he does not fall into the weakness of those partly

fanatical martyrs who undertook the particular merit of being somehow

murdered. Coming down to do a work of love, he simply took the

liabilities of a human person doing such a work. He was not ignorant of

the immense value or power of a right and great suffering, as regards

the possible effect of it, and as sin would certainly be exasperated by

his goodness, and drag him down to suffering, he meant beforehand to

make it a right and great suffering, and so to win dominion by it. He

suffered understandingly, therefore, as the Lamb that was slain from

the foundation of the world, though not as aiming to get himself

afflicted, or to make an ostentation of being wronged.

What, then, we have now to look after, is the manner and degree of that

power over men's convictions and feelings, which Christ obtained by his

physical suffering. And the points to which I call your attention are

such as these.

1. The manner in which, by his physical suffering, he magnifies and

sanctifies the law in men's convictions. This in fact was a kind of

first point to be carried in getting the necessary power over fallen

minds. The speculation that requires him to suffer in a way of helping

God to justify himself in the forgiveness of sins, before certain great

judicial minds in other worlds and spheres, is a speculation that to

say the least travels far, and the scripture gives it no help. The true

Christian idea appears to be that Christ is magnifying the law, and

making it honorable, not before the remote altitudes, but before the

sinning souls of this world by whom it has been trampled. How else

shall they ever be regained? God is an essentially practical and not a

romantic being. He will not concern himself about the figure he makes

in the forgiveness of sins, before the outlying populations of his

realm, if only he can bring transgressors down to ask forgiveness here

on earth, by making the pinnacles of order smoke before their guilty

consciences.

See then how he does it in the matter of Christ's physical suffering.

He came into the world with a perfect right to be exempted from such

suffering. There is nothing in his character to require this kind of

discipline, or even to make it just. He also had power to put all

suffering by, and sail over the world as the stars do, in a region of

calm and comfort above it. He could have exorcised the wild hate of his

enemies, as he did the poor lunatics of the Gergesenes. By his power of

miracle, if not without, he could have driven Pilate and his accusers

out of the judgment-hall into the street, passing intact through all

the conspiracies of his enemies, even as Moses passed through the sea.

But he would not so far infringe on the penal order of God's

retributions., Looking on society, in its madness against him and

against the truth, as grinding in God's mill of retribution, swayed,

and rent and tortured by exasperating causes in the guilt of its own

transgression, he refuses to take himself out of the general torment.

Having taken humanity, he takes all the judicial liabilities of human

society under sin, preferring, in this manner, to submit himself to the

corporate order of God's judgments, and testify in that manner, his

profound homage to law and justice. He will not so much as parry any

one of the bad causations loosened by sin. He will let the world be to

him just that river of vinegar and gall which its sins have made it to

itself. So he bears the world's bitter curse, magnifying, even by his

pains, the essential sanctity of law and justice.

He suffers nothing as from justice to himself, and therefore makes no

satisfaction to the justice of God. But he powerfully honors that

justice in its dealings with the world, by refusing to let even his

innocence take him out of the murderous and bloody element it mixes.

Hence the marvelous, unheard of power his life and gospel, and

especially his suffering death, have exerted in men's consciences. His

suffering has this wonderful divine art in it, that it sanctifies both

forgiveness and justice, and makes them common factors of good, in the

conscience of all transgression.

2. The physical suffering of Christ has an immediate values under that

great law of human nature, that ordains the disarming of all wrong, and

the prostration of all violence, by a right suffering of the evils they

inflict. Nothing breaks the bad will of evil so completely, as to have

had its way, and done its injury, and looked upon its victim. And if

the victim, suffering even the worst it could do, still lives

unvanquished, the defeat is only a more absolute and stunning

paralysis. Thus in the bitting of horses, the animal champs the bit as

if he would crush it, and throws himself on the rein as if he would

snap it, till finding that he only worries and galls himself, he at

last gives way to what has not given way to him, and so is tamed, or,

as we say, broken to the rein. So when the wrath of transgression hurls

itself upon the Lord's person, sparing not his life, nor even letting

him die easily or in respect, the bad will is only the more fatally

broken that, accomplishing so much in a way so dreadful, it has yet

accomplished nothing. It has mocked him, tortured him, thrust him out

of life, only to find him still alive and see him go up to reign! In

one view it has succeeded against him, and he has been seemingly

crushed under the heel of its malignity. It has pierced the noblest

heart and seen it bleed. It has finished the worst, most shocking, deed

of murder ever conceived, And yet that murdered one still lives and

loves! How dreadfully crest-fallen now and weak is that bad will, how

nearly slain itself by what it has done! Nay, to have only spent so

great malignity, and come to the point of exhaustion, would produce a

nearly mortal weakness. Suffering kills, how often, the wrong-doing

that inflicts it. The man of blood who looks upon his murdered enemy is

disarmed by the sight. Even if there seemed to have been some

provocation, how tender, and soft, and low-spoken, how visibly gentled

in feeling is he, standing in the room where his lifeless adversary

lies! That dead face looks imploringly up to him, and his fire is

extinguished by natural relentings. How much more when the murdered one

is a friend inherently good, bearing a much honored name and great; how

much more, if he is the incarnate Son of God; still more, if he is not

only killed, but crucified, hung up thus to be looked upon depending

from his cross--sad, broken flower, which the spite of so great beauty

has plucked! O how weak, irresolute, guilt-broken, now, is all sin,

when confronted by that suffering goodness which reveals at once, both

its spite and its impotence! "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou

persecutest"--How piercing is the word!

3. The sublime morality, or moral worth of Jesus, could never have been

sharply impressed, except for the sensibilities appealed to by his

physical suffering. If he had come as one born of a good family, if he

had been a considerable owner of real estate, if he had made his

journeys in a chariot, lodging, at night, with distinguished senators

and persons of consideration, if he had been a great scholar among the

Rabbis, or had been familiar to the people in the livery of a judge, or

a priest, winning great popularity by the profuseness of his charities,

and exciting even applause by his attention to low people and his

tender ministry to their diseases; dying finally by some of the modes

that are common, to be followed to his burial by multitudes that come

to weep their loss at his grave--if, I say, he had lived in condition,

and died as one admired for his excellence, the real depth of his

virtue could never even have been conceived. He would only have been

looked upon as fulfilling the type of a graciously benevolent

gentleman, and described as the John Joseph Gurney of his time. No, it

was only as he waived the honors of condition in his birth, and the

comforts of property in his life, became a footman, hungered often,

slept under the sky shivering with cold, spent himself daily in

exhausting sympathies and got almost no sympathy in return, met the

looks of crafty messengers and spies on every side, and scarcely found

a place, except in the lone recesses of the mountains, where his ear

was not all day, perhaps all night, saluted by the carping sounds of

bigot voices quarreling with his doctrine, ending finally his hunted,

hated, weary life, by a slave's death on the cross--this too, even for

enemies, as truly as for his friends--it is here that we begin to

really look down into the deeps of his great bosom, deeps holy and

divine, that no mortal plummet has sounded! And so he is made perfect

through sufferings, able to wake a sense in our bosoms of what love is,

quickening thoughts in us that are new, opening sensibilities never

before consciously opened. All the most effective powers, in short, of

moral impression, contained in his character, would have been wanting,

if he had not borne the lot of wrong and bitter suffering.

4. It is only by his suffering in the flesh that he reveals or fitly

expresses the suffering sensibility of God. As certainly as God has any

sensibility, such as belongs to a perfect mind and heart, that

sensibility must be profoundly moved by all misery, impurity and wrong.

Impassible, physically speaking, he is not impassive to evils that

offend, or grieve, his moral perfections. Indeed his vast and glorious

nature is, in this view, nothing but an immense sensibility, whose

dislikes, disgusts, indignations, revulsions of pity, wounded

compassions, afflicted sympathies, pains of violated tenderness, wrongs

of ingratitude, are mingling and commingling, as cups of gall, for the

pure good feeling of his breast. So far he suffers because he is a

perfect being, and according to the measure of his perfection. Why if

he could not hate what is hateful, pity what is pitiful, mourn for the

hopeless, burn against the cruel, scent the disgusts of the impure--if

all bad things and all good were just alike to him, what is he better

than granite or ice? No, the glorious, all-moving fact is, that there

is a great sensibility at the head of the worlds, and a mental

suffering as great, when the worlds go wrong!

This accordingly it is, that we, as sinners, need most of all to know

and to feel, and this that Christ, for our salvation's sake, has taken

the flesh and suffered even death, to impress. Nature, in her scenes

and objects, had no power to express this moral pain of God's heart.

The ancient providential history was trying always vainly to elaborate

the same; testifying, in almost every chapter, of God's sorrows,

griefs, repentings, loathings, displeasures, and his afflictions over

the afflicted. Nothing could ever express it but the, physical

suffering of Jesus. Here, for the first time, a vehicle is, found that

will sufficiently bring home to our guilty feeling God's wounded

feeling, and put us in real acquaintance with that suffering state of

love, which his unseen goodness feels.

And every thing turns here, you will perceive, on the matter of

physical suffering; for, to our coarse human habit, nothing else

appears, at first, to have much reality. In the agony, for example, the

real suffering is mental, and the great struggle, a struggle purely of

feeling. But if it were not for the physical symptoms attendant, the

prostrations, the audible groans, and above all, the body dripping, in

blood-like drops, forced through the skin by the pains of the

mind--were it not for these physical tokens we should get no impression

of a suffering sensibility, that would be of much account. We should

only look on drowsily, doubting probably. how much, or what kind of,

reality there may be in this rather dull scenic of the gospels!

And here is the precise relation of the agony and the cross. One is the

reality, the other is the outward sign or symbol. Having all the mental

sensibility Christ has regarding our sin, and shame, and wrong, and

fearfully lost state, he still needs to be made perfect through

physical sufferings, or by these to have his higher sensibility brought

forth into power. He is perfect before, in all the pains of his perfect

sensibility, but to our coarse, sensuous, undiscerning habit, there is

nothing of much meaning in him, till we watch him undergoing his

murder! This physical suffering we can understand; the other is a great

way off and very dim.

In one view it is even a scandal that we make so much more of the cross

than we do of the agony. And yet the cross was appointed for the

culminating point of the gospel, partly in a way of condescension to

our lowness and the want of our coarseness, and is really the greater

for that reason. The grand thing to be revealed is that which stands in

the agony; and the superior value of the cross, or physical suffering,

lies in the fact that it comes to us, at our low point, speaking to us

of the other, in a way that we can feel. When we look on Jesus

suspended by nails through his hands and feet, and set up to die a slow

death, in delirium and thirst and fever, we do have raised in our

bosoms a little natural sensibility. And, taken hold of by that, our

apprehensions will perhaps be sufficiently fixed, at last, to let us in

where that deeper, and warmer, and more agonizing, sensibility heaves

unseen in the mental compassions of God!

Let us not be too much taken, my friends, by the typology in which our

gospel is here and there so feebly and pretensively dressed--the low

perceptions, and the short culture, always putting their cheap honors

and ornaments upon it. I speak not here of the cross set up as a symbol

on our peaks of architecture, worn upon the person, painted on the

banners of the religion itself; but I speak of the crucifixes, and the

carefully carved distresses of the dying Lord, the droppings of blood,

the contortions of form, the pallors of death so elaborately painted,

and the generally overdone studies of art, by which Christ's dying woe

is magnified as being, not the sign, but the all of his suffering. The

very shallow, feeble, look of such art, the want of all high insight in

it, is abundantly mortifying. There is scarcely a doubt that Christ

suffered more intensely in the agony, where the pain was wholly mental,

than he did upon the cross. Even the external signs appear to indicate

as much. In the same way too, his chief suffering, on the cross, was

probably mental and not bodily. For. some reason, his suffering on the

cross was so much more severe than that of the malefactors crucified

with him, that he died whole hours before them; not because they did

not suffer as great physical pain as he, but because he had a moral

sensibility so vast, a horror of wrong so deep, a concern of love for

his enemies so wrenched with agony, that his heart broke and his breath

stopped, as it were before the time. This now--would that we could

think it--was the real suffering to him! and the physical suffering of

the cross was probably a matter of consequence to him principally in

the fact that, considering our low, dull, habit, there might be force

enough in it to initiate, or pricl in, as it were, some faint

impression of the other. And this it is, this only, that makes it a

salvation. It is a cross before the eyes, for beings that live in their

eyes, and are too coarse to apprehend the spiritual things of God in a

spiritual manner--in that way a type of the more wondrous and

tremendous cross that is hid in God's perfections from eternity. O, it

is for this, to make sin feel this unseen, tender, sensibility, this

pain of goodness, this fatherhood of sorrow--this it is that Christ has

undertaken to impress, and for this end he is made perfect through

sufferings. Once more--

5. It was necessary that Christ should suffer in the body, and get

power over men by that kind of suffering, because the world itself is

put in a tragic economy, requiring its salvation to be an essentially

tragic salvation. God has made the world, we all agree, for the great

sentiments it will organize and bring into play, and souls themselves

to be lifted by that play, in those great sentiments. Hence the

wonderful affinity of our human nature for the tragic exaltations.

There may have been a prior necessity that a free moral kingdom should

include peril, disorder, suffering, great struggles to escape great

woes, sacrifices in the good, wrongs suffered by the good, to regain

and restore the evil; in other words, there may have been a prior

necessity that the plan of God's moral universe should be essentially

tragic in the cast of it. But, whatever may be true in this respect, we

can see, every man for himself, that so it is. No merely fine

sentiment, or morally high, is quite sufficient for us. The festive,

the gay, the triumphal, the melo-dramatic tenderness, the pastoral

sweetness, the flutes of domestic arbors, the gongs of public

liberty--none of these quite satisfy, not even the mighty love-passion

strikes our highest cords of tension till it draws blood! Blood! blood!

we must have blood! Human history therefore moves on trailing in blood,

tragic in its characters, and scenes, and its material generally.

The great crimes are tragic, and the great virtues scarcely less so.

The tribunals sprinkle their gate-posts with blood. The stormy

passions, honor, jealousy, and revenge, are letting blood in all ages;

and the little ones of trust, and truth, and worth, do the bleeding.

And then all the epics and romances, and a great part of the world's

poetry go on to add imaginary pangs and troubles, and torture us still

more with bloody felicities that are fictitious. Practically the world

has a general fashion of suffering. Right is trampled everywhere,,

goodness fights with wrong, nations fall, heroes bleed, and all great

works are championed by suffering. Some Prometheus, torn by his eagle,

bleeds painfully on every rock waiting to be loosed from his chain. So

if Christ will pluck away eternal judgment for the world, he must bleed

for it. So great a salvation must tear a passage into the world by some

tragic woe--without shedding of blood there is no remission.

This blood--O, it is this that has a purifying touch, working

lustrally, as the divine word conceives, on all the stains of our sin,

washing us, making us clean, sprinkling even our evil conscience. This

tragic power of the cross takes hold, in other words, of all that is

dullest, and hardest, and most intractable, in our sin, and moves our

palsied nature, all through, in mighty throbs of life.

And this is Christianity; meeting us just where we most require to be

met. Christ is a great bringer on for us, because he suffers for us.

Christianity is al mighty salvation, because it is a tragic salvation.

Why my friends, if it were not for this generally tragic way in things

about us, and especially in religion, I fear that we should have a more

dull time of it than we think. Indeed I suspect that even the same is

true of the general universe--it probably is and is forever to be an

essentially tragic universe. With, a fall and an overspreading curse at

the beginning, and a cross in the middle, and a glory and shame at the

end, where souls struggle out, through perils, and pains, and broken

chains, or bear their chains away unbroken still and still to be--how

moving, and mighty, and high, must be the sentiment of it! O how

grandly harrowing is that joy, how tremulous in tragic excitement is

that song of ascription, roaring as a sea-surge round the throne--"unto

him that loved us, and washed us, from our sins in his blood!"

Concluding at this point, my brethren, the exposition I have

undertaken, you will not fail to note how it gathers in its force upon

this table and rite of communion before us. These symbols, bread and

wine, body and blood, represent exactly what is most physical in

Christ's suffering. But they do not stop in that, as if there were a

value in the pains. They are even a language, as that was, bearing an

impression of something higher. They say "made perfect through

sufferings;" calling up to be thought, and received, just all that I

have here been trying to unfold, of the power which our Master was

obtaining, by his dreadful cross and passion.

Back of the wood and the nails, back of the suffering body, there was

another cross, another suffering, even that of God's deep love,

struggling out through the blood and the pain, to make its revelation

felt in us. And this for what? To bring many sons, that is to bring us

all, unto glory.

Suffering and glory! even so; in that tragic copula, the gospel stands,

and it is remarkable how many times it recurs. "Ought not Christ to

suffer these things, and to enter into his glory?" "For the suffering

of death, crowned with glory and honor"--"The sufferings of Christ and

the glory that should follow"--"A witness of the suffering of Christ,

and a partaker of the glory that should be revealed"--"Who hath called

us unto eternal glory, by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered

awhile"--responses all, as it were, to the word "made perfect through

sufferings in bringing many sons unto glory."

Here, too, as you have noted, Christ's sufferings for us, and ours for

him, and his glory, and our glory, are blended all together, heaving in

a common passion, shining in a common glory. And thus it is, my

brethren, that our ascended Master, by these communion tokens, pledges

us to-day our right to suffer with him, and to be strengthened with him

according to his glorious power. And what we call his glory, is, if we

rightly understand, but this same glorious power, or powerfulness of

glory--no phantom of display, or dazzling crown, conferred by servile

worshipers wanting a hero, but that most solid kind of merit which is

an element and power of day, on all who are blessed in the sight. When

Christ was transfigured in the mount, the shining as the sun, the

glistering whiteness, which are called--"the excellent glory," were yet

but a surface glory in themselves, and were only good as types of that

inherent, practical glory, that belonged to his nature, and was just

now dawning on discovery in his suffering sacrifice. The immense power

he gets in being made perfect through sufferings, is itself his glory.

And so the state of glory in us is the solid power that we are to

obtain, by following in our Master's steps, by suffering patience and

sacrifice. When Christ says, "the glory which thou gavest me I have

given them," that glory is the sense we have in them, as God's martyrs

and servants, of a somehow divine brightness and transforming luster.

There is something felt which yet we do not see, and we call that

invisible something, glory. It is splendor of soul, or the halo that is

on it, when the blur and disorder and opaque mixture of wrong are all

gone bye; or it is the state of perfect strength, concord, liberty in

good, freeness of knowledge, purposes eternally set, great sentiment

hallowed by great principle, and uttered by and through great action,

when Christ, who is himself the glory of the Father, has put himself

fully upon us, and when so the divine splendor and power, and truth,

and righteousness, are become our eternal investiture. And therefore it

is, that the very state of glory for which we hope is set forth as a

daylight element, bathing holy minds forever, whose sun is the

Revelation of God by suffering--"For the Glory of God doth lighten it

and the Lamb--is the light thereof. O, thou divine Lamb; suffering

symbol in the flesh, of God's suffering love in the spirit, what shall

be the light of our seeing forever, but that which may shine out from

thee!

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XIII.

SALVATION BY MAN.

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the

dead.--1. Cor. xv. 21.

It can not, of course, be the apostle's meaning, that mankind are going

literally to raise themselves from the dead. When he says "by man," he

mentally refers to Christ; only taking advantage of the fact that,

since Christ the Son of God incarnate, is become a proper man, a member

of the race, it is therefore permitted us to regard the whole remedy of

sin, or power of salvation, as being included in humanity itself.

Redemption, life, resurrection--all are, in a sense, being and to be,

by man. When we say humanity, there is inclosed and, as it were,

closeted in it, all the inspiration, all the light, all the

life-impulse of the divine man, and so all the supernatural, resurgent

powers of a complete salvation, even up to the resurrection force

itself. It is not as if God had called us here from a distance, or had

sent his Son to sit upon the circle of the heavens and lecture us from

those supernal heights, but he has gotten him into the race by a birth,

and has entered, in that manner, a corporate grace of life into the

race itself.

What I propose then at the present time, is the practically important

fact that Christ is not so much to be thought of as a being external,

or as dispensing salvation from above, as a second Adam in the race

itself; a regenerative and redemptive power, so inserted into humanity

as to be in a sense of it. Just as the apostle's language

intimates--"For since by man came death, by man came also the

resurrection from the dead." For this word "since" is a word of

rational connection, supposing an impression felt of some inherent

fitness, requiring the corporate disadvantage of the fall, to be made

good by a corporate remedy. Consider then--

1. The antecedent probability of such a remedy, indicated by familiar

analogies. It is not God's manner to work all remedies in things from

without, but to make them largely self-remedial, when attacked by

damage, or disorder. Thus all creatures of life, all substances above

the range of mineral substance, are endowed by him with recuperative

functions for the repair of their own injuries. The bush that is bent

to the ground does not require some other bush or even tree, to come

and lift it up, but, no sooner is it let go, than it springs up

suddenly by an elastic force within. Cut it down, as it begins to be a

tree, and it will set new growths to pricking through the hard bark

even of its stump, and so, by a newly begun architecture it will go on

to build the tree it was beginning to build at the first. Every animal

body has a distinct self-medicating force in its own vital nature,

called by physicians and physiologists the vis medicatrix. When,

therefore, it is attacked by disease, or hacked by violence, the

qualified physician, knowing how it will rally its own hidden force,

and put its own mysterious self-medications at work, will simply

endeavor, on his part, to clear the way, and supply the needed stimulus

of action, till the subtle, inborn physician, wiser and more sovereign

than he, has mended the break, or completed the cure. The same is true

as regards all defections of honor or character. If the man himself

does not return to himself, and repair his losses by a process of

recovery undertaken by himself, there is no recovery for him. The whole

world toiling at his vices and dishonors, could not repair one of them.

He alone has power to win the first inch of recovery. On a larger scale

the same is true of society. Broken down by oppression, desolated by

conquest, rent by faction, weakened by every sort of incapacity, it

finally gets clear and rises, by reactions from within itself--just as

Italy is rising now. The rational resurrection comes by man--man, that

is, grown manlier, as God prepared him to be, by his own great

struggles of devotion.

We see, in this manner, on how large a scale God contrives to

incorporate powers of self-recovery in things. What then shall we

expect, when humanity is broken by the irruption, or precipitation of

sin, but that if he organizes redemption, he will do it in a way to

have it appear as a redemption from within, executed in a sense by man.

I do not mean, of course, when I speak in this manner of

"self-recovery," and "salvation my man," that the recovery and

salvation are not by God. There is exactly the same propriety in this

kind of language that there is in speaking of a harvest, or a voyage,

as being by man--it is never such in the sense of excluding God and his

natural agencies. Indeed the recovery and salvation of souls are more

properly by man, because the agency of God is here incarnated and works

in the race by a man thus inserted into it.

2. It is another point to be observed, that we not only want a

supernatural salvation (for nothing less than that can possibly

regenerate the fall of nature,) but in order to any steady faith in it,

we must have it wrought into nature and made to be as it were, one of

its own stock powers. It does not meet our intellectual conditions,

till it satisfies, in a degree, the scientific instinct in us, and

becomes rational and solid, by appearing to work inherently, or from

within, as by a certain force of law. Moving on the soul and society,

as from a point above and without, it would be here, and there, and

nowhere, flitting as it were apparitionally, breaking out now as from

behind the moon, and vanishing next, as our faith reels away, in we

know not what spaces of the air, or abysses of the sea. What we want

can be seen, at a glance, from the eagerness that hurries such

multitudes of our time after the doctrine of progress. We love to look

on education, political liberty, personal culture, and the sway of

moral ideas, all as advancing under fixed laws of progress. This

doctrine of progress is even a better kind of gospel to many, and more

rational. And yet if we speak of a strictly natural progress, under

natural laws, there is no fiction more utterly baseless: for after the

fact of sin, or moral evil broken loose in the race, the progress of

society must be inevitably downward from bad to worse. Just that too

which ought to be true is true, many of the proudest, most historic

races drop into extinction; and many others exist that we call savage

races, just because they make no such progress, more than the animals,

from age to age.

And yet we want a salvation that is to us all which this doctrine of

progress pretends to be, and God defers to our want, by contriving a

gospel for man that is to be, in form, by man; giving us to see the

general humanity so penetrated and charged with the supernatural, by

Christ living in it, as to be, in a sense, working out redemption

naturally from within itself. We call it the progress of society, and

such it really is, and yet, solid and scientific as we think it, all

the reality it has comes of the incorporated, incarnated grace, in

Jesus Christ, which is countervailing always the penal disorders of

nature, and setting continually on, as by a destiny itself, the rising

fortunes of the race. Our gospel is a cause, in this manner, among

causes; a real calculable force, the Confidence of which can be held

with a steady assurance. Is any thing more rational than to believe

that goodness and truth are bound to master all things by their own

everlasting necessary laws? No matter from what sphere they come,

natural or supernatural, getting into man, into the race, they will as

certainly master man at last, master the race, as gravity will master a

stone. Exactly this confidence God therefore means to give us--no

visionary confidence but a rational, that of a banker whose fund is in;

for God has put the stock functions of his own everlasting kingdom into

humanity itself, and by man He must reign. Meantime--

3. We shall see that, if it were possible to restore the fall of our

race, by any kind of agency, or operation, wholly external, supposing

no recuperative forces and concurrent struggles operating from within,

it would reduce our character and grade of significance to a virtual

nullity. Dismiss the grand world-honoring fact of the incarnation,

conceive that the Jehovah angel, or some angelic messenger comes to us,

not humanized in sympathy or in order, but having a plastic power to

work on us from without and sway us to good, by his own methods of

divine magic, apart from our consent; this would settle us, at once,

into a state of cliency both dangerous and humiliating. We should

probably begin, at once, to pay him the honors of idolatry; for the

manly consciousness in us will be taken away, and we shall be to

ourselves a kind of second rate interest in God's kingdom; just that

which the incarnation, begetting a new divine power in the race itself

contrives to avoid with a skill so beautiful.

Or we may suppose that God was able to put the physical world into such

a state of divine glow, showing forth, in its objects, such radiances

and miraculous revolvings, such glorious apparitions of truth, such

faces of. goodness, that men should have their bad will quite taken

away by the magical sceneries they live in. But the transformation they

undergo in this manner would have little dignity in it, because their

manhood is unexercised in the change. It would be a kind of vegetable

conversion, not a kindling of God's fires in the soul's aspirations and

choices.

So, if the race were to be recovered in any way that includes no

struggle of self-recovery, no power within striving toward recovery, it

would almost take away the sense of our personality. We should be

ciphers to ourselves, not men. Exactly contrary to this, it is the very

great merit of the incarnation, that it brings help in a way to make it

valuable. God could easily help us in a way to crush us, just as many

human helpers will really make nothing of their beneficiaries, by

allowing them to make nothing of themselves, and be nothing for

themselves. The very thing wanted here is to get power into the fallen

race, and put it striving upward; to raise a ferment of recuperative

energy, feeling, aspiration, choice, and whole right working in

humanity; exactly what the nearness and high sympathy of God in the

incarnation must inevitably do. The Saviour being, or becoming man, the

salvation dignifies and raises man even before he receives it; giving

him the right to feel, that, coming verily as an approach of God, it is

none the less a power in the race itself, a salvation by man.

4. Since it is continually assumed by the scripture that we fall by

race, or as a corporate whole, we naturally look for some recuperative

grace to be entered into the race, by which so great disadvantage may

be repaid or overcome. Thus, if we say "as in Adam all die," we want

also to say, "so in Christ shall all be made alive." Or if we say that

"through the offense of one many be dead," we want also to say, "much

more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man,

Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." In this manner it is that

Christ is conceived to be a "second Adam," a kind of new progenitor,

such that we get in him, as it were, a new descent from good.

But we are born of Adam physiologically, it will be remembered, and so

we go down with him as a race by physiological consequence, while we

are not thus born of Christ the second Adam. He only comes into the

race at a given point, just as we do, and communicates nothing by

descent to persons collateral, any more than we do to persons

collateral to us. How then, being no progenitor, does he become any

proper Adam at all? how get himself into the race, in any such general

way, as to become a new headship of life?

To this I answer, that we must not press the correspondence too

closely; it is not understood to be literal, or to hold in any but a

general and qualified way. Let it be enough that as the sin abounded,

so the grace much more abounds, only not in exactly the same manner.

Adam is our head physiologically, Christ is our head by the head

influences he inaugurates, by the authority, sympathy, beauty, of his

suffering goodness--a power that propagates across all the lines of

generation, as efficiently as if it traveled by descent--a new

regenerative power incarnated into the race as such, there to work,

running down through all descent, as a redemption of man executed in

the large view by man.

Observe too this very striking distinction, that good souls have a

power to get into the race by collateral propagations of their

goodness, when bad souls have almost no such power at all. The bad

impregnate human feeling through falsities, and lies, and oppressions,

and combinations of interest, or at best through the dazzling exploits

of ambition. But there is a short run to such kind of power. Deep in

evil, the world is yet naturally shy of evil, and begins very soon to

get away from it. No bad character propagates long, as by character.

Even bad writings drop out soon and die, as it were, of their own

poison. On the other hand it will be seen that good and great souls

have a destiny of headship, propagating side-ways, and every way, till

they become Adams in the sublime fatherhood of their power, and that so

completely as to finally reach, and take headship of the race. Thus we

think of Socrates, for example, as a kind of progenitor in good for his

people; a man whose ideas, principles, sacrifices, entered him into the

whole Greek race, and more and more widely into the general life of the

world. So of Washington. Dying childless, he had yet many children, and

his large posterity still multiplies more and more rapidly, in every

part of the world. Aaron Burr was a man of greater splendor, but he

never got into the world's life and feeling at all, and never became

progenitor of any thing. He was dropped instinctively even out of the

world's thought. But Washington goes on to be, not father of his

country only, but world's father also; inserting his grand fatherhood

into kings, emperors, peoples, and laws, accepted more and more

reverently, by the compulsion of good in his life, and reigning, in

fact, as a kind of civil-state Messiah, that has come to propagate his

sway in human laws and liberties. The civil capacity even of the world,

is increased by the august propagations of his example and sentiment.

And so it is, illustrating the great by the small, the divine by the

human, that Jesus, the incarnate word of God's eternity, coming into

birth and living and dying as a man, fills the whole race with new

possibilities and powers, starts resurgent activities, overtops the sin

abounding with a grace that much more abounds, and becomes the Adam, so

to speak, of a new humanity. Consider now--

5. Some of the scripture evidences of the subject. And here we meet,

first of all, as it were at the head of all scripture, the remarkable

and rather strangely worded promise, which declares that the seed of

the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. The representation is not

that Christ, sometime hereafter to be born of the woman, shall bring

under and finally destroy the bad power, though that is true, but that

the woman's whole posterity, having Christ included, shall do it. God

will of course be always present in the struggle, pushing it on, and

turning all the crises of it, by his invisible agency; while outwardly,

to human apprehension, it is but a struggle, in one view, of society

and man. In this manner, he contrives, by the hiding of himself, in our

otherwise poor, dejected humanity, to put us in confidence and keep us

at a pitch of courage, quite above our own broken powers.

Here and there, it is true, this interior hidden method is departed

from, and he appears to be operating from without, doing something for,

or upon, our humanity, and not through it; working some astounding

miracle, sending some angel, or appearing by some angelic theophany. In

one case he even ordains a supernatural sign that is to be a kind of

institution, recurring, like the sun itself, with astronomic

regularity; the cloud, I mean, by day and the pillar of fire by night.

And yet none of these extraordinary, external things, appear to get

much hold of the race, just because they do not get into it. Nothing

works like a power that does not work by man. The sacrifice of Abraham

and the wrestling of Jacob bring more victory and might into the race,

as far as we can see, than the brazen serpent, or the waters drawn out

of the rock. When, too, Christ comes, what is he but a man? and though,

as such, he has a divine power and plenitude, how careful is he to get

his attitude in the race and not above it. He undertakes no outward

championship. Seed of the woman, a proper man, he only gets into the

common family register as such, and puts the struggle on, as being a

struggle of the race itself. Perfect in all divinity even, he is still

the Son of Man, claiming the appellation for himself. He dies low. And

when he is gone, all that we know is that a gospel is born! In one view

there seems to be nothing here but the same humanity there was before,

and the same hard fight still going on that before was struggling to

bring the serpent under and to bruise his head. But it is a very

different fight, as respects the power of it; for there is a Christ now

in the race, and the whole seed of man is quickened by the sense of his

divine brotherhood.

We shall find, accordingly, that the scriptures are full of images,

that conceive the great contest with evil to be a struggle in the bosom

of the race itself, and give us the expectation that it will go on, as

such, till it has won a complete triumph for the truth. Thus it is that

Isaiah uses the word "increase," which does not mean to enlarge by

additions, but by internal growth;--"And of the increase of his

government and peace there shall be no end." Thus it is that Daniel

represents the kingdom of the Messiah as "a stone cut out without

hands," but a most remarkable kind of stone in the fact that it grows

from within itself, and becomes a great mountain filling the whole

earth. In the same way it is compared, by Christ himself, to a grain of

mustard seed, which does not grow by something added on the outside,

but by an internal operation, becoming in that manner a tree. He

compares it also to leaven hid in a large quantity of meal, there to

work till all is leavened; where the working, it will be observed, is

not the working only of the original leaven, or that of the atmosphere

outside, but such a kind as puts the meal next the leaven working too,

and that also on doing the same to what is next to it; and so the

propagated working goes on, till the whole body of the bread is

leavened.

Here Christ is giving, you will see, his deliberate opinion of the

manner in which his kingdom will be extended. The process will be

forwarded, he conceives, within the race itself, and will so far be

human, that we may rightly say of it--for since by man came the fall of

the world, by man came also its restored glory and peace.

Observe, again, how even holy scripture is the scripture also of man,

written by man, given to the world by man, bearing, in every book, the

particular stamp and style of the particular mind, in whose personal

conceptions it was shaped. The subject matter too of the historic and

biographic parts is human, showing how men have acted, thought, felt,

suffered for the truth, fallen before temptation, triumphed over it.

Indeed the value itself of these records consists, to a great extent,

in the fact that they give us divine lessons under human incidents, in

the molds of human character and life. They show us too, on a larger

scale, what is the meaning and way of God's Providence, by the

disasters of wrong and the struggles of merit, and also by the

overturnings and uprisings of nations.

When we come to the writings of devotion, the Psalms, for example, and

other chorals of scripture, these are human sentiments, lifted indeed

by holy inspirations, but none the less properly human for that

reason--rolling in as such upon us, from the word, even as the tides

roll in from the sea.

The proverbs are specially human, being maxims of human wisdom, such as

have even gained a proverbial currency, in the judgments of philosophy,

and statesmanship, and common life.

The prophets, again--these are all men speaking by men s words and

voices. True their voices are voices also of God, but they are none the

less human, that God wants to use them as such, or that he sometimes

puts them to speaking in the first person for him, saying "I the Lord;"

for when he crowds himself thus into men, or men's voices, he only

proves how much he may prefer to do as man.

The same is true of the Epistles. They are written by men, to men, in

the words of men, under the relationships of teacher and taught, and

shepherd and flock. They deal with actual human conduct, in actual

human conditions. They speak to human difficulties and human dangers.

They show how good men suffer in times of persecution, how they bruise

Satan under their feet, how fidelity triumphs; in a word how the great

life-struggle of the church goes on.

A corresponding reason doubtless required the gospel of Christ to be

preached by human ministers. It is not commonly expected that thieves

will be sent to reform thieves, or perjurers to remonstrate with

perjury, but sinners are sent to gospel sinners. God certainly could

have taken a different method. He could have sent cohorts of angels

flying through the air, to publish the good news, even as they began to

do, for an hour, when Christ was here. He could have set the stars

chiming with the silver music of salvation. He could have made the

stones cry it out of the mountain tops, and under the ground, and under

the sea. But he wants the great work of the redemption to go on from

within the race itself, unfolding by internal growth, intending that

his kingdom shall be great and finally universal, only because the

powers or principles he has inserted are sufficient of themselves to

make it so.

He also constructs a corporate state, called the church, in which, as

being corporate, and not subject to death, he deposits the gospel and

the sacraments, and all the institutional appointments of religion,

thus to be conserved and perpetuated by man.

In the same way too, he makes the church even to be the pillar and

ground of the truth itself; for the disciples in it are to be Christ's

living epistles, gospels of the life, new incarnations of the word,

showing always what is in the text, by what is expressed in their life

and walk and character. Were it not for this light continually supplied

to the written gospel, from the lives of those who live it, the word of

the skies would shortly become an utterly dead language, a kind of

Sanscrit jargon, without either salvation or intelligence in it. Living

men are its interpretation, living men are its arguments and evidences.

It lives by man.

As the disciples are to be new incarnations, in this manner, of Christ,

so, in a sense, they are to be vehicles also of the Spirit,

demonstrations, revelations, of his otherwise unseen or unobserved

agency; and so, many of his most effective operations will be through

their gifts, works, prayers, sufferings, personal testimonies, and the

pentecostal glow of their assemblies.

Again, last of all, and as it were to include all, it is given to men

even to convert the world. Not that they, as being simply men, are able

to do any such thing, but that Christ, the Son of Man, being entered

into the race, and working as a leaven in the mass of it, will make

them a leaven also to one another, and set the ferment on till all is

leavened. And so the great world itself, all the empires, known or

unknown, all the continents, and islands undiscovered, all most distant

ages and times are given as a trust to men, originally to a very few,

very humble men. "Ye," said Christ, "are the light of the world." "Go

ye into all the world and disciple every creature."

I will not detain you with farther illustrations of the subject in

hand, but will simply suggest in conclusion, a few points variously

related, in the practical drift of its applications.

We have then a very significant presumption raised, that when any

breakage, or damage, occurs in any legitimate institution, or society

of the world, God has prepared, or put in somewhere, some kind of

self-remedial force to mend it. Thus if any church, or Christian

brotherhood, is rent by disagreements, embittered by recriminations,

and broken, for the time, as regards a due confidence of the future,

the remedy must still be in it, else it is nowhere. Even if God himself

undertakes for it, he will accomplish his restoring purpose, in some

very important sense, only by man, even by themselves; that is by their

strivings after one another, their sorrowings over themselves, their

prayers and their longings after the lost love. If there be any remedy

for them, it must so far come out of themselves. Not even God will try

to bring it from any other quarter.

So if there be a great nation rent by faction, a good government broken

down and trampled by rebellion, God has no miraculous fire to flash

upon the conspirators and scorch them down. It must be enough that he

has given a sword for the punishment of evil doers, that the remedy may

come by man, making due use of it. If the people too will know that God

is with them, let a spirit be kindled in their manly breast that shall

take them to the field, forbidding any word of peace to be spoken, till

the laws are vindicated and the foes of order crushed. If God will make

a broken world restore itself by man, much more a broken people, and it

will as certainly be done as there is quantity enough of manhood in

them--enough great sentiment and patriotic fire--to do it.

Again, the immense responsibility thrown upon Christ's followers, in

the fact that the salvation of the world is to be in so many ways, by

man, ought to be distinctly admitted and practically assumed. If they

are to preach the gospel, and light up the gospel by their lives, so to

be the gospel, and finally to regain the world to God; if Christ

himself lays it on them to be gospelers with him, putting the world in

their hands to be lived for, died for, won and saved, then how clear it

is that their faith will be no relaxation of responsibility, but the

begun fulfillment and seal of it rather. How nearly appalling too is

the fact that if God has any good thing to be done, it is to be done

somehow by man, and that he has the man, or men, or women, somewhere on

whom so great a charge is laid. As he has undertaken to make man good,

he will let the good that wants to be done, wait till their goodness

gets purpose, and fire, and sacrifice, in a word, reality, enough to do

it. And if they make slow progress, if the conversion of the world

drags heavily, then so it must; for God will not so far dishonor the

great salvation as to push on the propagation of it faster than it has

reality enough to propagate itself. If it takes a million of years to

recover the world to God, then a million it must have; for it never can

be accomplished, either in one, or in a hundred millions, unless it is

accomplished by man. O, how preposterous, in this view, is the soft

opinion many hold of faith; as if it were the faith of a soldier to

expect that his captain will do all the fighting himself, and that he

is never to fight under him, or win with him; or as if it were the true

believing unto life, to come in, as clinical patients, and lie down

upon the gospel to be saved by it! No! the salvation of God is no such

washy and thin affair--it has meaning, it has dignity; else it has no

mark of God upon it. To really believe is to come into the great

life-struggle of Jesus and be with him in it; to be engineering for

him, watching for occasions to commend him, watching for souls to

receive him, fighting for him in sacrifice, even as heroes fight for

their country. The salvation of the world by man--that is the

tremendous fact which all true faith takes hold of, and for which it is

girded even by the sign of the cross.

There is, furthermore, a great mine of comfort opened here, for such as

have settled into heart-sickness over human affairs, and the want of

all high movement in them. Some are sick because they hear no thunders,

and see no mighty stir in the heavens. If they could see God converting

the world by signs, and wonders, and mighty portents, there would seem

to be something going on! Nothing could be weaker than such a kind of

gospeling. Laying no hold of us by rational evidence, it would only

drum us to sleep in the tumults of the senses. And yet they are almost

pining to have the world's dull tedium broken, by some such outward

stir; never once recollecting that, while commotion is a profitless

noise, real motion is silent. Another class are pining, in the same

manner, for some new dispensation to break, that shall displace the

rotten hopelessness of the old; some second coming of Christ, some

purgation by fire, some literal new heavens. They want a Saviour

farther off and not one hid in the world's bosom, a Saviour in the

clouds of heaven, or in some miraculous new city,--just the Saviour

that would take us out of our faith and put us into our senses, and set

us running to see, instead of resting in love to know. Still another

class, who look for no such mock reliefs, are only the more sick,

because seeing no good, they have, beside, no hope of any. There seems

to be no good reason why the world should continue, for it comes to

nothing, losing always in one year, age, or place, what it gained in

another--constitutions, laws, liberties, learning, commerce, religion,

all swinging tidally, and as certain to go back in the ebb, as to come

in at the flow. Why should such a hopeless, always baffling, laboring

vanity be kept on foot? Why, my friends, because it is not hopeless!

because the grand, all-regenerating, force is already entered into the

world, and is working steadily on through all retrocessions and

advances alike. Lift up your heads O ye drooping ones! Christ is in the

world.! Jesus, Son of God, and word of God's eternity--he is about us,

within us, going through all things, moving onward in all. Leaven does

not make a noise when it works, and yet it works! And so the gospel

works, the progress goes on, a grand, mighty progress, and there is

really no retrocession. No river runs to the sea more certainly or

steadily, than the great salvation by man runs to conquest and a

kingdom. No reason why the world should continue? That is unbelief. Do

the men who are lifted up to such grand heights by the progress of.

society think so? No, there is reason enough to them, why the world

should continue; they only steal our gospel and millenium, which, if we

reclaim, we shall be as jubilant as they, with only so much better

right.

Let us also observe the beautiful delicacy of God in his plan of

salvation. He is not willing to make it a salvation for man only, as I

have said already, but contrives to make it also, as far as possible, a

salvation by man. As the seed of the woman goes down, so he contrives

to get a force into it that will finally bruise and trample its

adversary. If he should do every thing simply as acting upon us, it

would make us only underlings to eternity, waste timber of creation,

that he has only gathered and stored for the dry-rot of a state of

impotence, miscalled felicity. No, he wants to raise a character in us,

and, to do this, requires a great hiding of power. He must contrive to

put us a doing, in all that is to be done, striving to enter the

straight gate, working out our salvation with fear and trembling, as

only knowing by faith that he is working at all. And then his word of

promise at the end will be--"to him that overcometh." The beauty, the

delicacy, of his work is that he gets the force of it into our own

bosom, and lets it work as if it were a part of ourselves. True it is

all by Christ, and yet it is by the Christ within--the law of the

Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. And so, instead of making his mercy a

mere pity that kills respect, he makes it a power that lifts into

character and everlasting manhood. He becomes a second Adam, a kind of

better parentage in the race itself, and we rise by a new derivation

that nowise shames our feeling, or shatters our confidence. How

beautiful and tender the method! and when we conceive, in addition,

that we ourselves are to preach, and live, and illustrate, and

perpetuate, and spread, this gospel, having it as a gospel to prevail

by man, what shall we feel eternally, but that our very sorrow and

shame are ennobled by the grace we partake. And when we shall go home

to be with Christ, Christ the faithful witness, and prince of the kings

of the earth, what shall we do but confess, in loveliest homage--Unto

him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood; raising

our finale also to sing, in the glorified majesty of our feeling--And

hath made us kings and priests unto God.

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XIV.

THE BAD CONSCIOUSNESS TAKEN AWAY.

"Because that the worshipers, once purged, should have had no more

conscience of sins."--Heb. x, 2.

The reading is not, you observe, "conscience of no more sins,"--as if

the sins were stopped, but "no more conscience of sins,"--as if the

conscience of sins already past were somehow extirpated, or else the

sins taken quite away from it and forever extirpated themselves, as

facts, or factors of the life. And the allegation is, that while the

old sacrifices of the law had power to accomplish no such thing, it is

accomplished by the wonderful, seemingly impossible, efficacy of the

gospel sacrifice. Those older sacrifices could not make the comers

thereunto perfect--perfect, that is, as pertaining Ito the

conscience--and therefore they must needs be renewed as remembrances of

sin every year; but the offering of the body of Jesus, once for all,

was sufficient; allowing us forever after to have no more conscience of

sins. Now it is this practical wonder, this: seeming impossibility

accomplished by the cross, to which I invite your attention on the

present occasion. It is what our apostle elsewhere calls--The mystery

of faith in a pure conscience.

I fell in company, some years ago, with a college acquaintance--not a

minister of religion, but a remarkably subtle, closely scientific

thinker, and withal a devout Christian--who said to me, in a manner and

tone of sensibility I can never forget--My great trial in religion is,

to find how a clean bosom, in regard to sin, is ever possible. I can,

not see how my sin can ever be really gotten away; indeed I fall into

such darkness on this point, when I undertake to solve it, that I quite

lose my faith in the possibility of a real deliverance, and feel

obliged to say with David--"my Sin is ever before me." He went on to

state his difficulty more fully, but as I have it on hand to make an

exposition of the whole subject, the ground of his difficulty will be

covered with much other ground beside. How then is it, or how is it to

be imagined, that Christ, by his sacrifice, takes away the condemning

conscience, or the felt dishonor of transgression? This is the question

we are to consider, and, if possible, answer; in doing which I will--

I. Go over, as briefly as may be, certain supposed answers, that do not

appear to reach the real point of the question; and--

II. Will endeavor to exhibit and support by sufficient illustrations

what appears to be the true scriptural answer.

I. The supposed answers that are not sufficient. They are various and

very unlike among themselves; they still fall short, all of them, at

the same point; viz., in the fact that they do not touch, or take away

at all from the mind, or memory, or conscience, the fact and shame of

wrong-doing. Be the remedy this or that, still the man, as a man, is

none the less consciously guilty, none the less really dishonored,

shamed, damned, before himself. There stands the fact, unmoved and

immovable forever, that he is a malefactor soul, none the better for

being safe, or forgiven, or justified.

Thus, when it is conceived that Christ has borne our punishment, that,

if it were true, might take away our fear of punishment, but fear is

one thing, and mortified honor, self-condemning guilt, self-chastising

remorse, another and Very different thing; and that will be only the

more exasperated, that divine innocence itself has been put to

suffering on its account.

Neither will it bring any relief to show that the justice of God is

satisfied. Be it so; the transgressor is none the better satisfied with

himself--his own self-damning justice is as far from being satisfied as

before.

Is it then conceived that what has satisfied the justice of God, has

also atoned the guilty conscience? Will it then make the guilty

conscience less guilty, or say sweeter things of itself, that it sees

innocence, purity, goodness divine, put to suffering for it? If any

thing could exasperate, even insupportably, the sense of guilt, it

should be that.

Is it then brought forward to quell the guilt of the conscience that

Christ has evened our account legally by his sacrifice, and that we are

even justified of God, for Christ's sake? But if God, in this manner,

and by a kind of benevolent fiction, calls us just, do we any the less

certainly disapprove and damn ourselves even to eternity? Nothing it

would seem can save us from it, but to lose the integrity of our

judgments!

Forgiveness taken as a mere release of claim, or a negative letting go

of right against transgression, brings, if possible, even less help to

the conscience. Christ had forgiven his crucifiers in his dying prayer,

but it was the very crime of the cross, nevertheless, that pricked so

many hundreds of hearts on the day of pentecost. Christ bad forgiven

them, but their consciences had not!

But Christ renews the soul itself, it will be said, and makes it just

within; when, of course, it will be justified. That does not follow. If

Judas at the very point where he confessed--"I have betrayed the

innocent blood," could have been instantly transformed into an angel of

beauty, his purified sensibility would have been shaken, I think, with

a greater horror even of his crime than before.

But the fatherhood of God--the disciple of another and different school

will take refuge under that, and say, that here, at least, there is

truly no more conscience of sins. Would it not be strange, if a

tolerably good father can forgive and forget, and God can not? But who

is God, and what most fitly represents him? a mortal father who is

able, just because of his weakness, to forgive and forget, or to

forgive without forgetting, or to forget without forgiving, or the

transgressor's own everlasting immutable conscience, which can neither

forgive nor forget? What is this conscience, in fact, but God's throne

of judgment in the man? Why, if God, in his fatherhood, were such a

kind of being, dealing in laxities and fond accommodations, having no

care for his rectoral honor, as the defender of right and order, we

certainly are not such to ourselves. A conscience that can say, "no

matter, God is rather loose and very easy with his children, therefore

I will be to myself as good as good in my sin, and let the matter

go,?"--I certainly, for one, whatever may be said by others, have no

conscience that can go in that loose gait. I love my conscience because

it is the one thing in me that goes true and will unalterably,

inevitably damn my wrongs, even if God should let them go. Nay, if God

be such a God, it would even set me in a shudder, to find how easily I

might sigh for a being whom I can more sufficiently respect.

You perceive in this recital, my friends, how great a matter we have

undertaken, and how very obstinate, or intractable, our difficulty is.

Doubtless a foul vessel may be washed, a fracture mended, a personal

injury redressed, a sick body restored to health and soundness, and

dressed in a new covering of flesh; nay, there is a clear possibility

of raising the dead to life, but to conceive a sinner so wrought in as

to obliterate the fact of his sin, leaving no more conscience of it, is

a very different matter, and if the possibility were not really: shown

by the gospel itself, we must certainly give up the question, as one

that we can not solve, by any faculty that God has given us. We come

then--

II. To the question as it is, and the answer given it by the scriptures

of God.

The great question meeting us at this point is, whether it is possible,

or how far possible; to change the consciousness of a soul, without any

breach of its identity? In this manner, we shall find, the gospel

undertakes to remove, and assumes the fact of a removal of, the

dishonor and self-condemnation of sin. But we shall conceive the matter

more easily and naturally, if we notice, before going into the

scripture inquiry, certain analogies discoverable in our human state,

which may serve as approaches to the proper truth of the question.

Thus a thoroughly venal, low-principled man, elected President of the

United States, will undergo, not unlikely, an inward lifting of

sentiment and impulse, corresponding with the immense lift of his

position. The great honor put upon him makes him willing to honor

himself. He wants to deserve his place and begins to act in character

in it. He is the same man, regarding his personal identity, but he is

raised, even to himself, in the grade he occupies. His old natural

consciousness has a kind of Presidential consciousness superinduced,

which holds a higher range of quality. He lives, in fact,

Presidentially, and is dignified inwardly by the dignities of his

position.

How many thousand soldiers, who before were living in the low, mean

vices, lost to character and self-respect, have been raised, in like

manner, in our armies, to quite another grade of being. It has given

them a wholly different sense of themselves, that their dear, great

country has come upon them in so great power. They are consciously

ennobled, in the fact that they have borne themselves heroically in the

field; and are so become another kind of man even to themselves. They

are the same, yet by a vast reach of distance not the same. A certain

great something has come into their feeling. They stand more firmly,

and bear themselves more erectly; and it gives them an-exultant feeling

even, that their discouraged and miserably forlorn consciousness is

gone--supplanted by the sense of self-respect, and manly honor.

The same, again, is true in a different way, of all the gifted ones in

art and speech and poetry, when they are taken by the inspirations of

genius. When such a soul, that was down upon the level of uses,

torturing itself into production for applause, or even for bread,

begins to behold God's signatures upon his works, and worlds, and the

magnificent discipline he gives us; discovering in objects ideas, in

facts the faces of truth; catching also the fires of a Promethean heat

from all subtlest moods and hardest flints of experience;--then it is

become, to itself, quite another creature. It is as if the grub-state

were gone by, and the winged life had broken loose, to try the freedom

of the air. In that finer element he ranges at will, lifted by his

etherial seership, to move in altitudes hitherto invisited; consciously

another and different being--another, yet still the same.

In these and other like examples, afforded us in the field of our

natural life, we are made familiar with the possibility of remarkable

liftings in the consciousness of men, such as make them really other to

themselves, and set them in a higher range of being; and, by these

examples, we are prepared, as it were beforehand, to that more

wonderful ascent above ourselves which is accomplished in Christ, when

he takes us away from the conscience of sins. He does it--this is the

general, or inclusive truth that covers the whole ground of the

subject--by so communicating God, or himself as the express image of

God, that he changes, in fact, the plane of our existence. Without due

note of this, we do not understand Christianity; the very thing it

proposes is to bring us up into another level, where the consciousness

shall take in other matter, and have a higher range. Thus, when the

apostle says--"And hath raised us up together and made us sit together

in heavenly places in Christ Jesus," he is speaking of a change purely

internal, a conscious lifting to another grade of life, and a higher

range of joy. The word places, here occurring, belongs to the English

only, and it is put in to fill out the plural of the neuter adjective

heavenlies, used here as a noun. But sitting in the heavenlies, does

not mean, of necessity, sitting in other localities. It means sitting

in heavenly things, as well; above the world, that is, and the flesh

and sin, in the serene, pure element of God's eternal love and glory,

there to be folded in harmony, raised in- consciousness, filled to the

full with all God's heavenlies, even as his angels are; no more to be

shamed forever by the little, defiled consciousness that is henceforth

overspread, submerged, and drowned by the sea-full of God's infinite

worthiness and righteousness wafted in upon it.

Now it must not be imagined that this one passage of scripture stands

by itself in asserting such a sentiment. The whole New Testament is

full of it. "If ye then be risen with Christ seek those things which

are above where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God,"--"Hath made

us kings and priests unto God,"--"A chosen generation--a royal

priesthood,"--"Partakers of the divine nature,"--"Sons of God,"--In all

such modes of expression, and a hundred others that might be cited, we

have the same thought breaking out on our discovery; that Christ is

lifting us out of shame and condemnation, into a higher plane and a

footing of conscious affiliation with God.

But you will not conceive how very essential this idea of a raising of

the consciousness may be, if you do not bring up distinctly the immense

fall of our mortal consciousness, in the precipitation of our sin. In

their true normal condition, as originally created, human souls are

inherently related to God, made permeable and inspirable by him,

intended to move in his divine impulse forever. A sponge in the sea is

not more truly made to be filled and permeated by the water in which it

grows, than a soul to be permeated and possessed by the Infinite Life.

It is so made that, over and above the little, tiny consciousness it

has of itself, it may have a grand, all-inclusive consciousness of God.

In that consciousness it was to be, and be lifted and blessed evermore.

The senses it should have of God, always present, were to be its

dignity, its base of equilibrium, its everlasting strength, and growth,

and majesty, and reigning power in good.

But this higher consciousness, the consciousness of God, is exactly

what was lost in transgression, and nothing was left of course but the

little, defiled consciousness of ourselves, in which we are all

contriving how to get some particles of good, or pleasure, or pride, or

passion, that will comfort us. The great, inspirable, and divinely

permeable faculty, is closed up. We do not know God any more, we only

know ourselves. We have the eyes, and the ears, that were given us, but

we are too blind to see, too deaf to hear--"Having the understanding

darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance

that is in us because of the blindness of our heart." The true normal

footing or plane of our humanity was thus let down, and it is exactly

this which Christ undertakes to restore. And until that restoration is

accomplished, the soul occupies a plane of mere self-knowing, and

self-loving, and is, in fact, a lower order of being. It lives in the

conscience of sins, a guilty, self-denouncing, and miserably shamed

life. But as soon as it is opened to God, by the faith of Jesus Christ,

and is truly born of God, it begins to be the higher creature God meant

it to be--the same yet another. It is no more like the sponge stuck

fast on some dry rock, but like the same, filled and vitalized by its

own proper element, and spreading itself in its possessorship, so to

speak, of the sea!

It is of course to be admitted that the disciple, raised thus in his

plane, has the same conscience, and remembers the same sins, and is the

very same person that he was before; but the consciousness of God, now

restored, makes him so nearly another being to himself, that the old

torment of his sin will scarcely so much as ripple the flow of his

peace. It takes, in fact, a considerable rock, a little way out from

the shore, to do more than dimple or curl the tide-swell coming in; and

the sea, at the full, will simply bury it. and hide it from the sight,

in the depths of its own stillness. Or we may imagine, without much

danger of extravagance, that when a soul is really filled with the

higher consciousness, moving wholly in the divine movement, so great a

lifting of character, and quality, and action, will carry it above the

old range so completely, as to let the wrong and shame quite drop away;

even as the insect creatures hovering on wings about us, flitting in

swift motion, and playing with the air and the light, remember probably

no more the cold, slow worms they were, when crawling, but a week ago,

in the ground.

You will understand, of course, that if Christ is purging thus men's

consciences, by lifting them above themselves, into a higher range of

life, the conception will appear and reappear, in many distinct forms,

and weave itself, in so many varieties, into the whole texture of

Christianity. Notice then three distinct forms, not to speak of others,

in which this change of grade or personal consciousness comes into view

as a mighty gospel fact.

As the first of these, I name justification, or justification by faith.

The grand last point or final. effect of Christian justification is,

"no more conscience of sins;" for, having that accomplished, it is

inconceivable that God should condemn us. when we do not condemn

ourselves, and having it not accomplished, but condemning still

ourselves, no justification by God will do us any good. But in this

matter of justification, the less we make of the old standing

alternative the better; what if it should happen that, while we are

debating which of two conceptions is the true one, they are neither of

them true? And so I think it will sometime be found. According to the

scripture, which is very plain, gospel justification turns on no such

mere objective matter as the squaring of an account; nor on any such

subjective matter as our being made inherently righteous; but it turns

on the fact of our being so invested with God, and closeted in his

righteous impulse, that he becomes a felt righteousness upon us. Our

consciousness is so far changed, in this manner, by the river-flood of

God's character upon us, that, as long as our faith keeps the

connection good, and permits the river to flow, we are raised above all

condemnation and have no more conscience of sins. Inherently speaking

we are not righteous; our store is in God not in ourselves; but we have

the supply traductively from him, just as we do the supply of light

from the sun. But the new divine consciousness in which we live is

continually conforming us, more and more deeply, and will settle us, at

last, in its own pure habit. In this manner, faith is counted to us for

righteousness, because it holds us to God, in whom we have our springs

of supply.

See how beautifully and simply Paul sets forth this true Christian idea

of justification--"But now the righteousness of God, without the law,

is manifested, even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of

Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe." It is not

righteousness for us in a book, nor in us by inherent character, but

righteousness unto us and upon us, in its own living flow, as long as

we believe. It is a higher consciousness which God generates and feeds,

and as long as he does it there is no more conscience of sins.

This same truth of a raising of our plane appears in another form, in

what is called the witness of the Spirit. "The Spirit itself beareth

witness with our spirit that we are the children of God; and if

children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." Here

the conception is that, as being spirit, we are permeable by the divine

Spirit, and that he has a way of working in our working, so as to be

consciously known as a better presence in our hearts. And so we have

the confidence of children or sons, raised in our before low-bred

nature, and dare to count ourselves God's heirs--fellow heirs with

Christ our brother. Nothing is said of sins in this connection, but we

can see for ourselves that, being thus ennobled by the inflowing

Spirit, we shall be too much raised in the confidence of our dignity,

to be troubled, or shamed by the past. And this same lifting, or

ennobling-of our spirit, is put in other forms of assertion; as when

Christ, promising the Comforter, says--"At that day ye shall know that

I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." To be thus interlocked

with the Father and the Son in a firm knowledge of the fact, revealed

by the witnessing Spirit, is to have a consciousness opened that is

dignity itself and glory begun. The same thing is put more practically,

by the apostle, when he says--"Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not

fulfill the lusts of the flesh." Keep fast in the higher element, where

the senses of God and his joy are lifting the mind into liberty, and

the lower and more carnal impulses will be left behind and forgot.

Once more this grand fact of the gospel, the raising of our plane of

being, is presented in a still different manner in what is said of the

conscious inhabitation of Christ. "Christ in you the hope of

glory,"--"But ye see me,"--"bide in me,"--"Until Christ be formed in

you." But the great apostle to the Gentiles, himself a Christian man,

all through, having that for his sublime distinction, declares himself,

on this point, out of his very consciousness--"I am crucified with

Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." It

is, you perceive, as if his being itself were taken well nigh out of

its identity by Christ revealed in it. The old sin--he does not think

of it. The old I--why it is gone--"yet not I." He was going to say that

he Paul was alive, but he did not like to say so much as that, and so

he puts down his negative on it, and says he does not live. But O, the

living, all-quickening Christ--that is boasting enough--"Christ liveth

in me; for the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the

Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." How great a fact was

the lifting of this man's plane, which took him, demonized by bigotry

and hate, and made him the hero and strangely Christed propagator of

the cross. Then he was Saul, now he is Paul; but the change touches

more than a letter--he is raised even in his own feeling to quite

another order of being. The conscience of sins--it may be that he has

it in a sense; for, being an eternal fact, he must eternally know it;

but the Christ-consciousness in him ranges so high above the

self-consciousness, that he lives in a summit of exaltation, which the

infinitesimal disturbances of his human wrong and shame can not reach.

Here then, my friends, you have opened to view one of the greatest

triumphs of Christianity, perhaps the very greatest of all. To bring a

clean thing out of: an unclean is a much easier matter than to make a

good conscience out of an evil or accusing conscience. Here the

difficulty appears to be a. kind of metaphysical impossibility. Indeed

there is no philosopher, who would not say, beforehand, that such a

thing is even demonstrably impossible. For if the accusing conscience

accuses rightly, then it must either be extirpated, which decomposes

the man, or else it must be suborned to give a lying testimony, when of

course it will even condemn itself. But our gospel is able to look so

great a difficulty in the face, and, what is more, turns it by a method

so very simple as to be even sublime. When once you have conceived the

possibility of raising a soul into a higher grade and order, where the

consciousness shall take in more than the mere self, the body of God's

own righteousness, and love, and peace, the problem is solved and that

in a way so plain, yet so easily ennobling to our state of shame, that

it proves itself by its own self-supporting evidence. This we say

instinctively ought to be and must be true.

Only the more strange is it that, when this way of remedy is, and no

other can be, sufficient, we so easily fall out of our faith, and begin

to put ourselves on methods of purgation that only mock our endeavor.

Having the grand possibilities of a good conscience opened to us in

Christ, and nothing given us to do but just to receive by faith the

manifested righteousness of God, we begin to work, in the lower level

of our shame, upon the shameful unclean matter, as if going to purge it

ourselves. One will mend himself up in a way of self-correction; which,

if he could do, would, alas, not even touch the conscience of his old

sins. Another goes to the work of self-cultivation, where he may

possibly start some plausible amenities on the top of his bad

conscience, even as flowers will sometimes be induced to grow upon a

glacier. Another will pacify his bad conscience by his alms and

philanthropic sacrifices, when an avalanche on its way could as well be

pacified by the same. Others will make up a purgation by their

repressive penances and voluntary humiliations, when the very thing

their consciences complain of is, that they are too miserably shamed

and humiliated already. Multitudes also will expect much from

purgatorial fires hereafter, as if being duly chastised could make a

good conscience! or as if these supposed fires would not rather burn in

the brand of sin than burn it out! Now these poor scanty methods of

delusion, unlike as they are to each other, are just as good one as

another, because they are all equally worthless. Who could believe that

rational beings, having so grand a way open to the new footing of sons

of God, and having once conceived that way, could yet subside into

these wretched futilities?

Worthier of sympathy but scarcely more worthy of the gospel name, are

those hapless souls, who have fallen under their bad conscience to be

forever harrowed and tormented by it. They have no faith to believe in

a concrete, personal grace, and are only haunted by the nightmare of

their moral convictions. They mope along their pathway therefore,

looking always shamefully down; as if the sky above were paved with

condemnations. If they bear the Christian name, they have yet no real

peace, no sweet element of rest and confidence. They seem ever to be

saying, "mine iniquities have taken hold upon me so that I am not able

to look up." Or sometimes there is a trouble more specific--some one

sin, the shame, the inward mortification, or damnation of which,

follows them, day and night, and even year by year; a crime unknown to

the world, but for which they inwardly blush, or choke with guilty

pain, whenever it meets them alone. They seem to be even everlastingly

dishonored before themselves. Perhaps they are, and fitly should be;

but, my friends, there is a medicine for all such torments. Looking

down upon your sins, or your particular sin, you can be, must be,

everlastingly shamed; but if you can look away to Christ, take hold of

Christ and rise with him, you shall go above your trouble, you shall be

strong, and free, and full, and even righteous; established in all

glorious confidence, because your very consciousness is lifted and

glorified, by, what comes into it from God's eternal concourse and

friendship.

And here, just here, in fact, we strike the culminating point of wonder

and glory in what Christ, by his more perfect offering, has been able

and was even required to accomplish, to put us on a footing of complete

salvation; viz., a restoration, forever, of the soul's lost honor. We

could not take our place among the pure angels of God, and be really

united to their blessedness, when we are inwardly self-disgusted,

shamed, and even to be eternally stigmatized, by our condemning

consciences. Nothing sufficiently restores us, which does not restore

the mind's honor. And this, exactly, is our confidence; "that we are to

be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of our

Lord Jesus Christ." We are even called to "seek for honor, and glory,

and immortality." What dishonor, what possible shame, can be our

torment, when our very consciousness is robed in the righteousness of

God? There is to be no more condemnation, no more conscience of sins;

simply because we are so raised in the plane of our sentiment, and

life, that we may think of ourselves, without any sense of dishonor

upon us. We go in--heirs, sons, princes of God--joining ourselves

boldly to all the royalties and sublime honors of the kingdom.

Are there none of us, my friends, that have many times sighed after

just this hope, nay, that are sighing for it now? You have lost

forever, you say, the chastity of your nature, you are and must forever

be a guilty man; how then can you ever think of yourself without

mortification? Getting into heaven itself, what can you ever do with so

many bad facts upon you, and a bad conscience in you testifying

eternally against them? No! no! There is even to be given back the

sense of honor that was lost. You shall go in, not to hang your head,

but to hold it up in praise and confidence. Now that mighty word is

fulfilled according to its utmost meaning--"raised up together to sit

in the heavenlies." We are there "together" in the common fold, we

"sit" there in a titled security, the "heavenlies" are all ours--the

honor, the confidence, the peace, the praise. O my God, what reverence

shall every creature have for every other, when thou puttest honor upon

all! gathering in before thee, nothing which defileth, or abideth in

shame, but only such as Christ hath raised to eternal honor, before

both thee and--themselves!

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XV.

THE BAD MIND MAKES A BAD ELEMENT.

"Then answered the Jews and said unto him--say we not well, that thou

art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?"--John viii, 48.

It is often remarked as a curious, half ludicrous distinction of insane

persons, that they look on others round them as being out of their

head. And yet this kind of phenomenon is more or less observable, in

all cases of diseased action, whether mental or spiritual; the subject

sees his disorder, not in himself, but in the objects and conditions

round him.

Under the disease or disaffection called sin, the same is true; as we

may see by the answer of these carping hypocrites, when Christ reproves

their high pretenses, and sanctimonious lies. "You call yourselves

children of Abraham," he says, "when you do none of his works, when

your fatherhood is more truly discovered in the father of lies. And as

he abode not in the truth, and has no truth in him, so because I tell

you the truth ye believe me not." They feel the sharpness of the words,

but do not perceive the solemn justice of the argument--throwing it

captiously back upon him as in the text; "say we not well, that thou

art a Samaritan and hast a devil?" Just as they should if his argument

was true; for the men who have a devilish spirit are sure to see their

devil objectively in others. There must be a devil on hand somewhere,

they are sure, and who will expect them to find it where it is, in

themselves? The truth accordingly which I now propose for your

consideration is this:

That a bad mind sees bad things, and makes to itself a bad element. In

other words, a bad mind projects its own evils into persons and

conditions round it; charging the pains of its own inward disorder to

the objects that refuse to bless it, and counting, it may be, Christ

himself a sting only of annoyance.

It would be far more agreeable to me to assert this truth universally,

or so as to include the good; showing how they convert all things to

good by their bright and loving spirit, and how the stones even of the

field are in league with them to bless them; but this would take me

over too large a ground, and therefore I must be content to occupy you,

for the time, with a subject not grateful in itself, hoping that you

may even find the greater benefit in it. If the errand we are after is

not pleasant, if it compels us to go burrowing into the dark,

underground, abysses and pains of evil in the soul, let us not recoil

from the task, because we find a great deal of our conceit inverted and

a great many of our complaints of God and the world turned back upon

ourselves.

I do not mean, of course, to say, that we can have nothing to complain

of, or that other men can not do us bitter wrongs. Neither do I

undertake to say, that we shall not feel them. But he that suffers a

wrong rightly, finds a law of compensation going with him, as with God,

so that his injury, or injured feeling, is repaid many times over, like

that of God, by the consciously sublime repose of his own

self-approving spirit. And, this being true, it is only the bad mind in

us, after all, that allows us to be really troubled and harassed by

wrong. I will only add that what I am going to say may seem to be an

over-statement, or exaggeration of the truth, without this

qualification, and must therefore ask to have it remembered.

We shall best open the gate of our argument on this subject, if we

notice two great facts, or laws of our nature, which are the ground of

this tendency in us to refer our own evils to things about us, and in

the same way to keep us from a discovery of them as being in ourselves.

First, by a fixed necessity of language, we are obliged, apart from all

the blinding effects of our sin, to represent. a great part of what

transpires in our experience, in a way of objective description. For

example, it is the natural way of language to call things "hot,"

"sweet," "bitter," and the like, when in fact the words really describe

nothing but our own inward sensations. So we say that a "subject is

dark," not because there is any thing dark in the subject, but that we

are dark to it. So again we say. that a thing bears a "suspicious

look," when we are suspicious of it; or of some spectacle that it "is

fearful," when we are fearfully moved by it. We speak in the same way

of "taking our chances" and "meeting our dangers," when in fact there

is neither chance nor danger in things at all, but only an absolute

certainty that this or that will take place. The uncertainty, or

ignorance of what is to come is in us, and we call it chance or danger

in things. Now the great part of mankind go through life, using every

hour these objective terms of language, without ever once suspecting

that what they describe as without, is nothing but an experience within

themselves. Almost all staple words of language, as related to our

inward experience, are of just this kind; it could not, as might easily

be shown, have been otherwise. In this manner, we put almost all that

we suffer, enjoy, feel, and think, into the objects and doings and

characters round us, not understanding that what we figure, as in them,

is really transpiring in ourselves--just as we say, how often, that we

have "taken a cold," and verily believe that a cold something, we know

not what, has seized us; whereas we have simply gotten up a

fever--probably by over-indulgence--and then the shiverings and

atmospheric chills that follow we take for the causes of the mischief.

But there is another great condition, or law of experience in bad

minds, that is operating always and more powerfully in the same

direction. A bad mind lives in things and for things, or we might

rather say, under things. Condition, pleasure, show, are its god. And

then it follows that the worship is only another name for distemper,

unreason, hallucination. It is not positively insane, but what is very

nearly the same thing, unsane--a nature out of joint, poisoned, racked

with pains, a cloudy, wild, ungoverned, misconceiving power. It knows

nothing but things, and if things do not bless it, what can it do but

fall to cursing them? Being a distempered organ, it sees its distempers

only in things and conditions round it. Thus when a diseased ear keeps

up a nervous drumming in the brain, all sweetest music will have that

drumming in it. So if the taste is bittered by some dyspectic woe, it

will find that bitter savor in all most delicate things, and even in

the pure waters of the spring. So also, I suppose, if the humors of the

eye were jaundiced, the pure light of heaven would be yellowed also.

Even the sun is smoky, seen through a smoked glass. Just so we are

meeting all sorts of bitter, painful, and bad things, in our life, just

because we are bitter, painful, bad, ourselves, and can not see that

this is the root of our misery.

Besides it is a fact, under this great law of retributive disorder,

that even good things are really bad to our feeling, because there is a

bad mind in us. They are not given to be our torment, but the

subjective badness of the soul makes them so; just as the weakness of

the diseased eye makes the light a cause of injury and pain. The light

is not bad in itself, but the receiving organ is bad, and so the pure

light, image itself of God, shoots in arrows of pain that sting the

body. In the same way selfishness and sin make the whole soul a

diseased receiving organ; when, of course, every thing received or

looked upon is bad, and imparts some kind of pain. The good law is made

death unto it, Christ himself a savor of death. Truth is bad to us,

holy men are a disturbance, life a burden, death a terror, heaven

itself a world of constrained service and unreal or impossible joy.

We come now to the matter of fact itself. Is it only theory of which we

have been speaking, or is it fact?

Here we make our appeal first of all to the scripture, where the

illustrations are manifold and striking. There was never among men a

more inoffensive, winning, and beautiful character than Joseph. But his

brethren hated him and could not speak peaceably to him--hated him so

intensely that they were willing to put him out of the way, by almost

any method, however cruel. They talked with one another about him,

painted him as a selfish, proud brother, and set him off in the most

odious colors. Having a bad mind towards him, they saw only bad and

hateful things in him. But the bad things were all in themselves, not

in him. His only crime was his worth, and the beauty of his spirit, and

that God, on this account, had advanced him, giving him the precedence

his character deserved. So with Saul; the devil of jealousy creeps into

his morbid, selfish heart, and he sees in David, the faith-.ful servant

of his throne, a scheming usurper only and traitor, waiting to vault

into his place. He is wrought up thus to such a pitch of fear and

malice, that, in one of his paroxysms, he hurls a javelin at his head.

The evil he sees in David is really in his own wild, ugly passion, but

instead of strangling that, he tries to murder him!

Equally mad, exceedingly mad, almost conscientiously mad; as he himself

relates, was Saul, the young rabbi of Tarsus, though in a different

vein. The fiery young zealot was hot against Jesus, hot against

Stephen, hot also against all the disciples of the new religion; but

the heat of his passion he afterwards discovered was in the bad fire of

his own bad mind, and the miserable bigotry that possessed him.

It is also a fact most remarkable, evincing the same thing, that Jesus

Christ, the only spotless and perfect character that ever breathed the

air of our planet, was more accused and hated, and charged with worse

crimes, than it ever fell to the lot of any mortal to perpetrate. He

was not only a Samaritan and had a devil, but he cast out devils by a

devil, he broke the Sabbath, he was a mover of sedition, he made

himself equal with God, he spoke blasphemy, he was a conspirator

against C�sar, his silence was called obstinacy, his eating and

drinking gluttony and drunkenness, his cross the proof of his weakness

and a fit mark for jeering, his death his defeat as an impostor and his

final expulsion from the world. And yet there was nothing in him to

irritate, or anger good men. His life was beauty itself, his spirit

breathed the pure benignity even of God. Yes, and for just this reason,

he disturbed the bad mind of men only the more bitterly. Troubled,

heated, moved with jealousy, convinced of evil, they all rushed upon

him as the troubler; becoming, at last, so exasperated against him, as

to break out--priests, rabbis, senators, soldiers, populace--crying,

all with one voice, crucify him, crucify him. See them gathering round

his cross, hear their coarse mockeries and jeers! the poor fools have

no thought or suspicion, that they are raging, in this diabolical

malice, against exasperating causes that are after all in themselves!

The same truth is continually thrust upon our observation, in the

intercourse of life. The passionate, ill-natured man is an example,

living always in stormy weather, even though it be the quiet of

dew-fall round him--always wronged, always hurt, always complaining of

some enemy. He has no conception that this enemy is in his own

bosom--in the sourness, the ungoverned irritability, the habitual

ill-nature of his own bad spirit and character. I speak not here of

some single burst of passion, into which a man of amiable temper may,

for once, be betrayed; but I speak, more especially, of the angry

characters--always brewing in some tempest of violated feeling. They

have a great many enemies, they are unaccountably ill-treated, and can

not understand why it is. They have no suspicion that they see and

suffer bad things because they are bad, that being ill-natured is about

the same thing as having ill-treatment, and that all the enemies they

suffer from are snugly closeted in their own devilish temper.

The same is true of fretful persons--men and women that wear away fast

and die, because they have worried life completely out. Nothing goes

right; husband, or wife, or child, or customer, or sermon. They are

pricked and stung at every motion they make, and wonder why it is that

others are permitted to float along so peacefully, and they never

suffered to have a moment of peace in their lives! And the very simple

reason is that life is a field of nettles to them, because their

fretful, worrying tempers, are always pricking out, through the tender

skin of their uneasiness. Why, if they were set down in Paradise,

carrying their bad mind with them, they would fret at the good angels,

and the climate, and the colors even of the roses.

The animosities of the world are commonly to be solved in the same

way--"Hateful and hating one another." A purely good mind would not

hate even the worst of enemies and wrong-doers, but would. have a

sublime joy in loving him still. Thus we have one kind of enmity that

hates differences of thought and sentiment, and is continually rasped

by the fact that other men are so generally wrong-headed. Commonly the

difficulty is prejudice, or bigotry in ourselves, reigning as a narrow,

self-willed principle in the heart. Another misery we suffer, in the

pride, and the high airs, and the ambition, and the undeserved

successes of others. We wish there was some justice in the world, and

that such people had their due! This now is envy in the soul,

green-eyed, sick, self-tormenting envy. Then, again, we have it as

another form of misery, that, having injured some one, we for that

reason hate him; and there is no hatred so implacable, so bitter, and

so like the pain of hell, as that which a man has to one whom he has

injured--not to one who has injured him, but to one whom he has injured

himself. And yet he will charge it not to himself, but only to the

unaccountable fact, that the object of his malice must be so bad, so

unmitigably hateful.

So again in regard to things of condition. The poor hypochondriac is

just ready to be stranded in utter poverty and distress, though he

holds, it may be, millions of property. We laugh at the strange fatuity

he suffers. But every selfish mind is in it, only in some different

way, or in some less exaggerated and palpably absurd form. Thus, what

care, fear, anxiety, hunger, eagerness, is there in the world; and the

secret of it is, that we are all imagining some fault in our condition.

We want condition. Our thirsty, weary, discontented soul finds all it

wants of blessedness denied, and wonders why it is that God has given

us such a miserable desert to live in; as if the desert were in the

world and not in ourselves--an immense Sahara wider than Africa knows!

Why, if we were in the midst of God's own paradise, carrying our bad

mind with us, we should see the desert there. The inward dearth and

desolation of a mind separated from God and the all-sufficing rest and

fullness of his peace, would raise mutinous questions and harsh

accusations of dryness, against the finest, most superlative felicity

God has ever been able to invent for his angels themselves.

Let us not omit to notice that the immoralities and crimes of the world

are commonly conceived, by those who are in them, to be not of

themselves, but to be chargeable on the bad causes round them. What is

more continually asserted by thieves and gamblers, than the maxim that

the world owes them a living; till, finally, they half teach themselves

to feel that the world wrongs them, because it does not pay what it

owes, but requires them to take the pay as they may find it. Whereas

the bottom fact of all is, that they hate the bad necessity of work.

The blasphemer, raging in a storm of imprecations and swearing by all

sacred names--he is saying inwardly, even if no one remonstrates with

him, how can I help it? an angel would speak some bad words, if he had

such a horse as this to manage, or such a neighbor to deal with. The

poor victim of drink--was he not disinherited by his father? or broken

down by the slanders of enemies? or troubled by loads of debt from

misfortunes that overtook him? Or married to a wife who was a perpetual

thorn to his peace? Was he not driven by the bad world somehow, as he

manages to think himself, into this mode of drowning his misery? And so

of the traitor hatching his treason--whole states of traitors hatching

public treasons. Listen to their grievances--all in others, none in

themselves. They have been injured, or insulted, or at any rate they

were going to be. They are hot with the sense of injury not yet

arrived, and must have their redress! Farewell order! welcome anarchy

and blood! What an example of human passion, seeing worlds of wrong and

enmity through the smoke of its own guilty jealousies, and the rampant

fury of its own domineering habit.

Such is human nature in its bad estate everywhere. No sin sees its own

evil; but the world is evil, everything is evil to it. Even truth is

evil. Why should the preacher come to us with so many unwelcome

messages? as if it were not enough to be dragged through such a world

as this, without being disturbed all the way by hard accusations! It

may be that we all sin; but the circumstances we live in are all bad,

and what do we do, but what the circumstances make us. Let the preacher

charge upon the circumstances! When they are not really angry at the

truth, how many hearers dislike it. Little conception have they that

the badness of the sermon is in themselves--"Say we not well, thou art

a Samaritan and hast a devil?"

The subject I have now endeavored to illustrate is itself a purely

practical subject, and yet a great many practical things beside are

opened by it, that do not seem, at first, to be included. And--

1. It puts in a sad light of evidence what may well enough be called

the weak point of Christianity; viz., the fact that the souls to be

saved will be always seeing themselves in it, and not seeing it as it

is--turning it thus into an element as dry as their dryness, as bitter

as their bitterness, as distasteful and oppressive as their own weak

thraldom under sin. And so it turns out that Christ is dry, bitter, a

hard yoke, any thing but what he is. O, what power would there be in

his love, and beauty, and divine greatness, if it were not for this.

The grand difficulty in the way of a general conversion is, that the

bad minds of the world so immediately convert the gospel into their own

figure. Christ is to them a root out of a dry ground, having no form or

comeliness, and no beauty to be desired--they turn away their faces, he

is despised and not esteemed. And what does he propose, in their view,

but to make them like himself, laying it upon them also to be roots out

of a. dry ground, even as they are to follow him in self-denial,

self-sacrifice, and bearing the cross. "These you propose to us," they

say, "for our allotment; and what shall we have after we have

sacrificed ourselves in this manner, and given up even our souls to the

perdition of righteousness?" Every good and great thing offered is

discolored from the bad color of their own bad state. And so the

perpetual danger is, that what is given for their life, will be only a

savor of death. Even the liberty of Christ appears to be only a way of

thraldom--how can they imagine that the only real liberty of mind is

the liberty of being in the truth, and the only possession of self the

loss of self in God? And so it comes to pass that our gospel--mighty,

gracious, captivating enough, we might think, to make an easy conquest

of the world--dwindles sadly and gets fatally stifled, because it can

not be to men's eyes, what it really is in itself. It can not be the

salvation it would, just because a salvation is wanted.

It used to be frequently taught that men have no susceptibility that

can be acted on by the gospel, save in a way of revulsion; that they

must be only more exasperated by it, the more powerfully they are made

to feel it. No, the difficulty commonly is that they project their own

bad state into it, so as to almost shut away the feeling of it. As far

as they do feel it they are drawn by the beauty of it--sometimes

powerfully drawn--but alas! how soon is it discolored by their own

turbid state, and the power it was going to have subsides into

weakness.

2. We here perceive what is the true value of condition. I do not

blame, of course, a proper attention to condition--it is even a duty.

But the notion that we are really to make our state as bad or good by

the surroundings of life, and not by what is within us, not only

violates the scripture counsel, but; quite as palpably, the dictates of

good sense--it is in fact the great folly of man. For a bad mind is of

necessity its own bad state, and that state will be just as bad as the

man is to himself, neither more nor less, come what may. A bad temper,

a wrong love, an ungoverned pride, a restive ambition, a fretful,

irritable, discontented habit within--why if a man had a den of vipers

within, they would not make a state for him more absolutely than these.

The surroundings of condition are to the man what the cloak is to the

body, and the man who hid the fox under his cloak and hugged him close,

till he gnawed into his vitals, might as well have been thinking to be

happy because of his cloak, as any bad soul to be happy in sin because

of condition. O, that men could be so far disenchanted of this devil

that possesses their understanding, as to see how certain it is that

their condition, after all, is what they are themselves; that it can be

only bad as long as they are bad, even if all the riches and power and

splendor of the world were laid at their feet; and can be only good, if

good is the spirit and the inward element of their life. Toil on, O ye

slaves, contrive, and strive, and thrust yourselves on to riches and

power; and then, at the end, discover that you have only gilded your

misery, and built you a condition of more splendid sorrow; embittering

bitterness by the mockery you offer to its comfort. Still you will see

without, just what you are within, and the curse that is in you will

curse every thing round you. The down you sleep on will be hard as your

heart is, the silk that robes you will be a vesture of nettles to your

ugly tempers, the coach in which you ride will answer to the jolting,

night and day, of your bad conscience and your unsteady, gusty

passions. If the bad state is in you, then every thing is bad, the

internal disorder makes all things an element of disorder--even the sun

in the sky will be your enemy.

3. We discover in this subject, what opinion to hold of the meaning and

dignity of the state sometimes called misanthropy. Misanthropy is the

state of mind that distastes men, the world, and life, and withdraws

itself, more or less completely, into a feeling of self-justifying and

self-isolating enmity. It is the sentimental state of wickedness, or

wicked feeling, and is more common to youth than to persons of a later

age. For some reason they are not happy; they begin to sympathize with

themselves; they imagine how bad men are, and dislike them because they

are selfish, or proud, or unjust to merit; they disapprove the scheme

of life, it is such a miserable affair, an experience so dull and so

generally contemptible; they read Lord Byron, steeping their souls in

his poetic hate, and specially sympathizing with the truculent

sentiment of his Cain, retiring Cain-like, as it were, into the

felicity of a self-justifying malice, to look out upon the world and

curse it. Now the bottom of their woe, if they could dispossess

themselves of a little vanity, is that they are bad themselves. If they

have such a hatred of men, are they not men themselves? and is it not

probable enough that they have some as good title to distaste

themselves? Is there not another, in the next house, or chamber, who is

hating men, disgusted with men, just as they are? This very foolish

state of mind has one legitimate cure, and one that is true reason

itself, viz., conviction of sin. As soon as they can pass on just one

step farther, and see that what they so much distaste is themselves,

and that all the badness of the bad world is in their own bad spirit,

they are in a way to come at the true remedy. Accordingly it is in just

this manner that the Holy Spirit often leads to Christ. The man begins

to be sick and weary, sick in mind and so in body, for a full half of

the sicknesses of the body are only distempers of the mind; the world

palls and grows distasteful; he sympathizes with himself, in a manner

of inward complaint, draws off from that which does not satisfy, and

loosens a kind of sentimental animosity towards men and things. But the

load grows heavier, chafing through the skin of his conceit into the

nerves of conviction; misanthropy changes to self-disgust; the secrets

of the heart are opened; the conscience breaks restraint; and finally

it stands revealed that sin is in the soul--a bondage, a disease, a

shame, a curse. And now the question is who can heal the inward

bitterness? Misanthropy, then, and world sickness are the bad state

felt, conviction of sin is the bad state understood. That is a

conceited misery, this the shame of a self-discovering weakness, guilt,

and spiritual disorder.

4. It is clear, in this subject, that we have little reason for

troubling ourselves in questions that relate to a place of future

misery. Enough to know that the mind is its own place, and will make a

place of woe to itself, whithersoever it goes, in a life of sin and

separation from God. If the sceptic bolts upon us with the question,

where is hell? or the question, whether we suppose that a God of

infinite goodness has occupied himself in excavating and fashioning a

local state for the torment of bad men? it is enough to answer that a

bad mind carries a hell with it, excavates its own place of torment,

makes it deep and hot as with fire, and will assuredly be in that

place, whatever else may be true. A good mind sits in heavenly places,

because it is good. Go where it will it is with God, and God is templed

eternally in it; God in his own everlasting beatitude and peace.

Exactly what is true of place beyond this, or of place as related to

the condition of happy spirits, we do not know, but shall know

hereafter. Enough that the bad mind will at least be its own bad state

and element. It has the fire and brimstone in itself, and the

suffocating smoke, and the darkness, and the thirst, and the worm that

never dies--testifying always, "I myself am Hell." It would turn the

golden pavement into burning marl, and the hymns and hallelujahs of the

blessed into shrieks of discord.

Finally, it is evident in these illustrations, that the salvation of

man is possible, only on the ground of a great and radical change in

his inmost temper and spirit. What is wanted for the felicity of man is

clearly not a change of place, or condition, but a change in that which

makes both place and condition what they are. The bad spirit--this is

the woe; and nothing cures the woe, but that which changes the spirit

of the mind. Marvel not at this; you have only to take one glance at

the world, turn one thought upon yourselves, to see it. Hence it is

that Christ has come into the world as the physician of souls--it is

that he may impart to them a new life and spirit from himself, and heal

the disorders of their bad state, by uniting them to his own person.

Think it not strange that he proposes thoughts to you so different from

your own. O, ye weary ones, all ye desolate, all ye tossed with tempest

and not comforted, all ye world-sick and heavy hearted, hear ye his

call--"come unto me and I will give you rest." Why, my friends, what

does it mean that we are such a malcontent, miserable race of beings?

Did not a good God make us and the world we live in? Why then are we so

continually plagued and tormented in it? Why so hungry, so dry, so

empty, so bitter, so like the troubled sea and the mire and dirt it

casts up in its storms? Has God made some mistake in mixing the

ingredients of our state? No, it is we that make all this discord, we

that mix in the acid ingredients of misery. The moment you can enter

back, out of sin, into this pure element of love in Christ, this world

becomes a realm of peace, a paradise of beauty, a feast of satisfying

good, an instrument of joyous harmony. Change the inward state and all

is changed. Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace, the

mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and

all the trees of the hills shall clap their hands.

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XVI.

PRESENT RELATIONS OF CHRIST WITH HIS FOLLOWERS.

"Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away and come again unto

you."--John xiv, 28.

To go away and come again, or to go away in order to come again, would

seem, taking the words -at their face, to be a rather idle or unmeaning

operation; but if we can get far enough into the mind of Christ to

apprehend his real meaning, we shall find that he is proposing, in

these words, a change of the greatest consequence--a change that is

necessary to the working plan of his gospel and even to the complete

value of his incarnation itself. In what sense then he is going, and in

what sense he will come again, what change of relationship he will

inaugurate between himself and his followers, and so what kind of

personal relation he undertakes to hold with them now, is the subject

to which I call your attention this morning, as one of intense

practical interest, and even of the tenderest personal concern.

Whoever has reflected much upon the subject of the incarnation has

discovered that its value depends on brevity of time, and that no such

condition could be permanent, without becoming a limitation upon itself

and a real hindrance to its own objects. Remaining permanently on earth

in the body, Christ, plainly enough, could never have extended his rule

into parts remote, or to persons debarred by distance from the external

modes of access and acquaintance. The incarnation, therefore, requires

shortly to be inverted. After the immense new revelation, or new

salvation, of God has been accomplished, by such a manifested presence

and divine life in the flesh, there needs, just as truly, to be a

withdrawment from the eyes; otherwise Christ, remaining in the world

and permanently fixed in it, could only gather a small circle about

him, and become the center of an outward Lama worship, as restricted as

the mere sight, or appearing, of the divine man-idol requires it to be.

Therefore he says--"it is expedient for you that I go away," adding the

promise--"I will come to you." He means, by this, that the time has now

arrived, when there must be a change of administration; when he must

needs be taken away from the eyes, and begin to be set in a new

spiritual relation, which permits a universal access of men to him, and

a universal presence of him with them--so a grand, world-wide kingdom.

Saying nothing of the particular objects to be gained by his death, he

could not stay here and carry on his work; he had as many friends now

as 6he could speak with, or allow to speak with him; and if he should

remain, holding fixed locality, as of a body in space, he could be the

head only of a coterie, never of a kingdom. What is wanted now is an

unlocalized, invisible, spiritually present, everywhere present,

Saviour; such as all may know and receive, being consciously known and

received by him.

And this will be his coming again, or his second coming--such a kind of

coming as shows him bearing rule in Providence, and riding in the

clouds of heaven--rolling on the changes, unfolding the destinies of

time, and preparing his universal kingdom. The world, he says, seeth me

no more, but ye see me; and having your spiritual eye open for this, it

will be as if you saw me coming triumphantly in the clouds. This image

is a well-known Eastern figure of princely pomp and majesty; they say

of every great monarch, taking ascendancy, that he rides on the clouds

of heaven. So, as Christ comes on, bearing sway and ruling invisible,

it will be as if he were seen coming on overhead, in the clouds. And

especially will this be felt when Jerusalem the Holy City is blotted

out, as it were by God's hand of judgment upon it, in the conquest by

Titus. By that sign goes out the old, exclusive, Jew-state; and there

comes in after it, now to have its place, the Christian, catholic, free

state, that is to be gathered under the universal, spiritual headship

of Christ. That gathering in, as in power, is to be his coming, or

coming again--no bodily appearing, no visible pomp, no manifestation

locally as in space; for the very thing that made it expedient for him

to go away from the senses, forbids any such outward manifestation. And

therefore be adds a caution, telling his disciples expressly, that his

coming thus again is not to be a coming with observation. There shall

be no calling "Lo, here is Christ, or lo, there," "behold he is in the

desert," "behold he is in the secret chambers." The power in which he

comes will be morally diffusive and secretly piercing--"as the

lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so

also shall the coming of the Son of Man be."

In all which Christ, you will perceive, is proposing to do exactly

nothing which many of his disciples, specially taken by the faith of

his second coming, so fervently preach and so earnestly magnify. They

believe that he is to come in a body, and be visible as in body. He

will of course be here or there in space, a locally present being, at

some particular geographic point--Jerusalem, or London, or Rome, or

going about in all places by turns. Hearing now that he is here, or

there, we shall think no more of seeing him by faith, and begin to

think of seeing him with our eyes. Every ship that sails will be

crowded with eager multitudes pressing on to see the visible Christ.

Thronging in thus, month by month, a vast seething crowd of pilgrims,

curious and devout, poor and rich, houseless all and hungry, trampling

each other, many of them sick, not one of them in the enjoyment truly

of God's peace, not one of a thousand getting near enough to see him,

still fewer to hear him speak--how long will it take under such kind of

experience to learn what Christ intended and the solid truth of it,

when he said--"it is expedient for you that I go away." Nothing could

be more inexpedient, or a profounder affliction, than a locally

descended, permanently visible, Saviour. How much better a Saviour

present everywhere, and at all times; a Saviour who can say, "Lo, I am

with you always," and make the promise good; one whom the heart can

know, as being at rest in him, and behold, as. by faith; wheeling his

chariot on through all the tumults and overturnings of time, till his

universal kingdom is complete.

I am well aware that our brethren, who look for Christ's visible

coming, will not allow the inconveniences, or almost absurdities, I

have here sketched, to be any proper results of their doctrine. "We

believe," they will say, "that he will come in a spiritual body, such

as he had after his resurrection, not in a coarse, material body. It

will be such a body that he can be here, or there, at any given moment,

hampered by no conditions of space; even as he came into the room where

his disciples were gathered, when the doors were shut." But they only

impose upon themselves by such a conception. If their spiritual body is

to be visible, it must be as in space and outward appearing; for that

is the condition of all visibility. And then we have a flitting

Saviour, breaking out here or there, at what time, or on what occasion,

no mortal can guess. And the result will be that they are in a worse

torment than they would be, if he were established in some known

locality. Going after their eyes, they are taken off from all faith,

and where their eyes shall find him they know not.

Pardon me then if I suggest the suspicion that they are more carnal in

their expectation than they know. If it is so much better to have a

visible Saviour, are they not more weary of faith than they should be,

and secretly longing, catching at straws of prophecy, to get away from

it? There is nothing, I must frankly say, that would be so nearly a

dead loss of Christ to any disciple who knows him in the dear

companionship of faith, as to have him come in visible show; either

setting up his reign at some geographic point, or reigning aerially, in

some flitting and cursitating manner which can not be traced. How

beautifully accessible is he now everywhere, present to every heart

that loves him; consciously dear, as friend, consoler, guide, and stay,

in all conditions; close at hand in every sinking ship. in the

uttermost parts of the sea; the sweet joy of dungeons under ground,

where there is no light to see him in a body; immediately and

all-diffusively present, to comfort every sorrow, support every

persecution, and even to turn away the tempting thought before it

comes. A Saviour in the body and before the eyes can serve no such

offices. None can find him, but them that come in his way, or chance to

spy him with their eyes.

We have no want then of a locally related, that is of a bodily resident

Saviour; we perceive, without difficulty, the expediency of which

Christ speaks, that he should go away and not continue the incarnate,

or visible state, longer than to serve the particular objects for which

he assumed that state. But he gives us to understand, that he is not

going to be taken utterly away in the proposed removal, but rather to

be as much closer to his disciples as he can be, when all conditions of

time and space are cast off. And accordingly the question rises at this

point, how is Christ related now to the knowledge and friendship of his

people? "Ye have heard how I said unto you I go away and come again

unto you." And again--"I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to

you." And again--"but ye see me." And again--"Lo, I am with you

always." He evidently means to put himself thus in a practically close

and dear relation with his people--what is that relation? how set open?

how maintained?

Obviously what we want ourselves, is to be somehow with him, and to

know that he is with us. We want a social, consciously open state with

him, as real as if he were with us bodily, and as diffusive as if he

were everywhere; thus to have a personal enjoyment of him, and rest in

the felt sympathies of his personal companionship. This, too, exactly

is what he means to allow us; not in the external way, but in a way

more immediate, and blessed, and evident, and as much more beneficial.

If we had him with us in the external way, as his own disciples had,

when they journeyed, and talked, and eat, and slept, in his company, we

should be living altogether in our eyes, and not in any way of mental

realization. And, as a result, we should not be raised and exalted in

spiritual force, or character, as we specially need to be. What we

want, therefore, is to have a knowledge of him, and presence and

society with him, that we can carry with us, and have as the secret

joy, and strength, and conscious blessing of our inmost life itself;

that we may see him, when we are blind and can see nothing with our

eyes; that we may hear him speak, when we are deaf and can hear nothing

with our ears; that we may walk with him, when we can not walk at all;

sit in heavenly places with him, when we can not sit at all; rise with

him when he rises, reign with him when he reigns; never away from him,

even when beyond the sea, or passing through the valley of the shadow

of death.

Now it is just this relation that he undertakes to fill, when he goes

away. Being himself a Comforter, [Paraclete,] for this is the word

translated Advocate, he promises "another Comforter;" that is, in some

proper sense, another self. Indeed, he really calls the Comforter

promised, another self; for he says expressly, in this very

connection--"Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world can not receive

because it seeth him not; neither knoweth him, but ye know him; for he

dwelleth with you and shall be in you;" striking directly into the

first person, to say the same thing over again, as relating to

himself--"Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more, but ye see

me; because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that

I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." And then, to be still

more explicit, he gives the promise, that whosoever of his followers

follows faithfully, keeping his commandments, shall have the immediate

manifestation always of his presence--"I will manifest myself unto

him,"--"If a man love me he will keep my words, and my Father will love

him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him."

The great change of administration thus to be introduced, by the going

away and coming again, includes several points that require to be

distinctly noted.

1. That Christ now institutes such a relationship between him and his

followers, that they can know him when the world can not. Before this,

the world had known him just as his disciples had, seeing him with

their eyes, hearing his doctrine, observing his miracles, but now he is

to be withdrawn, so that only they shall see him--"the world seeth him

not." As being rational persons, they may recollect him, they may read

other men's recollections of him, but his presence they will not

discern, he is not manifest unto them, but only to his followers. He

that loveth knoweth God, and he only.

2. It is a point included that the new presence, or social

relationship, is to be effected and maintained by the Holy Spirit, the

Comforter. And he it is that Christ, in the promise, calls so freely

himself. The. New Testament writings are not delicate in maintaining

any particular formula, or scheme of personality, as regards the

distributions of Trinity. They call the Spirit "the Spirit of Christ."

They say, "God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts." They

speak of "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." They speak also of

"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." They say, "the Lord

[Christ] is that Spirit." Christ also is shown, more than once,

fulfilling the official functions of the Spirit; as in Paul's

conversion, where the invisible Christ, that is the Spirit, says "I am

Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest;" or again, when Paul himself

describes his conversion by saying, "when it pleased God to reveal his

Son in me." No theologic scruples are felt in such free modes of

expression, and indeed there never should be; for to every one but the

strict tritheist, Christ must, in some sense, be the Spirit, and the

Spirit, Christ. And when Christ calls the Comforter he promises,

himself, he gives precisely the best and truest representation of the

Spirit, in his new office, possible to be given. It is to be as if the

disincarnated soul, or person of Christ, were now to go away and return

as a universal Spirit invisible; in that form "to abide forever." And

the beauty of the conception is, that the Spirit is to be no mere

impersonal effluence, or influence, but to be with us in the very

feeling and charity of Jesus. All the fullness of Christ is in him; the

gentleness, the patience, the tenderness, the self-sacrifice; all that

makes Jesus himself such a power of personal mastery in us. He is to be

with us in Christ's name as a being with a heart, nay, to be the heart

itself that was beating in the Son of Mary. All the charities, and even

the blessed humanities of Jesus are to be in him, and, in fact, to be

ministered socially, and socially manifested by him; even as Christ

expressly declared--"He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of man

and show it unto you." This inward showing is, in fact, the virtuality

of Christ. He will be to the soul all that Christ himself would wish to

be; for he loves the world with Christ's own love. He will be as

forgiving as Christ in his passion, as tenderly burdened as Christ in

his agony, as really present to physical suffering, as truly a

Comforter to all the shapes of human sorrow. All which Christ outwardly

expressed, he will inwardly show.

3. In this coming again of Christ by the Spirit, there is included also

the fact that he will be known by the disciple, not only socially, but

as the Christ, in such a way as to put us in a personal relationship

with him, even as his own disciples were in their outward society with

him. "Ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in me, and I in

you." "But ye know him." "But ye see me." Many persons appear to

suppose that the Holy Spirit works in a manner back of all

consciousness, and that there is even a kind of extravagance in the

disciple who presumes to know him. And so it really is, if the

conception is that he knows him by sensation, or by inward phantasy.

But what means the apostle when he says--"the Spirit itself beareth

witness with our Spirit that we are the children of God"? That bearing

witness with imports some kind of inward society, or interchange, in

which a divine testimony flows into human impression, or conviction,

else it imports nothing. The real Christian fact in regard to this very

important subject appears to be, that the Holy Spirit, or Spirit of

Christ, though not felt by sensation, or beheld by mental vision, is

yet revealed, back of all perception, in the consciousness. We are made

originally to be conscious of God, just as we are of ourselves, and

know him by that immediate light. This is our normal state and it is

now so far restored. Our finite being was to be complete in the

infinite, and apart from that, could only be a poor dead limb, or

broken fragment, worthless to itself. And this accordingly is the

wonder of a true religious experience begun, that the soul, awakened to

the consciousness of God, not knowing how, has a certain mysterious

feeling of otherness imparted, which is somehow a new element to it--a

pure, inwardly glorious, free element. By and by it gets acquainted

with the new and glorious incoming, and dares to say, it is Christ, it

is God. A whole side of the nature turning Godward thus, and before

closed, is now open, and the man is even more impressively conscious at

times of the divine movement in his feeling, than of his own. And this

fulfills the promise--"I will manifest myself unto him." A promise

which Paul bravely answers, when he says, out of his own conscious

experience--"Christ liveth in me,"--"who loved me and gave himself for

me."

Here then is the relationship we seek--Christ is so related now, to the

soul of them that receive him, that he is present with them in all

places, at all times, bearing witness with their spirit, in guidance

and holy society; a friend, a consoler, a glorious illuminator, all

that he would or could be, if we had him each to himself in outward

company. Yes, and he is more than this; for if we simply had him in

such outward company, the contrast perceived would be even mortifying

and oppressive; but now, as he comes up from within, through our

personal consciousness itself, we are raised in dignity, and have him

as the sense of a new and nobler self unfolded in us. O, what a footing

is this for a mortal creature to occupy, an open relationship with

Christ and God, in which it shall receive just all which it wants,

being consciously girded with strength for whatever it has to do,

patience for suffering, wisdom for guidance. His very nature is

penetrated by a higher nature, and, being spirit to Spirit, he moves in

the liberty of that superior impulse and advisement. His relationship

to Christ is that of the branch to the vine, and the presence that he

has with Christ is immediate, vital, and if he will suffer it,

perpetual. Its whole gospel in one view it has in the promise--"Lo, I

am with you always, even to the end of the world."

But there is a different conception of this whole matter, which I must

briefly notice. Many persons appear to assume, that we have, and can

have, no relations to Christ, more immediate than those which we have

through language and the understanding, The Spirit, they say, works by

truth, and only as the truth gets power in our thoughts and choices.

Their conception is that we have nothing to do with God, except as we

get hold of notions, or notional truths, concerning him--reported

facts, for example, and teachings, and doctrinal deductions.

Undoubtedly we are to have this notional furniture in the

understanding, but it is never to be a fence between us and God,

requiring us to know him only at second hand, as we know China by the

report of the geographers. We are still to know God, or Christ, by our

immediate experience; nay, to know him as we know ourselves, by

consciousness. It is useful for us to know ourselves scientifically,

intellectually, reflectively; but this kind of artificial

self-knowledge is not enough. Some of us, in that way, would scarcely

know ourselves at all, and none of us more than partially,

intermittently, and in spots. We want to know ourselves all the while,

and without study, so as to be all the while possessing and going along

with ourselves, and therefore we are gifted with an immediate

consciousness of ourselves. But we want, just as much, to know God by

this immediate and perpetual knowledge; for apart from. God we are

nothing, we do not even half exist. Our finite existence becomes

complete existence, only as we are complete in Him, and this we can not

be, save as he is manifested, or participated, by our consciousness.

Thus we might have our advantage in a notional, or scientific

conception of the atmosphere, but if we could breathe only by such

scientific self-regulation, many of us would stop breathing entirely,

and all of us would be gasping for air a great part of the time; what

we want is a continual fanning of the breath that shall keep the air at

work, feeding our life all the time, without intermission, and without

any kind of notional self-regulation. So, too, we want a perpetual

inbreathing of God, a witnessing of the divine Spirit with our spirit,

else our very nature is abortive and worthless. It is not enough that

we have notions, or doctrines, of God, which we may use, or apply, to

obtain flavors of good effect through such media--we want the immediate

manifestation of God himself. And then, lest we should sink away into

the abysses and trances of contemplation, with Plotinus and others who

struggle out vaguely into and after the infinite, we have the infinite

humanly personated in Christ; so that, instead of wandering off into

any abysses at all, we simply let the Son of Man be God in our feeling,

and fashion us in the molds of his own humanly divine excellence.

Christ we say liveth in us; and therefore by the faith of the Son of

God, we live.

But is not this a kind of mysticism, some will ask, better therefore to

be avoided than received? I hardly know what is definitely meant by the

question; unless perhaps it be that a word is wanted that will serve

the uses of a stigma. A great many will begin to suspect some kind of

mysticism, just because they are mystified, or misted, and see things

only in a fog of obscurity. But if this be mysticism, nothing is

plainer than that Christ is the original teacher of it, and his two

disciples, John and Paul, specially abundant teachers of it after him.

Every man is a mystic in the same way, who believes that Christ is the

Life--in such a sense the life that he truly liveth in his followers,

and giveth them to live by him. God as the Life, the all-quickener, the

all-mover and sustainer, the inward glory and bliss of souls--this may

be set down as a thing too high to be any but a mystical notion. And

yet all highest things are apt to be most rational, and, at bottom,

most credible. What can be more rational, in fact, than to think that

God will give us most certainly what is most wanted--water, and light,

and air, and yet more freely, Himself? He will not put us off to know

only things about him, truths, notions, items of fact, but will give us

to know Himself. And since all souls are dark, living only to grope,

without Him--poor, blind pilgrims, straying on the shores of

eternity--what will he do, what, in all true reason, must he do, but

make himself the true sunrising to them, and the conscious revelation

of their inward day.

Our answer then to the question what are Christ's present relations to

his followers? is that he is present to them as he is not, and can not

be to the world; present as an all-permeating Spirit; present as the

all-quickening Life; consciously, socially present; so that no

explorations of science, or debates of reason are wanted to find him,

no going over the sea to bring him back, or up into heaven to bring him

down; because he is already present, always present, in the mouth and

in the heart. In this manner he will be revealed in all men, waits to

be revealed in all, if only they will suffer it. The word for every

loving, trusting heart is, I will come unto it, I will be manifest in

it. Lo, I will be with it always.

But the answer at which we thus arrive is a purely spiritual answer,

you perceive, one that is real and true only as it is opened to faith,

and experimentally proved. But all such spiritualities waver and

flicker; we are too much in the senses to hold them constantly and

evenly enough to rest in them. Therefore to keep us in the range of

this relationship, God has contrived to fasten us in the sense of it,

and make it good, by two fixed, partly outward, institutes, that are to

stand as forts, or fortresses, in the foreground of it; viz., by the

church and by the sacraments.

"Behold the kingdom of God is within you," says the Saviour, meaning

that he will be there, and there will have his reign. But he also lays

the foundations of a great, perpetual, visible institute, that he names

the church, calling it to be the light of the world, even as he, in the

body, was the light of the world himself, and because he is now, in the

Spirit, to be entered into and fill the body of the church with light.

His apostle calls it too "the pillar and ground of the truth," because

it is to be that corporate body that never dies, receiving the written

word as a deposit and trust for all ages to come, and becoming itself a

living epistle, answering faithfully to it, and shedding, from its own

luminous property, a perpetual light of interpretation upon it. Of this

body, called the church, he is to be the Head himself, and all the

members joined together in him, are to be so related to Him as to make

a virtually real, and perpetually diffusive, incarnation of him in the

world. While, therefore, it was expedient for him to go away as the Son

of Man, or of Mary, it was yet to be found, as he comes again by

revelation to the consciousness of his disciples, that he is again

taking body, in fact, for all time, in them; so to be manifested

organically, and, as it were, instituted in their undying and corporate

membership--"Head over all things to the church which is his body, the

fullness of him that filleth all in all." The members are to know him

personally, each in his own immediate life, and then they are to know

him again even the more firmly, that they are consciously instituted

and framed into body by his life. It is to be as if their divine

consciousness itself were certified, and sealed, and made visible, by

its own organizing power--that power which ages and times can not

weaken, which outlives the kingdoms and their persecutions, and defies

the gates of hell. "From whence the whole body, fitly joined together

and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the

effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the

body unto the edifying of itself in love." What solidity is there now

in such a relation to Christ! Spiritual as the relation is, it is yet

even more intellectually fixed, and carries better evidence, than

Christ in the body was ever able to give his followers.

But the spiritualities of the relation Christ maintains with his

disciples were to be settled and fortified by still another institute;

I mean the sacraments, and especially the sacrament of the Holy Supper.

The very object of the supper appears to be the settlement, and

practical, or experimental, certification of that revelation to

consciousness, of which we have been speaking. "This is my body, take

and eat." "This is my blood, drink ye all of it." And this, to

establish, as by institute, the fact that Christ here present, is to be

communicated and received, as by nutrition, or as life. And this is

what is meant by discerning his body, and the showing forth of his

death; for there is to be an accepting, in the partaker, of his here

represented embodiment, and a confession of trust in his death, to

which he will, by these instituted symbols and pledges, be inwardly

discovered, as certainly and as often as the rite is duly observed.

When, therefore, he says, "this do in remembrance of me," we are not to

take his words in the lightest, shallowest, possible meaning, as if he

were only giving us a mnemonic to refresh our memories, but in the

deepest and most sacredly inward sense; viz., that he is giving it to

us here, to receive the dearest hospitality, the communion of his own

divine Life. All that famous discourse. of his about the bread and the

blood, in the 6th chapter of John, is but the fit opening of his

meaning. "I am the bread of life--the living bread that came down from

heaven--if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever. My flesh is

meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. Except ye eat the flesh of

the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you."

And this exactly is the great institute of the supper. Christ engages

to be present in it, by a most real presence, without a miracle of

transubstantiation; so that when we come to offer him up ourselves, and

open our inmost receptivities to the appropriation of his presence, it

is no vague, volunteer, possibly presumptuous, thing that we do, as if

venturing on some almost aerial flight, in the way of coming unto God,

but we have the grace by institution, firmly pledged, and given, as it

were, by routine. Here is Christ to be communicated. Here are we to

commune. There is no miracle, but what is a great deal better, viz.,

life; community of life with Christ and God. What we get in the

conscious revelation of his Spirit, we here receive by an outward and

perpetually instituted dispensation. And we have this communion also

with each other as with Christ; because he is the common life, which is

endeavoring always a common growth in the members.

O, that we might receive this supper to-day, my brethren, according to

its true meaning, and eat and drink worthily. Take it as no mere

commemorative ceremony over Christ dead, but as the appointed vehicle

of Christ living, and in you to live. Come not here to be sad and sit

mourning for your Master's body, like the women weeping for Tammuz.

Consider, above all, this, that Christ, once dead, is here alive, that

he may here dispense himself to you. Blessed is the heart that shall be

fully opened to him. Be that true, as it may be, of you all; that you

may go forth loving one another as you love your Master, and shining

without, by the light he gives you within. Neither forget how that

open, dear, relation of spirit with him, of which we have been

speaking, is here sanctioned publicly for you, and sanctified before

you, even as by an institute of God. As he has gone away, so believe,

henceforth and always, that he has come again. Count this coming in the

Spirit to be with you, dearer than even outward society with him would

be, such as his disciples had at the first; and expect to be always

with him in this manner, in the closest, most immediate, knowledge;

even as he said himself--BUT YE SEE ME.

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XVII.

THE WRATH OF THE LAMB.

"And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the

face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.

For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to

stand?"--Rev. vi, 16-17.

The lamb is the most simply innocent of all animals. Historically also

it had become a name for sacrifice. For this twofold reason, Christ is

set forth as the Lamb. Under this name, as fulfilling the conception of

gentleness and sacrifice in God, we give him ready welcome. We magnify

him as the Lamb, and expect to magnify him even eternally, in

ascriptions offered to that dear name. Even such as are most remote

from the life of religion are commonly satisfied with conceptions of

God under this gentle, patient figure; making up, not seldom, schemes

of divine character and order, that have only the innocuous way of the

lamb--just as thousands of the devotees of liberty will magnify

liberty, as being the whole substance of government; counting it really

the same thing as a release from being governed. Yet liberty is but

justice secured; and, in just the same manner, the Lamb is but the

complemental gentleness of God's judicial vigor.

All which appears to be represented by a most paradoxical, jarring,

combination of words, that predicates wrath of the very lambhood of

Christ. To speak simply of the wrath of God is bad enough to some; it

is even a real offense. They recoil from such expressions as unworthy,

and as indicating, either a degree of irreverence in those who use

them, or else low ideas of God, such as may not be revolted by the

ascription of a temper so unregulated and so essentially coarse. It is

commonly no sufficient answer to such, that the scriptures of God speak

of his wrath in this way without compunction; for the scriptures, they

will suspect, are not as far refined themselves, in the moral tastes

and proprieties, as they might be. But here we have "the wrath of the

Lamb;"--which not only violates a first principle of rhetoric,

forbidding the conjunction of symbols that have no agreement of kind or

quality, but also shocks our cherished conceptions of Christ, as the

suffering victim, or the all-merciful and beneficent friend, in either

way, tile Saviour of sinners. Who will ever speak of a lamb's wrath?

Who, much more, of the wrath of the Lamb of God? And yet the scripture

does it without any sense of impropriety, or moral incongruity--what

shall we make of such a fact?

Simply this, I answer, that while our particular age is at the point of

apogee from all the more robust and vigorous conceptions of God in his

relation to evil; while it makes nothing of God as a person or

governing will; less, if possible, of sin as a wrong-doing by subject

wills; we are still to believe in christianity, and not in the new

religion of nature; in Christ, and not in the literary gentlemen. It

does not, in my view, require a very great degree of nerve to do this.

Only we must have the right to believe in the real Christ, and not that

theologic Christ which has so long been praised, as it were into

weakness, by the showing that separates him from all God's decisive

energies and fires of combustion, and puts him over against them, to be

only a pacifier of them by his suffering goodness. Our Christ must be

the real king--Messiah--and no mere victim; he must govern, have his

indignations, take the regal way in his salvation. His goodness must

have fire and fibre enough to make it divine.

We take the principle, in brief, without scruple, that if we can settle

what is to be understood by the wrath of God, we shall not only find

the wrath in God, but as much more intensely revealed, in the incarnate

life and ministry of Christ, as the love is, or the patience, or any

other character of God. Since he is the Lamb, in other words, the most

emphatic and appalling of all epithets will have its place, viz.,--the

wrath of the Lamb.

We want very much, in English, a word that we have not, to express more

definitely the true force of the original scripture word [orge]

occurring in this relation. We have a considerable family of words that

we can employ for this purpose; such as wrath, anger, indignation,

fury, vengeance, judgment, justice, and the like, but they are all more

or less defective. Indignation is the most unexceptionable, but it is

too prosy and weak to carry such a meaning with due effect. Wrath is

the term most commonly used in our translation, and it is really the

best, if only we can hold it closely enough to the idea of a moral, in

distinction from a merely animal passion; else, failing in this, it

will connect associations of unregulated temper that are painful, and

as far as possible from being sacred. It requires in this view, like

the safety-lamps of the miners, a gauze of definition round it, to save

it from blazing into an explosion too fierce to serve the purposes of

light.

We understand then by wrath, as applied to God and to Christ, a certain

principled heat of resentment towards evil doing and evil doers, such

as arms the good to inflictions of pain, or just retribution, upon

them. It is not the heat of revenge, girding up itself in fiery

passion, to repay the personal injuries it has suffered; but it is that

holy heat which kindles about order, and law, and truth, and right;

going in, as it were, spontaneously, to redress their wrongs and

chastise the injuries they have suffered. It is that, in every moral

nature, which prepares it to be an essentially beneficent avenger, a

holy knight-errant champion for the right, and true, and good. It can

be let in to nerve a resentment, or to bitter a grudge, and commonly

is, in souls given up to resentments and grudges; but it was ordained

specially to be such an equipment of moral natures, that goodness would

be an armed state, capable not only of beneficence, but of inflicting

pain where pain is wanted, in the fit vindication of order and right.

How it works, we may see, almost every hour, in some example greater,

or less, in its magnitude. Only to see a large boy in the street

harassing and persecuting a small one, stirs the natural

wrath-principle in us, in such a manner that, if we do not actually lay

hands upon him ourselves, we could easily be much satisfied if a

considerable chastisement should overtake him. So, if an officer of the

law arrests a woman in the street, haling her away to justice, you will

see a multitude, excited by her outcries, rushing quickly together,

wanting to know what a strong man can be doing in that fashion with a

woman, and about half ready to interfere, before they have learned

whether it is a case of oppression or not. We had an illustration, a

few days ago, of this wrath-principle in human bosoms, on a much

grander scale--the whole New England people, or rather the whole nation

itself, waiting, as it were, by the gallows of a Webster, and giving

their spontaneous sanction to his death, by their emphatic and hearty

Amen. Under the solemn wrath-principle of which I am here speaking,

every healthy and robust soul took the penalty with appetite, and with

a certain good revenge, stood stiff and firm by the impartial and

righteous sentence of the law. So if this great and awful rebellion

against which we are now in arms, should finally collapse and go down,

and the friends of Union, so long and bitterly oppressed by their

tyrants, should rise upon them and drag them to summary justice,

compelling them to expiate, by their death, the most terrible and

bloodiest, and really most impious, crime ever committed on earth, save

the crucifixion of Jesus itself, who of us would blame, or in the least

regret, the judicial severity of the retribution? Why, the unspeakable

desolations, the latitudes and longitudes of the woe, would even take

on a smile, in our thought, and we should find ourselves thanking God,

even before we knew it, that he has put a wrath-principle in human

bosoms for the avenging of so great a crime. Nay, we should be quite

willing to imagine this wrath-principle residing also in the very

ground itself, and crying unto God, from every blood-sodden field and

region, even as the blood of Abel did, in Cain's one, solitary, merely

initial, comparatively insignificant, murder.

In all these and similar examples that could be cited without number,

there is, you perceive, a function of wrath, or an instinctively

vindicatory function, that pertains to all moral natures, and arms them

to be the supporters of justice and the avengers of wrong. They have

this high moral instinct, or function, not as a vice to be extirpated

or stifled, but as an integral part of their inmost original nature. It

is constituent, consubstantial, and is to be eternal.

Having distinguished, in this manner, what is to be understood by

wrath, as predicated, whether of God or of the Lamb, we are ready to

proceed with the main subject of inquiry. Is it then a fact that

Christ, as the incarnate Word of God, embodies and reveals the

wrath-principle of God, even as he does the patience or love-principle,

and as much more intensely? On this point we have many distinct

evidences. And--

1. It is very obvious, at the outset, that Christ can not be a true

manifestation of God, when he comes in half the character of God, to

act upon, or qualify, or pacify, the other half. He must be God

manifest in the flesh, and not one side of God. If only God's

affectional nature is represented in him, then he is but a half

manifestation. And if we assign him, in that character, a special

value, then we say, by implication, what amounts to the worst

irreverence, that God is a being to be most desired when he is only

half presented, and when his other half is either kept back, or somehow

smoothed to a condition of silence. I take issue with all such

conceptions of Christ. He is God manifested truly, God as he is, God in

all his attributes combined, else he is nothing, or at least no fair

exhibition. If the purposes of God, the justice of God, the

indignations of God, are not in Him; if any thing is shut away, or let

down, or covered over, then he is not in God's proportions, and does

not incarnate his character.

2. It will be noted that Christ can be the manifested wrath of God,

without being any the less tender in his feeling, or gentle in his

patience. If God may fitly comprehend these opposite poles of

character, so also may Christ; and if the fires of God's retributive

indignations are no contradiction to the fact that he is love, no more

is there any such contradiction to be apprehended, when these

indignations are displayed in Christ. Indeed we have occasions in the

history of Jesus, when he actually displays the judicial and the

tender, most affectingly, together and in the very same scene. "And

when he had looked about on them with anger," says Mark, "being grieved

for the hardness of their hearts." Here we have the wrath, [orge] in a

connection of feeling so tender and loving, that he is even grieved.

His indignations have quickened his more tender sensibilities, and

these, in turn, have fired his indignations. And we have exactly the

same conjunction over again, when we find him even weeping over

Jerusalem, and, at the same moment, denouncing against it, in stern

retribution, the day of its final visitation. "If thou hadst known the

things that belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes!"

How tenderly, and yet how firmly spoken is the wrath. And then, while

the tears of his compassion are scarcely dried away upon his face, he

goes directly into the temple and drives out, in a terrible outburst of

indignant zeal, the whole crowd of hucksters and traders that have made

even that sacred place, to his pure feeling, no better than a den of

thieves. His tears did not extinguish his wrath, and his wrath did not

stifle the tenderness that issued in tears.

Indeed these two poles of sensibility, wrath and tender love, are not

only compatible; I must go farther and say, that the tenderest, purest

souls will, for just that reason, be hottest in the wrath-principle,

where any bitter wrong, or shameful crime, is committed. They take fire

and burn, because they feel. Furthermore you will observe that the man

whose dull-hearted phlegm keeps prudent silence, utters no

condemnation, burns with no indignant fire, when some wicked cruelty or

oppression is perpetrated, is, in almost every case, deficient in the

finer, nobler, and more tender sympathies. His cold, apathetic,

politic, sour nature is just about as defective in the gentle

sensibilities, as it is in the fiery and strong impulses.

3. It is another and distinct consideration that God, without the

wrath-principle; never was, and Christ never can be, a complete

character. This element belongs inherently to every moral nature. God

is no God without it, man is no man without it. Take it away from God

and he is simply Brama, a mere Fate, or Infinite Thing--no Governor of

the world, but an ideal, in the neuter gender, of the True and the

Good; a Beauty that lies in sweet lassitude on the world, for literary

souls to make a religion of, for themselves. Take it away from man, and

he is only paste, or, at best, an animal; for though animals have the

capacity of brute passion, or infuriated excitement, yet that moral

passion or vindicatory instinct, of which we are now speaking, they as

little share as they do the instinct of language, or that of scientific

inquiry. They have no moral ideas, and of course have no moral armature

of wrath to set them on the side of moral ideas, and steel them, as in

principled resentment, to be avengers of the same. Now it is this

principled wrath, in one view, that gives staminal force and majesty to

character. It is in this principle of the moral nature that it becomes

a regal nature. In these indignations against wrong, it champions the

right and judges the world. Without this, or apart from this,

submission to wrong is pusillanimity, forgiveness to enemies a flimsy

and feeble habit, love a merely clinging devotement. All such tender

passivities become great, only as they consciously consent to bathe,

what fiery judgment has a right to burn. There is no dignity in them,

till the grand vindicatory instinct, the governmental wrath-principle,

is found united with them. This also it is, in our humanity, that is

always volunteering government, and is, in that manner, the capacity of

society--all movements of redress, all institutes of penalty, all

executed pains of justice, being issued, as it were naturally, from

this. It is, in fact, a kind of electric battery moral that God has put

in the body of society, to shock, or stun, or kill, the violators of

order and right. No wrong-doer can so much as touch it, without being

struck and paralyzed by it. And it is in virtue of this same regal or

judicial instinct, that God's moral nature, including his lovely and

gentle sympathies, becomes everlastingly electric, in its wrath against

misdoing and wrong. He governs with a will, he towers in personal

majesty, he is great in his authority, because the regal attribute is

in him. Which if we suppose to be true in no sense of Christ, if we

take him to be a gentle way of goodness only, separated wholly from

this flaming kind of vigor--soft only, and submissive, and patient--we

put him in a grade almost unmoral, and show him making feeble suit to

the world, in the merely plaintive airs of suffering. The character is

weak, unkingly, unchristly, and it can not be more, till the wrath, is

added to the patience, of the Lamb.

4. It is a conceded principle of justice, that wrongdoers are to suffer

just according to what they deserve. It was unavoidable, therefore,

that if Christ brought in new mercies and gifts of grace, the

liabilities of justice must be correspondently increased--not

diminished, as many try to imagine. As the score of justice, too, is

augmented, the judicial wrath must be, and be also as much more

forcibly manifested--just as we shall find it to be, in fact, in the

new assertion made of God, by Christ's personal life and doctrine.

First he asserts the principle--"For unto whomsoever much is given, of

him shall much be required." Next he asserts the new liability that has

actually accrued under it--"If I had not done among them the works that

none other man did, they had not had sin, but now they have both seen

and hated both me and my Father." Then again he makes specific

denouncement both of the principle and the liability, declaring to the

cities that reject his ministry, that they are bringing a doom of

judgment on them, worse than God ever put upon the worst and wickedest

of the past ages--"Woe unto thee, Chorazin, woe unto thee, Bethsaida;

it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment

than for you." "And thou, Capernaum, it shall be more tolerable for the

land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for thee." His apostles,

too, only represent him fitly, when they say--"treasurest up unto

thyself wrath, against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous

judgment of God;" or again--"Of how much sorer punishment suppose ye

shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God,

and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified

an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." The

wrath-principle and justice, you will thus perceive, have the same

place under christianity that they had before. The divine government is

not made new, but is only new revealed. God is not less just, nor more

merciful, but more fitly and proportionately expressed.

5. One of the things most needed in the recovery of men to God, is this

very thing; a more decisive manifestation of the wrath-principle and

justice of God. Intimidation is the first means of grace. No bad mind

is arrested by love and beauty, till such time as it is balked in evil

and put on ways of thoughtfulness. And nothing will be so effectual for

this, as a distinct apprehension of the wrath to come. Then, when it is

brought to a condition of thoughtfulness by the apprehension of damage

and loss, the vehemence of God and his judgments starts a correspondent

moral vehemence in its own self-condemnations; when of course it is

ready to be melted by the compassions and won by the beauty of the

cross--that is born of God. Now it is no longer swayed by interest and

fear, but having come into God's occupancy and become spirit, as being

permeated by God's impulse, it ranges in liberty with God himself. The

precise thing not wanted, in this view, is to get justice out of the

way. To know that the avenging wrath-principle of God's moral nature is

forever hushed, would be fatal. The weak point of sin is that it can

tremble--does inwardly tremble even in its boldest moods. Too low in

its moral conceptions to be taken by goodness and love it for its own

sake, it can be seized and shaken by the rough hand of wrath. Hence the

wrath is wanted, and at this point the attack of salvation begins. It

could not be a salvation by rose-water, or by any means less stringent

than God's roughest enforcements.

6. We can see for ourselves that the more impressive revelation of

wrath, which appears to be wanted, is actually made in the person of

Christ. I will not stop here to speak of the driving out of the

money-changers from the temple, which has been the scandal of so many,

just because of the imagined over vehemence of the wrath, and which his

disciples took as being the zeal that was to eat him up; I will not

stay upon the fiery denunciations and imprecations of woe by which he

scorched the oppressions and the sanctimonious hypocrisies of the

priests and the Pharisees; I will not recur again to the terrible

judgments he denounced upon so many guilty cities, and among them even

upon Jerusalem itself; but pass directly to the fact that no other

preacher ever had appealed as strenuously as he to the sense of fear,

or employed with as little restraint the artillery of God's penalties.

The terrible and abundantly unwelcome, or unpopular, doctrine of future

punishment is specially his. Previously, the sanctions of religion had

been temporal, and the future state itself had been only dimly

revealed; save that in two or three single passages of the prophets it

had finally obtained a more distinct recognition and pronounced its

more fearful awards. But Christ, when he came, opened up formally and

distinctly the great world of the future, and pressed home the claims

of duty and repentance by the tremendous sanctions of eternity. He

uses, without scruple, in his language, the most appalling terms,

which, though they are certainly figures of speech, are yet such

figures as show that he is in no mood of delicacy, but is keyed up in

the wrath-principle, as intensely and heartily as he is in the

love-principle--speaking to men as offended majesty should, when it

goes to rebels in arms. He denounces what he calls "everlasting

punishment," "destruction," "death," "fire," "the worm that never

dies," "the gnashing of teeth," "thirst," "outer darkness," "torment."

I can not stop to settle the precise meaning of these figures. I only

ask you to note, first, that they are new, almost every one of them,

never heard of before, even under what is called the hard and pitiless

rigors of the Old Testament; and, secondly, that they are from Christ,

the all-merciful Saviour, and tenderly suffering friend of the world.

We call him the Lamb, for God's mercy was never before revealed, by a

sacrifice of simple, unoffending innocence. And just. so these are the

wrath of the Lamb; which never before shook human bosoms by such words

of doom and sanctions of eternal majesty.

Once more Christ is appointed, and publicly undertakes, to maintain the

wrath-principle officially, as the judge of the world--even as he

maintains the love-principle officially, as the Saviour of the world.

He consents, that is, when every attempt to do better by men, than they

have deserved, has failed to win them, to fall back on the merely

retributive regimen of his kingdom, and do by them as they deserve. He

even declares that authority is given him to execute judgment, because

he is the Son of Man; for as he has come into the flesh to unfold God's

human sympathy and tenderness, so, to maintain what is only fit

proportion, he must needs be clothed in the rigors of judicial majesty.

He, then, is to be the judge, as he himself openly declares, and before

his judgment-seat all mankind, including all his rejectors, shall be

gathered. He will separate them to their fit award. He will say, "ye

did it not to me." He will speak the "depart." Whoever has joined

himself wholly to evil, put himself to the uses of evil, that is, of

the devil and his angels, he will consign to the devil and his angels,

according to their real affinities and according to what they deserve.

And this is the wrath, and this the day of wrath; "for the great day of

his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?"

But it will be objected, I suppose, by some, that in the view now

presented, the hope of a possible salvation is quite taken away. You

can not, any more, deserve God's favor, how then can you be saved,

unless God's justice be somehow satisfied in your behalf? You could

not, I answer, if God were obliged to execute justice, having no option

concerning it. But exactly contrary to this, the wrath-principle in him

is only that judicial impulse that backs him in the infliction of

justice, whenever justice requires to be inflicted. And it does not

require to be inflicted always; it never ought to be, when there is any

thing better that is possible. The law of right, or righteousness, is

absolute and eternal. Not so the vindicatory principle of justice.

Since penal justice is only a matter of means to ends in government,

backed by the wrath-impulse, the means and occasions are to be

regulated by counsel, and the wrath moderated by counsel. It is with

God, in these matters, as it is with us. We are never bound to do by

men as they deserve, simply because the wrath-impulse moves us to this,

if only we are able to do what is better for them, and involves no

injury to others. We do not want our justice satisfied before we can

forgive. No more does God. As certainly as we may, at any time, do by

our enemy and for him, better than he deserves, however pungently we

may feel the wrong he has done us, so also may God. Something may be

necessary on his part to save an appearance of laxity, when he

forgives--some kind of honor paid to the instituted order of justice,

that will keep it in as high respect as the exact execution of it.

Christ will see to that. I can not here describe the provision he has

made; enough that when he remits the penalties of justice, in his moral

distributions, he shows most convincingly still, that he adheres to

justice in his feeling as firmly as ever. It does not follow, when I

forgive my enemy, that I condemn any the less heartily, or hotly, the

wrongs he has done me. The very heat, too, of my rebukes, and of my

decisive measures of redress, may be the means, in part, by which he is

subdued, and the redress of justice made unnecessary.

Put it down, then, first of all, at the close of this great subject,

that the New Testament gives us no new God, or better God, or less just

God, than we had before. He is the I Am of all ages; the I Am that was,

and is, and is to come; the same that was declared from the

beginning--"The Lord God, gracious and merciful, forgiving iniquity,

transgressions, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty."

At the same time, let. no one be concerned to find how God's justice

has been satisfied, or please himself in the discovery how Christ has

made up the needed satisfaction, by the pains and penalties of his

cross. For if Christ has satisfied God's justice, then who is going to

satisfy the justice of Christ? If the offered Lamb has propitiated, or

appeased, the wrath of God against transgressors, then a question of

some point remains, viz., who is going to propitiate the wrath of the

Lamb? Furthermore, if the lighter penalty of justice has been taken

off, on the original score of retribution, who is going to lift the

more tremendous liabilities of justice incurred by those who have

trodden under foot the blood of the Son of God, and cast away forever

all the glorious mercies and helps of the cross? O, it grieves me to

think of the poor, speculated inventions we have wearied ourselves to

set up. on this summit, and most central point, of gospel truth! Wood,

hay, stubble--God grant that when it is burned we may not perish in the

fire ourselves.

How plain is it, also, in such a view of God and the inevitable

wrath-principle of his nature, that the charity, so called, of our

modern philanthropism, is an effeminate and false charity. It

reprobates all condemning judgments and all inflictions of penalty. It

does not really believe in government, or sin as an act of responsible

liberty. Sin is only misdirection, and the misdirecting power is

circumstance. Are we not all what our conditions make us to be? Why,

then; do we lay severe judgments; or even torments of penalty, on the

head of transgression? Just contrary to this, we have seen that no man

even is a proper man, whose moral nature is not put in armor by the

wrath-principle. Much less is God true God, when no such central fire

burns in his bosom, to make him the moral avenger of the world. Neither

let any one argue. that God, as he is good, must desire the happiness

of all, and that, being omnipotent also, what he desires he will

certainly bring to pass. What if it should also be true, that there is

a wrath-impulse in his nature, burning to have every wrong chastised by

the pain it deserves; is not the argument as good to show that the

chastisement will certainly be inflicted? The argument, in fact, holds

neither way, least of all in showing that God will make every creature

happy; for we know, as a plain matter of fact, that he does not. There

may seem to be a considerable show of reason in the vaunted liberality

of this new philanthropism; still it is only that weak light of

moonshine which the higher light of day dispels. The eternal King is

King indeed, and no such dispenser only of the confections and other

sweet delectations of favor, as this feeble gospel of philanthropy

requires him to be. O, the wrath of the Lamb!--there is the rugged

majesty of meaning that transgression wants to meet! Smooth and soft

things only will not do. As certainly as God is God, and Christ his

prophet, he will not come bringing pardons only, suing and suing to the

guilty, but over against all obstinacy he will kindle his fires of

justice, and by these he will reign--even where by love he can not.

We are brought out thus, at the close, just where John began, when he

came to make prophetic announcement of the new dispensation. He looks,

you may see, for no merely soft salvation, but for a great and

appalling salvation rather. "Now the axe will be laid," he says, "unto

the root of the trees. He that cometh after me is mightier than I, his

fan is in his hand, he will thoroughly purge his floor, the chaff he

will burn with unquenchable fire." The doctrines of religion will now

be more spiritual and the tests more severe. God will not be changed,

but will only be more perfectly shown. Responsibilities will not be

diminished, but increased with the increase of light. If Christ bends

low at his cross, no such fearful words of warning and severity as his

were ever before spoken. The Old Testament is a dew-fall in comparison

with the simply judicial, spiritual, unbending, and impartial wrath of

the New. And this exactly is the impression, we can see, of Christ

himself--putting forth his most ominous warning in the tender shape

even of a blessing--"Blessed is he whosoever is not offended in me." He

speaks also of a taking away, and a still farther taking away, in his

parable of the. talents, where he seems to be looking distinctly on the

fact that, as life progresses, every soul is descending more and more

closely down to justice; losing out the conditions and prospects, one

after another, of being treated better than it deserves; to be finally

suited in the only alternative left--treated in strict justice as it

deserves. In his tenderest accents of mercy, there is always blended,

as it were, some reverberative note of judgment; as if there was a

voice behind saying, behold, therefore, the goodness--and severity of

God! It does not signify as much when he unmasks his judgment throne,

and shows the gathering in, and tells the issues to be made, as it does

that his very love is so visibly tempered with dread, in the sense of

what his rejectors are doing. O, how far away the conceit of, that

clumsy speculation which shows him smoothing down the rugged front of

justice. No such conception of his gospel mission has he, as we can

easily see for ourselves. Christianity to him, my friends, is not the

same thing that it has been to many of you. Doubtless it is a great

salvation to him; and you may also think it such yourselves; but if you

take it simply as a penal satisfaction for your sins, placing its value

wholly in that, so great an abuse will scarcely suffer it to have been,

or in fact ever to be, any real salvation to you at all. You presume

upon the cross. You take it for granted that Christ is going to do by

you better than you deserve, whereas that depends in part on you. If

you can not be turned away from your sin, then he is preparing to do by

you exactly as you deserve. Christ understands christianity--hear him

therefore say, with a manner of dread how deep, in words that toll in a

warning as deep for you--Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be

broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

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XVIII.

CHRISTIAN FORGIVENESS.

"Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven

you."--Eph. iv, 32.

Under these words, "even as," and the relation or comparison they

introduce, a very serious and high truth is presented; viz., that our

human or Christian forgivenesses are to correspond with the forgiveness

of sins by Christ himself; to be cast in the same molds of quality and

bestowed under similar conditions. And that we may not fail of

receiving such an impression, the principle or idea is made to recur

many times over, and in such ways that we can not miss of it, or throw

a doubt upon it. Thus we read again--"forgiving one another, if any man

have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you so also do ye."

Again, in the gospels, it is given us in Christ's own words--"forgive,

and ye shall be forgiven"--"for if ye forgive men their trespasses,

your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men

their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your

trespasses." He will not even allow us to pray for forgiveness, save as

we ourselves forgive--"Forgive us our trespasses, even as we forgive

those who trespass against us." All this on the ground that there is

such an analogy between the forgiveness of Christ to us, and ours to

our brethren and our fellow-men, as makes them virtually alike in

spirit and kind, though not equal of course in degree. The quality of

the virtue, the greatness of feeling, and height of meaning, will be so

far correspondent, at least, that the smaller will represent the

larger, and, according to its measure, reveal the same properties.

I state the point thus distinctly, because, in the matter of

forgiveness among men, a kind of lapse, or sinking of grade, appears to

have somehow occurred; so that, holding still the duty of forgiveness,

we have it in a form so cheap and low, as to signify little when it is

practiced. "O, yes," says the brother, finally worn out by much

expostulation, on account of the grudge he is holding against another

who has greatly injured him, "I will forgive him, but I hope never to

see him again." Christ does not say that to the man whom he forgives,

and I suppose it would commonly be regarded among brethren, as a rather

scant mode of forgiveness--such a mode of it as scarcely fulfills the

idea. Another degree of it, which would probably pass, says--"Yes, let

him come to me and ask to be forgiven, and it will be time for me to

answer him." Probably a quotation is made, in this connection, of the

scripture text which says--"If thy brother repent forgive him." And

most certainly he should be thus forgiven, when the repentance appears

to be an actual and present fact; but suppose that no such repentance

has yet appeared. Is it then enough to say, "let him come and ask to be

forgiven?" Many think so, and the argument appears to be conclusive,

when they demand--"How can I be expected to forgive, where there is no

repentance, and the wrong is just as stubbornly adhered to as ever?

What but a mockery is it for me to forgive, when there is no

forgiveness wanted, and my adversary has not even come into the right?"

Well then, suppose that Christ had stopped just there. Nobody is asking

to be forgiven, all are in their sins and mean to be there. They love

their sins. They have asked no release or forgiveness. They are not

repentant in the least degree? What then is there for him to do? Is he

not absolved from any such matter as the preparing and publishing of

forgiveness, by the simple fact that nobody wants it, or asks for it?"

"If they were penitent," he might say, "it would lay a heavy charge

upon me. But they are not, and what is forgiveness thrust upon souls

that do not even so much as care for it?"

Why, my friends, it is just here that Christ and his gospel begin--just

here, in fact, that his forgiveness begins; viz., in for-giving, giving

himself for, and to, the blinded and dead heart of unrepentant men, to

make them penitent, and regain them to God. The real gist of his

forgiveness antedates their. penitence; it is what he does, shows,

suffers, in a way of gaining his enemy--bringing him off and away, that

is, from his wrongs, to seek, and, in a true sorrow, find, the

forgiveness that has been searching beforehand so tenderly after him.

If we are to understand this matter accurately, as it stands in the New

Testament, we need to observe that two very distinct and, in some

respects, dissimilar Greek words are employed here, to denote the

virtue under consideration; both of which are translated by the single,

very beautiful, but strangely dishonored English word, forgiveness. One

signifies merely a letting go, a release of charges, an exemption from

punishment, the merely negative good of not being held in condemnation;

a word accurately translated here and there by the word "remission."

The other signifies the very positive and operative matter of sacrifice

and suffering to gain the heart of an adversary; that which not merely

lets go, but prepares men to be let go. Literally this word means "to

bestow grace." Thus in the text, where it is translated forgive, we may

read--"dealing grace, one towards another, even as God for Christ's

sake, hath dealt grace towards you." There is also this remarkable

contrast between the two words, translating both by forgiveness, that

one fixes on the very last point, or final effect of forgiveness, viz.,

the release, the letting go of charges, the absolution which says, "go

in peace;" and the other finds its main idea in the first things of

forgiveness, the love, the going after, the giving-for, by which the

soul is taken hold of sooner than it asks to be; that which did not

wait for penitence to come, that it might let penitence go, but which

undertook to bring on penitence, prepare it, melt the heart into it,

and so to execute the letting go of the soul, by making the sins let go

of it.

Now both of these words are names, we have said, of the same grace;

viz., the grace of forgiveness; only one names it from a last incident

or effect, and the other from the initiative movement of love and

operative goodness, in which it took its spring--just as one might name

the dawn, as a mere effect, or call it the sunrising, as denoting the

cause or spring of the returning light; where of course the names are

coincident, though inherently different from each other. In the present

case, there is an immense difference between the two words employed, as

regards the dignity and the real amount of their meaning--all the moral

greatness, or high beneficence, appears to lie in the grace-dealing of

love and sacrifice that prepares the remission; and yet when the lower,

feebler word is used, as it is in a majority of cases, all that is in

the other word is supposed to pass into its meaning, and keep along

with it. Nothing is further off from Christ and his apostles, than to

suppose, in any case, that the forgiveness they speak of is nothing but

the simple letting. go of charges against the penitent. They have it

understood always that the grand reality of the forgiveness preached is

that which went before, in the putting by of so much injured feeling,

the going after them that want no forgiveness, the giving for, and

suffering for, by which they may be drawn to God;--just that which is

described historically and transactionally, when the apostle says, "Who

gave himself a ransom for all," "who gave himself for me." For it is

precisely this which goes into the higher word "grace-dealing" and

composes the reality of its meaning. This is the grace, that Christ

gives himself for us, and so works in us, by his sacrifice, that we are

transformed, reconciled, covered in with God's feeling, in one word,

forgiven.

Do not understand me to say that the higher Greek word is made up of

the verb to give, with the preposition for, like our English word. It

is not; it signifies literally and simply "dealing grace," or "doing

grace upon;" which is represented by the genius of our tongue, in the

word "for-giving;" and, what is remarkable, the Latin and all the

principal modern tongues, [as in con-dono, par-don, ver-geben,] make up

their word signifying remission in the same way, by compounding their

verb to give with a preposition answering to for; giving it, as it were

by vote, and declaring it as their inward sense or conviction, that the

true forgiving of wrong and evil is that which has its beauty and

greatness and the spring of its operative power, in a giving-for the

sinners and the sins to be forgiven.

And lest this might seem to be scarcely better than a suggestion of the

fancy, or a curiosity of speech, let us glance a moment at the

practical, or practically Christian, import of forgiveness when it is

received. What is it practically to us, or in us? What does it do for

us? What internal changes of position, or experience, does it bring?

Answering these questions, we shall find that forgiveness, when

ascribed to Christ, has suffered a lapse or fall in our understanding,

much like that which it has suffered when applied to men. For the word

is taken by multitudes, including even teachers of theology, as if it

had no reach of meaning above the lower and more negative of the two

words just referred to. Thus we say that Christ first prepares a ground

of forgiveness, by suffering before God (penally or not penally) in a

manner to even the account of our sin; and then, having magnified the

justice of God, he is able to let go, remit, release the charge of, in

that sense, forgive, our sin. Well, suppose the absolution is passed

and we are let go, declared to be let go, as I let go verbally my enemy

when I forgive him. What does this signify, that God has let go, taken

off all charges against, his enemy? Just nothing but a most barren

mockery, unless he has somehow got into the man's bosom and executed

his pardon, by making the sins let go of him. And precisely here is the

stress, the struggle, the wonder and glory of the forgiveness; that

Christ, going before, has gotten him away from his sin; and, in all

this previous grace-dealing, the reality of the letting go, otherwise

nothing but empty words, is accomplished. Why, the man to be redeemed

had a hell of retributive causes tearing in his disordered nature, and

the mere letting him go only lets him have that hell to himself! No,

the grand effort of forgiveness begins farther back, in what is

undertaken for the sinner to win upon him, change him, get him loose

from sin, loose from retribution, and then the letting go is only the

ending off, or completion declared. And so the real forgiveness is that

Jesus came, to be for his adversary and execute the great release in

him. Long ages ago, before the foundation of the world, his mind of

love began to grapple with the wrong and bitter woe of his adversary.

He was not saying, "let him come to me, in his day, and ask it if he

will, and then I will forgive him;" as little was it in him to say,

"let him be a better man and by-gones shall be by-gones." But he was

the Lamb slain already. He was contriving how to get beforehand in his

forgiveness, postponing his just indignations, laying himself into the

case of his adversaries to gain them back, planning a descent into the

flesh and a suffering life--giving himself for, in a word forgiving, in

all profoundest reality of feeling, ages before they arrive, and of

course before they come to ask forgiveness. And when they come along in

their day, and say for their scanty testimony in receiving such a

grace, "Christ has let us go, Christ has remitted our sins," he will

himself have a deeper solution, in the consciousness of having long ago

given himself for them, and had the enjoyment of their forgiven state.

Neither will he ever think of it as any fit summation of his work in

the world, to say that he has first prepared a ground of forgiveness,

and then that having made forgiveness safe in that manner, he is able

to release or let go, or in that sense forgive sins. No, but he will

understand that he was lifted up to draw men away from their sins, and

be the release in them; that, by showing how God suffers in feeling for

sinners, he has gotten a power in their feeling; in a word, that, by

giving himself for his adversaries, in such burdens of sympathy, and

fear, and care, and against such tempests of murderous and bloody

wrong, he has slid himself into the secret place of their sins and made

them all let go--in that manner executed the release; so that now he

can say, with real truth in the words, "thy sins are forgiven thee."

We go back now from this excursion, to the subject-matter at which we

began; viz., the duty of forgiveness between brethren, or. fellow-men.

And we carry back this very important principle or discovery; that the

reality of forgiveness, or the grace of a forgiving spirit in us, lies

not so much in our ability to let go, or to be persuaded to let go, the

remembrance of injuries, as in what we are able to do, what volunteer

sacrifices to make, what painstaking to undergo, that we may get our

adversary softened, to want, or gently accept, our forgiveness. If it

is in us to forgive, in any real and properly Christian sense of the

term, it will not be that we can somehow be gotten down to it, by the

expostulations of brethren, nor that we only do not expressly claim a

right to stay in our grudge, or the hurt feeling raised by the wrongs

of our adversary, till he comes to us in a better mind. Perhaps he

ought to come, or to have come long ago, but that is nothing as regards

our justification. If we know how to forgive, we shall be like Christ

our Master, we shall be giving ourselves for our adversary,

circumventing him by our prayers, contriving ways to reach his

tenderness and turn the bad will he is in, taking pains, even to the

extent of great loss and suffering, that we may get him into the right

again; thus to accept our remission, and be joined to us openly for

Christ our Master's sake.

But this, it may be objected, carries the obligation too high--Christ

was a peculiar being, in a very peculiar office, and it can not be

expected of us to follow him and be like him, in what belonged rather

to his official work, than to the merely inherent principle of personal

excellence in his character. Now it may be very true that we are not

called to work out the same problems of divine government, but we are

required to have, in our degree, exactly the same modes of character,

and all that he did was the simple coming out of his character. He had

no good ways, or qualities, that were more than good, no merits of

character that were superlative and above all the known standards of

merit. On the contrary one of the great and blessed objects of his

mission was to consist, in the true unfolding of God's feelings,

graces, perfections, so as to draw us into the same, or impregnate our

fallen life with the same. No matter what relations he may have filled,

or solved, in the great mystery of government, still every thing he

undertook and bore was for forgiveness' sake, and: he had precisely the

same reasons of feeling for withholding himself that we have, when we

withhold from our adversaries. He had his personal indignations against

the wrong of transgressors, he had his disgusts towards their

character, he had feelings wounded by the sense of their wrongs, and if

he could have let a little pride play among his passions, he would have

had his bitter, invincible grudges against them; so that when he

thought of them he would have said, "I want no more to do with them.

Perhaps I will consider them, if they come to me in a better mind, but

until they. do, I shall let them take the wages of their sin, giving

myself no farther trouble." The only reason why he did not do this was

that he was too perfect in excellence to do it. He must dispense

forgiveness. He must go before, and give himself for, and watch, and

wait, and suffer, and sue, at the gate of his adversaries. And w1ly not

we? Because, says the objection, Christ was peculiar, and could do

things out of his peculiarity that are too high for us. No! no! his

great peculiarity was that he could be right. "Faithful and just," says

an apostle, "to forgive us our sins." He could not be faithful to his

trust as Creator and Lord, could not be consciously just or righteous,

(for that is what the term here means,) if he did not prepare and offer

the forgiveness of sins. If there be some kind of rectoral, or public,

justice that required to be maintained by some fit compensation, or

compensative expression, that is another matter, but there wanted

nothing in him better than that most solid justice, which is

everlasting, immutable, righteousness, to make him a forgiver of sin.

And in all that you distinguish of a nobler and diviner life, in his

bearing of his enemies and their sins, he is simply showing what

belongs, in righteousness, to every moral nature from the Uncreated

Lord down to the humblest created intelligence. Forgiveness, this same

Christly forgiveness, belongs to all; to you, to me, to every lowest

mortal that bears God's image.

Do we, then, undertake to say, that there is no salvation, out of this

same Christly forgiveness--has no man a right to expect salvation,

whose soul hangs fire at the point of such forgiveness? must he

forgive, in this Christly manner, going before and giving himself for,

his adversary, if he is to be forgiven? What then does the Saviour

himself say to this? When he has taught you to pray--"forgive us our

debts as we forgive our debtors," and has added, "but if ye forgive not

men. their trespasses, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your

trespasses," what does it mean, or to what does it bring you? Can you

turn off the bad conclusion, by contriving a sort of forgiveness that

is lower, such barely as can manage to choke down a grudge, or not

choke down an adversary, when he comes to ask a reconciliation? And was

that Christ's meaning? was he saying "forgive in your own sense, or

else I will not forgive in mine?" O, these niggard forgivenesses! He

would even make you repent of them! He wants you to be with him in his

own! He wants such a feeling struggling in your bosom, that you can not

bear to have an adversary, can not rest from your prayers and

sacrifices and the life-long suit of your concern, till you have gained

him away from his wrong, and brought him into peace. This in fact is

salvation; to be with Christ, in all the travail of his forgivenesses.

Besides, there is another answer to this question of salvation. As w6

just now said that Christ was simply fulfilling the right in his

blessed ways of forgiveness, so we may conceive that he is simply

fulfilling the eternal love. For what is right coincides with love, and

love with what is right. Now Christ is in this kind of

forgiveness--unable to stand for the relenting of his adversaries,

going before them, and giving himself for them--just because it is in

the nature of love to do so. For it is a vicarious principle and must

insert itself into whatever sorrow,, sin, suffering, danger, it looks

upon; and, for this most affecting reason, can not rest till it has

either gotten its adversary to its bosom, or discovered the

impossibility that he ever should be. Are we then to look for

salvation, when we are out of this- love? What do we most readily

believe and most commonly hold, but that our salvation lies in loving

God and having his love upon us. The being in heaven's love is, we all

agree, the bond of heaven's perfectness, the very life and constituent

beatitude of heaven itself. And what will this love do in us but just

what it does in Christ? If it keeps down all grudges and hard judgments

in him, if it makes forgiveness his dearest opportunity, if it puts him

into the case of his adversary, bearing his wrongs, and contriving only

how to prepare him to forgiveness--if, I say, the love so works in him,

what will it do and how will it work in you? Let it not be disguised

from you, that there are many kinds of mock love, and but one that is

true, even that which works so sublimely in the self-sacrificing ways

of Jesus our Master. Thus there is a theologic love, a state that is

tested by merely defined contrasts of feeling, apart from any effects

in the practical sacrifices of the life. There is also a sentimental

love, taken with God's beauty. And again there is a philanthropic love,

which is caught with great expectations for man, coming out of its own

prodigious, better than Christian, reforms. Now the test of all these

mock species of love is that there is no forgiveness in them. You may

be in this, or that, or all of them, and they will not help you to bear

one enemy, or put you into any tender ways of seeking after an

adversary. Could there be any more damning evidence against your love,

whether it be the defined evangelical, or the sentimental, or the

philanthropic, than that there is no Christly forgiveness in it? That

being true, how is any salvation to come out of it? No, my friends,

this is the love--the only true--"Hereby perceive we the love of God,

because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our

lives for the brethren."

Taking now this high view of the Christian spirit as related to Christ,

it would not surprise me, if there should be a feeling of special

revulsion, or repulsion, rising up in some of your hearts, to thrust

away even farther than ever the claims of religion. "I could not be a

Christian after this kind," you will say, "and I never can be. If I

must forgive all the wrongs I meet, after this manner, I must give up

any right to be a proper man. Such a volunteering of forgiveness before

it is sought, and even when smarting under the bitter wrongs of an

enemy, is too spiritless and weak in the look of it--I could not endure

being held down to any such forgiving way." All this, my friends, may

be very true, regarding only the present key of your feeling and

life--I presume it is. But it may be equally true, at the same time,

that your judgment is a false one, and that this very impossible

looking forgiveness, when you are once really in it, by the grace of

God, will be such an element of dignity, and rest, and strength, and

conscious superiority to all wrong-doers and wrongs, that you will even

seem to be raised by it in the relative grade of your nature itself.

Why, my friends, instead of being humbled, and tamed, and put in

mortification, by this entering into forgiveness with Christ, you will

ascend rather into greatness and conscious sovereignty with him, and

will then, for the first time, begin to conceive what it is to be. free

and a king! No, the forgiveness you so much distaste is probably not

the forgiveness I describe, but the low, false kind of your old

associations; that niggard, misnamed forgiveness that cheapens the

grace by putting all sacrifice out of question, and makes it

distasteful by reducing it to so low a figure, that pride can be just

goaded into it. Sticking fast in its bitternesses, resentments, and

grudges, and contriving how little and late to forgive, it is only

dogged into some verbal letting go, which is the more certainly cross

to self-respect, that there is no genuine meaning in it, and nothing

genuine but the fit mortification. Not so is it, but far otherwise,

with the really Christly forgiveness. Here the soul has a really great

feeling to begin with, and the moment it undertakes for its adversary,

it goes above him. No matter what his power and the dignity of his

station, the humblest peasant puts him under, when he begins to pray

for him, and contrive and labor for his sake. No matter what, or how

great, the wrong you have suffered, the way to make it greater is to

hug it fast in grudges and blistering resentments. Pride, passion,

hate, will make a great wrong out of a very small one; but in the true

forgiveness, you ascend to a range of feeling so high, so immovably

serene, that the greatest wrong looks small under you, and quite as

truly the greatest wrong-doer. O, there is no greatness possible to

man, none that lifts him so nearly out of the world, and above it, as

the true Christly forgiveness. This was the greatness of Christ

himself. Did any being ever tread the world in such majesty as he? And

his wrongs were bitter enough, and his adversaries high enough, and,

what is quite as conspicuous, he keeps the true sense always of their

wrongs, and hates the hateful in their sins, and feels a fit disgust

for what is disgusting in their character, holding all his judgments

level and true, as if he were going to proceed entirely by them; yet

giving himself, as it were out of majesty, for the wrongs he condemns

and the enemies he is obliged to pity. Do you call this an humble,

mortifying key to live in? Must you shrink from this? Why, my friends,

the moment you are born into this high consciousness you will feel that

your heads strike heaven rather.

Brethren in Christ, let me also turn the lessons of this subject

specially towards you; for it was specially Christian brethren, even

those of Ephesus, that the apostle was addressing when he

exhorted--"forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath

forgiven you."

You have seen what this forgiveness means, what a volunteering there is

in it, how the true Christian works in it, long before.the forgiveness

is wanted, works in sacrifice and patience, even as all love must. What

I want therefore to know, my brethren, is whether you find this

forgiveness in you? Can you give yourself for your brother, or do you

hold off in the stiff pretense, that he must come to you first and

right himself? Can you be the Christian towards hirn, or can you more

easily hug your injury, as a wound bleeding internally, and hold

yourself aloof? Let me tell you then how very bad the sign is, when a

Christian is slow to forgive. It does not show, it is true, that he is

a vicious, or viciously depraved, man, as other kinds of fault, or

deviation would, but it shows a great amount of unsanctified nature in

him--none can tell or guess how much. For it is our proud, wild nature,

just that in kind, though not in degree, that is observed to burn so

inextinguishably, in the bloody resentments of savages, which makes it

so hard for us to forgive. Therefore, if any one finds it more easy to

stay in the savage feeling, than to go after his adversary in the

Christian, the indication is fearfully bad. Nay, it is even a very

unpleasant and doubtful sign, when one has an adversary long to

forgive; for when a true Christian goes after his adversary, in such

temper as he ought, tender, assiduous, proving himself in his love, by

the most faithful sacrifices, he is not like to stay by his enmity

long. As the heat of a warm day will make even a willful man take off

his overcoat, so the silent melting of forgiveness at the heart will

compel it, even before it is aware, to let the grudges go. Still a

really good man may have enemies, all his life-long, even as Christ

had, and the real blame may be chargeable not against him, but against

them, and it would be too much to make their obstinacy a certain proof

against his fidelity. Enough that he follows his Master, and allows

them no reason for their obstinacy, by the stint of his own

affectionate and self-sacrificing endeavors. Commonly the wrong-doer of

two parties will be the most unforgiving, and, for just that reason,

the wrong sufferer will be readiest and most forward in forgiveness.

Sometimes the alienated, or aggrieved parties, will both of them be

Christian brethren; and how very sad a sight is it, and how much to be

pitied when two brethren fall into an enmity! How frightfully fallen is

their look when you look at them! How much worse their internal look.

to themselves! When they go to pray in secret, how are they choked in

their prayers! How very likely are they also, to be even choked off

soon from prayer itself. How certain are they in this manner, even

against much endeavor, to go down in their piety. The warm heart they

once had, or seemed to have--where is it? If they beamed in rich

feeling once on every body, and it was a, blessing to meet them and be

warmed in the glow of their faces, the blessing and the glow are soon

gone, and we may almost say the faces too; for there is scarcely any

but a negative meaning left in them. O, ye pitiable and sad pair of

disciples, that are paired in your enmity! How easily and beautifully

paired might you be in your forgiveness! Go apart and think of this! go

apart and pray over it! Nay, come together and pray over it! Pray

especially, as you most need, that God will forgive you, even as you

forgive each other--thus or--never.

Sometimes it will happen that a whole brotherhood of disciples will be

scored and scorched by disaffections, jealousies, wounded feelings that

are akin to enmity, in the same manner. There is much talk and a

general talking down of course, and as a family quarrel brings down

family respect, so it is when brethren are set to the work of

diminishing each other's worth and character. Believe them and they are

all no better than they should be, If they once loved each other, and

were firmly locked together in their common cause, so much the worse

now, for the dishonor falls on their tendernesses and prayers, and all

the good things that seemed to be in their love. The Holy Dove flies

their assemblies, or only hovers doubtfully over them, unable to light

where there is no peace. When they come to pray together, it is only

locally together, and not in spirit that they pray. There is a dreary

chill in their assemblies. Neither the prayers appear to go up, nor the

preaching to come down. There is no savoring element for the word, and

of course there is as little due sense of savor from it. It is neither

fire, nor hammer, but a chill made audible rather, like the ripping,

rifting noises of some ice-clad lake or river in a silent, freezing

night. The power is all gone, fatally benumbed. The power of the word,

the power of the living epistle, that of the prayers--every sort is

gone, and there is no fire of heaven left.

What then shall they do? Some of them perhaps will finally begin to

say, let us take the counsel of Lot and Abraham--go to the right, and

go to the left. Yes, but there is a difference; these friends, Abraham

and Lot, parted because they were agreed, not because they were at

variance; parted to save their agreement and not to comfort their

repugnances. Have then Christian brethren, under Christ's own gospel,

nothing better left, than to take themselves out of sight of each

other?--going apart just to get rid of forgiveness; going to carry the

rankling with them, live in the bitterness, die in the grudges of their

untamable passion? What is our gospel but a reconciling power even for

sin itself, and what is it good for--cross, and love, and patience, and

all--if it can not reconcile? No, there is a better way; Christ lays it

on them, by his own dear passion where he gave himself for them, by his

bloody sweat, by his pierced hands, and by his open side, to go about

the matter of forgiving one another even as he went about forgiving

them. O, it is a short method, and how beautiful, and one that never

failed. When they are ready to go before all relentings, and above all

grudges, and be weary, and sick, and sad, and sorrowful, and so to give

themselves for their adversaries, weeping on their necks in tender and

true confession, they will not be adversaries long, but they will be

turning all together to the cross, and joining in the prayer--forgive

us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. They

had much to say before of forgiveness, they were all ready to forgive,

but they could not find how much, or when, or how, because they took

forgiveness in too light a key. Now they take it in Christ's meaning,

and how shortly are their troubles ended. They can not forgive enough,

or soon enough, or with half as much love as they would. The

bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, are

put away, with all malice. They are kind one to another, tenderhearted,

forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven

them.

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XIX.

CHRIST BEARING THE SINS OF TRANSGRESSORS.

"So Christ. was once offered to bear the sins of many."--Heb. ix, 28.

Christ bearing our sins ought to be the tenderest and most

soul-subduing of all facts conceivable. And yet it may even be made

quite revolting, by the over literal, and legally hard, face put upon

it. Perhaps I ought to say that it too often is, and that what is given

to be the new creating power of God in our lives, is made, in this

manner, to be an offense that even balks our repentances. What I

propose then, at the present time, is to answer, in a very practical

way, the very practical question--

In what sense, or manner, it is, that Christ bears the sins of the

world?

To make the answer clear, I begin by specifying some things which are

not to be understood by it.

Thus we are not to understand that the sins of the world are put upon

him, or transferred to him, so as to be his. That is impossible. Guilt

is a matter so strictly and eternally personal, that nobody can be in

it, but the transgressor himself to whom it belongs. Apart from him it

is nothing. Strike him out of existence and it no longer exists. The

bad conscience, the blame, the damning self-conviction, is as

incommunicably his, even as his brain, or his will. Indeed, the

creatorship of the world can as well be transferred, as the doership of

a sin. The meum and tuum of property can be transferred, but the meum

and tuum of sin is even absolute. If I owe a debt, another man can make

himself a debtor in my place, but if I am a felon, no other man can be

the felon for me.

It follows, in the same view, that Christ does not bear our sins in the

sense that he bears our punishment. Everlasting justice forbids any

such commutation of places in punishment. What is this justice? An

indignation against wrong that wants pain out of somebody, caring only

that the quantum be made up? Or is it, rather, an indignation against

the wrong-doer himself, and no other? No matter if another consents to

bear that indignation, and suffer all the deserved pains of the

wrong-doer, when that second person comes to offer himself, God's

justice will forthwith object in the question--"Are you guilty of this

man's sin? Doubtless you may be his friend, but the only thing you can

do for him is to be innocence in him, and you can as well do that as to

be guilty instead of him. But as long as you are innocence yourself,

what kind of transaction is it that you undertake, when you come to be

punished in innocence? What opinion have you of my justice, when you

expect me to release the pains deserved, if only I can get enough that

are not deserved? Did I ever threaten to punish the guilty man, or

somebody else, when my law should be broken? You ask more than is

possible, when you ask me to smooth over even the everlasting

distinctions of principle, and be satisfied with the punishment of

innocence. I can only be revolted by the thought, and should be

everlastingly by the deed."

Again, it is not conceivable that Christ bears our sin, in the sense

that the abhorrence of God to our sin is laid upon him, and expressed

through, and by means of, his sufferings. How can God lay abhorrence

upon what is not abhorrent? Is he going to abhor goodness, truth,

beauty itself? And if Jesus, being all this, comes in as a volunteer

into the place of transgressors, challenging upon himself the

abhorrence due to them, will God falsify and mock all his own approving

judgments and moral affinities, by acting an abhorrence which he must

renounce every one of his perfections to feel? Perhaps it will be

imagined that he only puts great pains on Christ, which we ourselves

are to look upon as tokens of abhorrence to us. That would be very

ingenious in us, but how are we going to take up such a thought? In the

first place, God did not inflict those pains, but we ourselves. Are we

then going to put Christ to death and take it up as a religious

discovery, having a gospel in it, that God's abhorrence to us is so far

expressed by our very abominable deed of murder, that it need not be

any more, by our punishment? We can easily enough imagine God's

abhorrence, in such a case, to the sin perpetrated, and the murderers

by whom it is perpetrated, but the difficulty is to get either Christ

or his suffering into the same line; for the last thing any human soul

can think of will be, that God's abhorrence touches him any how, or

looks out any where from his pains.

We come now, having dismissed these rather common misconceptions, to

the positive matter of the question, or the positive answer to be

given. And here let me indicate, beforehand, a certain point of fact

that will probably distinguish any true answer; viz., that Christ, in

bearing the sins of transgressors, simply fulfills principles of duty,

or holiness, that are common to all moral beings, and does it as being

obliged by those principles. If there is any fundamental truth in

morals, it is that there is no superlative kind of merit or excellence;

that as far as kind is concerned, the same kind is for all, and there

is no other. Thus, if Christ has it incumbent on him, as a point of

beneficence, or love, to bear the sins of transgressors, it will be

incumbent on every moral being in the universe, ourselves included, to

bear sins; only not perhaps in the same degree, or with the same

effect. If he is to be a sacrifice for sin, it will be laid upon us to

be, every man, a sacrifice and an offering in like manner, only not to

accomplish all the same results. We are not then to look for some

artificial, theologically contrived, never before heard of, kind of

good, in the bearing of sins, but simply to look after what lies in the

first principles of religious love and devotion, as related to the

conduct of all. Having this intent in view I shall make out--

I. A general or inclusive answer to the question, and then, secondly, a

threefold, particular answer, the points of which. are included under

it. The general is this--that Christ bears the sins of the world in a

certain representative sense, analogous to that in which the priests

and the sacrifices of the former altar-service, bore the sins of the

people worshiping. The phrase, "he shall bear his sin," or "bear his

iniquity," means, it is true, when applied to the guilty person, that

he shall be punished for his sin. But when it is applied, as it is many

times, to the priests and sacrifices at the altar, we are not to

conceive that the priests, or the altar victims, have the guilt

actually put upon them--nothing could be more absurd--but we are to

take the words in an accommodated, ritually formal sense, where the

same thing is true representatively; the design being to let the people

feel or believe, that their sins are being taken away, as if put over

upon the priests, or upon the head of the victims. Not to multiply

instances, we have the phrase "to bear sins" used in both senses in a

single passage, (Numb. xviii, 22, 23)--"Neither must the children of

Israel henceforth come near the tabernacle of the congregation, lest

they bear sin [that is, their own sin] and die. But the Levites shall

do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall

bear their iniquity." No one will be so absurd as to imagine, that the

iniquity of the people is here declared to be literally put on the

priesthood. They are only to bear it representatively, coming so far in

place of the people before God, as to conduct their sacrifice for them,

and, as God accepts the sacrifice, put them in the state, formally at

least, of reconciliation. In a similarly representative sense, the

prophet Ezekiel lies upon his left side three hundred and ninety days,

"bearing," as he says, "the iniquity of the house of Israel," and upon

his right side forty days "bearing the iniquity of the house of Judah;"

where it is simply meant that the iniquity was made visible

representatively in that sign. So when "all the iniquities of the

children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins,"

were put, as we read, upon the head of their scape-goat, and he was

driven out into the desert, they knew not where, there was neither any

sin upon the goat, nor any punishment. The reality of the whole matter

stood in what was representatively signified; viz., the removal and

clearance of their sin.

And here is the ready solution of all those expressions in the New

Testament, which are brought over from the priesthood and sacrifices of

the Old Testament, and used, with so great power, to represent the

relation of Christ to the sins of the world. Thus he is declared to be

"made sin for us," just as the Levites were, in bearing the iniquities

of the congregation. Thus also it is declared that he "was once offered

to bear the sins of many." The meaning is that he comes

representatively in our place, undertaking, or taking on himself, the

case of our sin, even as the priests at the altar did. Such forms of

speech come to be natural, as it were, to the Jewish mind, under the

uses of their ritual, and pass into new applications of a different

shade. Thus Paul speaks of Christ "being made a curse for us."

Regarding Christ as having come into our state of corporate evil, under

the curse, and borne the bitterness of it, and at so great expense

delivered us from it, he takes up the representative figure of the

altar-service, and shows him, in that manner, bearing the curse for us.

He does not mean that Christ was literally and legally substituted, in

the matter of our punishment, but that he was substituted, as the

priests were, in bearing the sins of the people, and with a like

result. Thus also Peter says, in the fervor of his obligation to

Christ--"Who his own self bare our sins, in his own body on the tree;"

as if our very sins were personally chastised, or punished, in the

pains of his cross; and yet he does not say it, but turns the sentence,

in what follows, in a way to show that he means no such thing--"that we

being dead to sin, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye

were healed." After all he is only showing, at what expense, Christ

takes us away from our sin, and makes us "live unto righteousness." And

though he speaks of "stripes," a penal word, he does not say "by whose

stripes God's justice was satisfied," but, "by whose stripes ye were

healed."

Christ then bears our sin, we answer inclusively and generally, in the

sense that he has come representatively into our place and got such

power in us by his sacrifice, as to take it wholly away.

Pause here now a moment at the threshhold, and raise the question,

whether we, as human beings, can have any thing in common with him, in

such a sacrifice? Of course we can not do the same things; for we have

not the same grade of character and power over human sentiment, nor the

same undertaking for the world upon us. We are sinners ourselves,

wanting, for outfit in duty, just that taking away of sin and renewing

in good, which are to be the fruit of his sacrifice. It is not to be

expected, therefore, that we shall come into any such answering for

sin, as to have the representative figures of the altar applied to us;

unless it be in ways more restricted and partial. We shall only follow

him, as our very much abused faculty, and humbler key of being, allow

us to follow.

Still it is remarkable how many of the scripture terms of sacrifice and

priestly intervention are applied to Christian disciples, and how

constantly they are called to maintain precisely the way of the cross.

Nothing, in fact, is farther off from the New Testament, than to

conceive that Christ is in a superlative kind of virtue, inappropriate,

or impossible, to mortals.

Thus we are called to be sacrifices and priests of sacrifice. "I

beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, [that is, in

Jesus Christ,] that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, [in the

same manner,] holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable

service," [the dictate of your moral nature as it was of his.] The

phrase "acceptable to God," you will also observe, is a sacrificial

phrase, bearing an allusion to God's acceptance of the sin offerings.

And, in this sense, it occurs again--"Ye also, as lively stones, are

built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual

sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." The disciples are taken

often as being thus a priesthood, all, with their Master--"Kings and

priests unto God," "entering into the holiest with boldness;" entering

in thither also to act the part of intercessors--to anoint and raise up

the sick, as James represents; to obtain forgiveness of sins for the

brethren that have committed sin; to convert sinning brethren from the

error of their ways, in such a sense as to be in fact their human

saviours--"saving their souls from death and hiding the multitude of

their sins." And this word hiding it should also be observed is a word

of sacrificial atonement; for to atone is literally to cover, that is,

to hide; put away, forever, make as naught. Not that we are to do these

things in our own right, and by our own power, as Christ did, but, as

in the language just now cited, "by Jesus Christ." The conception is

that our life is to be so far in the analogy of his, and moved by his

inspirations, that the same words, priest, sacrifice, intercession,

saving of souls, converting sinners, hiding, or covering sins; will be

fitly applied to us-that is, in senses modified by our human capacities

and conditions.

Having sketched this general outline of what is to be understood by the

bearing of sins, we now proceed--

II. To fill up the outline by a more particular statement of the

subject matter included under it. Christ, we have seen, bears the sins

of the world representatively, in a figure, much as the priesthood, or

the scapegoat, bore them, only procuring an absolution for them as much

more real and spiritual, as the heavenly things themselves are more

quickening and substantial in him, than their shadows in the forms of

the altar. This for the general statement; which includes, we shall

find, when we look into the subject matter of his life more closely,

three particular modes, or distinctly and rationally conceived methods,

of bearing sin by him, in his mission as a Redeemer.

1. He bears the sin of the world, by that assumption which his love

must needs make of it. Love puts every being, from the eternal God

downward, into the case of all sufferers, wrong-doers, and enemies, to

assume their evils, and be concerned for them. Being love, it assumes

their loss, danger, present suffering, suffering to be; all their want,

sorrow, shame, and disorder; and goes into their case to restore and

save. As a father, who has a dear son straying from honor and virtue,

assumes that son to be an inevitable burden on his love, and bears him,

sin and all, as a heavy load upon his feeling, striving after him in

many tears, and prayers, and weary contrivings, and it may be under

great personal abuse, that he may regain him to a better life, just so

God assumes in Christ all transgressors and enemies, and all their sin,

and all their coming woes, and bears them on his paternal feeling,

through great waves of living conflict and dying passion--"For 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

assumption is such that we may even look upon it and speak of it, as a

kind of substitution. Hence the strongly substitutional language

employed concerning it. But there is no room for mistaking the meaning

of such language. The precise nature of the assumption, or

substitution, is given when the evangelist says of Christ's healing

works--"That it might be fulfilled that was spoken by. Esaias the

prophet, himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." It

does not mean that Christ literally took into his body, and bore,

himself, all the fevers, pains, lamenesses, blindnesses, leprosies he

healed, but simply that he took them upon his sympathy, bore them as a

burden upon his compassionate love. In that sense, exactly, he assumed

and bore the sins of the world; not that he became the sinner and

suffered the due punishment himself, but that he took them on his love,

and put himself by mighty throes of feeling, and sacrifice, and mortal

passion, to the working out of their deliverance. And these were the

throes in which we find him often struggling; declaring now that his

soul is troubled, heaving now, in prostrate weakness, and bloody sweat,

on the ground. In these throes he died, saying, "It is finished

"--viz., the bearing of sins that he had undertaken to bear. The sins

were never his, the deserved pains never touched him as being deserved,

but they were upon his feeling in so heavy a burden as to make him

sigh, "my soul is exceeding sorrowful." And just because the world in

sin took hold of his feeling in this manner, was he able, in turn, to

get hold of the feeling of the world, and become its true deliverer and

Saviour. In this fact lay bosomed the everlasting gospel.

Let me not be understood now, in transferring this analogy, to say, or

suggest, that Christ came into such a life of sympathy and death of

passion, just to give us an example which we are to copy. Nothing could

be more impotent, or farther from the truth. Giving and copying

examples is too tame a matter to be conceived as making out a gospel.

No, Christ took our sin upon him in this manner and bore it as the

burden of his mission, just because it was in his love to do it; and

that same love, in any being, of any world, in us just struggling up

out of our lowness and bondage, will put us, in our human grade, and

according to the measure of our love, on making the same kind of

assumption. We shall take the child of sin, or sorrow, our friend, our

enemy, any. one, every one we see to be in evil, on our feeling, and

make him a charge upon our sacrifices and prayers. Paul knew exactly

what this meant when he said--"Bear ye one another's burdens and so

fulfill the law of Christ;"--that is, the eternal love-law, or standard

of obligation, that he himself fulfilled. Paul had the meaning too, the

very Gethsemane of it, in his own heart, when he cried, under his

burden--"I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart. For

I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my

kinsmen, according to the flesh." And the same we find recurring, in

one form or another, in all the apostles, all the brethren. When they

hear the Master lay it on them to minister--"Even as the Son of Man

came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a

ransom for many"--they take the sense of it; for, having his love in

them, they are not afraid to find a cross of sacrifice in the love,

just the cross that he called them to bear as followers. Thus also it

is that he institutes a communion for them, and calls them to show

forth his death; by which he means, not that they are to simply

remember his death, or make mention of it, but that they are to show

the love that can bear sins with him, and be a sacrifice even up to

that stern limit.

O, what a calling is this, my brethren, the bearing of sins, with

Christ. Of course you have not the same things to do that he had, or

the same. capacity to do them; you have not even the same things to do,

one as another; but if his love has really been. quickened in you, the

fact will be known by the burdens that have come upon your heart;

covetousness, world-greediness, self-indulgence, prejudices,

resentments, feelings wounded by injury--none of these will hold you:

but there will be a most dear love going forth in you, not to your

friends only, but even more consciously to your enemies, and God's

enemies. There will be times when you seem to be well nigh crushed, by

the concern you feel and the burdens you bear. Is it so with you? Is it

here that you sometimes find even your joy--the same which Christ

himself had and bequeathed to you? Have you found, as every mother, for

example, has, and every Christian may, that love-pains are the deepest

attainable joys; tragic exaltations of a consciously great feeling

that, in bearing enemies and sins, challenges eternal affinity with

Christ and with God?

2. It is another and equally true conception of the bearing of sins by

Christ, that he is incarnated into the state of sin, including all the

corporate woes of penalty, or natural retribution, under it--woes that

infest the world, the body, and the social and political departments of

human affairs. These disorders and mischiefs comprehend what is called,

in scripture, "the curse;" for the curse is just that state of

retributive disorder, and disjunction, that follows, under natural

laws, the outbreak of sin The virus of disease, possibly of all

disease, is generated under and by these laws. Natural causes are

beneficent henceforth, only in the qualified sense, that they are

attacking sin with due mixtures of pain, as well as with favors

undeserved. Dreadful superstitions cloud the general understanding.

Truth is obscured. Passion is made coarse and violent. Envies,

ambitions, grudges, hatreds, are loosened, and bloody wrongs are

instigated everywhere by them. Oppressions, persecutions, rebellions,

wars, roll across the nations, and turn the world's history into a kind

of Alcedama. This now is the curse, the corporate woe of the world, and

when Christ comes down into the world to be incarnate in it, and do his

work of love, he enters himself into its corporate evils, and takes

them just as they are; even as a man, plunging into the sea, would take

the waves and the monsters coursing in it as they are. All which is

described by an apostle, when he says, that Christ "was made a curse

for us." Nor, when he adds, "for it is written, cursed is every one

that hangeth on a tree," does he mean to say that Christ is made a

curse for us only in the sense that he is crucified, or at the

particular point of his crucifixion; he merely drops in this allusion,

touching that particular point, taken as a good type of all that he

does and suffers in the world; for he meets the corporate woe and

retribution of the world at every step. His body, as being born of the

flesh, has the mortal maladies and temptations of the curse working

subtly in it. When there is no room at the inn but only in the manger,

that is the corporate mischief and curse of society, where the great

rule down the humble, and respect goes only by appearances. The

jealousy of Herod is the curse, before which he flies into Egypt. The

bigotry of the priests was the curse. The slowness of his friends, the

denial by one, the betrayal by another, the flight of all, was the

curse. The chief priests and the rabbis, and the council, and Pilate,

and Herod, all combined against him, only represent the corporate

wrath, and wrong, and curse, of the world. Incarnated thus into the

curse, he had the living contact of it at every breath. The waves of

God's retribution dashed against him all the way, as he waded through

on his course. Innocent he was, but had none of the rights, or proper

fortunes of innocence. Not that any thing befell him as punishment, and

yet he was scorching, every hour, under the great world's corporate

evils; those which God's retributions had kindled for the chastisement

of its sin. And why is he here, for what is he bearing thus the sin of

the world? Not that he may suffer, not that he may idly brave so much

of suffering--of what possible use were this?--no, but he is here

because he has an errand that brought him, or required him to come. His

object is to gain the human heart; and, to do it, he must open the

heart of God; and to do that, he must not come flying over the world,

but must be incarnated into it, put upon the same human footing in his

human life, that we are--all this to make God's feeling intelligible,

or what is the same, to open God's sympathies to us, and open our

sympathies to God; thus to beget us anew in God's likeness. If he had

come to be an exceptional man, whom the waves of the world's corporate

evils could not touch, or if he had come as a man of brass, not to feel

their touch, he were in fact nothing to us. But now that we have him

struggling in the waves with us, touched with all our infirmities, and

bearing, in deep sympathy, all our human evils, O, how tenderly do we

cling to him and what strength do we get from his power and patience in

our hearts!

Now, my friends, it would seem, at first view, to be very wide of all

possibility, that we should be called to any such bearing of sin as

this. Are we going to be incarnated like our divine Master? Even so!

Dropping only the form of the word, the coming into flesh, it is no

inconsiderable part of our dignity and God-likeness in sacrifice, that

we are able to go directly down into the corporate evils of men, for

their good!--into some house, for example, or village, or city, where a

dreadful pestilence rages, to minister to their sick ones and comfort

their dying; into the disgusts of low and filthy society, where vice

rages, rescuing the victims and their children; into works of

reformation, or maintenances of truth, that are unpopular, just because

society has lost the truth. Christ bids you make a feast and call the

lame, the halt, and the blind, passing, for the time, into their range

of sympathy--what is that but a kind of incarnation, like that which

brought him down out of heaven's orders of glory, into the lame and

halting sorrows of our human apostasy. When, too, you go out, in God's

love, into scenes of dissipation, or of splendid profligacy, it is an

almost literal incarnation--going into the flesh to be tempted as

Christ was. Perhaps you are just now in the question, whether you shall

forsake the refinements and comforts of a Christian home, and go down

as a missionary, for all your future life, into the level of a

barbarous and idolatrous people, where your. motives will not, for many

long years, be even so much as conceived, where your sympathies will be

repelled, your operations looked on with jealousy, your beginnings

crushed by violence, and many a sad long night of, tears and groanings,

witness your Gethsemane? Will you go, or will you not? What is it, in

fact, but the question, whether you can be incarnated with your Master,

under a little different version of the word? Almost half our duties

come to us in this shape, raising the question, whether we can take the

corporate evils of some condition that is unpopular, distasteful,

unappreciative, hostile, or without dignity? In these things it is one

of our greatest privileges to follow, and know that we follow, our

Master--are we ready?

3. Christ bears the sin of the world, in the sense that he bears,

consentingly, the direct attacks of wrong, or sin, upon his person;

doing it, of course, in but a few instances, such as may have been

included in his comparatively short life, but showing, in those few

instances, how all the human wrongs are related to his feeling, or

would be if he suffered them all. And here again it is that he gets an

amazing power, as a redeemer, over the sins of the world. He did not

come into the world to suffer these wrongs as an end, or to brave them

by an ostentation of patience, as possibly some may understand, when

they hear him commanding one who is smitten on one cheek to turn the

other. He is not counseling, in such words, a defiant, but only a total

non-resistance. Coming into the world thus as the incarnate Word of

God, God manifest in the flesh, he bears the wrong-doing of sin, not

defiantly, but as feeling after the sin; letting it see what wrong it

has in its own nature to do, when the Son of God comes to it

ministering love and forgiveness. And what a spectacle is this to look

upon! the Eternal King coming in love to win transgression back--mocked

in his doctrine, hated for his miracles, insulted, struck, spit upon,

crucified! And the more strangely impressive is the spectacle, that the

sufferer is dumb, makes no protestation of his rights, parries no

accusation, answers none. Pilate himself is "afraid" before such

dignity. All that he will answer is, that he is come into the world "to

bear witness to the truth." He does not say that he is here to bear the

worst they can do upon him, nor that he is here to suffer at all as an

end, but that his end is everlasting truth. That accordingly which so

visibly shook the courage of Pilate, at the trial, fell with as heavy a

shock, on all sin, everywhere, afterwards. When the sin found such a

being, even the incarnate Word of the Father, taking its blows, in such

patience, and dying under the blows, how dreadful the recoil of feeling

it suffered! How wild, and weak, and low, was it made to appear in its

own sight. Thus it was that, in his bearing of sin upon his cross,

Christ broke it down forever. Or, if it better please, thus it was that

sin broke itself across the silence of Jesus, and the wood, and the

nails, of his cross. And thus it was that the just now angry

multitudes, "all the people that came together to see that sight,

beholding the things that were done, smote their breasts and returned."

All sin was broken, as it were, in that sight; it was the sight of

Lucifer falling from heaven, even as he had testified in vision before.

And this kind also is for us, my brethren. Here we also are to take the

cross and follow, as our Master bade us. Many persons appear to

suppose, that we are required to submit ourselves to wrong as a kind of

tax, or tariff, levied upon us, without any particular end. They take

it as a mere blind appointment, and think it must be so accepted. Far

from that as possible! On the contrary it is to be evil or wrong

encountered in a work of sacrifice, encountered by one who is after the

ends of love, even as Christ was. That death of his was great in power,

not because he bore it, but because he was in the work of God's love,

and bore it on his way, unable to be diverted from his end by that or

any other death. In just that manner and degree, it was in his heart to

bear sin. So if wrongs are done to you, and the same love is in you,

the sin will have a great discovery to make in your patience, of its

own cruelty and weakness. If you do but suffer well, nobody can long

triumph over you, or live before you unforgiven. Do you then remember,

that, a great part of your Christian power and privilege is here, in

the bearing of sin with your Master. Perhaps you talk down your

enemies, perhaps you mix hot resentments with your words, perhaps you

break the silence of Christ first, and then break every thing else in

his example. Come back then if it be so, and read, and settle into your

memory, and transcribe on your heart, that one sentence of the apostle

concerning charity--"Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth

all things, endureth all things." There you have the power of Jesus

himself, and it is for you!

Having reached this point I see no reason why the subject should be

farther protracted. There is nothing, in fact, to add, even for

persuasion's sake. The gospel, as we have here seen it, is complete in

itself, asking, and in fact, permitting, no help from its advocate.

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XX.

THE PUTTING ON OF CHRIST.

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."--Rom. xiii, 14.

The highest distinction of man, taken as an animal among animals, lies

not in his two-handedness, or his erect figure, but in his necessity

and right of dress. The inferior animals have no option concerning

their outward figure and appearing. Their dress, or covering, is a part

of their organization, growing on them, or out of them, as their bones

are grown within. Be it feathers, or fur, or hair, or wool; be it in

this color or that, brilliant as the rainbow, or shaggy, or grizzled,

or rusty and dull, they have no liberty to change it, even if they

could desire the change, for one that is glossier and more to their

taste. But man, as a creature gifted with a larger option, begins, at

the very outset, to show his superior dignity in the necessary option

of dress. It is given him for his really high prerogative, to dress

himself, and come into just what form of appearing will best satisfy

the tastes into which he has grown; or, what is very nearly the same

thing, will best represent the quality of his feeling and character.

With this kind of liberty comes, of course, an immense peril; for there

is a peril that belongs to every kind of liberty. As dress and equipage

may create a difference of appearing, that very nearly amounts to a

difference of order and kind, the race of ambition, as soon as ambition

is born, will here begin. And now the tremendous option of dress, given

as a point of dignity, becomes, under sin, a mighty instigator in the

fearful race of money, society, and fashion.

You already understand from this course of remark, that I am going to

speak of dress as the outward analogon, or figure of character, and of

character as the grand "putting on" of the soul. It would be

instructive here to notice the immense reacting power of dress on

character, showing how we not only choose our own figure in it, but our

figure in turn chooses us; requiring us to feel and act, or helping us

to feel and act, according to the appearing we are in. But I hasten to

speak of the analogy referred to. Dress relates to the form or figure

of the body, character to the form or figure of the soul--it is, in

fact, the dress of the soul. The option we have, in one, typifies the

grander option we have in the other. The right we have in one, above

the mere animals, to choose the color, type and figure of the outward

man, foreshadows the nobler right we also have to cast the mold,

fashion or despoil the beauty, of the inward man. There is also an

immense reaction in character; what we have become already, in the cast

of life, going far to shape our doings and possible becomings

hereafter.

On the ground of this analogy it is that the scriptures so frequently

make use of dress, to signify what lies in character, and represent

character, in one way or another, as being the dress of the soul. Thus

they speak of "the wedding-garment," "the garment of praise," that "of

cursing," that "of pride;" "the robe of righteousness," and "of

judgment," and "the white robe," and "the best robe" given to the

returning prodigal, and "the robe that has been washed," and "judgment

put on as a robe;" of "white raiment," and "white apparel," of

"glorious apparel," of "filthiness," or "righteousness that are filthy

rags," of "filthiness in the skirts;" and more inclusively and

generally still, of being "clothed with salvation," "with strength and

power," "with humility," "with majesty," "with shame," "with fine linen

clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints;" "I put on

righteousness," says Job, "and it clothed me." And, in the same way, it

is that Paul, conceiving Christ to be the soul's new dress, or what is

no wise different, its new character, says "Put ye on the Lord Jesus

Christ."

All the figures of dress or clothing are used up, in this manner, by

the scriptures, to represent the forms of disgrace and filthiness, or

of beauty and glory, into which the inner man of the soul may be

fashioned--wearing heaven's livery or that of sin. As character is the

soul's dress, and dress analogical to character, whatever has power to

produce a character when received, is represented as a dress to be put

on.

Passing thus into the great problem of life as a moral and spiritual

affair, we are surprised to find that inward character and outward

covering are so closely related, as to be taken, by a kind of natural

instinct, one for the other, and the loss of one for the loss of the

other. What do the first human pair imagine when they fall into sin,

and make the loss of character, but that they have lost their covering?

It does not appear to be merely a stroke of art in the description

given, but a most natural turn of fact, that the shamed consciousness

within is taken, by their unpracticed simplicity, as a shock that has

come upon their modesty.

No sooner is the deed done, than the culprits, all covered in before by

the sense of God's beauty on their feeling--for exactly that was their

original righteousness and not any beauty of their own culture--begin

to be troubled by the discovery of their nakedness! The real difficulty

is that the pure investiture of God upon their consciousness has been

stripped away, thrown off by their sin. Nothing is changed without, as

they foolishly think--stitching their scant leaves, vain hope! to hide

a loss that is within. And probably the same is true of the immense

dressing art and trade of the world; it is put agoing and continued, as

regards the fearfully deep zeal of it, by just that shame of the mind

which keeps it company in evil, and makes it always emulous of some

better figure. Were this inward shame taken away, and the soul

inwrapped, as at the first, by the sense of God's beauty upon it, the

secret phrenzy at least would soon be over. The maiden would forget her

torment in the sense of a holier beauty within, the hidden man of the

heart, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit; and the man of the

world would be striving no more after the outward shows and trappings

that are needed to cover the lost honors of the mind.

In the same way it is, just according to the manner of the fig-leaf

history, that such an immense patching art, in the matter of character,

is kept in practice in all ages of the world. It is the general

admission of souls, that they are not in a true figure of respect

before themselves; but instead of returning to God, and the complete

investure in which he will cover them, they imagine, or get up, small

shows of excellence, which they contrive to think are as good, for the

matter of character, as they need. These small shows we have a name

for, calling them pretexts, shows of covering that, after all, do not

cover--patches, fig-leaves. In one view the absurd figures continually

put forward as pretexts, in this way, are abundantly ludicrous; in

another they carry a look most sad, as well as profoundly serious.

Politeness--this is one of the fig-leaves; taken for a complete

character by many, and carefully maintained, as the standard excellence

of life. Honor is another and scantier, assuming still to be even a

superlative kind of character; more imposing and airy than it could be

under the restrictions of virtue. Bravery, again, is a fig-leaf

pretext, put on to cover the loss of courage; for evil in the soul is

of a coward nature, and can only keep itself up, without heart, by

sallies and wild dashes of bravery from the will. These and many others

of the same class are pretexts of character outside of religion, but

immensely significant, as revelations of the shamed consciousness of

sin. Passing into the more immediate field of religion, the pretexts

there invented and put forward, as covers to the soul's nakedness, are

scarcely to be numbered or named--such as sacrifices offered the world

over to idols, self-tortures of the body to cover the sin of the soul,

penances, austerities of solitude, vows of abstinence and poverty,

exactness in rites and traditions, orthodoxy, alms-givings, honesty in

trade, the doing others no harm, resignations and fatalizing

submissions to God, works of reform and philanthropy, patience without

feeling, liberality without character. This fig-leaf stitching is, in

fact, the great business of the world; in which we may see, more

convincingly than by any thing else, the certainty that men are goaded

everywhere by the secret, inexpugnable feeling of nakedness or a want

of character. It is a most sad picture to look upon. Then how piercing

and fearful is the revelation, when the Holy Spirit strips away all the

illusions they practice, and they are made to see that their

righteousnesses are rags and not garments, and that they are wretched,

and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. O, this nakedness of the

soul! how dismal a figure it is even to itself! Jesus pities it, and

comes to it saying, in what gentleness of promise--"buy of me gold

tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that

thou mayest be clothed, that the shame of thy nakedness may not

appear."

Nor let any one imagine that these deep wants of spiritual nakedness we

speak of are to be satisfied, by any uprightness in the moral life. The

shame is religious, not moral--it belongs entirely to the religious

nature, divested as it is of what was to be everlastingly upon it, the

conscious infolding of God. The law moral is a law of this world,

sanctioned by this world's custom. It was not this out which the first

man fell; for custom had not yet arrived. No, it was the original

inspiration, that enveloped and, as it were, covered in his life; the

holy investiture that he had inductively from God, by community of

being with him--this it was that he had put off, and the loss of which

was the dreadful shame of his uncovering. Impossible, therefore, it is

for any one to reinvest himself with the covering he needs. He can not

dew himself in the dews of his lost morning, can not cover in himself

in the righteousness that was God's infolding of character upon him.

What he had by community of being he can never reproduce by his

personal will. lie must have it again, as he had it at the first; only

by that same righteousness of God revealed to faith, in Christ his Son.

Here again the robe is offered back, and he may have good use of his

liberty in putting it on; he only can not make a thread of it himself;

the warp and woof must be wholly divine--the incovering beauty of God's

own feeling and Spirit, that enveloped our first father, and, in

Christ, are offered to us all.

We pass, then, here to another point in advance, viz., to the fact that

Christ our Lord comes into the world to restore the investiture we have

lost; or rather to be himself, for us and upon us, all that our sin has

cast away. The original word of scripture, represented in our English

version by the word atone, or make atonement, literally means to cover.

In this manner, Jesus the Lord comes to cover our sin; covering, first,

our liabilities in the sins that are past, by the forbearance of God,

and the honor he confers on God's instituted justice, by community with

us in the penal scathing and curse of our transgression; and, secondly

and principally, in the sense that he undertook to be the divine

character upon us--yea, the divine glory. For he does not merely teach

us something, as many fancy, which we are to take up notionally and

copy, item by item, in ourselves, but he undertakes to copy himself

into us, and be the righteousness of God upon us. Had we been taught,

in the best manner possible, what things in character to add, what

things to change, or qualify, or put away, or put on, what could we

have done, in the weaving of so many and such infinite subtleties and

shadings of quality, but inevitably miss of all the really divine

proportions; producing only a grotesque and half absurd caricature? But

when Jesus comes to us bearing all these finest, holiest proportions of

beauty in himself, we have nothing to do but to believe in him, or

receive him in his person, and he copies himself into us, by the

wondrous power of his feeling and sacrifice upon us. Then, as every

shade is from him, nothing is overdone, distorted, missed, or omitted.

The glory of the Father, all the Father's character, is upon him, and

he is able to say--"the glory which thou gavest me I have given them."

Furthermore, there is this wonderful art, so to speak, in the incarnate

human appearing of Jesus, that he humanizes God to us, or brings out

into the human molds of feeling, conduct and expression, the infinite

perfection, otherwise inappropriable and very nearly inconceivable.

Since we are finite, God must needs take the finite in all revelation.

He can never draw himself close enough to get hold of our feeling, or

sympathy, and be revealed to our heart, till he takes the finite of

humanity. In the man-wise form only can we put him on. Otherwise his

very perfections, elaborated by our human thought, would be only

impassive, distant, autocratic, it may be, and even repulsive; as they

often are, even in the teachings now of Christian theology. That he has

any particular feeling for men, or this, or that man, that his great

spirit can be overcast and burdened with concern for us under sin, that

he is complete in all the passive virtues he puts it upon us to

practice--how could we think it, or be at all sure of it? But here he

is, in Jesus Christ, moving up out of a childhood, into a great

manhood, filling all the human relations with offices and ministries in

human shapes of good; helping the sick with kind words, and healing

them by the touch, so to speak, of his sympathies, careful of the poor,

patient with enemies, burdened for them in feeling even to the pitch of

agony, simple, and true, and faithful unto death. And so we have God's

infinite perfections in our own finite molds, and are ready to have

them even upon ourselves. God is now no more some blank idol of reason,

some fate, or infinite abyss, or some frigid, thin immensity of

pantheistic unconsciousness; his vast superhuman proportions no longer

baffle us, or spread themselves in phantoms of glory, which we can as

little think as partake. But they are given us in the traits of Jesus,

who being Son of God, has come to be the Son of Man among us, living

out, in his human way, and so helping us to conceive, that excellence

of God, in which we require to be invested. The ineffable character is

made human, set forth in the human proportions, and we have it as a

glorious, full suit, prepared in the exactest fit of our humanity, yet

still divine. The virtues, graces, glories, sympathies infinite, are so

brought forth and embodied in the incarnate whole of his life, that we

can have them all upon us at once, when we could, not even sketch the

pattern, by simply embracing, in trust, his human person.

In this manner, for this, in brief, is the gospel, we are to be new

charactered, by the putting on of Christ; not by some imitation or

copying of Christ that we practice, item by item, in a way of

self-culture--the Christian idea is not that--but that Christ is to be

a complete wardrobe for us himself, and that by simply receiving his

person, we are to have the holy texture of his life upon us, and live

in the infolding of his character. And this is the meaning of that

"righteousness of faith" which is variously spoken of in the

scriptures. It is that Christ is everything for us and upon us, and

that we are to see our whole supply--righteousness, beauty, peace,

liberty in good, graces, and stores of character, putatively ours in

him; reckoned to be ours by faith, always derivable by faith from him;

for this exactly is the difference between a Christian and a merely

humanly virtuous person, that one draws on Christ for everything, and

the other on himself--on his will, his works, his self-criticism,

shaping all his amendments himself. Or, reversing the order of

comparison, one manufactures a suit for himself, in patches of

character gotten together and laid upon the ground of his sin, and the

other takes a whole robe of life, graciously fitted and freely

tendered, in the humanly divine excellence of Christ his Saviour--who

is thus made unto him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and

redemption.

But we are to put him on--"put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." And here

is the difficulty--you can not see, it may be, how it is done. The very

conception is unintelligible, or mystical, and you can not guess, it

may be, what it means. What then does it mean to put on Christ?

It does not mean, of course, that you are only to make an experiment of

putting on the garb of a new life, and see how you will like it. No man

puts on Christ for any thing short of eternity. The act must be a

finality, even at the beginning. He must be accepted as the Alpha and

Omega. Whoever contemplates even the possibility of being without him,

or of ever being without him again, does not put him on.

Neither do you put him on, when you undertake to copy some one or more

of the virtues, or characters, in him--the gentleness, for example, the

love, the dignity--without being willing to accept the sacrifice in

him, to bear the world's contempt with him, to be singular, to be

hated, to go through your Gethsemane, and groan with him under the

burdens of love. There can be no choosing out here of shreds and

patches from his divine beauty; you must take the whole suit, else you

can not put him on. The garment is seamless, and can not be divided.

Neither do you put him on, when you undertake only to realize some

previous conceptions of character that are your own. The dress is to be

not from you, but from him--the whole Christ, just as he is, taken upon

you to shape you in the molds of his own divine life and spirit.

But we must be more positive. First, then, there must be a full and

hearty renunciation of your past life. As the apostle words it in

another place, you must put off the old man in order to put on the new.

You can not have the new character to put on over the old. The filthy

garments, all the rags, must be thrown off, thrown completely away.

Christ will be no mere overall to the old affections and lusts.

How, then, for the next thing, do we put him on? By faith, I answer,

only by faith. For in that the soul comes to him, shivering in the cold

shame of its sin, and gives itself over to him, to be loved, protected,

covered in, by his gracious life and passion. It sees such beauty upon

him that it dares trust him, and says--"be thou my all, the washing

away of my sin, the covering of my vileness, my character and life. O

Lord, my hope is in thee!" And this is faith; it is coming to Jesus in

all his manlike sympathies, characters, molds of life, and receiving

him, by a total act of trust, to be-upon you, as the Lord your

righteousness. Your iniquities are thus to be forgiven, your sin to be

covered. Righteousness from him, and not from your own will and works,

is to be upon you thus, by the infolding of a divine power; even the

righteousness that is of God by faith, unto all and upon all them that

believe.

Take another conception, which may be more intelligible to some, viz.,

that you will put on Christ by obedience to him; for whoever obeys

Christ willingly trusts him, and whoever trusts him obeys him. Hence

the promise--"If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my father

will love him. and we will come unto him and make our abode with him."

And then it follows that whoever has the abode with him, consciously,

of the Father and the Son, will be all folded in by the thought of it,

and will live as being in the sacred investiture of the divine

character and power. If, then, you can not understand faith, you can

understand obedience, and if you go into that, as the final, total,

giving over of your life, I will answer for it, that there will be a

faith in your obedience, and that Christ will be with you, manifested

in you, truly put on, as the consciously divine attire of your life.

I have only to add on this point, that you are to be always putting on

Christ afterwards, as you begin to put him on at the first. All the

success of your Christian life will consist in the closeness of your

walk with Christ, and the completeness of your trust in him. You are

not so much to fashion yourself by him, as to let him fashion you by

himself--to be upon you, as he is with you, and cover you with all the

graces of his inimitable love and beauty; and this you will do most

perfectly, when you trust him most implicitly, and keep his words most

faithfully.

It only remains, now, to bring our subject to its fit conclusion, by

speaking of the consequences of this putting on of Christ. And I name,

first of all, that which the apostle suggests, in a kind of cadence

that immediately follows and finishes out the text. "But put ye on," he

says, "the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to

fulfill the lusts thereof." Where he conceives, it will be seen, that

one substitutes, or takes place of, the other--that when Christ is

really put on, the world falls off, and the lusts of property, and

fame, and power, and appetite, subside or fall away. The effect runs

both ways, under the great law of action and reaction--as the old man

is put off that the new may be put on, so the new put on still further

displaces the old. This, too, we know by the attestations of

experience. He that has the sense of Christ upon him, has himself

ennobled. He is raised in the pitch of his feeling every way; having

such a consciousness awakened of his inward relation to God, that

money, and pleasure, and all the petty lustings of the lower life are

sunk out of sight and forgot. Sometimes you will see that an appetite

which has become a madness, like the appetite for drink, and has shaken

down all the man's resolutions, and floored him at every point of

struggle, utterly dies and is felt no more, from the moment when he has

put on Christ. He wants no more a sensation, when the sentiment of his

soul is full. It is as if he were in Christ's own appetites, instead of

those which have so long domineered over his diseased nature. And so it

will be universally. If there be any over-mastering temptation which

baffles you, and keeps turning you off in your endeavors, and boasting

itself against you, here is your deliverance--raise no fight with it in

your own will, as you always have done when you have failed, but simply

turn yourself to Christ alone: put on Christ, let your soul be so

covered in by the power of his grace upon you, that you feel yourself

raised and caparisoned for glory in him, and all the little and low

lustings of this world will be silent-felt no more.

There is also this most admirable effect in the putting on of Christ,

that being thus enveloped in his life and feeling, a power will move

inward from him, that will search out all most subtle, inbred evils in

you, even those which are hidden from your consciousness, and will

finally assimilate you in them, and in all beside, to what he himself

was. This, in fact, is the wonderful power of dress, that, while no

person who has spent his life in the rags of poverty, and the

coarseness of lowbred manners, can possibly fashion himself to ways of

elegance, by superintending his every particular look, motion, gesture,

and tone, the simple insphering of his life in new associations and new

proprieties of dress, may and often does suffice, in a very few years,

to recompose and assimilate his whole manner as a man. And so it is

that Christ will be able, when put on, to fashion us into a character

of innumerable graces, all consolidated, in a harmonious whole of

beauty like his own.

Here, too, is the true idea of Christian sanctification. It is that we

may so put on Christ, and be so infolded in him, as to be consciously

raised above all bad impulse into good, above all guiltiness into a

conscience void of offense, above all detentions of bondage into

perfect liberty, above all fear into perfect assurance, and so continue

as long as we falter not in the faith, by which Christ is thus brought

in upon the soul, to be its impulse and the appetizing force of its

life. But whether this can be fitly called a perfect sanctification is

more doubtful. That it leaves the soul in a temptable state all must

and do in fact agree, and if the faith, at any time, gives way, the

subject will immediately lapse into some kind of sin. Nay, if he were

sanctified far down, in all the deepest, most underground cells of

feeling he was ever conscious of, there would yet be treasons hid still

deeper in the soul, and he would fall at once, the moment he let go his

faith. The truth appears to be that, in such a state of perfect liberty

and good impulse as we have described, the character still is not

wholly inherent, but only in part;--a kind of supervening, or

superinduced character; a garment of grace put on, the grace of which

has not yet struck through into the inmost nature of him who is covered

by it. Christ is perfect on him, and he is in Christ, but he is not

perfected in himself. The transformation of the man has not yet come up

to the type of his Christly investiture. He is like a soldier in the

fiery panoply and dress of war. When he has it on him, and hears the

trumpet sounding bravely, he is bold enough to face all danger in the

fight; but there still are vestiges of a naturally coward feeling, it

may be, in the center and core of his personality, such that if you

strip him of the warlike trappings, and send him out to fight a silent

engagement in that common figure, he will not unlikely turn and flee

for his life. It is one thing in this way to have on a pure garment,

clean and white, and so to act purely, and quite another to be clean

and white all through, in the inmost substance, and deepest impulse,

and subtlest windings, of the soul's own habit. This requires time, and

it may be a long time. Even if he were to be in Christ so perfectly as

not to commit one conscious sin for many years, which is possible,

there would still be in him, after all this long investiture by Christ,

old vestiges of disease, and disorder, and bad passion, not yet

sanctified away.

But it is much, how very much, that all these can be thus kept under,

so as never again to break out and reign, as long as Christ is

faithfully put on by a believing, consecrated life. Potentially

speaking, all sanctification is here; for the superinduced character

may be kept up bright, and clean, full, and free to the last; when, of

course, it will complete itself in the all-renovated, absolutely

perfect, through and through character of the glorified.

Observe again the consciousness of strength, and the exalted confidence

of feeling, that must gird any soul that has truly put on Christ. It

will be with him, in his faith, as it was with the prodigal, when the

Father said, "bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a

ring on his finger and shoes on his feet." From that moment he felt

strong in the family. The shame fell off as the robe went on, and the

confidence of a son come back upon him. So it is that every Christian

is strong who has really put on Christ. He is clothed with strength and

honor, as with salvation. He lives in the garment of praise. All

misgivings flee, all mutinous passions fall under. Do you sometimes

try, my brethren, to be strong by your will, strong by your works,

strong by what you can raise of excitement, or high resolve, that is

only weakness, and a great part of all weakness comes in that way.

Nothing is more natural for a Christian losing ground, than to put

forth all the force he has, in a strain of hard endeavor, lashing up

and thrusting on himself; but in that, he is believing, probably, just

as much less as he is goading himself more. Let him go back to faith,

see that he lets go mere self-endeavor, to put on Christ, and he will

have all strength and victory.

Here, too, be it understood, is the source of that strange power of

impression, which is felt in the life and society of all earnest

Christians. Everybody feels that there is a something about them not

human. And the reason is that they have put on Christ. The serious,

loving, gentle, sacrificing and firm spirit of Jesus, is revealed

within, or upon them, and they signify to men's feeling just what he

signified. They fulfill that gracious name that was formerly in so

great favor in the Church--they are all Christophers, Christ-bearers.

They will even put so much meaning into their "good morning," or their

bow of courtesy, as to carry a Christly impression in the heart of a

stranger. This, my brethren, is the true power. Would that the

multitude in our day, who can think to be powerful only as they strive

and cry, and go dinning through the world in a perpetual ado of hard

endeavor, could just learn how much it means, to put on Christ.

It only remains to add, what has been coming into view in the whole

progress of our subject, that the only true salvation-title is Christ

put on, and found upon the soul as its heavenly investiture. A great

many persons are at work, in these times, to fashion a character for

themselves, and demanding it of them who preach the gospel, that they

preach conduct, tell men how to be good and right, correct their

faults, make them good husbands, wives, children, citizens--cease, in a

word, from the mystic matter of faith and divine experience, and put

the world on doing something more solid and satisfactory. This kind of

cant has gone so far, too, that many professed preachers of the gospel

itself are in it. The Master owns them not, so far, at least. He wants,

not simply a better conduct, but a solid, new man--so, new husbands,

wives, children, citizens; new kindness, truthfulness, honor, honesty,

beauty. This new man to be put on, as having put off the old, is a very

different matter from the old man in a better style of behavior. It is

that which after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness--a

man after God, even as Christ was, when he came in God's love to take

us on his soul, thatwe may take him on our soul, and be covered in by

the new investiture of his life; that sighing we may sigh with him,

dying die with him, rising rise with him, carrying up all our once low

affections to sit with him where he sitteth, at the right hand of God.

All which he figures in the parable of the great king's wedding-feast;

where the guests are called by sending round to each, for his card of

invitation, a caftan, or splendid wedding-robe. Putting on this robe

the guests are to come in, and, by this found upon them, are to be

admitted and have their places assigned. But it happens, at the great

eternal feast, as the Saviour represents, that the King comes in and

finds one there that has no robe on him but-his own. It may be a very

fine, wonderfully elaborate robe; he may even have thought to shine

there in it more than if it were the king's providing. But the king

says--"Friend, how camest thou in hither not having on the

wedding-garment? And he was speechless. The king said--"bind him hand

and foot, and take him away." Inasmuch as holy character in created

beings is and must eternally be derivative, finite from infinite, who

shall be able to stand by self-originative goodness, who that will not

put on Christ! Putting on his robe of self-criticism, self-endeavor,

self-righteousness, will not answer. All such fine attire is only rags

at the best. The true wedding-garment is Jesus himself, and there is no

other.

Here then, brethren and friends, I speak now to you all without

distinction, here is the fearfully precise point on which our eternity

hinges--the putting on of Christ. Observe, we are to put on no great

name or standard, no sectarian badge or livery, no lawn, or saintly

drab, or veil, or stole, or girdle--none of these are the real new man

to be put on. No! Christ! we must put on Christ himself, and none but

him. We must be in-Christed, found in him, covered in the seamless,

indivisible robe of his blessed life and passion. Far be it also from

us, when we put on Christ, to think of turning ourselves about, in the

search after some other, finer, pretext that we may put on over him, to

make him attractive, pleasing, acceptable. No, we are to put him on

just as he is, wear him outside, walk in him, bear his reproach, glory

in his beauty, call it good to die with him, so to be found in him not

having our own righteousness, but the righteousness that is of God by

faith. Cover us in it, O thou Christ of God, and let our shame be hid

eternally in thee.

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XXI.

HEAVEN OPENED.

"And he saith unto him--Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye

shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending

on the Son of Man."--John i, 31.

With a singular felicity and power of statement, Mr. Coleridge gives it

for his doctrine of scripture inspiration--"In the Bible there is more

that finds me, than I have experienced in all other books put together;

the words of the Bible find me at greater depths of my being; and

whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having

proceeded from the Holy Spirit." God only can be so far privy, that is,

to the soul, as to make it answer thus, all through, in its deepest and

most hidden parts, to his words. Whatever may be thought of his

doctrine, as a complete and sufficient solution of the question, it is

certainly good, and even powerfully good, as far as it goes. And it has

a beautiful coincidence, which he probably had never observed, with the

very simple and truly natural sentiment of Christ's interview with

Nathanael.

Fig-trees make a very dense covering of leaves and sometimes drop their

boughs very low. Nathanael had lately retired into the cabin of thick

foliage thus provided by some tree of his garden, and closeted there

with God, was opening his heart, in regard to some particular

difficulty, or enemy, or question of duty, or promise of a Messiah to

come, in a manner only the more guileless, that he felt himself to be

so entirely removed from human observation. Shortly after, probably on

that same day, being notified by Philip, he comes to see Jesus, who is

even thought to be the great Messiah himself. Jesus saw Nathanael

coming to him and saith of him--"Behold an Israelite indeed in whom is

no guile!" Nathanael saith unto him--"Whence knowest thou me?" Jesus

answered and said unto him--"Before Philip called thee, when thou wast

under the fig-tree, I saw thee." Nathanael saith unto him" Rabbi, thou

art the Son of God, thou art the king of Israel." Jesus answered and

said unto him--"Because I saw thee under the fig-tree believest thou?

thou shalt see greater things than these." And he saith unto

him--"Verily, verily I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven

open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of

Man."

The two main points of the dialogue are, first, that Nathanael was so

impressed by the finding of Christ, or the privity of Christ's

knowledge of him, under the fig-tree, that he at once declared his

belief in him as the Messiah; and secondly, that Christ immediately

proclaims a deeper finding, and a more convincing privity of knowledge,

that shall, in, due time, be shown or proved, by the opening, within

his own bosom, of a supernatural, sense and the discovery to him thus

of supernatural beings, the passing and repassing, the flow and reflow

of their blessed society. According to the description given, it will

be as if that isthmus barrier between the two great oceans of the world

were cloven down, for the oscillating tides to begin their coming and

returning flow; when also the ships of the nations, wafted convergently

thither, shall be sailing freely through, burdened with the fruits and

golden riches of all climes and shores.

Now this opening of heaven, which is to be our subject, is presented by

the Saviour in terms that may seem to be a little enigmatical. We shall

conceive his meaning perhaps more sufficiently, if we note three

principal views of the heavenly state that occur in the scripture.

First, there is the local objective view, that conceives it as a place

somewhere in the upper worlds of heaven or the sky. Secondly, there is

the terrestrial objective view, where the New Jerusalem descending from

God out of heaven and refitting our world itself to be the abode of God

with men, makes it a province, in that manner, of the other. Thirdly,

the subjective view, which has nothing to do with place or locality,

but conceives the heavenly state simply as a state of spiritual

beholding and social commerce opened in the soul itself. There is no

necessary contradiction or disagreement between the three conceptions

stated; they are all true, though probably in different senses, and may

be taken as complementary, in fact, to each other. The first is more

impressive and popular and more commonly used; the second, as being

more geographical, is more closely connected with our mundane prospects

and affairs; the third is more entirely moral and rational, being

simply the condition of character. All are to be used with entire

freedom, and without any attempt to maintain one against the others;

the presumption being that a state. so transcendent will be only feebly

conceived, when they are all brought in, to intensify and qualify, or

complement, each other.

In the conversation with Nathanael, the Saviour appears to be speaking

in the subjective way, as of a heaven to be opened in the soul itself.

In his terms of description, he refers, apparently, to Jacob's dream,

where that patriarch beholds, not without, but in the chamber of his

own brain, in a dream of the night when the senses are fast locked in

sleep, a ladder set up and the angels of God coursing up and down upon

it; only what transpired subjectively in his brain he naturally

associated with the place, conceiving also that the sky above was

somehow specially set open there, saying--"how dreadful is this place,"

and calling it "the gate of heaven." So the Saviour says, "ascending

and descending," putting the ascending first; as if the metropolis or

point or departure, in the commerce begun, were to be from within the

soul itself. There lives the Son of Man, reigning in his heavenly

kingdom at the soul's own center, and from him go up couriers and

ministers of glory, descending also back upon him there. The precise

point made, in this manner, with Nathanael is, that as he was

discovered under the fig-tree, so he shall be discovered, as regards

the immense upper world of the soul, existing unsuspected in him

hitherto, but now set open. These two propositions cover the ground of

the subject stated, and these I shall endeavor to substantiate.

I. That there is a supernatural sense, now slumbering or closed up in

souls, by which they might perceive, or cognize, supernatural beings

and things, even as they cognize material beings and things by the

natural sense. And

II. That Christ undertakes to open this supernatural sense, and make it

the organ or inlet of universal society.

I. There is a supernatural sense now closed up, or existing under a

state of suppression.

We encounter a difficulty here, in attempting to prove the existence of

faculties and powers that are shut in, or suppressed in their action.

And yet even our natural faculties are very nearly in that condition at

the first--no man knowing, or conceiving, what is in him, till it is

brought forth. We also know that all finest qualities and highest

powers are stifled, for the time, or even permanently, by wrongs and

vices. What we here suppose to be true is, that in the original and

properly normal state, souls were open to God, and a full, free

commerce with his upright society. Being made in God's image, they were

to be children with God their Father, living in society with him,

having him to know, enjoy, and love, and having all their desires

freely met and satisfied by the open ministry of his friendship. He

was, and, with all his glorious company, was eternally to be, revealed

in them, as in a heaven of present bliss, and immediately conscious

communion of life.

But this original and properly normal state was necessarily broken up

and brought to a full end, by their fall into sin. They now become

afraid of him and hide themselves instinctively from him. No longer can

he be revealed to their immediate knowledge, because the personal

affinities through which he was to be revealed are closed up in them.

They fall off thus into their senses, and become occupied with the

objects of the senses; having the understanding darkened, being

alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them.

So they live as under heavy storm-clouds in the night; the. lightning

flashes in sharp gleams across the clouds, or glares in red anger fits

from within their body, but there is no opening through, to let in the

light of the stars. Heaven is gone out to them in the same manner; God

is hid, and they know not where they can find Him; spirit and spiritual

being and spiritual society with his great family is so far a lost

possibility, that, if they think it, they can not give it reality.

There is something too in guilt, or the state of guiltiness, that

amounts to a virtual shutting up, or suppression, of all affinities

with supernatural being. It freezes in perception. It condenses all the

Godward and pure aspirations and gathers them in, by the dreadful

recoil it makes on the soul's own center. It pronounces a damnation too

upon itself, and by its own remorseful severities makes the sentence

good. Falling away thus from God, and closing itself up as regards all

supernatural relations and perceptions, it becomes self-centered,

isolated, a worm in the ground, having its belongings there and not in

the element of day.

Is there now any such supernatural sense existing under suppression in

the soul, as the statement I have made supposes? The question is a very

great, and is getting to be the almost only, question for our day.

To go over the evidence briefly, there is obviously nothing impossible

in the fact of such a sense. There may as well be a power to cognize

immaterial, supernatural being, as material.

Neither is it any thing, that our philosophers recognize no such higher

ranges of faculty. No faculty is ever recognized, save as it comes into

consciousness by use. That which is shut up, therefore, can be nothing

to philosophy. When the lantern of a light-house has no light burning

within, it will be an opaque body at the top, as it is in the base

below--even the transparency will be opaque.

But we can affirm, I think, with confidence, for one distinct argument,

that there ought to be just this upper world of supernatural insight in

souls. As they are related to God, there ought to be a power of

immediate knowledge, in which he is revealed--they require, in fact, to

be as truly conscious of God as of themselves; for God is the

complement of their being, and without him they only half exist. Again,

as they are related to eternal society with all good beings, they ought

also to have powers of discerning that may apprehend them. In this

manner, as they are not made to be mere plodders, however intelligent,

or scientific in distinguishing the laws and causes of things, but to

have their summits and supreme destinies of life, in their commerce

with God, and the supernatural society of his realm, their fit

equipment requires, obviously enough, a higher sense opening towards

the supernatural. How can the understanding, operating on the subject

matter of sense, discover, or attain, by mere inference, to what is not

in the premises of sense, but in a totally different range? Whoever

then adheres to immortality and religion, and denies the credibility of

what is supernatural, confesses, at once, that he wants the commerce of

God's universal society, and cuts off the possibility of finding it.

Again, there not only ought to be aspirations in the soul, and powers

of sensing for the supernatural, but we can see, by many signs, more or

less definite, that there are. Sometimes a groping will signify as much

as an open discovery, and what has the race been doing, in all the past

ages and everywhere, but groping after gods, and demons, and populating

even the earth and the sky with mythologic creations. It is as if some

divine phrenzy were in them, goading them on after what they so

mightily want. Little, indeed, do they discover of what is real and

true; they only go a marveling, as the phrenologists would say, carried

off from the mere plane of reason, by they know not what. They grope

with their eyes shut, and their groping signifies more than their

discoveries. I think also that we can find, every one of us, in

ourselves, dim yearnings, imaginations coasting round unknown realms,

guesses asking after the commerce of good and great beings, that put us

in profound sympathy with them. Nothing will account for what we find

thus in ourselves and the world, but the fact of supernatural longings

and perceptions, existing in us under suppression. Indeed, I think we

should very nearly suffocate, all of us, including even the infidel

deniers, shut down close under nature and her causes. After all, we do

think higher things, and there is more comfort in it than perhaps we

know.

We are able, again, to conceive certain things about this supernatural

sense, taking in supernatural things and beings, which makes it seem

less extravagant. To say that we can sense, or could, other ranges of

being, and have them in the open heaven of the soul, appears to be

violent, or extravagant. Just as violent is it still to say, that we do

take in the world of matter by the natural senses, and have it in us,

even from the sky downward. We do not go to things in our perception of

them, neither do they come locally to us; the latitudes, and

longitudes, and altitudes, are still there; we do not spread ourselves

in presence upon them; and yet we somehow have them in us, and

subjectively possess them. Besides, in the relation of spirits and

beings supernatural, we know not by what presences and revelations they

may come within the precincts of knowledge; as little by what fences

they are kept asunder. Place in this matter may be nothing,

congenialities every thing. It does not surprise us that the bad should

somehow come upon the bad; as little should it that the good have a way

of social presence with the good. Perhaps, too, it will relieve the

aspect of extravagance here, if I say, that faith is nothing but the

opening of the supernatural sense of the soul on the supernatural being

to be apprehended. It opens, in other words, the heaven of the mind,

and God, and Christ, and the good supernatural society press in to fill

it. Faith is the evidence, ill this manner, even as the scriptures

declare, of things not seen, and the substance, or substantiation, of

things hoped for. There is even a kind of faith in the sensing of

sight, turning mere images, in the eye, to things, and making them

real. That there is a higher sense, realizing beings supernatural, is a

fact every way correspondent.

Furthermore it is a fact well attested, in all ages, and proved by

manifold experience, that minds do consciously approximate God and the

heavenly society, accordingly as they are turned away from evil and set

open to good. They feel a certain nearness to beings and words

supernatural, that amounts to society begun. And then how very often,

as their affinities are more completely fined and set open, do they, in

their last hours, hail the Saviour present, and good angels revealed,

and departed friends whom they salute by name, waiting to receive them.

Doubtless all such things will be set down as the illusions of their

wandering faculty, but what if they should happen to be true--even the

truest truths ever beheld by them, and most profoundly wanted by us

all?

I will only add that the scriptures constantly assume, and in many ways

assert, the fact of a supernatural sense in souls, that is shut up and

requires to be opened. Christ declares this truth again and again, as,

for instance, when he says, "For this people's heart is waxed gross,

and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed,

lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their

ears, and understand with their heart." He does not say this of the

natural senses and judgments, but of the higher perceptions of the

heart, or the religious and spiritual man. The same thing also is very

deliberately and carefully put by the apostle, when he says--"But the

natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can

he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is

spiritual judgeth all things." There is, in other words, a natural man

and a spiritual, a lower range of perception and a higher; and by this

latter only, set open to the light, can the spiritual and supernatural.

things of God be discerned and judged. And this is the supernatural

sense of which I have been speaking, the upper range of faculty that

belongs to religion, prepared for a seeing of the invisible. By this it

was that Christ expected to be in the soul's inward beholding, as when

he said--"but ye see me." By this it was that a whole heaven of being

and society is conceived to reveal itself to souls, when they are

converted and set open to God--"But ye are come unto mount Zion, the

city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable

company of angels, and to the general assembly and church of the

first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all,

and to the spirits of just men made perfect." And so glorious and clear

was their inward beholding, at times, that one disciple seemed to be

caught up into some "third heaven" by it, though the heaven, as he well

understood, was within. Another also declared, as in vision, "I see

heaven opened," and though he "looked steadfastly up" at the time, it

was only that altitude is the natural language, or line of direction,

in such inward exaltations. So intensely perceptive, according to the

scripture view, may a human soul become, when awakened inwardly, and

drawn out in its higher apprehensions, after those invisible,

supernatural, associations for which it is created.

Assuming now the fact of a supernatural sense in souls, that it is shut

up by sin, we are next to consider--

II. How Christ, as he declares to Nathanael, will open this suppressed

faculty, and make it the organ, or inlet, of universal society.

And here it will be remembered, that angelic visitations had been

coursing back and forth upon the world and through it, in all ages,

both before Christ's coming, and at his coming, and after. Moses had

gone up into the mount and brought down tables lettered, as it were, in

heaven. Fires had been kindled, from above, in sacrifices offered on

rocks, and altars of turf. Two holy men had been visibly translated.

And yet heaven still appears to be somehow shut. The angels--not

ascending and descending but descending and ascending--are thought of

only as having gone away, to some invisible nowhere whence they came.

The great public miracles only help the chosen people to believe in a

kind of Jew-God reigning under limitations, and holding their little

patch of territory for his field. Instead of catching the hint from so

many wonders, and so many bright visitants, of a world above the world,

waiting to receive them in eternal society, it even makes them angry to

hear, that God will include, in one circle of being, all that come to

him on earth. A holy few found real access to the king, led in, to his

seat, by the teachings of their prophets and the more secret teachings

of the Spirit. But it is a most singular fact that no one of these, no

dying saint most enlightened by holy experience, speaks, in these

former ages, of going to heaven, or even of there being a heavenly

world where righteous souls are gathered; unless it be that one or two

expressions of the prophets are to be taken in that sense. Many critics

therefore have denied, that there is any revelation of immortality, or

a second life, before Christ's coming. And we know that, when he came,

it was even an open question, whether any such being as "angel or

spirit" really exists?

If now any one should ask what this means--how the world above seems to

be already opened if it ever can be, and yet is shut?--the answer is,

that all this apparitional machinery goes on without, before men's

eyes, while the heaven of the soul is shut; and that so many angels

therefore, coming and going, are looked upon only as ghosts of the

fancy, or at least mere outsiders and strangers. They do not stay to be

citizens, they are seen only as in transitu; they flit across the stage

and are gone-gone, as many will think, to the same blind nowhere that

receives all phantasms.

Here then is the deeper work Christ undertakes to do; viz., to open the

heaven of the soul itself, or, what is nowise different, to waken in it

that higher sense, by which it may discern the supernatural being and

society of God's realm. How he does it we shall hardly be at a loss to

find.

First, he comes into the. world himself, not apparitionally, like an

irruption of angels, but he comes up, so to speak, out of humanity,

emerging into his visibly divine glory, through a glorious and perfect

manhood. And so it comes to pass that, while they accomplish nothing by

their character, and have, in fact, no character beyond what is implied

in their message, he is bringing on his wonderful, visibly divine

manhood, and becoming, by force of his mere supernatural character

alone, the greatest miracle of time--with the advantage that, being

self-evident, even as the sun, all other miracle is upheld by it. At

first he appears to be only a man among men, the Son of Mary, growing

up in the mold and mortal weakness of a man; but his life unfolds

silently and imperceptibly, till the magnificent proportions of his

Godhood begin to appear in his manhood, and the tremendous fact is

revealed, that a being from above the world is living in it!

Supernatural event and character are built in solidly thus, into the

world's history, to be an integral part of it. Mere nature is no longer

all, and never can be again. The very world has another world

interfused and working jointly with it.

He comes too in no light figure, but in the heavy tread of one that

bears eternal government upon his shoulder--comes to reconcile the

world, to justify, and gather, and pacify, and save, the world; "For it

pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell, and having

made peace by the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all unto

himself, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven."

Everlasting order hangs tremulous in expectation round his cross, and

eternity rings out from it, tolling in the world. As the veil of the

temple is rent, so the way into the holiest opens. As the dead are

shaken out their graves when he dies, so the souls shut up in death are

loosened from the senses, to behold the new-sprung day. The middle wall

is now broken down, the dividing isthmus cut through, and things in

heaven, and things in earth, are set in a common headship in his

person. Heaven is become an open door which no man shutteth, an

abundant and free entrance is ministered, that we may enter with

boldness into the holiest.

It is a great point also, as regards the impression effected, that

every thing taught by him, in his doctrine, holds the footing of

immortality and eternity, looking towards a higher and relatively

supernatural state. Nothing is allowed to stop short, within the

boundaries of time, as in the old religion. The very law of God is

carried forward into spiritual applications; the temporal and outward

sanctions are taken away, and the inmost principle of duty under it is

enforced by the tremendous allotments of a future, everlasting state.

Outward sacrifices and remissions will not answer. There must be a

sacrifice that purges even the conscience itself. There must be a

righteousness found, that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and

Pharisees--even the righteousness of God. Every thing in the doctrine

out-reaches nature and time, piercing even to the dividing asunder, and

stirring all the inmost senses, sentiments, and fears of the religious

nature. Not that any mere standards, or sanctions, can force open the

shut heaven of souls; but that, by these things, grinding hard upon the

supernatural sense, it is made to feel a reverberative movement of the

powers of the world to come, and look in, through the rifts that are

opened in the stony casement that surrounds it.

Let us not imagine now that, by any or all these things, the

supernatural sense, or heaven of the soul, is really opened. These are

preparations, all, including even the cross itself--powers that move on

our consent, but without that consent accomplish no result. Nothing

done will ever accomplish that result with many; they will go to their

graves denying that any such upper world of faculty is in them. But

with some it will be otherwise; they will respond, they will believe,

and their faith will be the opening of heaven. In that faith the Son of

Man will be revealed, and the angels of God ascending and descending

upon him. But this faith, in still another view, is love, and here we

have the grand finality. Christ and his cross are a movement on the

world's love, and love itself is the higher sense, or apprehending

power of the soul. Love is perceptive; whatever is loved is most really

known, or discovered. He that loveth knoweth God, and, in that manner,

he that loveth universal society knoweth universal society. Worlds

above the world are present to the sense of love. All the immense

longings of souls after universal society are consummated and crowned,

when they are issued in love. And this is the opening of the soul, this

the state and character which are its heaven--the kingdom of God

within.

And what a finding of the soul will it be! what a sublime privity of

knowledge will it reveal! when Christ, as in the promise made to

Nathanael, shall have made it conscious eternally, in this manner, of

the paradise hid in its own higher faculty, so long shut up and

suppressed.

Some very important consequences follow, in the train of the subject

thus presented, and with these I conclude.

1. The real merit of the issue made up between Christ and the

naturalizing critics of his gospels is here distinctly shown.

Professing much respect to his character, they are offended by the

supernatural matters reported in his life, and set themselves at work

to produce a new Christianity, without either miracle or mystery, or

more than natural fact in it--and, of course, without even Christ

himself, who is the greatest miracle of all. Christ, on the other hand,

undertakes to give them, over and above the supernatural facts they

reject, supernatural evidences; viz., to set open a higher range of

faculty in them related to himself and all supernatural beings, and so

to find them at the point of deeper sentiments and apprehensions in

their nature, than they are themselves aware of. They do not even

imagine, that they have any thing included in their nature, above the

mere basement story so much investigated and magnified by the

philosophers; viz., reason, memory, imagination, affectional capacities

and the like, including, perhaps, a merely moral, in distinction from a

religious, conscience; practically ignoring, because they are shut, the

sublime upper ranges of their spiritual nature--their transcendent

affinities prepared for immense supernatural relations, their

capacities to apprehend what is above the test of mere intellectual

judgments, divine being, viz., arid concourse and the flow and reflow

of God's universal society. The heaven of their nature being shut, and

the supernatural sense practically undiscovered, they proceed to bring

the great questions of the gospels down for trial before the basement

court of their criticism; where it results, that having made their

souls small enough for their doctrine, they have no great difficulty in

making their doctrine small enough for their souls.

They are men of high talent, if any talent is high in the lower ranges

only of the nature, they are some of them scholars specially advanced

in their culture, but talent and scholarship are, alas, how pitiably

shriveled in their figure, when they undertake to handle the questions

of religion, without so much as a conception of the inherently

supernatural relations and discerning powers of the religious mind.

Why, the humble, guileless Nathanaels, who never had a speculation in

their lives, but have the heaven of their faith set open, and have

found the Son of Man deep set in the heart's own center, have a better

competence in the supernatural than Hennel, or Parker, or Strauss, or

Renan, or than all these brilliant gospel extirpators together. No,

gentlemen, Christ did not come to be approved before the tribunal of

your mere logic, or lore, or critical acumen, but before a nobler and

more competent, which, though it be in you, is yet hidden from you.

Having a nature boundlessly related to the supernatural, flowering

never, save in the knowledge and concourse of supernatural society, you

put your critical extinguishers on it and stifle it, and then you can

even triumph in the discovery that all you most sublimely want is

incredible--scientifically impossible! Hardly could you make yourselves

a more fit mark for Christian pity; for, with all your fine stores of

learning, you are in fact the least knowing men of your day. Would that

Christ might only find you, in that glorious opening of the nature of

which he speaks; what a revelation would it be--and, first of all,

because it would be a revelation so wonderful of yourselves!

You assume that you can settle questions of being, or not

being--supernatural being, or not being--by logic, and criticism, and

the processes of the head, even as you do questions of thought, or

idea. Can you then reason a rock, as being or not being, in that

manner? No, you will answer; subjects of being can not, in the first

instance, be thought or reasoned, they can only be cognized, or

perceived, by the senses. And so it is of all supernatural being, God,

angels, worlds above the world, universal society; they are known only

as they are cognized, by the supernatural sensing of the spiritual man;

or, what is nowise different, by faith. And when it is done, they are

had in as complete evidence even as the solids of matter. I do not

undertake to say what particular facts of the gospel will, or will not

be proved in this manner, but only that nothing will be rejected,

because it is supernatural. The soul will be going after things

supernatural and the commerce of the supernatural society, because it

is practically open to their concourse. Here then is Christ, on one

side, contriving how to open this immense upper world of the soul, and

you, on your side, protesting that there is not, and must not be, any

such upper world in you. He would make the soul a sky-full of glorious

and blessed concourse, and you set yourselves to it, as a problem

worthy of your industry, to make it a cavern! His work may be a hard

one, but yours will be much harder. The emptiness of your cavern will

ring back answers, stronger to most men, after all, than your

arguments. For heaven is as much a necessity to men as bread, and souls

can no more live without the supernatural, than the senses without

matters of sense. In the same way--

2. We have given back to us, here, the most solid, only sufficient,

proof of our immortality. How often do we stagger at this point, even

the best of us. All mere rational arguments, here, fall quite short of

the mark. They never established any body. And yet every man ought to

know his immortality, even as he knows that he is alive. He is made, to

have an immediate, self-asserting consciousness of immortality, and

would never have a doubt of it, if he had not shut up and darkened the

divine side of the soul. And for just the same reason, Christ, when he

opens the soul, opens immortality also. What was so dimly revealed,

under the old religion, stands out visible everywhere under the new.

There is no room here for a Sadducee to live. The metropolis of the

world is here in Christ's person, and the visitants of all unknown

spheres crowd about him, ascending and descending upon him. And they

are all certified to our faith, by his supernatural character. We grow

familiar thus with spirit, realize it, and know it in ourselves.

Immortality! why the dead Christ proves it. And again the resurrection

proves it; for what could such a being do but rise? It would even be a

greater wonder if he did not. Away to their native abyss fly all our

doubts--life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel!

It only remains--

3. To note precisely, as we can at no other point of view, the meaning

of salvation, or the saving of souls. Christ does not undertake to save

them as they are only half existing in the plane of nature. Do we call

it saving the hand, that we save it in all but the fingers? Is it

saving an eye, that we save it in all but the sight? Do we save a tree,

when we save the stump and the roots, and not the leafy crown of shade

and flower? No more is it saving a soul to save the economic under-work

only of opinion, judgment, memory, and the like. These are not the

soul, and if we take them to be, we only come as near saying, as

possible, that the soul is gone already. And it is in just this

condition that Christ finds us--O, that he might also find us in the

deeper sense of his promise! He comes to the soul as having a whole

heaven hid in its possibilities, which heaven is shut up, which

possibilities are even ignored and hid. He finds it made little, a fire

almost gone out. Related constitutionally to a vast supernatural

society, and to ranges of life and knowledge, as much broader than all

causes and laws of the world, as eternity is broader than time, he

undertakes to open it again upon its true field, relieve the pinch of

its compression, give it enlargement, and make it truly live. Whatever

man of opinion, taking on the airs of science, tells him that his

gospel is incredible because it is supernatural, will get no answer,

but that his soul is very nearly gone out already, and is wanting

simply salvation. And just here it is that the soul gets such an

immense lifting of pitch, and outspreading of dimensions, when it comes

to Christ. The coming unto Christ is, in another view, Christ coming

unto it and being revealed in it. Even as the apostle says--"When it

pleased God to reveal his Son in me." And what a revelation was it to

him!--as great proportionally to all who receive it. It is as if they

had gotten a new soul, with a heaven-full of society gathered round the

Son of Man there revealed. Therefore it is called "the new man;" not

because it is new, for it is older even than the old man put away,

being the original, normal, man of Paradise, hitherto stifled and

suppressed; still it is new, all things are new. The change is so great

as to be sometimes even bewildering. It is as if some wondrous, unknown

light had broken in; the whole sky is luminous. The soul is in day; for

the day has dawned and the day-star is risen. God, eternity,

immortality, universal love and society--into these broad ranges it has

come, and in these it is free, having them all for its element and its

conversation in them, as in heaven. The unknowing state, the old, blank

ignorance that was, because of the blindness of the heart, is gone; and

a wondrous knowledge opens because the heart can see. Before it was a

doubter possibly, mighty in opinion, wise in the wisdom of this world,

pleased with its own questions and reasons, now it has come up where

the light is, and the old questions and reasons do not mean any

thing--the judgments of moles, in matters of astronomy, are as good. O,

what strength, and majesty, and general height of being, are felt in

the new life begun! And this is salvation! great because it saves, not

some small part of the soul, but because it saves and glorifies the

sublime whole; restoring its integrity and proportion, and setting it

complete in God's own order, as in everlasting life. Who could wish it

to do less? who could ask it do more?

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\* vis medicatrix: [53]1

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